

Revolutionary Perspectives

60
Winter
2012

No Future Within Capitalism



**Beyond Protest
We Have to
Organise
For a New World**

Journal of the Communist Workers Organisation

Revolutionary Perspectives
Quarterly Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation
Affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency
Series 3, No 60, Winter 2012

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Beyond Protest



Despite the hopes of many grassroots activists, last November's public sector workers' strike has not triggered a more determined resistance by those who are paying for this capitalist crisis: the working class as a whole. The truth is that the unions are not the organisations many workers believe them to be. So long as resistance is trapped within the union frame there is little prospect of an effective class wide fight back against the onslaught we are facing. This point could hardly have been made clearer when, only a week or so after N30, Unilever workers took to the picket lines over exactly the same issue — i.e. the robbery of their pensions. Somehow or other the unions always manage to undermine the potential strength of real class solidarity. This is a constant process, not simply a question of the leadership 'selling-out' over one issue or poor organisation. It is absolutely no surprise that since November's 'day of action' most of the public sector unions have simply accepted that's the end of the battle and knuckled down to discussions over the exact terms of pension cuts. The position of those who are holding out, such as the teachers, and others who were not officially balloted for N30, such as fire fighters, is therefore that much weaker.

While our take on the unions is often more or less shared by a minority of workers, the union hold is secure so long as the majority are not ready to put up a serious fight and cannot see beyond the token actions of the unions. This is part and parcel of the generally low level of class consciousness which still pervades today but it is also the case that for the most part revolutionaries with an alternative way forward are few and far between in the workplace. It is in this context that a group of us met one night in Durham to discuss the question of how revolutionaries can organise in the workplace. (For a full account see p.26) Our starting point was not how to create alternative unions, but to create a hub of class conscious militants ready to pose a different way of struggling, above all within a revolutionary **political** perspective which puts the daily attacks of the bosses in the wider context of the need to overthrow capitalism.

Since the financial explosion of 2007-8 the words 'capitalism' and 'crisis' have become almost a regular part of everyday parlance. To be against capitalism is no longer the preserve of revolutionary Marxists and 'class struggle anarchists', that is so long as 'capitalism' is defined

as 'unfair' and 'anti-capitalism' a matter of getting more democracy in order to reverse the growing chasm between the haves and the have-nots. This kind of 'anti-capitalism' is epitomised by the Occupy movement which has caught the public imagination with its telling slogan (*We Are the 99%*) and put itself in the limelight with its 'tent cities'. Clearly, such a movement deserves our attention and we have already commented on it and some of our experiences with the Occupiers both here and in Italy as well as reporting on significant Occupy events in North America. The article in this issue is a Marxist overview of this disparate multi-class movement; a movement which if nothing else reflects the growing sense that there must be a better way than this...

The Economic Crisis

Of course the material basis for the widespread questioning of capitalism's automatic right to exist, or at least to carry on as it has been doing over several decades, is the capitalist economic crisis. This crisis, which is no less than the cyclical crisis of capital recognisable by Marxists but once denied as outmoded by capitalist economists, revealed itself decades back. In 1971-73 US President Nixon announced the de-linking of the dollar from gold and then proceeded to devalue the currency which had been established at Bretton Woods as the unit of international trade. By so doing the US not only exacerbated the crisis for the whole world, it opened the way for further manipulation of the dollar to maintain its position in the world and then to a secondary struggle to maintain the dollar by virtue of its military might ... in order to maintain US capitalism's (declining) position in the world.

Aware of the lessons of two world wars (where trade wars and currency devaluations turned into full-blown military confrontations) and encouraged by the collapse of the Russian imperialist bloc the capitalists resolved to find a way to revive profit rates (because this is what the crisis is really about). Somehow or other they had to increase the rate of surplus value — or the portion of value (wealth) produced by workers' unpaid labour (in capitalist terms, 'productivity'). By a combination of industrial restructuring on the basis of new technology and a ruthless dismantling of industries once regarded as indispensable to national economies, all of which involved massive unemployment

and were not accepted without a fight, the conditions which had held in the workplace since the war were already undermined. The era of flexible working had begun. Combine this with the farming out of more and more swathes of industry to areas of massively cheaper labour — part of the globalisation of capital — the portion of surplus value accruing to the capitalist class increased. It is now acknowledged that in the UK and the USA at any rate the share of wages in national income has been declining since 1970. For two decades or more this fact was disguised, even to workers themselves, by the effect of credit and financial speculation.

While financial capital found endless ways of multiplying the amount of (paper) profit that could be made from one original source of capital value derived from workers' unpaid labour, the working class — especially in the USA and UK — took advantage of the cheap money policy and learned how to use their credit cards for deficit financing and employ cheap mortgage loans for their own property speculation. Looked at in this light it is easy to see how Cameron and Co have got away with the idea that 'we are all in this together'. Yet there is no comparison between the negative equity of a working class household who finds that the nominal value of their house has dropped, or the outstanding credit card debt which is forcing hundreds of thousands to resort to pay day loans, and the trillions and trillions of dollars (for the sake of argument) of fictional capital amassed on the balance sheets and off-balance sheet accounts of banks, investment houses and the like and which is still undeclared, waiting like a ticking time bomb to bring another financial explosion.

More Attacks to Come

But the biggest con trick of all is the idea that somehow, if workers make sacrifices and tighten their belts, the 'national' debt for which we are all supposedly responsible, can be reduced or made 'sustainable'. In other words, not only must workers pay off their own personal debts from their wages, they must accept lower wages, lower pensions, longer working lives and cuts in every possible welfare service and work harder to produce a higher profits for the sake of paying off capitalism's debts — a debt mountain which is so large that few financial commentators are ready to face the fact that it is impossible to pay off.

Only a massive write-off and devaluation of capital, a write-off of unprecedented historical proportions, could really revive capitalist 'productivity'. In other words capitalism is facing an existential crisis, the crisis of its existence as a mode of production. This is not to say that ways will not be found to prolong its life. In fact capital's major way of prolonging its own existence at the moment is to find ever more ways of cheapening the cost of labour power. Vietnam, where, according to the Financial Times (10.2.12)

unskilled workers are typically paid a half to a third of the \$300 a month their counterparts might receive in the manufacturing clusters of southern China,

is becoming a very popular focus for capitalist outsourcing.) The inexorable logic of this, of course, is that workers elsewhere must accept more sacrifices and become 'more competitive'.

In this context the TUC's call for government spending cuts to be introduced gradually in order not to damage the recovery, Labour's theme of getting back to 'responsible capitalism', the Occupiers focus on parasitic financiers, Osborne's talk of a 'John Lewis economy', Cameron's stripping of Fred Goodwin's knighthood (which has only provoked others to say why not take away the honours given to Alan Greenspan or Mervyn King, both of whom presided over the loose money policy prior to the financial crash): all this adds up to futile posturing. The reality is that capital will continue to try and get itself out of crisis in the only way it knows: by attacking the working class at the same time as trying to maintain the fiction that 'we are all in this together'.

Every day in the UK there is news of more axing of benefits and services yet so far only 6% of the government's planned public services cuts have been implemented. The Bank of England's latest bout of 'quantitative easing' has staved off an immediate liquidity crisis for the banks but it means that another million people approaching retirement face a further cut in their pensions. Essentially workers everywhere are under attack. From Greece to Italy and Romania, from Nigeria to South Africa, from China to Vietnam the working class are obliged to resist. It can hardly be otherwise. In the words of Onorato Damen, *The proletariat would return to the ranks of mere*

plebeians if it lost its class character as the antagonist of capitalism. This issue charts some of their struggles and the obstacles and illusions which prevent a definite push towards the only meaningful anti-capitalist struggle, the struggle for a new kind of society based on direct democracy and the rational allocation of production to fulfil real social need. The biggest obstacle of all, of course, is the absence — as yet — of a revolutionary political leadership to point the way to such a course. As Damen pointed out, the means to overcome this obstacle can only be found inside the struggles themselves. This is not an argument for simple spontaneity but a recognition that the class struggle is a permanent state of affairs within which revolutionaries themselves have to play their part.

Meanwhile, it is worth noting that capitalism may be facing systemic decline but it remains a system of competing imperialist interests. The old cold war blocs no longer exist and a relatively weaker US is preparing to regroup and defend the hegemony of the dollar against all. The 'international community' has been unable to halt the present bloodbath in Syria because in reality it is a network of competing imperialisms. There is no such thing as an 'international community' only strong powers and weaker powers, useful alignments and dispensable agreements. The British and Argentine governments may be posturing over the Falklands but it is a reminder, however, of how easily capitalist governments facing serious economic problems at home can turn to nationalism and war in the hope of 'uniting the nation' behind them. All the more reason for revolutionaries in the present period to redouble their efforts to reach the wider working class.

Britain All In It Together?

You know things are bad when the *Financial Times* starts running a series of articles on the crisis of capitalism. Every sane member of the ruling class agrees worse is yet to come and politicians all over the world are starting to talk about the same thing: the inequality of capitalism and how to make it fairer. Politicians suddenly find themselves sympathising with the plight of workers, full of outrage at under-taxed millionaires and aghast at out of control bonuses. It's like an epidemic of fairness has spread from one G8 leader to another. President Obama has been gunning for the rich for some time, demanding they pay higher taxes and calling for tighter controls on Wall Street but he's become far more passionate about it in this election year. Even Mervyn King, the Governor of the Bank of England, has launched an assault on bankers, telling business leaders there was a growing sense of injustice because;

those who have suffered the most have been those who bear no responsibility...and who accepted the disciplines of a market economy only to find that others were excused that discipline because they were 'too important to fail'.

An Embarrassment of Riches

The gap between the highest and lowest paid was okay as long as the economy was okay. Since the crash it's become something of an embarrassment. The gap between the highest and lowest paid may have started to widen in the 1980's but it really got going under the Blair/Brown regime as part of the carrot to attract inward investment and make the city the heart of the British economy. Since then the difference has soared. The earnings of bosses at FTSE 100 companies have risen as a multiple of median pay from 14 times in 1980 to 75 times, and according to Deborah Hargreaves, Chair of the High Pay Commission, top bosses now earn 160 times average pay. At the World Economic Forum in Davos, 60% of global investors backed government intervention to control the earnings gap² and a similar number agreed, at least in part, with the statement that banker actions were 'driven by greed and harm the economy'³. David Cameron naturally joined in, criticising the City bonus culture as 'out of control' and said he was determined to do something about it. More than that even, he said excessive pay would be a thing of the past. He was going to curb high levels of pay that 'made people's blood boil' (but no sooner had the words left his lips when Royal Bank of Scotland's boss Stephen Hester was awarded a bonus package of £963,000 causing outrage and further hand wringing). And head of the pack is Vince Cable. On January 22nd he outlined what the FT calls 'the most



ambitious attempt in a decade to rein in soaring executive pay'³ telling MP's that Britons could no longer stomach top pay rising at five times the rate of that of average workers. And so his initiatives, binding votes on companies' pay deals and clawbacks on executives' pay was launched with utter determination to right wrongs. This was followed by the phrase 'No proposal on its own is a magic bullet' just in case none of it worked.

Of course, there is a material incentive to reduce the pay gap. A working class with diminishing pay can't spend, which means an economy desperate to shift consumer durables won't recover. But the real reason income disparity caused so much concern at Davos is the fear of unrest by workers forced to pay for a crisis they didn't cause following a boom they didn't gain from. Until this year inequality wasn't even on the Davos radar; now it is top of the risk list. Nervously watching for signs of unrest, the world's leaders are eager to stop the gap between the '99' percent and the 'one' percent from growing. Far from the usual congratulatory pats on the back, the leaders at Davos are desperately jostling with each other, trying to find a solution to the growing debt crisis which threatens to engulf them all. Many of them know the terrible truth; that there is no solution. The best they can do is try to limit the damage to their own states in the short term while finding new ways of making their workers pay.

Making Capitalism Nicer...

While David Cameron is joining his fellow leaders building a 'fair and worthwhile' economy, Labour leader Ed Miliband has chimed in with talk of 'toxic' blends of capitalism and short-termism, but overall he's been left behind in the debate. Miliband is caught between the rock of trying to talk about fairness and sound genuine and the hard place of presiding over a party which knows it will have to agree with savage cuts to pay and services in order to save the unfair capitalism he's criticising.

So when Labour announced it would carry on with public sector pay restraint if it came to power, Miliband came under fire from the unions who had supported him when he ran for leader in 2010. The

Crisis and Class Conflict

leaders of the GMB, Unite and Unison are furious at this betrayal. In all the unions still supply around 90% of the party's funds and last year Unite was Labour's largest donor, giving £1,493,317. Unison was second with £731,229 and the GMB was fourth-largest, giving £331,859. Paul Kenny of the GMB immediately wrote to senior Labour officials saying the decision to support the cap on public sector pay was a 'most serious mistake' while Len McCluskey, leader of Unite, told the *Guardian* that the shift on pay policy would lead to the party's 'destruction'. Dave Prentis (annual salary £120,000 plus perks) commented:

Our members needed hope and a reason to vote Labour. They have been snatched away.

And this is the real nub of the argument. If Labour can't pose as some kind of alternative at a time like this, the unions know they will find it hard to contain the anger of their members. If that anger can't be channeled into supporting a 'democratic' alternative to the cuts, they may well lose control of any outburst of struggle from the working class. So far the spat between them seems serious; Miliband greeted the attacks the union leaders made on him by defending his decision, saying it was 'tough' if they disagreed. Despite his supposedly "Red Ed" image he continues the strategy that New Labour adopted nearly 20 years ago. There is no need to worry about the working class. They have no other electoral choice but to vote Labour and, in any case, many of them aren't voting anyway. Instead try to sound "responsible" (mangers of capitalism) to win the votes of "Middle England". A spat with union leaders does this policy no harm.

Union Solutions

In reality though the unions have no credible solution to the crisis. So far their most radical solution has been to support causes like the Robin Hood Tax, but then so does President Sarkozy, Chancellor Merkel, George Soros and Warren Buffet. Their mix of Keynesianism and damage limitation will only ensure they police the crisis and persuade their members there is no alternative to the attacks. They're determined to keep public and private sector workers apart and have already managed to keep Unilever workers separate from public sector workers (see our last issue), even though both were fighting to save their pensions.

Where they do join in grass roots anti-cuts campaigns they try to control and contain them. When the 'Sunderland Against the Cuts' campaign recently criticized Unite for agreeing to compromises on pensions, Unite leaders took offence and asked the

group to withdraw the leaflet, accusing those who disagreed with them of trying to divide the movement. The unions are an invaluable tool for capitalism; they give workers a safe place to let off steam, they have a long history of splitting and dividing struggles and they keep workers' focused on saving only their industry or workplace rather than fighting for the class as a whole. As Unite proudly says on its website: 'The work of union reps saves companies up to £1.1 billion every year'⁴ and as the crisis deepens the unions will increasingly try to contain any angry outbursts of class struggle wherever they operate.'

All In It Together?

Much as the ruling class tell us this is a shared crisis, the reality is the working class are already bearing the brunt of it, and the poorest sections of the class bearing it most. An example is the recent changes to the housing benefit rules which are estimated to put 800,000 homes out of the reach of people on benefits or low wages. Payments are being capped to £250 a week maximum for a two-bedroom home and allowances will be scaled back by pegging them to the bottom third of rents in any borough. This means there won't be enough affordable homes in many areas with London being especially badly hit. As we write the government is struggling to get bills through to cap child maintenance benefits and charge single parents for using the Child Support Agency. It also plans to abolish the social fund, all of which will see a massive rise in child poverty.

The crisis is a long way from its worst point yet and as far as cuts are concerned more, and worse, are to come. Trying to make capitalism fair is like training a lion to become vegetarian; it just isn't in the nature of the beast. It's a system based on the exploitation of one class over another, where one class pays for the privilege of having another rule over it, where poverty and inequality are rife and set to deepen the worse the crisis gets. The only chance the working class have of a fair society is when they create their own, when they build a society of people producing for need and not profit. It's the only way we'll 'all be in it together'.

RT

Notes

1. Speech made 24th January 2012 Brighton.
2. Poll by *Bloomberg* January 2012
3. Quoted in *Financial Times* January 23rd
4. Unite website under 'Campaigns'

The Occupy Movement – Just Another Diversion?



The 'Occupy' movement has now been going on for several months. Starting in the USA in September 2011 with Occupy Wall Street, Occupy actions have taken place in 100 US cities and, according to the Occupy Wall Street website, 1500 cities worldwide. In the UK Occupy events have taken place in several cities such as Edinburgh, Bristol and most significantly the St Pauls occupation in London.

On the face it, this may look like a timely and welcome response to the international crisis of capitalism; an avowedly non hierarchical, anti-capitalist, movement, seemingly attracting a considerable amount of public goodwill, if not direct support, not only right there in the heartlands of capitalism, but literally within spitting distance the centres of finance capital such as Wall Street and the City of London. So is this the beginning of the popular revolt against the capitalist system that revolutionaries have dreamed of for so long?

The Occupy movement claims to be anti-capitalist, and there is something to be said for the Occupy camps that have given a platform to revolutionary organisations to speak and hold meetings. Elements of the St Pauls Occupation also gave support to striking electricians working on construction sites in the City, and discussions on the nature of capitalism abound at the 'Tent City University'. At the same time they also give a platform to those advocating petty bourgeois nonsense such as seeking a 'return to the land' and people who rant against the consumption of alcohol like nineteenth century temperance fanatics. You are probably more likely to stumble across the inter-faith prayer tent than encounter a coherent discussion on the possibility of communism. In short just about anything (within the boundaries of political correctness) goes at these Occupy camps, which in truth have more of the feel of Haight Ashbury, (the San Francisco hippy Mecca of the late 1960s) rather than Petrograd in 1917.

On a political level, the 'anti-capitalism' of Occupy, like the Occupy movement itself, has no coherency or substance. When questioned about the meaning of anti-capitalism most Occupy protesters would say they are against the banks and multinational corporations. But there is no economic critique of capitalism and no understanding of why capitalism will inevitably create these hated institutions. The Occupy Wall Street website states on

its home page:

OWS is fighting back against the corrosive power of major banks and multinational corporations over the democratic process, and the role of Wall Street in creating an economic collapse that has caused the greatest recession in generations. The movement is inspired by popular uprisings in Egypt and Tunisia, and aims to fight back against the richest 1% of people that are writing the rules of an unfair global economy that is foreclosing on our future.

This sort of reformist perspective to 'democratise capitalism' in line with groups like UK Uncut who think that capitalism could be fair if only the government made the bourgeoisie pay their taxes, seems to be as close as the Occupy movement gets to having any political perspective at all. Such demands for a fair and democratic capitalism are rooted in petty bourgeois utopianism and serve only to peddle illusions about what is possible under capitalism, illusions that the working class must dispel if it is ever to wage an effective struggle against capital.

This brings us to the question of class. This is an issue that the Occupy movement chooses to gloss over, or perhaps even to deliberately obscure. Of course the inequality that exists in society is at the heart of what the Occupy movement opposes, but this is conceptualised in terms of the 1% of those that own and control the world's wealth, compared to the 99% who don't. This may be graphic representation of that inequality but it is just presented as a given, the consequence perhaps of the power of greedy bankers or megalomaniac multinationals. The fundamental point that capitalism is a class society based on the exploitation of the proletarian majority by the bourgeois minority is neatly overlooked, as this would undermine the Occupy movement's utopian demands for a fair and democratic capitalism. Those who hold a Marxist understanding of the need for a revolutionary transformation of society led by the working class as the prime agent of change cannot realistically function under the Occupy umbrella for anything but the briefest period of time.

This is not just a theoretical difference, but one that has practical consequences for the aims and tactics of the struggle against capitalism. The Occupy movement is an eclectic one that will embrace

anyone who has any kind of grievance against the system as a whole or in part. They are happy to engage with priests and bishops (as shown at St Pauls), trade union bureaucrats or with representatives of capitalism's left wing such as left leaning members of the Labour Party or the Democratic Party in the USA. On our website we have published¹ an article about Occupy Atlanta which explains how the left sought to preserve the social peace by playing the race card and by claiming that any criticism of the black majority city council is racist. It is inevitable that these kind of diversionary tactics will prevail within the Occupy movement in the absence of any clearly defined class politics.

The Occupy movement is a genuine expression of popular resentment against the increasing austerity being imposed on the working class against a backdrop of the seemingly limitless wealth of the bourgeoisie. It has posed, albeit in a confused way, but not answered, the question of an alternative to the capitalist system, which resonates well with an increasingly large sector of the population. To the extent that Occupy provides a space for revolutionary ideas and tactics to be discussed and developed, this is to be welcomed. However because of the lack of any clearly articulated class politics, the Occupy movement, if it survives the onslaught of the courts and the police, will remain at the level of irrelevant gesture politics dominated by the diversionary tactics of liberals and the left. Occupy may contain within it some potential for revolutionary development but for this to be realised militants have to articulate clear class politics, and this would inevitably mean going way beyond Occupy's confused and limited vision.

PBD

¹ "Occupy Atlanta: An Insight into the Occupy Movement" on www.leftcom.org

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Thirty Years On: The Falklands War and the Working Class



Falklands Balance Sheet

It is now thirty years since the Falklands War took place. Many alive today will have only the vaguest idea about what it was all about. It came at a particularly sharp moment in the economic crisis in Britain and the CWO saw it as a key event at the time. Despite our size we gave out tens of thousands of leaflets calling on workers in both Argentina and Britain to strike against the war and refuse to support it. This brought us in hundreds of pounds in donations from workers who asked us to print even more leaflets. One of them is printed below.

Five years ago we published the final article we wrote in *Workers' Voice* after that conflict ended [see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 43 [£3 from our address] or <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2007-02-16/falklands-balance-sheet>]. The leaflet reprinted below adds to that archival document. This is an act of reflection rather than commemoration. Neither the leaflet, nor the article, are the best we wrote, but they do summarise a lot of our thinking, both good and bad, at the time. Moreover looking back at this episode is no mere exercise in political archaeology as many of the issues it raised are still with us.

Thirty Years On the Falklands are Back on the Agenda

By a curious irony the Falklands issue is once again topical. We don't just mean the arrival of the Meryl Streep film about Thatcher, "The Iron Lady", on the big screen. More significantly the anniversary has coincided with the latest bout of diplomatic fisticuffs in the South Atlantic. Much of the rhetoric is due to the fact that Christina Kirchner, the Argentine President faces re-election this year but there are also deeper issues at stake.

The latest tiff between Britain and Argentina really comes over the issue of oil. The famous Argentine anglophile (and conservative) writer, Jorge Luis Borges likened the original conflict to one of "two bald men fighting over a comb". A brilliant image but one which does not take into account the material factors behind imperialist wars, even little ones. Back in April 1982 when the British Government sent its fleet off to the South Atlantic, we said that Argentina's military junta had invaded in "a gamble to gain the oil, fishing and mineral rights around the islands and its dependencies in the Antarctic in an attempt to ease the crisis"

(*Workers' Voice* 7 May 1982) but when we spoke of oil then we spoke only of a hypothesis.

Since February 2010 the search for oil off the Falklands has become a serious project. So serious in fact that the Brown Government ordered a two day military exercise in December 2009 code-named "Cape Bayonet" which "simulated an enemy invasion....". The exercise involving Typhoon multi-role fighters and warships "took place during a tour of the Falklands by British forces ahead of the start of drilling in the basin in February 2010" (both quotes from *United Press International*, 28 Dec 2009). Oil has been found (by the British company Rockhopper) but as yet the amount is not clear (the shares of the Falklands Oil and Gas company go up and down with every new announcement) but seismic tests by the British Geological Survey have suggested that it could be as large as 60 billion barrels.

This has raised the sovereignty stakes still further. As soon as drilling began in February 2010 the Argentine Government refused to allow any Falklands-bound ships to dock in its port. Argentina's vice-Minister of Foreign Relations Victorio Taccetti accused Britain of "a unilateral act of aggression and subjugation" in moving to seize oil and gas in the disputed region. In December 2011 Argentina managed to persuade members of the Mercosur economic group to bar ships flying the Falklands Islands flag from ports in Chile, Paraguay, Uruguay and Brazil. This was followed by getting CELAC, a new grouping of American and Caribbean countries (i.e. minus Canada and the US), to unanimously support Argentina's claim to the Malvinas/Falkland Islands at its inaugural meeting in Venezuela. Since then the Argentine Navy has boarded 12 Spanish fishing vessels trying to land a catch from around the Falklands Islands in Montevideo (Uruguay) as they have to cross the Rio Plata estuary to reach Uruguay. In response the British have sent HMS Dauntless to the Falklands and have irritated the Argentine Government still further by sending their next King but one to the Falklands. Argentina is now threatening to cut off the (only) air link from the Falklands to the mainland which was established by an agreement between the two countries in 1999. It has already lodged a complaint at the United Nations that Britain has broken international agreements on the

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demilitarisation of Antarctica by sending a nuclear submarine to the area. In another ironical coincidence the United Nations Decolonisation Committee meets on 14 June the date of the surrender of the Argentine troops on the Falklands exactly thirty years before. The Argentine Government intends to use the opportunity to protest at the British “militarisation” of the Falklands (which seems to include sending the heir to the British throne to the islands)

As we suggested in 1982 this is not just a fight over the Falklands but also over the wider issue of the mineral and food resources of Antarctica. Back in 2009 Britain submitted a claim to the United Nations Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf for one million square kilometres in the South Atlantic reaching into the Antarctic Ocean. This was two days before the deadline for such claims (15 May 2009) was due to expire. It is the biggest landgrab since the heyday of the British Empire. The Falklands Islands, the Sandwich Isles and South Georgia (also claimed by Argentina) are strategically important for the development of such a claim. It is therefore a piece of sheer cheek (or arrogance in his case) for Cameron to describe the Argentinians as behaving like old style “colonialists”. In fact the British had been prepared in 1980 to give Argentina the islands (the diplomatic signals from those talks gave the military in Argentina the green light to plan their invasion and this was why the Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington resigned as soon as the invasion took place). The British today talk of the “right of self-determination” of the islanders as their main argument for defending them tooth and nail. This was what they said in 1982 but it was an outright lie. The inhabitants of Diego Garcia (who were unceremoniously evicted to make way for a US air base in the Indian Ocean in the 1960s) can bear ample witness to the fact that the British government did not give a toss for the “rights of islanders” when it suited them. In fact Falkland Islanders were denied British citizenship and refused the right to come to Britain until after the 1982 conflict. It is only since then they have been granted British citizenship.

On the Argentine side Galtieri inherited the invasion plan drawn up by his predecessors the year before. The brutality of the military regime (30,000 had “disappeared in the so-called “Dirty War” conducted by the Armed Forces) could not longer withstand the economic

crisis (inflation was 150% a year and unemployment on a par with Britain) and social unrest in Argentina. It was no coincidence that a massive demonstration of half a million people in March 1982 in Buenos Aires took place only 5 days before the decision to invade. For the military it was the final throw of the dice to save their regime. As it was it brought their murderous rule to an end.

Then and Now

There are in fact some striking parallels today with the situation in 1982. Global economic recession was hitting both Argentina and the UK. In the UK in January 1982 the unemployment level had doubled to 3 millions after two years of the Thatcher Government (which had largely won the election in June 1979 on the slogan “Labour Isn’t Working” as unemployment had reached one and half million for the first time since the Thirties under Callaghan). Inflation had reached over 22% and opinion polls showed that Thatcher was the most unpopular Prime Minister of all time (even beating Neville Chamberlain). And as the Tories intended to slash the state budget, the military and in particular the British Navy, was due for more severe cuts (the Secretary for the Navy Keith Speed resigned when he heard of them in 1981). Little wonder that the bosses of the Navy were absolutely the keenest to mount the expedition to the Falklands. It restored their position and many of the cuts were postponed (starting with the immediate reversal of a promise to sell an aircraft carrier to Australia).

They are up to the same old tricks today as it is people like Admiral Sir Sandy Woodward (leader of the 100 ship Falklands Task Force in 1982) who are writing in the *Telegraph* claiming that invading the Falklands will be easy meat for Argentina if current government cuts go through. It is true that the Royal Navy has lost its aircraft carriers, its Harrier jump jets (which were obsolete anyway as they have a range of less than 200 miles) and seen its warship fleet cut in half over the last decade. What he forgets is that in 1982 the islands had no major operational military base of 1000 infantry at Mount Pleasant (35 miles from Stanley) backed up by 4 Typhoon fighters and a frigate which might have made the Argentine dictators think twice. That is the situation today and every civilian leader in Argentina since 1982 has excluded getting the Malvinas back through the use of force.

The most striking parallel though is the fact that once again we have two regimes imposing austerity on their working class: Two regimes that don’t mind a little nationalist confrontation to distract our attention away from their economic failings.

In fact the Falklands War saved Thatcher. The consequence was a wave of jingoism (summed up in the Sun’s adulation of every success in headlines like “Gotcha” (on the sinking of the *Belgrano* (which was away from the combat zone) with the loss of 364 lives) or “Rejoice” (quoting Thatcher at the end of the war)) not seen since the Second World War. Up to this point Thatcher was not only the most unpopular Prime Minister in history but her government had no clear policy other than to try to increase the cuts started by the previous Labour regime. Although the steel workers had been defeated (largely thanks to their union (the ISTC) headed by Bill Sirs, later renowned as a personal friend of Thatcher) wildcat strikes by miners (1981) had already forced the Government to retreat on pit closures. A year later the tide of jingoism and a split in the Labour Party (leading to the formation of the Social Democrats) led to a Conservative landslide. With this, plus the fact that unemployment was now at an all time high, the scene was set for the confrontation with the miners which was to be the defining struggle of the 1980s. As we wrote at the time “a defeat for the miners will be a defeat for the entire working class” and so it turned out to be.

At the same time too the British ruling class stumbled on the realisation that mass unemployment was a great tool for disciplining the class struggle and used it to push through policies which the post-war settlement between capital and labour would previously have considered unthinkable. Deregulation and privatisation followed and the whole basis of the speculative economy which burst in 2007-8 was set up. Restructuring of British industry was made inevitable by the crisis but the Falklands War gave such a boost to the ruling class that it happened faster and in more confrontational way in the UK than anywhere else in Europe. The destruction of British manufacturing industry also tore the heart out of the great concentrations of the working class and destroyed whole communities.

The British victory in the Falklands War though had other repercussions. In the first place it demonstrated that imperialist

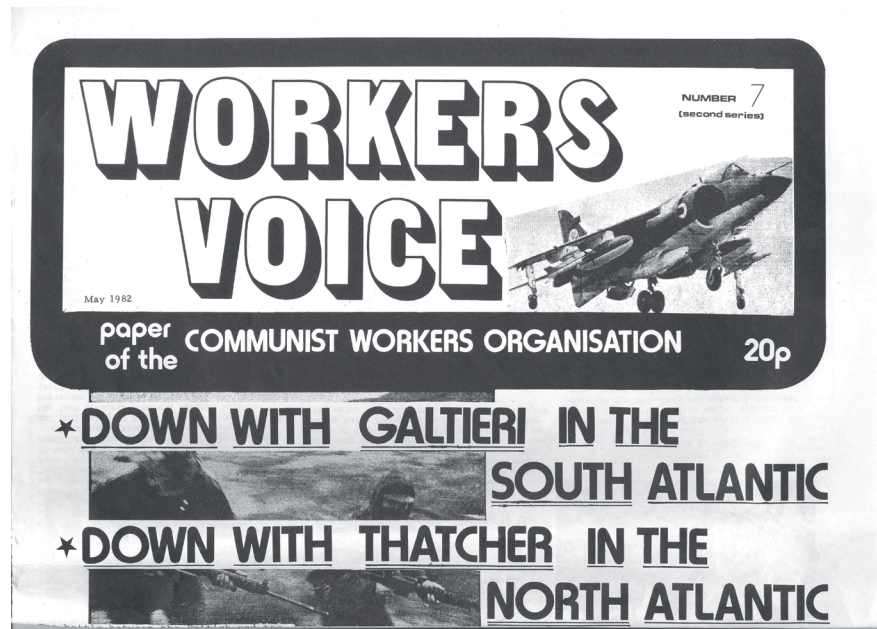
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adventures could be undertaken without the rest of the population being involved. Wars fought a long way from home by professional soldiers and which don't have too many casualties don't have the impact of a world war where the entire resources of a state have to be mobilised. It is probably not an exaggeration to say that this was behind Blair's commitment of the UK to supporting the US in Afghanistan and Iraq. After all he went to war despite the greatest demonstration ever seen in the UK against it (15 February 2003). There is not even much scope for workers striking for their own interests despite the war (as Hawker-Siddeley and Portsmouth dockyard workers did in 1982) since so few workers are actually directly involved in these local wars. Instead it is a bit like the scenario in Orwell's 1984 where distant wars are fought over issues which few understand and in which yesterday's friend (e.g. Saddam Hussein) may become tomorrow's enemy. The wars themselves are thus turned into nationalist propaganda opportunities (such as the Wootton Bassett salute to returning corpses "spontaneously" organised by the British Legion, or the "Help for Heroes" campaign). In such circumstances "revolutionary defeatism" had to have a slightly different meaning and in the Falklands War we tried to articulate it. We also tried to repeat it in the Iraq War by joining with others in the No War But Class War campaign in 2003. Revolutionary defeatism today means that we make no sacrifices of our living standards or existence for the "good of the country". Rejection of austerity programmes is part of that.

Our Error on Imperialist War

As the article we reprinted five years ago made clear we were obviously rather proud of the advocacy of revolutionary defeatism throughout the war. This is also reflected in the leaflet published here. In general our perspective that capitalism in crisis is leading to either a major imperialist conflict or a working class revolution still holds good. As we explained in the article we quoted it was certainly a clear position which exposed the sorry failure of many of the so-called "left" groups to defend working class autonomy from all capitalist conflicts. But we were undoubtedly wrong when we wrote that

Today we can see clearly the signs of the build-up to World War 3 ...



There was no shortage of empirical evidence at the time for the view that the build up towards World War Three was taking place. The arms race of the Cold War was just then reaching its height. Reagan's announcement of the Star Wars programme, the placing of Pershing missiles in Western Europe and the adoption of Trident and Cruise missiles (to be housed at Greenham Common) at this time all gave the impression that war preparations were rapidly advancing. Only three months before the Falklands War, CND managed to achieve its greatest anti-nuclear demonstration ever (referred to in the article cited). What we did not know at the time was that the KGB was actually carrying out an exercise which concluded that nuclear war was not winnable by the USSR (and the assumption was that any conventional war would escalate into a nuclear one in an all-out contest between the USSR and the USA). The arms race was bankrupting the Soviet Union (it accounted for 25% of its GDP whilst the USA was spending 6% of its) just as US planners hoped it would. The KGB were now calling for an end to the arms race and more significantly reform of the declining USSR (Brezhnev's reign was referred to as "the years of stagnation"). In this context the death of Brezhnev (also in 1982) provoked a split in the Politburo which the KGB candidate, Andropov won but he died 15 months later and was replaced by the Brezhnevite, Chernenko who halted any idea of reform. Only on his death in 1985 did the reformers win out with the appointment of Gorbachev. Gorbachev did not intend to destroy the USSR. On the contrary he intended to turn it round (his early speeches called for a return to Lenin's Russia although it

was not clear what he meant by that). Gorbachev's glasnost and perestroika, though, did not make him popular with an apparatus which had long established itself as new ruling class. Its privileges were now in danger and they sabotaged the intended reform at every stage, until, finally, they attempted to overthrow Gorbachev. The attempted coup led to the first case in history of a major imperialist power collapsing without first provoking an imperialist war. By 1989 we were ready for this development but in 1982 we were not.

Five years ago we added a footnote to our introduction¹ to explain our mistake but our error ran deeper than just being outdated by the facts. In 1982 we still held a mechanical view of the relationship of the crisis to the class struggle and imperialist war. Like many other new communist groups which appeared as a result of the capitalist crisis (which we date from the early 70s) we expected the material situation to be resolved into one of "war or revolution" relatively quickly. We very quickly recognised that the wave of militancy in the early 1970s (which had produced new groups like the CWO) was fairly limited and that a qualitative leap in class consciousness would be required in order for the subjective factor for revolution to be on the agenda. We expected it to be something like the previous crises before the First and Second World Wars which had ended up in imperialist war within a decade. What we failed to take into account was that in the epoch of state capitalism the mechanisms for sustaining the system are incredibly more sophisticated and able thus enable the crisis, and also its consequences, to be

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more drawn out.

Indeed it was only in 1983 at our annual general meeting (with observers from the ICC, Battaglia Comunista and the Student Supporters of the Unity of Communist Militants present) that we began to reflect on this and rejected the draft theses presented to the organisation which predicted that imperialist war was now imminent.

More significantly comrades at that meeting began to question the methodology which had brought us to expect the imminence of either World War Three or a significant proletarian response. This began a process of change of perspectives which would be developed over the next few years. The perspectives we finally published in 1983 (in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 21 [Second Series]) were something of a compromise. "War or revolution" were still said to be the historical outcomes of the crisis but there was now a recognition that the crisis was unlikely to be resolved any time soon. Indeed this crisis of the end of the cycle of capital accumulation has now lasted so long that until 2007-8 some were beginning to ask whether it was a valid analysis at all. Now that the bursting of the speculative boom has taken place this is no longer the issue.

As we discovered in 1982-3 there is no mechanical link between crisis and "war or revolution" and even now, at this stage of the crisis, we cannot say that proletarian revolution or generalised imperialist war are beckoning on the immediate horizon. Despite the depth of the crisis which has even had the *Financial Times* recognising that it took the Second World War to cure the last crisis of accumulation (see "Sovereign Debt and the Fight against the System" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 58 p.4) neither proletarian revolution nor general imperialist war are likely in the short term. Despite the objective situation of an insoluble capitalist crisis, despite all the programmes of austerity which have shifted the burden onto the working class the world working class has yet to respond in a coherent and collective fashion. There are a multitude of reasons for this, which we have analysed in many articles over the last few years, but the basic class solidarity which existed 40 years ago no longer exists to the same extent. It may be in the process of being rebuilt and the inevitable struggles in the months ahead will answer this for us.

On the imperialist war front there is no shortage of conflict and rivalry from Chinese soft power stealthily establishing itself in the Indian Ocean and Africa to the cyber wars being played by various powers (including the US-Israeli axis against Iran). However there is no clear fracture line of two opposing camps which indicates what course all these rivalries will ultimately take. You can see this in the fact that various comrades who insist on the proximity of imperialist wars all point to different conflicts of interest. Others highlight US-China rivalry, others the West (NATO) versus the Shanghai Cooperation Council (Russia, China and Iran) and of course there are still those like Samuel P. Huntington who point to the "clash of civilisations" between the West and Islamic fundamentalism. But the lack of agreement suggests that the game of thrust and counter thrust, the "petty" rivalries for big stakes and the localised wars will go on for some time before anything more dramatic evolves to untie the Gordian knot of imperialist rivalry.

For revolutionaries, for now, the main issue remains just how long the working class is prepared to tolerate a system which promises another decade of declining living standards for those who create its wealth. This is the challenge which throws enormous responsibility on to those who still think the proletariat is the only class capable of assuring we live in a future society without exploitation and oppression to constantly develop both theoretically and organisationally.

Jock

Notes

1 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2007-02-16/is-%E2%80%9Cthe-falklands%E2%80%99-factor%E2%80%9D-still-with-us> or send for *Revolutionary Perspectives* 41 (£3 UK from group address).

FALKLANDS WAR = WAR AGAINST WORKERS

THE LIES OF THE BOSSES

Thatcher is lying when she says that troops have been sent to the South Atlantic to defend the rights of British subjects. Galtieri is lying when he says he's trying to get rid of British "colonialism". The lies about the Falkland War are all part of the preparation for World War Three.

The real reason for the War in BOTH BRITAIN AND ARGENTINA is to deflect working class anger away from the effects of the ECONOMIC CRISIS. Argentina's economy is about to collapse. Inflation is 150% a year and unemployment (officially) at 1 million (1 in 8 of the population) is nearly as bad as Britain's. On top of that, Argentina's debts are bigger than Poland's! Only 5 days before Argentina had invaded the Falklands half a million people took to the streets to demonstrate against Galtieri. Since the military took over it has drowned workers' resistance in blood. Nearly 30,000 people have "disappeared" since 1976. The invasion of the Falklands is a last desperate gamble by Argentina's rulers to save themselves from working class unrest and, in the long term, to try and bolster the economy by gaining oil, fishing and mineral rights around the islands.

For Thatcher the invasion has been a great opportunity to call for "national unity" and divert attention from double figure inflation, A million unemployed and falling living standards; The economic crisis is out of control and this war will lead to more cuts in education, social services and welfare benefits to pay for greater military might.

"THE ENEMY LIES IN YOUR OWN COUNTRY"

Our quarrel is not with the workers of Argentina who are being drummed up to fight for their rulers. Our quarrel is with the ruling class here who grow rich on the fruits of our labour as we grow poorer. When Thatcher says, "we must, as a country, start paying ourselves less" she means the workers must be paid less whilst the bosses are paid more. (like BL boss, Edwardes' £47,000 pay rise this year). Now they are demanding sacrifices in blood to keep themselves in power.

But the enemy here isn't just Thatcher and the "patriots". Among the false "friends" of the workers is Foot's Labour Party. He supported the sending of the British fleet, saying it was going to fight "a fascist junta" — which Britain, France and the U.S.A. just happened to have supplied with its most modern arms! So much for Foot, the CND marcher. As happened in World Wars One and Two, pacifists end up joining the chorus that war is "justified".

In World War One and Two the trade unions showed whose interests they really defend when they came out in support of the war, agreeing to worse working and living conditions "in the national interest". Today in both Britain and Argentina the same has happened. In Argentina the CGT (their TUC) has called demonstrations in support of a regime soaked in workers' blood, whilst in Britain the unions called off the dock strike planned to start on 10 May and have persuaded Hawker Siddeley workers in Bristol to end their overtime ban.

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

Neither Thatcher's nor Galtieri's regime deserve working class support. Already in Argentina brave workers have risked their lives to demonstrate AGAINST the war. Already in Britain Portsmouth dockyard workers have refused to sail with the fleet to help refit ships as they sailed south.

These actions to defend our interests are important. If the bosses, through their newspaper and television propaganda, manage to whip up nationalism or "patriotism" amongst the working class for this stupid little dispute it will be so much easier for them to send us off as cannon fodder when bigger conflicts occur. Look how easily this war has started? Look how much it has been beyond our control. The NATO bosses have publicly admitted that this is just battle training for the British fleet in World War Three.

The war will end sooner or later in a "negotiated settlement" and all those who were killed will have died in an attempt to save two bankrupt governments. The war over the Falklands is only a foretaste of what bankrupt world capitalism has in store for us. We must resist the growing calls for "patriotism" of this crisis-torn system's mad descent to World War Three. Working class INTERNATIONALISM is the only sane response. We must begin this NOW by:

- * Stepping up the struggle against falling living standards
- * Rejecting government and union calls for "sacrifices"
- * Striking against any cuts caused by the war .
- * Refusing to load ships, transport arms or carry out war work
- * Striking and publicly demonstrating our solidarity with Argentinian workers.

Communist Workers' Organisation
May 1982

Italy

“The Revolt of the Pitchforks” and the Southern Proletariat



The so-called “revolt of the pitchforks” broke out in the second half of January in Sicily. This movement has now brought the island to a standstill for a week, and is now beginning to extend to other regions.

The revolt is supported by Sicilian farmers, fishermen and roadhauliers, and thus can be coupled with the simultaneous mobilisation of taxi drivers in Rome and other major cities. In both cases, it is the “middling sort” either in the process of proletarianisation, or who have seen their conditions deteriorate dramatically under the blows of an international economic crisis which the various governments, whether “technical” or not, continue to heap on workers and also partly, as in this case, on the weakest fringes of the petty bourgeoisie.

But compared to that of taxi drivers, the revolt of the pitchforks has unique characteristics that make it, for better or for worse, worthy of special attention from those who would like to give a shot in the arm to the class struggle as a whole.

The first fact is the breadth of the territory which the struggle involves. It is not just a single city but an entire region, and in the days ahead it could also extend beyond the Straits of Messina and up the peninsula.

The second fact is that it is in Sicily, a region where, as in the rest of the South, the unemployment rate is very high and where the chances for the young to find a decent job, or just any job, are really minimal. These are regions from where, for 150 years, many workers have continued to migrate to the North in order to build a life. Not surprisingly then, that at the present time many school students have gone on strike to show solidarity with the revolt: the discontent is expressed where there is conflict and vice versa, and right now, in Sicily, “the pitchforks” are blocking roads and motorways.

The third, very dangerous, fact is the hegemony that Forza Nuova (New Force) and other names in the galaxy of the neo-fascist right, such as the “Movement for the People” of the industrialist, Zamparini, have at the moment within the revolt. A fact that closely resembles the events of Reggio Calabria in 1970 (leftcom.org), when a fierce revolt, which lasted more than a year and involved not only the middle class but also large parts of the proletariat and sub-proletariat, was guided by fascist extremism and was found

everywhere on the ground in the struggle for the provincial capital. It's the same today as it was back then. If the proletariat doesn't mobilise as a class, dragging along with it the sectors of the petty bourgeoisie which are most affected, the risk is that the opposite happens; namely that the middle class take the lead in the conflict, pulling the younger generation with no future and proletarians into the trap of local corporatism and regionalism.

When Sicilian Confindustria (the Italian equivalent of the bosses organisation the CBI) speaks of “mafia infiltration” in the movement of the pitchforks it makes you smile, as if the Mafia in Sicily and the state institutions were not part of the same patronage system based on fear and very deep social inequalities. It's the same in the rest of the South.

Those who live in the South in mafia-dominated areas know perfectly well that, with rare exceptions, buying votes on both left and right is the norm. To have recommendations, protection, connections, that's the slogan. Otherwise, if you do not have capital to invest, or inherit a company, you also have to pack up and leave. The mafia will put workers on both sides of the barricades to control the situation and to prevent protests from becoming too “spontaneously” against the system. That's just a little of what the politicians get up to.

But let's leave Confindustria to play its part in this little theatre and get back to the revolt. In essence, the point where we have to start is that the South is not the North. In the South, capitalism throws off its disguise: it is brazen and brutal. Social divisions run particularly deep and the poor are really poor. In the South there is no widespread manufacturing base as in the northern regions so that the factory-based working class is numerically weaker than workers employed in the services, the underemployed, the unemployed and farm labourers.

And now we come to the farm labourers. The latter, in Sicily and elsewhere in the South, are almost all immigrants and represent perhaps the key to shifting a struggle, like that of the pitchforks, from a corporatist and regionalist terrain to a class and internationalist one. And there is no point in trying to oppose the fascist hegemony in the revolt on purely ideological level. It is necessary to clearly show our difference in its content. If this crisis also affects the farm owner, it affects

the immigrant labourers even more – mostly taken on illegally – they are brutally exploited today, and tomorrow will be likely to be out of work and their residence permit revoked. It is proletarians, and in particular immigrants, the most vulnerable part of the class, who are paying the highest price.

We workers must begin to break down the many barriers that still divide us: the worker of Termini Imerese, the unemployed youth in Palermo, the farm labourer of the plain of Catania ... it is they who should join in a united front and block the roads of Sicily, and not just to lower this or that tax or to oppose this or that governor, but to claim a legitimate guarantee of a “decent” job, a “decent” pension... If these goals are absolutely incompatible with an international capitalist system in crisis, it means that we have to go further. This is why is not enough just to brandish pitchforks: we must also know how to point them in the right direction. And even in Sicily, this direction must move beyond struggle for a single demand and start to question the foundations of capitalism, proposing finally a new kind of society without bosses, sponsors ... and owners.

Gek

Communist intervention in the Workplace *continued from p.27*

more effective, and to start to turn the fightback into something more.

GPH

The Discussion

The outline was broadly accepted by the meeting with comrades who had been involved as both union stewards and in anti-union workplace groups giving us the benefit of their different experiences. One comrade pointed out that the best-intentioned shop stewards and even union leaders who might think they have the welfare of members at heart always end up acting on the bosses' side since that is the nature of the unions' role in the capitalist process of exploitation. In addition comrades made a number of points in order to clarify one or two things. The first took issue with the description (in one of the quotes from *Death to Rank and Filism*) of permanent economic workplace groups becoming “reformist”. They were worse than this as they too end up identifying with the bosses like the old unions (and the example of the COBAS in Italy was cited). It was also suggested that we drop the words “intervene” and “intervention” as they were imported into our language from Italian and French.

In English they gave the impression that communists were outside the class movement instead of growing with it. We also need to correct the CWO statement that it was the “forerunner” of the future world party of the proletariat. The ICT is not only not the party but does not even see itself as its direct forerunner. Our aim is to participate in the struggles of the world working class towards such a party and to link up with those organisations which will be thrown up by the struggle.

Some points from the talk were expanded on, such as the nature of the unions today compared with the 19C when they were fighting organisations where nearly all dues were to save up for strike pay and this was used to have all-out strikes. This changed with the concentration and centralisation of capital to the creation of monopoly and then state capitalism in which the unions became more and more integrated into the capitalist state structure.

Unions have never been revolutionary but are now no longer even “schools of socialism” (Marx) or “transmission belts” (Lenin) between party and class. Unions are now vast bureaucracies who fight only on sectional terms, accept all capitalist restrictions on the struggle and use the members dues as investments for the

pensions of its bureaucrats.

When class struggle is acute they act to divide workers by section and nation. However this is not obvious to workers who think that the union still represents their basic interest and without which they would be isolated. Ergo workers see the union as the only framework for their activity. It is not true that the most advanced workers are outside the unions as union membership depends as much on circumstance as choice.

It is usually only at times of struggle that workers begin to question the unions. This means that (at least in the UK – in France and Spain the situation is different) revolutionaries do not boycott the unions as members but on the contrary join them to find fellow workers who are questioning the system and the unions too.

The question of the link between the daily struggle of the class and its long term interests cannot be resolved by a mere critique of the unions. It seemed agreed by everyone that any serious revolutionary organisation has to have a strategy to try to keep workers connected to the political programme. Our chosen strategy is the workplace group. This is made up of at least one member of the political organisation with others who recognise the limitations of the union-dominated struggle and who also share an understanding of the nature of the system of exploitation. It is open to all irrespective of any other political allegiance.

Wherever a member of the ICT is present in any workplace s/he should work to make contacts with the aim of setting up a group. If this means being a member of the union then so be it.

The tasks of workplace groups are:

- to promote ideas of class autonomy;
- advocate strike committees and mass assemblies to control the committees;
- promote solidarity struggles across sections and frontiers;
- maintain links between workers in times of class quiet;
- promote the dissemination of revolutionary ideas via leaflets and programmes of discussion and education in preparation for the more general battles ahead. This is not just a one way process but part of the education of all communist militants to be involved with workers in the immediate struggles of the moment.

Social Protests in Romania

Introduction

We reproduce below a translation of a text produced by our German comrades in the Gruppe Internationalistischer Sozialisten (GIS) on the events in Romania up until the date it was written, 28 January 2012. Since then, the Emil Boc government has “fallen”, against a background of continued protests (despite the intense cold) and, in rapid succession, Boc was followed by acting Prime Minister Mihai Razvan (6-9 February) and then by Prime Minister Ungureanu Catalin Predoiu, whose cabinet was approved by Parliament on 9th February.

In reality, Boc resigned to deflect the wave of working class anger unleashed by his government’s privatisation plans, and many members of his government (which included Razvan and Predoiu) have continued in office. Boc himself stated he was going to “defuse political and social tension” over austerity measures. That the measures themselves are going ahead has been confirmed by Predoiu.

The bourgeois opposition has boycotted Parliament since the 1 February, calling for a “totally fresh start for Romanian society”, which, of course, will be fresh only in that they would be in charge of the administration of capital-imposed austerity.

As usual, the Western bourgeois media has concentrated on the political goings-on at the level of the state, and there seems to be no news regarding the mass response to the Boc resignation and the manoeuvres around it (the comments of a handful of individuals, selected for their ability in foreign languages, and no doubt the extent to which their opinions gel with those of the interviewers, is no substitute). But it is to be hoped that the Romanian working class (see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-09-14/the-plight-of-workers-in-romania>) continues to strive for independence from bourgeois forces, and begins to aim at a “totally fresh start for human society.” To do that, it goes without saying, they will need to give themselves a (real) communist organisation.

28 January 2012

Since Wednesday 11 January 2012 there have been signs of movement in Romania. It has been 23 long years since the end of the Ceaucescu regime, which, after initial hopes, led to an era of resignation and social stagnation. From Friday 13 January thousands have taken to the streets with demonstrations spreading over the entire country, including over forty cities.

The protests and demonstrations have broken out completely spontaneously after the regime set a reform in motion, which aims at a comprehensive privatisation of the whole health system. The countrywide SMURD (Mobile Emergency Service for Resuscitation and Extrication) rescue service which operates alongside traditional ambulance services and provides an excellent complement to them will be subjected to a total privatisation. In fact, this will mean the end of this general purpose rescue service whose founder, Raed Arafat, a Palestinian by birth, is well-respected by the population. However, things have turned out completely unlike what the regime expected. Even last year the IMF had attested to the exemplary way in which the Romanian government had carried out wide-reaching social cuts against its population without encountering any meaningful resistance.

In 2011 the Romanian government of the PDL (Democratic Liberal Party) and the UDMR/RMDSZ (Democratic Union of Hungarians in Romania) pushed through one of the toughest wage cuts in the whole of Europe: in public services alone, the government cut wages by around 25%, pensions by the same and the already terrifying low unemployment benefit by 15%. Simultaneously, VAT was increased by 5% from 19% to 24%. This at a time when pensions don’t even stretch to paying even the most urgent medication or heating costs. “I worked for 35 years as a teacher, and now I am ashamed of my pension and can’t even pay for heating. That is a terrible humiliation”, explained 60 year old Gabriel Vernat. And she is not alone in this situation. At the same time, the government decided to pass laws further restricting workers’ rights. In 2011, unemployment officially climbed from 6.9% to 7.2%. Electricity, water and food prices all increased, especially in cities with a lot of tourism where prices shot up.

At first, it seemed that the health law brought in by State President Traian Basescu at the end of December 2011 would be pushed through by the government, just like all the other social and job cuts it had implemented before. But the ruling class had miscalculated. The

health law laid down massive cuts in the provision for those enrolled in the sickness benefit scheme. Additional payments as well as paying for all consultations with doctors was to become obligatory. It should be noted that the health system in Romania, in view of its low wages and corruption, has a miserable reputation amongst the working population. Cristian Cercel, the Romanian correspondent of the Guardian describes it thus: *"Many hospitals in Romania may be anterooms to death, but the system he [Arafat] founded is one of the few things many Romanians think works properly – it literally saves lives."* (16 January 2012). The plan to subject the rescue service to a total privatisation was the straw which broke the camel's back, and the mood swung completely around.

The absolute privatisation of the rescue service would have meant that everyone would be forced to either pay, or do without medical care even in an emergency. The intention to expose the SMURD rescue service to this drastic treatment, which meant in fact the overthrow of its former function caused Raed Arafat, its director and an Undersecretary of State, to publicly declare that the new law would destroy the health system and that he therefore would not agree to it. Traian Basescu, who was already unpopular because of his authoritarian style of leadership, got himself into hot water when he attacked Arafat in the media and declared him to be the *"greatest enemy of private health care"*. His attacks expressed themselves in the sentence: *"If he doesn't approve the law, then he must go"*. Following this, Raed Arafat resigned on Friday 13 January. The avalanche began to move. Even by the 11 January, several hundred people had demonstrated their solidarity with Arafat on the streets of Targu Mures, where Arafat had once studied. In Cluj Napoca too, several hundred people took to the streets. Rapidly and spontaneously, an unforeseen wave of outrage and solidarity swept through the entire country. In Banat, Apuseni and Maramures, in Transylvania, Moldavia, Burkovina, Wallachia, and above all in Bucharest and on the Black Sea, hundreds gathered in cities big and small, in order to carry their anger at the implementation of the health law onto the streets. Already by the following Friday, after a long period of political apathy, thousands took to the street as if it was the most natural thing in the world. Large demonstrations in Botosani, Deva, Alba Iulia, Craiova,



Brasov, Piatra Neamt, Lasi, Timisoara and Arad, Suceava, Constanta, Oradea, Slatina, Giurgiu, Ploesti, Constanta, Pitesti, Vaslui, Galati, Sibiu and elsewhere drew several tens of thousands of people in all. Astonishingly, the number of demonstrators increased, although the government made a retreat. State-president Traian Basescu rescinded the health law on Friday and Raed Arafat was allowed to return to office. The SMURD rescue service should continue to exist.

The Character of the Protests

"We are sick of the parties. LDP, SDP [post-Stalinist Social-Democratic Party] you are all the same," read a placard in Bucharest.

The protests went much further than criticism of the planned privatisation of the health system. They targeted the catastrophic cuts of the Centre-Right government of the Emil Boc cabinet as well as the authoritarian behaviour and government style of Head of State Basescu and the entire political establishment. Attempts by the opposition parties PNL (National Liberal Party) and SDP to channel the protest movement in their direction and to draw political capital from it largely failed. In contrast to the past, they did not succeed in dominating the protests against the government. In some demonstrations, the murdered victims of the 1989 "Revolution" were remembered, whose sacrifices should not have been in vain. There were the most varied reasons for the demonstrations. What unifies them the most is anger against the political establishment which is sharpening the ever more widespread impoverishment through its disastrous cutting policies.

The demonstrations are almost a cross-section of the entire population. The strongest participation in the protests comes from pensioners, who have long been the most active opponents of social cuts. They are joined by students and the young unemployed, nurses, doctors, IT-workers, trained skilled workers, who are no longer employed because more and more subsidiaries of Western concerns are leaving the country to produce in others with even lower wages. Many of the slogans are crude and in general it can be said that they are often put on a nationalist basis. Many see economic misery — viewed too narrowly — as a consequence of the government's policy of cuts or of its errors. The insight that this misery is above all else a product of capitalism's crisis and should be seen on an international level is an entirely minority view. Certainly, reactionary forces like the Monarchists or the fascist Neo-legionaries, which were able to gain influence during the long-lasting period of political apathy, seek to find a foothold in the movement. Nevertheless, it would be false to dismiss the protests as nationalist. Such a way of seeing things would not just not do justice to the present contradictory nature of the protest, but, on the contrary, would also leave the field clear for the reactionary forces. This would be fatal in every respect.

The Political Establishment

The leading politicians in Romania seem to be extremely aloof and display enormous arrogance. In this respect they are alongside Nicolas Sarkozy or David Cameron. Basescu says that the people do not deserve their leaders. The Foreign Minister Teodor Baconschi described

Crisis and Class Conflict

the demonstrators — in relation to the persistent street fighting in Bucharest — as *“inept and violent slum-dwellers”*. He was sacked on 23 January by Premier Emil Boc. Politically more dangerous are the pamphlets of a monk of the Orthodox Church, which represent the protests as the work of foreign powers, instigated by the billionaire George Soros, whose supposed aim is to destabilise Romania. An Orthodox-Nationalist MEP appealed to the patriotism of his countrymen in relation to Arafat:

“This protest disgusts me. We shouldn’t defend an Arab.”

According to the calculations of the so-called opposition parties, new elections should be held. In this way the strength of the protest movement would be undermined.

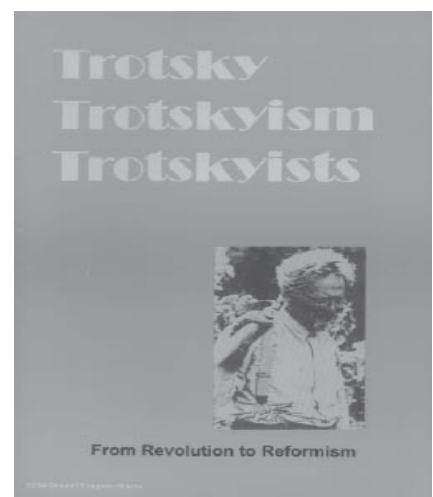
The behaviour of the police and gendarmerie, who have acted brutally against the demonstrations, already indicates how seriously the government takes the protests. According to eye-witness accounts, the police have also violently attacked passers-by and non-participants. In Bucharest, a man who was on his way home was harassed by the police. When he fled, they chased him and pushed him against a wire fence, and then fired a tear gas grenade against his leg from a distance of a meter, leading to badly broken bones. The Romanian security services have learnt a thing or two. Many rail passengers have been prevented from supporting demonstrations in other cities, either by being barred from leaving or else forced to leave their train. In 1989, before the fall of Ceaucescu, it was the exchange of information between cities, organised by students, that primarily led to the generalisation of the demonstrations.

Perspectives

At present, no prognosis can be ventured as to how the protests will develop, not least because of the very superficial reporting in “our” media. What should be saluted is that many of those protesting continue to demand the complete resignation of the entire present government. Day by day, protests are going on over the entire country. It appears that Romania is shot through with illusions that in the framework of “parliamentary democracy” many things would get better. But the opposition parties are in no way regarded as being better. What is new is that part

of the demonstrations have defended themselves against the violence of the police and gendarmerie. But this should not be over-estimated, because the state will be better armed the next time. If, here in Germany, the talk is that the violence at the demonstrations has its source in football fans or hooligans, then that should be viewed critically. The street fighting in Bucharest lasted four days and stretched over an area of 6km. Defaming the social protests as Romanian “people’s anger”, no matter how many-sided they seem on the spot, is nothing other than an active policy of disinformation aimed at reducing any solidarity. In this respect, it is entirely positive that there have been protests of various kinds and sizes outside Romanian Consulates and Embassies across the world. It is to be hoped that the various demonstrations merge with strikes in industry and the public sector, and lead to a new dynamic which causes petty-bourgeois solutions and approaches to solutions to lose their persuasiveness. This would be just as important if the struggles did lead to the racist and nationalist formulations being deprived of their basis. At present it does not seem as if this will happen. But, a few days ago no-one would have thought that the Foreign Minister Teodor Baconschi would be forced to resign. It remains to be seen how the protests in Romania develop. Nevertheless, their very existence is an important precursor of the further explosions which are to be expected with the sharpening of the international crisis. Even so, isolated outbreaks of rage at a national level will not suffice to deflect the social attacks of the ruling class. In the end, only an international and internationalist workers’ organisation anchored in the class can contribute to overcoming the lines of division and give the worldwide struggles a revolutionary direction.

GAC



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Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists

Examines the course of how Trotsky, who made such an enormous contribution to revolutionary practice, ended up giving his name to a movement which returned to the errors of Social Democracy

ANC – A Hundred Years in the Service of Capital



...unless you are a capitalist

In January 2012 the African National Congress celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its foundation and spent R100 million (£8.2M) on the party. It has now held power continuously for almost 18 years and so its leaders saw this as a great cause for celebration. However, the celebrations were largely for the political elite and the few who have enriched themselves from the ANC's rule. The working class, the unemployed and the impoverished millions, who have nothing whatsoever to celebrate, were conspicuous by their absence.

The ANC was founded shortly after the creation of the Union of South Africa by a handful of western educated lawyers and journalists at a time when African society still was largely tribal although the tribal economic subsistence system was being destroyed by capitalism. The ANC's founders turned their backs on tribal society and demanded equal rights for Africans within the emerging capitalist society, rights from which the settlement after the Boer War and the act off Union specifically excluded them. A further century of capitalist development, which has entirely destroyed tribal society, replaced it with capitalist society, and produced a predominantly African working class, has seen the ANC rise to become the dominant bourgeois force in South African politics.

The ANC which has always presented itself as a national movement, in particular one representing the interests of the entire African population, has in reality always been a party representing the rising African bourgeois class. The ANC's flirtation with the African working class has been a cynical manoeuvre to recruit workers as its foot soldiers with which it has been able to batter down the Apartheid regime and the resistance of Afrikaner nationalism. In its period in power from 1994 the ANC has taken over the management of South African capitalism and carried out this task like any other capitalist government in this period. Privatisations and opening of the country to global competition, while workers living standards have been cut, have been the order of the day. At the same time the power of the state has been used to promote the party elite into the top ranks of the bourgeoisie through the famous Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) programme. This programme has created a handful of black millionaires in positions of power in the mining and industrial corporations, a

process which the regime tries to present as compensation for the sins of the past century, and as a demonstration that the position of Africans is improving. However, at the same time as they promote themselves to the ranks of the capitalist class they are creating an ever growing urban underclass dependent on state welfare payments and the gap between rich and poor is getting ever wider. Creating a black bourgeois class was, of course, always the ANC's programme, but the lie, which it has maintained, is that this would somehow benefit the African working class. This lie is now being cruelly exposed. Although the issues of racial division and racial oppression have always clouded the South African situation, and have been exploited to the hilt by both the Afrikaner nationalists and the African nationalists, the real contradictions in South African society, as in capitalist society the world over, are those of class. The interests of the working class and the capitalist class are diametrically opposed and the ANC cannot reconcile the two. On the one hand the ANC has produced a situation where, according to its own calculations, 9% of the capital of mining corporations is in the hands of black capitalists while on the other hand it has created a situation where:

- 40% of the working age population are unemployed. This represents 6 million workers 2.8 million of whom are between 18 and 24.¹
- The urban underclass, surviving on welfare payments, has increased from 2.5 million in 1999 to 12 million in 2006!
- 50% of the population live below the poverty line
- 7 out of 10 black children grow up in poverty²
- Life expectancy has decreased from 65 years in 1994 to 53 years in 2009³

Such contradictions are threatening to tear the organisation apart. In the shameless enriching of its top members the ANC government has mired itself in corruption and cronyism which extends right up to the presidential office. At the 100th anniversary of its foundation there is actually little cause to celebrate.

South Africa

18 Years in Power

Since coming to power the ANC has been in a tripartite alliance with the South African Communist Party (SACP) and the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU). This has been designed to shore up its power and provide political cover for its attacks on the working class. Needless to say workers have resisted the erosion of their wages and living standards and the last 2 years have seen massive strikes. In 2010 there was a civil service strike involving 1.3 million workers which lasted 20 days, and in 2011 there have been strikes in the mines, energy, petroleum, metal and paper sectors which have seen hundreds of thousands of workers down tools for pay increases. Although COSATU does its best to control and defuse these strikes, the general deterioration of workers' conditions is putting pressure on the alliance and opening up fissures in the ANC itself. It was undoubtedly pressures from those feeling dispossessed and betrayed by the ANC which led to the ousting of the previous president Thabo Mbeki in 2008 and his replacement by the more populist Zuma. The ousting of Mbeki has led to his faction leaving the ANC and forming a new political grouping Congress of the People (COPE).

A further rupture, and a potentially more explosive one, has been opened by the disciplining and suspension of the ANC youth leader Julius Malema. Malema was a key supporter of Zuma during the defenestration of Mbeki, but the continual deterioration of the condition of workers and the poor has led him to turn his fire on the Zuma leadership and call for the nationalisation of the mines and the expropriation of white owned farm land. These issues, which are actually specified in the "Freedom Charter," adopted as the ANC programme in 1956, are now quite contrary to the demands of South African and international capitalists and, of course the ANC leadership. Consequently they are a great embarrassment to the ANC. His raising of these demands from the past is like the proverbial ghost appearing at the wedding feast to wreck the party. Although he has been silenced and suspended from the ANC for a period of 5 years he is giving voice to widely held grievances and the demonstrations at his trial show he has a strong following which is not going to be placated by the silencing of one man.

The unemployed are also finding a voice. A spokesman for the Unemployed People's Movement accuses the ANC of betrayal:

*"During the struggle our leaders embodied the aspirations of the people. But once they took state power they didn't need us anymore. We were sent home. We are only called out to vote or attend rallies. But all the time our people are evicted from farms, paving way for animals as farms are turned into game reserves under the pretext of tourism. Our people are evicted from cities. Our people are denied decent education."*⁴

In recent demonstrations, the unemployed demanding jobs, housing, running water and electricity have been met with ferocity similar to that of the Apartheid regime. At a demonstration in the town of Ermelo, in one of SA's poorest provinces, 2 protesters were shot dead by the police. At another demonstration, over precisely the same grievances, in the town of Ficksburg, a protester, Andries Tatane, was beaten to death by police in full view of the television cameras.

An explosive social situation is building up and could detonate if welfare payments are cut back. Certain commentators from within the ANC are looking nervously at the events of the Arab Spring, and seeing them as prefiguring the future for SA⁵. While it is understandable that those in the Unemployed People's Movement and some in the ANC youth organisation see the ANC as having "betrayed" them is this really true?

Development of the ANC

As mentioned above the ANC developed in a period when African society was in the process of being changed from a tribal economic system with Africans producing their needs directly from the land to a capitalist one in which tribal men and women were converted into wage labourers. However, the enforced separation of tribesmen from their means of production, namely their land⁶, and their conversion into wage labourers was accomplished by open violence and a doctrine of racism which tended to obscure the developing class divisions. Marx makes the following observation in regard to the separation of the producers from their means of production in the colonies:

*"It is otherwise in the colonies. There the capitalist regime everywhere comes into collision with the resistance of the producer, who, as owner of his own conditions of labour, employs that labour to enrich himself, instead of the capitalist. The contradiction of these two diametrically opposed economic systems, manifests itself here practically in a struggle between them. Where the capitalist has at his back the power of the mother-country, he tries to clear out of his way by force, the modes of production and appropriation, based on the independent labour of the producer. ... To this end he proves how the development of the social productive power of labour, co-operation, division of labour, use of machinery on a large scale, &c., are impossible without the expropriation of the labourers, and the corresponding transformation of their means of production into capital. In the interest of so-called national wealth he seeks for artificial means to ensure the poverty of the people."*⁷

The major part of the dirty work of converting Africans into wage labourers was accomplished by the British who were quite clear as to what needed to be done. After the military defeat of the of the various tribes the British authorities started to expropriate their land and impose taxes on them in order to force them into wage labour to get the money to pay the taxes. Even after military defeat, however, this met with resistance just as described by Marx. For example the imposition of a £1 annual poll tax in Natal led to the 1906 Zulu rebellion. Earl Grey the British colonial secretary, writing in 1880, put the issue nearly as clearly as Marx. He wrote:

"The coloured people are generally looked upon by the whites as an inferior race, whose interests ought to be systematically disregarded when they come into competition with their own, and should be governed mainly with a view to the advantage of the superior race. For this advantage two things are considered to be especially necessary: first facilities should be afforded to the white colonists for obtaining the possession of the land theretofore occupied by the Native tribes; secondly, that the Kaffir population should be made to furnish



as large and as cheap a supply of labour as possible.”⁸

The process set in motion by the British continued after the creation of the Union of SA and the most significant clearing of Africans from the land was accomplished the year after the foundation of the ANC by the 1913 Land Act. This restricted African occupied land to 7% of the total land, outlawed squatting on white owned land and sharecropping. Africans were forced to become labourers on the white owned farms or workers in industry or the mines. Provision of labour for the mines, however, had been a problem for South African capitalists from the start. In the period after the Boer War the British imported Chinese workers as unskilled labour to work the mines as insufficient African workers could be found. The separation of Africans from their lands was of course the key to the solution of this problem. It allowed the migrant labour system, which was eventually enshrined in Apartheid dogma, to become the norm for the mining industry. The mining houses organised a joint recruitment agency, the Native Recruiting Corporation, which operated from 1912 onwards and recruited from the South African areas reserved for Africans, which were to be reduced to a mere 7% of the country the following year, and from the British protectorates and Mozambique.

The overt racism which accompanied this process obscured the reality of what was really happening, and was of enormous benefit to South African capital since it produced a separation of white and black workers. Enormous pay differentials between blacks and whites existed and strikes on the mines were racially divided and so could be more easily defeated. This was the case for the most significant strikes, the white miners’ strike of 1922

and the black miners’ strike of 1946. The insurrectionary strike of white miners in 1922, actually inscribed on its banner the contradictory slogan “workers of the world unite for a white South Africa.”

This is the historical context in which the ANC emerged, and it was also within this context that African workers imagined that the ANC could represent their interest since both African workers and African bourgeoisie were discriminated against and excluded from political rights. This was, however, a serious mistake as 18 years of ANC power have shown. From its foundation the ANC has represented a westernised elite wanting to have their share of the spoils of capitalism, and has not attempted to disguise this. Mandela speaking about the Freedom Charter’s demand for the nationalisation of the mines and industrial corporations said the following:

“The charter strikes a fatal blow at the financial and gold mining monopolies that have for centuries plundered the country and condemned its people to servitude. The breaking up and democratisation of these monopolies will open up fresh fields for the development of a prosperous non-European bourgeois class. For the first time in the history of this country the non-European bourgeoisie will have the opportunity to own, in their own name and right, mills and factories and trade and private enterprise will boom and flourish as never before.”⁹

Mandela again returned to this issue in his famous speech at his trial in 1964 where he said:

“The most important political document ever adopted by the ANC is the Freedom Charter. It is by no means a blueprint for a socialist state. The ANC has never at any period of its history advocated a revolutionary change in the economic structure of the country, nor has it, to the best of my recollection, ever condemned capitalist society.”¹⁰

It is therefore incorrect to describe the ANC government since 1994 as having “betrayed” the working class as its opponents now do. It has implemented a bourgeois programme and is doing its best to foster an African bourgeois class in broadly the terms described by Mandela above.

Rise to Power

By the mid 1970’s it was clear to the main factions of the South African capitalist class that the migrant labour system in particular and Apartheid in general were leading the country to catastrophe. The increased capital intensity of South African capitalism meant that a skilled stable working class was required. Their strategy was to create an African middle class which they could use as an ally against the working class via the Urban Foundation, and African trade unions which could be used to control the class struggle. Of course, this meant providing political rights to Africans as well as other rights granted to workers in the metropolitan countries. There was only one political force which could implement such a programme and that was the ANC.

As we have shown above the ANC was on the bourgeois side of the class barricades and this made its co-option as a tool of Western and South African capital possible. Before the ANC was unbanned the key sectors of South African capital, particularly the mining corporations, had received assurances that the statist elements of the ANC’s programme, particularly the nationalisation of the mines would not be implemented. These were demands from the 50s which were considered suicidal in the period of globalisation. The slow deterioration of the social situation in the 80’s finally convinced even the Afrikaner nationalists that bringing the ANC into power was the only route by which South African capital could be rescued from the cul-de-sac in which it was trapped.

Since coming to power the ANC has not fundamentally changed the structure of South African capitalism. Having the ANC in power has benefitted South African capital in many ways, particularly in giving it access to the rest of Africa and making the opening up of trade with China, India and Brazil easier. The programme of Black Economic Empowerment which was, in fact, initiated by the South African corporations, not the ANC, has resulted in a few extremely wealthy black men who have no desire to change the present structure of things, and still remain in the top organs of the ANC. Politicians such as Cyril Ramaphosa, one time secretary of the National Mine Workers Union, and Tokyo Sexwale, ex-Robben Island prisoner, have become two of South Africa’s richest men through BEE.

South Africa

Both still retain their seats on the ANC's national executive committee.¹¹

All the above simply describes how the ANC has become the executive arm of South African capital. It is small wonder that the interests of the working class are ignored. The question which must be asked, however, is this "was the working class correct to ally itself with the ANC." Our answer is emphatically "NO."

Workers and the National Struggle

Today it is a Marxist axiom that the working class should not subordinate its political forces to those of the bourgeoisie, which, of course, includes the bourgeois nationalist forces. As far as South Africa is concerned we have written many texts pointing out the danger of subordinating the class struggle to the demands of the national struggle. The events since 1994 have certainly born out our predictions. Many of these texts, written largely during the 80's retain their immediacy and a certain prophetic quality and we intend to republish them in pamphlet form within the next few months. An example of this is a text published in April 1990 in our paper *Workers Voice*. We wrote:

Many black workers look to Mandela as the man who will free them from exploitation and hardship. They are greatly deceived.In fact the ANC's objectives have nothing to do with the working class's interests, they are to use the power of the state to foster a black capitalist class. ...South African workers have no interest in placing themselves in the infantry of the African nationalists.¹²

Instead we advocated that workers should pursue their own interests independently of the bourgeois nationalists. This would have allowed the class issues involved to be clearly seen. Instead these issues have been obscured by a smokescreen of liberalism and moral outrage at racism. The result is a great confusion with talk of betrayal and projects to change the leadership of the ANC which can only be a great waste of time.

Much of the argument for supporting the national struggle, made by the Stalinists and Trotskyists, started from the view that Apartheid was essential to South African capitalism and hence

ending it would bring South African capitalism crashing down. This would weaken western capitalism and produce a crisis in the developed capitalist countries etc. This has been shown to be complete nonsense. If anything South African capitalism is stronger as a result of the abolition of Apartheid, western imperialism has been strengthened and the class issues more confused than before.

Behind these arguments lies the theoretical debate between Lenin and other communists including Bukharin, Piatakov and Rosa Luxemburg on support for the national struggle. This argument was fought out in the period before and during the First World War. Those who argued like Luxemburg, that in the epoch of imperialism the national question is now a thing of the past, have been vindicated by the 100 years of history which have elapsed since these exchanges. However, in the Third International the *Theses on the National and Colonial Question* were a confused compromise between the views of Lenin, who saw cooperation with the local bourgeoisie as desirable and those (like M N Roy) who argued for an outright independent communist struggle in the colonies. This confusion was to have dire consequences for the revolutionary movement. The most tragic illustration of this confusion came in China 1926-27 when Stalin, following the original *Theses* but forgetting that they had called for an independent working class movement, instructed the Chinese Communist Party to place itself at the disposal of the bourgeois Koumintang of Chiang Kai Shek. This resulted in the brutal massacre of Chinese workers in Shanghai and Canton¹³.

Lenin's positions were developed in the period before World War 1 when he considered the bourgeois democratic revolution was on the historical agenda for Russia. He changed his position on the nature of the future Russian revolution in April 1917 but never followed through the consequences of this. If the communist revolution is on the historical agenda, and this revolution needs to be international, as the Bolsheviks openly admitted, bourgeois nationalist revolutions can only obstruct and weaken the struggle for communism.

Lenin's support for movements for national self determination in Europe undermined the programme for working

class emancipation. This became more confused in the debates in the Third International with Lenin arguing that national movements in the colonies should be supported as they weakened the imperialism of the colonising nations. In this he was following his earlier work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* where he had argued that;

Colonial possession alone gives the monopolies complete guarantee against all contingencies in the struggle with competitors.¹⁴

He argued that the colonies were a key source of the "super profits" with which the imperialist powers bribed their workers to maintain social peace.

Out of such enormous super profits (since they are obtained over and above the profits which capitalists squeeze out of the workers of their own country) it is possible to bribe the labour leaders in the advanced countries in a thousand different ways.¹⁵

Cutting off this source of super profits, he argued, would precipitate a crisis and make revolution in the capitalist heartlands easier. In the event, decolonisation did not produce the crisis in the capitalist heartlands which Lenin had so confidently predicted. This is because the capitalist system is a global system, extracting and distributing surplus value globally, and the replacement of colonial bourgeois regimes by local bourgeois regimes does not alter the system as a whole in any essential way.

Lenin also maintained that national bourgeois revolutions in the colonies could occur at the same time as communist revolution in the capitalist heartlands and in some way support this revolution.

The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a whole series of democratic revolutionary movements, including national liberation movements, in the undeveloped, backward oppressed nations.¹⁶

On the contrary the communist revolution must be a world revolution

and the bourgeois nationalist revolution could never support the world revolution. The world revolution would have to overthrow bourgeois nationalist revolutions if they occurred at the same time.

The mistakes of Lenin and the Third International have bequeathed a poisonous legacy which has been taken up by the left wing of the bourgeoisie, namely the counter revolution, with a vengeance. In the case of South Africa the arguments of a white workers' aristocracy of labour, the theory of super profits going to the workers in the capitalist heartlands and the idea that the bourgeois nationalist revolution in the underdeveloped countries supporting workers' struggle in the metropolitan countries have all been trotted out in order to justify subsuming workers' struggles under the nationalist struggle.

Today the increasing globalisation of capital has made the national state national only in the sense that it is dominated by the bourgeoisie of a certain nationality. In its key aspects it exists as an agent of international capital and the imperialist alliances in which it finds itself. This can be seen in the fact that the coming to power of the ANC was facilitated by US and European capital via financial sanctions and pressure. After the removal of the threat of Russian advances in South Africa in 1989 this pressure became irresistible.

The ANC and African Nationalism in general stand completely discredited after 18 years of power. What is needed now is a clean break from the forces of nationalism and their allies COSATU and the SACP. These forces must be recognised as part of the bourgeois front opposing the emancipation of the working class. Future struggles should be outside and against these organisations. They need to be united across racial divisions and pursue class demands. Ultimately they need to be united with workers struggles worldwide and directed to the overthrow of capitalist social relations and the establishment of a communist¹⁷ world.

CP

Notes

1 See *Financial Times* 5/9/2011 and 28/10/11

2 *Financial Times* 12/11/11

3 See <http://camerondudu.com/uncategorized/south-africas-tunisia-moment-will-occur-in-2020-says-moeletsi-mbeki>

[moment-will-occur-in-2020-says-moeletsi-mbeki](http://counterfire.org/index.php/articles/international/15408-anc-centenary-a-display-of-elite-power)

4 See Ayanda Kota quoted in *Counterfire* <http://counterfire.org/index.php/articles/international/15408-anc-centenary-a-display-of-elite-power>

5 See for example M. Mbeki "South Africa. Only a matter of time before the bomb explodes" Mbeki is media consultant to the ANC. see <http://camerondudu.com/uncategorized/south-africas-tunisia-moment-will-occur-in-2020-says-moeletsi-mbeki>

6 Under the Bantu tribal system land was occupied by the tribe. Individual ownership of land did not exist before it was instituted by the colonial authorities.

7 K Marx *Capital* Volume 1 Chapter 23

8 Quoted in *The Political Economy of Race and Class in South Africa*, B M Magubane, Monthly Review Press.

9 Mandela authorised biography, Anthony Sampson 1999

10 *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela p. 435

11 See M Mbeki *Architects of Poverty* p. 158.

12 See *Workers Voice* No 51

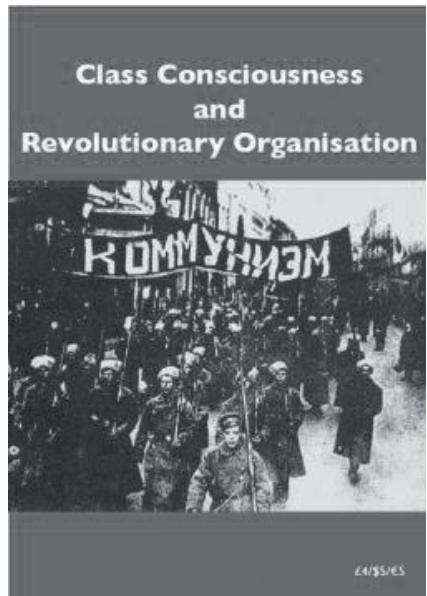
13 For a description of these events see H. Isaacs *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*.

14 *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Peking Foreign Language Press p. 98

15 Ibid, Preface to the French and German editions.

16 Lenin *Collected Works* Volume 23 p. 60.

17 By communism we mean a system of global production for human needs controlled by workers through workers councils. This has nothing whatsoever to do with the state capitalist systems, incorrectly called communism, which existed in Russia and China.



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- Class consciousness and working class political organisations
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Murder and Manoeuvre in the Middle East



Syrian Massacres

Last year as the death toll in Syria began to surpass that of all the “Arab Spring” deaths put together we wrote an article for our website (see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-06-13/syria-so-many-deaths-so-many-illusions-to-be-shattered>) which analysed the origins of that crisis and the social roots of the Assad regime. We recorded that the kind of massacre by the state that was going on was nothing new. We wrote:

In February 1982 the Muslim Brotherhood organised a rising of 5,000 armed men against the current Assad’s father, Hafez, in the town of Hama. The result was that the Army surrounded the town, cut off the water, electricity and telecommunication lines and began to bombard it. Not a single person could escape and it is reported that even supporters of the regime were killed by the Army. As many as 20,000 people may have died in that massacre. The message was clear and understood. Any resistance would be dealt with without mercy. Since then, until this March there have only been intellectual voices raised in protest at the corruption of the regime and the stagnation of the economy. The current risings in different places broke out when the regime arrested a dozen children for putting up anti-regime graffiti in Daraa.

Since then the death toll during the present bloodbath has risen to more than 5,500 (on a conservative estimate) as we go to press. The regime’s strategy in Homs is a repeat of the one used against Hama in 1982. That is, obliteration of anything and everything that moves in the areas where the “Free Syrian Army” is thought to have any toehold. The same is being applied in scores of Syrian cities from the suburbs of Damascus to Aleppo.

Imperialist Games

There has been much handwringing by the “international community” but little so far has been done to put an end to the misery of millions. The reasons are fairly clear to anyone who has a Marxist understanding that the so-called “international community” is just the diplomatic face of imperialist rivalry. Western papers blame the continued violence entirely on the Shanghai Cooperation Council trio of Russia, China and Iran. In the first week of February China and Russia vetoed a

so-called peace plan in the UN Security Council which had been proposed by the Sunni Islamic monarchies of the Gulf Cooperation Council via the Arab League. This called for Assad to step down as a precursor to talks with the Syrian Opposition. As a result the resolution failed and the shelling of Homs has increased apace with horrific results.

Russia’s position is that it now regrets having abstained on the motion to create a no-fly zone in Libya so that NATO airstrikes could tip the balance against their former ally, Ghaddafi.¹ They are not prepared to see the same thing used against their much closer and more critically important ally, Assad. Russia has a military base in Syria and supplies the regime with weapons. If Assad were to fall Russia would lose the last ally it has in the Arab world and would leave it with only the fair-weather ally of Iran as consolation in the Middle East.

And the West, as usual, plays an even more hypocritical role. When it suits them the Western powers can ignore the niceties of international legal constraints (as in the invasion of Iraq in 2003 which took place without a clear UN mandate²) but Syria is not Libya. It does not have sweet crude oil in abundance so there is no immediate opportunity to be exploited. And the Assad regime is also, to a certain degree, useful to the West and Israel. Sure, it backs Hezbollah in Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza but it is also a stable regime which has brutally suppressed the dreaded Islamic fundamentalism. It is less of a threat as it has been on the retreat in imperialist terms for a decade (pulling out of Lebanon and forced to seek a better relationship with the West). As Iraq and Libya (already) show signs of instability as a result of the outcome of Western actions the idea of maintaining the Assad regime in power is not such a bad one. It is even better if you can portray your imperialist rivals as the real cause of the massacres whilst all you do is wring hands and shed crocodile tears for the victims of the brutality of the Ba’athists.

Sanctions as a Weapon

Of course the West will say that by withdrawing their embassies and steadily increasing sanctions they are doing all they can to put pressure on Damascus but sanctions take a long time to work. Those being massacred in their hundreds today can hardly wait for them to take effect. There is no “humanitarian” case being

made today for going against the norms of international diplomacy. There is not even a big propaganda campaign on the need for democracy in Syria. After all, as Egypt shows, democracy in the Arab world can have the nasty consequence of favouring Islamic fundamentalists over secularists. It is also a bit difficult to play the democracy card when your main agents in the Arab League are the Sunni absolute monarchies of Saudi Arabia and Qatar. The Saudi invasion of Bahrain last year³ demonstrated just how committed to democracy they were and they remain the bedrock of US imperialist strategy in the Middle East.

What the Syrian horror story reveals is a new clarity of the fracture lines on the international imperialist stage. It clearly poses Iran, Russia and China against the West and their Arab allies. At the same time it brings the Middle East back to the centre of imperialist tension. Syria is not the only game on this playing field. The Iranian drive to acquire nuclear power has brought international tensions to an even higher pitch. Israeli intelligence is upping the ante by claiming that Iran is moving its nuclear research facilities deep underground so that it would be immune from an air strike such as that inflicted by Israel on Iraq's nuclear facility in 1980, or Syria's in September 2007. Their argument is that the West should not wait for the Iranian nuclear programme to become capable of producing a nuclear device (which the CIA thinks is a long way off) but should deal with it sooner rather than later.⁴ And to stoke up tension still further Israeli agents are assassinating leading Iranian scientists known to be working on the nuclear programme. This is useful to the hardliners in the Khamenei part of the ruling apparatus in Tehran who use it to stir up nationalist agitation in defence of the nuclear programme.

Iran has been a lot more circumspect than its enemies and, to their chagrin, has actually not suffered greatly from the aggressive action of the US in the Middle East. Iraq now has a Shia government whilst Turkey has broken with Israel over the Gaza issue. Iran's economy is, however, in poor shape⁵ but the regime has been able to blame the problems of inflation, unpaid wages and shortages on the sanctions regime. At the same time it is quite prepared to take on its opponents at the sanctions game. When the EU announced it was going to institute sanctions against Iranian oil production the Iranians announced immediately

that they would cut off oil to the EU. In fact Iran increasingly depends on China and Russia for its oil market whilst the EU is increasingly asking for more Saudi oil. But this growing economic apartheid is yet one more sign of the increasingly clear political split between the Russian, Chinese and Iranian grouping against the West, Israel and their monarchist allies in the Middle East. Although we cannot put a time frame on it the increasing stability of these line-ups will mean increasing instability in future issues of conflict in the Middle East.

Quo Vadis Syria?

In the immediate term it looks as if the agony of the Syrian population will go on. The Russians and the Iranians have both been to Damascus to try to help Assad find a way out of the impasse. What they said we do not know. We do know that the Iranians (or at least the Khamenei faction) have also sent leading generals from their elite Revolutionary Guards Quds force to advise on how to deal with "unrest" (following their "success" against the Green Movement in Iran in 2009). This bodes ill for Syrians and not just those actively involved in the opposition as the people of Homs can testify.

But the Assad regime is also burning its own boats. Most Syrians were prepared to tolerate even the repressive regime of the Ba'athists as long as it guaranteed a kind of stability and did not interfere in the economic activity of the locals. Both these have been blown away in the last eleven months. From a GDP growth of 6% in 2009 GDP has fallen to an estimated -6 or less this year whilst inflation is rising dramatically from 2% in 2009 to nearly double digit figures this year.⁶ Sanctions are only likely to make this worse unless Russia becomes incredibly generous in its support. On past performance this is hardly likely.

Paradoxically the shelling of the population in towns across Syria is actually also undermining one of the regime's previous assets – the fear factor. If you are already being murdered when you go to the shops there is nothing worse the regime can do to you. The incentive to fight back is all the greater. Here the balance of forces is, of course, quite badly tilted against the Army deserters who are known as the Free Syrian Army. With few weapons getting in (supposedly from Qatar) and only a few weapons taken from the regular Army this is certainly

an "asymmetric conflict". As long as the regime can rely on the crack regiments largely staffed by Alawites the prospect of major defection is not likely. At the same time the opposition is divided between different squabbling factions like the Syrian National Council and the Syrian National Coordination Committee. Its leaders are abroad (in Turkey) with one ex-army officer Colonel Riad al-Asaad coordinating the Free Syrian Army there calling later defecting (but more senior) officers traitors. According to the Syrian National Council no foreign power is financing their project to get arms into Syria (possibly true given the West's ambiguity about the situation but they would say that anyway) and they claim that all their funding comes from Syrian exiles.

Absent from all this is any kind of class movement. Factories are closing and opening all the time, but not because workers are striking. This is apparently due to the factory owners responding to successive threats against them by both the Free Syrian Army and the regime. Workers are generally not involved via strikes and unsurprisingly we have yet to hear of any autonomous workers' movement arising. Information is scarce (so scarce that the BBC are begging bloggers to send them news) but it seems that nationalism, democratism and Sunni jihadism seem to be the dominant ideologies in the opposition. All the signs are currently that this particular capitalist disaster is set to run for some time ...

AD

Notes

- 1 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-09-10/the-truth-behind-nato%E2%80%99s-victory-in-libya>
- 2 And the fact that Bush and Blair distorted a UN Resolution to justify the invasion of Iraq has not been forgotten by the Russian Government. This is why today they will not support any resolution on Syria.
- 3 For our analysis see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-11-01/imperialist-manoeuvres-in-the-wake-of-the-arab-spring>
- 4 See David Gardner "West must move to exploit the tide turning against Iran" *Financial Times* 7.2.2012
- 5 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-04-17/austerity-in-iran-the-working-class-face-the-biggest-attacks-yet>
- 6 See "Syria's political crisis shatters dreams of business growth" in the *Financial Times* 7.2.2012

Onorato Damen:

Bordiga – Beyond the Myth



Validity and limits of a revolutionary experience

The following presentation was written to introduce the French edition of Onorato Damen's book which was published last year. The basic outlines of this presentation were also given in meetings to launch the book in Paris and Brussels (3-4 February 2012). We are currently translating this into English in serial form. The next part, the Five Letters between Damen and Bordiga written in 1951 will be published on our website in the life of this Revolutionary Perspectives. This translation was originally prepared in collaboration with the Controverses website (www.leftcommunism.org) in advance of the meetings.

PRESENTATION (MICHEL OLIVIER, APRIL 2011)

It is a happy circumstance that, 39 years after its first Italian edition in 1971, this book at last finds itself in the hands of French readers.

It sheds light on the disagreements of 1952 that existed between the two principal protagonists within the Italian Communist Left: Bordiga and Damen. It will allow the reader to distinguish the thought of Bordiga on the one hand from that of the Italian communist Left as a whole on the other.

Damen is very little known, if not unknown, in France. Nevertheless he is one of the "giants" of the workers' movement of the XXth century on the same level as Bordiga, Pannekoeck, Korsch and others. Like Bordiga he was one of the founders of the Italian Communist Party at Livorno in 1921. He was one of the most fervent partisans and even the initiator of the Entente Committee (Committee of Intesa) that the Communist Left set up in order to oppose the bolshevisation of the Communist Party. Last but not least he was in at the origin of the Internationalist Communist Party in 1943. The French have valid reasons to know him nevertheless. He was director of the weekly "*l'Humanité*" in the Italian language in 1924 and a member of the political bureau of the French CP charged in particular with the organisation of the Italian comrades who had emigrated to France.

This document allows us to state that Bordiga and the Italian Left are not completely the same thing, contrary to the amalgam that has often been made, first within the Communist International on its way towards bolshevisation, later within the International Left Opposition before 1930, even later as this Opposition became entirely Trotskyist and, finally, in recent years among numerous revolutionaries.

Certainly, as Damen himself explains, the Italian Left is much obliged to Bordiga:

The object of this study is to finally render to Caesar that which is Caesar's and we will do it not by some general claim to objectivity which is always in

fact partial and subjective even when it is done in good faith but through the known and documented experience of those years. If therefore Bordigism as a particular and "original" attitude of thought and tactic had more importance amongst the parties of the International than at home this is due to a polemical interest and a "tendency" of the leading organs of the Comintern which found it convenient to systematically confuse the movement of the Italian Left with the personal positions and thoughts of Bordiga.

It is necessary to recognise this in spite of the fact that four fifths of all the theoretical work of this current was down to Bordiga and that until at least 1923 his contribution to the politics and organisation of this current was also about four fifths.

That being said let's see when and how Bordiga's thoughts really only express his personal positions and when on the other hand they have become part of the theoretical and tactical inheritance of the Italian Left...

[from Crisis of Bordigism? Perhaps, In any case it's not a crisis of the Italian Left in Prometeo 4/5 1953]

But the Italian Left is bigger than "Bordigism". Let us remember the differences that already existed in 1927 between the communist Vanguard Groups around *Réveil Communiste* with Pappalardi and the Italian Fraction of the CP of Italy who published *Bilan* and *Prometeo*. They had important differences in their respective political orientations. This continued during the whole emigration period, first and foremost during the war in Spain in 1936 and 1937 which saw the emergence of a minority within the Italian Fraction. Subsequently divergencies broke out during the Second World War between the Italian Fraction, who regrouped in Marseille, and the group that had stayed in Belgium around Perrone (Vercesi)¹. Finally there existed differences between certain former historical members of the Italian Left who found themselves on new, overtly heterodox, political positions at the end of

the Second World War in 1944, as was the case with comrade Fortichiari. The latter was stuck with an idealisation of "Livorno '21", as he often liked to remember. This meant to him: a bigger communist party pursuing the same politics as those which came out of the crisis of social democracy. But history was no longer the same!

Damen continues by defining the fundamental reasons for the disagreements:

Here and there the Italian left was forced to disagree with Bordiga, on each occasion the origin of discord was the product of a different interpretation of Marxism.

[Ibidem]

In consequence, he analyses the reasons for Bordiga's withdrawal from political action whereas the Italian Left continued its struggle as a political body.

It is a fact that from 1926 on the Left had practically ceased to exist in the Stalinist International and all the subsequent evidence of the thinking, the press and organisation of this current took place without the physical participation of Bordiga on lines which diverged in a good part from his thinking and especially from his general "attitude" which wasn't a casual but considered attitude and which continued until the fall of Fascism.

Let's therefore analyse the roots of this isolation, its link with his way of dealing with problems in Marxism of an ideological and political type. Bordiga never stopped thinking that Russia was an economic reality in which socialist characteristics predominated: for him only the policies of Stalin and the International had degenerated.

From that moment on the positions diverged. Whereas the Left continued to act on the traditional line inspired by a dialectical vision of history in general, and the proletarian struggle in particular, through which the party and the activities of revolutionaries were reduced to nullity due to changing objective conditions, Bordiga remained, in his determinist way of thinking went along with the situation.

After 1926 Bordiga withdrew entirely from political life until after the Second World War and beyond. For Damen the analysis of the nature of the USSR² was a fundamental question. It constitutes the subject of five letters that Damen and Bordiga exchanged between them.

Bordiga held scrupulously to this position (see the quotation above) and he never bothered about what



Onorato Damen in Paris, 1924

his comrades who had organised themselves as the fraction abroad were doing, in the same way that he was not interested in the first clandestine nuclei who were destined to renew the links which led to the formation of the party. And what was worse still was that colossal events like the proletarian insurrection in Spain, the collapse of the International and the Second World War all waited in vain for some comment, some critique and some collaboration on his part just to show the strength of continuity of Marxist theory and above all to really prepare the material of the ideas and experiences which were indispensable for the future revival of the party.

Effectively, the Italian Fraction of the Communist Left abroad continued to express itself and to defend its political analyses, whereas Bordiga had remained silent. As Souvarine visited Italy in the 1930s, he would meet Bordiga at Naples. The latter would reply to him that "there is nothing to do in this period" (according to relatives of Souvarine)³.

From then on, the political positions of Bordiga would continue to diverge from those of his former comrades of the Italian Fraction of the CP in the first place, and later from those of the Internationalist Communist Party until the split of 1952.

From our point of view real Bordigism was born after 1952. After this period new concepts like "the invariance of Marxism" appear in his thinking. But this invention is the clearest counter-example that demonstrates that "invariance" doesn't exist in Marxist theory and, above all, not even in the thinking of Bordiga himself. This shows that the "invariance" defended by him is in reality an idealisation that is neither expressed in the evolution of the thought of its progenitor, nor in political theory and practice.

How many times have I heard a confusion of the political positions of the Internationalist Communist Party of Damen with those of Bordiga after 1952? That is why this book is very opportune in re-establishing the political and theoretical differences between Damen and Bordiga,

notably on "the invariance of Marxism", on the trades-union question, on national liberation struggles, and above all on the party (the party-class relationship), etc...

The position defended by Damen on the question of the party, which is at the very heart of the political thought of the Italian Left, is totally different from that defended by Bordiga, it represents the continuity of the political tradition of the Italian Left of the 1920s. The reader may refer himself to the very enlightening text by Damen, ***The Overturning of Praxis*** in which he treats the party-class relationship.

The birth of the party does not depend, and on this we agree, "on the genius or value of a leader or a vanguard" but it is the historic existence of the proletariat as a class which poses, not merely episodically in time and space, the need for the existence of its Party. The proletariat would return to the ranks of mere plebeians if it lost its class character as the antagonist of capitalism; and its possibilities as an exploited class which struggles for its own defence and liberation would be thwarted and rendered null and void if the motivation and physical forces for a revolutionary leadership were not produced from within it through its struggles.

Likewise, Damen wrote in ***"Points of Disagreement on the "Platform" of 1952 elaborated by Bordiga"*** on the question: who exerts the proletarian dictatorship?

When Bordiga wrote:

"The proletarian dictatorship is exercised by the party."

Damen replied:

The statement is theoretically and politically correct and, despite the terrible recent Russian experience, is still valid though on condition that the party and its leadership bodies which exercise this dictatorship in fact act as a class party in unison with the interests, the struggles and the historic objectives of the entire proletariat right up to the disappearance of classes and the state. Historically the dictatorship is that of the proletariat and not that of the party in the sense that the proletariat as the class in power flows into and concentrates in "its" party and crystallises in it the causes, the forces and the will through which the dictatorship of the proletariat is sustained. Beyond these limits you get Stalinism, that is, state (party-state) dictatorship which has supplanted the proletariat and, on the day in which it succeeded in making the

wheel of revolution turn in the opposite direction, brought oppression back.

We end this presentation here in order to push our readers to read and find out for themselves the differences that existed between two of the principal leading figures in the history of the Italian Left.

Michel Olivier, April 2011

English translation January 2012

Notes

1 Michel Roger *Histoire de la gauche italienne 1926-45*. Doctoral thesis, Paris 1982-3. Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales under the direction of Madeleine Rébérioux. Philippe Bourrinet: *La gauche communiste italienne*, Paris, 1993

2 Basically the Italian Left considered Russia as having a state capitalist nature. Bordiga saw it as "state industrialism", that is, he emphasised only the forced industrialisation of Russia which before the revolution had little industry. From this fact he saw the regime as having a progressive character carrying out the role of the progressive bourgeoisie in Western Europe in the nineteenth century. He also spoke of an anti-feudal revolution when characterising October.

3 Police information dated 15 October 1936 which said "*Boris Souvarine, brother of Maurin's wife, returned to Italy one day ago. He tried to see Bordiga but I don't know the result of their discussions, the ideas and the intentions of the latter. I am trying to find out.*" And Jean-Louis Panné p. 228 of Souvarine's biography (Robert Laffont, Paris 1993) writes "*During the summer Souvarine decided to go to Italy to carry out some research into Savanarola on the request of Anatole de Monzie. [...] He left on September 10, 1936 [...] Souvarine returned in early October*" Is it when this trip was made that the meeting took place? See also Arturo Peregalli and Sandro Saggiaro *Amadeo Bordiga – La sconfitta e gli anni oscuri (1926-45)* Edizioni Colibri, Milan 1998.

Communist Intervention in the Workplace

Durham Open Meeting

11 January 2012

The CWO's regular monthly meeting in Durham was on "how do communists intervene in the workplace today?" The following report is a brief account of the discussion.

The meeting was introduced by a comrade from York who began by stating that there was

a two-fold contradiction between the working class and the bourgeoisie: the immediate contradiction was between the latter's interest in extorting as much surplus value out of us as possible, and the historic contradiction between their benefit from the last form of class society and our interest in creating a classless one.

Under normal circumstances, most workers are aware of the first, economic, aspect, even if only subconsciously in some cases, and, when the contradiction is sharpened, this awareness tends to become generalised. The awareness of the second aspect of the contradiction is not an immediate product of material conditions, but of a reflection upon, and analysis of, those conditions. Only the most advanced part of the class can make this analysis under conditions of capitalist normality, and they need to return the results of this analysis to the rest of the class before it can act upon them.

The History of Trades Unionism

As soon as the working class starts to become properly formed and thus aware of its economic concerns, it also feels the need to organise to protect those concerns. Initially, the bourgeoisie resists this organisation, and a bitter class struggle was necessary to establish the first trades unions (Tolpuddle Martyrs, the Chapelier Law passed by the bourgeois revolutionary National Assembly in France, etc). In the second quarter of the 19th century, at least in Britain and France, the bourgeoisie conceded a restricted right of workers to organise in unions.

These unions, in contrast to today's, were relatively unbureaucratic and the members' dues went mostly to strike funds. Nevertheless, even these unions were not in the least revolutionary, and existed to fulfil a role within capitalism, the mediation of the sale of labour power. Throughout the rest of the 19th century, the implications of this role and the development of monopoly capitalism

worked themselves out in reality, resulting in the unions more and more accepting the bourgeois view that the interests of the bourgeoisie were the interests of the nation, and the interests of the nation were those of everyone in it. In short, the union changed from being a usable tool in the economic fight of the working class to being an implement for the bourgeois management of capitalism. This culminated in the support of the unions everywhere for the imperialist slaughter in 1914.

Today, the unions actively act to prevent the generalisation of struggle, to sap workers' initiatives of life by bringing them within union control, etc., etc. And this role is not just restricted to the upper echelons of the unions — the shop stewards are sucked into it, even against their will.

Death to Rank and Filism, an article written by a militant active in Royal Mail is particularly good at describing how this happens:

Shop stewards are negotiators, and in spite of their best instincts have to play a similar role, albeit on a much lower key, as top union officials. The philosophy of unionism is one that accepts capitalism; accepts the justice of there being workers and bosses and even at its most extreme only argues for a left-wing implementation of capitalism. A shop steward has to actively work within this philosophy. If not at the instruction of the union and the bosses then at the behest of the members.

"A steward who goes wild in the manager's office, threatening to slit their throats every time they act 'unfairly' is no use to the people s/he is representing on the shop floor. Management will only listen to a steward if they think s/he can rely on the back-up of the workforce. A shopfloor will only want a steward who they think can defend them in everyday injustices.

Death to Rank and Filism! (<http://www.revleft.com/vb/group.php?do=discuss&discussionid=5869>, under articles from MD — originally published in Anti-Exchange and Mart, 1990)

We can't agree with *all* of this article, as it rejects the idea that the class nature of unions has changed with the development of capitalism, but it sees the basic problem of trades unions.

The History of Intervention

The most advanced part of the working class, the one that sees the possibility and need for a classless society, together with those individuals from other classes that join with it, has also organised, at times within a formal party, at times within smaller, less formal organisations, depending on the material and political circumstances in which it finds itself.

And it has always been faced with the need to “intervene” in the rest of the class, whether this has been with the realistic prospect of changing the direction of events in a sense favourable to the overthrow of capitalism, or favourable for the achievement of economic victories, or merely to attract enough militants to make that prospect realistic in the future.

Initially, Communists intervened in the unions, attempting to win the leadership in order to influence the mass of members. But, with the change in the class nature of the unions, this tactic has become out-moded (and, in truth, genuine Communists never really succeeded in carrying out this tactic), because there is an incompatibility between exposing the class nature of the unions and taking over their organisation.

Fortunately, the class struggle is a living thing, and if the unions stand in the way, the struggle will continue nonetheless, with workers breaking with them in practice and organising themselves to carry out their struggles more effectively. But therein lies the problem — breaking with the unions in practice, but not in theory, renders the new organisations thrown up by the class vulnerable to recuperation within the union framework, either by being absorbed by the existing unions, or by taking on a union role. Or, as the article mentioned above has it:

A permanent economic workplace group must always be reformist because it has to operate under the rules laid down by Capital. The rules may change slightly, we may force them to accept secondary picketing, for example, or they may make such action unlawful, but capitalism remains.

*What we want throughout workplaces are groups of people who do not accept capitalism and will not negotiate with it. **This means not trying to form a union!** These groups will try to show the true nature of capitalism and the choices that face the working class. While portraying a life without wage-slavery and alienation they will help show how we*

can take control of our struggles now. [Death to Rank and Filism!]

Factory groups

In fact, the solution pointed at by “Death to Rank and Filism” has been anticipated by Battaglia Comunista, and adopted by the whole Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT).

We posed the question of the penetration of communist ideas into the working class, and also how the working class can resist. The CWO’s Factory Group Platform of 1981 asks the latter question thus:

But workers can’t just accept the bosses’ attacks. They must struggle and they must organise, so how do they do this?

Platform of Factory Groups of the Communist Workers’ Organisation, 1981

Our answer to this question was the self-organisation of the class. However, in order to facilitate this self-organisation, we intended to create Factory Groups which would carry the lessons of past struggles into future ones, and, in particular, oppose the unions, as well as propagandise for Communism. This dual aim was expressed thus:

The Factory Groups have two aims. First, they help to lead the class struggle. However, they are not trying to become trade unions or any other kind of mass organisation so they avoid the traps laid for these. Second, the Factory Groups help to develop political understanding amongst the workers and to win them to communist politics and the communist party.

Platform of Factory Groups of the Communist Workers’ Organisation, 1981

The Platform goes on to outline the tactics to be used in the pursuit of these aims: arguing for mass meetings, extension of struggle, rejection of union control, ignoring bourgeois law where the balance of forces permits it, etc., and the holding of meetings for political education etc. In order to exclude those who do not in reality accept the need for communism, we drew up the following basis for membership:

- a) All countries in the world are capitalist.*
- b) Capitalism is a crisis-ridden system whose only alternatives are World War or working class revolution and the building of communism.*
- c) The struggle for communism requires the worldwide destruction*

of the capitalist state and a regime of workers’ councils.

d) For this an international communist party (of which the CWO is a fore-runner) is necessary.

e) The unions, Labour and Communist Parties are defenders of the capitalist system, and cannot be used by the working class.

f) Workers have no common interests with their exploiters and oppose all attempts to stimulate these by nationalism. Their only common interests are with the workers of the rest of the world.

Platform of Factory Groups of the Communist Workers’ Organisation, 1981

Territorial groups

However, things have changed since 1981. Firstly, the Eastern Bloc has collapsed, which means that some of the above points need to be rephrased — for example, b) excludes the possibility of a long-drawn out crisis without a world war, which doesn’t seem to make it suitable as a membership criterion. Secondly, the disaggregation of the working class, as analysed by, primarily, our Italian colleagues, renders the factory as a basis for organisation questionable. At the very least, the word “workplace” needs to replace “factory” in the title, and not just in our propaganda. The idea of territorial groups needs to supplement, if not supplant, the concept of factory groups. These gather together all the workers in an area who share the aims given above (or a new version of them). Not only do territorial groups answer the problem of the vanishing of most large concentrations of workers in single industries, they also contain from the start a generalisation across sectors of the class, as well as prefiguring the territorial character of soviets.

Conclusion

Although the CWO has not managed to create any factory groups, our Italian comrades have shown that this creation is possible and useful.

We appear to be on the threshold of a new period of class struggle as the bosses’ attacks on the class are more uninhibited than they have been in the past, driven on as they are by necessity. In this period, if the working class responds to the demands put upon it by the situation, the opportunity for factory groups, or a more modern analogue, will also grow. If this opportunity presents itself, we must take it, in order to render the fightback

This article is concluded on p.13

The Communist Workers' Organisation was founded in 1975 and joined with the Internationalist Communist Party (Italy) to form the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party in 1983. The Internationalist Communist Party was the only significant organisation to emerge in the Second World War (1943) condemning both sides as imperialist. It is the most significant organisation produced by the internationalist communist left which fought the degeneration of the Comintern in the 1920s as well as the process of "bolshevisation" (i.e. Stalinism) imposed on the individual communist parties. In 2009, in recognition of the new elements that had joined the founding groups, the IBRP became the **Internationalist Communist Tendency**.

We are for the revolutionary party but we are not that Party. Nor are we the only basis for that party which will emerge from the workers' struggles of the future. Our aim is to be part of that process by participating in all the struggles of the class that we can with the aim of linking the immediate struggle of the class with its long term historic programme — communism.

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The Communist Workers' Organisation which produces Revolutionary Perspectives (a quarterly magazine) and Aurora (an agitational paper)
BM CWO, London WC1N 3XX

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Il Partito Comunista Internazionale
which produces Battaglia Comunista (a monthly paper) and Prometeo (a quarterly theoretical journal)
CP 1753, 20101, Milano, Italy

Canada/USA

Groupe Internationaliste Ouvrier / Internationalist Workers' Group
which produces Notes Internationalistes/Internationalist Notes (quarterly)
R.S. C.P. 173, Succ.C, Montreal, Quebec, Canada H2L 4K1

Write to: us@leftcom.org

Germany

Gruppe Internationaler Sozialistinnen
which produces Sozialismus oder Barbarei (to appear quarterly)
GIS, c/o Rotes Antiquariat, Rungestrasse 20, 10179 Berlin, Germany

France

Bilan&Perspectives
produces a quarterly journal of the same name
ABC-LIV, 118-130 Av. J. Jaures, 75171 Paris Cedex 19

Meetings

CWO (North East) monthly meeting, DURHAM.

Anyone interested welcome to join the discussion.
Please note new date

Wednesday 7 March 7.00 pm

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26 No War But Class War; 11 months after 9/11; Stock Market Falls and War; Public Sector Strikes; Rail Farce; Consciousness (6); Immigration; Colombian Debt.

27 Iraq; Firefighters; Palestine; Consciousness (7); SWP and Stalinism; Earth Summit.

28 Iraq; Firefighters; North Korea; Consciousness (8) - Cult of the Party; Class Composition (1); Brazil.

29 Iraq; Galloway and Luxemburg; ME Road Map; 9/11: State Terror; Firefighters; Pensions; Consciousness (9) - Bordiga; Class Composition.

30 Iraq; US Imperialism and The Hutton Enquiry; Middle East: Workers Begin to Act; Class Struggle; Trades' Unions and Left-wing Leaders; Review Hard Work; US: Claimed Recovery; Class Consciousness (10): World Proletarian Party; Class and Education; A Hot Autumn for Pensions

31 Middle East, Britain and Class Struggle; Italian Rail Strikes; Africa; Anti-Globalisation; Parmalat; Universities; RESPECT; Hutton and BBC.

32 Terrorism, inc IBRP Statement; Iraq; Iranian Elections; Israel; Crisis; Decadence; EU Imperialism.

33 ESF; Beslan; Housing; Class Struggle; IBRP in Germany; Iraq; Saudi Arabia; Matteotti and Oil; Fahrenheit 9/11.

34 US Election; Iraq; Middle East; China; Ukraine; 1905 Russian Revolution (pt 1); Germany; IBRP; Tsunami.

35 UK Election, Abstentionism, Rover, Capitalism's New Economy (1), Pensions, 1905 Russian Revolution (2), John Paul II, Lebanon and Syria, US and Iran, Germany, Letters on Parliamentarism

36 Tribute to Mauro Stefanini Jr; Oil; Airline Workers; London bombings; IRA "Stand-down"; Holocaust and Hiroshima; History and Empire; Marx is Back; Capitalism's New Economy (2);

Uzbekistan; Make Poverty History; Africa, Aid and Debt Relief; Future of the EU.

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