

Journal of the
Communist Workers'
Organisation

Summer 2017

Revolutionary Perspectives 10



Corbynism - Leftist Illusions About Labour

The Global Economic Crisis

**The War in Syria and
Shifting Imperialist Positions**

**The USA, Qatar and
'New' Imperialist Alignments**

Autonomism and Marxism

**N. Ossinsky's Critique
of State Capitalism in Russia**

Revolutionary Perspectives

Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation
Affiliate of the Internationalist Communist Tendency
Series 4, No 10, Summer 2017

A Crisis of the Entire System	1
Corbynism - Leftist Illusions About Labour	4
The War in Syria and Shifting Imperialist Positions	13
The USA, Qatar and 'New' Imperialist Alignments	23
Autonomism - cutting the ground from under Marxism	28
N. Ossinsky's Critique of State Capitalism in Russia	46

For correspondence write to:

**BM CWO
London
WC1N 3XX**

email: uk@leftcom.org

Or visit our website:

<http://www.leftcom.org>

Subscriptions to *Revolutionary Perspectives* (3 issues) and *Aurora* (at least 4 issues):

UK: £15 (€18)

Europe: £20 (€24)

World: £25 (€30, \$30)

How to pay:

By cheque made out to the "CWO" and sending it to the address above.

By emailing us at uk@leftcom.org and asking for our banking details.

By **Paypal** using the "Donate" button on our webpage.

You can also take out a supporter's sub by adding £10 (€12) to each sum. This will give you priority mailings of *Aurora* and other publications including free pamphlets as they are published.

A Crisis of the Entire System

The UK once had a deserved reputation for pragmatic and stable politics. That will not survive the spectacular mess it is making of Brexit ... In an unnecessary referendum, a small majority chose an option they could not understand, because it had not been worked out. Thereupon, a new prime minister, with no knowledge of the complexities, adopted the hardest possible interpretation of the outcome. She triggered the exit process in March 2017, before shaping a detailed negotiating position. Some 70 days later, in an unnecessary election, she lost both her majority and her authority.

So wrote Martin Wolf in the *Financial Times* on July 14.

This mirrors exactly what we wrote about the political incompetence of our rulers in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 08. But what Wolf does not see is that, as we also wrote; *behind all the cock-ups lies a deeper reality. In the face of intractable economic stagnation the British ruling class are losing the plot. None of their strategies for reviving growth have worked ...*

A year on and little has changed. Although austerity has reduced current Government borrowing from 9.9% to 2.6% of GDP the overall debt continues to rise. It was worth about 37% of GDP in 2007 but has since leapt to almost 90% today and is still rising. The British ruling class congratulate themselves that this is only a fraction of world debt which, at \$217 trillion, is equal to 327% of global GDP. However if we added the borrowings of RBS (which is 73% owned by the Government) they would “dominate” the figures (BBC News 29 June 2017) which would then be much higher.

Whilst the working class have paid for the Government’s reduced borrowing (to the extent that personal debt in the UK now approaches £30,000 for every adult) the fact that the economy is stagnant means that the tax receipts are not coming in. According to the Office for Budget Responsibility the average annual growth rate of 2.2% will not be met again this year. They cut their latest forecast to 1.8% according to the Guardian (13 July 2017) and what is more have warned that a new recession within 5 years is “inevitable” before we have even recovered from the last one! And every 0.1% cut in growth wipes billions off expected Government revenues.

So how does capitalism get out of the next looming disaster? Corbyn’s Labour are in no doubt that adopting Keynesian policies will recreate “effective demand” that will then “prime the pump” to kickstart the economy. Paradise on earth? Not so. Let’s not forget how we got to here.

In 2007-8 the speculative bubble which had been built on a mountain of corporate and personal debt burst. But why was there a speculative bubble at all? As Marx

demonstrated in Capital (Volume 3) this is based on fictitious capital. Fictitious capital only becomes significant when the rate of profit is so low that investment in the development of material commodities falters. In search of a higher rate of profit the capitalists look for new means to increase capital.

With the development of interest-bearing capital and the credit system, all capital seems to double itself, and sometimes treble itself, by the various modes in which the same capital, or perhaps even the same claim on a debt, appears in different forms in different hands. The greater portion of this 'money-capital' is purely fictitious. All the deposits, with the exception of the reserve fund, are merely claims on the banker, which, however, never exist as deposits. (Capital Volume 3 Chap 29)

What fictitious capital really implies is a claim on surplus value which has not yet been created. As long as the debts are serviced fictitious capital's secret can be hidden but once the chain of default becomes too long, and then snaps, the consequences are enormous, as we saw after 2007. It is not deficient demand which is the cause of the rise of speculation but the lack of investment due to a low rate of profit.

In their simplistic way the Corbyn campaign is selling a lie. The problem is not the austerity policy of the Tories (grief though that causes us) but the contradictions of the profits system which is now past its sell-by date. Our slogan is not "Tories Out" but "Down with Capitalism".

The problem is that the system will not disappear of its own accord despite the optimism of some amongst the communisation movement. Capitalism has to be fought as a global system by the one global class that is exploited everywhere – the world working class. Currently that class is slowly recovering from decades of retreat and restructuring and it will be some time yet before it is ready to take up the task of fighting the system. We will have to go through a long period of partial struggles and growing confidence before we will see the emergence of a new movement. In the meantime it is the task and role of revolutionaries to fight within those struggles to point to the future, to criticise those who claim the system is reformable, to unite workers across nations, sections and cultures and create a political organisation which can lead their resistance in an international movement.

It's either that or the capitalist system imposes its own solutions. The same crisis that is revealing the political contradictions amongst our rulers (and not just in the UK) is also increasing international imperialist tensions. As each state seeks to blame the "other" for its economic woes (and Trump's "America First" is only the crudest expression of nationalism which is on the rise everywhere) trade wars, cyberwars, drone wars etc have all joined mass aerial bombardment as instruments of a decaying system. There will be many more Aleppos, Mosuls and Sana'as before the scourge of imperialism and

the forces which feed it are wiped out.

The stakes are high (and we have not even dealt here with the depredations which threaten the planet's ecology) but a movement of the vast majority is the only force which can undermine the threats which capitalism poses to our future existence. We have a world to win.

The English translation of
Bordiga: Beyond the Myth
 by
Onorato Damen

An introduction for English readers of the debate between Bordiga and Damen and its significance for revolutionary politics today. The work is divided into two halves, the first dealing with the exchanges between Bordiga and Damen and the second focussing on a critique of what Bordigism later became in the hands of Bordiga's 'epigones' or followers.

Over 170 pages with 114 footnotes and four appendices, it also contains the first full translation into English of Bordiga's letter to Karl Korsch.



Corbynism – Leftist Illusions About Labour

The Impact of Corbyn

The capitalist media expressed astonishment at the rise of a left-leaning Labour Party which appeals more to the young than anything since Blairism when it first appeared. In reality, the Corbynite phenomenon is not hard to understand. After decades where wages as a share of national income have continuously fallen and after almost a decade of austerity in which the rich have got richer, it is not surprising that many workers voted for a party which promised to “tax the rich”. The young in particular, who face a miserable future, rushed to support Corbyn, both within the Labour Party and among the electorate in general (where 1.7 million under 25s registered for the first time). Some of those who support Corbyn’s Labour do so with the idea that “it’s the least worst option” but many more actually believe that Labour can reform capitalism in favour of those who create the wealth that is enjoyed by a minority. However behind all these are those who claim to be “socialists” and “revolutionaries” but who in their cynical manoeuvres belie both terms. This article is mainly directed at their distortions.

In the last few months the CWO has intervened in this debate, distributing material explaining the case for revolutionary abstention and urging, with those who were ready to discuss the fact, that Corbynism is a dead-end and part of the ruling class order. We have carried articles on our web site and in our publications¹ and intervened on social media. We also distributed copies of our broadsheet “Aurora” on picket lines and University campuses as well as in our customary venues.

Some of the less politicised people we met argued in line with the standard bourgeois argument about democratic rights and duties. Others echoed the desperate hope that somehow electing a Labour Government would provide some relief from the cuts, crap prospects in work, cuts in benefits and crumbling welfare services. For many of those who we met the latter was a “straw they were clutching” in response to a lifetime of attacks seeing our class unable to sustain any adequate resistance. We did not agree and put counter-arguments but we’re able to understand the desperation as the crisis appears to grind forward remorselessly and all the scattered “direct action” resistance to it has no focal point around which to rally.

Counterfeit Communists

On the other hand, there was an inexcusable flood of phoney arguments from the leftists and even a few anarcho-Corbynists who we encountered. On more than one occasion these supporters of the “democratic illusion” (some more recent converts than others) defended themselves by explaining that voting only took 10 or 15

minutes. On that basis, voting was at worst only a minor aberration on a par with dropping a chocolate wrapper or breaking wind in a crowded lift. Of course such a facile defence dodged around the issues that centres on the leftists ongoing nurturing of false and corrosive ideas over many months or even years rather than a few minutes of delinquent behaviour.

At the core of all the arguments of the “organised” Corbynists was the desire to support key falsehoods. These regularly included nonsense about the Labour Party being a “Workers Party”, nationalisation or state intervention being a step towards socialism and the ability of well-meaning MPs to be the vital agents of change. Overall, the whole panoply of justification for a reformist view of the world was expounded in the finest traditions of Second Internationalism².

As the ruling class’s crisis has deepened the lack of any readily available economic solution has, at least since 2015, become dramatically evident in the political “superstructure”. Obvious examples of the bourgeois political machine not producing intended results include the near clean sweep by the Scottish Nationalists in the 2015 General Election, the 2016 referendum vote for Brexit which was not the preferred choice for the majority of the ruling class and the 2017 General Election which failed to deliver a “strong or stable” government of the right or left³.

Of course, the left of the political establishment was not immune from the series of unintended consequences. The changes to the internal voting practices in the Labour Party opened the way for Jeremy Corbyn to become the leader despite opposition from the majority of Labour M.P.s.

That last unforeseen quirk in the politics of the parties which present as options for being safe governments for capitalism resulted in further ripples. In Britain, for many decades, the various splinters that emerged from Stalinism and Trotskyism⁴ had seen their influence gradually decline. In Corbyn’s unexpected rise they saw their chance.

The re-emergence of Left Labourism as a significant sector in British politics breathed life into the spectrum of counterfeit Communists all vying to implement the politics of the past like the United Front and “transitional method”. Those approaches were spawned in the degenerating Communist International after the defeat of the revolutionary wave in the early 1920s. By the 3rd Comintern Congress in 1921 the revolutionary essence was increasingly being replaced by adaptations to the capitalist order. Those are the politics which symbiotically unite the epigones of the revolutionary wave with the re-emergent left Labourism and its layers of new, often younger, activists.

The spreading of confusion by the Left

Unlike the Jehovah's Witnesses who have been busy predicting imminent Armageddon for their whole history, the leftists see in Corbynism the living fulfilment of decades of leftist prophecies. Starting from Lenin's confused and confusing description of the Labour Party as a "bourgeois workers party", many generations of leftists have aimed for a left-leaning Labour Party as the key to a "British Road to Socialism"⁵ (BRS).

Despite Labour's defeat, the outcome of the General Election in June has given the Corbynite movement an extended lease of life. The beloved leader has to deliver nothing better than well-meaning words while all the ills of the system can be left at the door of the Tory Party or the Prime Minister. Hyping up a demand for another run of the General Election pantomime in the next 12 months⁶, Momentum and the other camp-followers will bang the electoral drum to their heart's content. Their case will also thrive in a battle against "the enemy within" as the majority of Labour MPs remain open to the charge of not being true followers of "the beloved leader".

In the previous section we referred to the British Road to Socialism, the name of the pre-1991 Communist Party of Great Britain's Programme. The position of the 2017 successors in the CPB and their "Morning Star" is encapsulated on their web-site. At the end of June their site still displayed their election propaganda, summed up by a poster-like front page entitled "Unity!". Half of the page is taken up with a picture of Corbyn and the words, "Labour to Win". Towards the bottom CPB call their supporters to "Vote Labour everywhere for a left-led government"

Before dealing with more fundamental arguments, we can comment on the grotesque illusions about a left-led government. Even if the most far-fetched leftist fantasies had been realised and 326 Labour MPs had been elected then the CPB propagandists knew full well that this would have been a Parliamentary Labour Party indistinguishable from the previous version. The political backbone amongst the riders on the gravy train would actually have been the same factions who had tried to remove Corbyn and forced him to face re-election by party members in 2015.

An outcome requiring a lesser leap of faith, but still more than the Labour Party could actually deliver, would have been a minority Labour Government supported by the Liberal Democrats and/or the Scottish and Welsh Nationalists. Such a prospect would have the leftists salivating as every disappointment would then have been blamed on the other parties restricting Corbyn's ability to perform miracles.

Even if a "left-led Government" had been a feasible electoral outcome, it as our duty, as revolutionary Marxists, to explain why we would not campaign for such a development.

At this point we have to reassert the basics that the cheerleaders for Corbyn have long since stopped presenting. The Stalinists, Trotskyists and even certain self-styled Anarchists abandoned the need to spread such basic analysis as they tried to encourage those who would listen that voting Labour is the path to a better future. Before the end of June a gathering called by the “Psychedelic Bolsheviks” in Sheffield heard its young supporters proclaim the need for a further push for more “young people and workers” to be drawn into the next Parliamentary exercise.

That endemic Leftist opportunism illustrates precisely why the organisations that operate as part of the left wing of capitalism have long been lost as potential parts of the proletarian revolutionary movement. If capitalism is to be overthrown – the only road to a sustainable human future – then the essential first step is the proletariat taking control of society via its own organisation and activity. That model will be based on mass involvement via assemblies and organisations such as Workers Councils (“Soviets” in Russian).

The politics of left reformism/Corbynism are separated from that perspective by at least two vast gulfs. Firstly assemblies and structures based on open participation with all representatives being accountable and recallable is totally different from bourgeois electoral structures. In the latter atomised individuals vote in their secret ballots for institutions all of which are designed to help the bosses’ system of power and control to keep running.

Secondly, the critical process by which the working class achieves our potential as “the gravediggers of capitalism” depends on the maturation of our class consciousness from “a class in itself” to “a class for itself”. That process crucially depends on the material reality of class struggle and the uneven manner by which sections of the class reflect on the process, absorb lessons and develop analysis⁷. It is crystal clear that the leftists who encourage false beliefs in the nature of the bourgeois state and the usefulness of reformist strategies serve to block and divert the necessary steps towards clarity.

In the next section we will look at how these rogues advocate electoral reformism even where their inner circles still have a grasp of certain fundamentals. With a profound contempt for those they can persuade, such charlatans play with “transitional” politics where the few are entitled to understand but their followers are encouraged to remain ignorant and be loyal voters – the identical role allocated by the bourgeoisie to the whole of the working class.

The transitional method – Trotskyist doublethink

“Doublethink means the power of holding two contradictory beliefs in one’s mind

simultaneously, and accepting both of them.” When Orwell wrote “1984” there is a suggestion that he was apparently influenced by the political positions adopted by Max Shachtman and what was to develop into a strand of critical Trotskyism that become known as “the third camp”. It is ironic that one of the most blatant exercises in “Corbyism” doublethink has been carried out by a Trotskyist trend that also has sympathies for the third camp⁸.

On the one hand, the initiates and inner circle may still maintain a Marxist analysis of the Labour Party. For example it is still possible to find the following on the “Workers Liberty” web site.

THE LABOUR PARTY IS A BOURGEOIS PARTY

The Leninist position is that the Labour Party, judged in its role and function, and despite its origins and special connection with the trade unions, is a capitalist, a bourgeois workers' party. Judged politically it is not a workers' party with deformations, inadequacies (its 'inadequacies' amount to a qualitative difference), but a bourgeois party with the special function of containing the workers - actually it is a special section of the bourgeois state political organisation. The Labour Party is the main instrument of capitalist control of the workers; the organisation formed out of an upsurge of the workers, but an upsurge in which the workers were defeated ideologically and thus in every other field, is now the means of integrating the drives and aspirations of the workers with the capitalist state machine. It is not a passive reflection but an active canaliser of the class - against itself, against the proletariat's own interest. (From “What we are and what we must become” – still described as a “founding document” of the ancestral organisation of the AWL).

The description above was written in 1966. Perhaps the AWL leading lights believe that during the last 50 years the Labour Party ceased to be “the means of integrating the drives and aspirations of the workers with the capitalist state machine”. If so, then they could choose to explain a) the process and b) what is the class nature of the Labour Party. However, that's their business not ours.

What is absolutely clear is that the AWL has been very active in the Corbynite movement and in the factional struggles within Momentum. Indeed there were weeks and months when at least one of their activists regularly appeared on national TV. Never did any of them take the opportunity to explain the analysis written in the epistles of the founding parents. Why not? Simply because they were only focussed on attracting new layers who would help build, join and vote for the Labour Party.

The doublethink is as clear as it is sickening. While the “cognoscenti” may understand the world, they deliberately and consciously avoid explaining the nature of reformism and parliamentarianism to their followers. Only the organisation, or perhaps its core,

are allowed to understand while the Corbyn cult followers are treated as gullible vote fodder left in a state of abject confusion and false hopes – a situation which will inevitably lead to disillusion and the belief that people who call themselves Marxists deal in nothing but lies and illusion.

Lest all the other 57 varieties feel left out, the AWL is of course only one of many playing the same game. Peter Taaffe, long standing guru of the Socialist Party of England and Wales (once known by the name of its journal as “The Militant Tendency”) was also granted his 15 minutes of fame to argue that the Labour Party should review its decision from the early 1920s and allow his party to affiliate. The representative of the Workers Revolutionary Party, Frank Sweeney, appeared on BBC’s Daily Politics to explain that the problem was that Corbyn would not be able to implement his (Corbyn’s) programme. The fact that there was a large grain of truth in that was clearly by accident rather than design in that Mr Sweeney’s recommended solution was to vote for the WRP in the 5 constituencies where they had candidates.

For others, half-forgotten folk memories of when their political grandparents played in the Labour Party were awoken. The plethora of factions within and around Momentum is evidence of this common method of swimming with the stream of bourgeois ideology and maximising the practice of opportunism.

Parliament is not the state

There is another seriously harmful dimension to the leftists encouragement of participation in elections, whether in favour of Labour or their own groups or coalitions.

The pretence that the election of more well-intentioned politicians could actually replace the capitalist system is part of the mystification circulated by and on behalf of the ruling class. They are fully aware that elected representation up to and including the “Executive” (Prime Minister and her/his Cabinet) is only the window-dressing. The state in modern society actually exists to maintain the domination of the ruling class.

Beyond, the layers of elected representatives lies the real power vested in entities such as the civil service, the armed forces, the police and the secret and semi-secret state and not least the controllers of the majority of the national capital. These are replicated beyond the national boundaries in the kaleidoscope of transnational institutions including the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organisation, military alliances such as NATO and, of course, the European Union and other regional trade organisations such as NAFTA.

That whole range of state institutions would still exist and exercise overwhelming

power even if the UK population were allowed to elect 650 Corbyn clones.

The leftist organisations, in their inner circles, very probably understand that full well. Similarly they understand that the state functions exist to maintain the control over every aspect of our lives that flows from the means of production being owned by firms, trusts, companies and conglomerates and in some cases by states themselves.

The pretence that electing MPs can counter those interests is a cruel deception. In most cases it only serves to help strengthen the grip of bourgeois ideology. In other cases such as Chile in the 1970s it meant death, imprisonment and torture for those working class people who had been persuaded that there was a "Parliamentary Road to Socialism".

Leftist illusions or the difficult path to the overthrow of capitalism

It does not surprise us that layers of "radical" young people including some workers have been dragged into the Left Labourist swamp. The fact that the capitalist system has offered the vast majority nothing substantially positive for decade after decade is the background to that desperation. During that time the working-class has not displayed a fraction of our potential to struggle to defend ourselves and then to overthrow this rotten system. Consequently, Corbynism/Momentum has appeared offering bogus promises based on the leftist recipe book for maintaining capitalism in an imaginary "fairer" style. Without a visible alternative based on working-class self-organisation and struggle, Corbynite Labour has been able to strike a chord. That explanation is clear and as Marxists we fully understand secular belief in salvation. This pie in the sky hope is just another expression of "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world" (Marx, from the introduction to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right).

We recognise that revolutionaries have a duty to engage with those fooled by the false promises of reformism, of either the left or right varieties. However we will not condone, let alone join with, those corruptors of youth who encourage belief in illusions and build false expectations that will end in disillusion and confusion. Being "where the class is at" for the leftists involves sowing and encouraging illusions and encouraging falsehoods and confusions that cannot advance awareness of the need and possibility of the working-class taking power. That revolutionary reconstitution of society is the only viable path to put an end to a system that is very evidently breeding war, misery, famine and ecological destruction across the entire planet.

Internationally Corbynism has other parallels which clearly demonstrate where support for a parliamentary left party gets you. In Greece the financial implosion brought a supposedly very left new party (Syriza) to power in opposition to austerity

imposed by the IMF and EU. The result is that Syriza has “managed” the introduction of the very policies they were elected to oppose. This has been, and remains, the function of the capitalist and reformist left everywhere.

The logic of the leftists decayed political method in Britain is seen where they line up against each other in favour of a capitalist UK in or out of a capitalist European Union or in favour of Scottish Independence or the existing state structure in Great Britain. Their politics of “lesser evilism” do not end there – while wars and massacres spread across the world the left chooses which side to cheer on. The same applies when we look at the historic atrocities in the Balkans such as the Kosovan separation from Serbia, or the current sufferings caused by the struggle between Ukraine against Russia and its supporters, or even the Kurdish nationalist YPG military campaign now openly part of a US-backed coalition. Wherever decaying capitalism generates conflict and misery the leftists cannot resist choosing sides while the working class suffer.

The cause of the working class only suffers when its false friends helps lock their followers into capitalist structures and ideology such as the Labour Party and the reformist falsehoods that are peddled. Of course, it is easy for those dressed in pseudo-Marxist threads to foster illusions in reformism or, as is their current practice, to join the Labour Party and increase the confusion of those who are finding conditions unbearable.

Genuine Communists will not be part of those exercises in deceit. Corbyn is not a new alternative but just a return to the same programme as the past. For the present, we will continue to explain that there is no quick fix to capitalist exploitation and austerity. On the contrary, the road to a better future lies through the working class rediscovering its confidence and combativity. This can only be achieved when workers on the ground actively shape and expand their own resistance to the thousand and one attacks which amount to a historical reversal and decline in living standards as the crisis of capitalism grinds on, whichever party is in Westminster. This is qualitatively different from the headless chicken activism for activism’s sake or the short-term perspective of “getting the Tories out”. There is a way for would-be revolutionary militants to help build up workers’ resistance to capitalism. It lies, not in promoting a particular character or faction inside any of the established parties, but in helping to promote the long term movement of resistance to capitalism and ultimately a political organisation of the world working class. The CWO and our comrades in ICT are organised to maintain and spread that theory and practice. We invite all those who share our understanding to discuss with us in the struggle towards a truly human, classless and stateless future.

KT

June 23 2017

Notes

1 See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-06-07/anarcho-corbynism-and-support-for-labour>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-06-02/don%E2%80%99t-vote-prepare-the-resistance>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-07-04/corbyn-and-the-left-%E2%80%98new-politics%E2%80%99-part-of-the-problem-not-the-solution>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-09-14/labour-s-left-face-don-t-get-fooled-again>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-10-23/new-leader-%E2%80%93-same-labour>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-08-09/the-labour-party-crisis-is-a-crisis-of-the-capitalist-class>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2015-10-11/jc-%E2%80%93-labour%E2%80%99s-second-coming>, <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-08/the-labour-party-no-use-to-british-capitalism-never-any-use-to-the-working-class>.

2 The Second International drew together erstwhile Socialist Parties from its foundation in 1889 until its political collapse in 1914 when the deep-seated abandonment of a revolutionary Marxist understanding led to its large majority supporting their national bourgeoisie in the First World War. Parties such as the Labour Party, SPD in Germany and PS in France continue to stand in that counter-revolutionary tradition

3 In fact a most obvious short-term effect of the loss of a few seats by the Tories is that the Government may have to work out how to transfer some millions of pounds to Northern Ireland "infrastructure projects" i.e. in the direction of the Democratic Unionists and other politicians and their "business associates". Since this article was drafted it became clear that the number involved would be at least a billion pounds.

4 Examples of Stalinist or Trotskyist organisations in Britain that have not hitched up to the Corbynite bandwagon are few and far between. Two that have "bucked the trend" are the Revolutionary Communist Group and the Socialist Equality Party. The former prefer to devote their cheerleading to the state capitalist regimes in Cuba and Venezuela. The latter has in 2017 given up its previous habit of legitimising electoral illusions by standing its own candidates as part of its own interpretation of the Trotskyist Transitional Programme

5 The name of the programme adopted in 1952 – issued the previous year – by the Communist Party of Great Britain, the supporters of the state capitalist Soviet Union. It has hardly changed since despite many rewrites.

6 The Byzantine nature of the democratic smokescreen means that the Tories would gain party political advantage – albeit slightly less since the 2017 results – by not calling the next General Election until the constituency boundaries have been redrawn to their advantage. This is scheduled to take place in 2019.

7 For an exploration of this see our publication "Class Consciousness and Revolutionary Organisation"

8 See "The Lost Marxism of Critical Trotskyism" in *Internationalist Communist* 17. Still available £4, including postage, from our addresses.

The War in Syria and Shifting Imperialist Positions

Introduction

The following two articles are translated from the latest edition of *Prometeo*, theoretical journal of our Italian comrades of Battaglia Comunista. The overall argument of both confirms the outlines of the article we published in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 09 entitled "Russia, China and the USA's New World Disorder" (<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-03/russia-china-and-the-usa%E2%80%99s-new-world-disorder>). The key factor in the rising tensions around the world is the global economic crisis which has now produced a decade of recession without much sign of a revival. The continuing need to devalue capital in order to restart a new round of accumulation is the elephant in the room that global capital cannot contemplate. For devaluation on that scale requires more than a few bankruptcies (which, as the Quantitative Easing programmes to bail out the banks show, no state is ready to countenance anyway). Instead, besides stepping up the exploitation of the working class, the ruling class everywhere seek to gain every economic and strategic advantage they can in a number of theatres and using a variety of means, some old, like the outright use of air power, some new, like the use of drones and cyberwarfare techniques. We shall be analysing more of these potential sources of conflict, including both China's advances in Central Asia and the Korean standoff, as well as their likely consequences in future articles.

Trump and Obama

Making the comparison is inevitable. One is a Democrat, the other a Republican. One is a reformist and the other a conservative. Obama was calculating and cautious, Trump is arrogant and disruptive. It appears that they could not be more different, but is this really the case? The war in Syria gives us some indication of the common denominator that presides over the most powerful imperialist country in the world.

The common view which predominates in a concerned international opinion is that with Trump the relaxed approach of the Obama administration is over. From now on we are in for the dangerously expressed imperialist *révanchisme* of the US, softened, if not halted, during eight years of a Democratic presidency. In other words, "America First" will mean an entirely new imperialist scenario with a "leader" who will bring back the hegemonic role of the United States, like Reagan, and the Bushes, father and son. This is like saying that imperialism is not just a behavioural choice from a political point of view, a military choice in terms of the use of force, but it is also based

on the imprint a single individual can give to his Presidential mandate. In short, the “Democrat Obama” withdrew from war theatres, made peace with Castro and with Iran and reduced the US to just one among many international poles by renouncing its dominant role. The “go-getting” Trump would do exactly the opposite, attacking anyone who is seen as a direct or indirect opponent of American interests anywhere on the planet.

Of course, personalities and political background can play a role within the strategic framework of any government. Foreign policy and economic policy decisions can be made depending on internal and external situations, but also depending on personal inclinations based on previous political choices. What really dictates the underlying choices, and the strategies adopted, are the pressing economic conditions in the life of capital, the most appropriate recipes to cure its crises and, at all costs, meet its needs for valorisation, both on the domestic (containment of labour costs and increased exploitation) and the international front (proxy wars, the state of governments and their policies, and the conquest of commodity, energy and financial markets). Equally certain, it may be a mistake to interpret the needs of capital in carrying out bad economic policies and counter-productive international strategies, but the fact remains that capital has its own life and laws for survival which cannot be avoided by anybody, not even by a President or a government worthy of the name responsible for maintaining the inevitable source of profits.

Different approach, same imperialist objectives

The difference between Obama’s mandate and the incipient Trump Administration, beyond the obvious difference in style and communication skills, is not that deep: in both cases the two administrations are serving American imperialism but in the two historical phases that, for simplicity’s sake, we define as “before and after the sub prime crisis”. When Obama came to the White House in 2008 with his reform programme, he had different priorities. These were dictated by the squeeze of the financial crisis. He had to “mend” a collapsing economy and launch a series of lifeboats capable of stabilising a drifting economic giant. The Obama administration went to work immediately. First, it sanctioned and accelerated the process of exporting the “financial” crisis by allowing banks, investment funds, insurance companies, etc. to offload “toxic” securities, by investing them on the global financial market. This operation had already begun a few months previously, but, in collaboration with the Central Bank, the first African-American president carried it further, thus unloading much of its own crisis onto global credit institutions through real financial criminal action. At the same time, he saved those American banks most exposed to bankruptcy, and then attempted, though he did not succeed, to reconnect the threads that link financial capital to the real economy. Quantitative Easing cost thousands of billions of dollars, taken from state coffers, i.e. from taxpayers, or from the pockets of those

proletarians who in the meantime lost their job or faced increasingly precarious living and working conditions.

On the imperialist front, Obama started with the promised withdrawal of American troops from Iraq and Afghanistan to exit these disastrous wars. The previous Bush administration had so deeply invested in them that, both at home and abroad, such adventures have become unpopular. However it is also a fact that Obama did not just wait wringing his hands as he contemplated a world which the crisis and the ravages of war were making worse. He contributed, for example, to relaunching the US' imperialist role, by using tactics of varying degrees of intensity. Inside a little-used foreign policy framework of "soft power", Obama alternated between the use of "intelligence" operations and the incitement of social tensions and civil wars, as well as military intervention through support for belligerent factions, or direct intervention in cases of greater necessity. "Intelligence" manoeuvres were evident in the role the US played in stoking and politically manipulating anti-Russian feeling in the "Colour Revolutions" in Eastern Europe. This was especially obvious in Ukraine, but also took place in other countries once belonging to the defunct Warsaw Pact, such as Hungary and Poland. Soft power, with the help of diplomatic intelligence, has also been used against Iran (to reach agreement on stopping its nuclear programme in exchange for the ending of trade and political sanctions) as part of a failed attempt to break the country from Russia's influence. The aim here was to overturn the oil and military axis that operates in the Middle East in an open competition with the interests of US oil corporations. The sanctions imposed on Putin's Russia also bear the mark of Obama diplomacy. He has done everything to isolate Russia from the rest of Europe, both in terms of energy dependence in Europe (Ukraine) and in military terms (extension of NATO to the Eastern European countries), forcing Putin into drastic countermeasures such as the annexation of the Crimea (disguised by a referendum) and a state of war with Ukraine itself.

As an alternative to "soft power" based on the role of "intelligence" and diplomatic pressure, Obama also resorted to the open use of indirect force, behind the scenes in war zones and civil wars. The US has directly encouraged or appropriately exploited these conflicts in places that required the power of the Stars and Stripes to "save" them. Let's take three examples: In 2011 in Libya and Syria and in 2015 in the war against the IS.

In the Libyan case, the US allowed France and Britain to intervene against Gaddafi's government creating a war and an international humanitarian crisis that persist to this day. Not only that, but in a second phase they collaborated with their airpower in the violent removal of their old enemy, the Colonel. This settling of accounts gave France the hope of some kind of monopoly in the management of Libyan oil whilst Britain saw an opportunity to increase its presence in the Mediterranean. The US finally got

rid of an awkward character as well as demonstrating once again that nothing, from Gibraltar to Malta happens (including wars), without the support or participation of the world's leading imperialist pole.

The Syrian crisis and the US

The Syrian crisis and the ensuing civil war between Assad loyalists and his opponents had already started, but was then developed by US economic, military and logistical aid in close collaboration with Turkey, Saudi Arabia and the countries of the Gulf. The same happened with the birth and growth of IS. Given Russia's naval presence in the Mediterranean, Obama, in anti-Assad mode, did not shrink from financing and arming Baghdadi's militia until it became a small force between Iraq and Syria. He only tried to get rid of him when this "diabolical creature" ran away from him by declaring partial and hostile autonomy. In this "second half" Obama even organised a coalition that would take charge of physically eliminating the Black Caliphate, now more an obstacle to American imperialistic projects than a malleable instrument to use against "Russian-Alawite" opponents. Of course, this was without the US military setting foot on the ground where the fighting was taking place; their role was to bomb Assad and his allies, leaving the "dirty work" to Syrian and Iraqi Kurds. The same was true of the intensification of the bombings in Syria. This produced so many civilian deaths that the Obama administration was forced to apologise on more than one occasion. So, to argue that the Obama administration's eight years were characterised by a political withdrawal from war scenarios in a sort of "rethinking" of the horrors perpetrated by the Bush administration, and are now being resumed by Trump, does not correspond to the truth. It is possible to discuss the respective merits of their foreign policy choices, their ability on how to intervene best, or about the domestic and international conditions that have led to these choices and strategies. However it cannot be argued that the "red thread" of American imperialist interests has ever been broken. It runs through a series of episodes where continued aggression and use of force has been proportional only to the severity of the international crisis and to the need to provide "ideal solutions" for the ferocious depredations of American imperialism.

It is true that Trump's arrival on the international political scene has been disturbing. He is atypical in terms of his manner and timing, as well as being both impulsive and contradictory. But it is also true that his actions, though with less media noise, would have been taken by Hillary Clinton as head of government, as with former President Obama, for the simple reason that the Syrian war and North Korean manoeuvres do not leave many options for a US economy with "pharaonic deficits" to finance. Russia and China thus had to be sent warning messages by force given the increase in imperialist tensions due to the continuing crisis on the financial and commercial markets. It is not just about the "personal whims" of each President, though Trump is doing everything to take personal credit for the latest decisions as opposed to the

supposed lack of action of the previous President.

So it was no big surprise, except for the very short time it took or that it was done like a neighborhood bully if, on the night of April 6-7, Trump, without the Pentagon's agreement, without waiting for the UN to complete its investigation to see whether the massacre of 72 civilians in the Syrian town of Khan Sheikhun could be blamed on Assad, ordered the launching of 59 missiles against the Syrian air base from which any chemical raid might have occurred. The airfield was destroyed, oil storage facilities and weapons were blown up and there were at least 5 deaths among Assad's military, who also alleged that there were civilian casualties.

The immediate justification Trump gave for his decision was the unbearable horror at the sight of the twenty children who died in this criminal operation. It was a demand for vengeance unleashed by a particularly pious and God-fearing man. But since then he has grudgingly admitted to other reasons which have little to do with humanitarianism. At the same time, the US President has heavily criticised his predecessor, Obama, accusing him of not having what was needed to complete the military mission against the dictator Assad. It's a bit like saying, "Now it's up to me to do what you couldn't." And then more motives emerged. The continuation of the Syrian crisis, in terms imposed by the Russia-Iran duo, seriously puts at risk the defence of American interests. It also could bring "uncontrollable" numbers of Syrian migrants to the US, with the added danger of importing terrorists as well as giving a chance for those who would "steal jobs".

Most of this is nonsense, of course. Trump's drastic action has many other roots, both domestically and internationally. The domestic one lies in the fact that with the lowest popularity rating a newly-elected American President has ever had, he needed to do something "extraordinary" to give credibility to his loudly-proclaimed intentions.

The economic crisis ...

Moreover, the much-trumpeted revival from the economic crisis has left doubts and a lot of confusion amongst American analysts themselves. The US economy has improved but at a very low rate, too low for the expectations it has aroused or to counter the heavily negative numbers that accompany it. Public debt of \$19.200 billion is 105% of GDP. It was \$18.992 billion in 2015, after years of Quantitative Easing. It was "only" \$9.267 billion in 2007 at the beginning of a crisis which, we should not forget, started from the economic and financial contradictions of the US economy. If the Trump's tax cut reform is passed, public debt will rise to 135%. The supposed economic recovery is still based on a huge shift in production, with entire sectors such as manufacturing and steel industry in the hands of China and Japan. To reverse that trend is practically impossible. German competition in engineering (mainly, but not

only, in vehicles) is at very high levels. The deficit in the balance of payments with foreign countries has reached the historic record of \$500 billion.

The millions of jobs, created by the Obama administration as well as the 600,000 in one hundred days of this administration, are deceptive because they are based on dodgy statistics, which claim that it's enough to work 15 days a year to be considered employed. In addition, the new posts are very often in the black economy, or are short-term temporary contracts and underpaid (in many cases the rate is three dollars an hour). As we said, the figures for the US economy make clear the real state of the internal market in terms of the production of goods and capital flows. US gross domestic product grew only 0.7% in the first quarter, at a much slower pace than the analysts who expected +1%. This is the worst increase since the beginning of 2014. In the first quarter of 2017, consumer spending in the US grew by only 0.3%, well below 3.5% in the previous quarter. In this case, this is the worst since 2009. In addition, cash flows to the US economy have decreased, despite the unsuccessful efforts to maintain a "high" dollar capable of attracting investors and speculators. Flows calculated as a percentage of gross domestic product fell from 57% in 2007 to 36% in the first half of the year when the crisis began. This was accompanied by a sharp fall in foreign investment which went down by 50% in the same period.

In addition, households, businesses, and many state governments that survive through central government subsidies should be added to the list. In post-crisis US there is a heavy dissatisfaction both in the environments of the small bourgeoisie in advanced state of proletarianisation and in the world of dependent labour. Official figures speak of real wages that have not risen for forty years. From 1979 to 2015, the wage bill went from \$528,524 to \$533,297 billion in 2015, while the income of the 1% richest in the same years went from \$269,102 to \$671,061, widening further the pay gap between the holders of capital and the workforce. The result is that two of the wealthiest families in the United States, Walton and Koch, have a wealth equivalent to the total holdings of 150 million US-based nationals.

It is no coincidence that 90 million people eligible to vote in the last Presidential elections have thought it was better to stay at home because they could no longer kid themselves that any ruling class faction, right or left, could offer even a partial solution to their serious economic and social problems. 50% of those 90 million live below the poverty line, have had no fixed jobs for years, survive on food handouts, and have no health cover. They move to the periphery of big cities and survive amidst the decay of their social infrastructure. These are all factors that could, sooner or later, bring about a social explosion inside the most advanced capitalist country in the world. Hence, the calls about the need to "defend themselves" from external enemies, who are seen as the source of America's internal ills. It's a line backed by blatant use of force that speaks louder than words, and may be a strategy for preserving the

system, like promising the Earth to the depressed American people. Let's take two examples amongst many. The first is the promise to drastically lower taxes, the second concerns employment growth with a rise in wages. The promise is to "restart the real economy"; to become more competitive with the good (high-tech investments) or the bad (taxation and protectionism) on the international market: More production, more employment, more competitiveness, more profits and higher wages. The corollary is the encouragement of businesses with less taxes on the production of goods and lower tax rates on income from productive investment. In the first case it would drop from the current tax rate of 35% to 15%, in the second from 39% to 35%.

Did that happen? No. First of all because Trump's idea has to be approved by the Congress, which is not in step with him. The plan also has a number of flaws. The first and most obvious is that just lowering taxes, however consistently, will convince a huge mass of capital which has been speculating for years because of low profits and low rate of profit, to return to the real economy. To those who already are in the real economy low taxes might give a big breath of oxygen, but a high dollar to attract capital from the four corners of the world, would outweigh much of the advantages of the tax break itself. This is without mentioning that the scheme would deny state coffers anywhere between \$2500 and \$5000 billion thus increasing the already overwhelming public debt. The idea that this would lead to economic revival creating new jobs, more income, more wages and more demand to drive the capitalist motor of the national economy, has yet to be confirmed. First, because future investments would be high tech with the creation of few jobs and the loss of many of those that already exist. Second, to go alongside the new massive investments, the lowest possible wages are needed, thus diminishing and not expanding "domestic" working class demand.

... and its consequences for US imperialist policy

On the international scene, Trump realised that he has to remain alert, as the previous administration had partly done, to anything that could cause significant damage to US imperialism, if competing imperialisms increased in size and scope. From the trade issue, where the new President threatened to crack down on all international treaties such as NAFTA (with Canada and Mexico), TPP and TTIP, not to mention accusing China of unfair competition and threatening to impose heavy customs duties in the same way as Europe (read Germany), in an impossible attempt to make up lost ground in the US trade deficit. It does not matter if Trump is having a rethink on NAFTA, or if he has contradicted himself so often on China. The same goes for Russia: before the elections Putin was the bosom buddy of the aspirant President of the United States, three months later he was an enemy to be halted on both the East European and Middle Eastern fronts. There is also Trump's contradictory attitude to the North Korean President who had to be punished with an immediate bombing, before being

transformed into an interesting interlocutor, who he declared he would be “honoured” to meet. Trump’s contradictions can be taken with a pinch of salt. What is at the moment most pressing for the new American administration is the strong and visible return of American armed forces to the hottest areas on the international chessboard, the Middle East, Syria, the Mediterranean and everything going on around the Sea of Japan, including the role of China and its Korean ally. A clear example is Trump’s recent visit to the Saudi King Salman in Riyadh. The US government signed an agreement with him to provide \$300 billion for infrastructure, as well as selling weapons to the “Saudi” clan for \$100 billion, officially to be used against ISIS, but actually to counter the Iran/Russia axis in the Middle East. The move, in addition to having a sense of international strategy by re-launching the old alliance with the Saudis, who have not always been reliable, but who now face a heavy economic and financial crisis, also has value back home. Trump himself in a “wonderful” synthesis of an odious imperialist flavour, promises to sell weapons abroad to buy the workforce at home. In concrete terms he has promised jobs in exchange for threatening wars. Exploitation and death go together in this unending capitalist nightmare.

Returning to the “Assad issue,” it would be irrelevant, if it is linked only to the dictatorial figure of the character in question. The real Trump problem, as with Obama, is to impede Russia’s support for the “dictator of Damascus” regime and with it Putin’s ability to maintain his commercial fleet and, above all, his navy in the Syrian ports of Latakia and Tartus, since the US wants the commercial and military control of all seas. In theory, the US Navy can stop anyone from sailing and landing in strategic ports, through the unchallenged superiority of its navy. The III, IV, V, VI and VII fleets are present in Atlantic, Mediterranean, Indian and Pacific waters, through which 90% of world trade flows. Normally, Admirals Nora Tyson, Sean Buck and Kevin Donegan allow access to international navigation routes, which can be easily denied or revoked if American imperialism considers it appropriate. So giving the Russian adversary a free hand in the Syrian question would intensify naval competition and massively upset the Pentagon’s plans. Trump has thus increased the defence ministry budget by at least 10% (approximately \$52 billion) for both immediate war operations and a short-term programme of rearmament with a high-tech content.

It is not surprising then that the Syrian operation, though planned previously, was carried out suddenly, without the UN Congress’s approval, and without any International Criminal Court investigation being able to shed light on the use of chemical materials. It was a warning to those who needed it: To Russia over military hegemony in the Mediterranean, and to China to keep North Korea and its “extrovert” President Kim Jong-un under control: “Otherwise we will think of doing something ourselves.” But it is against China, in its own right, that the missile barrier in South Korea is also being built. To reinforce this warning, Trump sent an aircraft carrier and an atomic submarine into South Korea’s waters to impress the belligerent North

Koreans. Even in this case it does not matter much that he then backed down, declaring himself willing and “honoured” to meet Kim Jong-un. The important thing was to make the voice of the “boss” heard while creating a situation of international tension and nuclear danger not seen since the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

It was also a warning to Iranian imperialism, which participates in the war against ISIS, for trying to occupy both territory and oil fields against the US’ Saudi ally. And to the Shiite groups, which have been formed as fronts for Iran, Iraq and the Syrian Alawites during this war crisis that has lasted for six years. This also includes the Lebanese Hezbollah, the Iraqi-Iranian Shiite-oil axis that defends Assad under the leadership of the Russians and who, furthermore, fought in Ukraine after the Crimean peninsula was taken over. As for the Taliban, Trump experimented on them with the dropping of the most powerful non-nuclear warhead ever designed and the biggest to be exploded since World War II. Although, it must be said, the act was more for show than effect since the powerful weapon was launched against the rocky walls of the Hindu Kush and not against a designated military or strategic target. Behind all this is the usual war of the “pipelines”, the recent and precarious Russian-Turkish project of the “Turkish Stream”, the Russian and Azeri gas pipelines towards Europe and Asia, the struggle for crude oil and control of the Asian gas marketing routes, and the continuation of the monetary and financial supremacy of the dollar on which all US ambitions for domination are based.

Of course Trump’s arrogant and rude belligerence might seem astonishing, but it is less so if we consider the factors we have briefly put under the magnifying glass here: the crisis is still making its disastrous consequences felt even despite the insistent declarations that it is now over. Capitalist measures have had some effect on the economic “superstructure”, but not on the factors that caused the crisis, from which international capitalism cannot escape. These, like the high ratio between constant capital and variable capital, the permanent lack of satisfactory rates of profit in the real economy, the subsequent increase in speculation that is always lurking with the risk of recreating speculative bubbles even bigger and more devastating than the sub prime, continue to hold back output.

It is in this scenario that imperialism moves with worrying speed and determination, unleashing bloody wars and threatening much more generalised conflict. It is the same scenario that imposes the indiscriminate use of violence and the risk that everything will turn into a global carnage over even more territories especially the most sensitive from both an economic and military strategic point of view. Faced with such a perspective, which is already partly tragic reality, in denouncing war and the heartbreaking massacres of the unarmed that the barbarism of a capitalist world in a permanent crisis produces more ferociously than ever, we must add a tragic appeal to the masses around the world. If this is the imminent future for humanity, if the

barbarity of society leads only to war, to the destruction of everything and everyone in the name of the preservation of an economic and social system like the capitalism which causes it, then we must make war on war, and struggle against capitalism for a world that is no longer based on exploitation, crisis, wars, and millions of dead to survive. Only a revolutionary process can stop the war and with it destroy the economic system that sustains it. Only another type of organisation of production and distribution of social wealth can and must be the guarantee that such barbarism is not periodically repeated with tragic regularity.

FD

Tuesday, May 30, 2017

Translated from *Prometeo* 17 (June 2017), theoretical journal of the Internationalist Communist Party



**For a free copy or copies
of our broadsheet *Aurora*
email or send a stamped
addressed envelope to
our London address.**

The USA, Qatar and 'New' Imperialist Alignments

The Blockade of Qatar

The official story is that Saudi Arabia, supported by Egypt, the Emirates, Bahrain and other sidekicks in the Gulf, is trying to isolate Qatar from the rest of the Arab world as punishment for betraying the Sunni cause and for financing jihadist terrorism. Like all lies, this one contains an element of truth which conceals other aspects of the situation which the Saudis don't want brought to attention and certainly they don't want to talk about them. It's true that Qatar has financed the Lebanese Hezbollah to the tune of \$700 million and has given another \$300million to some Syrian jihadist groups. It has also copiously funded Baghdadi's Isis and al-Nusra and has business and economic relations with the Iranian enemy, including running a large natural gas field in the Persian Gulf. When the Emir of Qatar made a phone call to congratulate Iranian President Hassan Rohani on his re-election, this was seen as a real provocation by the suspicious Saudi monarchy, who has always sought to keep Qatar out of the orbit of the Shiite regime. What must not be mentioned, is that the very Arab regimes who are now condemning Qatar have funded jihadist organisations, have allowed the birth and development of the Islamic State, and have supported al-Nusra by all manner of means. But this is no secret. The real skeletons in the cupboards of these countries are very different and concern the imperialist relations that are about to be modified and accelerated both from within and without.

But let's take it in order. In fact the Saudi initiative took place soon after Trump's visit to Riyadh. For once the American President – the worst at diplomacy (and not only diplomacy) that Washington has had in the last few decades – was thoroughly impressive. The visit was intended to patch up a relationship which had heavily fractured over energy issues as well as other matters by giving King Salman credits worth \$110 billion for rearmament and \$200bn for infrastructure at a time of economic and social crisis for the Saudi monarchy. This breath of oxygen has prompted Riyadh to stifle Qatar's ambitions within the Sunni world where, after three years of falling crude oil prices, the Saudi kingdom no longer has the same financial wherewithal as before. Whilst the Saudis had previously initiated hostilities aimed against US oil, aiming to push down the price of crude, the manoeuvre ended up boomeranging against Riyadh's interests. On the other hand, Qatar – the world's top liquid natural gas producer – was able to increase its energy revenues and so develop its ambition to play a stronger imperialist role in the various international markets and within the Arab world. Saudi acrimony stems precisely from the fear that this small, but financially powerful Qatar, may carve out increasingly wider economic, political and religious

spaces for itself, threatening Saudi supremacy within the Sunni world and more generally in the overall Arab scene. The former British protectorate, which also hosts an important US base and which has made partial steps towards President Trump, now possesses almost more property in London than the British monarchy, including Harrods department store, the sophisticated Shard skyscraper built by Renzo Piano, part of Canary Wharf and the London Stock Exchange, plus owning land and hotels on the Costa Smeralda, the futuristic Porta Nuova in Milan and the Valentino brand. The activity of the small but rising monarchy of Al-Thani is obviously not limited to global shopping. It also invests in production, as it did in Germany where it has bought shares in Porsche and Volkswagen. Strengthened by this tremendous availability of capital, Qatar is trying to exploit the weaknesses and contradictions of the region to increase its own leadership, even at the cost of granting political recognition to Iranian, Lebanese or Iraqi brands of Shi'ism, but this has inevitably brought it into collision with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states. Aside from the nominal excuse that it finances terrorism, the real game remains the respective strengths of both states at the level of imperialist power.

Saudi Arabia and Egypt

For Saudi Arabia the main aim is to maintain its Sunni leadership, which means continuing to play a key role within OPEC to control the quantity of oil produced throughout the area as well as determining its selling price. Finally, it aims for hegemonic control in military terms across the Persian Gulf. The struggle against its Iranian enemy and competitor, including military intervention in Yemen against the Houthi, Shiite rebels who are backed by the Tehran government, stems from these imperialist needs. Thus Saudi Arabia, supported by the US, did not hesitate for a minute to cut off all land, air and sea links with Doha, creating a sort of security belt around the ambitions of the Emir Al-Thani by the formation of an anti-Qatar coalition which it has 'obliged' the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen to join. But it is a sign of the upping of imperialist games in that an opposing front has immediately arisen to support Al-Thani. Iran, under its new president Rohani, has offered him three ports on the Gulf to break the isolation so Qatar can continue trading with the rest of the world. Erdogan's Turkey, another imperialist lynchpin in the area, which aims to replace Saudi Arabia for hegemony within the Sunni world and to support its own role as an energy-distributing hub, has promised to send military contingents to defend the Emir if necessary.

For Egypt, the anti-Qatar Coalition has essentially two aspects. First, in the form of revenge by the current Sisi government, who did not welcome the support of the Muslim Brotherhood members Doha provided during the 2014 civil war (state coup). The second aspect concerns Egypt's attempt to resume a prominent role in the Middle East and North Africa, at a time when the internal and external significance of the

serious economic and social crisis marked by the 'Arab Spring' is being re-defined. The most obvious example is the Libyan one where Egypt supports one of the factions, that of General Haftar, against the government of Tripoli recognised by the Western powers. General Haftar, in turn receives political, diplomatic, and probably even military support from Russia. [1]

Challenges for the US

As for the USA, President Trump – who is behind the anti-Qatar/pro-Saudi Arabia move – has his finger in every pie. In addition to Syria, where US commitment appears to be growing in order to prevent Russia and Iran having a free rein in the fake fight against Isis. (Since the real goal is not to undermine the “black caliphate” but to counter Russian imperialism in the Mediterranean on both the Syrian and Libyan shores), Trump is also committed to the anti-Iran front, so Qatar’s overtures to the Ayatollah’s republic are not appreciated. Similarly, Al-Thani’s investments of tens of millions of dollars in Europe and Germany in particular are regarded as one of the primary reasons for the \$500 billion dollar hole in the US foreign balance of payments. But the campaign against Qatar must take into account the not-so-small fact that the Al-Udeid airport is the largest US military base in the Middle East. It is no coincidence that Trump, after initiating Doha’s ostracism, had to partially step back by opening up a dialogue aimed at softening the tone and consequences of isolating Qatar. At the same time Europe, especially Germany, did not approve of the move against Qatar, leading Merkel to define the US as “no longer reliable” under the management of the new President. This is only a partial step back since all the previous interests continue to make their weight felt and take precedence in the strategic priorities of American imperialism. Nobody should be deceived by the “iconoclastic fury” of Trump who, impeachment permitting, is trying to destroy Obama’s diplomatic successes. (Paris climate agreement, detente with Cuba, resumption of diplomatic relations with Iran, which have all been cancelled.) It is as if his main purpose was to compete with his predecessor. Trump is giving substance to the “America first” slogan. He does it in his own way and in the belief that it is too soon to pronounce Washington’s role in the world as a “post-crisis” one.

The economic and financial situation of the US is heavily burdened by a series of debt mountains ranging from the federal government (\$20,000 billion) to a \$500 billion balance of payments deficit. Overall, when the federal states, household and business debts are included, the deficit comes to 350% of GDP, which makes the United States one of the most indebted countries in the world. With its industrial apparatus crumbling and a growing mass of speculative capital which could burst at any moment in a repeat of the devastating experience of the “sub-prime” crisis. It is a bloodsucking imperialism which only survives through the domination of the dollar and the weapons which defend it. Thus Trump’s moves, rough and contradictory

though they appear, are just another attempt to strengthen an empire which otherwise would have even more difficulty playing its hegemonic role in the world.

So if Trump's frenzied wrath appears to have been triggered by the spat between Riyadh and Doha, over statements allegedly made at the time of Qatar Emir's Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, the real reasons are elsewhere. Qatar's official news agency, QNA, has published some of the Sheikh's statements which underline the excessive and growing opposition to the anti-Tehran policy. In these so-called Al-Thani declarations he expresses support and solidarity with Iran, as well as Hamas and Hezbollah, under the assumption that Trump is so politically incapable that he will not last long in the White House. In fact, however, the USA's 360 degree turn-round in its imperialist position is the consequence of the new direction of conflict against everything and everyone, Tehran and Moscow included. In this context the "Qatar affair" is only one small link in a long chain.

Russia and China

As for Russian imperialism, while it continues "its" war in Syria and intensifies support for General Haftar in Libya, including diplomatic backing to Egypt, the official "sponsor" of the general in Tobruk, it seems to be disinterested for the time being in the "Qatar" issue, even though it has not hidden its sympathy for the Doha regime which is positioning itself against the "pax Saudi Arabiana" and the US-related front. Nevertheless Putin is weaving together energy, economic, financial and even prospective military links with former Soviet republics. An Energy Expo in Astana on June 8/9th this year Russia and China – with the support of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and external adhesion of India and Pakistan – laid the foundations for a sort of Asian common market based on cooperation between oil and gas nations (Russia and Kazakhstan) that could oppose OPEC. The Chinese idea of building a "new silk road", or rather a commercial route from Beijing to Europe by invading it with goods from former Soviet Republics marked "made in China" was also endorsed. Not least, following Washington's securing of a naval monopoly in the Indian Ocean, they also agreed on an undeclared objective of forming a sort of "military alliance" to block US access to strategic points on the Asian continent's chess board (use of airports, bases for ground troops or the presence of military technicians). Beyond this, the Expo also aims to widen the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, of which Belarus and Afghanistan are also founding members) to include Pakistan and India, while Iran has stated that it will also apply to become a member.

In fact, we are witnessing the formation of a front which is certainly not homogeneous – because economic and strategic interests are rarely unique and don't always coincide – but which is tactically significant on the international scene, given its ability to oppose the Western line-up headed by the USA, and to a lesser extent by Western

Europe, Japan and Australia. This is all the more disturbing because it is not just about control over the marketing routes for “black gold”, or competition for control over international markets, nor even a struggle over currency markets. Above all, this is an attempt to get out of the economic and social disaster produced by the last crisis. Escalating military tensions on one side then the other, the many wars already being fought, the growing number of political and diplomatic crises of which Qatar is just a small example, do not augur well. The recent “incident” whereby a Syrian fighter was downed by America in the skies of Syria speaks volumes about the true meaning of these wars and tensions. Now IS is more or less reduced to nothing and its end is imminent, so the real reasons for the war and the real faces of the actors are emerging more clearly.

Capitalism can only overcome its increasingly deep crisis by the destruction of capital values and reducing the territory under control of its opponent, and wars (increasingly generalised) are the most effective instrument. What we need is war on war: Class war against the wars that the bourgeois class is preparing as a solution to its problem of economic and political survival.

Fabio Damen
19 June 2017

[1] See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-04-16/the-libyan-tragedy-is-not-over> for more on this.

Autonomism – cutting the ground from under Marxism

Introduction

Over the years we have had contact with a number of groups who have been influenced by the ideas of Italian Autonomists in their various forms. Whilst we have points of agreement with them and sometimes find they produce good analyses we have often found it difficult to engage with them especially since attempts to discuss political issues are dismissed as irrelevant because they are mere “ideology”. For them the *terra firma* of the workplace is all that matters. The following article is an attempt to get to grips with some of the ideas behind these groups and which have influenced the political and organisational direction of some of the class struggle organisations that have arisen in recent years.

Autonomism, in which we include Workerism¹, developed as an outcome of Italian workers struggles in the period from the early 60s to the late 70s; the high point being the struggles of the “hot autumn” in 1969. It was always a heterogeneous movement which attempted to correct or update what it saw as the failings of traditional Marxism. Traditional Marxism as they understood it was Stalinism and many began to question what claimed to be Marxism after 1956 when the Hungarian Revolt and Khrushchev’s speech to the CPSU XXth Party Congress exposed some of Stalin’s crimes. The movement consisted essentially of intellectuals who had emerged from the Italian Communist Party (PCI) and the Italian Socialist Party (PSI), together with militants and students grouped round journals and other publications. Gradually they came to the view that Marx’s analysis needed to be either re-focussed or extended to explain the current situation of class composition and class struggle. The movement had a mass following and intervened extensively in both the workers’ struggles and social struggles but never formed a political organisation. This was despite the fact that it was a movement which began by rejecting the *modus operandi* of the existing leftist political parties and unions, in particular the (PCI) and the (PSI). Many militants argued against “Leninist” forms of organisation (by which they meant the top-down structure of the existing left political parties) and for organisation to be rooted in factories and neighbourhoods promoting struggles managed directly by those involved. However, its leading theoreticians always had an ambivalent attitude to organisation and to established leftist parties, which they supposedly opposed. Key figures remained members or returned to both the PCI² and the PSI³ and even argued for continuing to work inside the PCI⁴.

Certain sections of the movement also advocated the armed struggle of the working

class and saw in the guerrilla movements of Latin America (like the Tupamaros in Argentina) something of a model. This led the state to falsely accuse them of being the ideological support for the terrorist Red Brigades (Brigate Rosse) in the so-called “anni di piombo” (years of lead). As a result it was targeted and smashed by state repression in the late 70s with thousands of militants and its main theoreticians imprisoned and hundreds fleeing Italy⁵.

However, some of the leading intellectuals continued theoretical work after the crushing of the movement and attempted to develop the themes of the earlier period and relate them to the developments of the 80s and 90s and in particular the global situation following the collapse of the Russian bloc. A lot of these later writings, particularly those of Antonio Negri, are based on a denial of the defeats which Italian (and other) workers suffered from 1980 onwards and a denial of the theoretical failures of Autonomism. Negri’s later work represents an attempt to fuse Autonomism with post-modernism, a theory which became popular amongst university intellectuals in the 80s. In so doing he made a break with the Autonomism of the 60s and 70s for which he has been criticised by theorists of the earlier period⁶. However, this later work bases itself on many of the fundamental theoretical positions of the earlier period. The break with key aspects of Marxism is contained in the theory of the earlier period as we aim to show in what follows.

However, the Autonomist description of the changes in contemporary capitalism and the changed structure of the working class is largely correct. This has led to parts of Autonomist theoretical analysis, and some of the solutions they proposed, being taken up by some of the new struggle organisations⁷ which have emerged in the present period. Some of their analyses have also found their way into the theory of movements like the “communisation” tendency, libertarian communism and even the writing of popular leftist journalists such as Paul Mason⁸.

The key change in capitalism’s structure over the last 3 decades has been the globalisation of production and mobility of capital worldwide⁹. This has led to the relocation of much of global industrial production to the peripheral countries where capital finds cheaper labour, while in the central capitalist countries the economies have become predominantly service producing. Most work done in the central economies does not produce material commodities and is described, by Autonomist theory, as immaterial production¹⁰. This has led to changes in the structure of the working class. In peripheral countries the proletariat had become massive and composed largely of first generation workers formed from ruined peasantry. In the central countries, on which Autonomism concentrates its focus, the changes have been equally dramatic. Workers have gone from previously stable labouring occupations to precarious employment. Part time working, casual work, non-guaranteed work such as zero hours work, outsourcing, freelance, home working, and continual monitoring of workers’

activities and output by computers, have all become ever more common. In the UK this has led to arrangements like the gig economy where workers are treated as self-employed freelance agents accepting contracts and therefore without any traditional employment rights, such as rights to holidays, healthcare, pensions, maternity leave and so on. At the same time the social wage, for those who are still eligible these benefits, has been savagely cut. The result has been a general reduction of wages which has accelerated since the financial crisis to 2008. The question is how to struggle against all this.

Autonomism argues that the working class is autonomous from capital and favours direct action to oppose capitalism. This can take many forms but the present street battles of the “black bloc” are a legacy of the Autonomist practice of “social antagonism”. However, the problem for Autonomists has always been, and still remains, giving this claimed autonomy a political direction. Autonomist theorists considered a centralised political party an anachronism that belonged to a bygone era. Antonio Negri and other theorists of Autonomism turned to the example of the anarcho-syndicalist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) as a model for organisation in the future¹¹. They argued that a structure organised from below and organised horizontally could unite industrial struggles with social struggles. It could allow liberation to grow in the process of struggle and could create a form of workers power. Although this was not put into practice by the autonomist movement itself this idea and other elements of the autonomist theory have found an echo in the UK.

In the period since the financial crisis of 2008 the failure of the established trade unions to protect workers in the precarious sector has been so blatant that there has been a revival of alternative rank and file unions. This has seen a revival of the IWW and renewed interest in the factory organisations which arose in Germany in the period after World War 1, the AAUD-E¹², which were the general workers union unitary organisations. These organisations were formed in factories and called unitary organisations because they dissolved the political organisation into the factory organisation and hence dispensed for the need for a party. In the decade since the financial crisis there has been a growth in the presence of the IWW in the UK as well as a number of derivative unions such as the Independent Workers of Great Britain (IWGB), United Voices of the World (UVW) and the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU). These unions represent a UK version of the rank and file unions, or Cobas¹³ which arose in Italy in the 80s in opposition to official unions. With all this has come a renewed interest in Autonomism and the concept of horizontal networks of struggle and the idea that a political organisation, or party, would arise out of the struggle itself. What is not properly understood is that the fashionable aspects of Autonomism which are being taken up again today are based on a rejection of key aspects of Marx’s analysis of capitalism. One cannot remove key aspects of this analysis, as the Autonomists do, without undermining the whole structure of Marxism and this

has political consequences which are not being faced.

In what follows we intend to:

- Look critically at four of the key theoretical ideas of Autonomist movement of the 60s and 70s.
- Consider the extension of these ideas in the work of the theoreticians who survived the defeat of the movement.
- Look again at the question of political organisation.

Is the working class autonomous and determining capitalist development?

Mario Tronti, one of the most important early theorists of Autonomism, argued that there were two sides to Marxism. The first was Marxism as a science. This analysed labour power and capital and their interaction while assuming workers are integrated into the capitalist production process. The second side was Marxism as a revolutionary theory. This saw the working class as revolutionary since it refused to be integrated into capital relations. What this division fails to understand is that the two sides are intimately connected and revisions of economic theory necessarily entail political consequences. Autonomist theorists were, however, influenced by the massive class struggles going around them and tailored their analysis to suit what they saw going on before their eyes. In the 60s and 70s workers in Italy (and just there) were refusing union negotiated contracts, striking, not bothering to turn up for work, sabotaging machinery and so on. This led Tronti and others to see the working class as refusing to be integrated into capitalist relations. They placed great stress on what they called a refusal of work and argued this made the working class autonomous of capital. At a more general level, they argued, the working class was autonomous because, while capital needed labour, labour did not need capital. They claimed the second side of Marxism determined capitalist development. Living labour not capital determines capitalist development. Autonomists described this as an inversion of traditional Marxism or the Copernican discovery of Autonomism.

Marx however saw the development of capital as determined by objective developments within the system itself. Capital appears as an autonomous force independent of the will and actions of humans. The system is not under anyone's control but determined by such forces as the law of value and the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. Autonomist theorists, however, see the subjective human forces that struggle against capital's hegemony as determining the development of the system. They claim, for example, that the restructuring of industry which took place in the 70s is empirical evidence of the truth of this contention. Restructuring was, they assert, a capitalist counter-offensive to workers' struggles which exemplified the general thesis that

capital attempts to contain labour but is itself contained and determined by labour.

In terms of the capitalist system Autonomism claims that wages are the independent variable upon which all the other variables in the system depend¹⁴.

A lot of questions arise from this. Is labour, in fact, autonomous in the way it is claimed? It is one thing to act outside trade unions and political parties but quite another to be autonomous from capital. Negri claims the working class refuses capitalist valorisation and instead self-valorised itself¹⁵. What does this mean? If it means labour is independent of the wage this is clearly untrue. Labour needs the wage to survive and will do as long as capitalism exists. A later autonomist writer, Nick Witheford¹⁶, says that labour is only “potentially” autonomous because it can dispense with the wage relation. This is to say labour can become autonomous of capital after the abolition of capitalist relations of production which is so obvious it’s hardly worth saying. But in saying this he is admitting that labour is not autonomous of capital under capitalism. Labour can only survive without the wage while the social wage exists and the social wage can only exist while workers in work are taxed to provide it. The working class is not therefore autonomous of capital.

The question of refusal of work on which the autonomists, and their legatees in the communisation and anarchist milieu, place such emphasis, is also tied up with the existence of the social wage. While absenteeism and sabotage express resistance to capitalism, such resistance does not make those who resist autonomous. It is essentially a negative reaction while those who practice these things remain within the boundaries of capitalism supported by wage labour even if it is not their own.

Another issue which undermines the idea of autonomy is the attitude Autonomists have adopted to nationalist struggles. The movement joined many of the leftist struggles of the 60s and 70s including support for the Vietnamese NLF, while the publication “Potere Operaio” in the 70s called for victory for the PLO, ETA, and IRA¹⁷. This indicates that the movement, or sections of it, did not actually think that the working class as a whole was autonomous or even should be autonomous. Any support for nationalism subjects the autonomy of working class to that of the national bourgeoisie¹⁸. It is the actual denial of autonomy in practice.

The idea that the wage is the independent variable determining all other variables in capitalism, which is a key economic premise in Autonomist theory, is in direct contradiction to what Marx argued in *Capital* Volume 1. Marx writes:

*“To put it mathematically: the rate of accumulation is the independent, not the dependent variable; the rate of wages, the dependent, not the independent, variable.”*¹⁹

Marx could, of course, be wrong but we do not think so. Capitalist production depends

on production of profit and because of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, this entails continual accumulation of capital. The working class is always fighting a rearguard action against the effects of accumulation which entail layoffs, speed-ups or restructuring of production. When capital is restructured the working class is also restructured. The empirical examples of capital responding to workers' struggles, which Autonomists provide²⁰, are invalid when capitalist development is looked at in the longer term. The heavy defeats of the 80s preceded much of the restructuring of the system which has occurred in the last 3 decades. The restructuring of Fiat, for example, was preceded by a 35 day strike in the autumn of 1980 which was defeated. This defeat opened the way for mass layoffs and changes in production methods. In the UK rationalisation of the steel and coal industries were each preceded by bitter strikes provoked by the bourgeois state in order to outflank class resistance. Once the strikes were defeated rationalisation took place. A further example in the UK is the digitisation of the newspaper industry which was preceded by the defeat of a 54 week strike by printers' at Wapping in 1986. The digitisation could only be implemented after the defeat of the print workers. Generally the defeat of a whole series of struggles of the 70s and 80s preceded the globalisation of production and the transformation of the economies of the central capitalist countries into largely service economies. Global industry has been restructured introducing computer control, instant communication, use of robots etc. following an era of defeated workers' struggles. This has not occurred in response to global struggles, refusal of work, absenteeism, sabotage or whatever else the Autonomists claim. The changes themselves have been primarily in response to falling profitability of capital which provokes the drive to increase production of surplus value, not struggles of workers resisting this drive.

However, to properly understand the development of capitalism it is necessary to look at the system as a whole. There is, as Marx maintains, a struggle between the forces of production and the relations of production. The development of the forces of production proceeds in response to the structural contradictions of the system, in particular the falling rate of profit. This is the objective side. The struggles of the working class are part of the struggle within the relations of production, a struggle to resist exploitation. These struggles could be characterised as the subjective side. Capitalist development depends on a dialectic relation between these two sides. Autonomism sees only the subjective side as determinant and consequently Autonomist theorists of the 80s are in complete denial of the defeats of this period. This is a consequence of an idealist analysis which leads to a distorted view of reality. The most important consequence of this is their abandonment of Marx's Labour Theory of Value (LTV).

Labour theory of value rejected

By maintaining the working class is autonomous from capital and a key attribute of this is the refusal both of work and integration into capitalism, Autonomist theorists need

explain the continued survival of capitalist system. Their explanation is that value is also produced outside the labour process and that capital manages to appropriate this value through the action of the state. Mario Tronti argued that labour power produced surplus value before the labour process took place, this was the idea of the so-called "social factory". Antonio Negri extended this idea until he concluded that virtually every human activity produced value. Capital had, he argued, extended the factory until all of society became one big factory, value was produced everywhere and the state was the boss. Therefore, reproduction of labour power, procreation and bringing up children, education, training, recreation, prostitution all become producers of value.

Autonomist theory argues that it corresponds to the change in capital's regime of exploitation, namely the change from formal to real subsumption of labour. Subsumption designates the degree to which labour is integrated into capital's process of value extraction. Real subsumption would describe economies where the wage form is universal and where scale, cooperation, communication, monitoring of workers and organisation of work serve to maximise value extraction. However, the Autonomists extend the idea beyond the workplace to society as a whole. All are exploited and exploitation can no longer be measured by time at work since it occurs continuously over 24 hours. Negri writes:

*"Capital has insinuated itself everywhere, and everywhere attempts to acquire the power to coordinate, commandeer and recuperate value."*²¹

One consequence of this is that the distinction between productive and unproductive labour disappears. All labour produces value at all times. Negri argued there has been a change from the "mass worker" of the post war period to the "social worker," the latter included the unemployed, housewives, students, prostitutes, peasantry etc. All social activity therefore becomes a source of economic surplus. The class battles of the late 60s, according to Negri, had disrupted the functioning of the law of value²².

Autonomists understood that their theories meant that the Law of Value was obsolete. They argued that it was necessary to go beyond Marx and create a new theory of value in order to understand the new situation. In this new situation the state had absorbed civil society and relations of production were enforced by law. Whilst it is true that the state has increasingly played a much greater role in the management and survival of capitalism over the last century than it did in the time of Marx, this has not solved or altered any of the key contradictions of the system. The continual reappearance of economic crises is alone proof of this.

Autonomist claims for this major break with a key element in Marxism thus appear to be simply based on assertions drawn from observation of events in Italy in the period of 1963 to 1980, and are asserted without any attempt at proof. The most important claim, from which a lot of the above follows, is that surplus value is produced outside

the labour process. This needs to be theoretically proven if it is to be taken seriously, but it remains unproven. It is based on the misunderstanding that general domination, which most people in capitalist society suffer, is the same as exploitation, which the working class suffers during the production process. As an assertion it is undermined empirically by the fact that capital consistently attempts to increase the length of the working day or the intensity of work during working hours and always has done so. If exploitation is continuous over 24 hours there would be no reason for capital to do this. The claim that Marx's value theory cannot explain the present and needs to be revised is baseless. Similarly the idea of the social factory is baseless.

If all activity produces value and the distinction between productive and unproductive labour vanishes so does the class analysis of society. Valorisation of capital is no longer the result of material production by the productive working class, and their ability to disrupt the system by withdrawing its labour also vanishes. The materialist understanding that the working class is the agent of revolution, because of its position in the production process as an exploited class, has been abandoned. The struggle for communism, therefore becomes a moral struggle, a utopian struggle. It loses its material base which Marx and Engels were at such pains to establish.

The assertion that the state has absorbed civil society and class relations are now enforced by the state is a further example of the consequence of Autonomism's idealist method. It inverts Marx's materialist view that the state is an emanation of civil society and is a return to Hegel's view that civil society and law were expressions of the state. Again Autonomists make no attempt to prove these assertions. In Marx's view relations of production form the basis of civil society and the state is an expression of these relations. While the state is obviously the agent of the dominant class it is unable to control the contradictions within the system, particularly the falling rate of profit, even if it takes over society's entire capital as the crisis and collapse of the command economies of the former fully integral state capitalist regimes, like Russia, illustrate.

The confusion about Marx's value theory points to a general lack of rigour in economic analysis. It is not therefore surprising to find Autonomist explanations of capitalism's tendency to crisis are equally confused.

Contradictory crisis theory

Marx argues in *Capital* Volume 3 that the lack of surplus value produces the tendency to crisis. The shortage of surplus value springs from the tendential fall in the rate of profit. Autonomists produce two contradictory explanations of crisis. True to their subjectivist method they argue that wage struggles are the motor force which causes the rate of profit to fall²³. This is the familiar "profit squeeze" theory which claims the

problem for capitalism is that workers' consumption is too high thereby depressing profits. On the other hand they take up Rosa Luxemburg's theory of imperialism that capitalism is unable to realise all the surplus value produced within the system itself²⁴. To realise the capital required for accumulation non-capitalist markets are required. Imperialism is the struggle for division of these markets and their resources. This theory boils down to the view that workers' consumption is too low and supports the thesis that the post war recovery was based on high wages which the Fordist organisation of mass production created. Hence the explanation of the crisis is that on the one hand workers' consumption is too high, while on the other it is too low. No attempt is made to reconcile these two contradictory explanations.

In reality a general fall in the rate of profit occurs irrespective of whether the class struggle is intense or non-existent²⁵ which belies the first explanation. The idea that all the surplus destined for accumulation could be consumed and thus realised in non-capitalist countries and their markets is today so absurd it is not worth seriously considering. The higher wages of the post war period were not a clever policy of a cunning Keynesian bourgeois class. Capital will always attempt to keep wages to a minimum no matter in what period of history it operates. The higher wages of the post war period were the result of higher rates of profit which in turn were based on the expansion of the system after the destruction of constant capital and the consequent decrease in the organic ratio of capital which had been brought about by World War Two.

Political organisation

Sergio Bologna,²⁶ one of the most important early theorists of autonomism, in his review²⁷ of Steve Wright's book "Storming Heaven" sums up the key organisational weakness of the autonomist movement as follows:

"The Italian operaisti (autonomists - CWO) aimed to be neither 'class vanguard' nor political class or 'small party' and thus experienced to the bitter end the contradictions of exercising political theory while simultaneously refusing traditional models of organisation."

The movement never aimed to be a vanguard or a party and therefore never formed an organisation or agreed a political platform or even an agreed a critique of bourgeois leftist parties such as the PCI or the PSI. This ensured its political nature remained heterogeneous and allowed intellectuals to put forward different political positions and go in different directions. The lack of clarity on political organisation must also be seen as the most significant factor leading to the movement's demise.

The Autonomist writers did, of course, try to justify their stance on organisation theoretically on the basis of the other positions we have considered above. Negri, for

example, argued that since command by the state had replaced the law of value as the means of dominating the working class, and because of the class' refusal of work made it autonomous from capital, the working class no longer needed direction given by a so-called "Leninist" party. A further argument, which Negri makes, is based on the issue of the supposed passage from formal to real subsumption of labour which we considered above. A "Leninist" party, he claims, belongs to the period of formal subsumption of labour and is, therefore, an anachronism, a distraction in the present period because the structure of social production has changed. It was not needed as director of a passage to socialism since real subsumption made immediate appropriation of accumulated wealth and workers' power is possible. It was not needed for stimulating mass consciousness of the need for communism and projecting a programme for achieving it. The change in the regime of exploitation meant that consciousness was insinuated into working class by reality without the mediation of a party. Real subsumption had simply made the party irrelevant.

Negri's views were, however, changeable. They altered with the development of the Italian workers struggles and after the Fiat Mirafiori occupation in 73, he appeared to revert to a position where a party of some sort was necessary but concluded the party would emerge from the struggle. He saw the IWW as a model for a future organisation as we have already mentioned. We note, however, that the massive Italian class struggles of 1969 and 1973 did not generate a party as he now expected. Rather they died down without leaving any organisational remains.

If a new organisation was required or could be generated from the struggle itself, why did so many of the theoretical leaders remain in the PCI or the PSI? According to Sergio Bologna²⁸ this was to produce a political shift in the workers movement which, he says, consisted primarily of the trade union confederation CGIL²⁹, the PSI and the PCI. This demonstrates that the Autonomist movement did not regard these organisations as arms of capital and therefore enemies of any attempt to overthrow capitalist relations. Despite the theoretically autonomous struggles of workers, specifically against these organisations when they tried to enforce capitalist discipline and wage contracts, the theoreticians of the movement still regarded them as essentially working class organisations which only needed reform. Their critique was confined simply to the party "form" and not to the class nature of the existing parties which defines that form. No surprise then that the likes of Tronti could return to the leadership of Berlinguer's PCI in the 1980s, and is today a Senator of the Italian Republic for the Democratic Party (PD – successor to the PCI and currently in power).

We can agree with those autonomists (particularly of the operaisti wing) that a proletarian revolutionary party has to be built from the bottom up, from the class itself (otherwise it is not a proletarian party) but the key question is how this is to be done and it is a real problem for revolutionaries. Assuming this will arise automatically

out of a billion economic struggles is an easy way to avoid the issue but this cannot be the complete answer to how class consciousness develops. By definition class consciousness is uneven, but at its clearest it involves a wider political, historical view of global capitalism and the revolutionary potential of the class which is subject to exploitation worldwide. Those who hold to this world view need to fight openly and honestly in front of the class in order to create a force which can clearly counteract all the reactionary organisations which, one way or another, will be battling to preserve the system.

Sadly it is autonomism's anti-organisational position which explains why it retains much of its popularity today but we will return to this issue in our conclusion.

Hardt and Negri attempt to marry Autonomism with Postmodernism

Negri³⁰, who founded "Potere Operaio"³¹ and was one of the founders of the journal "autonomia operaia"³² in the early 70s, was also one of the Autonomist theorists falsely imprisoned by the Italian state after the destruction of the movement at the end of the 70s. He continued his writing in prison and cooperated with the US literature professor Michael Hardt, to produce two books, "Empire" and "Multitude" which were published after his release. These books have received widespread acclaim and rekindled interest in Autonomism in general including the movement of the 60s and 70s. While it is true that they represent a break with the writings of "autonomia operaia" and the earlier period, they are in many respects extension of the theoretical positions of that period. Such an extension reveals their break with Marxism more clearly. The main theoretical positions which reappear are:

- The working class is autonomous of capital though it is no longer a class but a multitude.
- Capitalist developments are controlled by struggles of the multitude.
- Society has become a social factory – the factory without walls.
- The Marxist labour theory of value is wrong and must be replaced. Value is produced everywhere.
- There is no distinction between productive and unproductive labour.
- Capitalism's crisis is caused by both a profit squeeze because workers' wages are too high and a realisation problem because wages are too low.

What is new is the attempt to link Autonomism with the postmodernism theory which

became popular in universities during the 80s. Post-modernism held that the economic pillars of modernism which had supported capitalism in the period following World War Two were, Taylorism, Fordism and Keynesianism, and that these had now been superseded. In their place cooperative and communicative systems of production and teamwork using the internet and immaterial labour had been instituted.

Hardt and Negri (H&N) claim that the internet had produced a cyber-proletariat. This new proletariat was engaged in immaterial production and these knowledge workers were producing more value than workers in material production. To explain this H&N admit a new theory of value is required but they do not propose any such theory themselves.³³ If, however, this cyber proletariat is producing more value than was produced before, this meant more surplus value was produced than previously. This assertion creates two problems. Firstly since Marx claimed that the crisis was caused by a shortage of surplus value, and this cyber-proletariat is, we are told, now producing more, a new explanation of crisis was required. Again H&N do not propose any such explanation. Secondly if the system does not tend to crisis, which would be the case if more surplus is being produced, then it would not be necessary for capital to attack wages and conditions. Why then should the working class struggle against the system? If class struggle is not a manifestation of the system's tendency to crisis it must be an act of voluntarism. The creation of communism by the working class ceases to be an objective need springing from the contradictions of the system and becomes a utopian project. Despite the new concept of the cyber proletariat and the multitude the utopianism of the earlier theories is reproduced.

H&N tie the concept of immaterial labour with the concept of the general intellect contained in Marx's fragment on machines in *Grundrisse*³⁴. They claim that this fragment, which is a note written 9 years before *Capital* Volume 1 was published, describes the present period better than the volumes of *Capital* itself. They claim it refutes not only the labour theory of value but also Marx's analysis of crisis in Volume 3 of *Capital*. Immaterial labour is again autonomous from capital but it becomes more than just autonomous. Immaterial labourers, H&N claim, become free agents with their own means of production, namely their brains producing knowledge. Immaterial labour is, they conclude, no longer linked to variable capital. Furthermore, since it is cooperative and depends on horizontal communication it validates itself and makes communism possible.

*"Today productivity, wealth, and the creation of social surpluses take the form of cooperative interactivity through linguistic, communicational, and affective networks. In the expression of its own creative energies, immaterial labour thus seems to provide the potential for a kind of spontaneous and elementary communism."*³⁵

Hence this new cyber proletariat is autonomous and proto-communist. Somehow,

despite autonomy and being spontaneously communism, capital manages to steal all the value produced!

In reality immaterial labour mainly exists in the developed countries and is mostly involved in transferring or recycling value produced by material labour to the pockets of the capitalists in these countries. H&N's multitude is, in reality, divided into productive and unproductive labour just as Marx showed. Immaterial labour exists only because there is material labour elsewhere. Neither is immaterial labour as new to capitalism as H&N imagine. Specialisation of design for buildings, bridges, engines etc. are examples of labour which does not produce a material product but depends on designs being built by others, in other words it depends on a material product being produced somewhere by other workers. If a material product were not produced all the labour which went into these activities would be valueless. Despite H&N's imaginings, what we are seeing is a further division of labour but on a global scale, the division between what Marx called manual and mental labour. As we have discussed elsewhere this mental labour is directly related to variable capital and is ultimately a type of material labour³⁶. All this can be explained by the labour theory of value which does not need replacing.

In the earlier Autonomist theory the idea of the social factory implied the extension of the working class beyond the factory. H&N now replace the working class with the concept of the "multitude"³⁷ which includes more or less everyone even those not engaged in any activity. H&N tell us:

*"The multitude of poor people have eaten up and digested the multitude of proletarians. By that fact the poor have become productive. Even the prostituted body, the destitute person, the hunger of the multitude - all forms of the poor have become productive... The discovery of postmodernity consisted in the reposition of the poor at the centre of the political and productive terrain."*³⁸

The epochal development which H&N claim has occurred in the postmodern period is the ending of imperialism based on the nation state and its replacement by "empire." "Empire" is an all pervading network of power consisting of supra-national and national organisations which dominate through horizontal links which extend everywhere. It is organised in three tiers. In the top tier of power we find the US, which holds hegemony over the global use of force as a type of international police. (The Gulf War of 1990 was an example of a police operation³⁹.) In the second tier we find nation states controlling monetary instruments and international exchanges, World Bank, IMF, WTO organised through the G7, the Paris club, London club, Davos meetings etc. In the third tier we find the UN, NGOs and more nation states employing cultural and "biopolitical"⁴⁰ power⁴¹. Empire, however, has no centre and no margins but is organised through a network of power centres. This structure has, we are told, been created by the capitalist class in

reaction to the proletarian internationalism of the autonomous multitude.

What we see in this is the description of a unipolar world where imperialism has become a single universal power in which many nations combine. This looks like the achievement of K Kautsky's "ultra-imperialism" phase, which he predicted would follow the phase of imperialism. It could be argued that this is what appeared to exist in the period when "empire" was being written, namely after the collapse of the Russian bloc. This is, however, a dangerous illusion. We intend to make only a few observations on this. Firstly, the decline of imperialism based on the nation state has been a feature of the period since WW2; it is not new. The war led to two imperialist blocs opposing each other, that of the US and that of Russia. Minor states were only able to pursue their imperialist interests within the framework of one or other imperialist bloc. Secondly, H&N see the new global structure they describe as superseding imperialism. They write:

*"Imperialism creates a straitjacket for capital – obstructs capitalist development ... Capital must overcome imperialism."*⁴²

This is almost exactly the position of Kautsky who wrote in 1914:

*"Imperialism is thus digging its own grave. From a means to develop capitalism, it is becoming a hindrance to it."*⁴³

Imperialism is digging the grave of capitalism but not, as Kautsky thought, because imperialism is something left over from earlier history which capitalism had to get rid of. Imperialism is the form capitalism has developed into from the very process of concentration and centralisation of capital Marx analysed in *Capital*. Thus capitalism has produced imperialism. Imperialism is based on same economic interests and conflicts of economic interests that distinguish capitalism but these contradictions have been taken to a higher level which draws in the entire planet. These contradictions are, in fact, as sharp and potentially violent as ever. The collapse of the Russian bloc has not meant imperialism is superseded. The wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where the US, the so-called police power, failed in its attempt to assert its interests, provide empirical refutation of H&N's depiction of the world. Instead we are seeing potential new imperialist blocs arising to challenge US domination such as the European Union and also China and Russia. Imperialism has in no way been superseded. The main point we draw from H&N books is the unrealistic and wildly optimistic picture of the potential for revolution which they locate in the multitude. The multitude, which we have already noted is autonomous and spontaneously communist, has caused capital to construct this global "empire" because capital fears the multitude's internationalism⁴⁴ and its resistance to domination. The multitude is also capable, of itself, constructing a counter empire⁴⁵ and can go straight to communism without any transition period. H&N explain:

"Empire creates a greater potential for revolution than did the modern regimes of power because it presents us ... with an alternative: the set of all the exploited and subjugated, a multitude directly opposed to Empire, with no mediation between them."⁴⁶

All this reinforces the view which bedevilled the earlier Autonomist movement that political organisation was not required. What organisation is required will develop from the struggle itself.

"... This new militancy does not simply repeat the organisational formulas of the old revolutionary working class."⁴⁷

Need for political organisation

The idea that the economic struggle will transform itself into a political struggle without any intervention of a political organisation, or at least it will generate the required organisation itself is today quite common. It is supported by struggle groups like the Angry Workers of the World (AWW)⁴⁸ who, in a text on their website, repeat uncritically the ideas of the Autonomists on organisation which we have criticised above. The party, we read, is a hangover from a previous period. It was supposed to bring consciousness to the class struggle from somewhere outside it. The economic struggle, they say, will lead workers to discover the political nature of capitalism.

Consciousness is of course a product of the economic struggle and the general experience of the existence of the working class. However, the process is more complex and has an internal dynamic. The daily class struggle will lead some workers to understand the political nature of capitalism but these workers must necessarily be a minority. The question is how can this consciousness be generalised and how can it be converted into an attack on the system itself, and the replacement of capitalist production relations with communism. The class struggle itself, even if linked to social struggles, is not enough to produce this. No permanent economic bodies of the class can exist without being integrated at some point into the capitalist state (and it the fate of most rank and file unions too). An independent, dare we say autonomous, body of the class has to arise from a political rejection of all reformist attempts to buy it off. Such an organisation has to give itself the tools to link with the economic struggle and give it an historical direction as part of the fight for communism.

The working class needs to produce a movement strong enough to seize political power from the capitalist state and expropriate capital. For the linking of the economic struggle and the political struggle, for the generation of class wide communist consciousness and for a programme for gaining political power a class party is required. Such a party is a part of the class - it is not outside the class - hence the development of

communist consciousness is a dynamic process within the class. To imagine this party or a similar political organisation will arise in a spontaneous way from the economic struggle is mere dreaming. We point again to the fact that the massive struggles of Italian workers of 69 and 73 led to no such organisation emerging.

Today the global working class is larger than ever before which makes the potential for revolution better than ever before. However this class is fragmented in ways which give capital the upper hand. It does not yet understand itself as a global working class, nor as a class for itself. It needs a global struggle and global political organisation to become a class that can create world communism.

And this global political organisation will not be a repeat of the parties of the past. It will lead the way, inspire the fight, and argue for the communist programme that is the product of the centuries of struggle of the working class. This is by no means to argue that the political organisation can complete the process itself. The building of a new mode of production which is based on the self-activity of all people cannot be delegated to any body – not even a working class party. It is only through the mass organs of working class life that a new society can be built. Communism cannot be brought in by decree but is the living product of a mass collective consciousness struggling towards new forms of social organisation.

The question of organisation is today crucial and Autonomist theory, by condemning all political parties – and by extension any organised political struggle – as obsolete, has thrown the baby out with the bathwater. It has no answer to the complex question of how the daily resistance to the system becomes the means to politically overthrow it. Furthermore in its attempt to rewrite key aspects of Marxism, Autonomism, is undermining the very theoretical framework which we need to use to overthrow capitalism and build communism.

CP

Notes

1 Workerism is the translation of Operaismo, the name by which the movement was known in Italy in the 60s and 70s.

2 Mario Tronti rejoined the PCI in 1967. For more on his political odyssey see the section on “Political Organisation” in this article.

3 Raniero Panzieri remained a member of the PSI and was, at one time, a member of its central committee editing its theoretical journal *Mondo Operaio*.

4 Mario Tronti in his pamphlet “Lenin in England” argued for work inside the PCI to “save it from reformism.”

5 After the assassination of the Italian Prime minister Aldo Moro by the Red Brigades in 1978, the Italian state turned on the Autonomist movement claiming it provided the intellectual justification for

the Red Brigades' campaign of terror. Thousands were imprisoned on false charges including Antonio Negri one of the leading theorists of the movement. Negri was subsequently elected as an MP, while in prison which allowed him immunity from imprisonment and he then escaped to France. After most of the charges against him were shown to be false he returned to Italy and served out the remainder of his sentence.

6 Negri's work in the 80s on has been criticised by other Autonomist theoreticians. For example Sergio Bologna who writes in the 80s: "Negri washes his hands of the continued difficulties of the mass worker to ply the traditional trade of the theorist in possession of some grand synthesis." Quoted in *Storming Heaven* Steven Wright (Pluto Press). The entire book can be found at libcom.org

7 For example the "Angry Workers of the World" (AWW) <https://angryworkersworld.wordpress.com/>

8 Paul Mason's book *Post Capitalism* is reviewed in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 07. See [http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-02-21/post-capitalism-via-the-internet-according-to-paul-mason-%E2%80%93dream-or-reality](http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-02-21/post-capitalism-via-the-internet-according-to-paul-mason%E2%80%93dream-or-reality)

9 We have analysed this in scores of text from this <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2003-03-01/on-class-composition-and-recomposition-in-the-globalisation-of-capital> to this <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-13/class-composition-in-the-crisis> as well as our latest analyses of the gig economy like <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2016-10-21/the-gig-economy-capitalism%E2%80%99s-new-normal>

10 In the UK 80% of the economy is classed as services.

11 See Michael Ryan "The Theory of Autonomy in Negri's other writings."

12 The AAUD-E (General Workers Union – unitary organisation, whose theorist was Otto Rühle. <http://libcom.org/history/councilist-movement-germany-1914-1935-history-aaud-e-tendency-grupo-de-comunistas-de-con>

13 Cobas short for "Comitati di base" base committees or rank and file unions. Recognition of Cobas as negotiators by capital resulted in their integration into capitalist management of labour placing them in a similar position to the established unions. See <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-03-21/two-comments-on-recent-events-around-sicobas-in-italy>

14 See A Negri "Marx beyond Marx"

15 See A Negri "Domination and Sabotage" published 1978.

16 See Nick Witheford "Autonomous Marxism and the information society" *Capital & Class* 52

17 Quoted in Steve Wright *Storming Heaven* p. 66 quoted in *Aufheben* #11

18 For an expansion on this see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2010-09-15/the-national-question-today-and-the-poisonous-legacy-of-the-counter-revolution>

19 K Marx *Capital* Vol 1 Chapter 25 p 581 [Progress Publishers].

20 The restructuring of the large factories in northern Italy in the 60s and early 70s was seen as an example of capital reorganising itself in response to class struggles.

21 A Negri "The politics of subversion: a manifesto for the 21st century"

22 A Negri "Crisis of the planner state: communism and revolutionary organisation."

23 This was the position of Mario Tronti

24 See Antonio Negri "Empire" p. 225

25 See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 06 "Piketty Marx and Capitalism's dynamics" <http://www.leftcom.org/files/2015-07-15-revolutionary-perspectives.pdf>

26 Sergio Bologna was one of the important theorists of the movement. He participated in Quaderni Rossi and Cronache Operaie in 1964, before founding Classe Operaia with Mario Tronti, Toni Negri and Romano Alquati

27 See Sergio Bologna <https://libcom.org/library/review-storming-heaven-sergio-bologna>

28 See Sergio Bologna <https://libcom.org/library/review-storming-heaven-sergio-bologna>

29 General confederation of Italian labour. Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro

30 A Negri started as a teacher of philosophy before he took to political writing. He is still considered an expert on Spinoza.

31 Potere Operaio means workers' power. The group published newspapers and leaflets distributed in the large factories of northern Italy from 1968 - 73

32 Autonomia Operaio means workers autonomy. It existed from 76 to 78 and published a journal of the same name.

33 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p. 29

34 K Marx "Grundrisse" p.704

35 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.294

36 See RP 09 Review of Guglielmo Carchedi "Behind the crisis."

37 Apparently the concept of the multitude comes from Spinoza who Negri claims was the seminal influence on Marx rather than Hegel.

38 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.158

39 This is a complete misunderstanding of events. The motive for the war was control of the oil supplies of the region and ensuring the dollar remained the currency of the oil trade. The motive was imperialistic not the violation of international law.

40 This is a concept borrowed from Michel Foucault, the French sociologist. It appears to mean domination through internal means via control of the consciousness of the multitude.

41 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.309

42 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.234

43 K. Kautsky "Ultra imperialism" <https://www.marxists.org/archive/kautsky/1914/09/ultra-imp.htm>

44 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.43

45 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.xv

46 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p.393

47 Hardt & Negri "Empire" p. 413

48 Angry Workers of the World reproduce the main arguments on organisation. See <https://angryworkersworld.wordpress.com/2014/07/30/general-thoughts-on-relation-between-capitalist-development-class-struggle-and-communist-organisation/>

N. Ossinsky's Critique of State Capitalism in Russia

(from *Kommunist* No 1 April 1918)

Introduction

This is our third translation from *Kommunist* No 1 the journal of the "left Communists" which appeared briefly in the spring of 1918 to register the concerns of its supporters about certain developments in the Russian revolution which they saw as dangerous to its future. The previous two documents (both by Karl Radek) plus our introduction to the journal *Kommunist* can be found on our website and in our journal *Revolutionary Perspectives* 09. For the website see; <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-17/an-epitaph-for-the-october-revolution>
<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-04-02/radek-on-the-international-situation-in-spring-1918>

Valerian Obolensky (1887-1938) is more famous under his revolutionary name of Nikolai Ossinsky (or Osinsky). He participated in the 1905 Revolution and joined the Bolsheviks. He was imprisoned by the Tsarist regime in 1910 but was on the streets of Moscow to take part in the 1917 Revolution. In December that year he became the first Chair of the Supreme Economic Council (Vesenkha) which also included Bukharin, Lomov and Vladimir Smirnov. All of them were future participants in the *Kommunist* project. Vesenkha was set up "apparently at the behest of the factory committee leadership" [R.V Daniels *The Conscience of the Revolution* p.84] to coordinate the socialisation of the economy that was already underway from the bottom up by the various factory committees which had emerged in the course of 1917. At this point in time Lenin enthusiastically endorsed the Left Communists' approach. The day before Vesenkha was set up Lenin wrote "*There was not and could not be a definite plan for the organisation of economic life. Nobody could provide one. But it could be done from below, by the masses, through their experience. Instructions would, of course, be given and ways indicated but it was necessary to begin simultaneously from above and from below.*" [Collected Works (Moscow 1964) Volume 26 pp.365-6]

This was no one off. From the start of the October Revolution right through the winter of 1917-18 Lenin constantly hammered on the theme that:

"Creative activity at the grassroots is the basic factor of the new public life. Let the workers' control at their factories. Let them supply the villages with manufactures in exchange for grain... Socialism cannot be decreed from above. Its spirit rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach: living creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves." [op. cit. p. 288]

At the Seventh Congress of the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in March 1918 he was still arguing that

"... socialism cannot be implemented by a minority, by the Party. It can be implemented by tens of millions when they have learned to do it for themselves." [Collected Works Volume 27 p. 135]

However, by this time there was a growing mismatch between socialist intentions and the need for economic survival in the face of the horrendous economic situation which the Soviet power had inherited from the Provisional Government. It is this that is the target of Ossinsky's articles in *Kommunist*.

Basically he sticks to the position that the Bolsheviks appeared agreed on at the start of the revolution: that socialism cannot be decreed from above, not even by a working class party, but must be the product of the initiative of the working class itself. And indeed the initiative for the socialisation of industry came initially from the workers themselves who took over their factories in many places (often after the employer fled) and demanded it be "nationalised" (i.e. that the Soviet power took on responsibility for keeping production going).

The consequences of workers' management of the factories were not always positive through a combination of ignorance and lack of experience. In the cruel situation in which the new Soviet regime found itself getting production up was essential to overcome a dire economic crisis. This brought the majority of Bolsheviks to take an instrumentalist and productionist approach to the issue. The "productive forces" had to be developed but these were seen (as was common throughout a Social Democratic movement dominated by the ideas of those like Kautsky who saw the productive forces primarily in technological terms) as being all about machines and not about people.

Ossinsky opposed all this. He argued that the only road to socialism had to be based on worker initiative, however long that took. And if the working class could not achieve socialism on its own initiative then it clearly wasn't ready for it. One thing was certain; bringing in capitalist management techniques would not be temporary but permanent, as workers would never learn to run things themselves. Management would dominate workers, not the other way round.

Ossinsky also criticised the direction of economic policy as leading to "state capitalism". This gives him the honour of using the term first to describe the direction of policy of the new society. However, two points need to be made about this. The first is that he can quite clearly see that "nationalisation" is not socialism but is perfectly compatible with a capitalist regime (here he was repeating Engels from the 1880s). However the state capitalism he was criticising in 1918 was more specific. It was one where the state and private enterprise would enter into a profit-sharing partnership. This was proposed but did not actually take place as footnote 11 makes clear. By the time the article came to be published the Bolshevik

majority had decided to proceed without the assistance of the old capitalists. Lenin never claimed that they were seriously building socialism in an isolated Russia. At the most the Bolsheviks were carrying out a holding operation until the world revolution arrived. However its failure condemned the Bolsheviks to create a new form of state capitalism, a bureaucratic command economy which did not do away with the capital-wage labour relationship and which tragically, in time, came to sully the very name of socialism itself.

Perhaps Ossinsky's biggest mistake in this document was his identification of the social retreat on the production front with the backward step on the international front represented by the signing of the Treaty of Brest Litovsk. It is entirely understandable that he did this since the Left Communists had first come together to oppose signing the Treaty. However they had already lost that particular battle and within two months Bukharin and Radek would be confessing the error of their position on the Treaty. By associating his penetrating analysis of the social direction of the Revolution with opposition to the Treaty, Ossinsky undermined the strength of his own argument and gave an easier target for the majority to exploit. Lenin could now lump his criticism with the other "revolutionary phrasemongers" and ridicule his fears.

In a savage and, at times, deliberately misleading, polemic Lenin concluded that *"Only the development of state capitalism, only the painstaking establishment of accounting and control, only the strictest organisation and labour discipline will lead us to socialism. Without this there is no socialism."* [Speech to the All-Russia CEC, Moscow, April 29 1918 (but not published until 1920) in *Collected Works* Volume 27 p.297]

There is much more to be said on this identification of state capitalism as a step on the road to socialism. It is a view held by many so-called socialists (Trotskyists and Stalinists etc) today but the experience of the Russian revolution has taught us that state capitalism was not only not a step on the road to socialism but its very opposite for the reasons Ossinsky gives here. By undermining the initiative of the masses and replacing the old bourgeoisie with a new class of "commissars" the essential basis of the mode of production could not be changed. Capital and wage labour still confronted each other even if that capital was now in the hands of the state.

History has now vindicated Ossinsky on this issue but in April 1918 the Left Communists were a small minority lacking deep roots in the working class. Had the workers' revolution been extended to the more advanced parts of Europe in the years that followed (and thus given it a springboard for a world revolution) the policy might have been reversed, but the imperialist invasions and support for the Whites from 1918-20 transformed the agenda into one of military and economic survival. Productionism gradually replaced the social experiment of workers' control and the Bolshevik military victory by 1921 could not disguise the fact that capitalist relations still prevailed albeit in a new and unprecedented form.

The Construction of Socialism

1

"The new orientation" is currently being carried out by the majority of our party. We are not talking about foreign policy, but about domestic policy, in particular economic policy.

This orientation, the author of which is Comrade Lenin, consists in the following. Approximately until the end of January 1918 we experienced a period of acute civil war, the period of collapse of the old political and economic order and the forces that defended it. Today this period is over. It is time to actively begin the "*organic construction*" [1] of a new society. On the one hand, we must build socialism. On the other, we must establish the order that everyone wants and end confusion, disorganisation, and disorder. By assuming that we hold power, that our enemies are defeated, we must not be afraid to use the forces who were once our enemies. We must make the intelligentsia work instead of carrying out sabotage. They sell themselves in the service of capital. We have to buy them too. Within the intelligentsia we especially need the organisers of production, the "captains of industry" who organised the economy for capital. Like the commanders of the Tsarist army that we must solicit to help us organise the Red Army, we must ask the leaders of the trusts to organise socialism, by paying them whatever the price.

"*Learning and organising socialism through the organisers of trusts*" is one of the slogans of Comrade Lenin, another being: "*put an end to disorder*". From top to bottom, within the structures that govern the different branches of the economy, disorder, idleness and flight thrive on this rotten ground. "*Do not steal, do not be lazy, make strict account of everything* "; these simple petty-bourgeois recommendations must become our main slogans. [2] We must teach everyone, employees, workers, civil servants, not only to consume, but also to work. For this we need self-discipline and tribunals, to strengthen the power of the Commissars elected by the soviets which must work and not make speeches. There is a need to intensify work through the introduction of piece-rate payments and bonuses in the factories, the railways, and so on. Perhaps it is necessary to introduce Taylor's American system [3], which links piece work payments and payment by the hour: you pay not only according to the quantity of products, but also according to the speed of their manufacture.

The supporters of the "new orientation" claim that all of this represents the construction of socialism, that this new vision of political tasks depends only on the fact that a new period *within the country* has begun and that it is an organic period. Yet all these new trends correspond to the conclusion of the peace, a retreat in the face of international capital which the annexationist peace in fact was, in the *domestic* concessions made to foreign imperialism resulting from it. Indeed war is waged not just to seize territories, but also to subjugate them to the tentacles of capital. The annexationist peace was concluded by the imperialists to make use of the economy of the defeated country. And even in the head

of Comrade Lenin, the new organic “socialist” period requires new relations with foreign capital from which he wishes to obtain *money, engineers, weapons, military instructors, and even military support*. It is the same with the formation of a so-called “Red” Army, but with the close – too close and dangerous – collaboration of Tsarist officers and generals.

2

And then, we will be asked, in your opinion, isn’t the critical period of the overthrow of bourgeois society now over? Do you deny the need to actively build and put in order our “Socialist” homeland? We do not deny either. But for us the end of this acute period has another meaning entirely. And we think we need *another* construction, *another* kind of order to that advocated by the majority of our party.

The intense period in which the military forces of the bourgeoisie (White Guards, Kaledin’s forces, etc. [4]) have been crushed is over; as is the sabotage by the bourgeoisie, and by the intelligentsia. In addition, the acute period of the destruction of the bourgeois state and economic order, old justice, zemstvos [5] and municipalities, banks, the capitalist economy and landowners, etc is complete. But the period of acute class antagonism between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is not over; it cannot end like this. After having overcome the bourgeoisie, the workers cannot conclude peace with it; they must eliminate it completely as a class; after having broken the armed forces and class bases of the bourgeoisie, we cannot co-operate with what is left of its organised forces maintaining the remains of bourgeois social relations; we cannot make a pact with the bourgeoisie as a class.

We must use the knowledge and experience of the former mercenaries of the bourgeoisie, its organisers, its technical specialists, its scholars, etc. (the bourgeoisie itself and the capitalists have little of such knowledge). But we have to use them *in our way* by breaking their organised class ties, their relationships with the bourgeoisie and the bourgeois order. We have to get them to work in new social relationships, as workers of the whole society under the power of the workers and peasants; we have to dissolve them into the ranks of the latter. And our concrete work as well as the “organic construction” of socialism must be carried out in another way. The organisers of the trusts cannot and will never build socialism. It can be realised only by the creativity of the proletariat itself, through its gigantic efforts and with the technical assistance of the intelligentsia.

One should not even think of *peaceful* work in bodies led by the petty bourgeois. Above all, it is impossible because of the external situation, of the all-out and powerful offensive of imperialism. If what we are building is *socialism*, this structure will inevitably be linked to the struggle, to resisting the ambitions of foreign imperialism. And even this construction, such as it is, simply cannot come about via the detailed and mechanical petty-bourgeois directives imposed by just anyone. The former servants of capital cannot simply move the

workers like lifeless puppets; the working masses must develop their own initiatives and activities. During this construction process the workers must organise and develop their strength. Socialism will thus have a firm foundation and it will not be possible to eliminate it if the new economy is implemented by the proletariat, if it is subject to it as master, if mastering and organising it is taken on by the workers themselves.

We are not talking about a passive activity carried out under the direction of capitalism's former servants and the establishment of "socialism" by them as in the trusts, but a voluntary construction of socialism by the workers with the technical assistance of the intelligentsia and a struggle of the proletariat for socialism against enemies both at home and abroad (sometimes defensive sometimes offensive, this will depend on the situation) – that is our position.

3

First of all, we would like to make some general comments on the organisation of production, especially in capitalist society.

One of the most characteristic features which stands out from the activity of capital in production, is the fact that all the elements, all the aspects, of the process of production acquire some value here which, by uniting, increases and forms capital which then produces surplus value.

This concerns, in the first place, the labour power that is purchased as a commodity entering into capital and consumption; its exploitation creates new surplus value, while the initial value, that of the means of production (machines, materials, etc.) is retained, and 'transferred' into the goods produced. This is characteristic of the labour force which is the source of the alleged economic superiority of capitalism, its power (*"Kommando des Kapitals"*, Marx [6]).

In the capitalist factory, the worker does not so much use the means of production to manufacture products as the means of production, converted into capital, exploits and drains the worker by extracting surplus value. This is why, in a large factory, the agents of capital, those who embody its eyes and ears (directors, engineers, workshop foremen, etc.), organise not just the technical process of production, but also work as a "concrete" activity producing use value, and utilising labour power, the extortion of "abstract" labour from workers, an expenditure of energy that creates exchange value. This latter aspect is essential. And in this sense, for them, the free man has no will of his own. He is only a particular commodity, a living thing, a source of exchange value, of golden juice. Yes, this commodity is sold for money, it must no longer "speak". And this is why the main task of all engineers, technicians, and supervisors is to make the best use of this commodity and, as much as possible, draw its precious juice from it. That is why their power over the labour

force must be unlimited.

The management of a large plant is always *centralised*, concentrated in one place, due to the fact that such technical concentration is necessary for capitalism; moreover, it is *dictatorial* because that is what the production of surplus value requires.

There is another aspect linked to it but is the main aim of capitalist production. For the capitalist, it is important to use a purchased commodity: the labour force. It is also important to have a hold over the possessor of this commodity. The worker possesses it, and even the door to it and it rules the market. That is why the capitalist tries to create a situation where, in ensuring capitalist domination and the unlimited right to exploit, he maintains the worker as a living thing and enslaves him, as the owner of the commodity and of the labor-power, to extract the most golden juice from him to give to the capitalist. According to Marx, this is ensured by the transformation of the wage, that is to say the value of the workforce, into the value of labour. The worker is not paid by being hired for a certain time, for example, a month or two weeks. He is paid by the hour, by piecework, he gets bonuses, and so on.

The proletarian – as a person who has no capital and who is not interested in producing surplus-value (because it exhausts him and it is not for his profit) – conceives production and its work especially from a social point of view. As a conscious member of the class of industrial workers, he sees the factory as a social production which produces use values and which, one day, will eventually be useful to society. Thus he considers work as the social function of the production of goods. He has the weakness to consider himself a human being and member of society. Even as a holder of the commodity, he is not at all interested in this labour power which prematurely wears him out.

But such a position cannot suit the capitalist: for him it is important to break up the workers, to reduce them to a commodity which would sell its labour power for a penny. This reinforces the power of capital and makes it easier to extract surplus-value from workers. This is why the authoritarian and hierarchical management system of the capitalist enterprise is closely linked with piece work, bonuses, “profit-sharing” and, finally, a synthesis of all these processes, with the “Taylor system” (which is above all that of forced labour).

4

Let’s look now at how the comrades of the majority of the party want to “build socialism”. They offer a form of organisation of production which can be described thus: one organises, for example, the industry building coaches and trains [7]; and for this purpose all the factories which produce coaches and trains are declared state-owned. We thus form an enterprise, a state trust. From the outside this factory has the appearance of a

limited company whose shares (or their majority) belong to the State. But to “buy” the participation of “captains of industry” and trust managers, either we have to sell them some shares, or this limited liability company issues bonds for which a defined interest rate is paid once (as opposed to shares where the dividends are variable and dependent on the annual profit). It is with these obligations that one buys the capitalist organisers. We should note in this connection that we not only buy the capitalists, but we are *thus buying again* the nationalised factories. This is not the cancellation, liquidation of the old capital stock, but their repurchase by bonds in place of the shares. The co-owners of the company, the shareholders, have become its creditors.

If they are reimbursed for *all or part* of their capital, is another question. In any case, they will receive at least part of their capital; moreover, they will benefit by exchanging shares for bonds or – “bribes”.

How will such a trust be managed? It will surely be fairly centralised. It will be concentrated in the hands of a nucleus which will consist of representatives of the State, of messieurs “the captains of industry” (who will also represent the creditors, bondholders), and representatives of the trade unions. Any initiative on the organisation and management of the undertaking shall be the responsibility of the “organisers of trusts”; because we do not seek to *educate* them, into becoming workers, but will *learn from them*. Naturally in each factory the management will be centralised and authoritarian with regard to the rank and file. The centre will appoint the directors from whom, will perhaps arise the controller-commissars, the “archangels”, as Comrade Krylenko [8] puts it. Their power will not be controlled by the factory workers: at best, the workers’ committees will have the right to complain about them to a higher authority. We will no longer need to develop workers’ control; everything can be controlled from the centre because it will be made up of representatives of the workers’ and peasants’ authorities and professional managers. It is true that we can learn from these gentlemen the capitalists; it does not matter since the students will be able to control their masters.

In this case, the organisation of industrial work is also edifying. Its enough just to react and “resolve conflicts”! But first of all, to work! The centre will deal with the organisation of production; the ordinary worker must not forget that it is primarily labour power (himself) which has to be used in the most intensive manner. The workers have not yet demonstrated their social maturity, they have not yet given assurance about production, nor married their emancipation from capitalism to an increase in labour productivity: This is why they must not be allowed to manage production and forced to work through material stimulation: paid by piece work and, probably, with the introduction of Taylorism. Since there are no more capitalists, there is no danger. In addition, it is necessary to make propaganda amongst them for self-discipline, professional tribunals, performance standards, etc. It is necessary to pull the strings from above and incite the workers below to submit to their direction; and we ourselves, must submit too. All this is not dangerous: the working class has the power and the organisers of the trusts will be no more than

masters and instructors.

5

Is it true that there is no danger? And what will or might happen in the course of such a “construction of socialism”? We think that it is a very dangerous road that has little to do with socialism.

First, if one considers the construction of socialism as nationalisation of enterprises, it must be seen that nationalisation *as such*, that is, the transfer of enterprises to state property, does not mean socialism at all. In Prussia the railways are in the hands of the State, but nobody asserts that this was a transitional step towards socialism.

For nationalisation to have such a meaning and to become socialisation, it requires above all, the organisation of the economy of nationalised enterprises on the basis of socialism, that is, that capitalist control is eliminated and that, in the organisation of the enterprise there is no opportunity for it to regain control. Secondly, social power must be in the hands of those who possess the means of production, that power must be proletarian. How are these conditions faring?

The *second condition* already exists. So far we have the dictatorship of the proletariat and the poorest peasantry. Is this definite? If this question means: “Is there a threat of a restoration of the power of the conciliatory faction of the intelligentsia and the constitutional democratic bourgeoisie?” – the answer is no. But if we mean that there might be a tendency towards degeneration of the semi-proletarian dictatorship and its transformation into the political domination of the semi-proletarian, half-petty bourgeois mass, the answer is yes. Such a danger exists. As can be seen in the “Theses on the Current Situation” published in this issue [9], the economic and international consequences of peace create a tendency of this kind and can be overcome only by a resolute class policy for the *coherent construction of true socialism*. In the course of such a construction, the working class, which is currently suffering from some blows, must organise and strengthen itself. If it does not, if it is pulled in another direction the degeneration of the dominant political power in Russia, Soviet power, will be inevitable. This is why, to a large extent, to answer the question: “Can we exercise power through nationalisation as a step towards socialism?”, it will be necessary to see *how production is organised*, will it be based on socialism and will it organise and push the proletariat onto a socialist path?

We have a responsibility to examine the form of production that is proposed by the majority of the party. Its external, legal framework is nationalisation. We have already said that, in itself, this is not socialism. In addition, the form of a public limited company which is proposed to be given to state trusts is purely the fruit of financial capital and state capitalism. The public limited company is the most appropriate form used by financial capital to unite the banks with industry.

Here this form may be an accidental circumstance (although in our view, this is not the case). But it is not an accident that “a bribe” in the form of a bond issue, will be granted to the organisers of the trusts [10]. A good *personal* remuneration would have been enough if we had hired them as simple instructor-organisers. But the fact is that we appointed them as representatives of a class, and a “bribe” (specifically, the repayment) is given to them all. Thus, on the one hand, a concession is made to this class which reinforces its social power, and on the other, it consolidates the link between these instructors and their class, the bourgeoisie. They not only play the role of employees of the Soviet Republic, but also act as representatives of financial capital. In addition they often take part in the future trusts as official bondholders. And since these bondholders are international bankers who already hold the shares of factories and that they will do business, with the endorsement of Mr. Mechtcherski [11] and company (“the organisers of trusts”), it is obvious that there is a real link, a “blood” link with foreign financial capital. This is why the system of compulsory borrowing and limited liability is not a coincidence: for the “organisers of trusts” this system is a necessary part of the transaction that links them to foreign capital and may become the bridge through which the latter can get back into “socialised” industry. From this point of view there is already danger that our “masters” are not helping us to build socialism, but surreptitiously create real *capitalist* trusts to carry out their class activities.

But, for the moment, this remains superficial and concerns only the relations with the “outside” capitalist world. However, the shifts in this direction are extremely dangerous, especially today where the tentacles of foreign bankers and the bayonets of imperialist coalitions (which they direct) surround us, to the extent that any connection with them can very quickly turn into submission. It is this external aspect which is the most important, alongside the maintenance of the dictatorship and the guiding power of the proletariat and not that of the capitalists in the internal organisation of production.

What is the situation? It is very sad. We propose to the masses of proletarians to consider themselves solely as workers in the professional and technical sense of the word. First and foremost, worry only about work. Take on board petty-bourgeois commands; these are now your main slogans. Don’t worry about the enterprise or its activity. These gentlemen, the organisers of production will “teach” you. Everything will be decided by the centre. Your social task will be reduced to the participation in the elections of leaders who will defend your interests, and passively agreeing to the introduction of “discipline at work” and keeping order in the workplace. Here, of course, it is obvious that even the *centralisation* of management has its autocratic character. The directors sent to the factories have total power and the right to demand complete obedience: this will be how discipline and order are carried out (see the decree on the running of the railways).

Will the workers’ leaders participate in the management of companies alongside the businessmen? Will the capitalists succeed in ensuring the proletariat has a real power

of command over production? We doubt it, especially if the proletariat as a class is transformed into a passive element, the object and not subject of the organisation of work for production. Labour leaders can only draw their strength from their direct link with the active masses. Thus, this workers' bureaucracy will play the role of passive pupil of these gentlemen representatives of capital, and it will be the most adept in the "business" commandments of Smiles [12]. We are creating here the surest way to get capital back (especially since there is strong external pressure) in its old place.

Finally, we must take a third point on board. To encourage the zeal of the workers at work, piecework and time and motion studies (calculating how long a task should take, the Taylor system) are introduced. We have already spoken of the influence of this form of wage on the unity of the class and on the consciousness of the workers. These forms were invented by the capitalists to break proletarian solidarity. They create competition and division among the workers. They lead to the domination of personal, selfish interests over common class interests. They transform workers into small traders of their own labour power. They are the best way to plant petty-bourgeois psychology and influence in the working masses and also to simply transform the most experienced workers into smallholders. They force increased attention on vocational work in the workshops at the expense of social tasks. The worker tries to "receive" a maximum per day and no longer has either the time or the interest to think about anything else. Considering the fatigue and the general overwork of the current workers, it must be said that all these capitalist temptations will enormously increase the passivity of the class, the inaction of the Russian proletariat. And all this, on the one hand at a time of a resolute offensive by world imperialism and, on the other, on the eve of the decisive battle for which we must always be ready!

We are not talking about the influence of all this on the situation of the unemployed and on the relations between the employed proletarians and the unemployed. The prospects are dismal everywhere: the differentiation within the proletariat, the appearance of a working class aristocracy indifferent to politics, alongside those who are unlucky and jealous and finally a general passivity. Under such conditions, the participation of capitalists in the organisation of production promises nothing good.

6

In general, what then are we promised? Suppose that the workers approve the new system (although the introduction of former butchers and saboteurs in the factories under Soviet power is unlikely). Above all, it promises the reinforcement of the capitalist positions. The end of the "acute period" of the destruction of the bourgeois order will mean at bottom the beginning of concessions to the remnants of the defeated bourgeoisie. If it does not strengthen the positions of the Russian bourgeoisie, at least it will be an opening for international capital. Currently German imperialism is undoubtedly concerned with the search for such an outcome and uses hundreds of officials and "experts" for this purpose.

Let us face up to what we can expect. Once we start down this road, which uses the passivity of the working class and which is developed by the “organic work” of the right-wing Bolshevik type, foreign capital will go far and begin to restore more and more its power and its leadership.

The form of organisation of state enterprises (the formation of trusts, borrowing, bureaucratic centralisation, the form of stock and shares) facilitates the intrusion of foreign financial capital, whether of the German “brute”, or of the “kind” American. The absolute power of management, half in the hands of notorious businessmen, will evolve towards the power of capital. And, in short, the whole system (considering the other circumstances consistent with such a political line) may become a step towards the emergence in Russia of *state capitalism* from the rotten terrain of the tsarist autocracy and now born on a land freed from serfdom, if the decadent tendency of the Russian revolution prevails (leaving aside the prospect of *international* revolution).

The Russian proletariat must choose another way, through which it will strengthen its active class strength, its ability to resist foreign plunderers, and its influence on the development and success of the international revolution which will be a great and final deliverance from the yoke of capital. It is the way to build true socialism through the efforts of the proletariat itself, without the tutelage of the capitalist masters. We will discuss this in a future article. [13]

N.Ossinski

Notes

[1] The expression “organic construction” appears to be attributed to Lenin by Ossinsky but the term does not seem to appear in any of the documents written by Lenin at this period (covered by Volumes 26 and 27 of his *Collected Works*). We can only assume that Ossinsky was using the term to contrast it with his own “dialectical construction of socialism”. He was trying to underline the contrast between those who were obsessed with organisation and discipline to boost socialism with his own view that socialism can only be built through the initiative of the masses, even if this takes longer, and is more problematic. For a theoretical discussion of this distinction in the works of Luxemburg and Lenin see George Lukacs *History and Class Consciousness* Chapter 7 which can be found at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/history/ch07.htm>.

[2] All these slogans as well as the programme on which they are based are to be found in the theses of Comrade Lenin who promised to publish them quickly after the 4 April meeting between members of the Central Committee and the Left Communist group. Why have these theses not yet been published? [footnote from the original document].

They would be published in the pamphlet “The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government”, appearing for the first time in *Pravda* No. 83 on 28 April 1918. They can be found in Lenin’s *Collected Works* (Moscow 1964) pp.235-277.

[3] The American system of Frederick Winslow Taylor (1856-1915) chief engineer at the Midvale Iron Works sought to raise productivity of workers through a scientific organisation of labour by studying the time taken for every operation and developing standardisation of work as well as introducing piece work.

[4] Alexei Maximovich Kaledin (1861-1918). A Cossack general, who never accepted the overthrow of the Tsar, and followed Kornilov in 1917. Elected Ataman of the Don Cossacks after October he was defeated by the Bolsheviks under Antonov-Ovseenko in February 1918 and committed suicide.

[5] Elected by local gentry as a form of local and provincial government. They were set up after the emancipation of serfs in 1864 by Alexander II.

[6] See Karl Marx *Capital* Volume 1 (Penguin Classics 1990) p. 439

[7] "Competent" people know that these example are not made up by us but are based on schemes discussed in the relevant institutions. More recently (after this article had already been written) these plans, in their original form, have now been deferred. The slogan of learning socialism from the organisers of the trust has now also "withered". But this changes nothing as we are examining an entire political tendency in its clearest expressions. These schemes can still *be revived*. The speech of the "communist" Goukovsky (People's Commissar for Finance and a former Menshevik) prove that in the realm of financial politics the ideas of Samuel Smiles (see footnote 12 – trans.) continue to rule. [footnote from the original document].

[8] Nikolai Vasilyevich Krylenko (1885-1938), old Bolshevik from 1904 on and very close to Lenin. He was army commander from November 1917 to January 1918. On 10 February he received the telegram from Trotsky announcing the ceasefire and the beginning of peace negotiations and began to demobilise. The next day however he received information from Lenin that peace negotiations had broken down. On 19 February he ordered the troops to resist a new German offensive. By the 24 February, seeing the difficult situation on all fronts, he demanded that peace be signed no matter what the conditions were. Deputy Commissar for Justice and assistant Prosecutor General in the trials of the 1920s he became People's Commissar for Justice in 1931 but left the post of Prosecutor General to Vyshinsky after 1932. Accused of treason he was imprisoned and shot in 1938.

[9] *Theses on the Current Situation*. In English at <http://libcom.org/library/theses-left-communists-russia-1918>

[10] The same is true of the transfer to the bankers of part of the shares and other instruments of this kind [footnote from the original document].

[11] Prince V. Mechtchersky, iron and steel magnate owned the leading factories for building locomotives and wagons. Representing an important group of capitalists in the machine and metallurgy industries in March 1918 he proposed to the Soviet government to set up a new trust. The group would hold half the shares of the metallurgy trust and the state the other half. The group would be responsible for management in the name of the trust. On the basis of a narrow majority the government decided to negotiate but on 14 April finally rejected the proposal in favour of the complete nationalisation of industry. The Government suspected that German capitalists were behind Mechtchersky's proposal.

[12] Samuel Smiles (1818-1904). A former Chartist he became the ideologue of Victorian individualism. His *Self-Help* sold a quarter of a million copies in his lifetime.

[13] The second part of this document, which we will be translating shortly, appeared in *Kommunist* No 2.

About Us

The Communist Workers' Organisation is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency which was inspired by the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista). Formed during the Second World War in 1943, the PCInt. condemned both sides as imperialist. Its roots go back to the Italian Communist Left which had fought the degeneration of the Communist International and the Stalinisation imposed on all its member parties. Today there are ICT affiliates in several countries.

We are internationalists. We believe that the interests of the exploited are the same all over the world, and that communism cannot be achieved in one country, a myth peddled by Stalinism. Stalinism was never communism but a particular form of capitalism, state capitalism. After 1917 the economic blockade of the Soviet Union and the failure of the world revolution in the West meant that the revolution was transformed into its opposite, eventually becoming an imperialist bloc that would collapse after only seventy years. We are opposed to all (Trotskyists, Maoists) claims that state capitalism in whatever form is socialism.

We aim to be a political reference point for the working class, first of all for those who are tired of the unions, all unions. This does not mean giving up on the fight to defend immediate interests (wages, hours, work rates, etc.). But the unions are now a tool to control the class struggle and manage the labour force on behalf of capital. Today, any 'self-organised struggle', has to go outside of and against the unions. However, rank and file unions are a blunt instrument for workers. Even when they win a particular battle if they settle into a permanent existence they must accept the legal and economic framework imposed by the state. Any attempt to maintain a permanent body to defend workers' immediate economic interests will fail.

The only permanent body the working class can establish today is the political organisation, which is not only possible but essential. The starting point for this must be recognising that the general interest of the class lies in getting rid of capitalism. This is only possible through a revolution, i.e. the overthrow of the existing state and establishment of a new form of political power by the proletariat. The road to revolution does not mean the futile attempt to win control of the existing state via elections to parliaments or local governments which are means for the capitalist class to exercise its rule. History has shown us that the forum of our "democracy", the bodies of power of the revolution, will be the workers' councils, (or soviets) – mass meetings in which delegates will be entrusted with specific mandates and will be recallable at any time. But these potentially revolutionary organisations will be undermined by capitalist forces from within if they do not have a clear programme aimed at the abolition of exploitation and, therefore, the elimination of classes, for a society of "freely associated producers" who work together to directly meet human needs.

The programme is not the creation of any single theorist or one organisation. It is the outcome of the key lessons learned from past and present struggles and as such defines the practical way forward for the working class as a whole. Without a clear political compass the working class movement will be prey to all kinds of capitalist tricks and illusions. Thus political clarification and reorganisation today are vital for a revolutionary party to come into being which is in a position to win over the working class to the revolutionary programme. This is not a party of government that would replace the class and its class-wide organs of power, but a party of agitation and political guidance on the basis of that programme.

We are for the party, but we are not that party or its only embryo. Our task is to participate in its construction, trying to link immediate demands to the historical programme; communism.

Join us! Support the Internationalist Communist Tendency

The Internationalist Communist Tendency

Britain

The Communist Workers' Organisation which produces *Revolutionary Perspectives* (a six monthly magazine) and *Aurora* (an agitational paper)

BM CWO, London WC1N 3XX

uk@leftcom.org

Italy

Il Partito Comunista Internazionalista

which produces *Battaglia Comunista* (a monthly paper) and *Prometeo* (a six monthly theoretical journal)

CP 1753, 20101, Milano, Italy

info@leftcom.org

USA

IWG, P.O . Box 14485, Madison, WI 53708

us@leftcom.org

Germany

Gruppe Internationaler Socialistinnen

which produces *Socialismus oder Barbarei* and *Germinal*

GIS, c/o Rotes Antiquariat, Rungestrasse 20, 10179 Berlin, Germany

<http://gis.blogspot.de/> and de@leftcom.org

France

Bilan&Perspectives

produces a journal of the same name

ABC-LIV, 118-130 Av. J. Jaures, 75171 Paris Cedex 19

fr@leftcom.org

Our Pamphlets

The Platform of the Internationalist Communist Tendency 70p
(formerly the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party)

For Communism £4

An Introduction to the Politics of the CWO

Class Consciousness and Revolutionary Organisation £4

The issue of "consciousness" is one of the most important for the working class and for revolutionaries. Our approach is unashamedly historical and attempts to draw out the real experience of the working class in its struggles of the last two centuries. 56pp

Trotsky, Trotskyism, Trotskyists £3

How Trotsky, who made such an enormous contribution to revolutionary practice, ended up giving his name to a movement which returned to the counter-revolutionary errors of Social Democracy.

Stalin and Stalinism £1

The lie that the former USSR was "really existing socialism" remains a potent weapon against the working class. This pamphlet not only examines the origins of the regime that emerged from the defeat of the October Revolution but also explains the motivations of Stalinism.

Holocaust and Hiroshima 50p

Examines how the nature of imperialist warfare comes to inflict mass murder on the world through an examination of these seminal events.

Capitalism and the Environment (by Mauro Stefanini) £1

Translated from *Prometeo* these articles were written some time ago but show that our late comrade was ahead of his time in analysing the unsustainability of capitalist production.

Spain 1934-39: From Working Class Struggle to Imperialist War £3

Reprint of key CWO articles long out of print and translations of contemporary documents from the Italian Left in exile. New introduction.

Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925 (new edition) £3

The start of the Italian Left's fight against Stalinism as Fascism increased its grip.

South Africa's New Turmoil £2

An analysis of class relations in the period after the fall of apartheid thrown into relief by the strike wave which followed the Marikana massacres.

