

For Communism

"We Have a World to Win"

**An Introduction to the Politics of the
Internationalist Communist Tendency**

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An Introduction to the Politics of the Internationalist Communist Tendency

Foreword

Today the international working class is faced with one of the greatest upheavals in its history. By restructuring entire branches of industry, implementing technological innovation and depressing wages, capitalists everywhere are trying to maintain their competitiveness on an increasingly globalised and vicious world market. At the same time the bourgeoisie has utilised the collapse of Stalinism in order to strengthen its ideological campaign against the working class: they are using all means to try and discredit the idea of communism and to inject the message that there is no sense in the class fighting and defending itself. Yet the credibility of capitalist propaganda is in direct contrast to the reality of the lives of the majority of humanity: twenty percent of the population of the so-called advanced capitalist countries lives in poverty and need caused by unemployment. The system's capacity for destruction cannot be ignored.

A growing portion of the world population suffers from malnutrition and hunger, while global agriculture produces enough food to feed a population 50% bigger than today's. At the same time, capitalist production for profit more and more wrecks the ecological resources of the planet.

None of this is by accident. It is the direct result of the manner in which the capitalist system reproduces itself. Almost 150 years ago, Karl Marx wrote that capitalism *"comes into the world dripping from head to foot, from every pore, with blood and gore"*. Child labour, slavery and slums, this all enabled the owners of capital to bring in unheard of profits. But the horrors of early industrialisation are nothing in comparison with the genocide, wars and famines that capitalism imposes on the world today. The struggle for communism has, as a pre-condition, a profound and far-reaching understanding of the mode of operation of today's capitalism.

Our politics are not merely a product of our own reflections. The ideas we defend, are based on the historical experience which the international working class has amassed over the last one and a half centuries of the struggle against capitalist exploitation.

We stand in the tradition of the revolutionary currents of the workers' movement, begun by the Communist League around Karl Marx, down to the Third International, which was founded in the wake of the October Revolution. It continued with the minorities of the Communist Left, which fought both against the degeneration of the revolution inside Russia and inside the Third International in the '20s. We have always resolutely rejected Stalinist and Trotskyist currents as the product of the state-capitalist counter-revolution in Russia, and have politically combated them. For this reason, too, for us the collapse of the Stalinist regimes represents no loss for the working class.

The immediate origins of our tendency go back to the international conferences which the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista) of Italy called between 1977 and 1980. In these conferences, the Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO) convinced itself of the coherence of the methods and positions which the Italian comrades had developed since their foundation in 1943, and began to examine their own positions. In 1983 the two organisations founded the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party (IBRP) on the basis of a shared platform. Thereafter, groups from other countries joined the Bureau and the IBRP became the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT). Today it coordinates the international efforts of the organisations constituting it.

The ICT is for the revolutionary party, but it does not pretend to be the party or even the sole nucleus of a future party. To claim something like this would necessitate the senseless assumption that a revolutionary party could come into being through the will of a few people. In order to create the pre-conditions for the overthrow

of the international capitalist system, the proletariat must take up once more the mass struggle for its own interests. We want to be prepared for this. Hence, the ICT's groups attempt to encourage the development of a solid kernel, a potential constituent part of a centralised and international proletarian world party.

For those who wish to help humanity out of its present cul de sac, there is no other alternative. For one thing is certain: all that capitalism has to offer is a future with a sharpened crisis, more environmental destruction, yet more human misery and yet more wars.

Socialism or barbarism. There is no third way!

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Capitalism: the Basic Contradictions of the System

Capitalist society, like the slave and feudal societies which preceded it, is a class society in which the dominant class lives off the work carried out by the subject class. Humanity has lived in class societies for an extremely short period of its history and such societies are not in any sense an expression of human nature. The ICT considers capitalism to be the final class society and that the next step for humanity is the overthrow of class society itself and its replacement by a classless society based on cooperation and production for need.

In previous class societies the subject class was obliged to give up that surplus it had produced and the exploitation of slaves, serfs and other subjects was obvious. Within capitalist society this process is disguised. The working class appears to be free and to freely sell its labour to the bourgeois class in a market contract. In fact, as Marx showed, the working class sells its ability to work, or its labour power, to the bourgeois class. This labour power, when set to work with machinery and raw materials produces a greater value than that required to reproduce it. This is the fundamental mechanism through which surplus labour is extracted from the working class by the capitalist class. Under capitalist production relations the working class receives back, in the form of wages, only a part of the value that its work creates. The remaining part is appropriated by the capitalists and they use this as they see fit. It is this appropriated surplus labour, or surplus value, and this alone, which provides the entire bourgeois class with its source of profit. This process operates on a global scale and profits are divided amongst the entire global bourgeois class. There is a tendency for profits to be equalised and distributed in proportion to the amount of capital each section of the bourgeois class holds, irrespective of whether the capital in question directly exploits workers producing surplus value or not.

For capitalism to operate the working class has to be deprived of ownership of the means of production. It has to become a propertyless class possessing only its ability to labour, and to have no alternative but to sell this to the bourgeois class. This separation results from the central

contradiction of capitalism. On the one hand production is social, on the other hand control of the means and conditions of production, and the commodities produced are in the hands of the bourgeois class alone. This control is used not to satisfy social needs but to generate profits and accumulate capital.

The objective of capitalist production is to produce profits. The capitalist system will only satisfy human needs if it is profitable for it to do so. It is not interested in producing products which are useful, but commodities which can be sold for a profit.

The profit which each capitalist receives tends to approximate to a global average which is dependent on the global amount of surplus value extorted from the global working class. This average rate of profit tends to fall as the value of the capital employed and the productivity of workers increases. The capitalists are thus permanently compelled to revolutionise the means of production in order to gain a temporary advantage on their competitors and so appropriate a larger portion of the global surplus value available. Capitalists have to invest part of their surplus value in new constant capital (e.g., machines, buildings, raw materials, etc.), in order to exploit wage labour in a more unrestrained manner. While some workers are fired, the exploitation, or “productivity” of the others is increased. This allows an individual capitalist concern to raise its profit rate above the average. The average profit rate is determined by the ratio of surplus value to the entirety of the invested capital. The growth of constant capital at the expense of variable capital (human labour power) leads to a higher organic composition of capital (i.e., the ratio of constant capital to variable capital). Because surplus value can only be created by living labour, this curtails the capitalists’ rate of profit. This does not mean that the actual mass of profit automatically decreases, but that capitalism as a whole experiences a tendency for the rate of profit to fall. Capitalists attempt to counteract this in various ways. The most usual of these are:

- by increasing the productivity of workers through

- more efficient plant and control of the labour process,
- by extending working hours,
- by decreasing wages
- by lowering the value of capital equipment used in production.

This process leads to a competitive struggle between the capitalists, which in the end brings about periodic crises of the capitalist system. When the weaker (and, in general, smaller) capitalists establish that they are bringing home insufficient surplus value to endow their investments with new capital, they either go to the wall or they are taken over by stronger rivals. In the 19th century, this happened at regular, roughly ten-year, intervals. The crisis led to a devaluation of capital, and so to a reduction in the organic composition of capital, which enabled the surviving capital to resume and expand the accumulation process. Capitalist production became ever more concentrated and centralised. The search for cheap raw materials and investments in less developed areas (i.e., places with a lower organic composition of capital) compensated for the fall in the rate of profit. In addition, this extended the world market and made the capitalist mode of production more international — until, on the threshold of the 20th century, a world economy had emerged.

Imperialism

Towards the end of the 19th century, capitalist competition took on new forms. Production was increasingly dominated by giant capitalist monopolies and the great concerns of finance capital. This growing concentration and centralisation of capital, which, through the class struggle, caused social problems and the need to defend the national capital, led, from the late 19th century onwards, to a tendency towards increasing state regulation of the capitalist economy. (Customs barriers increased enormously in the last two decades of the 19th century.) Capitalist competition moved from the level of the individual firm to that between nations. To the degree that it was drawn into the regulation of the national economy, the state placed increasing weight on military force to open up sources of raw materials and markets.

Capitalism moved into the epoch of imperialism.

Imperialism is a stage which is reached by capitalism when the organic composition is so high that the access to cheap raw materials as well as the export of capital to countries with a lower organic composition of capital is essential to prop up the rate of profit in the capitalist centres. Consequently, imperialism is not just a simple policy which the capitalists can change at their convenience.

Originally, imperialism was characterised by the erection of tariff barriers and the striving for colonies, a “place in the Sun”. Lenin was firmly convinced that colonies formed an essential component part of the imperialist system. He took it as a starting point that a process of decolonisation would drive the revolution onwards and accelerate it. However, the end of colonialism in Africa and Asia after the Second World War did not have this effect. In the place of the old colonial powers, not only did new superpowers like the USA and the USSR enter the field of play, but also a new form of imperialism, which some describe as neo-colonialism. The mechanisms the dominant capitalist countries use to ensure their domination are varied. The bourgeoisie of the peripheral countries are forced in every case to play along with the existing imperialist trading and financial order. The capitalists in the periphery may not have the same access to the same mass of capital as their stronger rivals, but they are just as driven to maximise their profits. Like the rest of the world bourgeoisie, they exploit their “own” proletariat — and also the world proletariat (through capital invested in Western government debt, or deposited in foreign bank accounts).

The inevitable outcome of imperialism is war, i.e., the continuation of economic competition by military means. An economic crisis of the 19th century type no longer devalues enough capital to set a new cycle of accumulation in motion. Only the massive destruction and devaluation of a global war can accomplish this. The real and objective task of a world war in our epoch

lies in this. Of course, the capitalists do not consciously decide to have a war for this purpose. But, aside from the various political or strategic justifications, it is imperialist competition itself which brings about war again and again. As a consequence capitalism is now caught in a vicious circle of crisis, war and reconstruction. The fact that wars have become an essential part of the system shows that capitalism long ago played out its progressive role in history.

State Capitalism

Capitalism entered a new phase with the catastrophe of the First World War in 1914. The continual centralisation and concentration of capital now threatened important sectors of some national economies. With this, the state was forced to not only intervene externally (imperialism), but also internally, in order to head off the worst social and economic effects of the system. This state capitalism, like imperialism, ran through various stages. The state now began to play a role in the accumulation of capital which was still unthinkable during the competitive struggle of 19th century capitalism. To the extent, however, that the tendential fall of the rate of profit more and more threatened the “commanding heights” of the national economy, state intervention became centrally significant.

This tendency towards state capitalism was particularly exemplified by the failure of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The October Revolution promised a new society, in which the working class would take its fate into its own hands. Because of the isolation of the Russian Revolution in a single country, in which in addition the working class was a minority, these hopes were not fulfilled. Private property in the means of production was indeed done away with to the greatest degree, but this was not to socialise it, but to transform it into state property. Capitalist categories like wage labour, money and exploitation persisted. A new ruling class, which recruited itself primarily from the careerists of the bureaucratised Communist Party, subjected the proletariat to a brutal exploitation. The myth that the USSR was “socialist” and that stratification equals

socialism was one of the many illusions of this epoch. Only the Communist Left reached the understanding that the USSR was a particular form of state capitalism. The idea that the state could moderate all the crimes of capitalism also led to broad state intervention in the West after 1945.

This was the age of the so-called “Welfare State”, which was even sometimes celebrated as the “solution of the social question” by the propagandists of the ruling class. Even if in this phase of capitalism, far-reaching concessions could be made to the working class, the “Welfare State” was never a charity, but its entire essence was that of a repressive instrument for control and suppression. By nationalising beleaguered key industries, the leading capitalist powers sought to ensure their survival. However, when the system’s crisis of accumulation re-surfaced in the early ‘70s, it was as a crisis of the state.

The Crisis

At the beginning of the ‘70s the accumulation cycle set in motion by the Second World War’s massive annihilation of constant capital came to an end. The crisis showed itself in the decoupling of the dollar from its value expressed in gold in 1971. To counteract the fall in the rate of profit, capital relied on the restructuring of the productive process (e.g. the introduction of micro-electronics) and a massive increase in the rate of exploitation.

In the wake of this restructuring, core sectors of the industrial working class in the metropolises were heavily fragmented. Factories were shut and production shifted to low-wage areas in Asia and Latin America. The flow of Western and Japanese capital to these areas strengthened. As a consequence, the factory declined as the location of proletarian experience and the starting point for resistance, at least in the West.

Class composition thoroughly changed. More and more people now work in the service sector. Although most produce no surplus value directly, these people are just

as exploited as other workers, and are hence part of the working class. The expansion of bogus self-employment and precarious conditions of employment also makes new demands on the development of proletarian resistance.

A further phenomenon can be seen in the exorbitant bloating of the finance sector. This sector appropriates surplus value produced elsewhere in the global economy. Here, in a miraculous fashion, money appears to create new value without entering the process of commodity production. The fall in the average rate of profit has led to a situation where surplus value is not being reinvested in productive capital but is used for speculation. This has led to massive speculation in such commodities as housing, foodstuffs, energy and so forth. This speculation and its eventual collapse are a symptom of the basic problems of the declining average profitability of capital. It does not address the causes of the crisis. It bestows considerable gains on a handful of super-rich but, in the long term, they lead to growing indebtedness, more speculative bubbles and increasing instability.

The crisis in the meantime has become the longest since the Great Depression of 1873-96. Like preceding crises, it is characterised by mini-booms and even deeper slumps. It is building the basis for imperialist rivalries, growing competition and shifting alliances in which everyone seeks to place the burden on someone else's shoulders. Up until now the ruling class has succeeded in preventing both decisive social uprisings as well as a complete collapse of the system. Nevertheless, this has been at the cost of a growing state indebtedness which threatens to blow the whole system apart. The need for all states to reduce this indebtedness leads to harsher cuts in subsidies as well as educational and social spending. Capitalism has failed, both through expenditure and cuts, to find a way out of its structural accumulation crisis. The present crisis is preparatory for a more general catastrophe tomorrow. If the capitalist system is able to continue unchecked, then humanity will once again be plunged into a world war and thus into barbarism. Communism for this reason is not just a nice idea, but a real necessity for humanity.

The Communist Perspective

The apologists of the ruling class raise their hands over the horrors of monopoly capitalism, but always declare that there is no alternative. They admit that capitalism is not the best social system but then say it is the only possible one. Marxist revolutionaries, who support their analyses by looking at the entire history of human development and the experiences of the class struggle, are able to expose these lies. Humanity can be spared the horrors and misery of this rotten social system — but only if it is overthrown and replaced by a society without exploitation based on the satisfaction of human needs.

Such a society can only be created by an international revolution of the working class. We continue to call this social alternative Communism — despite all the vilification of it by its open enemies and the manifold distortions and false interpretations of those who have worked their mischief under this label. Socialism or communism (for Marx these concepts were synonyms) is not a condition or programme which can be put into practice by a party or state decree, but a social movement for the conscious overcoming of the capital relation, the doing away of the state, commodity production and the law of value.

Whereas previous revolutions have merely replaced one form of exploitation by another, the communist revolution will be the first to do away with every kind of exploitation and repression. As the sole creator of social wealth, the working class can only free itself by doing away with all classes.

Communism will destroy the capitalist state and end national borders. It will overcome money, wage-labour and commodity production. Communism means doing away with the power of control of the means of production by a special class. For this reason, communism is synonymous with the liberation of the working class from all forms of exploitation. This liberation can only be the work of the working class itself.

2

The Proletariat's Class Struggle

Although the economic contradictions of the capitalist system bring one economic crisis after another, the system will not collapse “automatically”. The overthrow of the system can only be carried out by the one class which is globally exploited — the working class. By the “working class” we do not mean the abstract figure with horny hands and blue overalls so passionately loved by the dinosaurs of the old workers’ movement and industrial sociologists. For us, all those who are dependent on a wage, have no power over the means of production and are forced to perform alienated labour, belong to the working class. This class is an indispensable element of the capitalist mode of production. But, simultaneously, this collective producing class, which is forbidden access to the fruits of its labour, is also the “grave-digger of capitalist society”.

The capitalists understand this very well and never tire of denying the contradiction between wage-labour and capital, and, consequently, the class struggle. In capitalist booms, we are told by all sorts of paid charlatans (the Bernsteins, Burnhams and Marcuses) that the working class no longer exists, because improved living standards have “embourgeoisified” the workers. When capitalism finds itself in a crisis, we are told (by Gorz, Hobsbawm, etc. ...) that the working class no longer exists, because the newest technologies have made it obsolete. In times of relative class peace, such theories are in great demand, but then they are always refuted by a new wave of struggle.

The Economic Struggle of the Working Class

As the crisis continues, the bourgeoisie is more and more forced to attack the working class. More and more people are fired because of “rationalisation”. Unemployment is rampant. Fewer and fewer workers find jobs, and those who have work are being put under pressure by harder work, longer working days and wage cuts.

The working class may at first retreat in the face of these capitalist attacks, but the character of capitalist production forces it in the end to defend itself against capitalist exploitation. This struggle can only be successful if the working class achieves the necessary unity and solidarity to

drive back the attacks. The significance of such successes should neither be overestimated nor underestimated. They are important and necessary so that the working class rediscovers both its common interests as well as its collective power as a class. But, with this alone things are not over. Every success wrung by the class in the economic struggle is important but is, however, of temporary duration. The real defence of workers' interests demands that they proceed against the system of exploitation as a whole.

Class Consciousness

Crisis-ridden capitalism is threatening humanity with further misery and the danger of a global war. But it won't collapse by itself, nor can it be essentially altered gradually. The overthrow of this system, the liberation of the working class through the conscious worldwide abolition of the wage labour-capital relation is the basic condition for the eradication of exploitation and repression.

The bourgeoisie was able to develop capitalist relations of production under feudalism, by struggling for the defence of free trade and against feudal restrictions (guild laws and mercantile monopolies, etc.), so that every step in the economic development of the bourgeoisie "was accompanied by a corresponding political advance of that class." [Marx]

In contrast to the bourgeoisie the proletariat is an exploited class of collective producers. It has no system of property to defend. The communist mode of production cannot develop within the capitalist system. It first requires the political overthrow of the bourgeoisie by the conscious and active struggle of the working class. Only when the working class has deprived the bourgeoisie of power, can it take on the task of the economic reshaping of society.

Everything else would simply be reformism. Nevertheless, this throws up a series of problems. If, as Marx declares, "*the ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas*" [The German Ideology], how can the working class

then become aware of the need to overcome capitalism?

In view of their control over the apparatus of repression and their ideological domination, it appears as if bourgeois rule is almost unbeatable. So long as the capitalists more or less manage the crisis and can keep workers' struggles isolated and on the terrain of the bourgeoisie, their rule is relatively secure. But the class struggle never ceases, even if in certain historical phases it is played out at a very low level. From time to time it openly breaks out, and, under certain circumstances it even reaches the magnitude of uprisings like the Paris June Days of 1848, the Paris Commune of 1871, the mass strikes and revolutions in the Europe of 1904-5 and the Russian Revolution of 1917.

But revolts by themselves are not enough to overthrow capitalist rule. If the working class is not already politically prepared and has no programme of its own at its disposal, the various forces of the bourgeoisie will step in and put their stamp on events with pseudo-radical rhetoric. History has shown often enough that even the workers participating can forget the lessons of their own experience of struggle if they do not have an organised political expression. The economic struggle of the working class indeed poses the problem of exploitation again and again, but this does not give us an answer to the question of how exploitation can be overcome. It is true that the proletariat is in a position to become aware of the totality of capitalist exploitation, because of its role in the mode of production and its organisational capacity. In view of the dominance of bourgeois ideology, the process by which the proletariat becomes conscious is nevertheless not a linear one.

In capitalist class society, the level of consciousness of the working class, because of its division into branches, groups of occupations, nations and genders, is necessarily fragmented. There is no single or evenly formed consciousness in the class. The circumstances in which various segments of the class and individual workers develop class consciousness in different degrees and at different times, allows only the logical conclusion that class consciousness can only be consolidated and further

developed within an organisational framework. Only through the political organisation of those workers who recognise the character of capitalism as a transient society of exploitation that is not permanent can the ruling ideas, which are still the ideas of the ruling class, be challenged and overcome. By politically generalising the elements of consciousness which emerge in the daily struggles against exploitation, a political organisation can contribute to communist theory becoming a “material force”, and put an end to the bourgeois state and exploitation. Given the domination of bourgeois ideology such a conscious political struggle will not simply spontaneously develop in the daily struggles of the class.

The Organisation of Revolutionaries

In order to successfully carry out the struggle for socialism, it is necessary to incorporate the most conscious parts of the class into a revolutionary party. The revolutionary class party can neither be an aloof circle of intellectuals nor a populist mass organisation. It is the organisational expression of the conscious Marxist minority of the class. Its task consists in the evaluation and generalisation of experiences in struggle and in the defence and further development of the revolutionary programme. For this reason it is an indispensable political instrument giving a political orientation and perspectives to the struggles of the class. The organisation of the communists is fundamentally different to bourgeois parties and formations. Instead of the uncritical obedience of yes-men (or women) and passive agreement, it demands from its militants a clear understanding of the communist programme as well as the active dissemination and defence of revolutionary positions inside the working class. Even though the party must play an organisational role in the revolutionary process, its task is essentially politically defined. If, for example, the conditions for the revolution develop (for which the embedding of the party in the class is a basic pre-condition), its task comprises of carrying out the corresponding preparations for revolution. Nevertheless, it should never attempt an insurrection alone and/or in the place of the working class (and should not even try to do so). We reject the notion

that a revolutionary party can be a substitute for the class in taking over power. The communist revolution can only be the work of the immense majority of the working class.

The organs of “workers’ democracy” will be the councils and mass assemblies, which will be based on the election and recallability of delegates. Nevertheless, these organs, in the absence of a political programme which aims at the final overcoming of class society, cannot develop into true organs of workers’ power. Such a programme does not fall from the sky, but emerges from the conscious efforts of the part of the working class which has drawn the lessons of past struggles and has come together on an international level in a revolutionary world party.

A revolutionary world party is, however, not an instrument of domination, but, on the contrary, a means for the political clarification and generalisation of the communist programme. This is a central lesson that the communist left drew from the failure of the Russian Revolution:

“There is no way for the working class to be free or a new social order to come about, unless it springs from the class struggle itself. At no time and for no reason should the proletariat surrender its role in the struggle. It should not delegate its historical mission to others, or transfer its power to others — not even to its own political party.”

[Political Platform of the Partito Comunista Internazionale, 1952].

It is unlikely that the world revolution will triumph everywhere at the same time. The task of the party is not the administration of some proletarian outpost, but, on the contrary, the ceaseless work of spreading the international revolution. As the struggle for socialism must necessarily be conducted internationally, the party must have an international structure and presence and be well-anchored in the class. The working class has no fatherland, and the same is true for the organisation of communists.

3

The Struggle for Class Autonomy

The bourgeoisie has a great interest in using differences in the working class to divide it. Workers, who stand in a competitive relation to each other and at loggerheads with themselves, do not defend themselves against oppression. A divided working class is a welcome object of exploitation, and, in the final analysis, is cannon fodder for the wars of the imperialist age.

The ruling class is also able to rely on various ideologies and a whole network of traditional relations of domination. These forms of oppression already existed in previous class societies, but under capitalism have taken on a modified shape corresponding to the interests of the system. Framing and maintaining the divisions within the working class into local and foreign, men and women, cis- and transgender, hetero- and homosexual, etc., is central to the security of the ruling class. The stirring up of prejudice and bigotry has always been an important ideological weapon of the bourgeoisie. It is all the more important for communists to resolutely stand up against all forms of oppression and the manifold ideological mystifications of class domination.

Nationalism and the Myth of “National Liberation”

In war and peace the bourgeoisie tries to make the workers identify with “their” country. For generations we have been told that “our jobs” are in danger and we will lose them if we don’t work even harder. Exactly the same message is rammed down the throats of workers everywhere.

In time of war they also call for us to be slaughtered, and/or to massacre our class brothers and sisters, for the “good of the country”. The idea of the nation is a decisive prop for bourgeois domination. It disguises the class character of the system and makes it appear as if the existing order is the expression of the common interest of the “people”. Nationalism always means the submission of the proletariat to its “own” bourgeoisie. In the age of imperialism, in which the rule of capital grips the entire globe, the concept of specific “national possibilities of development” and “unfulfilled democratic tasks” is

absurd and is in every sense reactionary.

The internationalist communist left has never supported so-called “national liberation struggles”. It is often asserted that these struggles are against repression and therefore are anti-imperialist. It is true that in many countries there are oppressed minorities. But these minorities can gain nothing by identifying with their own ruling class or parts of the bourgeoisie. Demanding that the working class participates in a national movement means leading them into capitalism’s abattoir. These struggles are equally not “anti-imperialist”. Nationalist movements are dependent on finding sponsors and supporters in the imperialist power structure merely in order to be able to develop military fire-power. Even a newly “liberated state”, after a successful “struggle for independence”, will not be able to withdraw from the network of imperialist relations which make up the world economy.

No state today can develop independently and outside the demands of capitalist competition on the world market. We answer those who endlessly argue that Marx supported certain independence struggles or that Lenin championed the right of nations to self-determination by saying that such mechanical “Marxism” has nothing to do with Marxism. Marx wrote at a time when capitalism was in its infancy, creating a working class, new technologies and machines. Against this background, Marx and Engels supported those national movements which they believed would speed up the triumph over feudal and pre-capitalist structures. In that ascendant phase of capitalism there was still room for manoeuvre for the formation of independent capitalist states and, with that, for the further development of the working class, the future grave-digger of capitalism.

But in the epoch of imperialism the room for manoeuvre for “national independence” is squeezed within narrow boundaries. It was Rosa Luxemburg, not Lenin, who better understood this fact (despite her erroneous analysis of imperialism’s roots). The further development of capitalism since the early years of the 20th century

has confirmed the correctness of Luxemburg's position on the national question. Lenin expected that the political struggle of the colonial countries would shake the imperialist powers to their foundations. But in the wake of the decolonisation after the Second World War these hopes were unfulfilled. Decolonisation altered little in the economic power structure. In many cases the independence of the old colonies was the result of an inter-imperialist power struggle as the USA prevailed against the old colonial powers.

The bourgeoisie of the peripheral countries may sometimes find themselves in a weaker position in the imperialist pecking order. They may rely on all sorts of "anti-imperialist" rhetoric and social demagoguery. But all of this does not alter the fact they are an integral component part of the global capitalist domination over the working class. For this reason so-called "national liberation movements" represent the interests of bourgeois fractions and currents and act as part of an inter-imperialist line-up against the working class. All theories and slogans of "national liberation" or of the "right of peoples to self-determination" are aimed at encouraging nationalist fault lines in the class and subjecting the proletariat to bourgeois control.

Today, anti-imperialism means proceeding against the system as a whole. The exploited and oppressed can only struggle for their liberation on the basis of class autonomy. As internationalists we therefore recognise no solidarity with "peoples", "states" or "nations", but only with real and specific human beings and their struggles and social confrontations. Our aim is the struggle of the workers of all countries as this is the sole perspective for the overthrow of all oppression and discrimination.

The Oppression of Women

Exploitation, housework, discrimination and sexual violence — that is the daily reality for millions of proletarian women worldwide. The oppression of women has its roots in the division of society into property owning and propertyless classes. It represents a special

relation of oppression which weakens the working class as a whole.

Women represent over half the world population, but perform the majority of society's work. Today, as always, the burdens of the work of reproduction (raising children, house work) are primarily carried by women. Even when the work of women is paid, the payment on average is considerably lower than it is for men. Women are always the first to feel the harshest attacks of capitalism in the form of wars, hunger, programmes of cuts and waves of redundancies. The bourgeoisie may talk a lot about equality laws and "sexual liberation", but, in reality, women are deprived of basic rights today as much as ever. They are deprived of the right of decision by laws on abortion, and even denied the right of self-determination over their own bodies. This is coupled with the propagation of a sexual morality which reduces women to their role as mothers and raises the bourgeois nuclear family to a social model.

On the other hand, women's bodies and sexuality are treated at all levels of the "cultural industry" as a commodity for profit, whether this is in the more or less socially accepted forms in advertising or in the clearer forms like pornography and prostitution. All this contributes to the oppression of women eating into everyday bourgeois consciousness as a supposed normality and its daily reproduction on all levels of social life.

In the period after the Second World War women did experience far-reaching improvements, but these were only short-lived victories which were primarily down to the economic boom and the requirements of capitalism. All of this was subject to the return of the crisis as the worsening position of women on the labour market and the various ideological campaigns for a return to family values show.

It is true that capitalism has laid the basis for the liberation of women, by enabling their entry onto the labour market and participation in social life, but, nevertheless, women's oppression cannot be overcome within capitalist relations.

Today, as in the past, the roots of women's oppression lie in the family, the last bastion of bourgeois property relations. The development of capitalism has, without doubt, weakened the institution of the family. Also, at least, and in the leading capitalist states, the most blatant excesses of patriarchal oppression can be curbed by legal regulation like the right to divorce and the criminalising of violence and rape within marriage. Nevertheless, capitalism is not in a position to go beyond the family as the fundamental unit of socialisation. The emancipation of women can only be realised in a society in which the tasks of raising children, housework, and the care of the sick and elderly are part of a collective social activity. The emancipation of women is directly connected with the creation of a socialist society and the liberation of the working class as a whole. Nevertheless, the struggle against sexist discrimination cannot be postponed until day X after the revolution. It is a basic task of revolutionaries to work unsparingly against reactionary conceptions about, and models of behaviour for, women. We oppose the glorification of bourgeois marriage and family, the nucleus of patriarchal oppression and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientations which do not conform to the ruling bourgeois sexual morality.

In contrast to bourgeois feminists we don't think that sexism can be moderated or even overcome by rules for individual behaviour or even quotas imposed by the state apparatus. By ignoring the division of society into classes, feminism disguises the contradiction of interests between bourgeois and proletarian women and thus reveals itself as a reactionary cul-de-sac. The struggle against the oppression of women is for us no "affair purely for women", but, on the contrary, equally a means and a pre-condition for the production of class unity. The revolutionary organisation must take all requisite steps to ensure the full participation of as many women as possible in the communist movement. There is no socialism without the liberation of women, no liberation of women without socialism.

Racism

Racism, the oppression and discrimination against people on the basis of characteristics ascribed to them, is one of the most repulsive manifestations of bourgeois society. It is no relic of the past or even a natural human phenomenon, but an ideology of oppression with a specific history and a particular social function. Racism evolved in the wake of colonialism and the development of the capitalist economic system. Differing from other ideologies of exclusion, the devaluation of other people was now linked with characteristics and features which were declared to be unalterable.

Racism has taken on the most varied forms and facets in its history. All the same, it has continually fulfilled the same function for our rulers, that of ideologically justifying exploitation and oppression. Racism is therefore not just a moral obscenity, but, on the contrary, an essential organisational principle of capitalist society. The maintenance of the structure of the capitalist economy demands that workers regard other workers as competitors for employment, accommodation, entry to educational institutions, etc. This is an important trapdoor for nationalist and racist ideas, whose effects Karl Marx was already observing in the 19th century:

“Every industrial and commercial centre in England now possesses a working class divided into two hostile camps, English proletarians and Irish proletarians. The ordinary English worker hates the Irish worker as a competitor who lowers his standard of life. In relation to the Irish worker he regards himself as a member of the ruling nation and consequently he becomes a tool of the English aristocrats and capitalists against Ireland, thus strengthening their domination over himself. He cherishes religious, social, and national prejudices against the Irish worker. His attitude towards him is much the same as that of the “poor whites” to the Negroes in the former slave states of the U.S.A.. The Irishman pays him back with interest in his own money. He sees in the English worker both the accomplice and the stupid tool of the English rulers in Ireland.

This antagonism is artificially kept alive and intensified

by the press, the pulpit, the comic papers, in short, by all the means at the disposal of the ruling classes. This antagonism is the secret of the impotence of the English working class, despite its organisation. It is the secret by which the capitalist class maintains its power."

Racism in this way undermines the only way to successfully resist the daily impositions of the system — class solidarity. In spite of the internationalisation of capitalism, the bourgeoisie exercises its rule in the form of national states. In opposition to this, the proletariat is an international class, a class of migrants. Every split weakens its struggle and tightens the screws of exploitation. For this reason, it is an urgent task for communists to struggle without compromise against racist ideas.

Our resistance against racism has nothing to do with the patronising reform projects of the so-called multi-culturalist propagandists, who peddle all sorts of culturalist recipes and, in the framework of their own positive racism, only accept those "cultural differences" which they consider that the local public can digest. The division in the working class cannot be overcome by the "foreign" minority conforming to the prevailing "dominant culture". We reject every positive evaluation of "integration" or "assimilation". These kind of concepts are always based on the bourgeois prejudice of the higher worth of some sort of "national culture" and language.

To overcome racist divisions, a conscious minority politics for the most oppressed sectors of the class is necessary. Action without compromise against all racist shenanigans, discrimination, exceptional laws and administrative practices is an essential basic condition for the production of class unity. The working class has neither countries nor national cultures to defend. The only way out of the treadmill of exploitation consists in the overcoming of the capitalist system, which gives birth to racism and reproduces it on a daily basis.

Fascism

Fascism was one answer of the bourgeoisie to the strengthening of the class movement after the First World War. Historically, fascism unfolded as a movement of radicalised petty bourgeois, who felt their existence to be threatened to the same degree by the crisis of capitalism as by the class struggles of the proletariat. By its militant behaviour and a bizarre propaganda mixture of aggressive nationalism, anti-semitism and social demagoguery, fascism, however, achieved mass influence even outside these circles. But it was its terror against the organisations of the workers' movement rather than its reactionary eclectic programme which moved parts of the bourgeoisie to harness fascist movements to their own purposes.

For a crisis-ridden capitalism, fascism proved itself to be an option for rule everywhere where the class's revolutionary struggles had threatened the foundations of the system and a revival of the economy made a corporatist and centralist organisation of society necessary. By nipping the struggle of the working class in the bud, by smashing every attempt at opposition and by subjecting every area of society to state control, fascism proved itself to be a particularly authoritarian form of capital's dictatorship.

The bestial crimes of fascism showed once again what inhuman brutality capitalism is capable of in the imperialist cycle of crisis and war. For this reason, it is no accident that some paid moralists of the bourgeoisie happily try to represent fascism as an anti-bourgeois revolt or as the most extreme form of bourgeois society. In the light of the almost incomprehensible horror of the Holocaust, such arguments may appear plausible at first sight. Nevertheless, they remain mystifications with which the symbiotic relationship between fascism and democracy is to be hidden. Without doubt, the fascists escalated racism to its highest extreme. But neither racism, nor anti-semitism and nationalism are exclusively fascist inventions, but, on the contrary, are essential elements of capitalist society. Neither do the fascists stand outside, nor do they stand against the ruling capitalist relationships. Rather, they pick up the resentments and ideologies that

The Cul-de-sac of Anti-Fascism — Against all United Fronts and People's Fronts

our rulers spread on a daily basis, in order to intensify them in their own way. For this reason, communists combat fascism like every other form of bourgeois rule.

For the working class, it is absolutely necessary to resist the emergence of fascists and their attacks. Even so, such a struggle can only have perspectives for success if it rests on a clear class basis. Resistance to fascism must be part of the comprehensive anti-capitalist struggle to vanquish all forms of bourgeois rule. We reject all participation in the various anti-fascist leagues and campaigns for the “defence of democracy”. These represent reactionary cul-de-sacs which aim at yoking the working class to the cart of “democratic”, but still bourgeois, states. The whole logic of anti-fascism is to resist fascism by defending the democratic state as the lesser evil. The conception of wanting to defend democracy comes down to accepting, promoting and, in the end, succumbing to the myth of the state as a class-neutral entity. It means strengthening the state, subjecting oneself to its power and robbing oneself of every possibility of self-activity. In the end, this means nothing more than chaining the proletariat to the state and delivering it defenceless to repression.

Consequently, anti-fascism always fails where it claims to be effective — preventing the transformation of democracy into a dictatorship, through the broadest possible alliance of all do-gooders. All attempts to dress up the state as revolutionary end, either in the scandal of the state presenting itself as the best anti-fascist, or in a catastrophe, if, in the name of “anti-fascist unity”, the revolution is given up. As an ideology glorifying the state, and a practical route to the renunciation of revolution, anti-fascism is just as much directed against the proletariat as is fascism. Those who wish to settle with fascism, must fight anti-fascism, and vice-versa. The alternative which stands before humanity in the light of capitalism’s power for destructive development, is not “democracy or Fascism”, but “socialism or barbarism”.

4

False Friends

False friends are sometimes the worst enemies. In order to maintain its rule, capitalism supports itself on a series of organisations and currents which profess to wish to improve the position of the working class, but, in reality, work to direct all resistance into cul-de-sacs and thus make it harmless. In order to successfully carry out a struggle for its interests, the proletariat must become aware of its historical tasks and give all these forces a clear rejection.

The Unions

“Trade unions work well as centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital. They fail partially from an injudicious use of their power. They fail generally from limiting themselves to a guerrilla war against the effect of the existing system, instead of simultaneously trying to change it, instead of using their organised forces as a lever for the final emancipation of the working class, that is to say the ultimate abolition of the wages system”, Marx wrote in 1865. Today we can only declare the absolute failure of the unions to even defend the most basic interests of the workers. Their transformation from “centres of resistance against the encroachments of capital” to state-supporting bureaucratic apparatuses is irreversible.

Taken by themselves, unions were never revolutionary. They emerged as workers in specific branches of the economy united to fight for better conditions. For this reason they were initially combated by the bourgeois state with all the means at its disposal and sometimes even banned. After much sacrifice and thanks to the solidarity of the working class they were finally recognised as legal organisations.

Increasingly, a tendency for the unions to subordinate themselves to the logic of capitalism permeated these organisations. With the development of imperialism, they became an integral component part of bourgeois rule. Their elixir of life consisted and consists still in negotiating the conditions of the sale of the labour power commodity to the bosses. This only makes sense on the basis of the political acceptance of the wages system and within the

framework of the capitalist national economy.

As early as the First World War, the unions, in agreement with the Social Democratic leadership, supported imperialist war. They proclaimed the “Burgfrieden” [civil peace] with the ruling class and collaborated in the implementation of anti-strike laws. To the same degree, the militarisation of labour, the intensification of work, the lengthening of the working day and wage cuts found their willing support. Since then, the unions have continually acted as the defenders of the ruling order.

From their position as the supposed representatives of the working class, they are able to sell “restructuring” (i.e., redundancies), “realistic” wage agreements (which usually contain wage cuts), etc., as being in the interest of “economic sense”. It is always the unions which scream the loudest for protectionism and import controls, in order to “save jobs”. The unions have a manifold repertoire of methods to domesticate and control workers’ struggles and to lead them into dead-ends. By isolating and selling-out strikes, dividing workers into groups by industry and occupation, preventing and sabotaging effective forms of struggle, they try to make sure that the rule of capital is not seriously challenged.

Anyone on the “left” who continually explains the union’s actions by the treachery of the current leadership, which should be replaced by a different one in order to improve the unions, marks themselves out by a thought-process which is as naive as it is idealist. This kind of thinking reduces all problems to the question of the right people in strategic positions and which all too often turns out to be a desire for posts and state support, hedged around with “Leninist” clauses. The unions cannot be reformed, “reconquered” or be transformed into instruments of liberation! The problem is not simply one of this or that “leadership”, it is the organisational form of the unions itself, based on representative politics, that stands opposed to a perspective of workers’ emancipation.

Unions betray nothing and no-one, least of all themselves.

If they sabotage struggles, take us for a ride and, in this way, make themselves indispensable to capital as factors for negotiation and order, they are only acting consistently and logically in agreement with their original concerns, wishing to negotiate the business conditions of the sale of the labour power commodity with the capitalists “on the same level”. This does not mean that we simply call for leaving the unions or for membership cards to be torn up, which would be just the same as many of the illusions of participation encouraged in the unions. The old quarrel about whether private legal costs, insurance or union membership offers the best protection from sacking and the whims of the employer is a debate about bogus solutions. As long as workers confront the boss alone and isolated and hope to receive protection from “above” in this desperate situation, things usually end badly.

We do not call for the construction of new and better unions, which, sooner or later, will end in exactly the same politics of representation as the old ones. Permanent economic organisations of the working class must enter into negotiations with the capitalists, and thus, sooner or later, accept the rules of the game of the system of exploitation. At best this kind of “syndicalist experiment” would merely repeat the history of the last two hundred years in double quick time. The main issue is to understand that the unions’ framework for action, legalistic and fixated on the state, is a strait-jacket, which continually subordinates resistance and combativity to bourgeois economy, bourgeois right and bourgeois law.

In order to be able to carry out its struggle for its long-term goals, the working class must go beyond the union framework. Strikes, not unions, are today’s “schools of socialism”. This is particularly true when they bring together workers from different branches and are led by strike committees of elected and recallable delegates who are responsible to full assemblies of the workers. The sole alternative to the unions consists of the self-organisation of the struggle — autonomy from below. The task of revolutionaries consists of struggling for the communist perspective everywhere that the working class is to be

met (including in union meetings). In the present phase of capitalism, even defensive struggles against job losses and wage cuts rapidly come up against the limits of the system. Not putting the “question of the system”, and/or excluding the question of the power of control of the means of production, means answering it in the sense of the unions and accepting worsening conditions and sacrifice. Communists must actively take part in struggles which have the potential to go beyond the limitations of the mainly economic struggles and take all necessary steps to organise the workers around the revolutionary programme.

Social Democracy

The Second International was founded in 1889 at a time when its biggest section, German Social Democracy was still struggling against Bismarck’s anti-Socialist Laws. In reality, it functioned more as a federation of national social democratic parties which adopted only non-binding resolutions. All its parties were based on a reformist minimal programme and a formal maximum programme which abstractly declared itself for socialism, behind which it was able to hide its reformist daily practice.

It is true that the social democratic parties developed into mass organisations, but this was at the price of their progressive integration into the bourgeois order. Belief in parliamentarism necessarily led to accommodation with, and finally submission to, bourgeois public order. The bureaucracy, which emerged insidiously, placed maintaining the organisation, and its finances, above its socialist principles which were increasingly reduced in importance except in the party’s sermonising.

Reformism led necessarily to loyalty to the imperialist national state which the reformists wanted to take over. In 1914 against all their previous anti-war resolutions, the social-democratic parties largely supported the war aims of their respective bourgeoisies. In the light of the Second International’s previously adopted anti-war resolutions, this was an open betrayal of all principles.

Fundamentally, support for imperialist war was only the logical consequence of the practice followed up until that point. The *Burgfrieden* sealed with the bourgeoisie in August 1914 was, in the final analysis, also an indicator of how far social democracy had become an elementary constituent part of the bourgeois order. From then on, the social democratic parties evolved into major supporters of capitalism.

Between 1918 and 1923, Social Democracy played a leading role in smashing the revolutionary workers' uprisings, and in the murder of thousands of communists (including Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht). Today, social democracy acts as the advocate of a reformism without real reforms. By continuing to sow illusions in parliament, selling cuts as either a regretful necessity or just a lesser evil, it attempts to chain the working class to the state. In periods of strong class struggle it plays a central role in the defence of capitalism by claiming to be a workers' party. In times of class peace it spreads the illusion that the workers have a choice in elections. Social democracy is an important ideological prop for capitalism and cannot be won back to the camp of the working class.

Stalinism

The Russian Revolution was already long defeated before Stalin became the undisputed leader of the USSR in 1928. The degeneration of the Russian October Revolution resulted from the defeat of the worldwide class movement and the consequent weakness in defending the hard-fought stirrings of workers' power against the Stalinist counter-revolution. Stalinism did not represent the logical result of the Bolshevik revolution but, on the contrary, it was a total break with all its hopes and efforts. Instead of freedom for the working class, Stalin (and/or the developing capitalist class, whose representative he was) developed a party dictatorship of unprecedented cruelty.

Instead of communism, a particularly brutal variant of state capitalism developed. While the basis for capitalist society, commodity production and wage-labour, was

preserved, all-embracing state control and forced labour were lyingly painted as “socialist achievements”. Proletarians remained wage-labourers with no power of disposal over the means of production which were concentrated in the hands of the state. Stalinism was able to triumph in Russia because it was a question of an especially retrograde country. In a certain sense, he anticipated certain elements of the “mixed economy” which emerged in the West after the Second World War. Here, too, it was claimed that the nationalised industries were the “peoples’ property”. Primarily, however, it was an exceptional capitalist formation which evolved in a unique context.

It became a model for a series of countries such as Cuba or China, as well as various nationalist movements which inflicted severe defeats on the proletariat. As a form of rule and as a political current, Stalinism acted on the basis of a nationalist and state capitalist programme: subjection of the proletariat to the state, terror, renunciation of revolution and the mass murder of communists. It’s totally reactionary character revealed itself in the cultivation of nationalism and anti-semitism, in the propagation of a sexual morality hostile to women and the glorification of wage-labour. It was not a somehow degenerated “socialist experiment” but, on the contrary, the grave-digger of the revolution, an especially perfidious variant of anti-communism.

Heirs of the Counter- revolution: the Left of Capital

“The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living”. Today, there are a bewildering number of groups and organisations calling themselves “socialist” or “communist”. For the majority of them it is sometimes a question of unintentionally comical attempts to re-invent social democracy or to reanimate Stalinism. But the confusion and damage that these groups cause in the “name of Marxism” is considerable. Most of these groups construct their programmes by equating socialism with the state ownership of the means of production. At the end of the day, this is a reactionary position which cannot be

equated with revolutionary Marxism, and which Friedrich Engels had already denounced:

“The modern state, whatever its form, is an essentially capitalist machine; it is the state of the capitalists, the ideal collective body of all capitalists. The more productive forces it takes over, the more it becomes the real collective body of all the capitalists, the more citizens it exploits. The workers remain wage-earners, proletarians. The capitalist relationship is not abolished; it is rather pushed to an extreme.”

There has never been a socialist revolution in China, Vietnam, Cuba or North Korea. In these countries a social upheaval which was the work of the working class has never happened, nor has a proletariat organised in councils ever had the possibility of making political or economic decisions there. For this reason we draw a clear dividing line between us and those who wish to ascribe to these regimes of exploitation a “progressive”, “anti-capitalist” or even “socialist” character. Maoism, like Guevarism represents an anti-communist current directed against the working class, which relies on the same ideological premises as Stalinism (the people’s front concept, the stages theory, the glorification of the state, nationalism, etc.).

The various Trotskyist currents like to use the prestige of the opposition to Stalin led by Leon Trotsky to make themselves look good. But, apart from the fact that Trotsky’s struggle developed fairly late, he was always hamstrung by the fact that he confused state capitalism with socialism and regarded the communist party as the exclusive arena for political confrontation. Trotsky interpreted the guidelines decided by the first four congresses of the Comintern as the basis for revolutionary politics. Consistent with this, he accepted the fatal notion that social democracy was a proletarian current, with which one could seal agreements and leagues (so-called united fronts). The reactionary consequences of this way of seeing things revealed itself in 1934 when he instructed his followers to enter the social democratic

parties. This was the basis of so-called entryism, that is, the collaboration of Trotskyists with social democracy, the force that had supported the imperialist war and bloodily defeated the proletariat's uprisings. In the "Transitional Programme" of the "Fourth International", which was written by Trotsky in 1938 his deeply idealist method found its most striking expression. Essentially, the so-called Transitional Programme was nothing more or less than a return to social democracy's concept of the minimal programme. It expressed especially clearly the deeply rooted belief of Trotskyists that they could draw out a revolutionary consciousness through a series of reformist demands. Briefly, that is a politics which rests on manipulation and denies the working class the capacity to arrive at communist consciousness through its own struggles. On top of this, Trotsky and his followers continued all the confusion of the early Comintern on the question of imperialism and so-called "national self-determination". This ended in leading them to take sides in various local imperialist conflicts (the Spanish Civil War, Abyssinia, the Sino-Japanese War), and finally to participate in the imperialist Second World War as a defender of democracy and the "socialist fatherland". Trotskyism today represents nothing more or less than a state capitalist current, which must be decisively criticised and combated by internationalist revolutionaries.

Although the various Trotskyist, Stalinist and Maoist currents have their differences, they are all part of what we call the capitalist left. They all stand for alliances with the forces of the bourgeoisie, support of nationalism and the more or less critical defence of Stalinism. All of their concepts, programmes and tactics have broken the back of proletarian struggles more than once. It is not therefore a question of carrying on with the same old stuff in the name of "left unity", but, on the contrary, of a clear political break, in order to have a clear vision of the perspective of class struggle across borders.

5

The Tasks of Revolutionaries

Today communists face great difficulties and challenges. The domination of bourgeois ideology has led to a marked separation between the working class and its revolutionary minorities. Although the working class is more international and larger than ever before and although the globalisation of production provides the basis for unification, today the class is more fragmented and disorientated than ever before in its history. At the same time, we face a mighty international enemy with the greatest reserves of wealth and power. And the bourgeoisie has learnt from its history too. It knows every trick to divide the working class and so to maintain its rotten system. But it cannot solve the objective contradictions of capitalism. The growing barbarism of capitalism in its imperialist epoch represents the material basis for its final overthrow by the working class. The task of revolutionaries is to keep the interests of the working class as a whole in view, by supporting its struggles, by criticising its limitations and by trying to strengthen wage-labourers' trust in, and consciousness of, their own strength.

Revolutionary politics develops when revolutionaries are in a position to learn from the struggles of the class, to generalise experiences of struggle and to carry consciousness and perspectives to the movement. Whenever they can, revolutionaries must take practical initiatives in this regard. But, as long as capitalism exists, victories in economic and political struggles can only be temporary. The emancipation of the working class demands a political struggle for power. Communists must mercilessly unmask and combat all bourgeois organisations which strive to shift class struggle to ground which is secure for the capitalists. This demands, as has already been explained, an organisational framework. According to our understanding, this can only be an international and internationalist revolutionary organisation. International, because capitalism can only be combated and overcome on a global level; Internationalist, because the rejection of all nationalist ideology is the basis for the production of class unity; revolutionary, because it is only in the radical break with capitalism that there lies the perspective for living a life not just in humane conditions, but simply as a

human being.

The Need for a Revolutionary Break

None of humanity's global problems like hunger, destruction of the environment and the growing danger of war can be tackled within the framework of the capitalist profit system, let alone solved. The working class cannot fundamentally change its social situation, so long as the bourgeoisie commands political power through an intact state apparatus. All attempts by the workers' movement to develop the structures of production resting on common property through the formation of retail co-operatives or self-managed concerns have continually been shipwrecked on the political and economic realities of capitalism. While the up-and-coming bourgeoisie could make treaties and temporary alliances with the feudal classes, the proletariat can only free itself through intransigent class struggle. In distinction to the rising bourgeoisie, the proletariat must first conquer political and economic power before it can seriously change anything in its social position. Capitalism can neither be gradually improved, progressively and essentially altered, or managed humanely.

Against Representation For Delegation

All reformist attempts to tame capitalism through compromises with our rulers have proved themselves to be disastrous dead-ends. There is no parliamentary road to socialism! Parliament long ago lost the role given to it by the bourgeois revolutions of the 19th century, that of being the central organ of arbitration between classes. While the real decisions are taken in closed committees of the state apparatus, parliamentarism today has the primary ideological function for our rulers of cloaking the deeds of the government in "democratic" clothes. Parliamentarism, in addition, has a structural function to integrate us into capitalist life. Every parliamentary orientation leads sooner or later to the desire to co-manage the things necessary for capitalism in conformity with "public opinion". As a classical variant of representation, parliamentarism stands in the way of the single feasible way to alter society, the self-activity of

the working class. It is just the same with the operation of small armed groups in the form of terrorism or guerrilla warfare. Individual terror reflects the voluntarist mentality of the radicalised petty bourgeoisie. It is in most cases a product of the machinations of bourgeois secret services and a favourite field of play for inter-imperialist confrontation. Isolated actions by terrorist groups are completely unsuitable to challenge bourgeois rule. They place the proletariat in the role of a passive onlooker and impart the illusion that “others” can act in the place of the working class in achieving change. The account that the international working class has to settle with capitalism is too comprehensive to hand over to a few of this system’s functionaries and characters. The struggle for liberation cannot be delegated to self-nominated elites or ever so well-meaning vanguards. The overthrow of this system requires the solidly united self-activity of the masses. As an expression of self-emancipation of the working class, communism rejects the idea of a state which supposedly has the right to rule over us and to suppress us.

Workers’ Democracy Instead of Party Dictatorship

The experience of the Paris Commune long ago showed that the working class cannot take over the structures of the bourgeois state apparatus and use it for its own purposes. The bourgeois state is not an institution hovering above classes, but is, on the contrary an organ of repression and control for the maintenance and defence of the rule of capital. It must be smashed in a revolutionary way and replaced by the organs of proletarian self-organisation. The historically discovered form and driving force of this revolutionary transformation process towards communism is the councils. The councils are no abstract invention of socialist theoreticians, but, on the contrary, are thrown up again and again by the struggles and uprisings of the working class. It is no accident that our rulers’ propaganda machine either keeps quiet about the history of the councils or distorts it. The inspirational examples of the councils show how millions of people can take their lives in their own hands and run them themselves. In contrast to bourgeois democracy, which rests on representation and passivity, the councils

base themselves on working class self-activity. The principle is the electability and recallability of delegates at any time, the duty of office-holders to account for themselves and control from below. The historical experience has, however, also shown that even the most complete council democracy by itself is no guarantee for the development of socialism. Exactly as communists must give an orientation towards the smashing of the bourgeois state before the proletarian conquest of power, at the time of the transition period they must struggle for suitable measures to prepare the end of capitalist commodity production on a world scale. The organisation of revolutionaries must do justice to their political responsibility towards the class. Its task consists of "combin[ing] and generalis[ing] the spontaneous movements of the working class, but not to dictate or impose any doctrinaire system whatsoever" [Instructions for delegates of the provisional General Council (1866)]. They should not fear to struggle, even as a minority, for the communist programme inside and — when necessary — outside the councils. On the other hand, they should not act in the place of the class, usurp the councils or merge with the structures of the proletarian semi-state. Neither the revolutionary party nor the councils taken by themselves represent a guarantee against counter-revolution. The only guarantee of victory lies in the initiative and living class consciousness of the international proletariat.

The International Dimension

The overthrow of capitalism cannot be completed overnight. But, as soon as the working class overthrows the ruling class in a country or territory, the period of transition towards communism begins. The proletariat must use the political power it has conquered and smash the bourgeois state apparatus, disempower the bourgeoisie and introduce the first steps towards the socialisation of the means of production. This demands the establishment of a revolutionary regime on the basis of workers' councils. As an international system, however, capitalism can only be fought and overcome on an international level. Socialism cannot be constructed in

a single country or territory. A so-called “workers’ state” or the “dictatorship of the proletariat” is, in the first instance, a political category. Nevertheless, a “workers’ state” will take measures for the improvement of the conditions of life of the working class (reduction in the working-day, free access to the health and education system, etc.) and try to direct production for the needs of society. But these measures are, in any case, milestones for a socialist future. As long as the capitalists have the crisis in hand to some extent and can keep workers’ struggles on a bourgeois terrain and isolated, their rule is relatively secure. As long as capitalist commodity production in the rest of the world continues to exist, the diktat of the law of value holds. Just as an isolated strike or factory occupation can only be maintained for a limited time, a “workers’ state” in a hostile environment cannot survive for long. Either world capitalism will destroy the revolutionary experiment by military means, or it will place it under enormous economic pressure, or both. This would have the consequence that a proletarian regime (as in the case of Bolshevik Russia) would be forced to compete with the bourgeois states under capitalist conditions. This would sooner or later lead to a competitive struggle over the accumulation of capital and block any socialist perspective. The highest priority of a proletarian regime and of a communist world party therefore lies in the extension and consolidation of the revolution internationally. Only when capitalism has been defeated across the world will it be possible to undertake real steps towards socialism.

Beyond the State, Nation and Capital...

The establishment of a society which puts an end to the exploitation of people by people is a long and difficult process, which demands the solution of a series of extremely complex problems. One great challenge will be to meet the dramatic consequences of capitalist exploitation of both people and the environment. Capitalism has nevertheless also brought about an unprecedented level of social wealth and technological innovation. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the take-over of production by the producers will open up great possibilities of development. The entire potential

of science, research and technology would be able to be used for the benefit of humanity. It would no longer serve short-sighted profit motives, but, on the contrary, would solve real problems. Production and distribution would be oriented towards the needs of people, society's work would be more fairly divided and could be decisively reduced. Art, culture and science could freely develop and would no longer be the privilege of certain social classes. On the basis of material security, freedom and social equality, for the first time in the history of humanity the formation of real individuality would be possible. As classes and class contradictions are overcome the structures of the proletarian semi-state would become superfluous and wither away. "The government of persons" can be "replaced by the administration of things". But a socialist society can only be spoken of when commodity production, classes and states have disappeared on a world level. Only then can the association of the free and equal become a reality and "the free development of each the condition for the free development of all".

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The Internationalist Communist Tendency

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

Italy

Il Partito Comunista Internazionalista
which produces Battaglia Comunista (a monthly paper) and Prometeo (a quarterly theoretical journal)
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