

1919



Issue No 3 — June 2022

ABOUT US

1919 is a joint political journal between the two North American affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), Klasbatalo and Internationalist Workers' Group. We fight toward the historic task of the working class, communism. Communism is the organization of society directly focused on the fulfillment of need in which the antagonism between the individual and collective is abolished. It is a world which knows no classes, property, state, or bureaucracy. In short, communism is the abolition of political society. To achieve this task, we believe the working class must fight on its own terrain to defend against the bosses' attacks, and to push forth its own interest. We are for the formation of the world communist party. We do not believe that we alone will be this party. Rather, we see ourselves participating in the real work that is necessary for its formation.

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Contents

— Editorial

Klasbatalo & Internationalist Workers' Group

— “If we can show them, we're capable of anything:” The 1972 Québec General Strike in retrospect

Azdak, Klasbatalo

— Malignant ulcers of capitalism: The proletarian struggle for reproductive freedom (Part 3)

EK (ICO) & KM (IWG)

— Cuba: The real fight against state repression begins with workers' self-organization

Affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency
and Internationalist Communists of Oceania

— The impossible aspirations of reformism during capitalism's decadence

B (Internationalist Workers Group)

— Uncle Sam's "Socialists" and the war in Ukraine

ASm (IWG)

Editorial

In part, because world events happen so quickly, and because of the difficulties faced by part-time contributors/full-time workers, who must continue to work to reproduce our daily existence, the Spring 2022 Issue of 1919 includes several ongoing topics, some of which may seem “out of place” by the time of this publication. While the fate of the world appears in the balance in ways none of us could conceive of prior to 2020, we still believe it is important to cover the topics we have included in this issue. In fact, the issues discussed in the articles are deeply relevant in this current moment, and will continue to be so long as class society continues.

Labor militancy rose to great heights by the 1940s. Since then, we have seen the gradual defeat of the working class, with the number of strikes declining year-over-year, until now. Over the past several years, strike activity has begun to increase. Many workers are not old enough to remember first-hand what their class was capable of. It is essential to know and understand, and to learn from the mistakes made by organizing workers of the past.

The United States has had some degree of abortion access in every state for the past 50 years. However, that is about to change rapidly, sharpening the crisis as many women will be forced to travel hundreds of miles for legal access. We discussed deepening restrictions on abortion in the previous issue in “Malignant ulcers of capitalism” but will now delve into the effects of imperialist war and the climate crisis on working-class women. In light of the Texas law, the impending Supreme Court decision, and the war and destruction in Ukraine, this discussion is truly necessary.

We also cover the dual threats to working class power, Stalinism and social democracy. We discuss a top-down and poorly executed liberal movement to oppose the regime in Cuba. We cover reformism in the United States, and how it serves capital at the expense of the working class, despite all of its “good intentions”. And finally, we explore

some of the ways the left finds itself supporting the ruling class in times of war, in our first examination of the war in Ukraine. Below we will discuss the war a bit more in-depth, since it was not the focus of this issue. However, we plan to focus solely on the Russian-Ukrainian war for our next issue, covering topics such as imperialism, anti-imperialism, and what the world could look like if the war moved beyond Ukraine to include NATO forces.

To better understand this conflict, it is important to set the stage. We are in a period of international crisis. Since 2021, high inflation has emerged as a new feature of the contemporary economy. Capitalist economists struggle to explain the causes beyond “supply chain issues” and have yet to offer solutions that work. The inflation rate has doubled since Spring of 2021 and is expected to continue steadily at historic rates. Compounding the issue is the continued rinsing of the working class at the expense of the capitalists. Oxfam estimates that a new billionaire is minted every 30 hours. Simultaneously, they estimate that one million people will fall into extreme poverty every 33 hours.¹ Extraction from workers is accelerating, and now the threat of world war looms. These phenomena are connected. Competition between world powers raises the threat of imperialist war, and economic sanctions perpetuate and worsen economic crisis.

The conflict in Ukraine has brought with it great destruction, as cities have been levelled and refugees pour into neighboring countries. The initial invasion shocked only those who have failed to pay attention to the conflict that has existed in Eastern Ukraine since 2014. The conflict continues, and although unimaginable quantities of weapons have been supplied by NATO, it continues technically as a “local conflict”. The bourgeois media of the opposing imperial powers accuse one another of instigating the war. Russia blames NATO expansion and arms buildup adjacent to Russian territory. The United States and NATO feign ignorance as they have worked to expand the alliance to former

Soviet Bloc states while isolating Russia. Russian state media acts as a singular messenger to portray Ukrainians as Nazis, while the liberal end of the US media spectrum has primed Americans for war with Russia with nonstop anti-Putin rhetoric going back to at least 2015. Many on the left have embraced Ukraine, seeing in them an underdog hoping for nothing more than to remain sovereign. Some anarchists have even joined in the mobilization effort, farcically echoing Makhno while fighting side-by-side with battle-hardened Ukrainian Nazis. And, of course, many on the left (and far-right) have all but declared allegiance to the Russian Federation, apparently unable to lift themselves from an “anti-imperialist” fever dream that started in 1991. There is no end to the irony of every faction of capital dashing whimsically from one side to the other, assuring themselves that this is the right sight in this conflict. In some ways, the dysfunctional economy and the heavy-hanging threat of a world war conjures images of the 1930s, but even more so the confused jockeying of a million left and right factions is history repeating itself uncannily.

Communist militants arriving at this juncture know that both sides of an inter-imperialist conflict are enemies of the working class. Workers share a common bond in that they are all oppressed by capitalist regimes with different flags that will attempt to convince them to slaughter one another.

This message is as true now as it was in 1914, as we live in a teetering and decadent phase of capitalism that is incapable of innovating its way out of its decline. However, it is important not to simply pat oneself on the back for accurate analysis of the current geopolitical climate. Many on the left will grow disillusioned with support for this or that bourgeoisie. And more importantly, many less political workers will see this coordinated assault for what it is and will soon find themselves looking for answers as to why they must sacrifice so that workers in another country can be robbed of life. Therefore, it is vital that communists engage with their class on this subject, and do so in a coordinated manner. We must speak out against our own governments and demand an end to the conflict. We must instead re-direct eyes to the conflict that workers participate in every day. This conflict has raged on for centuries and continues unabated. This war has been one-sided for far too long. So while we call for “no war”, we must condition this, because we realize that the often-defeated working class can and must stand up and fight against its class oppressors. And so, we say, “No war but the class war!”

Notes

¹ <https://www.oxfam.org/en/press-releases/pandemic-creates-new-billionaire-every-30-hours-now-million-people-could-fall>



“If we can show them, we're capable of anything:” The 1972 Québec General Strike in retrospect

The growing militancy of the North American working class, marked by the uptick in strikes last fall, in facing its deteriorating conditions post-2008 financial crisis and its sharpening with the Covid-19 pandemic demands a serious examination of past revolts against the domination of workers by the wage system and capital. Fifty years ago, the workers of Québec, placed in an impossible position on the eve of the global economic crisis of the 70s, found strength in unity and self-organization. The 1972 Québec General Strike went beyond prior labour struggles in both extent (over 300,000 workers directly participated) and character; the Québec workers acted in class independence to take strike action, held mass assemblies, and set the political agenda. Although the Québec working class was effectively demobilized by the “Common Front” troika of public-sector unions, the kernel was planted for workers today: the independence of the working class from capitalist organs such as the union structure or the state provides the

basis for effective, generalized struggle against the capitalist class and its transformation into a revolutionary force.

Background to 1972

Prior to the General Strike, Québec was not foreign to working-class struggle. As part of the continent-wide surge of labour agitation in 1919, marked by the Winnipeg and Seattle General Strikes, over 12,000 workers (mainly in the factories) went on strike in Montréal, with another 15,000 threatening to join them.¹ This strike failed to generalize on a city-wide and country-wide basis, mainly due to the conservatism of the unions, but still represented a great degree of class agency and there were expressions of support for the Winnipeg workers.² Many strikers were affiliated with international unions such as the AFL.³ Post-war Québec saw key strikes at Asbestos (1949), Louiseville (1952), and Murdochville (1957) culminate

into a greater width and depth of the union movement, the former lasting four months and Louisville lasting seven.⁴ With the 1960s, the unions were secularized from the Catholic Church and underwent a process of expansion and concentration.⁵ The growing institutional power of the unions, coupled with stagnant or worsening working conditions, made the early '70s ripe for a general struggle by the working class.

Québec workers faced deteriorating working conditions, reinforced by the structural disadvantage of Francophones and women, which must be put into context. Although Québec underwent a period of rapid economic growth in the '60s, its working class faced persistent disproportionate unemployment and wage rates. Amidst other factors, this is because the provincial government took the whip to its working class as a strategy for attracting global capital. The labour market, wherein Québec faced 29% higher unemployment rates as compared to the Canadian average in the period from 1946-69, depressed wages as a means of securing higher rates of profit.⁶ Industries that relied on the labour of women particularly benefited from the fact that, on average, men were paid 60% more than their female counterparts.⁷ Furthermore, the national question, especially pertaining to language, played a great role in stratifying the working class by paying French-speaking workers less and typically consigning them to the lower ranks of the army of labour. According to the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, monolingual anglophones were paid higher than any other group, receiving a yearly salary of \$6,049 compared to the \$5,929 of bilingual anglophones, \$4,523 of bilingual francophones, and \$3,107 of monolingual francophones.⁸ This was a primary basis for the national question in Québec, especially as formulated by the workers themselves rather than the French-speaking capitalist class, who would rather that it was their factories exploiting Québec labour than Anglo-Canadian or American companies.

Finally, it must be noted that the 1972 General Strike was launched at the edge of the precipice—in

a little over a year's time from the conclusion of the strike, the OPEC oil embargo would expose global capital's decline and spark spiraling inflation, lowered wages, and mass unemployment. All talk below of working conditions, workers' demands, and government concessions should be relativized with the fact that the militant workers are soon to face a decade of crisis. Especially when considering the tangible gains of the strike, the near future should be taken into account.

The Road to General Strike

Although the opening salvos of the general strike were (for the most part) led by the unions, their actions betrayed a high degree of militancy by the workers they were supposed to represent. This was conditioned by spontaneous displays of class solidarity in late 1971. After five months of a lockout at the La Presse newspaper building and ensuing union protests, the city of Montréal and Québec government banned demonstrations on October 29th. In spite of this, 15,000 workers arrived the next day, leading to a bloody street battle against the police and resulting in one death.⁹

In response to both the anger of Québec workers and the direct state suppression of the workers' movement, the three leading unions of Québec, the FTQ, CEQ, and CSN (who officially represented 215,000 workers) combined their efforts ahead of public-sector contract negotiations and formed the Common Front. These unions, especially the CEQ and CSN, utilized radical political positions (the CSN even described itself as Marxist!) and an (unofficial) alliance with the nationalist Parti Québécois (PQ) to match the dire situation Québec workers faced and the militancy they wielded. As a formidable force vis-a-vis the employers, the union announced a series of demands, including an 8% raise (to counteract inflation), a \$100 per week minimum wage, and equal pay irrespective of language, sector, or sex.¹⁰

April, 1972

By the beginning of 1972, the Common Front en-

joyed a high degree of popularity and trust amongst the workers they claimed to represent and whose energies they leveraged. This enabled their launch of the first phase of the 1972 General Strike after failed negotiations, beginning on April 11th and ending on the 22nd of the same month. The strike, mass in scale (involving over 200,000 public-sector workers), posed a direct threat to the continuity of capital accumulation in the province. From hospitals and schools to the staff of Hydro-Québec, workers ceased labour “essential” for the reproduction of the economy. A response from the provincial and federal governments was inevitable.

The modern state is “but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie,” and in periods of capitalist crisis (be they economic or due to the class struggle) this becomes quite clear. Just as the state ensured capitalists access to “essential workers” during the pandemic by outlawing strikes of Montréal port workers and American meatpackers, the Québec government prohibited the continuation of the General Strike, attacking first (on the 19th) over one hundred healthcare workers with arrests and heavy fines.

Two days later (on the tenth day of the unlimited strike), Bill 19 was passed by the provincial government with the assent of Ottawa, placing an injunction on the strike at-large. The strike was to become illegal on the midnight of the 23rd. The Common Front union leaders, Marcel Pélipin, Yvon Charbonneau, and Louis Laberge, initially campaigned for the continuation of the strike in spite of the injunction and called for a referendum on the mandate. However, despite the fact that a majority of the striking workers (60%) voted in favour of continuing their struggle, the union bureaucracy, perceiving a weak position vis-a-vis the state, turned face and demanded the strikers return to work.¹¹ The resulting confusion and fragmentation, where some workers continued to strike and some returned, led to an effective end of the first phase of the general strike and the May 9th imprisonment of the three union leaders for originally supporting the continuation of the strike.

The about-face of the union leaders did not go unnoticed by Québec workers. For example, the workers of Sept-Îles, a small mining city of the Côte-Nord region, sent a delegation to Québec City to address the union leaders, criticizing the decision to call off the strike as well as the bureaucratic structure of decision-making within the Common Front itself; saying that the “people doing the striking need to be the ones setting the tone.”¹²

May, 1972

From the 9th of May onwards, it was the workers themselves setting the tone, since the Common Front was unable to continue the struggle. Just two days before the resumption of the strike, Yves Charbonneau, president of the teachers’ union (CEQ), estimated that it would not be until another six months before any general strike could recommence.¹³ Furthermore, the imposition of 1-year sentences on Laberge, Pepin, and Charbonneau after they were tried in absentia left the union structure without a plan of any sort, let alone a plan of attack. Being the good democrats that they were, the three leaders went to Québec City on the 9th and voluntarily handed themselves in to the authorities.

In direct contrast to this display of civic virtue, the workers of Québec at large viewed the detentions as absolutely unacceptable and as the prelude to further suppression. As one worker put it in the ensuing struggle, “They can’t do this. If we let them, they can put us all in jail, anyone of us.”¹⁴

As the Common Front leaders were on the way to Québec, the first salvo of the spontaneous workers’ offensive began at the ports of Montréal and Québec City, when 2,000 longshoremen set up pickets in reaction to the news. The strike spread in rapid fashion, the workers’ ranks rising to over 300,000; unionized or not, in the large cities (such as Montréal, Québec City, and Sherbrooke) but also small industrial towns such as St. Jerome or Sept-Îles throughout the province.

The union structures, deprived of their heads, were

caught totally unawares. However, they threw their lot behind the workers whom they now tailed. Although the unions facilitated the process by federating newspapers, sending communiques, and opening buildings for discussion, the workers took the initiative throughout the course of the May strike in the form of mass assemblies, the creation of strike committees, and the publishing of local political journals and newspapers. In direct contrast to the April phase of the strike, May saw Québec workers equipping themselves with tools that enabled them to act at their own behest.

Indeed, the strike itself was able to generalize solely due to the workers' self-initiative: it was word of mouth, illegal radio broadcasts, and solidarity actions that were the basis for their strength. The strike at Chibougamau, an isolated town of northern Québec, was instigated by a march of working-class women to the local mines who compelled the miners to strike.¹⁵ Building and going beyond the already-widespread April period, the strike was able to expand far past a sectoral outlook since the struggle was carried out by workers as workers, rather than as members of this or that union (or union alliance).

In the smaller towns, the workers displayed a strong capacity to lead and take practical action against capital. In Sept-Iles, whence the delegation criticizing the unions' capitulation came, workers from various industries formed a strike committee that took control of the radio station (broadcasting union and local bulletins), stopped local air traffic, and set price controls to ward off speculation. Sept-Iles set the model for other industry towns, and radio stations were seized in 21 other communities to broadcast news of the strike.

A worker from one of these towns near Montréal, St. Jerome, brought to the light the extreme confidence and bravery workers across the province exhibited: "What's our complaint? I guess the answer is that we're tired of being pushed around, and now, finally, we're pushing back. If we can show them, we're capable of anything."¹⁶

It has been seen that the Québec working class demonstrated active resistance to capital as a class, uniting workers of disparate trades, bridging the divisions of skill and professions, and sweeping up non-workers into their movement, especially students. It has also been seen that this was conditioned by the workers' independence, initiative, and militancy gained in the course of development of the general strike as a whole. The events in May show that the Québec workers stood at the vanguard of North American workers' self-organization. However, the end of the May phase of the strike shows that even this degree of class struggle was insufficient.

The immediate cause of the resumption of the strike, the imprisonment of the Common Front leaders and their immense popularity amongst the workers, was also to be the cause of its end, despite the fact that the workers had moved far beyond the union structure in practice from May 7-14. On the 14th, the Common Front issued a call to return to work, on the grounds that it would augment their strength in negotiations with the province. With hindsight, it is clear that these unions were indebted to the state and could not move beyond it. The workers, however, demobilized, and the strike was over for most workers by the 16th of May.

In anticlimactic fashion, the Common Front leaders were released on the 20th in order to enforce social peace and re-enter negotiations with the government. They did so willingly, and struck a deal involving very limited gains. The \$100 weekly minimum wage was secured, but, across the board, workers received around 5% wage augmentations (as opposed to the 8% they demanded) and, according to one database, "greater job security and equality among workers [were] not discussed at all."¹⁷ Coming off the greatest display of working class strength Québec had ever seen, the best the unions could attain was partial victories and full defeats on crucial demands. That the workers did not rise up again at this juncture should come as a surprise to the reader, but this attests to the ideological pull the unions retained even as the work-

ers' practice superseded them.

Understanding the 1972 General Strike

That the unions played an instrumental role in the defeat of the strike in both phases, countermanding the mandate of the majority of the striking workers and duping them into ending the strike against their interests, goes to show the separation of the unions (even at their most combative and radical) over and against the working class. Not only did the unions stifle working class initiative during critical moments of the strike, thereby decaying the militant workers, they did not even share the same interests and perspectives of the combative working class.

Despite their manifestos declaring that "there is no future" in the bourgeois state, the ultimate role of the Common Front was to mediate the class struggle and arrive at compromise when it was at its highest pitch. The union is only possible when there is a boss to bargain with, and as such they cannot move beyond the boss.

The workers of Québec, on the other hand, as the class with nothing to lose but its chains, had no such structural hurdles. Albeit brief, the workers were able to establish a class terrain of their own through mass meetings and strike committees. Such self-organization provided workers not only experience, activity, and strength through numbers, but also opened up new avenues of tactics.

The union structure was tied to the legal apparatus of the state, even on the rare occurrence when it opposed the latter such as when the Common Front initially campaigned for the continuation of the strike. To break the law was such a colossal undertaking for the union that they backed out of their decision in spite of a workers' mandate to carry it through. In contrast, the Québec workers in May did not conceive of their actions as legal or illegal, at least not in any significant sense. They sensed an emergency and carried out according to their will, through their independent organizations, the measures necessary to build and extend their

movement and press their demands.

For example, the workers of Montréal took no issue with disrupting law and order when they saw it necessary. In the May strike, the workers blockaded three bridges and bombed twice the metro system's electrical station in order to enforce the strike.¹⁸ This tactical character of working class terrain is of vital importance for the success of a workers' revolution, since, as we see in 1972 as well as 2020, the state reserves all right to restore bourgeois "order" when the working class asserts itself.

The independence and immediacy of the Québec workers' action and organization also developed into a contradiction with the unions on the subject of national liberation. It was the stated position of the unions that an independent Québec was an absolute precondition for the development of the class struggle and the possibility of socialism. Whether or not they in their minds agreed with this position, the workers in practice repudiated it since they organized as a class independent from any national forces such as the PQ. The task they set in motion for themselves is the same task that belongs to all workers under the capitalist mode of production- the confrontation against imperialism and national oppression at their roots, the seizure of power by the workers and fundamental transformation of the social-economic fabric, i.e. communism.

The Québec workers' reliance on the union was not substantial- they had proven to themselves that they did not need it. Yet, they relented to the union at the end of either phase of the General Strike. If a small minority of workers continued to strike, they were neither organized nor influential enough to pose a viable alternative.

For us workers today, if we are to avoid the pitfalls of 1972 (the groundbreaking elements of the General Strike aside), we need an organization that understands the course of the class struggle as a whole and promotes the independence of the working class as a whole. Workers need to know before and during the course of the crisis that only

they themselves can liberate themselves. The spontaneous self-defence of the working class must be united with a working class political organ, which unites the workers' movement internationally to assault the common enemy of capital.

-Azdak

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Malignant ulcers of capitalism: The proletarian struggle for reproductive freedom (Part 3)

In our first two pieces on reproductive struggles in class society we highlighted the family unit, prostitution, sex-selective abortions, sterilization, religion, bourgeois laws, and some of the facts and dangers surrounding abortion and contraception. This piece examines sexual violence in times of imperialist conflict and the impact that the climate crisis is having on reproduction.

Imperialist conflict and sexual violence

Women being driven into the workforce because of imperialist conflict is as old as imperialism itself. This has been the case in Syria for over a decade now; multitudes of working men have been killed in the war and this has left many women as the

family breadwinner. The need to support their families now has them bearing the burden of unemployment, low salaries, and high living costs.¹ Women were largely confined to the household prior to the outbreak of the war in 2011, with only 4 percent of households headed by women.² Now around 22 percent of Syrian households are headed by women, and they make up most of the workforce in certain sectors.³ In pre-war Syria, 96 percent of women were able to access qualified maternal healthcare. Consequently, the maternal mortality rate dropped significantly between 1970 and 2009.

The past 11 years of ongoing conflict on top of the pandemic has left many starving due to what little

income they had having been wiped out.⁴ Maternal healthcare services are now near non-existent and previously long eradicated diseases such as polio have reappeared.⁵ Approximately two-thirds of professionals in the medical industry have fled Syria and more than half of all hospitals have been closed or are only somewhat operational. What hospitals remain in the war-torn country are not sufficiently protected from airstrikes and so many women give birth at home or in the streets rather than risk the danger of debris or falling shells. Newborn babies are often malnourished and sick, and with little to no neonatal care available, imminent death is a frighteningly real possibility.

The situation is quite similar in Yemen. According to reports from Unicef, one in 260 women die during pregnancy or childbirth, one out of every 37 newborn babies die in their first month of life, and just 3 out of every 10 births takes place in a health facility. Only around half of all health facilities are fully functional and they still suffer with severe shortages of medical and health essentials.⁶ In these times of crisis, reproductive healthcare is all too often the first thing to go. The necessity of these services has been overshadowed by the urgent need to respond to outbreaks of cholera and more than 80 percent of the population lacking food and drinking water. Increasing poverty endured by working class families is another reason the number of women giving birth at home continues to rise, with medical care only sought if there are complications.

In Afghanistan, decades of war have left at least half of the population so poor that they are lacking necessities such as clean water and basic nutritional foods. The pandemic, ongoing food crisis, and winter weather have only aggravated the situation.⁷ Although child labor and marriage have long existed on some scale in Afghanistan, it has now become commonplace for children to be put to work and for pre-pubescent girls to be sold into marriage so that the rest of their families may stave off starvation a little longer.⁸ There is research showing young girls who are married off are more likely to suffer through domestic violence, have

poor mental health, and develop complications during pregnancy. Moreover, the longer girls remain in school, the less likely they are to be married off as a child. Thus, another factor which has increased the incidence of child marriage in Afghanistan is the prohibition of women and girls' education, reinstituted by the Taliban since taking power once more.

Sexual violence is exacerbated by militarism and used as a weapon of war by all factions in nationalist conflict. It is inextricably linked to imperialist competition and the subsequent decline in conditions among the proletariat.⁹ It is not just inflicted on outsiders though; it especially runs rampant among members of the military. In the US Armed Forces, for example, unwanted sexual contact rose by almost 40 percent between 2016 and 2018. Roughly 85 percent of rape survivors know the identity of their attacker, who is most commonly a superior officer.¹⁰ It is telling that members of the US military are more likely to develop PTSD because of sexual trauma than they are as a result of combat.¹¹

One of the most agonizing complications of sexual violence is unintended pregnancies. In many countries across Africa and the Middle East, children are not eligible for national IDs unless the father's name is on the birth certificate; this prevents children born as a result of rape from going to school or receiving government assistance. Many Yazidi mothers who survived enslavement at the hands of ISIS have been left with the heart-breaking decision of having to either abandon their children or not return home.¹² Women who give up their children are sometimes told they will be able to visit them or be reunited later, but this tends not to be true. Once the mother has entered Iraq, she is stopped by border security from returning to Syria. These women often have no other resources and are almost entirely dependent on their families, who typically forbid them from bringing their children back with them.

Similarly, in DR Congo, women who have been raped are often deserted by their husbands and

families. These attitudes are largely influenced by the trauma and shame associated with men regularly having witnessed the assault and feeling as though they have failed in their “masculine duty” to protect their wife.¹³ In cases where the husband stays or returns, and this is especially true if his wife has had a baby as a result of the attack, it isn’t uncommon for men suffering from untreated trauma to feel as though they must reassert their role and place within the family, through inflicting more violence if need be.¹⁴

The same social stigmas and sense of shame have often ensured that the most heinous instances of sexual violence go largely unreported and undocumented throughout history. The state also covers up and passes the blame for the violence carried out in its name. The 2020 report on Australian war crimes in Afghanistan has a significant amount of information blacked out, and remarkably, neither rape nor sexual assault are mentioned as having been committed by Australian Defence Force (ADF) soldiers. Yet, if they were willing to reveal allegations of 39 unlawful killings, including ADF soldiers slitting the throats of two 14-year-old boys, then it is likely that what was blacked out would be even more horrific and shameful than that.¹⁵

To this day the above factors help conceal from the public that working men and boys are also targets of sexual violence as a weapon of war. While working women and girls are still disproportionately harmed by sexual violence on a global scale, in places such as Syria, boys and men are almost just as likely to be victims. With zero resources available they are simply left to isolate themselves—sometimes completely losing interest in sex and other activities they once found enjoyable. At other times, the combination of untreated trauma and further poverty from the subsequent inability to work, results in these boys and men becoming violent.¹⁶ The stigma they experience often pushes them to relocate to a place where people are unaware of the assault they endured.¹⁷ Studies from wars in Liberia, Uganda, and post-Yugoslav countries have also shown that men and boys are targeted. Sexual violence in times of war is used to

humiliate, terrorize, and subjugate workers of all genders.

Contrary to liberal beliefs, changing laws and providing reparations to survivors of sexual violence will never be adequate nor will it stop this barbarism from happening in the first place.¹⁸ Bukharin put things well in Imperialism and World Economy when he stated, “Human society as a whole, placed under the iron heel of world capital, pays tribute to this contradiction—in unbelievable torment, blood, and filth.”¹⁹ So long as capitalism and mercantile relations of production persist in some form or fashion, militarism, war, and sexual violence will too. Thus, the only war to which we can, in good conscience, lend our support is that which leads to our emancipation and deliverance from every form of oppression – the class war.²⁰

Climate Change

With the climate crisis worsening, young workers are increasingly opting out of having children out of fear of raising them during environmental catastrophe. Although birth rates in the US are declining due to various factors, surveys indicate that more than a third of young adults are reconsidering having children because of climate change. Similar results have been found among working people within the same age cohort in Australia.²¹

Climate reformists have advocated having fewer children as one of the ways people can reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It has become an increasingly popular position to claim that it is immoral to have children in the face of the climate crisis; this kind of moralizing is unproductive and stigmatizes working class families, many of whom do not have access to proper sex education or contraceptives. A 2017 study showed that having one fewer child in a developed country would save 58 tonnes of carbon dioxide per year, reducing their carbon footprint. Bourgeois reformists have latched onto these statistics as justification for their anti-natalist narrative. However, the fact that Niger has the highest birth rate in the world and the lowest carbon emissions per person make it beyond

clear that the main culprit is capitalism.

In fact, a climate scientist who was part of the same 2017 study, Kimberly Nicholas, clarified that reducing the population, by choosing not to have children, will not solve the climate crisis. In the context of the study, the amount of carbon dioxide per year that would be saved from having one fewer child in a developed country was calculated by considering the hypothetical long-term carbon emissions that would be emitted across multiple generations. Given the recent intensification of the climate crisis, we have a much smaller timeframe to stop the planet from falling into total environmental collapse; long-term consequences of having children are therefore not as relevant or immediately concerning. On the contrary, climate scientists like Nicholas have argued that it is more important to transition away from fossil fuels to clean energy on a global scale. The bourgeois reformists that peddle this brand of climate conscious anti-natalism misrepresent science by taking findings out of context and guilt-tripping couples into not having children, displacing all the responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions onto individual consumers. The onus of “solving the climate crisis” is put on individual workers while the capitalist class continues to indulge in environmental destruction guilt-free. While personal choices may have a small impact on reducing one’s contribution, no

amount of “birth strikes” will put a dent in the environmental damage caused by capitalist accumulation.

The drastic increase in emissions following the industrial revolution indicate that production based on never-ending accumulation is responsible for our environmental crisis, and if we wish to avoid total environmental catastrophe, we must organize along class lines towards a new mode of production based on human needs rather than on profits.²² The solution is not to wait for politicians to reach a global consensus on climate reform, or to avoid having children, but to abolish the capitalist system before it is too late. Politicians would never prioritize saving the planet from environmental destruction if it meant they could not profit from it; even if they did, reforms do not address the root of the issue. Only in a world where production is social, and our development is free will we be able to meet the needs of humanity and save ourselves from ecological collapse.

Our next part in this series will comment on the full impact that the COVID-19 pandemic is having and is predicted to have on us having and raising children.

EK (ICO) and KM (IWG)

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Cuba: The real fight against state repression begins with workers' self-organization

The following statement was written six months ago in the weeks and days leading up to planned protests in Cuba on November 15th, 2021.

When the statement was first published, it was feverishly denounced by online crowd of detractors who by their own admission hadn't bothered to actually read it; they saw that their cherished bourgeois state was being called out for what it was, and they sprung to imaginary action on Twitter by repeating the same-old tired and unserious accusations claiming that the ICT and Communist Left were supposedly made up of Feds/CIA/whatever. These insults were ignored and it was difficult for these internet warriors to actually attack the essence of the statement (we made clear our opposition to both the current regime as well as the planned march and liberal/nationalist opposition, as we called the former "a fallacy built upon an even greater fallacy" and of the latter we said that "Liberal capitalism is a remedy for the ailments brought on by six decades of state capitalism in just the same way that swimming in sewage would be a suitable "remedy" for a staph infection"). For this reason, criticisms from the usual quarters of the left against the statement hinged on a prediction that

the "peaceful march planned for November 15 is likely and tragically destined to end up as a bloodbath." If the march went ahead as planned, this likely would have been the outcome. However, the march's organizers were either arrested or went into self-imposed exile, such as the march's liberal leader Yunior García Aguilera, and the state was successful in using its tools of repression to scare workers into staying home. So while what we predicted didn't manifest itself, this isn't evidence of the regime's benevolence, but rather the extent of its anti-worker repression.

Politically the statement still holds up; Cuba, like every other country in the world, is a capitalist society, complete with a ruling class in charge of the means of production and political power, and a working class that must sell its labor-power in order to (barely) survive, along with money, police and other characteristics of capitalist society (such as being wrapped up in imperialist military and trade networks). The statement was published a little over four months after the July 11th Uprising in Cuba, in which workers spontaneously took to the streets to protest against food, water, gasoline and electricity shortages, as well as mismanagement of

Covid (the articles that we published at the time are on our website [here](#), and we clearly pointed out Cuba's status as a capitalist class society in which workers, like in its northern neighbor, struggle to survive and face hideous exploitation). The Uprising was put down with brute force and order reigned in Havana and across the island. Nonetheless it looks increasingly likely that this bourgeois order will face another proletarian challenge, as the world faces the prospect of a real global food crisis that will leave hundreds of millions, if not billions, newly hungry and starving, in addition to those already experiencing capitalism's worst across the world. This crisis will worsen the already strained capacity of the Cuban bourgeoisie to keep their workers fed, thanks to both the US embargo as well as Cuba's innately weak position within the world imperialist hierarchy. This food crisis is of course tied to the sharpening of imperialist rivalries and consolidation of blocs, a process which Cuba is unable to avoid. Cuban workers, as with all workers across the world, will see the choice become ever starker in the months and years to come: hunger or revolution, nationalism or internationalism, socialism or barbarism, communism or extinction. It is our role as revolutionaries to make sure that we can be there to win the class' leadership against both the Stalinist monstrosity which currently exploits and rules over the proletariat in Cuba, or the liberal bourgeois opposition which would like to do so in the future as stooges of American imperialism. This is why this document was published back in November.

Political events in Cuba since the July 11 protests

Currently the political and social climate within Cuba is bleak. On July 11 of this year there were turbulent protests against the government which saw the latter employ all its repressive muscle and issue a call, out of sheer desperation, to its own supporters through national radio and television to join its armed thugs on the streets in beating protesters and hauling them off to jail. In the immediate aftermath of this historic revolt, the scale and

intensity of which provoked terror in the ruling class and exposed the limits of the regime's security apparatus, liberal-minded activists on the island are planning another mass action; this time a peaceful march, of a more formal style and putting forward a more cohesive set of demands.

The aforementioned march, which is scheduled for November 15 of this year, is in favor of the "Archipelago Platform", so named after the private Facebook group wherein it was developed. This platform has as its stated objectives the release of political prisoners, particularly those detained on July 11, basic democratic rights, and multi-party elections. In other words, it is a march for liberal capitalism. Meanwhile, the public face of the protest, Yúnior García Aguilera, a young liberal playwright, has been slandered in state media as a terrorist and agent of US imperialism. This is a tactic familiar to the ruling class in Cuba, who have been waging a similar smear campaign against the July 11 protesters, vilifying them as mercenaries or useful idiots of the same foreign entities in order to retroactively justify the violence being done to them in the name of a so-called "social peace" that means hunger for the majority.

Officially, the government has denied permission for the protest, and state officials at all levels, from President Miguel Díaz-Canel to the attorneys general of Havana and the Republic, have made very clear their position that anyone who marches will encounter all the brutality of the state's security apparatus and, should they survive, will be subsequently charged with serious criminal and political offenses. The state is doing everything that it can to generate an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among the exploited with the aim of discouraging them from taking any type of organized action. They are trying to accomplish this by mobilizing security forces from all over the country to a few sensitive "hot spots", even going so far as to bring them in by buses or military vehicles from the easternmost provinces to the capital, a major hot spot of the July 11 revolt and the place where approximately 20% of the island's population also resides. The government has also deputized its regular sup-

porters—i.e., not simply those most involved in the alphabet soup of regime organizations—to serve as its informants and gendarmes for the march scheduled for November 15, and in any future mass action against the regime.

In large cities like Havana and other sites of major clashes between protesters and state security forces on July 11, the social tension is palpably dense. There, well-fed police and agents of the Department of State Security (DSE) stand fully equipped and ready to repress an unarmed population of mostly hungry people. If that were not enough, the state has also ordered its supporters to conduct public military-style drills in which they practice striking a person with a metal pipe or other blunt object. Obviously, those in power intend that these exercises will function as preparation for the regime supporters, who will be present at the protests to support the state security forces, as well as a terror tactic designed to inspire fear in the exploited, whose living conditions would otherwise drive them to revolt against the state.

The myth of Cuban “socialism” and the false alternative of liberal capitalism

The current regime in Cuba is the product of a military coup with limited support from sectors of the peasantry and Cuban capital, not a workers' revolution; therefore, to speak of “socialism” in Cuba is complete nonsense. Rather, in Cuba as in all other countries, including those that call themselves “socialist,” all the basic features of capitalism (wage labor, prices, money, merchandise) exist completely intact. The irony of this situation does not go unnoticed by most workers in Cuba. Indeed, they understand, on some level, however abstract or superficial, that the hardships and hunger they daily experience is the result of an economy presided by a subset of the society that, being capitalist in all but name, justifies its privileges and social position in the name of the same workers it ruthlessly exploits.

Given the harsh reality of living conditions for the majority of island's inhabitants—not to mention the

shameless way in which the Cuban government has discredited the authentic ideas of socialism, transforming its ideas from a tool for workers' self-emancipation into an ideology that rationalizes the infallible authority of the Cuban “Communist” Party—it is not difficult to understand why so many workers on the island would join a march, like the one scheduled for November 15 of this year, to demand from the government basic freedoms. However, if the history of all the so-called “pro-democracy” movements has demonstrated anything with certainty, it is that the guarantees provided by liberal regimes, which many naively call “freedoms” and “democratic rights,” are fundamentally temporary and contingent. That is to say, they will be rescinded without notice when necessity demands it, as it inevitably always does.

Moreover, a transition from the state-capitalist model that has prevailed in Cuba from the early 1960s towards a more “liberalized” economy, which would mean that the private sector will constitute the majority of the economy, as opposed to the approximately 25 percent that it currently represents, will do precious little to improve the living conditions of the island's working population. Capitalism forces all companies, whether large or small, private or state-owned, to pursue profits to keep up with other companies, which are their rivals in the market. Companies achieve this by two means, primarily: increasing labor productivity and reducing the working-class consumption (either as money-wages or any other form in which it can be “paid out”, for example, as part of the crop yield). This necessarily happens at the expense of the workers, whose bodies and living standards are sacrificed to achieve the growth targets of the company or the state. There is neither a capitalist nor national solution for the widespread misery in Cuba because the world capitalist economic system, of which Cuba forms part, is the source of that misery. Liberal capitalism is a remedy for the ailments brought on by six decades of state capitalism in just the same way that swimming in sewage would be a suitable “remedy” for a staph infection.

The role of the nationalist poison

Within Cuba today, the social strata that aspire—or already are—in power use nationalism to mobilize the exploited in support of their political programs. It is not a specifically Left or Right phenomenon either. The majority of the population within Cuba, as in the entire world, who are forced to earn a living by working for someone else in exchange for a wage, have no stake whatsoever in debates between competing nationalisms. The nation as such does not exist. It is rather the name given to the regime of capital within a specific geographic area. It is a false community where the exploited and exploiting classes are theoretically "equal", insofar as both are citizens of the nation, but the false equality of the nation hides the real material inequality that exists between them, and which fuels the class struggle. All nations and nationalisms, whatever their origin, therefore, reveal themselves as so much manipulation and falsehood. That is why, as workers, we do not have a nation or countries; no homeland to defend or die for. On the contrary, the working class of the entire world exists as a single exploited group, whose interests are one and the same everywhere. Nations, countries, and states are our enemies since these are all manifestations of the will of capital over the working class. Our self-organized struggle as a class issues the death penalty to every state, without any distinction. If, on the other hand, the workers let themselves be mobilized under the banner of the "Fatherland" (or the "nation", or the "people", which are nothing more than different names for capitalism), then they will continue to be the playthings of other classes, who will use them when and however they wish and then just as easily discard them, in the best of circumstances. The only way out for the exploited in Cuba and in the entire world, their only method of escape from state control and wretched living conditions, will be found in their collective struggle as a class—i.e., as a conscious political force—for the overthrow of capitalism everywhere.

For a revolutionary working-class alternative

The spontaneous uprising of July 11 is a moment

practically without equal in the history of Cuba after 1959. The closest event were the uprisings that took place in August 1994, known collectively as the "Maleconazo", but these protests were limited to the capital, they were not a nationwide movement, and the number of participants was estimated at a few hundred people. Although there are no precise counts of the total number of protesters on July 11, a conservative estimate based on the hundreds of confirmed arrests would put the total turnout figure in the thousands. However, this would be purely conjectural. Regardless of the true figure, the July 11 protests inspired fear in the hearts of the ruling class in Cuba because it reminded our rulers, albeit momentarily, that their privileges and power are not a divine right; that it can all evaporate to nothing if and when, we the exploited, decide to stop playing their game.

The peaceful march planned for November 15 is likely and tragically destined to end up as a bloodbath. The ruling class has been mobilizing its entire personnel (and recruiting new ones), training and preparing them for a mass action of this type and scale since the July 11 protests, in which they were caught "with their pants down", so to speak. But even in the extreme improbability that the protesters managed to extract from the regime all the concessions they are asking for, such that Cuba peacefully transitioned from a one-party state to a multi-party one, with its accompanying temporary guarantees; this would not improve the living situation or solve the essential problems of working people in Cuba. In short, the march is a fallacy built upon an even greater fallacy that will end inevitably in butchery.

To avoid this outcome, workers must create their own fighting organizations (strike committees, mass assemblies, workers' councils), which exclude non-exploited strata, to coordinate and lead their own struggle. This is not a novel idea, nor something that we are trying to impose schematically on the Cuban situation. The workers' councils, or whatever one wishes to call them, are simply the organizations that the exploited class is naturally inclined, by their living and working conditions in capitalism,

to build in order to deepen and generalize their struggle. In broad outline, they are assemblies of mandated (meaning they are obliged to vote as their electors have instructed them) and democratically-elected delegates, who function as glorified messengers between different groups of workers. This decision-making structure, in addition to representing the purest system of democracy (the only one worthy of being called such), allows the entire class to join in and participate in the struggle, moving in unison towards the same goal: the global revolt of the wage-slave class against the capitalist system.

The unity of the exploited as an organized power in society is indispensable to combat the savage repression of the Cuban state and the misery in which the majority of the island lives. All the mechanisms of brutalization and deprivation of the majority disappear before it like castles floating on air. The self-organization of the workers, which consists in their unity of action and their independent struggle for their own material interests, achieves the total emancipation of the exploited; in the first place, by organizing them for the overthrow of the state, which cannot be anything other than the imposition of one class over another of its economic and social regime, and secondly, by creating the basic decision-making apparatus (the councils) through which the freely associated producers will be able to jointly manage the economy, which will grow as the revolution does, according to their own needs as human beings.

A genuine workers' revolution in Cuba can have profound implications that reverberate beyond the island, potentially serving as the initial eruption site for the worldwide revolt of the exploited. On this matter, we must insist that such a revolution, whether it begins in Cuba or any other country, will soon have to spread beyond its initial start point, or otherwise be asphyxiated by imperialist encirclement and the inevitable reassertion of capitalist imperatives, a consequence of the interconnected-

ness of all national economies to the world market. To that end, there must already be in place a class political organization, international in scale and operation, that regroups within itself the most politically advanced elements among the exploited. Its principal objective is to expand the class struggle to the entire world capitalist system. Both this organization and its practical interventions within the class are guided by the fundamental socialist maxim that only workers can win their own freedom. As such, it does not attempt to act for the class in any fashion, nor does it strive to gain power for itself. Instead, it participates in workers' struggles as equals and fights for their interests within their organizations. The class political organization of the proletariat is a guiding beacon always pointing the way to freedom, to communism.

This is the way forward for the exploited, for the working class and peasants (effectively agricultural workers) in Cuba as anywhere else. The unity of the working class in the struggle for its own material interests, as made manifest via the workers' councils, can overcome any resistance from the exploiters, shatter any and all barriers. Our capitalist masters tremble with fear when we stop taking their orders and instead unite to fight them. They know that the unity of the working class means that their giant racket is over. In Cuba, the exploited must not be intimidated by state terror or join liberal protests as cannon fodder for another class' political project. Instead, they should organize themselves independently, on the basis of their shared hardships and material interests as workers, to create their own fighting organizations capable of overthrowing the state and assuming control over the society.

Affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency and Internationalist Communists of Oceania

Sunday, November 14, 2021

The impossible aspirations of reformism during capitalism's decadence

Politicians continue to put out programs containing provisions for worthwhile reforms while the crisis-stricken capitalist system has already decided that life-saving safety measures to decrease the spread and mortality of covid has continued longer than what is acceptable from the perspective of profit-making. Throughout the major waves of the pandemic, most of the working class continued to work as these safety measures were one-by-one repealed. Instead of increasing the social expenditure for provisions to benefit the working class, the ever-brazen capitalist class, directed by the chamber of commerce, has lifted the moratorium for rents and unemployment insurance due to the slower-than-expected economic recovery. Unions too have continued to play their role of negotiating the sale or labor on behalf of the capitalist class and have mediated the current uptick in working class struggle by enforcing unpopular concessions unto their members. Some of the main demands animating the working-class struggle are ending the tiered wage system, an increase in wages due to rising inflation and decreasing the length of the work week. The tiered wage system was forced onto workers by the unions on behalf of their capitalist, workers have also made demands to increase wages since inflation has decreased their spending power. Workers are also being made to constantly work overtime due to labor shortages. These demands are untenable for unions in crisis-stricken capitalism, they instead have handed down raises that are below the rate of inflation and the ultimatum that workers either work overtime when re-



quested to or they'll be made to work seven days a week. This was the striking Kelloggs' workers' experience in the fall through winter of 2021, but it's an old story. Unions are an old vehicle of the capitalist state, they'll continue even in a "diminishing capacity" to get workers into the voting booth. Some politicians haven't completely lost the plot despite their growing inability to manage the affairs of the populace brought on by decades of declining profit rate, worthwhile reforms are no longer tenable. This is despite the aspirations of these farsighted politicians who see their class conciliatory value, in juxtaposition to those who support more rigid class domination. The former, as reality sets in, comes to realize that reforms must be sweet and cheap, and while highlighting the virtues and strengths of liberalism. This falls into the category

of "culture warring." Detractors towards these assertions use the mammoth military budget of the USA as proof that the right politicians are all that's needed to usher in worthwhile reforms. However, the military and production of waste material is held differently by the capitalist class: a) it furthers the foreign interest of national capital, b) state production of waste material helps rationalize production, and c) the state creates demand and doesn't compete against other capitalist formations. This is especially the case in states with a historically strong bourgeoisie like the USA. Workers can't recoup lost wages, but the capitalist can recoup lost profits, workers have received ever vicious attacks by the capitalist who are dead set on making workers pay for the crisis, wages aren't increasing with inflation, working hours have increased and President Biden had recently announced his commitment to decrease the states spending deficit by \$1 trillion.

Capitalism is a social system of class exploitation and oppression. Reformist politicians will step up to curtail the worker's struggle against the system. These leaders will camouflage that capitalism is dependent on exploiting labor power and oppressing the working class. Reformist leaders can only address areas of oppression such as national, racial and sexual oppression which aren't essential for the continuation of capitalism. They can't address the exploitation and oppression of the working class which the entire capitalist system depends on. This oppression is based on wages, labor and the production of surplus value. These democratic leaders will babble on about fighting for democracy, freedom or human rights, but a condition for the capitalist system is that the working class remains alienated from exercising political power, sooner than later these potential democratic statesmen may let the open class oppression of the capitalist state shine through their high-sounding phraseology about the virtues of democracy. These reforms don't cost the state anything and relatively speaking the more dominant sections of the capitalist class can put their support behind them. These haute bourgeoisie don't depend on extracting absolute surplus value and may be less pressed

to enforce untenable racist policies or need to segregate the work force to prevent class activity. For these capitalists, certain economic demands made by unions negotiating on behalf of the capitalist class can be furnished. They may also be more open to anti racist, sexist, or xenophobic legislation. Some of these capitalists can easily see that outright containment and open oppression cost more than it's worth. These concessions are revocable and will keep the working class constantly on the back foot fighting for reforms and carrying water for the capitalist system. Instead of struggling on their own terrain which opens the possibility for the working class to develop organizational strength and their class consciousness.

During every election cycle, the capitalist managers of the state will make promises pertaining to healthcare-reforms. The most common promises made are to never reduce the state's spending on healthcare, or even the implementation of a national healthcare insurance program to benefit primarily uninsured workers. This is because it's unpopular for the capitalist-class to directly attack public health spending, or to outright oppose the implementation of a national healthcare insurance. It's important for the maintenance of class peace. The illusion of the possibility for reforms is also great for maintaining the voter base for the many left and progressive parties, this is also the basis of the left wing of capital's "harm reduction" arguments, which are centered around the belief that capitalism can be managed in the interest of the working class.

By politicians maintaining the illusion that there is a possibility for reforms that are beneficial towards the working class, it greatly helps to prevent workers from becoming disabused towards the capitalist system. This thwarts the development of working-class consciousness and potential for a revolutionary rupture. Workers will instead get involved in organizations such as institutional parties, and unions, etc. that operate on the capitalist class's terrain. This directs the potential for genuine class activity into avenues that are safe and affirming towards national-capital. The working class, which is

practically excluded from exercising political power, is drawn into electoralism. Each party is competing for the power to manage the state, and to ensure capitalist accumulation continues without a hitch. These parties will bid to win the workers' votes as the working class is numerically the greatest class in capitalist society. Their programs may offer concessions for reforms, but once they win 'your' vote, and become 'your' representative, the working class's role in political consultation is immediately relinquished.

Then there's unions, which were legalized as a part of the New Deal and were integrated into the state as a part of the state's security apparatus. Workers received unemployment insurance and paltry wage increases in exchange for outlawing strikes, small wage increases were gradually replaced by stagnant wages and decreases while the union bureaucrats could receive fat salaries from collecting dues, along with receiving positions in the state. Even before their integration into the state as a part of a corporatist setup they were never revolutionary organizations. They are permanent mass organizations that have no political commitment for entry; their function in the capitalist system has always been to negotiate the sale of labor-power and as such are dependent on the continual health of the capitalist system. They will never advance the class struggle—instead they'll keep it off proletarian class terrain. Sections of capital only began to repel unions as the rate of profit began to decline. Workers' activities in unions are limited to participating in a secret ballot, canvassing for the Democratic Party and paying dues in the spirit of taxation; they may get involved only in deciding who will manage the negotiation for the sale of labor-power.

“Due to its essential role in the revival of the capitalist system, [the union] is destined to continue until the end of the economic, social and political hardships of a dying capitalism, and will only be defeated when the assault of the revolutionary proletariat brings down the imperialist state.”—Onorato Damen¹

Even unions that call themselves "revolutionary", "rank and file", or "grass roots" have the same function in capitalism: negotiating the sale of labor power. Organizations that claim to be part of some kind of union have to resolve the dilemma: either become a mass organization with reformist goals or become a political organization. Syndicalist organizations are yet another reformist vehicle among the left wing of capital. The stated purpose of syndicalist organizations is to group the whole class into one large union at best. They too must bow under the pressure of the same capitalist structural imperatives that control any other union, or face a loss of membership. They also have to adopt a similar bureaucratic structure to maintain their organization; when they have to concede to capital or face the capitalist divesting and shipping away the shop. Despite their entirely correct desire to overcome the divisions of workers into categories created by the capitalist division of labor, this can be done only on a political level with a political organization. Unions by their very nature express those divisions and are linked to its negotiating counterparts, the capitalist.

"It is therefore beyond question that even many members of the union, like many of the anarchists and syndicalists, do not want the communist party, because it puts the revolution before reforms." —Herman Gorter²

It's important to remember why the capitalist-class is comfortable in workers' enfranchisement to begin with. They know that the working class by and large isn't class conscious outside of revolutionary situations. Most workers believe there's no way to organize production without waged labor and capital. Workers are aware they can't sustain their needs without working for a wage in capitalism, but they believe that the capitalist system will provide worthwhile reforms that will improve their living standards. So most of the working classes potential energy is spent on elections. Recently, during the democratic primaries for the 2020 election Bernie Sanders and his pseudo revolutionary-reformist platform (which had provisions for

'Medicare-For-All' and American jobs instead of abolishing the system of wages) had by mid-2019 over a million people volunteering in his campaign; thousands of events were put on by campaign volunteers and his campaign received \$46 million in February 2020 alone.³

It is fair to say that the worker's involvement begins and ends in the ballot box of the democratic system. There's considerations for rights such as freedom of speech, assembly, and press, etc. There will be no interference by the state if these rights are used for systems-affirming purposes that don't oppose the capitalist system. Any opposition is immediately brought onto capitalist terrain as reformism, which demands that the capitalist system is improved, not abolished. The class, or more so strata, who make these demands are those who are most involved in the democratic system, namely the so-called middle-class or middle strata, composed mainly of the petite bourgeoisie and sections of the bourgeoisie. Some sections of this strata are those involved in management or academia. They want a better functioning system since they're becoming discouraged by their lack of upwards mobility. Or some sects of this strata believe that class and structural contradictions can be overcome, and that it's possible to provide an improved standard of living for the masses in a classed society. They take up the same opportunistic reformist politics which transformed the class character of workers' organizations in the Second International and the labor movement in the late 19th-early 20th century. In the end, these promises and aspirations made by the capitalist left and other progressive functions of the capitalist class are undermined by the reality of the declining rate of profit, which has pushed capital increasingly onto the offensive against the working class. This is a result of insoluble contradictions in the capitalist system. The continual existence of the social system requires increasing the rate of exploitation of the working class, a class that's "in civil society but not civil society".

"Capital is dead labor, that, vampire-like, only lives by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more

labor it sucks." Karl Marx. Capital Volume One Chapter Ten.⁴

What's known as neoliberalism is a set of policies that correspond to the conditions brought on by the scarcity of profits in the private sector, as a result of the post-war accumulation cycle coming to an end. Neoliberalism is crisis-stricken capitalism. The state is cutting tax rates and funding for social expenditures that would supplement the poorest section of the working class; while the state increasingly relies more and more heavily on deficit financing to fund its growing expenditures, it's all done so to redistribute surplus value upwards and bolster anemic profit rates. The crisis of profitability has also caused the state to go against the former sacred calf and abandon the commanding heights of the economy, to restructure investments in favor of leaner, more profitable industries in the metropolises to restructure investments in favor of leaner, more profitable industries in the metropolises as well as taking advantage of cheap proletarian labor in Asia. This increases the rate of absolute surplus-value that's being extracted and the import of cheaper commodities has been used to offset stagnant wages in the metropolises.

The state won't drastically increase its already rapidly growing expenditures and reduce the diminishing profits of the capitalist, which can negatively impact the state's own spending power. States that can do so have been more reliant on deficit spending, or deferred taxation to fund their rapidly growing expenditures. The main impacts of state reliance on deficit spending is that a colossal portion of the state expenditure goes towards debt servicing simultaneously with increased inflation brought on by bringing more and more money into existence without increasing the rate of exploitation. This may all sound counterintuitive when in May 2021, the USA's defense budget for the fiscal year 2022 increased \$10 billion from the previous fiscal year.⁵ The reason for this is out of all of the production for public consumption, the capitalist states prefer arms production since arms are neither means of production or consumption, but rather waste production. Since the beginning of

capital's period of decadence, there's been a continual growth in the state's expenditure for state-induced waste production. Their purpose is above all else to rationalize production, utilize a greater proportion of the nation's capital, and there's also the need for arms production. Even during times of war when the percentage of unproductive expenditures to productive, profit-producing expenditures is greatly expanded, states have difficulties keeping most of the nation's capital utilized and keeping the entire working class employed. In the 1970 during the peak of USA's war in Vietnam the state could keep around 80% of the nation's capital utilized and officially 6 million remained unemployed. Despite the restructuring of capital, this has remained the case, especially with arms production which, like all other unproductive expenditures, are used to help maintain employment and social stability.⁶ After the 2nd World War the US military budget "became a very crude substitute for public works or social actions and, in itself, made possible government deficits [...], thus sustaining the whole economy [...]" All states, not just the USA, have economic and political investments in militarism.⁷

Arms production is preferred over the rationalization of production in what was called the commanding heights of the economy because they back up purely economic competition. The state has to carry out imperialist objectives and repress the working class and capitalist who threaten the health of the capitalist system, which requires arms. Imperialist objectives can take on the form of preferred state agreements, diplomatic pacts or even the highest expression of the crisis of decadent capitalism—imperialist wars geared towards destroying rival states as competitors. Neither does arms production compete against private capital formations involved in the production of marketable commodities. The state-induced production of arms doesn't further diminish the market demand for these commodities. The capitalist class especially supports arms production as a form of waste production due to that, it's augmented both when state intervention is increased to maintain the utilization of productive capacities and increase employment levels and when there's steady capital

formations which increases the state's spending power without drastically decreasing capital accumulation. Under the former conditions there's the need to forcefully alleviate structural contradictions, through carrying out imperialist objectives, eventually leading to wars of varying intensity and involvement of major imperialist states. Under the latter, the capitalist tend not to fuss over arms expenditures due to their role in maintaining a state's standing on the international market and its ability to uphold the interest of the national capital. Overall, the state prefers guns, not butter: arms over any other expenditures.

"Arms production (and all that goes with it) does not appear as 'end' goods on the market. Governments either tax or borrow private resources and induce private entrepreneurs to produce armaments. Their production costs and profits, though paid by the government, are paid out of their own contributions to the government by way of taxes or loans—the latter merely implying deferred taxation. Looked at from the point of view of society as a whole, not from that of the individual arms producer, the arms economy removes through its growth an increasing part of 'end' goods from the market and thereby diminishes productive (profitable) investments. Instead of the accumulation of capital there is the accumulation of the national debt." Paul Mattick⁸

The production of waste has its limits, until it impacts the rate of capital formation, which corresponds to the rate of profit. They're a deduction of the national income; waste production can't be capitalized or be used to enlarge capital or be consumed. The growth of arms expenditures are at the expense of capital accumulation, also decreasing living standards.

Sections of U.S. politicians who are more open to reforms still consider the policies of the "New Deal" to be the highest triumph of the democratic system's history. In 1933, the 'New Deal' was conditioned by an increase in industrial activity. The state also used inflationary policies to finance the new set of expenditures mainly to finance firms; it was enamored by effective liberal phrases in order

to appeal towards the mass of the working class and help reinforce the state. This was necessary at the time due to the opposition of some sections of the capitalist class against the 'New Deal', namely; investment bankers. The "forgotten man" turned out to be industrialists who supported the decoupling of commercial and investment banking, agribusiness who wanted higher commodity prices, mining firms, ailing railways firms who had lost a substantial amount of revenue and their capital had massively devalued and alcohol producers who wanted prohibition to end. By 1937, the opposite trend began with a decline in industrial activity; the 'New Deal' program which called for increased wages and living standards now turned towards increasing the rate of exploitation, through implementing new technology to increase the rate of relative surplus value and decrease the prevailing wage.

"Defeated slogans came to the force again. No longer was a policy of higher wages and shorter hours demanded, but the reduction of prices by way of an increased productivity in other words, more work and less pay to raise profits." Paul Mattick⁹

The prerequisite for temporarily overcoming the crisis and implementing the post-war social state was American participation in an imperialist war, which devalued capital internationally by a figure of 50%, opening up the longest cyclical boom until 1973.

Capitalist healthcare reforms tend to only amount to cost cutting measures; the ideals of a socialized medicine are in stark contrast to the imperatives of the market, which the capitalist class has no real control over. Even the "socialist" health care systems, both former and current so-called "actually existing socialist states", only served the needs for capitalist accumulation. It decreased individual firm's cost of maintaining labor power and limited the disruption to the reproduction of profits caused by illnesses, which is all in all the capitalist class's main concern when it comes to the health of the working class. There were always practical economic reasons for why welfare reforms were ever implemented in the first place, not to mention their

value for class conciliation. The capitalist class tends to avoid direct assaults against the working class when it comes to blocking these reforms, decreasing their coverage or real funding. For example, in the UK, despite some sections of capitalist politicians' commitments to increase public health spending, public health spending has in reality decreased when inflation is accounted for. Apart from the IMF's stipulation for a loan to bail out the UK's public finance, the state had to reduce its spending on healthcare. Over about a fifty year period, the state has reduced the hospital capacity of the NHS by about 50%.¹⁰ The origins of the so-called social state can be traced to 1917 and the revolutionary wave, where the bourgeoisie, under the impetus of workers' radicalization, changed the juridical ownership of the commanding heights of the national economy and began to implement what would become comprehensive healthcare programs such as the NHS, which has served capital masterfully. It fitted the social democratic voting-machines and the democratic labor movement's definition of socialism, despite neoliberal restructuring of the national healthcare services in various states. This has been used to deflect the working class's attention away from forming revolutionary political organizations. Instead workers are persuaded to vote for the right politicians, and only do that. This keeps workers constantly on the back foot and it prevents the working class from developing its organizational strength.

For the USA, which doesn't have a single national healthcare system, there's the illusion wielded traditionally by the Democratic Party that a National Health Insurance will be implemented through electing the right politicians. This is great for maintaining a voter base and limiting workers disabuse towards the system. Overall, in any state most sections of politician's won't directly attack public health spending; it's important for the maintenance of class peace. Rather, cuts in public spending for health, education and social insurances are done through stealth and deceit.

The possibility for the state to increase expenditures that could be beneficial for the working class is

predicated on high profit rates; only then will the state redistribute surplus-value for such provisions. This was the case even when the capitalist system was stricken with the global Covid-19 pandemic, at a time when public healthcare reforms would be the most needed. States are instead terminating unemployment insurance to get workers back to work to pay for the crisis of decadent capitalism. States in the early days of the pandemic that could quickly move towards creating public-private partnerships did so to prevent their internal markets from collapsing. By late February 2020 most states had already seen a 10% decrease in market activity.¹¹ The state's role was ramping up production for public consumption (similar to times of war which further negatively impacted accumulation) namely personal protective equipment (PPE), medicine, expanding hospital capacity to counteract decades of decline, as well as a vaccine for Covid-19 using decades of past research. Some states hoarded PPE or the materials needed to manufacture them; this caused a spike in certain commodity prices and bidding wars.¹² This helps show what measures the state will take when there's a threat to the system. The interest of the state and capital are intertwined. While on one hand states produce an abundance of vaccines, enough for the whole world, most lack access to them. This is due to the struggles between states to secure vaccines and other materials to resume economic activity with the least amount of disruption. While the capitalist states "say follow the science", in their actions they're defending their national champions' (pharmaceutical companies) ability to collect rents on vaccines and spread their influence. Another contradiction is the state's concern for the health of the capitalist system as a whole, as shown

in these initiatives along with partial and full lockdowns while promoting spending money at small businesses, or going out to increase economic activity. Currently, Covid-19 safety measures have been rolled back or outright repealed, as some sections of capitalist view them as too great of an interference to profit making. States have also been deregulating labor laws, such as decreasing the age minimums in certain industries to help increase the total amount of surplus-value. Surplus value is going to be distributed upwards to bolster anemic profits—not to be spent on a greater amount of social support for the working-class, despite some sections of capital who aspire to alleviate the workers' conditions. For the capitalist, it's merely a concern of national cohesion and security in profit-making; for workers, the lack of access to insurance and the state's decrease in spending on public health means privation. For workers, the consequences of the pandemic are real: due to the conditions of the capitalist system, workers face death and degradation from diseases and ruin from unemployment. Each election cycle, workers are drawn in to simply vote for which capitalist will rule them. Instead, workers must become disabused towards the system and not simply support this or that state measure. This will require a revolutionary organization to relate these conditions to the crisis of decadent capitalism; only such an organization can direct workers' demands for things such as PPE, better wages, hazard pay, or to close shop and receive unemployment insurance, onto our own class terrain.

-B
Internationalist Workers Group

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Uncle Sam's "Socialists" and the war in Ukraine

The US never developed a social democratic party with a share in power on the national level as social democrats in other countries had. However, there was a broad socialist movement in the US. In 1910 it was looking like it would one day be enshrined in the halls of Congress as a solid third ruling party. The first world war and the red scare that followed it, in the space of ten years, this changed. A hundred years later the largest organization that is popularly said to be on the political left in the US is the "Democratic Socialists of America". It is an avenue for ex-leftists and Democratic Party functionaries to give themselves a leg up in their political fortunes. It is reformism's death mask used as a facelift for a capitalist ruling party.

When one thinks of leftists taking sides in an imperialist war, the first imperialist power that comes to mind that they might side with is not usually the US. However, there is a long precedent for right-wing

social democrats in the US that lend support to American imperialism. These elements often were particularly oriented towards support for war, eagerly trying to prove themselves to their favorite clique of capitalists.

Today they wave Ukrainian flags. Our latter day mensheviks love war. The frightened petty bourgeois liberal intelligentsia is so repressed that they can only vent their hatred in a direction acceptable to American imperialism. Now they hate Russia because it is one of the few places and peoples that are truly acceptable for them to hate. You have the bizarre spectacle of woke warriors supporting one of the most corrupt, racist, right-wing and decidedly non-woke political forces in Eastern Europe - Ukrainian nationalism. This wasn't anything new. Many of this same western intelligentsia supported the war in Syria with its 28 religious fundamentalist gangs inspired by such progressive slogans as "Christians to Beirut! Alawites to the grave!"

Both in the Korean War and in the Vietnam War numbers of right-wing social democrats supported the wars and the respective governments propped up by the US, including the Dictatorship of Syngmann Rhee. As socialists it was their first duty to attack the Stalinist garrison states for being "Communist". They had to prove themselves to the capitalist political faction they were attempting to join, and this was the price they were more than willing to pay.

The opportunists' path

Bayard Rustin, Max Schachtman and many other figures on the American left have beaten a path into the co-ruling Democratic Party. The parliamentary-fixated social democrats held an idea that class consciousness could be created by electoral propaganda and measured in the number of votes their candidates received. In this view it became easy to argue that class is too narrow a focus to win reformist victories via the ballot box. Or that political independence from the ruling parties was impractical.¹

While reformists seek to make use of the state, the state isn't a neutral entity. Thus it is the capitalist class that makes use of them. The precursors of the modern DSA, the DSOC and the SDUSA existed as voting lists within the Democratic Party. For the capitalist class the remnant social democrats in the DP held vestigial relevance to the Democrats as long as they could give a left voice to support American imperialism.²

This collapse of social democracy was the product of repression and ideological collapse. At its peak in 1912 the Socialist Party of America managed to attract voters due to a period of popular disgust with the two ruling parties. So the 1912 elections saw the Socialist Party's high water mark. After this many of the liberal progressive elements drifted off to vote for Woodrow Wilson. A vote for social democracy was not a vote for socialism.³

Further weakening the Socialist Party of America

was the wave of expulsions that began in 1912. In an attempt to establish their legalistic democratic credentials they took first to expelling the "syndicalists" and figures like Bill Haywood. Later the Communist Party would do the same during its period of "bolshhevization". Eventually the expulsions culminated in the forced exit of all the left of social democracy in the US. The latter went on to form the first communist parties in the US. The First World War opened the existing fissures in the Socialist Party and left them without a left-wing. The remaining socialist party leadership, represented by Morris Hillquit and Victor Berger, was then freed to drift rightwards.⁴

The next stop could only be the Democratic Party. A ruling party that since its' inception has always postured as a party of the "workingman" while at the same time being a party of slave holders and capitalists. It excelled at getting the votes of every immigrant group to arrive in America. Today its' modern incarnation excels at appealing to people of all racial, sexual, ethnic and religious identities. The very existence of a social democratic party was a threat. So for a short time the Socialist Party was able to establish itself across the US as a third party against the two older ruling parties, the older ruling parties were never going to allow a third party a seat at the table.

A typical figure of this type of US government token social democrat is the figure of Carl Gershman who ran the US government's "National Endowment for Democracy" from its inception in 1983 to 2021. In 2021 he was in the news for being pranked by a pair of Russian comedians, Vladimir Kuznetsov and Aleksei Stolyarov, who called him pretending to be working for Alexy Navalny. In the course of the prank call Gershman talked up all the many NED projects in Russia.⁵ Gershman set the course for the very organization that the US government uses to conduct much of its overt political interference around the world. Having gotten his start in the Young People's Socialist League to being a favorite of the Reagan administration's cold war propaganda effort. The Young People's Socialist League (YPSL) was once the youth organization

of the Socialist Party of America (SPA). With Trotsky's French Turn, the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the US joined the SPA until it was kicked out taking YPSL with it. This was one of the few instances that Trotsky's French Turn managed to gain more members for a Trotskyist party. YPSL became the core of many future cadres of James Cannon's SWP. Trapped in a reformist minimum program and given the predominance of entryist political practice the only direction they could move was to the right. Once moved to the right, the only other logical move is further to the right.

Tankies in reverse

In the last century a "tankie" referred to a Trotskyist who was so pro-USSR that they would celebrate Soviet tanks rolling into Hungary to put down the Hungarian uprising in 1956. The word has entered the mainstream to the point that it indicates anyone who is opposed to American imperialist wars implying that opposition to imperialist war is support for the enemy. The subtlety of being opposed to all imperialist powers while recognizing that the main enemy is at home is beyond those whose class interest or conditioning is to rally around a tricolor flag. The word tankie in itself is a part of this process of mainstreaming the subculture jargon of the left into the Democratic Party orbit and around the world of the English language internet. The primary use the bourgeoisie has for these reformed leftists is getting them to support imperialist wars, and thus help demobilize opposition to war.

While there are violent nationalist reactionaries on all sides of the conflict, Ukrainian nationalism represents one of the oldest of America's imperialist proxies. With confirmed contacts with Ukrainian fascist organizations going back to the immediate post-WWII period. This support is decades old, dating back to 1946 according to the CIA's own declassified documents.⁶ If you want to see what sort of government American imperialism had in mind for a "liberated" pro-western Ukraine one need not look further than the current repressive regime in Kiev that has banned all opposition political parties and centralized the political leader-

ship and its propaganda apparatus into one ruling coalition umbrella. It is a government that officially defines itself as a nationalist republic that in structure bears a remarkable similarity to the Stalinist regimes of the soviet period but under the control of a puppet government run out of the US embassy in Lviv. There is a direct organizational continuity between the Ukrainian fascist organizations of the past and the Ukrainian nationalists of today. A large part of this continuity is that the US has chosen to do its business with the worst national chauvinist kakistocrats they could find. It was a nationalism fostered by expatriates in western academic institutions with Anglo-American state sponsorship. Led by the likes of Mykola Lebed and Yaroslav Stetsko throughout the second half of the Twentieth Century. With the coup in 2014, the US saw its golden opportunity to install its very own neo-fascists in power, with American politicians like John McCain and Victoria Nuland playing a leading role in promoting what was to become America's newest puppet government.

Yet some DSAers have even argued for support for the Zelensky regime as the lesser of two evils that must be supported.⁵ There is never a shortage of lesser evils to support, even if that means turning a blind eye to the role of US imperialism and its proxies in Ukraine. The human rights record of the pro-US regime in Ukraine is well documented with instances of torture and nationalist violence from the last eight years of civil war. As a faction within the Democratic Party, they bear responsibility for a great deal of bloodshed in Ukraine. As the American policy, from the coup in 2014 on, was to aid the Ukrainian nationalist government. The only way to finally bring Ukraine into the American bloc would be to fully reset the ethnic balance of the country in favor of ethnic Ukrainians. For eight years the US supported the Ukrainian government in its civil war against the Donbass republics. During this entire period the Ukrainian army was built up and trained to NATO standards by the US, Canada and Britain. When the White House recently asked for \$33 billion dollars for the war in Ukraine, the Congress increased the amount to \$40 billion more. Not one DSA member in Con-

gress voted against it.

For revolutionaries who do not take sides with American, Russian, or Ukrainian nationalists it is a given that any nationalist will regard such a position as de facto support for whichever capitalist faction they oppose. Such that by opposing a war one gets labeled a "tankie" even though the real tankies were supporters of imperialism. With the threat of a war between two nuclear armed imperialist powers looming, this bourgeois leftist political faction is working overtime to demobilize and discredit any anti-war sentiment and act as sheepdogs for their capitalist ruling party.

To accept the present war in Ukraine as an imperialist war can be deceptively interpreted as a relativization of the sides of the conflict. For both the US and Russia the conflict is existential. American imperialism cannot stop expanding. In capitalism one either expands or contracts. From the perspective of Russian imperialism, the US and its proxies cannot be allowed to gain a permanent foothold on their doorstep as this would only be a prelude to the attempted breakup of the Russian Federation itself. When we say "no to NATO, no to Putin", we mean no to either imperialist power. To side with the class means that for workers their main enemy is at home. It is easy for bourgeois philistines and democratic cretins to "oppose imperialism" on the other side of the world, it is harder to oppose the

imperialism of the enemy at home. It is easy for an imperialist power in conflict with another imperialist power to sound "anti-imperialist". For workers in America's NATO-land, a victory for their ruling class means inflation, poverty and all consequences surrounding participation in the war. For Russian workers it isn't much different. It is worse still for a Ukrainian worker whose own ruling class wants to get as many of them killed as possible to try to guilt trip the West into more direct military intervention. Ukrainian workers are as trapped in this situation as the remnants of the Azov brigade were in the cellars of the Azovstal steelworks.

Within the English-speaking world information bubble the present climate of national chauvinism is tinged with the dementia of American imperialist decline. The US has lost Afghanistan and is losing its latest acquisitions in Ukraine. The threat of a conflagration between nuclear armed imperialist powers has never been greater. For years the western press has been awash with anti-Russian propaganda. The last thing workers need is bourgeois moralizing and pseudo-humanitarian war propaganda. For those who think Russia's invasion of the Ukraine is bad they should try starting World War Three. Of course, these social democrats are already on the job there as well.

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About Us

1919 is a joint political journal between the two North American affiliates of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), Klasbatalo and Internationalist Workers' Group. We fight toward the historic task of the working class, communism. Communism is the organization of society directly focused on the fulfillment of need in which the antagonism between the individual and collective is abolished. It is a world which knows no classes, property, state, or bureaucracy. In short, communism is the abolition of political society. To achieve this task, we believe the working class must fight on its own terrain to defend against the bosses' attacks, and to push forth its own interest. We are for the formation of the world communist party. We do not believe that we alone will be this party. Rather, we see ourselves participating in the real work that is necessary for its formation.



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