

REVOLUTION or WAR

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Crisis and War are Raging, the Issue of the Moment...?
Not to Leave the Initiative and the Leadership of the Struggles to The Unions

International Situation

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Internal Debate

Criticism of the Contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* (Published in *RoW* #21)

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Crisis and War are Raging. The Issue of The Moment... ?

Not to Leave The Initiative and The Leadership of The Struggles to The Unions

Prosperity and peace have disappeared from the capitalist gospels. And from the minds. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, the lines of confrontation between bourgeois propaganda and ideology on the one hand and the theory and principles of the proletariat, Marxism, on the other hand have shifted. The fight to warn the proletarian ranks of the inevitability of the crisis of capital as well as of the imperialist war belongs to the past as a central battle. The struggle to convince the proletarian camp, especially the forces of the Communist Left, of the danger and the perspective of the Third World Imperialist War and the historical alternative of *revolution or war* is a thing of the past. Crisis and war have become immediate realities announcing an increased and brutal fall into generalized suffering and misery. An obviousness for all. And even for the bourgeoisie, which does not even try to hide it anymore.¹

As for the revolutionary political forces, only the most sectarian and sclerotic refuse to take note of the general rearmament, of the calls to develop the war economy and of the accelerated imperialist polarization of these last six months.² There is no central struggle now, no urgency, to convince the most dynamic components of the proletarian camp, who have remained faithful to the principles of Marxism, of the reality and actuality of the threat of a march to the generalized imperialist war as well as of the historical alternative. They are convinced of this and try to act accordingly.

The central ideological and political confrontation has moved to the field of direct confrontation between classes, to the ground of workers' struggles **and above all to that of their conduct, of their political direction.** What is at stake is not even the capacity of the proletariat to react, as some could still doubt a few months ago. Just as the crisis and the war have become

dramatic and bloody realities, so is the resumption of its struggles by the international proletariat. The more or less massive revolts of the less developed capitalist countries are now answered by the dynamics of strikes and proletarian struggles of the most developed countries. There is no need to convince the proletarians that they have to struggle. They are struggling. They try to respond to the crisis. They react above all to the general rise in prices, to the inflation that is exploding everywhere, on all continents, in all countries, without exception. Faced with the current inflation, the wage demand is central. It therefore becomes the **political** object and factor of the generalization and unity of proletarian struggles. And, by fighting for the wages, the proletariat breaks *de facto* the national unity and rises against the sacrifices that each national bourgeoisie, each government, each state, wants to impose to it for the defense of national capital and the needs of imperialist war. As a result, its *national indiscipline* tends to become a brake, an obstacle, objective, relative and tendentious, to the forced march of capitalism towards generalized imperialist war.

The current strikes in the UK are setting the tone for the international class struggle. The proletariat of Great Britain is showing the way forward: engage in the struggle without further delay.³ The fact that the British bourgeoisie is one of the most warlike against Russia in Ukraine illustrates, oh how much, the reality of the historical stakes, of the alternative *revolution or war* and the proletarian potentialities. But above all, the current strikes show that the central fight that the proletarians in struggle must lead today crystallizes around their leadership and their control. Faced with a dynamic of spontaneous workers' reactions, of *wildcat* strikes, since May, the bourgeoisie has not remained inactive. Far from opposing these strikes head-on, the unions are trying to overlap them and take over their direction in order to better undermine and hinder from within the dynamics towards their generalization and unity. By organizing votes to decide on legal strikes, they have sought, and apparently succeeded, in controlling the tempo and imposing their ground: that of successive days of action by corporation or sector. Their objective is clearly stated: to play for time by threatening a general strike for... October.⁴ After the appointment of the new Prime Minister!

¹ . "Global Economic Growth Slows Amid Gloomy and More Uncertain Outlook. (...) This reflects stalling growth in the world's three largest economies—the United States, China and the euro area—with important consequences for the global outlook." (IMF, July 2022, <https://blogs.imf.org/2022/07/26/global-economic-growth-slows-amid-gloomy-and-more-uncertain-outlook/>)

² . We have a special thought for the specific case of the International Communist Current and its opportunist theory of the *Decomposition* which excludes any perspective and danger of generalized imperialist war. Indeed, to go back on this position will inevitably put into question the *Decomposition*, taking with it all its sectarian anti-parasite policies carried out since the 1990s at the cost of the exclusion and condemnation of dozens of its members. Faced with the historical reality and its contradictions, the survival of this organization and the political conviction of its members become increasingly difficult;

³ . It is useless here to remind that the communists are not "strikes culvicators", that they do not call everywhere and always for the open struggle and for the strike, independently of the course of the events and particularly of the evolution of the balance of power between the classes.

⁴ . See our communique and leaflet on the strikes in UK in this issue.

To the reality in movement of a *hot summer* marked by a dynamic of mobilization and generalized strike, of *mass strike*, the unions oppose a “*hot autumn*” for later. To accept this tempo is to accept the tempo of the bourgeoisie and its unions. It means giving them up the control over the timing and the terrain of the confrontation. It means letting the succession of days of action by sector or corporation go on unopposed, which can only disorientate first, then divide, and finally demoralize the proletarians in struggle. It is to give up the struggle for unitary demands allowing all the sectors to recognize them as their own, to take them up and thus to unite around them. It is not to assume the indispensable real struggle, in the assemblies, on the pickets, in the workplaces, against the substitution by the unions of the dynamics of extension, generalization and unity by that of sectorization and division by corporation and specific demands; in the end to let the division settle itself. Waiting for the *trade union autumn* means allowing the various days of action to serve as a counter-fire and, in the end, to smother the blaze of the proletarian summer that is still going on today. It is to accept the preparation of the workers' defeat without delivering a real fight.

That's why we called, and still call at the time of writing⁵, the proletarians of Great Britain to enter into struggle all together, at the same time, without waiting, so that they can keep the initiative which has been shown both by the *unofficial* strikes of May and June and by the massive participation in the *official* strikes. The organization of successive strike days, sector by sector, corporation by corporation by the unions, the absence – to our knowledge – of any attempt to “overrun” the unions, for example by refusing to go back to work after a day of action, the apparent sympathy or understanding of the media towards the strikers so far, leads us think that we are already behind the events; that the bourgeoisie succeeds in mastering the dynamics of the events and in seizing the effective control over the strikes. For all that, the confrontation continues. If the proletarians want to keep, or take back, the initiative of the struggle, they have to contest the direction, the objectives and the means of it to the unions, whether it is the central unions or the base union sections. And it is today that this is at stake. Not in two or three months. That will be too late. In the United Kingdom, at the very moment when the proletarians are in open and massive struggle, the time is not for propaganda but for *agitation*. The time is not for explanation and analysis, but for concrete orientations and action slogans for the struggle.

⁵ . With all the limits, even reservations on this or that particular aspect, due to our absence on the British territory and our difficulties to follow on a daily basis and "on the spot", by militant intervention in the workplaces and in the demonstrations and pickets.

To call the proletarians to contest to the unions and leftism the control of the timing, of the goals, of the grounds and of the means, is the first responsibility of the communist vanguards. Thus, far from letting the bourgeoisie and the unions maneuver as they please and impose the terrain and the moment of the battles, it is up to them to rise up to the political vanguard of the conflict, to anticipate as much as possible the course of events and confrontations; in short, to assure a real political direction of the struggle of our class. In this sense, it is also up to them, as *political leadership*, to participate in the fight for the definition and adoption of immediate demands that allow the extension, the generalization and the greatest unity of the struggle. Convincing of the need to provide concrete orientations and slogans for action during the very course of the struggle, and according to its dynamics, its moments and different episodes, its highs and lows, becomes in turn an issue within the communist forces and the proletarian camp.

“Instead of puzzling their heads with the technical side, with the mechanism, of the mass strike, the social democrats are called upon to assume political leadership in the midst of the revolutionary period. To give the cue for, and the direction to, the fight; to so regulate the tactics of the political struggle in its every phase and at its every moment that the entire sum of the available power of the proletariat which is already released and active, will find expression in the battle array of the party; to see that the tactics of the social democrats are decided according to their resoluteness and acuteness and that they never fall below the level demanded by the actual relations of forces, but rather rise above it – that is the most important task of the directing body in a period of mass strikes.” (Rosa Luxemburg, we underline)⁶

As we write, and as the week-long Felixstowe dockers' strike comes to an end, the stakes remain the same: to warn strikers and non-strikers alike, to convince other revolutionary forces, that waiting for the *hot autumn* announced and planned by the British unions is tantamount to leaving them the field of the initiative and conduct of the strikes; and to let them set up and plan the union days whose final goal will be to smother the last embers of the summer's mobilization.

“To drag at the tail of the movement [is] of no service to the movement; at worst, it would be exceedingly harmful.” (Lenin, *What Is to Be Done?*)

Revolution or War, August 26th 2022

⁶ . *The Mass strike*:
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1906/mass-strike/ch04.htm>

International Situation

Dynamics of Wildcat Strikes in The UK: For Wage Increases, Strike Everywhere and Without Delay!

Warning: not having the means to intervene concretely in Great Britain in the situation of mobilization and workers' strikes, it is difficult for us to put forward in a precise and local way orientations and slogans of concrete action according to the situation and the immediate possibilities. For all that, the proletarian response in progress allows us to put forward orientations and general slogans that would be the basis for the entire party, if it existed, to mobilize its forces. This is why what is in fact more of a communiqué calling the attention of the international proletariat to the situation in the United Kingdom has been written in the form of an agitation leaflet. In this sense, it is intended to be direct and limited to a few orientations and slogans. It does not explain; it calls for action. It does not analyze; it puts forward a slogan: to go on strike all together. But let's recognize right away that this leaflet is in fact already late in regards to the real situation and that it should have been published and distributed before the succession of strikes of the London Underground and the British trains of August 18, 19 and 20. If it is not in advance of the situation and cannot be massively distributed in Great Britain, it will serve as a reflection and an experience for the communist minorities for the period that is beginning: a period of massive confrontations between the classes. All comrades or groups of comrades who would like to reproduce it and diffuse as a leaflet are welcome to do so.

For Wage Increases, Strike Everywhere and Without Delay!

In the United Kingdom, there is only one slogan today for proletarians: to go on strike and join the wave of struggles and strikes that has been going on for several months in many companies and sectors of varying importance: transport, trains and the London Underground in particular, the port of Felixstowe, refineries, Amazon centers, the Post Office, etc. To do as many strikers do, to take the initiative of the strike or of any other form of struggle if the strike is not possible immediately. To take the example of the many spontaneous strikes, not to fear that they be "unofficial", i.e. wildcat, without call, nor legal notice, from the unions. Reinforcing the dynamic of strikes provoked by inflation and the explosion of prices in Great Britain, just like the generalized inflation that affects the whole capitalist world, is the way to make the government and the bourgeoisie back down, at least momentarily. It is the moment to go all together. It is the moment to impose the increase of the wages for all the proletarians and in all the sectors. It is the moment to say no to sacrifices in the name of the crisis of capital and the preparation for generalized imperialist war.

This is also the time not to leave the initiative to the unions, whether they are the official Trade-Union direction or rank and file. If they have been forced to call for days of action on the trains and subway, for example, or in the port of Felixstowe, it is precisely to prevent *unofficial* strikes, which they would not be able to control, from continuing to appear across the country in an increasing way and becoming massive and united.

"10 May: some 100 refuse collectors in Welwyn Hatfield

walked out in protest against a manager accused of sexism, racism and bullying; 11 May: some 300 construction workers at a refinery in Hull went on strike because of wage payments being delayed or incomplete; 17 May: over a thousand offshore oil workers in the North Sea walked out across 19 rigs demanding their wages match inflation; 27 July: some 100 workers at a food plant in Bury walked out in response to not being allowed proper breaks at work; 3 August: hundreds of Amazon workers at various sites in Tilbury, Rugeley, Coventry, Bristol, Dartford and Coalville have staged walkouts and slowdowns in response to a pay "rise" of only 35p more per hour; 10 August: hundreds of contract workers, including scaffolders and maintenance workers, at refineries, chemical plants and other facilities in Teesside, Grangemouth, Pembroke, Fife, Fawley and Drax walked out in a fight over pay, picketing motorists entering and leaving the facilities."

The strike dynamic in the UK is the example – of the moment – for the whole international proletariat to follow. Moreover, street demonstrations and protests against the rise in prices are exploding on all continents. But above all, the same dynamic of strikes, often spontaneous and wildcat, tends to emerge, here and there, in other countries, in particular in Western Europe as in Italy and in France⁽⁷⁾.

It is precisely this dynamic that the British unions are trying to control in order to sabotage its development by organizing limited strikes, like those of June and August and the one, called a

⁷ . TCI-CWO, *Wildcat Strikes in the UK: Getting Ready for a Hot Autumn*

(<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-08-15/wildcat-strikes-in-the-uk-getting-ready-for-a-hot-autumn>)

“general strike”, to come ... after “Liz Truss became prime minister in September”!(^b) The unions aim to ride the dynamics of spontaneous proletarian reactions in order to better control them and, thus, direct them towards days of action spread out in time; and this in the name of the so-called preparation of a united struggle of all sectors. If the proletarians of the UK let themselves be softened up by the unions, let them take the initiative and organize the struggle, the field of demands and the timing of the demonstrations and strikes, by October, the present dynamics will have been stifled.

We must put ourselves in struggle and on strike wherever possible. Decide collectively to continue the strike and do not return to work after the days of action conclude . Seek solidarity and extension to other companies and sectors, starting with those closest geographically. Send mass delegations and picket lines to nearby workplaces. For the workers not yet in open struggle, regroup in struggle committees and seek the help and solidarity of the proletarians already on strike. Do not let the unions determine the demands and the timing of the fights and battles; take the initiative into your own hands

Quick and Incomplete Response to Some Critical "Posts" about our Intervention

When we published our leaflet on the strikes in the UK, we received, among others, two critical posts. They raise, it seems to us, an important question about the intervention of communist organizations, tomorrow that of the party, in the very dynamics of workers' struggles on the move such as the crisis and the war inevitably provoke them. The objections of the comrades are of two kinds:

- “I expect the situation to develop much more in the months ahead. I don't think workers need to be told to strike since the situation will become dire but to know that the strike is only the beginning. I think we have to point beyond the wage struggle and link all the attacks.”

- “why only advance a salary increase? It is verified that if they increase the salaries to us, then will come the inflation. What is the use of fighting for so little?” Or still, “We need also to give a longer vision – asking for crumbs is not enough now – we need to take over the bakery. In other words we need to be more than super activists but inject into the struggle political questions which others do not.”

The first criticism is not from a point of view internal to the very strikes, their dynamics and successive battles that take place, but from the outside the struggle. Outside the movement and wait and see. It considers that, mechanically – without opposition of the bourgeoisie, therefore, of its unions and its left and leftist forces – the strikes will

develop until the “hot autumn”... that the unions announce today. To wait therefore to intervene, as a *political direction of party*, that is to say without fighting already for it. But in the autumn, if this is not already the case, it will be too late, because the unions will have taken complete control of the strikes, if they have not already succeeded in stifling and extinguishing them by then. It is today that the battle is taking place, perhaps it has already been played out since July-early August; today that the dynamic of wildcat strike must, or should, open the way to the overflow of the unions and, to be concrete, of their day of action, sector by sector and sector after sector, in order to open a perspective of generalized and united strike. At the moment – August – when the bourgeoisie and its unions “called” the workers to strike in dispersed order, one after the other, in order to better control and stifle the rise of the strikes, the *party intervention* required to call the whole of the proletarians to strike all together and without waiting to oppose the current counter-offensive of division and sabotage of the unions, of *salamiing*⁸ of the strikes by corporation or enterprise.

Against price increases!

For the general increase of wages!

All in struggle! All on strike against the growing misery that capitalist crisis and imperialist war can only aggravate!

The IGCL, August 20th 2020

Note (^a): “This Tuesday, SNCF train drivers on the Paris-North network put down the bag and went on strike without respecting the notice period. Inflation, low salaries and broken working conditions cause exasperation among railway workers.” (*Révolution permanente*, <https://www.revolutionpermanente.fr/Greve-surprise-des-conducteurs-SNCF-a-Paris-Nord-Avec-l-inflation-on-ne-s-en-sort-pas>). “Thanks to a massive “surprise strike” last Wednesday, the railway workers of the SNCF Saint-Lazare network obtained a bonus and stopped part of the attacks on their working conditions.” (<https://www.revolutionpermanente.fr/Greve-SNCF-a-Saint-Lazare-On-a-prouve-qu-avec-une-greve-bien-organisee-on-peut-gagner>)

Note (^b): *The Guardian*, “Union leader issues threat of UK general strike as rail crisis grows”, July 27th.

Here, to wait for *the spontaneous development of the strikes and the autumn* means to let the bourgeoisie,

⁸ . “Saucissonner”, cut the salami or “saucisson” is an image of separating in diverse peaces the wave of strikes

the unions in the first place, maneuver as they please, to establish their control of the struggle, to set up their tactics and to define its tempo without opposition; it is to abandon the concrete, real, immediate, **political** fight against the unions; it is to place oneself, not in the vanguard of the ongoing battle between the classes, but in its *tail*, as Lenin used to say.

The second criticism of the *wage increase* slogan – of which we do not make an absolute –, under the guise of *radical anti-reformism*, is in fact part of the same hesitation to assume the real confrontation, such as it is unfolding before our eyes, for the effective leadership of the struggle. Refusing, or underestimating, to put forward and fight for a central demand in which all workers can recognize themselves and which they can take up on their own, whatever their trade, their company, their corporation, leaves once again the unions free to define the demands by sector and, thus, free to “open negotiations” by company, each in its own corner; in short, to maneuver freely with the company managements and the government. This will allow them, if by any chance this or that sector obtains any specific demand, to call for the resumption of work in that sector without taking into account the other corporations.

More broadly, it is not indifferent to communists, as well as to the proletarians themselves, that workers' struggles can “win victories”, or at least make the bourgeoisie back down on this or that attack on living or working conditions, even if we know that they can only be, besides rare, temporary as long as capital is not destroyed. It is true that a wage increase today would inevitably be recuperated by capital, especially in the period of inflation that is opening up because of the crisis and the preparation for generalized war. For all that, obtaining an increase would help to limit the aggravation of the immediate impoverishment of the proletarians. And the communists are not indifferent to this, in itself of course, but also to verify that their method of struggle, orientations and slogans, are indeed the most efficient ones to impose a more or less favorable balance of forces against the ruling class. Then, succeeding in making the bourgeoisie back down on a demand following a collective struggle can only be an encouragement to it and a positive experience that will be found in future fights and that the party will not forget to remind the proletarian masses. Finally, and even if these victories can only be very rare and that the workers' struggles are mostly made of defeats, “there is defeat and defeat”. Some end in bitterness and a feeling of despair, impotence and sometimes division, others

in a feeling of pride, solidarity and unity in the struggle that will only wait to be expressed again. In general, this feeling is linked to the way in which the strike or the struggle was carried out, in particular if the workers succeeded in imposing, even if only partially, their own collective and unitary dynamic against that of the division of the unions.

To believe that to put forward wage demands is to fall on the bourgeois terrain, or even so-called *bourgeois reformism*, is not to understand that the so-called economic demands will remain topical and an integral part of the struggle of the proletariat as an exploited class until the advent of communism. And it is especially, in the immediate, to consider the demands only as *economic* or *protest* without understanding that they can and must become a moment of the extension and generalization of the struggles, that they are object of a fight between the most combative proletarians and the trade unions, that they are essential to make of each strike a moment of the extension and the unity of the struggle. In short, they are as much *political* as *economic*.

In this sense, the communist organizations, tomorrow the party, must assume the fight for the adoption of the most unitary demands possible as much as to call for this or that form of fight **according to the moments**, here to call for the entry in strike of all the sectors. To oppose to these immediate demands, here the increase of salaries in front of the explosion of inflation, understood as *crumbs of the cake, the appropriation of all the bakery* as one of the two comrades proposes it, amounts to advancing as immediate orientation, in the strikes, the assemblies, the pickets, ... the workers' insurrection, if one wants to be consistent with the proposal. But... is the proletariat in the UK already there? Seriously?

Really, should we call on striking workers in Great Britain today *to take over the entire bakery* while waiting for the hypothetical future development of strikes? Or should we not, on the contrary, call them to compete with the unions for the initiative, the control and the effective direction of the struggle by starting to call on them to join and extend the strikes without waiting? Which of these two orientations for a militant worker, or a group of combative, even revolutionary workers? Because it is in this spirit and this will, to provide a weapon for every combative worker, a text and concrete and immediate orientations that they can read and/or take back to their workplace, in assemblies, picket lines, etc. that we wrote our leaflet.

RL, August 30th 2022

No War But the Class War Committees in Canada

In the wake of the imperialist war in Ukraine, which went from being a latent conflict since 2014 to an open war last February, the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT) has taken the initiative to set up committees to fight against the imperialist war. These committees, called No War but the Class War (NWBCW), are now participating in the "real movement which abolishes the present state of things"⁹ in the four corners of the world, among others in Liverpool, Montreal, Rome, Turkey, with other committees about to be birthed in Toronto and Paris.

Already, a first public meeting organized by the Klasbatalo collective, Canadian section of the ICT, had taken place in Montreal at the very beginning of the summer concerning the housing crisis and its intrinsic link with the world economic crisis. It must be said that the mere fact of finally meeting between communists to discuss the stakes of the class struggle after several months of forced social isolation due to the covid pandemic must have been experienced by many comrades as a breath of fresh air.

The first meeting of the NWBCW-Montreal committee took place at the end of July. The theme of the meeting was the 1972 workers' protest movement in the province of Quebec, particularly around the very combative struggles in the city of Sept-Îles, where a mass strike¹⁰ dynamic was set in motion. One of Klasbatalo's comrades gave a pretty politically accurate presentation of the events. The reader can always refer to the article in the journal *1919 #* entitled "*If we can show them, we're capable of anything*": *The 1972 Québec General Strike in Retrospect*¹¹ to get a better idea of the presentation that was basically based on this text.

Afterwards, a broader discussion was initiated. The comrades from Klasbatalo rightly made the link between the 1972 strike and the imperialist war that is going on in Europe at the moment. Indeed, it is by basing itself on its own class interests and its own economic-political demands that the proletariat can hope to stop the dynamic of imperialist war and put forward its own political program: communist revolution. In other words, it is the class struggle that ultimately dictates the course of history. In this sense, the NWBCW committees are not *pacifists*, but aim to transform the imperialist war into a civil war, *a class war*. The mass strike dynamic of 1972, which was finally and unfortunately defeated by the unions and the bourgeois state, shows the political path we have to take even today.

Therefore, we fully support and endorse this political positioning of ICT and its Canadian section. We engage with ICT on NWBCW committees as we are able and where we can.

Finally, we must emphasize the very fraternal spirit of the comrades of Klasbatalo: they welcomed us with open arms, allowed us to use their literature table to exhibit our own literature alongside that of the ICT, etc. This is an absolutely positive and serious political attitude from the militant point of view, which is in line with the historically important issues that our class, the proletariat, is currently facing.

Robin

⁹ . Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*.

¹⁰ . The terms we use have political implications. We prefer the term *mass strike*, as used among others by Rosa Luxemburg, to the ambiguous term of *general strike*. The first one take account for a dynamic conception of the class struggle where every proletarians' struggle for demands must eventually and necessarily raise the question of the conquest of political power. The second one tends to take up the apolitical and revolutionary syndicalist myth according to which it is enough for the proletarians to cross their arms and to stop the work for that capitalism falls...

¹¹ . <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-06-29/if-we-can-show-them-we-re-capable-of-anything-the-1972-qu%C3%A9bec-general-strike-in>

The Cost-of-Living Crisis is a Capitalist Crisis

It is easy to forget that when COVID-19 restrictions were first relaxed economists were eagerly awaiting a bounce back of the economy. There was a general clamour among business owners, landlords, and Tory backbenchers to ‘let the economy breathe’. Almost a year after these restrictions began to be reduced to a minimal level in Western countries, the economy still has a hacking cough. There is only doom and gloom from professional economists and central bankers as the ‘cost-of-living crisis’ has become the inescapable backdrop to the current political scene, leading to plummeting approval ratings for most leaders in the capitalist heartlands and food riots in the periphery. Given the centrality of the cost-of-living crisis to current political discourse it is important to be clear about what exactly it entails, what is causing it, and why the purported solutions of the bourgeois class have nothing to offer the working class against whom the cost-of-living crisis is primarily an assault.

The most immediate effects that can be seen are primarily energy and petrol price rises. The energy price cap, the maximum annual price energy companies are allowed to charge, was raised by £700 in March, an increase of 54%, and will be raised again in October by another £600 - a total rise of 100%! The rise in energy prices is part of a generalised inflation of prices, especially in foodstuffs, where an increase in annual grocery bills of £380 is forecast.¹² For all governments out-of-control inflation is a greater problem than a falling standard of living as it threatens the conditions necessary for a stable relationship between creditors and debtors, and thus weakens profit expectations and long-term investment. Christine Lagarde, the head of the European Central Bank (ECB) has worried that:

“Inflation pressures are broadening and intensifying (...) eurozone wage growth is expected to double to 4 per cent this year (...) supply bottlenecks are likely to be persistent and there is no sign of an end to high energy and commodity prices caused by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.”¹³

Of course, energy prices had begun to rise before the invasion in February this year reflecting the fact that

it is not the political decisions of one rogue leader causing these problems. Equity markets have seen their greatest devaluation since 1975. Even bond markets, which have been seen as safe for 30 years are now considered risky due to inflation.

The central banks of the western world have been hurriedly planning abrupt rises in their interest rates in order to keep inflation down. Some central banks are even requiring higher capital ratios from major banks in anticipation of further instability. The rate rises of the Bank of England (BoE), the US Federal Reserve Bank (FED), and ECB compared to inflation rates are summarised below:

The job of central banks (and this is the reason why their ‘independence’ was so strongly safeguarded in the first place) is limited to the maintenance of stability in prices and ensuring a ‘healthy’ level of growth. They maintain price levels in periods of inflation by increasing the interest rate offered to commercial banks for loans and deposits to above the inflation rate. The idea is that when commercial banks correspondingly increase their rates, saving will become

	Interest rate (%)			Date expected rate will be met	April 2022 global inflation rate* (%)
	Covid era minimum	Current rate	Expected rate		
BoE ⁷	0.1	1.25	2.9	End of 2022	7.8
FED ⁸	0.05	1.75	3.4	End of 2022	
ECB ⁹	-0.5	-0.5	>0	September 2022	

more profitable than investment for the wider market, and so an ‘overheating’ economy will cool down.

This is the idea – but the reality is more problematic. A critical issue for the current economic system has been the proliferation of so-called ‘zombie companies’, entities which are only able to maintain the illusion of profitability through creative shadow financing that takes advantage of low interest rates. High interest rates would reveal the shaky foundations of large parts of the economy such as ‘innovative’ start-ups and tech firms which would be suddenly unable to meet their debt repayments. Raising the interest rates above current inflation rates would be such a shock to a heavily debt-laden market that it would probably worsen the economic slowdown, cause an over-shooting of the inflation reduction targets and possibly lead to a generalised deflation and new recession. The bottom line is that an interest rate higher than the rate of profit will cause profits to fall to below zero, destroying the productive basis of the economy. In an economy where profit rates are already razor thin, there is

¹² .bbc.co.uk

¹³ .ft.com

little to no room for manoeuvre. Hence central banks are very tentatively raising rates (which while drastic in terms of recent history are small in comparison to historic rate increases) and coquetting with reductions in quantitative easing in that vain hope that they can reduce the demand for money and bring down the price level without harming investment in value-productive industries. Whether or not this strategy works in reducing inflation and maintaining conditions for investment (and essentially no-one is sure that it will), it is still not a solution in the sense that it provides stability or prosperity to working people. In fact, one of the main intended consequences of reducing investment is to reduce wages by increasing unemployment. Low unemployment caused by workers taking early retirement or otherwise leaving the workforce during the pandemic has been a persistent worry of capitalists as it puts upwards pressure on the price of wage labour, especially in America which has a more 'dynamic' labour market.¹⁴ To the uninitiated, low unemployment may seem a good thing. However, current economic orthodoxy understands that there exists a trade-off between inflation and unemployment in the short term. Former US Treasury Secretary Larry Summers has given a crude exposition of this principle by explicitly calling for high unemployment to reduce inflation.¹⁵ The idea is that a temporary reduction in demand for labour will reduce wages and thus costs, increasing the profit rates of businesses. The capitalist 'solution' is, as ever, simply whatever aims at a return to profitability.

Causes of the crisis

The crisis has been blamed on various factors. These are mainly the impact of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine. Both undoubtedly are major factors. However, both these explanations are contingent on a deeper problem which is the long running crisis of the capitalist system itself. As we have argued in many texts the secular fall in the rate of profit is the cause of the intensification of the destruction of the natural environment and the irresponsible overuse of antibiotics in factory farms, producing the consequent migration of animal diseases to humans of which COVID-19 is the result. It is also the fall in profitability which lies behind the build-up and explosion of imperialist tensions which has resulted in the Ukraine war. The crisis of the system as a whole is what is behind the cost-of-living crisis.

However, rising prices are also blamed on 'pent-up demand' and 'supply chain issues', two shadowy

figures which are themselves worth investigating.

The story behind 'pent-up demand' is that, during the lockdown, many were forced to work from home and forego discretionary spending such as meals out or cinema tickets. They also received money from the government directly through the furlough scheme and indirectly through other government support packages. This meant they were able to save more, and once restrictions were lifted, they consequently had extra money to spend on consumer goods and services, causing prices to rise in order to meet this extra demand. While this story may be true for that small proportion of wage earners (especially those who write economic policy and column pieces) who were able to work from home easily and did not see a reduction in their income during the pandemic, it is not true for the majority of workers¹⁶ for whom the pandemic meant continuing to commute to work in unsafe conditions in 'frontline' roles, reductions in business for the self-employed, and falls in living standards for those furloughed workers already living in or close to poverty.

The other way this argument is presented is by claiming that inflation is caused by there being too much money. Is there a link between the printing of money by the FED and the other central banks, and the recent inflationary spike? A simple link based on the monetarist quantity theory of money (that there is a linear positive relationship between 'money supply' and the general price level) would suggest this to be the straightforward result. However, 'printing money' has been the default response of the central banks since the financial crash of 2008 and that strategy has been carried on without disruption (though without success in terms of stimulating growth) throughout a historically low and stable inflationary era. The most damning indictment of the quantity inflation explanation is that it necessarily requires a wage-price spiral as its mechanical cause. There has simply been no wage growth over this time (real wages have in fact fallen) and hence why there has been no inflation. The extra money which central banks pumped into the economy, rather than being invested in production, has been used to settle the balance sheets of failing companies (i.e., righting the wrongs of their previous speculation), fill the savings of the already mega wealthy who have an infinitesimal marginal propensity to consume, and inflate the speculative housing and financial sectors.

The principal manner a change in the money supply can have an impact on the general price level is in

¹⁴ .ft.com

¹⁵ .fortune.com

¹⁶ .voxeu.org

the circulation (i.e., velocity multiplied by quantity) of money rather than simply quantity by itself. Since COVID-19 struck there has been a massive increase in the circulation of money concurrent with the inflation spike. It doesn't however follow that the increase is causing the inflation. Energy prices had also started to rise in Summer 2021 and this has had a knock-on effect on the energy intensive fertiliser and agriculture industries which has pushed up food prices. Considering there has been zero wage growth and the only rise has been in food, petrol, and electricity prices which all must pay to secure their daily existence, the blame for the recent inflation spike must fall on cost-push forces from the energy sector rather than demand-pull forces from supposed over-generous wages. As the central banks have increased the amount of money in circulation it has allowed companies to raise their prices with ease in order to maintain their profit rates and avoid the financial and industrial crash that would have happened otherwise. But this doesn't itself cause these price rises.

This false argument is to blame workers for non-existent wage increases (and this has been the main line of commentary from bourgeois media during the recent railway workers strikes in the UK) even though the price rises have come directly out of their pockets. We have to see through the distortions and mystifications of the present crisis to see the same old story that has been playing out over the last 50 years: an existential crisis for the system being abated via a full fronted assault waged by the government, 'free' market, and unions against the working class. When inflation is high, the capitalist class will fight tooth and nail to see that the costs of rising prices are passed onto the working class wherever possible.

This doesn't however mean that the capitalist class welcome inflation as a means to lower the living standards of the working class – far from it. Inflation threatens the stable relationship between creditor and debtor which is essential to capitalist finance. Indeed, the immediate response of the central banks to the inflation crisis is to renege on their decades-long attempt to revive the capitalist system via low or even negative interest rates aimed at encouraging investment and shift to encouraging saving in order to cool down the economy. For an economy suffering from a prolonged freeze this may seem an odd choice, but it represents the predominance of the financial capitalist interest, over the industrial interest that may have prevailed in more juvenile forms of capitalism. Another issue with inflation for the bourgeoisie is that it raises the possibility, even if it is only a small one, that workers may resist the

attempt to shift the costs of systemic failure onto them through price rises and therefore engage in strikes. This was what was happening during the widespread labour militancy of the 70s and 80s which eventually ended in working class defeat and a new more vicious phase of capitalist restructuring.

While rising costs are a succinct way of explaining the cause of the crisis, use of this trope often leads to pinning the blame for them on exogenous forces such as COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine which supposedly have nothing to do with the capitalist mode of production (though, as we have mentioned above, this is not true). Assuming for a moment that these forces are exogenous, while they are certainly calamities of unique proportions and qualities, the effect that these events have on the capitalist system is still conditioned by capitalism's particular contradiction, namely the need to maintain profit rates in the face of disaster. As such the responses are not neutral, but are opportunities taken by the capitalist class to make the working class pay for the capitalist crisis.

The energy shock

The energy price spike began at the end of Summer 2021 as many nations were reducing COVID-19 restrictions. In the background was declining UK and Norwegian gas production as the North Sea field reaches the end of its life, reductions in gas pipeline flows from Russia along the Yamal-Europe route during rising imperialist tensions over Ukraine, and issues at various LNG (liquefied natural gas) plants around the world (which seem to be related to disruption of maintenance schedules due to COVID-19 and hang-over issues from the cold winter of 2020/2021 in the Southern US and North-east Asia¹⁷). Since the invasion of Ukraine, Europe has reduced its reliance on Russian gas from 40 to about 20% of total supplies. However, there seems to be little possibility of further reducing this. The extra capacity of the international LNG market has been exhausted.¹⁸ Any further reduction of Russian gas would likely have dramatic impacts on gas prices in Europe. Oil prices increased over a similar time period due to reductions in OPEC production in order to account for maintenance issues and supply outages in Angola, Kazakhstan, and Nigeria; and disruption in supply caused by winter storms and Hurricane Ida in the USA.¹⁹ The outbreak of war in Ukraine at the end of February then sent energy prices skyrocketing and has given the energy shock its particularly sharp edge.

¹⁷ . Oxford Institute for Energy Studies Report Jan 2022, iea.org

¹⁸ . ft.com

¹⁹ . blogs.worldbank.org

The place of fossil fuels in the global economy is so fundamental that there is no industry the energy shock does not have an effect on. And those most automated sectors with the highest organic composition of capital will be most affected as the industrial constant capital they rely on requires fossil fuels to run. The food and agriculture sector will be especially hard hit due to its reliance on fossil fuels. In the agricultural sectors of the most industrialised nations, the IEA estimates that more than 50% of costs are energy costs either directly (energy bills) or indirectly (fertilisers), and thus especially sensitive to wholesale energy prices.²⁰

Empirically there seems to be a stronger relationship between energy prices and the general price level than with any other commodity.²¹ The case of fertiliser is instructive as to why this may be. The Haber-Bosch process uses fossil fuels (primarily natural gas with the exception of China which for the sake of balance of payments uses the less efficient energy source of coal) to turn methane and air into ammonia (the most common form of artificial fertiliser) by heating and applying hundreds of atmospheres of pressure to enormous sealed containers. Most of the major industrial regions are self-sufficient in ammonia and only export a small portion of their product. Russia is the exception with 20% of their product going to the international market. On the other hand, many countries on the capitalist periphery with large agricultural sectors which export to other countries import nearly all of their ammonia. Brazil, Egypt, and Sri Lanka are examples of this model. In this case, between each stage of production – methane extraction, ammonia production, crop seeding and cultivation, and selling, all of which demand heavy energy inputs – are separate international transportation stages, themselves incredibly energy intensive. One can see how a rise in energy prices is not simply felt once by the consumer when they pay their gas and electricity bills, but again and again for every purchase they make due to the presence of fossil fuels in every stage of production. No matter how far removed from the raw energy product, the cost is added on in a death-by-a-thousand-cuts. Hence why in an economy with a high organic composition of capital inflation is so sensitive to energy prices.

One can see evidence for this in the relative levels of inflation in European countries based on their energy mix. Germany, especially dependent on gas

imports from Russia which have so far fallen by half²², has one of the highest rates of inflation at 8.7% in May. France on the other hand, which has a large domestic nuclear sector, is relatively well off, with inflation rates of only 5.8%.²³ Uranium prices, in contrast to oil and gas, have stayed relatively constant over the last couple of years.

In a similar situation to American oil refineries which are closing (despite the strained pleading of President Biden), gas price rises are so extreme that it is causing some fertiliser production plants to have to shut or wind down production as their business becomes unprofitable. This is at the same time that there is an acute need for fertiliser, and many agricultural producers are expecting to have reduced crop yields. The shortage of fertiliser was the original cause of Sri Lanka's current economic woes (compounded by economic mismanagement by the local bourgeoisie).

Sri Lanka, which has a heavily subsidised agricultural sector especially in the international purchase of chemical fertilisers, has been going through a phase of economic liberalisation and structural adjustment since the defeat of its Tamil insurgency in the late 2000s. They have used international loans principally from China (although denominated in dollars) and other regional neighbours to pay for a reduction in corporation tax, paying off the (then) low interest rates with income from tourism. Come the start of the pandemic in 2020 this tourism-based model collapsed. The Sri Lankan government then made an ill-advised ban of fertilisers to limit their balance of trade deficit and stabilise their currency. This however has massively reduced their crop yield causing Sri Lanka which is normally an exporter of crops to become an importer, weakening its currency further, making the entire Sri Lankan economy inoperative. The IMF are offering to lend a 'helping' hand.

While Sri Lanka was especially poorly positioned, many other peripheral economies find themselves in similar positions and may also be exposed (Zambia, Belize, and Ecuador have already defaulted). The 2010s have seen the largest, fastest, and most broad-based increase in government debt by peripheral countries in the past 50 years.²⁴

Similarities to the 1970s

Capitalist hacks have been making superficial comparisons between the oil crisis of the early 70s and the present inflationary (or stagflationary)

²⁰ .iea.org

²¹ . Bank for International Settlements annual economic report June 2022, bis.org

²² . ft.com

²³ . reuters.com

²⁴ . CEPR Working Paper DP17381 Global Stagflation June 2022, cepr.org

moment. It too had an energy crisis precipitated by inter-imperialist conflict (the Arab-Israel conflict back then), in addition to high debt levels in the capitalist periphery. However, the real cause was that the cycle of accumulation had entered the downward spiral caused by a declining profit rate. Today, after half a century of systemic crisis, the situation is worse than that in the 70s. Global growth rates decreased from the 60s to the 70s from 5.5% to 4.1%. Growth in the 2010s was already sluggish at an average of 3%. And the rate of growth is expected to slow by 2.7% during 2021-2024, which is more than twice the amount growth slowed between 1976-1979.²⁵ The 2010s was a decade that saw the euro area crisis of 2010-2012, the taper tantrum of 2013, a general slide in commodity prices from 2011-2016, a purposeful slowdown of the Chinese economy, and trade tensions beginning in 2017 leading to tariffs and quotas being erected between major economies. Economists also worry that the limit of productivity gains from improvements to education, health outcomes, and financial complexity has been reached.²⁶ In short, the capitalist system was in poor health to begin with.

As of yet labour militancy has not reached the levels of that decade. But the question of who will take the hit for the crisis is already being raised. Railway workers in the RMT are just the first of many to strike. Train drivers; railway workers in the TSSA; council workers in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Hackney and Rugby; Post Office workers; binmen; criminal barristers; teachers; junior doctors and nurses; care workers at the St Monica Trust; and bus drivers – all are planning or balloting for strikes over the next couple of months.

There are however other signs that this coming decade will be very different from the 70s. While growth forecasts are worse than the 70s, inflation is not as high nor broad-based. The response of governments to inflation will also be different. In the 1970s governments often vacillated between aiming for high output and full employment, as well as price stability. Now that governments largely only care about price stability, the sword dangling over the head of the working class has the potential to fall much faster.

Trade conflicts, supply chain disruptions due to COVID-19, and now war in Ukraine have all helped to inflate the price of commodities. When workers demand that their devalued wages be correspondingly increased, they are met with spluttering cries that “this will take us back to the wage-price spiral of the 1970s and 80s!” It is true

that the conditions of post-war capitalism may have been unable to ensure a continuing standard of living for workers and an acceptable profit rate for capitalists. In the convulsions of that decade the post-war social compromise between labour (i.e. the unions) and capital collapsed as capitalist restructuring led to mass unemployment. The decades after the de-linking of the dollar from the gold standard in 1971 led to a hyper-financialisation of the global economy which, rather than solving capitalism’s problems, has merely reproduced its most basic contradiction.²⁷ It was not wage demands that created the grotesque bubble which led to the biggest financial crash in history. And it was not wage demands that have created the crisis today. It is still essentially about capital’s attempts to solve the insoluble problem of the low rate of profit, attempts which at every turn involve attacking the wages and living conditions of the people whose unpaid work is the basis for that profit.

What option is left to workers but to fight every attempt at their impoverishment? Ultimately there is no other way for the world working class to maintain a decent existence. But as they struggle it puts in question the rotten system which has placed them in this bind. As we have seen here, the crisis is an international one, and as such any response would have to be international in dimension. Whether the working class will relearn the lessons of its history remains to be seen. But the cost of not doing so, like everything else in this society, is simply too high.

Editorial for Revolutionary Perspectives 20 (Series 4). JS Communist Workers’ Organisation (August 14, 2022)

²⁵ . *Ibid.*

²⁶ . *Ibid.*

²⁷ . There are literally scores of articles on our site analysing how the crisis has developed since the 1970s but the following three could be a starting point: leftcom.org, leftcom.org, leftcom.org

Debate within the Proletarian Camp

In the previous issue of this journal, we published Theses on the meaning and consequences of the war in Ukraine and a letter from the ICT that took a critical yet fraternal position on them. We accompanied it with some quick comments. We reproduce here the letter of response that we sent to the ICT and which tries to go further in the common reflection and political clarification.

It should also be pointed out to the reader that this exchange of correspondence took place before the dynamics of the strikes in the United Kingdom had reached the magnitude that they have since.

Response to the Internationalist Communist Tendency on our Theses on the Significance and Consequences of the War in Ukraine

The IGCL to the ICT,

Dear comrades,

We would like to respond here to your statement on the *Theses on the significance and consequences of the war in Ukraine* that we adopted and published on March 2. Firstly, we apologize for the delay in this response. Secondly, we welcome this critical stance which can only help us to clarify our position – without excluding that you can ultimately convince us of some of your critical arguments, or even of the validity of your position; and above all, more importantly, to provide a place, a reference, for a contradictory debate and a fraternal confrontation for all the communist forces of today, old and new, so that they can orient themselves and, for those who wish to, join us in the historical struggle for the party. To clarify where the divergences and differences of approach and method lie and to confront the positions is an essential dimension of the struggle for the future party so that it can equip itself with the clearest and most effective programmatic, political, theoretical and organizational tools possible.

Your letter addresses three essential points: our position on the party; the central place that we attribute to Europe in the historical situation following the outbreak of the war in Ukraine; and our method of analysis which refers to the concept of *historical course* and which you judge as idealist. A preliminary precision: this criticism is for us of political order and as such completely legitimate.

Our Position on The Party

But first let's go back to our “*positive evolution*” on the party issue. The IGCL had to formally adopt, with relative urgency in 2013, the ICC's *basic positions* document – excluding the one on Decomposition – as the minimum programmatic framework for a coherent, centralized and united development of its activities. Knowing that we were not then in a condition to pronounce clearly, seriously, on the existing platforms of the ICT and the ICC, it was the only document that mentioned succinctly and clearly the *class frontiers*. On these, all members could define themselves with seriousness and

conviction. Nevertheless, we were already aware of the limits of this platform, especially because of its councilist coloration on the question of the party. In fact, the two nuclei that dissolved to form the IGCL had their origins on the one hand in participation in the then Canadian group of the ICT, the IWG – and thus being on the ICT's position on the party – and on the other hand, the Internal Fraction of the ICC and its claim – and even defense – of the *struggle against councilism* in the 1980s that the ICC had led then and has since rejected. From the birth of the IGCL, then, we were conscious that we would have to move beyond these basic positions²⁸, if only because we were already situating the struggle for the party as a central priority of our group's activities and intervention. Then, on the basis of this initial orientation, our *evolution* on this question asserted itself and developed throughout the struggles, intervention in the class struggle, debates and political confrontations with other forces of the Communist Left – including the ICT of course –, process of integration of new comrades, etc., that the IGCL had to carry out since its constitution and which our journal reported and expressed.

This process of political clarification has led to and materialized in our statements on the platforms of the ICC, rejected as openly councilist, and of the ICT, which we consider insufficient for the historical period that is beginning, but whose approach and

²⁸ . “The new group, the International Group of the Communist Left (IGCL), has adopted a political platform based mainly on the common positions of two main currents of the international communist Left, the ICT and the ‘historic’ ICC. This platform comes in the form of the basic positions as they were published on the back of the FICL's Communist Bulletin and previous ICT publications. The adoption of a platform in the form of concise positions means that the group, although it refers to the positions of the ‘historic’ ICC, does not unilaterally claim this single stream of the communist Left only, but as well that of another historical left communist trend, which essentially defends the same positions and is represented today by the Internationalist Communist Tendency. For this reason, given this format, the platform will require greater development and argumentation in the future.” (Resolution on The Foundation of The IGCL, November 2013, RoW #1)

positions we share. In the end, we have adopted a platform that is based – tries to be based – on the principles and heritage of the Communist Left of Italy, the Theses of Rome and Lyon, and on the 1945 and 1952 platforms of the PCint-Battaglia comunista, and that takes up the approach of the latter. While the coherence of the platform of the ICC of 1976 is provided by the *ascendancy-decadence* framework of capitalism, too often reduced to *reforms possible-reforms not possible* to establish the coherence of the class positions, the coherence of the platform of the PCint of then is provided by the question of the party: all the class positions are based and articulated around it and defined by it. It is the methodological approach that our platform has tried to take back, to develop and to adapt to the current historical situation, the one that the war in Ukraine comes to illustrate, clarify and define.

Europe at The Center of The International Situation

We will limit ourselves here to the few comments we published in our last journal on this question. The theses insist on the return of Europe to the forefront of the historical situation both on the imperialist level and in the class struggle, which would make us forget-underestimate-the reality of the fundamental Chinese-American antagonism, according to your letter. We do not believe that there is a real divergence between us. In fact, the theses try to underline and warn the international proletariat of the historical significance of the war in Ukraine and in Europe. In itself, the ravages and the imperialist powers involved are similar to those of the war in Syria. In itself, there is no notable difference, except for establishing a macabre count of deaths and massacres. However, one and the other do not have the same historical significance, except to drone out that *war is permanent in the imperialist phase of capitalism*, which does not allow to see the reality of the course of events and therefore the concrete, political stakes of the situation.

The fact that the first conflict marking an important step towards the generalized war does not oppose China and Taiwan, which was a probability, but Russia and Ukraine, makes of Europe the epicenter of the situation **for the moment** and challenges in the first place the proletariat in Europe; proletariat having like the others its own historical experience; experience which is certainly the richest of all the other fractions of the world proletariat up to now; experience which does not prejudge in any way its capacity to struggle en masse in the period to come, knowing that for the moment it is largely absent – the ICT is right on this point. Claiming this does not

mean that we exclude in advance any reversal of the international situation that would make Asia the epicenter of the situation **at another time**, or even a whole period, and the Pacific Ocean the main theater of imperialist polarization and generalized war if it were to occur. Nor that the proletariat in China and Asia can't take the initiative of an international revolutionary wave in the face of a war that would affect it directly, as the Russian proletariat did in 1917. If there is a divergence on this point, it lies rather in the fact of establishing the probability – and not the prediction – of future events according to the analysis of current events and their dynamics, which are determined by the perspective of the generalized imperialist war and the class confrontations that the bourgeoisie cannot fail to seek to impose. For the time being, due to the war in Europe, the aggravation of the crisis that it provokes in its turn (inflation and increased exploitation), the redoubled and brutal anti-proletarian attacks of the European bourgeoisies for their "re-armament, and due to the historical experience of the proletariat of the continent – all material and historical facts – we consider more probable a **mass** proletarian reaction to the war and to the crisis starting from Europe than from America, Asia or Africa. This probability is neither a prediction, nor does it exclude in an absolute way that it could be different, the situation remaining the same.²⁹

Permanence of the class struggle?

While stating that war is *permanent* under capitalism in its imperialist phase, just in itself, is not of great use today, and even turns one's back on consequent internationalism, on the other hand recognizing or not that the class struggle – the struggle between classes – is **permanent** represents an important theoretical and political stake³⁰. For example and for

²⁹ . There are several contingencies, themselves probable, which could call this probability into question if they were to occur in the short term: the explosion of a brutal financial or stock market crisis that could erupt at any moment because of the gigantic and generalized indebtedness, itself destined to deepen because of the new armament expenditures; or, a generalized famine on the African or Asian continents, fanned by the blockage of Ukrainian wheat and the explosion of energy prices, which would provoke social upheavals such as the one in progress today in Sri Lanka.

³⁰ . Even in the darkest moments of the counter-revolution, during the Second World War itself, workers' struggles, sometimes mass ones, developed and participated in establishing, admittedly at the margin, a slightly modified balance of power between the classes; from 1942 – the mines in France –, then in Italy in 1943 until being one of the factors in the constitution of the *Partito Comunista Internazionale* and even in Nazi Germany in 1944-1945. There can be little doubt that the memory and fear of 1918

the most caricatural, there are Bordigist groups that deny the existence of the proletariat, and therefore of the class struggle, in the absence of the party. Others believe that the proletariat does not exist, and therefore the class struggle does not exist, as long as it does not struggle openly for its revolutionary historical objectives. We know that this is not your position. But we don't know to what extent we differ in our conception and understanding of the dynamics of class struggle - between classes³¹.

You criticize our assertion that “the bourgeoisies of Western Europe have difficulties in ‘making the fraction of the international proletariat that has the greatest experience of the workers’ struggle against the crisis and also against the imperialist war accept the indispensable degree of submission to the march to war’. Unfortunately, it seems to us that this is not the case, on the contrary, we see that for about half a century our class has suffered all the attacks coming from the bourgeoisie without responding or without responding adequately.”

A first self-critical remark: our exact formula which is “one of the difficulties [it is not the only one] for the bourgeoisies of Western Europe... is to impose... the degree of submission indispensable to the march to war” should have specified march to **generalized imperialist war** in order to avoid any confusion. On the substance

of the question, it would be blind to deny that the proletariat does not succeed in preventing local

and of the international revolutionary wave of the post-First World War, dictated the massive bombing of German cities, then the military occupation of the country and the detention of German prisoners of war in the expectation that the German state would be reconstituted and strengthened. Even in the depths of the counter-revolution, class antagonism remains a factor, an element, of the situation and its development.

³¹ . We specify for two reasons: on the one hand, some people understand the struggle of the **classes** only as the **class** struggle, that is to say that they see, or take into account, only the proletarian struggle without taking into consideration the class enemy, the other pole of the contradiction. Then, to this difficulty or confusion, is added the fact that in certain languages, in English for example, the class struggle and the classes' struggle seem to be translated, to our knowledge, in the same way, by Class struggle; and that Struggle of the classes, or between the classes, does not exist.

imperialist wars; just as that “there has been no mass opposition to the war, of the class as such, neither in Ukraine, nor in Russia and, unfortunately, not even in the ‘West.’”³² Or even more widely that the proletariat does not suffer all the attacks coming from the bourgeoisie without a real response to the stakes. But, these objective facts, verifiable and verified, do not take away anything from the necessity for the bourgeoisie to **impose** the various and multiple sacrifices, **additional** to those already imposed in the

past, that the march and the preparation to generalized war require. The impotence of the international proletariat to prevent local wars, and here in the first place the impotence of the European proletariat in the face of the war in Ukraine, does not take away from the fact that the bourgeoisie, especially the European bourgeoisies, because of the war on their own soil, will have to develop a war economy – as the French president Macron says, and as the rearmament of Germany illustrates – which, just like the crisis, will be paid for by the proletariat in one form or another. Is this not already happening with the brutal explosion of inflation and the intensification of exploitation in the workplaces? Is this not what the most enlightened fractions of the bourgeoisie are preparing when they warn that: “the truth must be

“There are objective situations when the balance of forces are unfavourable to revolution (...). It must be emphatically stated that in certain situations, past, present and future, the proletariat has, does, and inevitably will adopt a non-revolutionary stance – either a position of inertia, or collaboration with the enemy as the case may be – but despite everything, the proletariat everywhere and always remains the potentially revolutionary class entrusted with the revolutionary insurrection; but this is only insofar as within it there exists the communist party and where, without ever renouncing coherent interventions when appropriate.”

Theses of Lyon,
Left of the PC of Italy, 1926

told to European public opinion (...) **To think of pressing Russia without sacrifices is an illusion.** While the Ukrainian army, leaders and civilians are putting up heroic resistance to the Russian invader, the time has come for the European political leaders to clearly face the price of solidarity and **to prepare public opinion for it.**” (editorial³³ in the French newspaper *Le Monde*,

³² . At least for the time being, because we do not exclude that it could be overturned in the more or less near future in one or more European countries, including Russia – we think the blood-letting and poison of nationalism in the ranks of the proletariat of Ukraine makes class reactions from it less likely.

³³ . We reproduce part of the quotation from the French newspaper *Le Monde* that we used in the theses. There are others of the same order and with the same political preoccupation to *prepare public opinions for the sacrifices to wage war against Russia*. While strikes for wage increases have broken out in various sectors in France, especially transport, in direct connection with the new inflation that everyone equates not only with the crisis but now directly with the

February 26, 2022, emphasis added)

From these objective, verifiable and verified facts, we can note that the factor “march to the generalized war”, product of the exacerbation and the impasse of the economic crisis of the capital, becomes a **direct factor** of the course, of the dynamics, of the events of the international situation and of the class struggle; at least the one that the bourgeoisie begins to lead and will develop for the needs of the generalized war, the one that the military experts call *high intensity war* and for which many staffs, American, British and French to our knowledge, have been trying to convince their governments to prepare themselves for some years. The war in Ukraine³⁴ will have finished convincing them. From the previous analysis and, today, on the basis of the empirical recognition of the facts in movement, the class struggle can only be exacerbated, if only because of the bourgeoisie itself. Isn't that what your platform itself rightly *foresees* – long before the war in Ukraine?

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

It is therefore highly **probable** that one of the central stakes of the class confrontation that is opening up will be the capacity, more or less great, of the bourgeoisie to impose on the proletariat the sacrifices necessary, beyond what has already been imposed, for this preparation for the *war economy* and the march towards generalized war. Also, because of the war in Ukraine, the Russian imperialist and military threat on the whole continent and the direct consequences on the living conditions of the proletariat in Europe, it is probable that the heart, the center, of this first massive class confrontation can occur in Europe. This is what we

war, the media and politicians – to what extent is it the same in other countries? – keep worrying about the social situation and the risk of movements and struggles in the coming months.

³⁴ . The continuous escalation in the supply and use of more massive and destructive weapons in Ukraine, for example the 50,000 bombs that the Russian artillery throws daily on the Ukrainian lines and which raises the question of their production on both sides, forces each side, North American, Western and Eastern European, Russia of course, to relaunch and increase their production lines which are no longer able, for the moment, to supply each front.

are saying today.

Today, two months after your letter, this likelihood seems to be confirmed with the first skirmishes of this massive class confrontation as a **direct** result of the war and the crisis – the war in Ukraine only aggravates the inflation which was already exploding before. Numerous strikes and proletarian struggles, even *social revolts*, tend to develop, in particular for wage increases, in Europe and on other continents (Sri Lanka, Ecuador...); **let us repeat once again: in reaction to bourgeois attacks**. The fact that the former remain largely controlled by the unions, that they do not take on a character that some would call radical, even revolutionary, that they would consider only economic and not political, does not take anything away from the dynamic, from the tendency, towards proletarian reactions. From this class confrontation, of which nothing in today's situation allows us to delimit precisely the terms, the conditions and the terrains of confrontation, except that they will be determined – economically, politically and ideologically³⁵ – by the march to war, it is **possible**, not to say that it is likely at the time of writing, that the proletariat will succeed in clearing the way for an adequate response to the stakes of the situation, by *slowing down* the march to war, or even in clearing the way for its own revolutionary perspective as an alternative to the generalized war. But we are not there yet and nothing, except our hopes and our all too limited action allows us to affirm today that it is **likely** that the proletariat will succeed in slowing down, and then opposing the dynamics towards war, and even less to clear the way for its own perspective, that of the proletarian insurrection and dictatorship.

Idealism and Historical Course

The conception and analysis of the class struggle and of the current historical situation, the one opened by the war in Ukraine, that we have just presented in the previous part is related to our use – attempt of use – of the method that we associate to the concept of *historical course* – the same that the ICC abandoned at its 23rd congress in 2019. We know that this is a major difference between us. But we think it is important to clarify it in order to know as well as possible what the

³⁵ . The defense of democracy against *autocracy* and *dictatorship* for the Western countries and the shameless use of the *heroic resistance of the Ukrainians to the Russian invader* and the bloodletting of which they are the first victims are already ready-made arguments (cf. the quotation from the newspaper *Le Monde* reproduced above) against the *class egoism* of which any strike and workers' struggle would be the expression and which it would be necessary to forbid and to repress in the name of national unity and the needs for the war.

real points of divergence are and without formalistically focusing on the... formula itself.

We do not start from the idea of *course towards class confrontations*, to reduce all the facts to this one, or to deny them when they appear too openly in contradiction with the idea to be reduced to it. We try to reject any *idealist speculation*, trying to base ourselves on the evolution of the relation of force between proletariat and capitalism according to its relation to the perspective of the generalized imperialist war such as it acts and realizes itself concretely; that is to say today from the war in Ukraine, its significance and its consequences. These latter, war, its meaning and consequences, being verifiable and verified, at least partly to date, allow us to draw probabilities, not predictions, in terms of the course of events, of the situation, in order to be able to adapt our activities, our intervention, according to these probabilities and advance corresponding orientations and slogans for the fights of our class, even if they can still remain only very general³⁶.

An example? This is the fundamental reason why we have joined the ICT Call for the constitution of NWBCW committees. Precisely because it is based, and could only be based, on the recognition of the historical alternative of revolution or war to be able to warn clearly about the practical, material consequences that the on-going imperialist war in Europe has in relation to the generalized imperialist world war and what it implies for the proletariat. It is therefore based on the *dialectical* understanding that the additional sacrifices that the bourgeoisie is going to try to impose, for and in the name of the war, involve, and raise the necessity, the conditions and the perspective of proletarian reactions. Example of the contrary approach? The abstract declaration of principle of the ICC without any proposal of concrete action and orientation towards the proletariat, impotent by the very fact that it

ignores, in fact rejects, any danger and any dynamics towards generalized war, not allowing it to advance orientations and watchwords of concrete action, except its classic antiphon and on every occasion for a new Zimmerwald!

The *permanence* of the antagonism between the classes means that the struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat, capital and labor, is itself permanent, a constant. Whether the *course* of this struggle between the classes, its dynamics, is unfavorable or not from the

point of view of the historical and immediate interests of the proletariat, does not change anything about the *permanence* of the antagonism in movement between the classes. To try to understand the dynamics, what we call the *historical course*, of the class struggle, i.e. towards an aggravation or a lull, an acceleration or a slowing down, of the confrontations and to define the most probable evolution of the relation of forces between the classes, is precisely one of the central tasks of the party, the political leadership and vanguard of the proletariat. It is up to it to adapt its activities and its intervention, orientations and slogans, to the stakes and to the different battles that arise according to the moments and the places.

That it can be mistaken in the definition of what is most probable cannot be ruled out, just as the probability does not come true for different conjunctures. This is why it is necessary to constantly verify whether the facts confirm or not what has been defined as probable; and if necessary to adapt, modify, as soon as possible and as well as possible, the orientations and the watchwords, the tactics. But to reject any analysis and research of what is the most probable, of what the dynamic indicates, weakens considerably the capacity of comprehension and analysis, which has become superfluous, and can only produce a dogmatic and static approach and defense of the principles and slogans valid in all times and places; that is to say, abstract and without utility for the different moments and battles that the proletariat finds itself confronted with.

Fraternally, the IGCL, July 13rd 2022

“In the state of extreme decomposition in which they find themselves, the masses no longer speak their own language, but the language of the traitors who ensured the victory of capitalism when the revolutionary situations had shaken the capitalist regime. In all countries it is the common voice of the Stalins, the Vanderveldes, the Hitlers, the Mussolinis, which rises up and temporarily connects the masses to world capitalism. But this is only the dress rehearsal. When will the war come? No one can predict that. What is certain is that everything is ready: this month of March 1936 was to prove it tragically, luminously.”

**The Course Towards War
Bilan #29, March 1936**

³⁶ . We can't deal here with the place of the factor *communist groups and political direction* in the reality of the current balance of forces, in spite of their general isolation and the weakness of their influence, both real, especially without movement of the class, without massive "open" struggle. For all that, the party-class link is not limited, is not summarized, to the simple immediate observation of the isolation of the first with respect to the second, especially if we consider that *“the concept of class must not suggest to us a static image, but instead a dynamic one.”* (Party and Class, CP of Italy, 1921) But this is another debate to be clarified between us.

Correspondence With The Red Specter Collective (USA) on The Dynamics of The Class Struggle and The Communist Organizations' Intervention

We publish here extracts from the correspondence we had with the Red Specter Collective of the United States³⁷. The comrades of the Red Specter Collective initially understood our position on the unions as an “indifferentist” position towards the daily struggles, economic or protest, of the proletariat. It is essentially this confusion that we try to clarify in our letter. We have not had time to deal directly with various other questions raised by the letter, such as, for example, what it calls “pre-party formations” and which corresponds to intermediate organs between the party and the class. Similarly, we do not directly address the question of the “network of territorial groups” that the collective called for in the first place; or the distinction that the letter makes, wrongly in our opinion, between “struggle in itself” and “struggle for itself”. Nevertheless, the comrades came back on some of these points following our letter and their reading of Marx's German Ideology and Rosa Luxemburg's Mass Strike, Party and Union. We are convinced that the publication of these exchanges and the continuation of the debate on this point will be of interest to all communist and revolutionary forces at the dawn of massive confrontations between classes inevitably provoked by the crisis and the war.

Letter of the Red Specter Collective to the IGCL (June 29th 2022)

Comrades,

Yes you may share the correspondence with ICT. (...) We are discussing your platform at our next meeting this Sunday and we hope to make an effort to send you additional reflections after that. If possible it would be great to hear your reflections on the views presented here before Sunday if time allows you so that we can further develop from there. (...)

Trade Unions, Economic Struggle and Spontaneity

As it regards the trade union question we agree in principle regarding their ultimately counterrevolutionary role historically; however, we are still debating internally regarding the appropriate tactics of how to relate to them today. What follows is an essay from one member which hasn't been fully reviewed by all members but we would appreciate a response to.

Abstention from the Economic Struggle?

Your platform seems to imply that pre-party formations which should become “genuine permanent organizations” should not themselves engage within defensive, economic, class struggle to advance the immediate interests of the workers on an ongoing basis..

“Consequently, the capitalist character of these organs extends to all new organizations which give themselves similar functions, whatever their organizational model and the intentions they proclaim. This is the case of the 'revolutionary unions' or 'base unions', as well as of all the organs (committees or workers' nuclei, workers' commissions) which can subsist beyond the end of a struggle, even opposed to the unions, and which tend to

constitute a genuine permanent organization of defense of the immediate interests of the workers.”

The struggle around the defense of the immediate interests of workers is part and parcel of the class struggle in-itself. The job of communists is to engage within this struggle to broaden it into a class struggle for-itself as much as possible; the emergence of the political class struggle comes out of the realities brought forth within the economic struggle, by contradictions within the economic substructure that put workers in direct confrontation with their class enemy and thus are able to constitute themselves as a distinct class out of a mass of individual workers acting in competition to one another in normal circumstances. It is only the class struggle which can erase the confused fog of bourgeois ideology, constantly attempting to recuperate the social antagonisms created by its system of production to further rejuvenate itself.

By precluding ongoing organizational activities incorporating tactics oriented around the joining in with workers around the practical organization of the defense of their immediate interests, communist lose the opportunity to advance workers consciousness within the critical and sometimes brief moments when they act upon their class instinct, and are most susceptible to making large strides towards wider class consciousness. As class consciousness is not a linear progression and typically only arises as a result of the economic contradictions workers face and in defense of their material interests, it is our duty to intervene in ways that add capacity to workers efforts to defend their

³⁷ . <https://redspecter.net/>

individual interests while helping them to understand their broader class interest and historic role. It should also be our critical aim to work to incorporate workers who are won over the internationalist position within these class struggles into living and breathing territorial groups of revolutionaries. We know communist conciseness decays and dies if left in the minds only of isolated individual workers detached from a revolutionary collective, where the history of our class and its lessons lives only. The ICT's "Theses on the Role of Communists in the Economic Struggle of the Working Class" states

*"Today the economic struggle is immensely more complex than it was at the dawn of capitalism but Communists cannot shy away from it or sit with folded hands to await a better time. It makes no sense for an organisation defining itself as communist to regard action among the workers as an activity to be carried out only in certain historical periods or a future circumstance of greater numerical strength. Being involved in the daily struggle of the working class is an integral part of revolutionary work. As Onorato Damen insisted: "To put forward revolutionary demands on the ground, **however small**, in the current insecure and feeble conditions of workers' struggle, to engage in an active political militancy not just restricted to a typewriter and theorising which is an individual activity that is always debatable in intention as well as results." Today it is not the union which is the school of socialism but the class struggle itself."*

Here the ICT and Onorato implies that putting forth of "small" revolutionary demands within the daily economic struggle of workers is an essential part of communist work, in moments such as today when the workers movement is small and feeble. Throughout writings of the ICT they describe how part of the work of communist organizing is to expand and generalize the demands within the economic struggle of workers based on the reality of the situation.

Of course if communists only engagement with workers in the heat of a strike or escalatory action, is to appear as a complete outsider distribute reading materials and then exit the situation, the most likely outcome is for those scraps of paper to be placed immediately in the trash can. Our interventions must involve both theory and action by direct participation in these struggles and assisting workers in the labor that is involved in carrying out militant activity as they may require. Thus an appropriate balance of labor of both theoretical development and action must be struck in pre-party formations. Such activity requires groupings and

membership of people who are not only experts in theory, developing propaganda and educational material for distribution, but courageous fighters who prove themselves within the class war itself who work together in unison adding to the overall activity of the pre-party formations. Through active participation in the shared labor of collective struggle militants engage in relationship building with workers which propagandizes and agitate workers much more thoroughly and consistently via discursive exchanges and dialogue within the ongoing developments of a particular struggle. This sort of method is much more effective in raising communist consciousness than simply distributing reading materials. (...)

Revolutionaries should not inadvertently reproduce divides that separate themselves from the general movement of the workers by refusing to engage in the menial logistical labors that is often required to sustain such moments of working class action or from taking the risky actions associated with being on the front lines of a picket line or the barricades when workers take decisive action. Yes we should join in any assemblies if and when they form but we should also not forget to emphasize the importance of joining in the actual work and labor such things like running a strike require. The movements of the economic struggle are movements of the class itself developing an initial consciousness and thus we have responsibility to immerse ourselves within these activities to whatever extent is advantageous given the array of revolutionary forces in any given area.

Thus communists must be responsive to the living breathing realities of workers themselves and act as good prudent generals in assessing the alignment of class forces in any given situation, to devise the importance of dedicating themselves respectively to agitational, propaganda or work of direct interventions. If pre-party formation only intervene more directly within the economic struggle of "their own workplaces", as seems to generally be the doctrine of the Damenist tradition today then, the pre-party forces again separate themselves from the general movements of the class, and don't allow themselves the tactical room to grow their numbers in any given location to a sufficient degree required to reunite proletarians with the weapons of the historical lessons of their class. The party must strike a balance between a focus on theoretical development and activity within the class. (...)

In this situation there is a necessity for both developing organizational practices that allow

pre-party formations a tactical field fully capable of outreaching to proletarians while preparing themselves in developing methods of longer term secrecy and capacities at functioning in a time of deeper state repression such as those which could eminent in the United States. Additionally, a more direct engagement within the economic struggle, would allow us to both introduce workers to the communist program and recruit militants. The need to present fellow proletarians with a viable political alternatives to the increasingly polarized battle lines being drawn between the left and right wing of capital and the various imperialist blocs, presses down more than ever. Without the presence of local grouping of militants capable of actively participating within class movements, it is a guarantee that the revolutionary program will never make contact with the masses of the working class, this is not a process we can count on happening on its own due to some mystical unfolding of material determinism, but practical and tangible questions of organization that must be addressed concretely. (...)

Beyond the manipulative totalitarian control of communication technologies that shape and carve subjective consciousness and political frameworks of how proletarians understand and see the lines of fight for advancing their individual interests within the decadent capitalist order, The presence of a vast army of NGO groups, and grassroots formations of left capitalist ideologies, supported by a vast array of bourgeois intellectual and ideological factories called universities, present themselves immediately within any spontaneous movement outside of the workplace to dominate and control these movements. In today's "information age" and "attention economy" we can't rely on state capitalist dominated tools to give us knowledge of the class terrain and guide our interventions. Instead pre-party formations should seek out sections of the working class, even before they make news with their own

active struggle. Build ties with the working class, encourage them to self-organize, to take action, offer our solidarity and organizational methods for combating attacks by the bosses and generate agitational content out of the lived experiences of the class itself, instead of tailing the latest outrage focused on by the forces of left of capital, as it continues its inevitable dissent into a more regressive despotic authoritarianism.

Territorial Groups and The Defensive Aspect of the Class Struggle

Thus we see a need for pre-party formations where they exist in localities with adequate numbers to develop regular programs of focusing on internal education, propaganda, agitation and activities rooted in joining in with active solidarity with the defensive struggles of the class. These could look like the creation of territorial groups organized around internationalist principles that actively sought out groups of workers considering taking action against their boss in their workplace. Encouraging them to form temporary action committees and/or joining the territorial group itself. Such tactics allow pre-party formations the capacity to develop organizational and confrontational experience, win proletarians to the communist program and present our tendencies views to much larger sections of the working class. Without developing a wider tactical field pre-party formations will likely be unable to develop the organic membership composition necessary to develop vital organizations capable of becoming a real material force capable of having an impact on the unfolding of events. Our tendency represents the only coherent principled answers for the global proletariat and it is a vital necessity to discover ways to bring this tradition to proletarians across the world searching for tools of liberation. (...)

Red Specter Collective, June 29th 2022

IGCL Letter (July 2nd 2022)

The IGCL to Red Specter Collective,

Dear comrades,

Unfortunately, we won't be able to send you any developed comments and arguments before your meeting of tomorrow. Actually, your letter mainly deals with the question of the revolutionaries' intervention within the working class and raises several theoretical and political questions – the very process of class struggle, the relation *party-class* – that would require more time and clarification of our respective positions. May be the *easiest* way for you to have a first idea of our conception – and thus may be of the differences we may have – on the class struggle and on our intervention within the class is to refer to some of our articles. We don't refer you to these ones as absolute positions, to “accept or reject”, but as tools for your and our reflections and political debate – may be confrontation – as well as general clarification to know what are the agreements and disagreements.

We're particularly concerned to clarify our position regarding the *economic struggle*. Not only do we think absolutely necessary the communist groups intervene and be part of it, through their general intervention as well as through the members or *sympathizers* they may have in the workplaces, but we defend that they must attempt, fight for, taking the political lead of these economic struggles, whatever limited and local they may be. There, there is already one point to underline: for us, any class struggle, even very local and very limited is not only an *economic* struggle but also a *political* struggle, if only because on our historical period any working class struggle is directly confronted with the whole capitalist state apparatus. For a struggle be as *efficient* as possible in regards with the demands, it requires to look for extension and generalization and thus to confront the union opposition, open or masked, to any spreading. Thus, the economic demands and the political dimension of any struggle is closely linked because the communist groups and their militants in the workplaces have to put forwards demands that are part of this struggle for extension, for the workers of other places can take them back and enter into the very struggle. So, the political fight that any proletarian struggle has to lead for looking any *efficiency* is in first place to organize the extension and fight against the attempts to keep the struggle isolated, setting specific and *corporatist* demands alien to other places or sector, etc. The specific role of the political

vanguard is not only to put forwards these demands and methods of extension but also to state what is the immediate relation of forces for the extension and the demands be a real stake of the situation, of the fight, that is politically possible – obviously, we don't call for the workers insurrection at any moment. The same goes for the definition of the means and goals, kind of extension and demands, of any struggle. Finally, in this fight for the demands and the extension, the proletarians are confronted with the unions, trade-unions as well as rank-and-files³⁸, who oppose, openly or not, this *unitary* demands and need for spreading the strike or struggle. To make it simple and rough, this confrontation, open or not, with the unions as full organs of the bourgeois state in our historical period is full part of the political dimension of the struggle.

The second concern we have reading your letter is the *Internationalist Workers Solidarity League* your put forwards. It'll require further clarification. At first look – thus we don't have a definitive position on this –, it appears for us as a kind of formal schema, while the class struggle process is much more dynamic and moving. The way you present it focuses on the *roots within the class, not being outsiders, assisting such workers who accept internationalist principles*. The approach tends³⁹ to set the relation party-workers as a relation with an addition of individuals. It also reduces this specific organization – is this a *pre-party formation* you mention? – to the workers who *accept internationalist principles* – what about the others? Is this position the same as the KAPD's AAUD that actually, and despite their formal anti-union position, were new unions? Other questioning: what do you mean by *appearing as outsiders*? Do you reduce the relation party-class only to the physical presence of militants within the workplaces or their local relation to such or such group of workers? Since you refer to the Thesis of Lyon, we think worth quoting this passage in relation to any *labourist* conception and to reflect on both class struggle dynamic and the relation with the party:

“Any conception of the problems of internal organisation that leads to the error of the labourist conception of the

³⁸ . Whatever honest rank and file unionists or union delegates may be, and whatever they can sometime agree and support our orientation for a given moment and situation. And, if we can convince them, fine...

³⁹ . We remain careful since we're not sure we have understood well your position. But, we also want to present you our first concern so that to favor as much as we can the clarification of our respective positions.

party reveals a serious theoretical deviation, inasmuch as it substitutes a democratic vision for a revolutionary one, and attributes more importance to utopian schemes for designing new organisations than to the dialectical reality of the collision of forces between the two opposed classes.”⁴⁰

To be short, let's present you, very roughly, what are the main organs-organizations the proletariat develops for its historical and immediate struggles under the period of state capitalism:

- what we call the *unitarian* organs that gather the whole workers, just because they are proletarians and they want to participate to the struggles; they were the unions from the 19th century up to, let's say, the 1st World War ; nowadays, they are the workers councils or soviets during revolutionary or pre-revolutionary period in which the class is mobilized *in masse*, general assemblies or strike committees – whatever formal name they may have. These unitarian organizations gather all the workers for the struggle.

- the proletariat also *produces* its political organs, that is the political party, the communist party and groups, whose function is to assume the **historical** and practical **political** leadership of the whole class.

- there is a third kind or *dimension* of organization that makes a direct link between both. To limit ourselves here, we can mention what the ICT calls the *factory and territory groups* set up by the party. For our part, we point out the need for *struggle committees* that can be the result of the gathering of several workers for a workplace or a *territory* who want to mobilize and prepare a struggle. These *struggle committees* may be, and some times must be, set up by the initiatives and the calls of the communist groups and party – in a certain way, we consider for our part the NWBCW committees as such *struggle committees*.

This presentation is very rough and simple. The reality of the class struggle is much more dynamic and moving than formal distinctions and categorizations. It is just to give you a general idea of our approach.

May be a “specificity” of the IGCL update is that, among the *pro-party* forces and the ones claiming the Communist Left of Italy, we refer and base our understanding and position on the class struggle to *The mass strike* process such as Rosa Luxemburg described it, such as Trotsky related it in his book 1905 and the mass strike such as Lenin referred to on

several occasions.

So as you can see, your letter opened a field of questionings and discussions that we hope we'll be able to develop. We just wanted here to present you some general lines of thought and debate. If you've time enough, you can refer to some of our previous statements:

- in *Revolution or War #8*, and in response to the ICT text *The Role and Structure of The Revolutionary Organization*, we published *Reflections on The Intermediary Groups Between The Party and The Class* (<http://igcl.org/Reflections-on-the-Intermediary-318>);

- in *RW #11*, we published *Comments on The GCCF Theses on The Union Question* (<http://igcl.org/Comments-on-the-GCCF-s-Thesis-on-433>).

About our intervention, you can also refer to several leaflets and balance-sheet of specific struggles, particularly in France, which we published. Particularly in issues 6, 10 and 14. For instance, very short is the article *Response to critical comments* (<http://igcl.org/Quick-Critical-Comments-on-our>) about the question of *economical* demands so that you can have a quick look and read it before your Sunday meeting. A little longer – not too much actually –, the *Second Communique on The Strikes in France* (<http://igcl.org/2nd-Communique-on-the-Strikes-in-544>) deals with the question of the “intermediary” organs and our intervention within them.

We're sorry to respond you so close to your meeting. But, any clarification and discussion process has to be set in the long run, particularly in regards with the struggle for the party. For sure, you won't have time enough to read and discuss the texts we refer you to. But our aim is just to give you some references for the future and help you see and know, what are our positions and what may be our differences. That's also part of any process of *clarification*. As well, and for experience, we know that debates, confrontations and comments, whether critical or not, are always welcome. Not for a *democratic* reason, nor because any position is equal to others, but because it forces us to reflect and respond to the arguments and criticism, whether by improving the argumentation, or by being convinced of the criticism. (...)

Internationalist Greetings, the IGCL, July 2nd 2022

⁴⁰ .
(<http://www.sinistra.net/lib/pre/lunita/dufeadixye.html#u3>)

Response of the Red Specter Collective (July 29th 2022)

Comrades,

Since our last correspondence we have been collectively reflecting on some of the points you raised and materials you sent. The questions you stirred for us along with our reading of *The German Ideology* by Marx, & Luxemburg's *Mass Strike*, all within the context of a growing number of strikes across the globe, even from our last correspondence, have clarified many things for us. A major sticking point was obviously regarding the question of spontaneity and the party-class relationship.

From reading the *German Ideology* we have a clearer understanding of how historically the "revolutionary mass" arises out of the contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces. This is a historical process which emerges over the course of a long period, as such we should not so much see ourselves as individuals separated from the determining dynamics within the capitalist mode of production. Instead we act as the self-conscious element of the class itself. According to Marx in the *German Ideology*

“The separate individuals form a class only insofar as they have to carry on a common battle against another class, in other respects they are on hostile terms with each other as competitors. On the other hands the class, in its turn assumes an independent existence as against the individuals so that the later find their conditions of life predetermined, and have their positions in life, and hence their personal development assigned to them by their class, thus becoming subsumed under it. This is the same phenomenon as the subject of the separate individuals to the division of labor and can only be removed by the abolition of private property and of labor itself.”

So we as revolutionaries are not detached from the fabric of the various factors which determine the alignment of the capacities of the proletariat at any given time. We act as a conscious element of the class itself,

which has arisen as a result of the exact level of contradictions at this historical junction within the system itself as it has played out over our lifetimes.

Upon familiarizing ourselves more with the *Mass Strike* as it occurred in Russia, we now see how the process Marx discussed in the *German Ideology*, unfolded in concrete terms over a protracted period of escalated class struggle historically. Given the sustained period of the current accumulation crisis it does not seem that the current trend of increased workers militancy is likely to end anytime soon. It

points to a potential development of a global mass strike. We agree that every economic struggle is also a political struggle. As such, we agree that it is essential that we as members of the revolutionary class conscious vanguard perform our historical role in providing political leadership within the emerging struggles of our class. Given that the capitalist class can only resolve its current crisis through a third world war, we also agree on the central importance of developing proletarian opposition to this by presenting the only alternative to capitalism's war drive, revolution.

In regards to the interventions within the class we appreciated your clarifications, and are in agreement that these should focus on the generalization of struggles and the breaking of their isolation within individual sectors. We have witnessed how even within recent events this has occurred within the struggle of healthcare workers where we are presently situated and more broadly with the railroad workers attempts to move to a strike in the United States. We

also agree in regards to efforts to extend the demands of particular workers struggles in relation

“The work of propagating its ideology and proselytizing for its ranks which the party continuously carries on is thus inseparable from the reality of the proletariat's activity and movement in all its myriad forms. It is a banal error to see as contradictory: participation in struggles for contingent and limited objectives, and the preparation of the final and general revolutionary struggle. The very existence of the party's unitary organism, with its indispensable conditions of clarity of programmatic vision and solidity of organizational discipline, gives a guarantee that partial demands will never be accorded the value of ends in themselves, and that the struggle to fulfil them will only be seen as a means of experience and training for useful and effective revolutionary preparation.”

**Theses of Roma, PC of Italy,
1922**

to an assessment of the immediate relation of forces within any given workers struggle.

Given all of this, we have scrapped our plans in regards to the Territorial Defense League. Upon further reflection we indeed felt that it was too schematic and was falling into past errors of ours, in attempting to generate class struggle where conditions were not driving workers already towards spontaneous activity. Instead we have chosen to redouble our efforts within the No War But Class War committee. Our correspondence have helped us clarify the historical context of how spontaneous

action arises as a result of the objective historical situation, what are possibilities for more effective interventions in the future and the appropriate party-class relationship.

(...) Additionally, we would ask for your permission to publish all of our correspondences we have had thus far on our blog as we are hoping to also put into practice this element of the "party method" as it relates to our Red Specter blog and conversations with other groups in the communist left.

Red Specter July 29th 2022

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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)

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Internal Debate

In the previous issue of this journal, we published the last part, *Capitalism and Democracy* (<http://igcl.org/We-publish-here-the-third-and-last>), of the series of contributions on Communism and Community and Marxism and Knowledge in RW #19 and 20. It raised a number of criticisms in our ranks which were presented succinctly in the introduction made by the editorial team in RG #21. We publish here a more argued response.

Criticism of The Contribution *Capitalism and Democracy*

"I've seen a screw machine in London that makes three thousand screws in an hour. If only I could implement that here!"

(*The Effingers, a Berlin Saga*, Gabriele Tergit)

The contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* contradicts several points of the platform we have just adopted while calling into question entire passages of K. Marx's *Capital* and the political lessons of the Communist Left. The basic political error, undoubtedly due to the initial approach, lies in the parallel and direct link it makes between the passage from *formal domination* [subsumption⁴¹] to *real domination* of capitalism and the development of "democracy". Let us quote the most problematic passage:

"The rise of capitalism and the rise of bourgeois democracy are inseparably linked. (...) It is important to distinguish two distinct phases in the history of capitalism. The first phase, which Marx calls the formal domination of capital, and which includes the process of primitive accumulation, refers to the phase in which capital emerges and dissolves the old traditional social relations. To do this, capitalism necessarily takes a rather authoritarian and undemocratic form. Examples include the censitary suffrage in most of the young Western democracies of the 18th and 19th centuries, or the establishment of English workhouses in the same period. But even the Russian Gulag and the Chinese Great Leap Forward appear as equally authoritarian forms of the emergence of national capital. Between primitive European accumulation and the authoritarian regimes of the Eastern bloc in the 20th century, there is in fact more of a difference in form, linked to the different eras, than in substance. Once capitalism enters its phase of real domination (...) it can let go and thus become more and more liberal in the modern sense of the term. If we take our examples mentioned above, England is much more democratic today than it was in the 18th century. Similarly, Russia and China are also much more democratic than they were in the mid-20th century, despite the fact that these are regimes that are considered

undemocratic by the West"

Let's summarize the point. The phase of formal domination would correspond to an "authoritarian and undemocratic" form of the capitalist state, as the example of the United Kingdom in the 18th century and "the censitary suffrage in most of the young Western democracies of the 18th and 19th centuries" attest; but also the Russian gulag or the Maoist *great leap forward* in China, the first in the 1930s and the second in 1950. In other words, the transition from one form of domination to another would have taken place in the 19th century for England and in the 20th for Russia and China. Moreover, there is only a difference in form between primitive accumulation in Europe, which "appears as 'primitive' because it forms the pre-history of capital"⁴² according to K. Marx, and the Stalinist dictatorships in Russia and China in the 20th century. Finally, the more capital develops, the more it could "let go [and its political apparatus become] more and more liberal in the modern sense of the word" to the point that England would be, according to the contribution, much more democratic today than then.

In *The Capital*, K. Marx explains that the formal domination of capitalism corresponds to the extraction of absolute surplus-value and to the labor process linked to the manufacture as opposed to the factory and then to large-scale industry; the latter corresponding to the extraction of relative surplus-value and to real domination. "That form of cooperation which is based on division of labour assumes its classical shape in manufacture. As a characteristic form of the capitalist process of production it prevails throughout the manufacturing period properly so-called, which extends, roughly speaking, from the middle of the sixteenth century to the last third of the eighteenth

⁴¹ . In the English version, Marx used *subsumption* instead of *domination*. In French, he used *domination*.

⁴² . *The Capital*, Vol.1, chapter 26, *The Secret of Primitive Accumulation*, Penguin Classics.

century.”⁴³ In other words, according to Marx, the transition from formal to real domination takes place in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. “At the same time as machine production was becoming more general, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, it [large-scale industry] gradually took over the construction of the machines themselves.”⁴⁴ In the same way, since a long time, the Communist Left has revealed that the late USSR and the so-called People Republic of China were only particular forms of the universal tendency to state capitalism, itself being “first and foremost a **political** response against the proletariat and for the needs of imperialist war” according to our platform; and therefore having nothing to do with the passage to real domination or even less with the primitive accumulation of capital. Finally, “the old, bourgeois, parliamentary democracy” according to Lenin⁴⁵ was far from strengthening with the apogee of capitalism, then its phase of historical decline and the development of state capitalism, including in the historical countries of so-called democratic capitalism. On the contrary, it proved to be ever more authoritarian and totalitarian, to the point that as early as 1920, the Communist International affirmed that “the center of gravity of political life has at present been removed finally and completely beyond the bounds of parliament.”

Formal and Real Domination According to The Modernist Group *Invariance*

For anyone who has read, or taken a look at, the journal *Invariance*⁴⁶ of the 1960s-1970s, the parallel between its theorization of the *formal and real domination* of capitalism and the approach of the contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* is striking. The difference is that the former goes much further in its political implications. Let's stop there for a moment. What does *Invariance* say? In its 1969 *Working Theses*⁴⁷ on *The Communist Revolution*, *Invariance* relies on the

⁴³ . Op. Cit, chap. 14, The Division of Labour and Manufacture, I. The Dual Origin of Manufacture.

⁴⁴ . Op. Cit, chap. 15 Machinery and Large-Scale Industry, I. The Development of Machinery.

⁴⁵ . Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and The Dictatorship of the Proletariat, 1919, 1st Congress of the International Communist.

⁴⁶ . “*Invariance* is a French magazine edited by Jacques Camatte, published since 1968. It emerged from the Italian left-communist tradition associated with Amadeo Bordiga and it originally bore the subtitle “Invariance of the theory of the proletariat”, indicating Bordiga's notion of the unchanging nature of communist theory. (...) However, around 1972-75 it broke with many of the tenets of Bordigism and Marxism per se, arguing that in the aftermath of May '68 there was no longer any potential for the working class to escape the domination of capital through revolution.” (Wikipedia)

⁴⁷ . We translate from French and we refer to Part 4, le développement du capitalisme, of these extremely long theses (<https://revueinvariance.pagesperso-orange.fr/revolutiononcommunisme.html>).

distinction between the two phases of formal and real domination to establish the passage from one to the other in the 20th century: “during the period which goes from 1870 to 1914 (...) capitalism extends to the whole planet, but it is mostly a simple formal domination. (...) When the war of 1914 broke out, a period of profound crisis for the capitalist mode of production began. It is the period of its metamorphosis, from its form of formal domination to the real one.” This metamorphosis extends until 1945: “It is only by ensuring its absolute domination over the proletariat that capitalism achieves its real domination. This is what happened during the two world wars.” So we are far, very far, from what *The Capital* puts forwards. And close, very close, to what the contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* advances.

In fact, *Invariance* makes a sleight of hand by taking up concepts used in *The Capital* while substituting another theoretical and historical content. *The Capital* merely studies the process of the capitalist mode of production and, in the distinction between formal and real domination, the technical process of labor, which allows us to understand the difference between the extraction of absolute and relative surplus-value and how the productivity of labor will explode with large-scale industry up to the present days, making communist society not only possible but indispensable. “Intrinsically, it is not a question of higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms that spring from the natural laws of capitalist production. It is a question of these laws themselves...” K. Marx underlines in the Preface of the first edition, describing his work. For its part, *Invariance* extends “the real domination of capital (...) to the subordination of all social or political components to capital”, this being realized “on the society” at the “higher or lower degree of development of the social antagonisms”; contrary to *The Capital* therefore. In so doing, it reduces all the phenomena more or less linked to the development of state capitalism since 1914 for the purposes of the world war to the passage from *the formal to the real domination* of capitalism. Now, the generalized imperialist war is the highest expression of the economic crisis in the so-called period of decline or decadence of capitalism and of its historical impasse. It does not express any still *progressive* or *historically necessary* period of capitalism such as the transition to the *real domination* of capitalism would be, and was in its time.

“... It is clear that the transition from the manufactory to the factory is particularly important when we deal with the development of capitalism. Whoever confuses these two stages deprives himself of the possibility of understanding the transforming, progressive role of

capitalism.”⁴⁸

And it is precisely here, politically, where *Invariance's* modernist revisionism falls off the *political* mask. The passage from formal domination to “*real domination over society*” is used as a theoretical justification to grant a progressive character to Mao Tse Tung's Chinese *great leap forward* and to... Stalinism and Fascism: “*Fascism, Nazism, the New Deal, Francoism, Salazarism, as well as Stalinism, have a fundamental role in the establishment of the real domination of capital over society.*”; or “*the crisis of 1913 was linked to the transformation of capital, to its passage – on a social scale – from formal domination to real domination; the political form of the latter being fascism.*”⁴⁹ Fascism, Nazism, American New Deal and Stalinism are no longer expressions and diverse actors – all counter-revolutionary – of the universal tendency to state capitalism for the needs of generalized imperialist war, and against the revolutionary proletariat; but expressions and actors of the progressive passage towards the real domination of capital. From there to support them as *progressive*, there is only a door to cross and that *Invariance* has left wide open. And that it crosses cheerfully, at least in the support of the struggles of national liberation: “*After 1945 (...) it was the grandiose struggle of the so-called colored peoples against Western capitalism. (...) First there was the great revolutionary wave in Asia, then in Africa.*” (*Working Theses*)

In the end, *Invariance* has the “merit” of not denying that it openly questions Marx, who “*did not produce an explanation of real domination.*”⁵⁰ At least this is clear to all.

Formal and Real Domination According to *The Capital*

In the limits of our critique, we cannot make an *minima* presentation of the description that K. Marx makes in *The Capital* of the passage from manufacture to factory, and then to large-scale industry⁵¹. We just want to insist here on the

⁴⁸ . Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, chap. VII, I. The Scientific Conception of the Factory... (marxist.org)

⁴⁹ . *Invariance*, Perspectives, <https://revueinvariance.pagesperso-orange.fr/perspectives1.html>

⁵⁰ . We cannot mention here all the so-called *modernist* positions of this group claiming to Marx's *superseding* [dépassement] and the disappearance of the proletariat, making that “*insofar as one can no longer speak of class, it is no longer possible to speak of party even in its historical sense. It is important to put the community in the foreground. The parties become rackets.*”

⁵¹ . We refer our readers and comrades to the 4th and 5th sections of volume 1 of *The Capital*, “The Production of Relative Surplus Value” and “The Production of Absolute and Relative Surplus Value”, Penguin Classics; or simply to the... *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, which, as early as 1847,

revolutions in the technical process of labour that took place with the introduction of the machine tool, and thus the development of the factory and then of large-scale industry, in order to understand whether the process leading to the passage from formal domination to real domination must necessarily be repeated identically and autonomously according to the countries in question, depending on their accession to the nation-state and to the parliamentary bourgeois democracy that classically accompanies it. This is what *Invariance* and the contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* advance by presenting Stalinism in Russia in the 1930s and the *Great Leap Forward* in China as moments of the transition to the real domination of capital.

As we have already mentioned, K. Marx “*contents himself*” – if one may say so – to make “*the analysis of a process of production into its particular phases*”⁵², its technical process. In manufacturing, “*handicraft [of the self-employed worker, the craftsman] remains the basis. (...) The skill of the craftsman remains the foundation of the manufacture.*”⁵³ The tool remains there in the service of the worker whereas it is the worker who puts himself in the service of the machine in the large-scale industry which, by means of the machine-tool, *revolutionizes* the technical process of labour. “*Steam and machinery revolutionised industrial production. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, Modern Industry.*” (*Communist Manifesto*) From then on, “*capital threw itself with all its might, and in full awareness of the situation, into the production of relative surplus-value, by speeding up the development of the machine system.*”⁵⁴

Insofar as *The Capital* mentions the transition from one domination to another only in Western Europe and provides examples almost exclusively from England, it is tempting to believe that the transition from manufacture to large-scale industry in the first half of the 19th century concerns only this country, or even part of Western Europe, where the revolutionary bourgeoisie succeeded in creating the nation-state and thus a national market against the resistance and opposition of the feudal aristocracy. The new capitalist nations constituted afterwards would then have had to go through the same successive process of “*domestic industry-manufacture-factory-large scale industry*”. This *mechanical, non-dialectical, scheme* is already

already deals with the already accomplished transition from manufacture and to large-scale industry.

⁵² . *Op. Cit*, chap. XIV, I. The Dual Origin of Manufacture.

⁵³ . *Idem*. But, we stick to the French version of the Éditions sociales, which refers explicitly to the manufacture while the English does not.

⁵⁴ . *Op. Cit*, chap. 15, III. c) Intensification of Labour.

contradicted by the particular cases of Germany and Italy, whose constitution as a nation-state, accompanied by parliamentary democratic regimes, although headed by an emperor and a king, dates from 1870. “The forms in which Italian industry will appear are of the great monopoly; the improvements that had required long years in other countries will transplant themselves directly to Italy.”⁵⁵ In other words, the development of industrial capitalism in Italy is made directly from the modern process of work, from large-scale industry, through the introduction of the machine tool existing on the universal market. The real domination of capital and the extraction of relative surplus value are already a reality in Italy, even if manufacturing and formal domination are still widespread in the country.⁵⁶ If we remain faithful to the definition of the formal and real domination of capitalism put forward in *The Capital*, which is limited to the labor process, as opposed to that of *Invariance*, which extends “over the whole of society”, then it is clear that the capitalist development of China takes place from the outset under the same conditions, those of large-scale industry and the labor process that goes with it. In China, “after the revolution of 1911, the trade union movement developed rapidly. Alongside the old guilds of craftsmen and apprentices, the first workers' unions were formed in some industrial centers. But it was above all the world war that, with the decrease in imports, caused the development of indigenous industry and, as a result, an increase in the working class.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ . Bilan #20, Report on The Situation in Italy, 1935, Left Fraction of the CP of Italy, translated from French.

⁵⁶ . The advent of real domination and relative surplus-value is not contradicted by the maintenance of formal forms of domination and absolute surplus-value. “If we consider the two forms of surplus-value, absolute and relative, separately, we shall see that absolute surplus-value always precedes relative. To these two forms of surplus-value there correspond two separate forms of the subsumption of labour under capital, two distinct forms of capitalist production. And here too one form always precedes the other, although the second form, the more highly developed one, can provide the foundations for the introduction of the first in new branches of industry.” (Results of *The Immediate Process of Production, The Real Subsumption of Capital* known as *Chapitre inédit du capital* in French) Even today, in particular in the luxury industry which calls upon the old handicraft of traditional craftsmanship, one can still speak of absolute surplus value, as in the case of the seamstresses of the high fashion houses or of works such as the stonemasons for the renovation of castles or old houses...

⁵⁷ . Bilan #9, La Chine soviétique, 1934, translated from French. The *Manifesto* is also clear on this issue as early as 1847 : “The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market (...) has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations. (...) The cheap prices of commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls...”

Formal and Real Domination in Russia According to Lenin

For *Invariance*, “Lenin's time [in 1916 when he published *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*] was the one of the transition to the real domination of capital” in Russia. In *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, written in 1899, Lenin succeeds brilliantly in declining the teachings of *The Capital* on the transition from the formal to the real domination of capital to the development of capitalism in Russia.

“So long as capitalism in Russia did not organise large-scale machine industry, and in those industries in which it has not done so yet, we see almost complete stagnation in technique, we see the employment of the same hand-loom and the same watermill or windmill that were used in production centuries ago. On the other hand, in industries subordinated to the factory we observe a complete technical revolution and extremely rapid progress in the methods of machine production.”⁵⁸

He already rejects there the thesis which will become thereafter that of the Mensheviks and Plekhanov in particular, according to which the proletariat in Russia could only support the bourgeoisie for the needs of the bourgeois revolution. But above all, he affirms that the transition to large-scale industry has already been accomplished in Russia in spite of the historical backwardness of Russian capitalism:

“This picture clearly shows, on the one hand, that commodity circulation and, hence, commodity production are firmly implanted in Russia. **Russia is a capitalist country.** On the other hand, it follows from this that Russia is still very backward, as compared with other capitalist countries (...). The complete separation of industry from agriculture is effected only by large-scale machine industry. **The Russian facts fully confirm this thesis,** [we underline] which was established by the author of *Capital* for other countries, but which is usually ignored by the Narodnik economists.”⁵⁹

The result is that, according to Lenin himself, Russia is a fully-fledged capitalist country, which does not detract from its historical backwardness, where large-scale industry is decisive, even if it is a “minority”, and the real domination of capital has already been achieved several decades before the Russian Revolution and the 1930s; this is the very decade where *Capitalism and Democracy* sets out “the emergence of [Russian] national capital.”

⁵⁸ . Lenin, *The Development of Capitalism in Russia*, ch. VII, part XII (marxism.org).

⁵⁹ . *idem.* Part V and IX.

Real Domination of Capital and “Democracy”

The contribution *Capitalism and Democracy* differs on one point from *Invariance's* theses: on the question of democracy. Indeed, and contrary to the latter, it argues that with the real domination definitively established, capitalism “can let go and thus become more and more liberal in the modern sense of the term” to the point that “England is much more democratic today than it was in the 18th century.” We have seen that the real domination of capitalism and the development of “bourgeois democracy” were not directly linked, one not automatically determining the other. In this sense, if the hypothesis of a more accomplished bourgeois democracy were valid for today's England, it would have nothing to do with a phenomenon, the transition to real domination, that dates back almost two centuries now in this case. But for all that, is bourgeois democracy more effective, “less authoritarian” to use the terms, today than in the past, than in the 19th century? This position openly contradicts the point of our platform on *The Parliamentary and Electoral Mystification*:

“With the entry of the system into its phase of increasing domination of state capitalism for the needs of generalized imperialist war, the parliament ceases to be an organ in which the different bourgeois fractions debate and settle their differences, which could leave space for the other classes. With the imperialist war and faced with the revolutionary threat of the proletariat, the executive definitively takes precedence over the legislative, the governments over the parliaments, which are now only recording chambers for government decisions.”

Besides this contradiction with our platform, which should be argued, the text suffers from its initial approach. It addresses the question of democracy in itself. The first paragraph even explicitly claims this abstract methodological approach: “we will attempt in this contribution to analyze democracy in itself, without any other adjective.” The addition, often, not always, of the classist qualifier of *bourgeois* to *democracy* does not succeed in modifying the angle adopted from the start and the method it induces. Hence, for example, formulas at the same time a-classist and a-historical on “democracy” presented several times as only conservative or only guarantor of the social order: “democracy is the political form par excellence of social conservation”, “The dynamism of democracy aims above all at socio-political conservation, at maintaining the strict political status quo”... If this is the case, it is difficult to understand why both Marx and Lenin, to name but two, supported democratic movement and even “revolution”, especially in Germany and Russia, including against the bourgeoisie when it was unable to take the lead and assume this struggle:

“The proletariat must carry to completion the democratic revolution, by allying to itself the mass of the peasantry in order to crush by force the resistance of the autocracy and to paralyse the instability of the bourgeoisie.”⁶⁰(Lenin)

Historically, the process leading to the advent of bourgeois democracy was not directly and mechanically linked to the economic development of national capital. It was the product... of the class struggle, itself determined **in the last instance** by the development of capitalism. It resulted from the ability, or not, of the bourgeoisie to wage its own class struggle against the remnants of feudalism and for the establishment of a bourgeois state apparatus, of which democracy and parliament in particular were the classical attributes. These were the most appropriate tools for the bourgeoisie to manage and settle its disputes, mainly between its commercial, industrial and financial fractions. The fact that suffrage was not universal, remained censal, does not change the degree of “democracy” for the bourgeoisie itself. But in arguing that England is more democratic today than it was at the beginning of the 20th century, the contribution relies on the fact that the vote is now universal. It is thus a victim of the democratic mystification of decadent capitalism. The fact that the vote is today universal does not reinforce the more democratic or liberal character of the capitalist state, but on the contrary the mystifying character that has become dominant of parliament and elections against the proletariat.

In the end, beyond the flirting with the modernist sirens of *Invariance*, the contribution weakens, to say the least, the overall coherence of our platform and the theoretical basis of most of the *class frontiers* that are exposed in it: state capitalism as an expression of capitalist decadence; the counterrevolutionary character of Stalinism and national liberation struggles; even, in the name of the progressive character of the transition to real domination, the equally counterrevolutionary character of frontism with bourgeois political forces; and our position on elections and parliament. In particular, the point on *The Conditions of Proletarian Struggle Against State Capitalism*, based precisely on the development of state capitalism – and not on the transition to real domination achieved “in the last third of the 18th century” – sees its theoretical and principled foundation seriously weakened, at the risk of being nothing more than an abstract declaration of intent and of breaking the indispensable unity between theory, principles and tactics.

RL, July 2022

⁶⁰ . *Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, 1905, part 12.

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Summary of the journal #19 and #20

#20 February 2022

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The Question of the Historical Course

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

Contribution: Capitalism and Bourgeois Democracy

OUR BASIC POSITIONS

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

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

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