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Revolutionary Perspectives 21

The Ukraine War and the Future International



**Inflation: The Other War
on the Working Class**

**COP 27: A Predictable
Failure**

**Capitalism's Economic
Foundations [Part Two]**

**Syndicalism:
Then and Now**

Revolutionary Perspectives

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The Outlook for 2023

There is no point pretending that the prospect for 2023 is anything other than dismal. Inflation has come back to haunt capitalism and wage workers throughout the world are facing sharp cuts in their standard of living, if not outright penury. As the economic options for capital in general are narrowing, the politicians' room for manoeuvre is also becoming more limited. Last summer's quick turnover of UK prime ministers has put an end to the UK's reputation for 'stable government'. On top of the bullshit element, there is now no denying that the incompetence element is liable to have worse than laughable consequences. As the article on page 3 points out, a serious cost of living crisis for the working class has been made worse by the deluded antics of Truss and Kwarteng. But of course the wider context is the deeper, insoluble crisis of low profit rates that has been haunting the whole capitalist system for decades and for which there is no solution outside of the massive devaluation of capital values by means of the hellish destruction of war. It is really no accident that we are currently updating and republishing the CWO's original document which defines our economic *raison d'être* which, we believe is the legitimate interpretation of the consequences of the falling rate of profit analysed by Marx for the present epoch.

And there is plenty of evidence of the sharpening crisis of profitability. Last year was the worst for financial speculators since the crash of 2007-8. According to the *Financial Times* stock and bond markets lost more than \$30 trillion in 2022. At the same time the price of gold — that trusted 'safe haven' for capitalists in crisis — is at or near the proverbial record high. The rate of profit is rarely discussed by the financial pundits but

evidence that this rate continues to decline is there, with the complaints of 'lower profit margins', particularly in the United States.

Predictably, after all the hoo-ha of COP26 in Glasgow, the delegates at last year's follow-up in Egypt hardly bothered to feign embarrassment at the failure to achieve any of the previous year's goals, without which, we are assured, life on earth is under growing threat. Do not misunderstand us, we are not 'climate deniers' but we are more than sceptical about capitalism's ability or even intention to tackle the climate change question which is fundamentally a question of life and death for all of us. As it is, COP27 proved to be more of a business opportunity for capitalist wheelers and dealers than a serious attempt to do anything for the future of humanity.

Nevertheless, 2022 will not just be remembered for the mounting human cost of floods, storms and droughts due to global warming that hit the headlines. The war in Ukraine is a war between the US, hauling in its NATO allies, and Russia in all but name. It comes after decades of unending proxy wars around the world. Ukrainian refugees have added to the number of people displaced by war passing 100 million for the first time in history. It is already the widest, longest military conflict in Europe since the Second World War and is a game-changer for the whole world. Capital is running out of economic and financial dodges to offset its crisis of profitability. As in the past, military competition between the world's biggest economic powers has come to the fore. To coin a flippant journalists' term, "big war is back" and this is not only about the prolongation of the military action in Ukraine. This war is a harbinger of worse to come. Both Biden and Blinken have missed no opportunity to connect today's war in Ukraine with

the real threat of China.

There is no question which power is the strongest militarily. Russia's defence budget last year of \$66bn, even when combined with China's \$293bn of spending, is dwarfed by NATO members' combined budget of over \$1.1tn. But neither Russia nor China are ready to submit to Pax Americana, especially as there is not much 'pax' involved. A continuous increase in arms spending is the order of the day, even for the cash-strapped UK which last year forked out £45bn on armaments, making it NATO's second-biggest arms spender after the US. So much for "*there's no money in the kitty*" to fund a pay rise for public sector workers.¹

NATO's defence ministries are discovering that dormant weapons production lines cannot be switched on overnight. Permanent war means continually increasing arms production capacity which requires investment which, in turn, depends on securing long-term production contracts. The US and its 'allies' are busy offering weapons manufacturers such long-term contracts and reading themselves for large scale expansion of weapons production. Germany has pledged €100 billion for "military modernisation".

Notes

1. Clearly, the defenders of UK capital now have different priorities, since "defence spending will be protected from inflation next year and is forecast to grow to nearly £50bn." [UK Minister of Defence, Ben Wallace report to parliament, quoted in the *Financial Times* 3.1.23]

Japan is increasing its military spending in order to "counter the threat from China". The least we can expect in 2023 is that tensions between the US and China will increase, particularly over Taiwan where a Chinese military strike cannot be ruled out.

In the face of capitalism's build-up to the 'final solution' for its economic woes, there is only one force capable of changing the course of history — that sleeping giant which, once it awakens, has the power to revolutionise the world — the working class. This is the frame that underpins our call for 'no war but the class war' committees. They are not intended as a short-term, one-off response to the war in Ukraine, but as a permanent focus to put the real issues before today's struggles, not just in the UK but throughout the world. These are early days, but the groundwork is being laid. In the process, possibilities for working alongside other internationalists are opening up, just as they must in future when the working class creates its own class-wide bodies. And, let's be clear, our aim is to build the political resistance of the global working class to the wars and the decaying system which is fuelling them. **NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR!**

Cost-of-Living: The Other War on Workers

Since the last issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives* the political and economic turmoil in the United Kingdom has surprised the rest of the world.¹ It began in late September with the ill-fated ‘mini-budget’ of Liz Truss and Kwasi Kwarteng which, by proposing a £45 billion tax cut and spending increases, temporarily crashed the pound, destroyed investor confidence in UK treasury debt, and added a ‘moron premium’ onto government borrowing of around 1.4% compared to early 2022.² It ended with an ‘austerity 2.0’ budget from Rishi Sunak & Jeremy Hunt in mid-November comprising £55 billion of tax rises and spending cuts. While the international financial press reacted positively to this exercise of financial restraint in Hunt’s Autumn Statement, for the British working class the new budget simply means an all-out, prolonged attack on their already difficult living and working conditions, disguised by a winter fuel allowance, due to “the war in Ukraine”. For a start, inflation means that the freezing of nominal income tax thresholds for the next six years (the longest since 1955) ensures that more of the lowest paid workers will have to pay income tax for the first time, whilst the wages of others higher up the ladder will fall into a higher tax bracket. The Chancellor’s estimate is that this will bring in £100bn for the Treasury over the next 5 years. On top of the tax rises, the highest rate of inflation in decades spells a much more direct assault on working class living standards. Even the Office for Budget Responsibility is saying that “households will have to draw on savings as the cost of living crisis bites” and recognising that “living standards will still be below pre-pandemic levels by 2028”.³

In response to this, the sporadic strikes against declining real wages which have been asserting themselves over the past year are continuing to grow, with the tabloid press having a field day recalling the ‘Winter of Discontent’ back in 1978/9 (which presaged the era of Margaret Thatcher). Faced with a government that is not even giving union leaders ‘room to negotiate’, the legally-faultless strike ballots and timetables of pre-announced strike days for railway workers, postal workers, nurses and ambulance workers are only the tip of the iceberg of workers striking.

The wider context of all this is the sharpening of the global economic crisis which politicians, depending on their party allegiance, lay the blame alternatively at the feet of a few lone weirdos at the top of the Conservative Party or one isolated paranoiac in Russia. It is important to understand that the actions of these individuals do not exist in a vacuum, but have a history, and are the increasingly desperate responses of a global ruling class which has no solutions for a crisis-ridden system that is unable to return to profitability.

History and pre-history of the ‘mini budget’

In the waning days of Boris Johnson’s premiership, the global economic outlook was particularly dismal. High inflation combined with low growth is a hopeless mix, and the pessimism was ratified by Federal Reserve Chair Jay Powell’s warning of coming drastic interest rate increases in August.⁴ It was intimated several times and formally announced on Tuesday 20 September, three

days before the mini budget, that the focus of the world financial market was going to be shifted from an expansive and inflationary phase, meant to help lift the world economy out of its post-Covid slump, to a restrictive phase in which reducing inflation was the main aim. In the Conservative Party leadership election of September, the membership rallied behind the hard Thatcherite right due to their shared aversion to the reality of Johnson's perpetual sleaze and mismanagement. The fresh-faced pair of Truss and Kwarteng naively took this minor and highly conditional approval from a marginal section of the bourgeoisie as endorsement for a radical economic programme based on reheated Thatcherism. A week after political activity was allowed to commence following the Queen's funeral, Kwarteng, with Truss' full support, announced his 'mini-budget' on Friday 23 September which both aimed to address the energy crisis and boost the economy by respectively introducing energy price caps for households and businesses, and extensive cuts to corporation tax, national insurance, and the 45p rate of income tax.

The problems began to be noticed the following Tuesday, when by the afternoon, 30-year gilt yields⁵ had reached 5% from 3.5% the week before, and the pound crashed in value against the dollar to almost parity. The volatility had its roots in a variety of long-term and short-term conditions. Jacob Rees-Mogg, several days after the event, blamed the volatility on the BoE not raising rates fast enough the day before, which is a bit like someone who climbs over a safety rail blaming the architect for putting it on top of a 20-storey building. However, the point is correct in respect to the fact that the rate increase by the BoE — which was small relative to the increase by the Fed a few days earlier— drastically reduced the British government's room for fiscal manoeuvre. In

fact, due to the BoE's dovishness, the government would have had to announce a budget cut simply in order to maintain the current dismal and inflationary conditions. When the Fed decides on a monetary tightening by increasing interest rates, then all countries have to follow suit. If a country has a rate increase lower than the USA's, then money will flow out of that economy towards the USA where investors will be able to get better interest rates. The drain of money out of the country in turn results in a fall in the value of the currency, leading to more expensive imports, which has the impact of effectively exporting inflation from the US to the dependent country. Not only did the UK have a smaller rate increase than the US, Kwarteng also proposed a £45 billion spending increase. The mismatch between monetary and fiscal policy has already become something of a classic case, a cautionary tale from central bankers to those rogues who would question current economic orthodoxy.

Truss's economic plan represents in some ways the political dead-end which the Conservative Party has pushed itself into. The comment that 'Britain is a nation of idlers' published in *Britannia Unchained*, a Tory Right tract which Truss, Kwarteng and others co-authored in 2012, is emblematic of how they see the economic problems of the UK. Productivity, a measure of how efficiently labour inputs are used in relation to capital expenditure to create a given level of economic output and in some ways a cypher for the rate of profit, is reduced to a moral issue of 'laziness' which is used as a justification for the continuing punishment of the British working class in the hopes of restoring the rate of profit (often referred to in the bourgeois press as 'Britain's chronic growth problem'). In fact, all advanced countries have experienced a productivity slowdown since the financial crisis, although

it has been more pronounced in the UK. Different reasons are given for the cause of this slowdown, such as lack of investment and training on one hand and reduced demand due to the financial crisis and austerity on the other⁶. However, the means of countering this slowdown employed by all recent governments have been remarkably consistent.

The big bang of the early 1980s plays an oversized role in the political imagination of British Conservatives. In their mythical retelling of the events, it allowed the spirits of free enterprise lying dormant in slacking proletarians to grow unencumbered by government interference. In reality, growth was entirely in the financial market, comprised of fees from selling British state property, and similarly re-organising production overseas through speculation and extreme leveraging. All of which was not made possible by the supposed daring genius of Margaret Thatcher, but by the expansion of money supply caused by the de-linking of the US dollar from gold with the ensuing oil crises and price hikes which exacerbated the crisis of profitability in the 'real economy' of the early 70s.⁷ In capitalist terms that round of restructuring was successful in that it allowed a short-term return to profitability, never mind the decimation of the 'traditional' working class and the decades-long economic restructuring that turned the UK economy into a service one, dominated by finance. But the financial crash of 2007-8, with the low-growth and multiplication of zombie companies that the world has been experiencing since then shows that financialisation has already run its course, and that further 'growth' through further financial restructuring is extremely difficult.

The precise mechanism which induced this mini-crash was in fact a result of this very same financial restructuring, which shows it is just as capable of destroying capitalist

growth as it is of temporarily prolonging it. The obscure section of the financial sector known as Liability Driven Investment (LDI) began as a means of increasing returns for pension funds who were threatened by the requirements of mainly public sector defined-benefit pension schemes. These sorts of pensions, which offer some sort of guarantee on the financial remuneration of pensioners, were slowly replaced during the 1990s by defined contribution pensions schemes which did not have to guarantee this and therefore had much less onerous funding requirements. Large sectors of the population still had defined-benefit schemes which by 2004 were collapsing due to an increasing number of firms reneging on their contributions and lower returns from stock markets. In order to help these funds manage this the New Labour government introduced the Pensions Act 2004 which allowed pension funds more 'flexibility' in their investing strategies. Pension fund managers then began to employ the LDI strategy which had been developed by investors at US bank Merrill Lynch in 2003 in order to help protect defined-benefit schemes from large movements in interest rates and inflation. Part of this involved 'hedging' using gilts (government bonds, the equivalent of US Treasury securities), usually considered a completely safe investment due to having price levels that are relatively unreactive to demand, allowing them to be sold en masse when large amounts of cash are required quickly.

However, this strategy of using gilts to provide liquid assets fails when the bond issuer violates the basic requirements of asset liquidity. Namely, when the issuer defies Keynes and increases the supply beyond the range where a "*price inelasticity of supply*" holds. The mini-budget, with its unheralded profligacy,⁸ was exactly this circumstance. The price of gilts crashed and pension funds,

which had to answer margin calls⁹ on their LDI portfolios, were unable to liquidate these assets due to a 'fire sale' dynamic.¹⁰ At one point there were no buyers for long dated UK treasury bonds — the textbook liquid asset had become completely illiquid (they should have invested in ministerial positions, a commodity which has been showing great signs of liquidity). The result of the political manoeuvres of the British ruling class over the last 50 years: moving away from an export-led industrial economy but only half-heartedly committing to becoming the lapdog of American imperialism, is an economic system based on the financial services industry that therefore lives and dies on its financial plausibility. Part of the reason why the UK crashed out of the ERM in 1992¹¹ was due to the fact that the markets recognised that sterling, the currency of a financial services economy, had been over ambitiously pegged to the Deutschmark, the currency of an industrial goods exporter. The hard truth is that the UK economy lacks the bulwark of a massive current account surplus (Germany) or imperialist domination (USA) to weather an economic crisis in which its own financial solvency is put into question. The fact that the pound dropped in value so rapidly is proof of this; when investors can no longer rely on the British financial system, the alternative is not to invest in the British manufacturing system, but move their money outside the UK entirely¹².

By Tuesday afternoon it was clear that defined-benefit schemes were within a few hours of complete insolvency. The Bank of England was forced to act decisively and announced a bond buying scheme of up to £5 billion per day for 13 days in order to keep prices high and stop the margin calls. From 10am Wednesday bond yields began to drop.

Over the next few weeks, against increasing criticism from the Labour

opposition who rapidly rose to unprecedented levels of popular support with a position of fiscal orthodoxy and conservatism, the government dug its heels in ideologically, even as it offered concessions drop-by-drop. First, a week after the mini-budget, the cut to the 45p tax rate, the most obvious example of class warfare, was dropped, even though it was by far the smallest portion of the tax cuts. This itself was not primarily intended to calm the markets as the gilt purchase scheme introduced by the BoE was working well and by Monday 3 October, the day after the 45p tax cut U-turn, only £4 billion of the potential £30 billion had been used. However, once it became clear that the government was determined to not offer any concessions beyond this, exactly one week after the problems had begun, 30-year gilt yields began to rise again, albeit this time more slowly. The BoE thus began its next phase of action. A Temporary Expanded Collateral Repo Facility was launched through which banks would be able to help to ease liquidity pressures facing their clients LDI funds¹³ and the scale of its remaining gilt purchase operations were expanded. On Tuesday the scope of the gilt purchases operations was widened to include index-linked gilts up until the end of the purchase scheme that Friday. The next day, as 30-year gilt yields reached 5% again, it was clear that none of these operations were going to be as successful the second time around, and that some change to the government was necessary. That Friday, as the purchase scheme came to an end, Kwarteng was hastily summoned back from an IMF meeting in Washington D.C. to be sacked by Truss and replaced by Jeremy Hunt, businessman, stalwart of financial orthodoxy, and the former Health Minister who did his bit for the current crisis in the NHS. The same day the promise to avoid a planned £18bn corporation tax rise was scrapped. The market reaction was

positive with falls in gilt yields the following Monday closing about £10bn of the fiscal hole that had been opened in public finances. At this point, the cat was out of the bag. Only an end to the Truss-Kwarteng regime and its policies would keep the markets happy. After a chaotic fracking vote on Wednesday evening which fully exposed the deep divisions within the Conservative Party, Truss resigned on Thursday 20 October, making her the UK's shortest serving Prime Minister after spending only 49 days in office.

The Autumn Statement and its future

With little fanfare, Rishi Sunak became the next prime minister five days later. His cabinet reshuffle, which kept Jeremy Hunt in his position and removed almost everyone else, has solidified his reputation as a man of orthodoxy. In the Autumn Statement a new budget, released just 56 days after the old budget, was announced along with an independent OBR forecast. The budget included a slew of tax rises and spending cuts spread over the coming decade, such that by 2024/25, the tax burden will reach 37.5% of GDP, the highest since the post-war period. The OBR forecast is especially gloomy, predicting a recession for at least another year, a loss of over half a million jobs over the next two years, and a reduction in living standards of 7% over the same period wiping out the previous eight years of growth¹⁴.

Behind the figures, the implications for daily life are arduous. The health service and the railways are at breaking point. In both cases the pay freeze of the last ten years has produced a massive shortage of nurses (tens of thousands), doctors and train drivers. There are huge shortages of workers in social care and the "hospitality" sectors. Previous shortages were covered to some extent by EU

workers but with Brexit many of them have left. Add to this the corruption of billions of pounds' worth of contracts awarded to government supporters for PPE that never worked or arrived, and the financial meltdown which we have just described, we can see that the economic situation has been made worse by incompetence.

The consequence is that wages have fallen behind prices at a faster rate than any time since 1977. There is no surprise therefore that even before these last few weeks the number of days lost to strikes has been the highest since 1990.

The government refuses to negotiate seriously even when faced with the largest ever nurses' strike (whose pay has been dramatically cut for a decade or more). Instead it is claiming that there is no money for it (although there is for weapons to Ukraine or bribing Rwanda to take migrants) and is basically hoping inflation will come down. If that fails they propose to remove the limited 'right to strike' of all public sector workers (nurses and rail workers first of all). The Labour Party is cosying up to Big Business (most of which sees it as the best team to bring the situation under control). It does not even need to promise the workers anything to win the next election so dire have the various Conservative governments been.

The present strikes thus assume a pivotal position in British politics, into which the hopes and expectations of both the working class and their class enemy are placed. For the balance of forces to swing towards the working class it is necessary for the growing number of workers who are striking sector by sector to come together to strengthen their resistance. (Ultimately this will mean uniting beyond national borders as proletarians exploited by an international capitalist class.) For many this will inevitably mean coming up against a union bureaucracy

aiming at 'social peace' with their exploiters¹⁵, not to mention the danger of being co-opted by leftist figureheads vying for institutional sinecures. After decades of passivity it is time for the people whose lives depend on working

for a wage to organise for themselves and fight the wage cuts, price rises and job losses carried out by the national and international organs of capitalist rule.

JS

Notes

1. *Le Monde* 21/10/22: "After the resignation of Liz Truss, the UK plunges into a deep and unexpected political crisis."

The New York Times 20/10/22: "The beleaguered British prime minister relinquished her office after just 44 days of political and economic tumult, the shortest tenure in British history."

Süddeutsche Zeitung 20/10/22: "the British are rid of Prime Minister Liz Truss, who has caused so much mischief in such a short time"

2. Five-year gilt premiums (i.e., the interest the government has to pay on its borrowing that has a maturation of 5 years) were around 1.8% prior to September 2022 and have now stabilised around 3.2%.

3. Delphine Strauss, 'Households braced for largest fall in living standards since records began', *Financial Times*, 18.11.22.

4. <https://www.federalreserve.gov/newsevents/speech/powell20220826a.htm>

5. A gilt is a UK treasury bond, an agreement by the treasury to repay an investor at a set interval of time the principal plus interest (the yield). It is the main means along with taxation the government uses to raise funds. Yields vary inversely with price, so that a gilt which is less valuable due to perceived increase of risk (possibility of default) requires a higher yield to offset that risk.

6. <https://cepr.org/voxeu/columns/explaining-uks-productivity-slowdown-views-leading-economists>

7. See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 18, 1971-2021: 50 Years Since the USA Reneged on Bretton Woods

8. It's worth pointing out that the fiscal strategy

of the Truss government is, from the point of view of international money markets, identical to that proposed by Jeremy Corbyn, and as such would have engendered the same market reaction.

9. Hedging strategies are only guaranteed within a certain range of value of the original equity. Once the price deviates beyond this, then extra funds are requested by the broker to make up the gap.

10. The margin calls were a result of the deviation of the gilt price. However, as more gilts were sold to answer these, the price was pushed lower triggering further margin calls.

11. See *Workers Voice* #63 November/December 1992 <https://libcom.org/article/workers-voice-second-series>

12. This is historically a disciplinary response which has been meted out to many peripheral capitalist nations such as Latin American and Asian nations during the 1990s. Some commentators remarked on the peculiarity of a developed economy experiencing such a mechanism.

13. Essentially by offering cheap overnight loans.

14. <https://obr.uk/efo/economic-and-fiscal-outlook-november-2022/>

15. Such as the leftists' man of the hour, Mick Lynch, who is clear to stress his reformist credentials, for instance in an interview with LBC on 1 August stating that he does 'not want a revolution that destroys the important structures of our communities'. These important structures presumably include those that promote the systematic exploitation of the working class.

The War in Ukraine, the Working Class and the Future International

War is a constant fact of capitalism today. The operation of the capitalist system inevitably leads to the competitive struggle to appropriate the surplus value produced by the world's working class — in other words an imperialist struggle. As the amount of surplus value relative to existing capital declines, this struggle becomes more violent eventually leading to war. Over the last 120 years, war has been almost continuous. At times, such as 1914-1918 or 1939-1945, it has been so widespread that it has been called a 'world war'. The foundation of the UN in the aftermath of the Second World War was intended — according to its founding statements — to be a guarantee of world peace. But somewhere in the world, war has been raging almost constantly since 1945, indeed since the beginning of the 20th century.

Though we see war as a constant factor, the Russian invasion of Ukraine marks a significant deepening of inter-imperialist tensions, over and above the catastrophe for the people of Ukraine and Russia who have been targeted in different ways by the military actions of both sides. The rationale for war is fundamentally economic. The ongoing crisis of the capitalist economy is a result of its insoluble contradictions, but on a national level war can bring some temporary relief by destroying the productive capacity of competitors and directly taking over resources. Ukraine is a major producer of agricultural staples, such as wheat and sunflower oil. It also has significant mineral wealth. Acquisition of these would be an asset to the Russian economy. Failing that, destruction or dislocation of Ukraine's production would help Russia's economy by

knocking out an economic rival. The political manoeuvrings over disputed elections and the status of the predominantly Russian-speaking regions in East Ukraine over the last 20 years are both the background to, and the consequence of, the manoeuvres by pro-Russian and pro-American factions of the Ukrainian bourgeoisie and external fractions of the capitalist class.

It is not the only war currently being fought, however. Azerbaijan and Armenia have been fighting, with more or less ferocity, since the early 1990s, and the war there briefly blew up again during the summer of 2022; the wars in Syria, Ethiopia, Yemen, Israel/Palestine, Somalia, Iraq, Myanmar and across the Maghreb are continuing; warlords and criminal gangs (sometimes it is difficult to tell the difference) are continuing to ravage Africa and South America. There are more continuing conflicts than can readily be listed; some states are fighting more than one ongoing conflict and they span every continent.¹

None of these conflicts have anything to offer the working class but more misery. Whichever gang is in charge of the state, whether regions and language-groups secede from a particular state, join another state or found their own, are not issues for the working class. It does not change the reality of capitalist relations or exploitation.

The war in Ukraine, though not so far the deadliest of the ongoing conflicts, is nevertheless an important one. It directly involves Russia, a nuclear power that has threatened to use nuclear weapons. Russia has been trying to build a closer alliance with China, now the US's main rival, with some (though not total) success.² It has however moved,

diplomatically and militarily, closer to Iran, also a long-term enemy of the US. The US and other NATO countries are backing Ukraine, supplying weapons and training to the government in Kyiv. The US has succeeded in disciplining some of its allies, like Germany, and bringing them more into line with its own foreign policy. Sweden and Finland are in the process of overturning 70 years of neutrality by joining NATO. At the time of going to press (Jan 2023) only Hungary and Turkey are still to ratify the accession treaties. Turkey, however, though a NATO member, has been playing its own diplomatic games with Russia, posing as an honest broker. Hungary is, for an EU and NATO member, quite close politically to Russia, and the president, Viktor Orban, is likely to take his time about ratification.³ These manoeuvres by powers great and small represent nothing more than jostling for position to take best advantage of the carnage in Ukraine, to get the best deals while picking over the carcasses left by the slaughter.

This is a war between two imperialist camps and the working class can have no side in this fight. The liberal western 'democracies' say that Putin is an authoritarian and Ukraine is a beacon of democracy; the former may be true, but the latter is a lie. Putin says that Ukraine is soft on fascism and the Russians are liberators; again, the former may be true, but the latter is a lie. Neither the 'anti-fascist crusade' nor the 'defence of democracy' are worth one drop of workers' blood.

The working class is the only force that can stop the war — by ending capitalism, which is the driver of war in the modern world. But at the moment the working class is weak and divided. In much of the world it is — happily or unhappily — tied to the nation, and hardly aware of itself as an international class that has the historic mission to

overthrow capitalism and create a worldwide socialist society.

In this new situation, revolutionary groups (and ostensibly revolutionary groups) have been casting around trying to understand what is happening, and finding parallels in the history of the workers' movement.

Some parallels seem apt. In 1914, as the Austro-Hungarian army attacked Serbia, the event which triggered the cascade of alliances that led to the apocalyptic slaughter of the First World War, socialists across Europe struggled to come to terms with the new situation.

One section of the Second International stuck by the resolutions of its Congresses, spearheaded by Lenin and Luxemburg, at Stuttgart in 1907 and Copenhagen in 1910 and reaffirmed by the Basel Manifesto of 1912. These called on socialists to oppose the war on a revolutionary basis and agitate to bring about the downfall of capitalism. These revolutionaries included the Russian Bolsheviks, the Bulgarian Tesnyaki, the Dutch Tribunists and the Polish and, crucially, Serbian Social Democrats, who proclaimed that the war was one between belligerent capitalist powers and had nothing to offer the working class, even though Serbia had been directly attacked by Austria-Hungary. They said:

"for us, the decisive fact was that the war between Serbia and Austria was only a small part of a totality, merely the prologue to universal, European war, and this latter — we were profoundly convinced of this — could not fail to have a clearly pronounced imperialist character. As a result, we — being a part of the great socialist, proletarian International — considered that it was our bounden duty to oppose the war resolutely".⁴

Most of the ostensibly 'Marxist', 'revolutionary' Second International tore up the resolution of the International against the war and supported 'their own' ruling class. This marks the historic betrayal of the majority of the 'socialists' — the Labour Party in Britain, most of the SFIO in France, the majority of the Social Democrats in Germany — who, along with the trades unions in the belligerent countries, lined up to recruit men for King and Country, Emperor and Fatherland, the defence of civilisation ... whatever the excuses, the reality was to slaughter and be slaughtered in defence of the interests of national capital. In countries which were not directly involved in the war, many socialist parties fractured into groups supporting one side or the other, such as in the Socialist Workers' Party of the Netherlands which produced pro-German and pro-Allied groups as well as a revolutionary minority.

A third contingent of the Second International took up a pacifist position. The likes of Karl Kautsky declared that the war was an aberration and the world must return to the *status quo ante bellum*. In other words, the working class's best interests were served by a return to the 'normal' workings of capitalism. Exploitation and misery in the service of capital were fine, but war was just going too far.

In the responses of different groups to the Ukraine war, we can see echoes of these historical positions. There are revolutionary groups that have remained firm in defence of internationalism and the interests of the working class. Groups that support either Ukrainian 'resistance' or Russian 'liberation' can be likened to the socialist groups that supported one or other belligerent power in the First World War, while some groups have a confused position between outright support and outright condemnation.

Internationalists

The groups of the Communist Left have without exception opposed the war on the basis that it is imperialist and serves only the interests of capital. All affiliates of the ICT have published numerous texts dealing with the war since it began. We refer readers to previous issues of RP and to our website.⁵ The other groups of the Communist Left have also roundly condemned the war as imperialist. We have many important disagreements with the International Communist Current (ICC) and the various International Communist Parties (ICP), but we recognise that the statements these groups have published on the war are rooted in proletarian internationalism. Both have condemned the war as a war for capitalism with nothing to offer the working class.⁶ Numerous smaller groups inspired by the wider Communist Left, such as Internationalist Communist Perspectives in Korea⁷, have also published internationalist statements against the war. We consider that all these groups are correctly opposing imperialist war with class war, no matter what other disagreements we have with them. We see proletarian internationalism, which ultimately means the refusal to take sides in imperialist conflict, as being a cornerstone of the positions of the Communist Left since the early 20th century and fundamental to all groups which claim the heritage of the Communist Left today.

Various anarchist or anarchist adjacent groups have also taken internationalist positions on the war, opposing the class struggle of the workers of both sides against the war of the capitalists. The international Anarkismo group⁸, the Anarchist Communist Group (ACG) in Britain⁹, the IWA-AIT (which includes the CNT in France, Solidarity Federation in Britain and many others)¹⁰, Tridini Valka in Czechia¹¹,

the Kurdish-Speaking Anarchist Forum,¹² A\$AP Révolution in France,¹³ and many other groups have opposed the war on a class basis. Most significantly some in and near the belligerent countries have opposed the war – notably KRAS, the section of IWA-AIT in Russia¹⁴ and the Assembly group in Ukraine¹⁵ whose statements have been widely re-published by ourselves and others; ‘*Some Anarchists From The Central European Region*’¹⁶ who issued a call for solidarity with deserters on both sides; or the group ‘Konflikt’ in Bulgaria¹⁷ which issued statements and provided analysis on the basis of clear class positions. We are heartened that these groups have been able to put forward clear expressions of class politics, no matter what other disagreements we may have with them.

The Litany of Defencists

Not surprisingly, a great many groups that claim to represent the working class have come out for one side or another. In the main, Stalinist groups have come to the defence of Russia, citing NATO support for Ukraine and Putin’s idea of an ‘anti-fascist’ crusade as sufficient reasons for supporting Russian imperialism. Of course, they do not see Russia as imperialist, and claim Russia should be supported precisely because it is ‘anti-imperialist’, by which they mean an enemy of the USA. Their failure to understand capitalism is the flip-side of their inability to understand socialism. The CPGB-ML in the UK is a paradigm of this current: its position is entirely of support for the Moscow ‘line’.¹⁸

Some Stalinist groups, such as the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) in the UK and the KKE in Greece, have opposed the war. However, this does not mean that these groups have somehow become internationalist; their fundamental method is

still entirely leftist and calling for an end to the war is a matter of tactics, not fundamental principle. The CPB for example calls for a negotiated peace, not class war, echoing Kautsky and the pacifists of the First World War who saw the war as a failure of policy, not a sign of the fundamental crisis of the capitalist system.¹⁹

The Trotskyist groups have come out with a variety of positions, but tend towards more-or-less clear support for the Ukrainian regime, while simultaneously criticising NATO militarism. The Socialist Workers’ Party in the UK (SWP), once the largest group to the left of Labour and now a tiny rump, has called for a Russian withdrawal, and also said that Russia’s military defeat by ‘the Ukrainian people’ would be a positive result.²⁰ The Socialist Party of England and Wales, formerly Labour’s loyal internal opposition group ‘Militant’, calls for ‘self-determination for Ukrainians’, which in the midst of this war is tantamount to support for the regime in Kyiv.²¹ The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty (AWL) in the UK (an organisation which emerged from the Trotskyist milieu) has made its support for the regime in Kyiv, and therefore for US imperialism and NATO militarism, explicit.²²

The continued support of the majority of Stalinist and Trotskyist groups for the belligerent powers (even if, in the case of the Trotskyists, it is couched in terms of ‘national self-determination’ and ‘the victory of the Ukrainian people’) is hardly surprising. Long ago the political forebears of these organisations made their peace with capitalism as a whole and settled for fighting for their place within the structures of the national state and the imperialist pecking-order. Without calling into question the fundamentals of their history, the organisations that descend from Stalinism and Trotskyism cannot offer a real alternative to the working class. Instead,

these parties serve only to offer different formulae for the management of national capital, and to tie the working class more tightly to a statist version of capitalism.

However, it is not just the descendants of the shipwreck of the Communist International that have called for workers to fight for capitalism. A section of the anarchists have also enthusiastically called for workers to throw themselves into the slaughter. Following in the footsteps of Kropotkin, who along with others in the 'Manifesto of the 16' called for support for the Allies in the First World War against the military aggression of the German Empire, some anarchist groups have taken the position that it is the job of workers to defeat the Russian invasion.

Most prominent among these have been, in the UK, the group around the newspaper *Freedom* (closely connected with Kropotkin at its foundation), which has enthusiastically promoted the idea of an 'anti-authoritarian resistance to the Russian invasion',²³ and the Anarchist Federation (AFed), which is currently intimately connected with the *Freedom* group. In its magazine *Organize* 96 it expressed its solidarity with those fighting 'against fascism and forces of the imperial invasion'.²⁴ AFed is part of an international organisation, the International of Anarchist Federations (IAF), which has not, in the main, come out in favour of Ukrainian national-defencism,²⁵ but its international statement leaves no doubt that it sees the war as being a result of Russian aggression, even if in response to NATO provocation.²⁶ The IAF's willingness to lay the blame at the door of particular states, to see Russia as the 'aggressor' and Ukraine as the 'victim', leaves the door open to national-defencism. The section of the IAF in Czechia and Slovakia, for example, has repeated the same pro-war rhetoric as the British section, and specifically criticised the Italian section's defence

of internationalist positions!²⁷ The British and Czech-Slovak sections of the IAF are echoing the call of some anarchists in and around Ukraine, in Russia and Belarus, to resist Russian 'fascism' — an irony, as the campaign against 'Ukrainian fascism' is the justification Putin gives for the Russian invasion.

Sadly, some anarchists have taken these calls seriously and so-called 'anarchist' or 'anti-authoritarian' detachments are fighting in the Ukrainian army, alongside and even part of battalions that include fascists. See for example the report, originally from 'Anarchist Black Cross Dresden', on the state of the Anarchists fighting in Ukraine.²⁸ This is one of the German anarchist groups providing solidarity to the "*Ukrainian resistance*". They don't hide their main aim. "*It's about freedom, it's not about nationalism, about a state, it's about the Russian world not spreading to Ukraine*". There is no mention of NATO or the US. They even claim that Ukraine before the invasion was somehow a "*place where people found refuge from repression*"!

This group provided support for the 'anti-authoritarian' units in the Ukrainian army. They say that initiative has now collapsed and the founder of the solidarity campaign stole €20,000 of donations. So 'anarchists' and 'anti-fascists' are now just fighting in various military units both in the normal army, but also in specific ideologically right wing units.

They admit "*it has been difficult to oppose the structural organization of the war, i.e., the army, precisely because there are no independent units*". And they say their comrades "*attempts to get a place in the military ranks brought them directly to units directly connected with Ukrainian fascist groups*", the Right Sector, Azov Battalion and such like, which means "*some antifascists and anarchists are now, in one way or another,*

becoming forces that support the development of far-right politics in Ukraine”.

In the face of this, they now give people the choice to donate to “antifascists and anarchists” either in normal army units, or in right wing units! So, in a roundabout way, these German anarchists are also providing support to fascist groups in Ukraine, and quite clearly supporting the Ukrainian state’s military drive. So much for ‘anti-authoritarianism’ and ‘fighting fascism’.

Perhaps the collapse of some anarchist groups into national-defencism, no matter what is given as a defence, is not surprising. Lesser-evilmism, which generally falls back on a ‘defence of democracy’ or something similar, is a recurrent feature of political approaches that are not based on a class analysis. As has been shown, many anarchist organisations do centralise class struggle, but others fall back on abstractions like ‘freedom’ and ‘the people’ that have no meaning in class societies — and thus, end up repeating the commonalities of the rest of bourgeois politics, even when they see themselves as the antithesis of both the bourgeoisie and ‘politics’. Yet this they are not; at best they are their witless instruments.

More worrying, from the point of view of those who try to express the political programme of the proletariat, are organisations that have a more nuanced approach to these questions, but still fall into the traps of the bourgeoisie and end up mouthing the words of the bourgeoisie in a superficially-proletarian garb.

The Angry Workers of the World (AWW) are an organisation with which the CWO has had some interesting and fruitful discussions in recent years. We have reviewed each other’s publications and written about our criticisms of each others’ practice.²⁹

But once the war began, the AWW revealed some major differences of opinion

inside the organisation. On the one hand, some comrades in the AWW could write “we generally assumed that, “workers’ should not fight their bosses’ war” and that, although being a very blunt verbal uttering, “no war, but the class war” could express our general political line. We still carry shreds of the umbilical cord that connects us to the back-rooms of Zimmerwald and other communist internationalists in the past.”³⁰ This grouping also draws parallels between those that think there could be a ‘progressive’ form of military resistance to Russian imperialism, with the German SPD in 1914:

“The SPD argued that a war against the Czar’s regime will further the cause of a modern working class movement and that war credits should be granted – in a way this was not a betrayal, but just an example of taking this political approach to its practical conclusion.”³¹

Identifying one side as a unique aggressor and the other side as the victim, as we have seen, can lead to support for the state through identification with the ‘wronged’ side. Whether this is dressed up as some sort of ‘progressive’ action in defence of ‘workers’ autonomy’ is irrelevant. Both sides who are doing the fighting in the war are made up, primarily, of workers, and the victims on both sides are, primarily, workers. The class which spans all national frontiers has no interest in one national section slaughtering another. In a further article, the representative of this internal grouping says that “*in the current system, war is an integral part of politics by all state powers and workers should do what they can to avoid fighting their bosses’ wars*”, and we can only agree.³²

Yet another section of the AWW rejects the slogan ‘no war but the class war’, and affirms that (in the context of the wars in

Yugoslavia in the 1990s) “many of the people who started with “no war but the class war” ended up either totally irrelevant to the working class or even worse, on the side of reaction, because of their inability to understand the working class kernel wrapped up in a “national flag” shell”.³³ In a subsequent piece, the same writer repeatedly asks what the Ukrainian working class should do faced with Russian invasion, and falls into the same ‘lesser evilism’ as the anarchists, without ever hinting at what the war means for the Russian working class.³⁴ It is as if the Russian working class has ceased to exist and only the response of the Ukrainian working class is important. While talking about how Russia is a more brutal state than the Western backers of Ukraine — rather reminiscent of the Anarchist Black Cross Dresden’s fear of the “Russian world” encompassing Ukraine, quoted above — it has little to say about how anti-war voices in Russia can be strengthened, how the working class as a whole (not just in Ukraine) can oppose this war in particular and capitalism’s drive to war in general by acting on its own account for its own interests.

Another group which the CWO has in the past had relatively friendly relations is the international group in France, Belgium and Czechia known as Mouvement Communiste/ Kolektivně proti Kapitálu (MC/KpK). We have considered this group, though influenced by autonomism, to be in broad agreement with the positions of the Communist Left. However, in March 2022, it published a communique which affirmed “*The Ukrainian population is resisting the invader. And that is only to be expected. The defence of towns and villages is above all the defence of its condition against the dramatic aggravation of it caused by the war. The freedom of a democratic regime is, in their eyes, preferable to a military occupation. The resistance in the*

larger sense must thus be read as an armed democracy movement.”³⁵ It also predicts the collapse of the Kyiv government and urged the Ukrainian working class to turn resistance to Russian invasion into “a mobile war, of harassment and guerrilla action” against Russia. Furthermore, this piece goes on, “*The first duty of communists is to encourage by all means (very feeble today) the democratic armed movement to free itself from the symbolic tutelage of the Ukrainian state, which is already collapsing, by appealing to its proletarian component – the vast majority of the volunteers – to anchor the resistance to the defence of its own interests against its state and its bosses (who will certainly change sides at the first opportunity).*”

In subsequent documents MC/KpK talk about ‘proletarian resistance’ and how it cannot subordinate itself to the Ukrainian state, how it must retain its independence and ‘turn the imperialist war into a civil war’.³⁶

We think this is fantasy. There is no independent proletarian resistance in Ukraine, the expressions of ‘popular’ or ‘working class’ resistance to Russian invasion are entirely within the framework of the Ukrainian state’s resistance to an imperialist rival and not signs of the class war. MC/KpK is seeing phantoms. Ukrainian workers may generally see the Ukrainian state as better for them than the Russian state. Other workers in Ukraine, especially in the east of the country, may see the Russian state as less bad. Neither hold one gram of comfort for the working class as a whole. Both are the states of capitalists and warmongers. The way the working class can end wars is by working together, by fraternising across the lines, by resisting cuts in wages and living standards even when this is called sabotaging ‘their own’ war effort, and by supporting the actions of other workers, on either side of the front line, against all the governments involved in this

barbaric slaughter.

***“The Only War Worth
Fighting is the Class War”***

Some of the anarchists, some of the members of the AWW, and MC/KpK, may reject the slogan, and the principle, ‘no war but the class war’. Nevertheless, for us it means that the working class cannot mix the struggle for its own freedom with the competition between capitalist states. The war in Ukraine is a capitalist war, it is not the class war. Class war may emerge from it, but at present it is a war between two capitalist states, with various imperialist allies and backers, and offers nothing to the working class. We consider it is the duty of revolutionaries to pose the alternative to the working class — either you support the capitalist state which demands that you risk your lives on its behalf (whichever state, however one wants to caveat it with equivocations about ‘peoples’ war’ and ‘armed democracy’ against one-sided ‘imperialism’); or you take up the fight for genuine class war, against capitalism and all bourgeois states.

The present situation bears out what we have been arguing for years. It marks a significant step down in the decades’ long economic crisis of global capitalism for which the ultimate solution can only be a massive devaluation and destruction of capital values. In other words “war”; increasingly tending towards head-on clashes between the 21st century’s ‘great powers’. This is not 1914 but for communists the situation faced by revolutionaries at the start of the First World War is a salutary warning of the need to make working class opposition to capitalist war an integral part of organising a class-wide opposition to ‘the cost of living crisis’ as it morphs into an immediate pre-war crisis. In 1914 the Second International collapsed

when the majority of its members simply shut up shop and supported their ‘own’ capitalist side in the war. Social Democracy then, like Social Democracy now, did not make the link between fighting capitalism’s economic attacks and resisting all-out imperialist war. When push came to shove the majority sided with their own imperialist camp.

Only a minority, who later became the Zimmerwald left, remained with the international interests of the working class as a whole. Their slogan “turn the imperialist war into a civil war” was coined by Lenin and became the slogan of the Bolsheviks during the carnage of the First World War. The Bolsheviks propagandised both inside and outside Russia. Inside, to put a consistently anti-war position to the Russian working class which eventually led to their recognition as the party that best represented the proletariat; outside, to rebuild links with other revolutionaries to re-forge the international. This political strategy eventually found an echo in the working class and led to the Russian revolution of October 1917, but also contributed to mutinies in all combatant armies and revolutions in the central countries.

War is inherent to capitalism but the insoluble crisis world capitalism is facing today means that, whatever the result in Ukraine, we are facing more tangible, direct preparations for the ‘ultimate solution’. We are already seeing these preparations in the US denunciations of China over Taiwan³⁷ and in the ideological preparations, such as a war for the defence of ‘democracy’. The sell-out of Social Democracy in 1914 is a salutary reminder that the class war does not stop when the shooting war starts. Far from it, even before the ‘shooting war’, the class war continues. Austerity is the bosses’ class war. Exploitation is the bosses’ class war. The working class is always the victim of war,

military or economic. Capitalism long ago ceased its progressive role of developing the social and economic basis for a world socialist community and now itself needs to be overthrown. What the world needs now is a new society without wage labour, money or states.

It is not for revolutionaries today to wait until the ‘great conflagration’ before they take the ‘*no war but the class war*’ message to the wider working class. We consider that the situation is so serious that internationalists should join together now to take this message to workers’ struggles. The ICT has proposed the formation of ‘*no war but the class war*’ committees, in response to war, but not just as a way to organise against this war. The basis for these committees is agreement on five conditions and a willingness to take this message into present workers struggles. These conditions are:

- Against capitalism, imperialism and all nationalism. No support for any national capitals, “lesser evils”, or states in formation.
- For a society where states, wage-labour, private property, money and production for profit are replaced by a world of freely associated producers.
- Against the economic and political attacks that the current war, and the ones to come, will unleash on the working class.
- For the self-organised struggle of the working class, for the formation of independent strike committees, mass assemblies and workers’ councils.
- Against oppression and exploitation, for the unity of the working class

Notes

1. A relatively comprehensive list can be found at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ongoing_armed_conflicts
2. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-06-10/the-ambivalence-in-russian-chinese-friendship>

and the coming together of genuine internationalists.

NWBCW groups — often, but not all, with the involvement of the ICT — have already been set up in the UK, US, Canada, France, Italy and Turkey. Our declaration and invitation has been shared further afield, such as Korea. These committees are not a replacement for the self-organised bodies that the working class needs to create in the course of its struggles (strike committees, mass assemblies, etc.), rather they are a tool for internationalist intervention in the class struggles already happening.

In the seriousness of the current situation, this is no short term initiative but however long the war we say our task is to encourage and defend the independence of the working class struggle, and also to link immediate demands to the need to replace capitalism and to build an organisation of internationalist revolutionaries who are indispensable to this process. We hope that NWBCW groups can, over time, contribute to this process of clarification of the positions necessary for the working class to overthrow capitalism and all states. As part of the rise in its revolutionary consciousness, the working class will eventually need to forge its own political tool, its own reference point, with a global reach.³⁸ Fantasies of workers in Ukraine defeating the Russian army in a Makhno-style ‘mobile war’ and coming through the fascist-inspired battalions of the Ukrainian army to some kind of internationalist proletarian consciousness have no part in the work needed to create such an International.

SJ

3. <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/commentary/trackers-and-data-visualizations/when-will-sweden-and-finland-join-nato-tracking-the-ratification-process-across-the-alliance/>
4. Dušan A. Popović, 1915 - letter to Christian Rakovsky. First published in Russian in Trotsky’s *Nashe Slovo*. In English, published in “*The*

Balkan Socialist Tradition, 1871-1915" edited by

Andreja Živković and Dragan Plavšić

5. For instance, the statement of the ICT in September: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-10-22/russia-s-annexations-in-ukraine-are-another-step-towards-global-imperialist-war>

6. For example, from the ICC - <https://en.internationalism.org/content/17159/joint-statement-groups-international-communist-left-about-war-ukraine> ; and from the ICP - <https://www.international-communist-party.org/CommLeft/CL50.htm#ukraine>

7. http://communistleft.jinbo.net/xs/index.php?document_url=342784&mid=cl_bd_03

8. <https://www.anarkismo.net/article/32552>

9. <https://www.anarchistcommunism.org/2022/02/24/their-war-or-class-war/>

10. <https://www.iwa-ait.org/content/lets-turn-capitalist-wars-workers-revolution>

11. <https://www.autistici.org/tridnivalka/internationalist-manifesto-against-capitalist-war-and-peace-in-ukraine/>

12. <https://anarchistnews.org/content/kurdish-speaking-anarchist-forum-no-war-class-war>

13. <https://asaprevolution.net/index.php/2022/04/27/against-the-war-class-war-engita-esp/>

14. <https://www.iwa-ait.org/content/kras-iwa-against-war>

15. <https://libcom.org/article/what-defend-ukraine-interview-italian-anarchist-federation>

16. <https://antimilitarismus.noblogs.org/post/2022/09/12/appeal-days-of-international-solidarity-with-deserters/>

17. <https://kon-flikt.org/en/articles/the-real-end-of-history-is-the-end-of-war/>

18. <https://thecommunists.org/2022/03/01/news/ukraine-kiev-junta-facing-defeat-russia-roots-out-fascist-militias/>

19. <https://www.communistparty.org.uk/stop-the-war-start-the-peace/>

20. <https://socialistworker.co.uk/features/the-great-power-grab-imperialism-and-war-in-ukraine/>

21. <https://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/100301/17-08-2022/six-months-of-ukraine-war-devastation-in-whose-interests/>

22. <https://www.workersliberty.org/story/2022-12-13/back-ukraine-against-russias-war>

23. <https://freedomnews.org.uk/2022/04/19/ukraine-war-video-dispatch-north-eastern-european-anarchists-respond-to-the-russian-narrative/>

24. <http://afed.org.uk/organise-96-is-out-taster-article-here-ukraine-anarchist-approaches/>

25. For example, the IAF's section in Italy, the FAI has opposed any kind of defencism – see https://www.federazioneanarchica.org/archivio/archivio_2022/20220722manifestonowar_en.html

26. <https://i-f-a.org/2022/04/04/against-the-war-for-global-solidarity/>

27. <https://www.afed.cz/text/7724/people-must-come-first>

28. <https://enoughisenough14.org/2022/12/04/a-political-and-personal-statement-as-well-as-a-review-of-our-solidarity-work-around-the-war-in-ukraine-so-far-anarchist-black-cross-dresden/>

29. See for example: <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-02-24/class-consciousness-and-working-class-emancipation>

30. <https://www.angryworkers.org/2022/03/10/fragments-of-a-debate-amongst-angryworkers-on-the-war-in-ukraine/>

31. *ibid.*

32. <https://www.angryworkers.org/2022/04/04/on-the-question-of-armed-resistance-more-thoughts-on-our-discussion-about-the-war-in-ukraine/>

33. <https://www.angryworkers.org/2022/03/17/no-war-but-the-class-war-not-a-very-useful-slogan/>

34. <https://www.angryworkers.org/2022/05/31/on-dogmatism-in-relation-to-the-war-in-ukraine/>

35. <http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT2203ENvG.pdf>

36. <https://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT2204ENvF.pdf>

37. see <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-08-19/the-war-in-ukraine-opens-the-way-to-global-imperialist-conflict>

38. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-06-22/on-the-future-international>

Capitalism Takes One More Step Towards Our Extinction

The twenty seventh UN Conference of the Parties (COP 27) was held in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, in November. ‘Parties’ refers to the countries that signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty that came into force in 1994. There are now 193. The Egyptians dubbed it “the conference of implementation”.

Just before the COP the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) issued a familiar report, the so-called “emissions GAP report”¹ pointing out that the current emissions programme would lead to an increase in global temperature of 2.8°C above pre-industrial levels and that a 30% reduction in emissions by 2030 is required to limit global warming to a 2°C rise. The possibility of achieving the famous 1.5°C temperature rise by 2100 (needing a 45% reduction in global emissions yet solemnly pledged at the Paris COP in 2015) is now effectively dead. Despite the fine promises made at the Glasgow COP, it was also reported that 2022 was all but certain to be the year with the highest emissions ever.²

The UN secretary general, Antonio Guterres, set the tone of the conference by announcing “*humanity is heading for collective suicide*.” This apocalyptic warning, plus the GAP report, were intended to galvanise the COP into decisive action.

Did it work?

Even asking this question verges on the ridiculous. All previous COPs have failed to deliver any reduction of emissions and this one, far from being “*the conference of implementation*” followed the same well beaten path. It was probably worse than previous COPs. However, it is still worth a brief look

at what happened, bearing in mind that the egregious failures of Glasgow were supposed to be rectified at this COP.

Failure at Sharm-el-Sheikh

45,000 delegates attended, including 636 oil and gas company lobbyists who were sponsored delegates. (BP’s chief executive, Bernard Looney, plus four other BP executives, even attended as official UN delegates for the West African state of Mauritania!) Many of the participants arrived in private jets without even a gesture to reduce their own carbon emissions! The whole COP performance has been appropriately described as an expensive bloated “travelling circus.” It ended with no formal agreement to reduce fossil fuel use. Instead, the side meetings were used to sign deals for exploitation of timber and minerals³ and, of course, for the oil and gas reps to meet with mainly African heads of state to lobby for new drilling concessions. This was justified, we were told, by the Ukraine war and the need to “dash for gas.” Thus, COP 27 is likely to lead to even more extraction of oil and gas and more carbon emissions. Precisely the opposite of what was intended.

A glance at the COP 26 pledges and the failures which were supposed to be rectified in Sharm-el-Sheikh shows no progress on all important issues.

The salient feature of COP 26 was its failure to eliminate burning of coal by 2040. The International Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) calculates this must be phased out in OECD countries by 2030 and globally by 2040. A host of countries rejected this in Glasgow. India, for example, still maintains it will only eliminate coal by 2070. There was

no mention of this issue, confirming how empty the Glasgow pledge to “phase down” coal burning was.

The parties were supposed to present new emissions reduction plans. Only 24 of the 193 attendants submitted improved targets. Methane (CH₄) reductions agreed at Glasgow have not been achieved. Instead, 2021 saw the highest ever methane emissions. Meanwhile, deforestation has continued with 7 million hectares of forest cut down since COP 26. Forests are now emitting more carbon than they are absorbing. Also the \$100bn which was supposed to be provided annually from 2020 to developing countries has not been met. It appears most of what has been provided has taken the form of loans not grants.⁴

The one supposed triumph of this COP was an agreement to set up a “Loss and Damage” fund for countries suffering the effects of climate change. How it is to be funded and controlled is unclear. What is clear is that it is not an attempt to counter the causes of climate change but a sticking plaster

attempt to mitigate its effects.

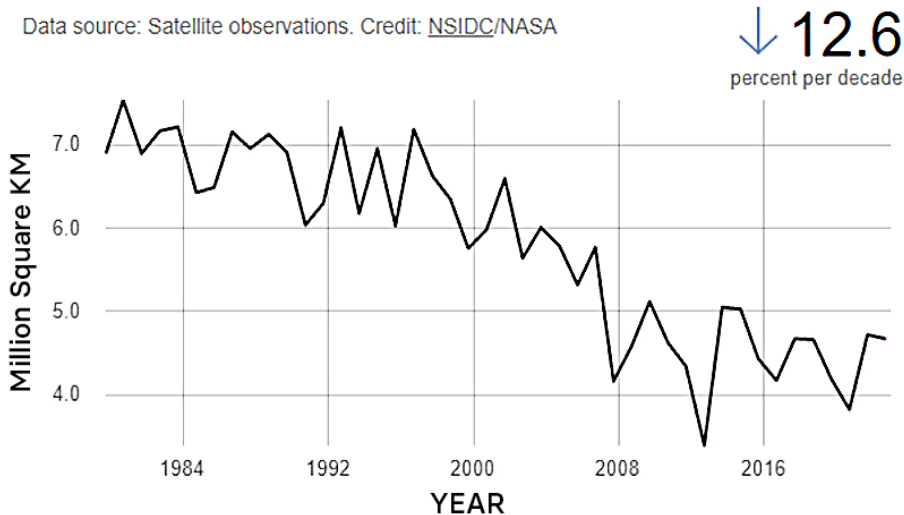
What are the effects of the climate change we have seen in the last year?

State of the Planet

The Arctic is the bellwether for what is in store for the planet. It is warming 3 times faster than the rest of the planet and sea ice and snow cover are melting at unprecedented rates. Ice area measured in September had decreased from 7 million square kilometres in 1984 to 4.6 million in 2022. The US national space agency (NASA) calculates from satellite data that 12.6% of sea ice is being lost each decade.

Snow covering in June was shown to have reduced by 6 million square kilometres between 1980 and 2012. Sea ice and snow reflect incoming solar radiation back into space via what is called the “*albedo effect*”. The snow on its own reflects 90% of the incoming radiation and ice on its own reflects between 50% and 90%. The sea water, because it is dark, only reflects 10%. Loss of

Graph 1: Arctic sea ice minimum extent



sea ice from the 1970s to 2012 reduced the *albedo effect* and caused additional warming, equivalent to 25% of all the CO₂ added in this period. Similarly the loss of snow covering on ice and arctic lands caused another additional warming, equivalent to 25% of all CO₂ releases in this period. In other words, these two effects amount to a further 50% of additional warming to the whole earth or an additional 0.21 Watts per m² over the whole world.⁵

Arctic warming is affecting the jet stream and the ocean thermohaline circulation of sea currents and is starting to create dramatic changes in the current weather. The jet stream arises from temperature differences between the cold air of the Arctic and warmer air from lower latitudes and can create winds of up to 200 miles per hour at high altitude. As the temperature difference between these two lots of air decreases the jet stream starts to slow down and to meander. One side of the jet stream has very cold air and the other has hotter air. In 2021 we got an indication of the sort of effects we can expect from this process. The village of Lytton, north of Vancouver in Canada, got hit by the high temperature side of the jet stream in August 2021 and experienced a so-called heat dome suffering temperatures of 49°C, resulting in fires which burned down most of the village. On the other hand, Texas in February 2021 got hit by the other side of the jet stream and suffered a freeze of minus 19°C leaving 4.5 million homes without power. The jet stream, of course, also controls weather in Europe which has also seen heat waves and drought. But these changes are not just producing local effects, their impact is world-wide. The devastating floods in Pakistan last year are an example. They affected 33 million people, equivalent to half the UK population, and destroyed 900,000 homes as well as livestock and crops and infrastructure. 20

million people are now homeless and require food aid. In Africa the worst drought in 40 years has left 164 million people unable to grow crops and suffering extreme hunger. China has suffered the worst heat wave in its history; Australia the worst drought, and subsequently, catastrophic floods.

Melting of the ice on Greenland and Antarctica, which is causing the rise in sea level, is proceeding very much faster than the IPCC estimated. NASA satellite measurements in 2016 revealed that 300 cubic kilometres of water were being released into the sea by the Greenland ice melt annually and 84 cubic kilometres by the West Antarctic ice sheet melt. This melting process is not linear and will accelerate as it proceeds. Further, the West Antarctic ice sheet is becoming unstable. Its collapse into the ocean would raise sea level by several metres.⁶ Low lying areas of the world are likely, sooner or later, to become uninhabitable.

In the northern hemisphere weakening of the Gulf Stream will upset the fairly regular climate sequence of ice ages and interglacials⁷ which we have experienced throughout our evolution from the stage of *Homo erectus* 1.8 million years ago to *Homo sapiens* today.

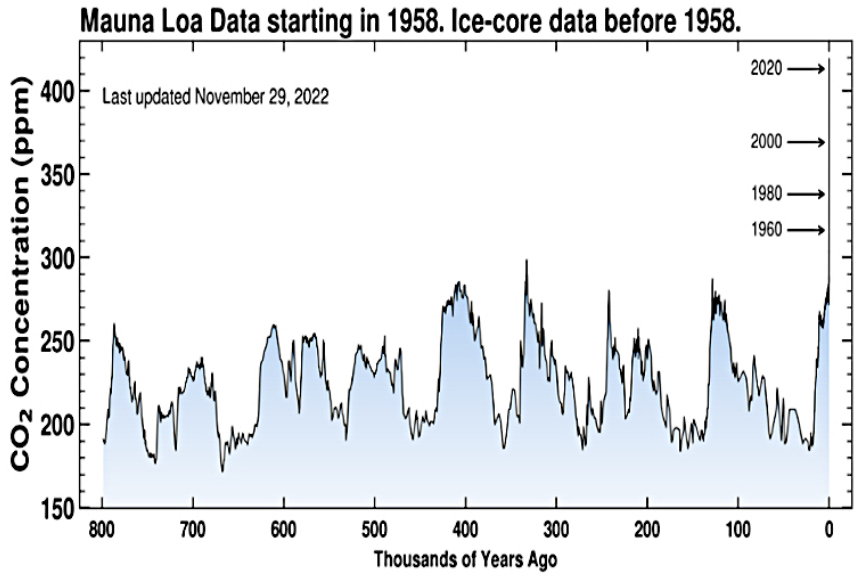
Another very important consequence of Arctic warming is the release of methane from the permafrost and undersea deposits. During the last ice age methane combined with water to form methane hydrate and was frozen into the silt deposits of the continental shelf which was subsequently flooded about 15,000 years ago. It is only stable at low temperatures or high pressures. The temperatures in the shallow areas of the Arctic seas have been at zero degrees since the Ice Age. However, with the ice melt, much warmer water⁸ is impinging on the frozen sediments and releasing the stored methane. In the longer term methane is about 25 times more powerful a greenhouse gas than CO₂.

It is estimated that the methane in the ocean deposits stored in the Arctic continental shelf contain approximately 13 times the amount of carbon at present in the atmosphere. There are between 800 and 1,400 Giga tonnes (Gt)⁹ of methane waiting to be released. The release process has not been scientifically studied but it appears that between 4 and 8 Gt is being released annually. For comparison, annual release of CO₂ is approximately 35 Gt. If these figures are correct the global heating effect of methane release is already significantly greater than the CO₂ annual emissions. Stored methane is without doubt the equivalent of an unexploded climate bomb which the capitalist mode of production has brought to the point of detonating.

What has been studied in detail is the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere in both the present era and, via analysis of ice cores, for the previous 800,000 years. These studies indicate that the concentration of CO₂ in the air corresponds fairly closely to the

temperature. During the ice age concentration of CO₂ was on average about 180 parts per million (ppm) and during the interglacial period about 280 ppm. Now that concentration is 420 ppm — 140 ppm higher than the stable interglacial concentration within which our species survived for the entire Pleistocene geological period.¹⁰ If we are to believe the GAP report, mentioned above, and the IPCC report AR6,¹¹ current CO₂ concentrations are leading to a general rise in temperature of 2.5 to 2.8°C. This would be equivalent to conditions in the mid-Pliocene period¹² when there was no sea ice and sea levels were 25m above present. In this period our ancestors, probably *Australopithecus afarensis*, were a very few ape-like animals living in central Africa. Most, if not all, of the present human race would not survive such a change but it is a typical sleight of hand of spokesmen for the capitalist world order like UN Secretary General Guterres to talk of a collective suicide pact. A suicide pact implies

Graph 2: CO₂ concentration



*MLO data from the most recent month is preliminary

that the people in it have made a mutual decision. But who amongst the world's wage workers have had any significant influence over emissions policies? Moreover, what needs to be understood is that such a change is coming due to the CO₂ that has *already* been emitted, not future emissions. So long as the present mode of production continues future CO₂ and methane emissions will only make a bad situation much worse. We have no carbon budget we can burn through, nor is a zero emissions policy going to save us, as the politicians pretend.

So what can be done?

We must either reduce the amount of CO₂ in the atmosphere to get back to stable interglacial levels¹³ or reduce the solar radiation reaching the earth. Schemes for doing both of these have been proposed by scientists but generally entail further ruinous ecological effects or produce as much CO₂ as they capture. All proposals have been subjected to the test of capitalist economics, in particular expenditure and profit. Needless to say, all have failed these tests. As long as capitalism is the system of production worldwide, all attempts to deal with the climate crisis will be made within the bounds of capitalist production and social relations. They will therefore be subject to the constraints of profit and loss and will fail.

Why Do the COPs Achieve Nothing?

Fossil fuel production is extremely profitable and thus a key sector of global capitalism. For this reason it is directly supported by the most powerful nation states. Over the last 50 years oil companies have, on average, made profits of \$2.8 billion per day while receiving \$64 billion per year in state

grants.¹⁴ Hence the reluctance to implement any serious measures to restrict the operation of oil and gas extractors. Further, the fact that capitalism is structured into competing nation states means that international agreements which would disadvantage a major state will not be agreed. After COP 27 the UK government, for example, issued over 100 new licences for oil and gas extraction in the North Sea and also approved construction of a new coal mine in Cumbria. This trashing of climate pledges was justified using the alibi that higher fuel prices caused by the Ukraine war meant the UK needed to look after itself: so, produce more fossil fuels not less as well as coal for export! The hypocrisy of governments is complemented by the furious rear-guard action of the oil companies themselves to discredit global climate science, including blatant efforts to vilify the top scientists involved. What Marx noted about bourgeois economics applies almost word for word in regard to oil companies' attempts to undermine climate science.

It is no longer a question of whether this theorem or that is true but, whether it is useful to capital ... In place of disinterested inquirers there are hired prize fighters; in place of genuine scientific research, the bad conscience and evil intent of apologetic.¹⁵

Even if the attempts to deny global heating have now largely collapsed under the weight of empirical evidence this does not alter the drive to continue "business as usual" and so the emission of greenhouse gases. The prize fighters' denialism has morphed into nihilism with the idea, which can only be classed as nonsense, that the problem can be left to future generations to solve. Clearly, the short term interests of capitalist profits trump any long term interests of humanity.

However, it is not simply because the capitalist class are generally hypocrites and liars, which they clearly are, that they act in this way. Their actions are dictated by the needs of the capitalist system itself, specifically the need for profit and for continual accumulation of capital which is equivalent to continual growth. Global heating is thus a systemic problem of capitalism itself and it cannot be solved while capitalism remains the global system of production.

As we wrote in RP19:

Since it is the system itself which is driving this process, we can see why attempts to reform it via Green New Deals or civil protests and disruption, as pursued by "Extinction Rebellion" or "just stop oil" in the UK, will also fail. As long as global capitalism rules the world, we will continue the headlong route to the inferno and mass extinction. To avert this, we need a change of historical proportions. The historical alternative is basically: either the breakdown of capitalist civilisation, through global warming or war, leading to massive destruction of human life ... or, alternatively, the replacement of capitalist production by a higher form of production and a new form of social organisation¹⁶

How can the second alternative be achieved?

Communism is All That Can Save Us

A new social system in which production is for human needs must be constructed. This implies a society of freely associated producers in which all the hallmarks of capitalism such as the necessity to work for

a wage, commodity production, money, national states and their boundaries are abolished. Such a social system needs to be run democratically via a worldwide network of workers' councils. This is what we mean by communism, though it clearly has no similarity with the system of state capitalism which existed in Russia up to 1991.

Capitalism is a class-divided society and the capitalist class who control this society need to be overthrown before a new society can be born. The global working class is the only class with the collective strength and the material interest in abolishing the existing order. At present, however, this class lacks consciousness, organisation and the political direction to accomplish this historic task. The construction of a political organisation to assist the world's workers to regain revolutionary consciousness and political orientation is the vital task of the present epoch.

A communist society will be able to plan for the long term to restore its ecological balance with nature. Of course, we will have to face the massive problems left to us by capitalism. However, once freed from the constraints of profitability and continual accumulation, we will have a better chance of solving the impending climate catastrophe and this will be a prime task of the new society.

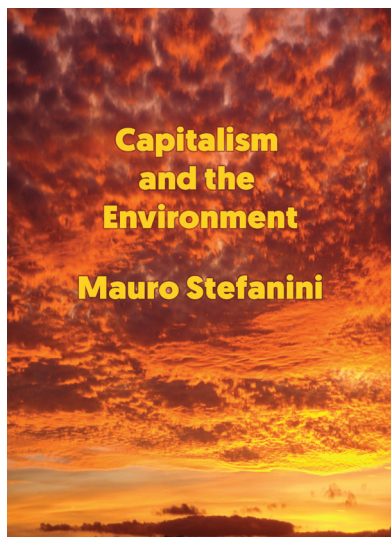
As for today's eco-warriors, their attempts to make the ruling class see the error of their ways so as to reform the system are a complete waste of time and effort. The only political task worth engaging with is helping to construct an international political organisation of the working class to assist in the overthrow of capitalist society. This is the only realistic possibility of combatting the climate catastrophe.

CP

Notes

1. Emissions Gap Report 2022 (unep.org), <https://www.unep.org/resources/emissions-gap-report-2022>
2. *Guardian* 17/11/22.
3. See Laleh Khalili report in *London Review of Books* 1/12/2022
4. \$83bn has been provided but an Oxfam report says only \$21bn has been mobilised, the rest has taken the form of loans!
5. Figure from Scripps Institute of Oceanography quoted by P Whadams in "A farewell to ice" 2016
6. Quoted in P Whadams *op.cit.* p.112
7. The sequence of ice ages and interglacials was controlled by the Milankovitch cycles which result from the slight eccentricities in the earth's orbit and position of its axis of rotation.
8. A record high temperature of 17°C was recorded in 8/2014
9. A giga tonne (Gt) is a thousand million tonnes.

10. The Pleistocene period lasted from about 2.6 million years ago to the end of the last ice age about 12,000 years ago. At the start of this period our ancestors were *Homo habilis* (the tool maker or handy man) leading to *Homo erectus* (or upright man) about 1.8 million years ago.
11. This is discussed in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 19.
12. The Pliocene period lasted from 5.3 million years ago to 2.6 million years ago .
13. It has been calculated that we must remove 20Gt of CO₂ annually for the rest of this century. See P Wadhams *op.cit.* p.188.
14. Quoted by Monbiot in *Guardian* 19/11/2022
15. K Marx, *Capital*, afterword to second German edition.
16. See *Global Warming: IPCC Report AR6 - Writing a Death Warrant?* <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-10-27/global-warming-ippc-report-ar6-writing-a-death-warrant>



Capitalism and the Environment New Edition

... the central nub is that a system based on alienated labour, devoted to growth (increased profits) and subject to periodic crises which exacerbate the drive to cut costs whatever the human or environmental price, cannot find an effective way of combating global warming. In short, these articles are as relevant today as when they were first written. They remain relevant because they provide a framework and give body to our argument that only when capitalist relations of production are eliminated, when money is a thing of the past and a world-wide human community produces for need instead of commodities for profit, can the environmental problems which capital daily exacerbates be seriously tackled

Our late comrade Mauro Stefanini was one of the first to recognise the dangers of global warming and all the more immediate consequences of the environmental devastation created by modern capitalism. He eventually put these into articles published originally in 1994. We have translated and reprinted them here in a new edition which also includes a list of our main publications on this issue up to 2021.

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Capitalism's Economic Foundations (Part II)

As explained in our previous issue, we have decided to re-issue a serialised and updated version of an article which appeared almost 50 years ago in only the second edition of the first series of *Revolutionary Perspectives*, when the group that was to become the CWO was setting out

its Marxist political analysis. Apart from some additional commentary, mainly to address concerns by contemporary readers, most of the additions are in fact re-insertions of material from the original draft which had at the time been omitted to save space.

The Crisis-Driven Rise of Capitalism

What we have presented so far is the theoretical analysis Marx developed in the three volumes of *Capital* and elsewhere to understand the real laws of movement of the mode of production. Two decades before the first volume of *Capital* appeared, Marx could see that this rising mode of production had the potential to revolutionise the productive forces in a way never seen before. This is why he saw it as an advance on feudalism. However he was under no illusion about the origins or the day to day horrors of capitalism. Primitive accumulation, which provided the capital to launch this revolution, was “anything but an idyll”.

In actual history, it is a notorious fact that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, in short, force, play the greatest part.¹

Alongside the theft of common land which turned most of the peasantry into a “free” and “labouring poor”, capitalism could only burst out of Europe, via the spoliation of the rest of the planet.

The discovery of gold and silver in the Americas, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the

indigenous population of that continent, the beginning of the conquest and plunder of India and the conversion of Africa into a preserve for the hunting of black skins are all things which characterise the dawn of the era of capitalist production.²

Recent research suggests that “extirpation” via war, brutal exploitation and imported disease in the Americas killed 56 million people or 90% of the population by 1600.³ Little wonder then that Marx concluded that “*capital comes (into the world) dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.*”⁴

Whereas previous modes of production had crises due to a dearth of goods to satisfy basic needs, capitalism’s periodic crises were the product of what “would have seemed an absurdity” in earlier epochs, “the epidemic of overproduction”.⁵

It was only after the 1848 *Communist Manifesto* that Marx set out to explain why this was so, and in so doing discovered the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall which we described earlier. This not only explains why capitalism is such a dynamic mode of production but also why capital accumulation takes the form of booms followed by crises. Under classical capitalism, these were overcome by the devaluation of capital,

increased concentration and centralisation and renewed accumulation with a higher organic composition, and hence with a lower general rate of profit which implies both an increase in tempo and an increase in intensity of crises. Thus the capitalist process of reproduction is not a mere circular process of devaluation and renewed accumulation, but rather is more accurately described in terms of a spiral which narrows until eventually no renewed accumulation is possible because, at a certain point, the organic composition reaches such a level, and the rate of profit is so low, that to reinvest in more constant capital would bring in less surplus value than with a lower organic composition. Thus,

The same laws which had at first constituted the motive forces of a rapid development of capitalism, now become the driving force of capitalist collapse.⁷⁶

However, long before accumulation reaches its ultimate limits the process of concentration and centralisation of capital brings about significant changes in the mode of production. As wealth accumulates so too does excessive control of capital in few hands, or monopoly, which “*becomes a fetter upon the mode of production which has flourished alongside and under it*”.⁷

This is only another way of saying that up to a certain point in time the accumulation of capital was in the historical interests of humanity as a whole, in that the material pre-conditions for a higher mode of production were being developed. However, once capital had developed the productive forces on a world scale, then the material foundations for a higher form of production – production for human needs without commodity exchange – were now in existence; and although history has shown us that renewed accumulation and economic expansion can still occur, it has

also shown us that such accumulation is in no sense in “the best interests of humanity”.

However this is to anticipate. In the nineteenth century the accumulation of capital was still a progressive force, involving the overthrow of the last remnants of feudal relations and a gradual improvement in the general standard of living. This expansion of the capitalist mode of production and the increase in mechanisation, which is associated with the growth in the organic composition of capital, consisted largely of the gradual elimination of cottage industries and small craftsmen who became more and more unable to compete with capitalist production techniques. For instance, in England there were still twice as many hand-loom as power-loom in operation in the cotton industry in 1834, but the hand-loom weavers’ increasing inability to compete led to their being completely driven out of the industry after the crisis of 1846-48, and replaced by factory production.

A similar picture of increasing capital accumulation resulting in increased output from the industrial sphere, but still within the context of a substantial handicraft production, could be drawn for other developing capitalist economies in Europe, as well as in North America, in the middle of the nineteenth century, although in 1850 capitalism was far from having established itself as the dominant mode of production on a world scale. However, by the mid-nineteenth century the basis for capitalism’s continued development of the productive forces, both nationally and internationally, was firmly established in the advanced capitalist countries. Small craftsmen were being eliminated; the gradual abolition of serfdom, coupled with a rising population and relatively low agricultural wages meant that capital had a continuous supply of wage labour to facilitate its expansion. Improvements in transport

and communications, whilst shortening the period of capital turnover and thus providing a counter-tendency to the declining rate of profit (by reducing the period during which raw materials and finished goods were in transit and reducing the volume of stock necessary to be held in hand), at the same time provided the technical foundations for capital's further expansion.

In spite of some state intervention in the economy in areas like railways which required a high initial outlay of capital, the tendency towards *laissez-faire* meant that private capitalists were responsible for capital accumulation. It has been estimated that from 1815 to 1835 government expenditure in Britain actually fell and from 1835-60 the rise in government expenditure was only approximately 10% of the national income of Britain.⁸ Many of the government measures in the economic sphere were in fact designed to eliminate feudal legal restrictions on production and the movement of capital. Thus in Britain, for example, the policy of traditional firms holding privileged monopolies was abandoned in the early nineteenth century. Instead state action tended to boost investment by lowering risks for investors, culminating in the 1862 Act which limited the liability of shareholders for the debts of any firm only to the amount they had invested in it. At the same time the state, in response to the class struggle, passed laws which aided the general improvement in the working and living conditions of the proletariat. (For example, the Ten Hours Act of 1847).

Britain, as the most advanced capitalist economy in the mid-nineteenth century, was the first country to extend *laissez-faire* measures into the field of foreign trade. The ports of British colonies were opened to foreign goods between 1822-25 although British goods still had a lower tariff in them. In 1843 the free export of machinery was permitted

whilst the tariff reforms of 1842-45 meant that almost all raw materials were allowed into Britain tariff-free. The Corn Laws were repealed in 1846 and the seventeenth century Navigation Acts were finally abolished in 1849. We have already seen that trade with foreign capitals of a lower organic composition is one of the means whereby capitals with a higher organic composition can offset the decline in the rate of profit. **It is no coincidence therefore, that British capitalists in the mid-nineteenth century should be the first to advocate free trade policies** – by doing so British exports could be sold above their value whilst still undercutting the prices of less advanced capitals. British exports, therefore, were in the main sold to the other developing capitalist states in Europe and the USA. Thus exports became an increasingly important part of Britain's total national product, rising from \$185 million in 1800 to \$350 million in 1850.⁹

After about 1815 Britain began to export capital for investment and even by the middle of the nineteenth century capital export was greater than commodity export – the total reached by 1854 is estimated at £210 million.¹⁰ This phenomenon provides further evidence for our thesis that capital export is one of the means for offsetting the falling rate of profit, since we can assume that in 1850 British industry had the highest organic composition in the world, and thus a higher rate of profit could be obtained by British capital investment in foreign capitals of a less advanced organic composition.¹¹ Thus British capital investment contributed to the accumulation of foreign capital and hence the internationalisation of capital, but once the capital of these latter countries advanced to a similar level of accumulation as Britain, the respective national capitalists began to export capital, first of all to less advanced capitalist states in Europe and later to other areas. As

yet though, Britain was the only significant exporter of capital in 1850.

The picture of capitalism, therefore, as it existed in Europe and the United States in the mid-nineteenth century, is one of increasingly rapid accumulation which has led to an increase in the quantity and variety of commodities produced as well as an increase in the number and standard of living of the proletariat. Real wages were increasing and continued to increase until the beginning of the twentieth century (see Table 1 in the Appendix). Although exports were a small proportion of output, world trade was increasing rapidly,¹² reflecting the international expansion of capital. Nevertheless, the structure of capitalist firms at this time was still predominantly that of the individual entrepreneur managing his own factory.

The increasing centralisation of capital which capital accumulation necessitates led to rapid changes in the structure of firms in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first sign that the individual entrepreneur with his own business was finding it difficult to raise the necessary amount of capital which accumulation at a higher organic level demanded was the growing importance of joint-stock companies, which enabled outside investors to provide capital for a business in return for a share in the profits. With limited liability of shareholders spreading from Britain (see above) to France in 1872 and Germany between 1870-2, investing in joint-stock companies took off. In Britain the number of such companies registered increased from 8,692 in 1885 to 62,762 in 1914.¹³ The rise of joint-stock companies made it possible for an even further centralisation of capital to take place in all the advanced

countries of the world.

Most of the combines formed in the late nineteenth century were of a horizontal nature (cartels, syndicates, trusts, holding companies etc.); that is, agreement or actual fusions between firms making similar products in an attempt to eliminate competition and monopolise markets for their goods. Thus by the beginning of the twentieth century a large proportion of national production in these countries was under the control of some industrial combine with a virtual monopoly of production. US capital quickly became the most centralised and concentrated since there were no legal restrictions at this time on the formation of combinations and monopolies, unlike in Europe. In 1897 there were 82 industrial combines in the US which were capitalised at about \$1,000 million; by 1904 this figure had risen to 318 industrial combines, capitalised at over \$7,000 million and incorporating 5,300 separate establishments.¹⁴ By 1910 industrial combines were responsible for the production of 50% of textiles, 54% glassware, 60% cotton and printed fabrics, 62% foodstuffs, 72% beverages, 77% non-ferrous metal production, 81% chemicals and 84% of iron and steel in the USA. A more centralised capital involves a greater degree of concentration, as evidenced by the increase in the average amount of capital held by those leading companies in the United States:

In thirteen leading manufacturing industries in the USA the average amount of capital of each manufacturing plant was multiplied by thirty-nine between 1850 and 1910, and the value of the average output was multiplied by nineteen.¹⁵

In the single decade after 1895, 2,274 manufacturing firms in the USA were

merged into just 157 corporations dominated by the “robber barons” of what was called the “Gilded Age”. Most of these corporations “dominated their industries” and enhanced the fortunes of the likes of John D. Rockefeller and J.P. Morgan.¹⁶ However by the turn of the century, the same tendency towards monopoly organisation of capital was manifested in other capitalist states.

Thus, in Britain between 1896 and 1901 large combines were formed in the manufacture of sewing cotton, bleaching powder, Portland cement, wallpaper, tobacco and most branches of textile finishing.¹⁷ In Germany in 1906 there were 400 combines in existence in various diverse branches of production; in France at the beginning of the century there were syndicates in such industries as metallurgy, sugar, glass, etc. And so on, Bukharin quotes F. Laur’s figures for the beginning of the century:

*... out of 500 billion franks invested in the industrial enterprises of all the countries of the world, 225 billions; i.e. almost one-half, are invested in production organised in cartels and trusts.*¹⁸

Thus, by the turn of the century, competition in many industries had been virtually eliminated within the national economies of the most advanced capitals. This is not to say that competition had disappeared altogether among industries controlled by monopoly capital, on the contrary, international competition was now fiercer than ever. The move from predominantly individual enterprises competing within the boundaries of each capitalist state, to predominantly international competition between monopoly capitals involves a corresponding shift in the operation of the law of value and the equalisation of profit rates to a supra-national level – that is, it implies the existence of a world

capitalist economy where:

*The level of prices is, generally speaking, not determined by production costs as is the case in local or “national” production. To a very large extent “national” and local differences are levelled out in the general resultant of world prices which, in their turn, exert pressure on individual producers, individual countries, individual territories.*¹⁹

Bukharin illustrates this tendency towards global equalisation of prices by quoting the price of corn in various areas of the globe which, despite wide variations in the conditions of grain production, show a relatively small range of price differences.

**Price per thousand kilogrammes
(in marks) between 1901 and 1908**

Markets	Rye	Wheat	Oats
Vienna	146	168	149
Paris	132	183	---
London	---	139	138
New York	---	141	---
Germany	155	183	163

Source: N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy* p.24

In other words, international competition between monopoly capitals implies a certain interdependence between the various national capitalist states, as manifested by the expansion of world trade, the existence of the world market and the so-called world division of labour. Once the world economy exists and the law of value operates on an international level, then the concept of **global** capital has become a reality and with it comes the **world proletariat**.

From the standpoint of capital, on the other hand, the growth of the world economy and the international competition between national monopoly capitals means the rise of imperialism. By 'imperialism' we do not mean war, conquest or annexation in general – such a definition, as Bukharin pointed out, in *Imperialism and World Economy*, “explains” everything – from the conquest policy of Alexander the Great to that of Russia and the US in Vietnam. The epoch of imperialism represents an entirely new stage in capitalist development which results above all from the international competition between national capitals with the highest organic composition of capital. In so doing we are able to distinguish between the policies of the advanced capitalist states from the late nineteenth century onwards and earlier examples of war, conquest, annexation etc. Imperialism is a specific historical category, linked to the development of the world economy, and it is to the latter which we now turn.

The continuing internationalising of capitalist relations from the middle of the nineteenth century which led to the development of the world capitalist economy was itself a product of the accelerated accumulation of capital and the continuing attempts to offset the declining rate of profit as the organic composition of capital increased. If we take Britain as our example, the following table shows how the general rate of profit continued to fall from 1860-1914.

Faced with an ever-diminishing rate of profit, capitals of the most advanced capitalist states relied more and more on foreign exports (exporting manufactured goods to areas of a lower organic composition and importing cheap raw materials) and capital export as a means of offsetting the decline.

Profits As a Percentage of Industrial Income

1860-4	45%	1890-4	37.8%
1865-9	46%	1895-9	40.6%
1870-4	47.7%	1900-4	39.0%
1875-9	43.3%	1905-9	39.5%
1880-4	42.6%	1910-14	39.2%
1885-9	42.2%	---	---

Source: S.B. Saul, *Myth of the Great Depression* p.42

Capitals invested in foreign trade are in a position to yield a higher rate of profit, because, in the first place, they come in competition with commodities produced in other countries with lesser facilities of production, so that an advanced country is enabled to sell its goods above their value even when it sells them cheaper than the competing countries. To the extent that the labour of the advanced countries is here exploited as labour of a higher specific weight, the rate of profit rises, because labour which has not been paid as being of a higher quality is sold as such. The same condition may obtain in the relations with a certain country, into which commodities are exported or from which commodities are imported. This country may offer more materialised labour in goods than it receives, and yet it may receive in return commodities cheaper than it could produce them. In the same way, a manufacturer who exploits a new invention before it has become general, undersells his competitors and yet sells his commodities above their individual values, that is to say, he exploits the specifically higher productive power of the labour employed by him as surplus value. By this means he secures a

*surplus profit; on the other hand, capitals invested in colonies, etc., may yield a higher rate of profit for the simple reason that the rate of profit is higher there on account of the backward development, and for the added reason that slaves, coolies, etc., permit a better exploitation of labour. We see no reason why these higher rates of profit realised by capitals invested in certain lines and sent home by them should not enter as elements into the average rate of profit and tend to keep it to that extent.*²⁰

From the mid-nineteenth century to the outbreak of the First World War, world trade grew as follows:

Year	Total Exports and Imports (In billions of dollars, contemporary value)
1840	2.8
1860	7.2
1880	14.8
1900	20.1
1913	40.4

Source: D.B. Clough and C.W. Cole, Economic History of Europe p.60

By 1914 Britain exported about 25% of its industrial output and Germany about 20%.

At first the development of other European capitals to the point where they were able to compete with British exports was accompanied by a movement towards free trade. During the 1860s there was a general lowering of tariffs in Europe (though not in the US). However, the growth of international competition which developed with the increasing centralisation of capital within national states quickly saw the reversal of the

movement towards free trade in Europe and an increase in protectionism. Thus,

*...with the increasing competition of American and Australian wheat in the 1870s, with greatly augmented industrial equipment of the western European nations, with the depressions of 1873 to 1896, a tidal wave of protectionism surged over the Continent ... Austria raised its duties in 1878, 1882, and 1888; France, in 1881, 1885, 1887, and 1892; Belgium, in 1887; Italy, in 1878, 1887, and 1891; and Russia, in 1877 and 1892.*²¹

The general raising of tariff barriers from the late 1870s onwards to protect individual ‘national economies’, i.e. the home market, from foreign competition, must be seen as part of the development towards monopoly capital and the extension of capitalist competition to the world market.

Tariff barriers are thus an aspect of the development of imperialism, for they involve the strengthening of state boundaries vis-à-vis other states in the interests of monopoly capital. Moreover, tariff barriers promoted competition between foreign capitals on the world market by enabling goods sold on the home market to be sold at high prices, well above the cost of production, and those sold on the world market to be sold at much lower – sometimes below the cost of production (dumping). Such practices were the earliest signs of a significant and permanent change in the nature of capitalism; for when dumping occurs, this means that foreign trade is no longer a viable means of counteracting the falling rate of profit, for high prices on the home market merely increase the exchange value of labour power and hence the cost of production for the capitalist. (That is, assuming the workers are to maintain their living standards – in fact by the beginning

of the twentieth century, real wages began to fall).

The expansion of industrial capital at the expense of agriculture in the advanced capitalist states of Europe meant an increasing reliance on the import of food stuffs (principally grain and meat) from areas where production was devoted to a single crop or kind of meat. Capital accumulation led also to the need for more raw materials for industry which were imported from less advanced or underdeveloped economies. Moreover, if these raw materials could be obtained cheaply, they lowered the costs of production and hence provided a counter-tendency to the falling rate of profit.

In 1910 the price of rubber rose from 2/9 (14p) to 12/6 (62.5p) per lb. owing to the great demand for rubber for motor tyres and the covering of electrical plant. The profits of some rubber companies rose to 200 per cent per annum as a consequence. This attracted the attention of financiers and company promoters, and very soon millions of capital were thrown into the rubber growing industry in plantations in S.America, Central Africa, India, Ceylon, etc. In time the rubber output increased and the price has fallen to the old level and even below it to 2/6 (12.5p). The same happened in the case of oil for motors. It ought to be noted that this rush to the torrid zone for raw materials was one of the many economic factors leading to the feverish secret diplomacy that ultimately landed Europe in the present world war.²²

Thus the search for cheap raw materials was bound up with the increasing rivalry between European states for control over, and annexation of, previously undeveloped areas – as evidenced by the extent to

which territories which contained important mineral deposits were annexed, and by the seizure and development of monocultural agricultural areas after about 1870.

Another aspect of the internationalisation of the capitalist mode of production in the late nineteenth century, which stemmed from capital's attempts to maximise profits and offset the declining rate of profit, was the increasing rate of export of capital from those states with the highest organic composition to areas with a lower organic composition – in other words, to places where a higher rate of profit could be obtained. We have seen how Britain, as the state with the highest organic composition of capital, had begun to export capital to France and the US by the middle of the nineteenth century. Until about 1875 British export of capital was mainly to Western Europe and the US where it contributed to the expansion of those capitals. With the accumulation of US and European capital to the point where the organic composition had turned these states into capital exporters, British capital sought more profitable areas of foreign investment, notably the Empire and Latin America. It has been calculated²³ that from 1900 to 1904 the average rate of returns offered by borrowers in London for large potential investors was 3.18% on home issues, 3.33% on colonial, and 5.39% on foreign. By 1913 47% of British foreign investments were in the Empire, 20% in the US and 20% in Latin America, and Britain was by far the biggest exporter of capital in the world. By 1914 total British overseas exports were worth over £3,700 million (mainly railways: 40%, government and municipal loans: 30%, and raw material production: 10%). Nevertheless, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, first French, and then German capital became the chief competition with British capital for more profitable areas of investment in less developed countries. By 1880 French foreign

investments had reached £595 million and that figure was to increase threefold by 1914. Half of the latter total was invested in Europe – again, mainly the less advanced states in Central and Eastern Europe, with a further 17% in the US and another 17% in Latin America.²⁴

Foreign investments, therefore, played an important role in the internationalising of capital and the development of the world economy. But, as Bukharin pointed out, the internationalising of capital does not coincide with the internationalising of the **interests** of capital, and the increased rate of capital export, like the increase in foreign trade, was of necessity accompanied by a sharpening of hostile relations between the most advanced powers as competition increased for control over actual and potential investment zones. The interests of investors in “backward” areas were ultimately secured by the threat or use of military force (e.g. colonisation of Tunis by France after default, or Egypt by Britain after defaults).

It can be seen from this brief outline that the development of the world economy and the development of imperialism are inextricably linked.

Thus, together with the internationalisation of economy and the internationalisation of capital, there is going on a process of “national”

intertwining of capital, a process of “nationalising” capital, fraught with the greatest consequences.²⁵

The attempts by the highly centralised capitals to offset the decline in the rate of profit, which had led to the internationalising of capitalist relations to the point where capitalism had become a global system, had also led to the increasing nationalisation of capital (increase in protectionism, etc.) to the point where capitalist competition was competition between the advanced states for control over the rest of the world. Such inter-imperialist competition necessitates the existence of powerful military forces to ‘back up’ the purely economic competition, not only with regard to the weaker, under-developed economies, but ultimately to determine the outcome of direct conflict between the most advanced powers. From 1850 onwards the cost of armaments production increased annually as competition between the advanced capitalist states increased, resulting in the arms race of 1890-1914. During these years military expenditure was the largest single item of government expenditure (which was itself increasing) in all the advanced states. The table below shows the increase in government expenditure on arms for eight advanced states from 1875 to 1908.

By 1914 Britain’s total military expenditure has been estimated as

Military and State Expenditure

States	Years	Military expenditure per capita of the population	All state expenditure per capita of the population	Percentage of military expenditure in relation to all expenditure
England	1875	16.10	41.67	38.06
	1907-8	26.42	54.83	48.6
France	1875	15.23	52.71	29.0
	1908	24.81	67.04	37.0

Austria	1873	5.92	22.05	26.8
	1908	8.49	37.01	22.08
Italy	1874	6.02	31.44	19.1
	1907-8	9.53	33.24	28.7
Russia	1877	5.24	15.14	34.6
	1908	7.42	20.81	35.6
Japan	1875	0.60	3.48	17.2
	1908	4.53	18.08	25.1
Germany	1881-2	9.43	33.07	28.5
	1908	18.44	65.22	28.3
USA	1875	10.02	29.89	33.5
	1907-8	16.68	29.32	56.9

Source: N. Bukharin, Imperialism and World Economy p.126

£77,029,300; Germany: £97,845,960; France: 1,717,202,233 francs; Russia: 825,946,421 rubles; USA: \$313,204,990.²⁶

World war is the inevitable outcome of such inter-imperialist competition.

If our analysis of ascendant capitalism appears to draw a picture of a 'smooth', straightforward expansion, then let us emphasise again that accumulation occurred within the context of cut-throat competition and the so-called "business cycle" of boom – slump – recovery; where each period of slump ensured that the least competitive enterprises were bankrupted and taken over by their higher organic competitors. The subsequent "recovery" made possible by the devaluation of capital (as a result of a general fall in prices) was on the basis of an ever more concentrated and centralised capital. Given the tendency towards equalisation of profit rates as capitalism expanded, capital's periodic crises became more uniform and widespread throughout the world. Thus, for example, England and France only shared the same phases of the cycle in 28% of the years between 1840-82, but they shared it in 65%

of the years between 1882-1925; whilst seventeen countries analysed after the turn of the century showed almost identical patterns of crisis and recovery.²⁷

Just as the crisis became more extensive, so each one in succession wracked the system more deeply. Because, as we explained above, each crisis led to a greater concentration and centralisation of capital, in each successive crisis there were fewer competitors to go to the wall. Ultimately this centralisation of capital proceeded to the point where, within each national capital, the interests of monopoly capitalism became intertwined with the State. Now capitalist competition, which had hitherto appeared to offer humanity the real possibility of abundance, led to a restrictive curbing of the forces of production as each state sought to protect its national capital. As we shall see, capitalism was now a decadent social system and its further existence could only be obtained by plunging the world into the first global conflict between nation states.

ER

Notes

1. *Capital* Volume 1 (Penguin Classics 1990) p. 874
2. *op.cit* p. 915
3. See H.W. French *Born in Blackness* (Liveright 2021) p.175
4. *Capital* Volume 1 p. 926
5. *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1975, Peking Edition) p.40
6. Paul Mattick *The Permanent Crisis – Henryk Grossman’s Interpretation of Marx’s Theory Of Capitalist Accumulation*, <https://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/icc/1934/11/permanent-crisis.htm>
7. *Capital* Volume 1 p. 929
8. W. Ashworth *A Short History of the International Economy, 1850-1950* pp.131-132
9. *The Fontana Economic History of Europe*, Vol. IV p.670
10. Ashworth, *op.cit.* p.170
11. In fact this is a recurring pattern throughout capitalist history. The British were not the first to export capital to a more dynamically productive nation. Dutch mercantile capital facing a small productive economy at home financed much of the industrial revolution in the UK. The same pattern would be repeated in the USA until that too overtook its sponsoring capital. Something similar has happened in the present epoch since the crisis of the 1970s, with US capital having created a commercial rival in China. The difference with the latter though is that the capitalist context has now changed and in the epoch of imperialism there is unlikely to be a repeat of the previous peaceful reconciliations to the new situation.
12. One estimate is from £280 million in 1800 to £380 million in 1830 to £800 million by 1850. See Ashworth *op.cit.* p.30
13. *op.cit.* p.94
14. *op.cit.* p.96
15. *op.cit.* p.69
16. Timothy Wu *The Curse of Bigness* (Columbia Global Reports, 2018) pp.24-5
17. Ashworth *op.cit.* p.96
18. N. Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, p.69
19. *op.cit.* p.23
20. Marx, *Capital* Volume III, p.238 (Lawrence and Wishart, 1974)
21. D.B. Clough and C.W. Cole, *Economic History of Europe*, p.610-611
22. John Maclean, *The War after the War*, p.8
23. By A. Cairncross, see Ashworth *op.cit.* p.171
24. Figures from Ashworth *op.cit.* pp.173-174 and Clough and Cole *op.cit.* pp.657-661
25. Bukharin *op.cit.* p.80
26. *loc.cit.* p.126
27. Quoted from O. Schwarz “Finanzen der Gegenwart” in *Handwörterbuch der Staatswissen*. Bukharin points out “... that the author’s figures of German and Austrian expenditures are incorrect, for they do not include the extraordinary budgets and the appropriations made only once; the figures for the USA do not include the “civil expenditure” of the individual states, so that the increase (33.5-56.9) is in reality much larger.”

Appendix

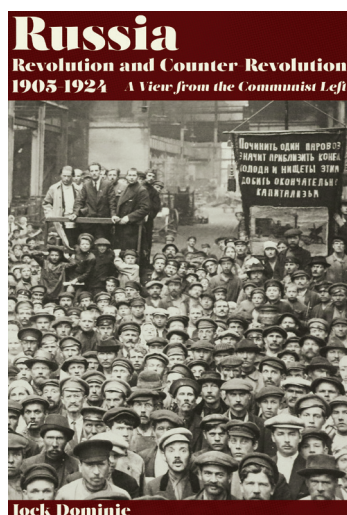
Real Wages Index

(Cyclical averages: 1900 = 100 for United Kingdom and Germany; 1895 = 100 for France)

Cycle	United Kingdom*	Cycle	Germany**	Cycle	France
1820-26	43	1830-39	78	1820-29	79
1827-32	42	1840-49	71	1830-39	79
1833-42	49	1844-52	72	1840-49	78
1843-49	52	1852-59	63	1850-51	79
1849-58	57	1860-67	74	1852-58	68
1859-68	63	1868-78	78	1859-68	82
1869-79	74	1879-86	84	1868-78	83
1880-86	80	1887-94	92	1879-86	90
1887-95	91	1894-1902	97	1887-95	98
1895-1903	99	1903-09	98	1895-1903	107
1904-08	95	1909-14	96	1903-08	114
1909-14	93	1924-35	77	1909-14	114
1924-32	93	---	---	1922-35	105

*Takes into account unemployment from 1850-1935; social insurance payments for 1912-32, and unemployment-insurance payments for 1924-32.

**Decennial and not cyclical averages. Takes into account for the period 1887-1935 wage losses from unemployment, illness, taxes, insurance benefits. For 1903-1935 takes into account trade union dues. Source: Clough and Cole *op.cit.* p.676, taken from J. Kuczynski, *Labour Conditions in Western Europe, 1820-1935*



Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1905-1924 A View from the Communist Left

The “socialism” that eventually emerged from the 1917 Russian Revolution had nothing in common with the vision of Marx. This history explains how a genuine workers’ movement from below degenerated into a new form of state capitalism. Its legacy remains the discovery of workers councils (soviets) as the basis for a new social organisation, alongside the need for a revolutionary programme to politically unite the class, against all the distortions of the various defenders of the existing order

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Syndicalism: Then and Now

The period between the 1830s and the 1880s saw the working class arrive on the historical stage as a class-for-itself properly speaking. This was the era when workers began to successfully form the first political parties and trade unions; this is when the First International was founded in an attempt to unite the political and the economic struggles of the working class. On the other hand, the period between the 1890s and the 1920s, when syndicalism emerged, coincided with the transition towards the imperialist phase of capitalism. This was no accident – the increasing centralisation of capital demanded the increasing centralisation of labour. Syndicalism was inherently associated with the historical process of the centralisation of local trade unions and workers' societies into federations on the national level. Different political currents took an active part in this in an attempt to unite workers for different ends. As such, the meaning of syndicalism is often contested and differs between national contexts. In France, where the term originates, *syndicalisme* refers to trade unionism in general. Here however the object of examination is the tendencies variously called revolutionary syndicalism, industrial unionism and anarcho-syndicalism. What distinguished those kinds of unions, whichever label they went under, from conventional trade unionism is that, with their emphasis on direct action and the general strike, they simultaneously appeared to pose a challenge to the growing reformism within the workers' movement of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The Rise of Syndicalism

Syndicalist unions arose in countries where the formation of permanent economic bodies was possible in the first place. This required both a particular composition of the working class and, at least to some degree, favourable legal conditions. For this reason syndicalism never took a real hold in places like the Russian Empire where due to state repression the existence of trade unions was only ever limited and temporary. In general, the creation of syndicalist unions was a symptom of growing working class militancy in the early 20th century, a period characterised by mass struggles (syndicalists played leading roles in events such as the 1905 Limoges porcelain strike in France, 1907 tenants' strike in Argentina, 1909 Barcelona revolt in Spain, 1911 Liverpool transport strike in Britain, 1912 Lawrence textile strike in US, and so on). In some countries, syndicalist unions developed as the first national trade union centres; in others, due to ideological or regional factors, they developed as rivals to previously established national trade union centres.

- In France, repressions that followed the Paris Commune of 1871 had stifled working class activity for a decade. Unions were then legalised in 1884, and the first labour-exchanges (*bourses du travail*) were introduced under the impulse of Gustave de Molinari, a liberal economist. These union employment offices gradually became spaces for working class agitation and, in 1892, began to unite in a Federation of Labour

Exchanges (FBT). In 1895 the General Confederation of Labour (CGT) was founded, a national trade union centre which the FBT merged into in 1902. Socialists and anarchists played a prominent role in the CGT and particularly under the influence of the latter, the 1906 Charter of Amiens declared that "outside of all political schools, the CGT groups together all workers conscious of the fight to be carried out for the disappearance of the salaried and of employers". The CGT became the model revolutionary syndicalist union.

- In Great Britain, the legal status of trade unions was established by the Royal Commission in 1867. The Trades Union Congress was founded in 1868, soon creating its own parliamentary committee, and from 1897 onwards developing into a national trade union centre. The short-lived Industrial Syndicalist Education League (ISEL) was formed in 1910, by members of the Social Democratic Federation inspired by the activities of the French CGT. Rather than setting up a separate trade union body, they advocated "boring from within" existing trade unions to promote syndicalist practices.
- Following the suspension of the Anti-Socialist Laws in Germany in 1890, a General Commission of German Trade Unions was founded to coordinate the activities of the Free Trade Unions under the leadership of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD). A localist current gradually split off and between 1897 and 1903 reorganised itself as the Free Association of German Trade Unions (FVdG), though it remained attached to the SPD. However, in 1907-8, following the adoption of a resolution put forward by August Bebel, members of the FVdG were expelled from the SPD (a decision opposed by Rosa Luxemburg). This resulted in an exodus from the FVdG of those who still wanted to remain in the SPD, but the organisation continued to exist and became increasingly influenced by the practices of the CGT.
- In the USA, the legal status of trade unions was established by the Hunt case of 1842. A national trade union centre, at first still dominated by craft unions, was established in 1886 with the formation of the American Federation of Labor (AFL), following a dispute over funds within the Knights of Labor. Under the leadership of Samuel Gompers the AFL eschewed socialism and refused to support unskilled and foreign workers, African-Americans, and women. In opposition, socialists, anarchists and trade unionists met in 1905 to form a rival organisation, the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). In its constitution it adopted Marx's declaration that "Instead of the conservative motto, 'A fair day's wage for a fair day's work,' we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, 'Abolition of the wage system.'" The IWW tended to reject the syndicalist label, in favour of what it called industrial unionism. There were attempts to form IWW branches in other countries, mainly, but not only, anglophone.
- In Spain, workers' societies grew in the period between the "Glorious Revolution" of 1868 which overthrew Queen Isabella II and the Bourbon Restoration of 1874. In the 1880s, after the government began to contemplate social reforms aimed at improving the well-being of the working class, space for trade union activity was once again

opened. The General Union of Workers (UGT) was founded in 1888 under the leadership of the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), but its growth was mainly restricted to Madrid, Biscay and Asturias, and in 1907 the union Solidaridad Obrera was founded in Catalonia. Socialists and anarchists battled for influence within Solidaridad Obrera, the former wanting it to join the UGT but the latter succeeded when in 1910 the union was transformed into the National Confederation of Labor (CNT), a rival national trade union centre.

- In Italy syndicalists of various hues existed inside the Socialist Party (PSI) up until 1908. Arturo Labriola countered Sorelian confusions by publishing *Avanguardia Socialista* which, despite its name, reflected the sizeable portion of the PSI members who were revolutionary syndicalists. They were the driving force behind the efforts to unify working class strike action in the early 1900s. But in 1905 the clash between the syndicalists' emphasis on concerted strike action as the vehicle of revolutionary change and the social democrats' tendency to equate nationalisation with socialisation of the means of production, came to a head when a general strike of railway workers protesting against nationalisation plans (which included a ban on strikes) was defeated at the cost of five deaths. By 1908, when Filippo Turati declared syndicalism incompatible with socialism, most syndicalists had already left the PSI. In 1912 they founded the Italian Workers' Union (USI) as an alternative to the PSI affiliated General Confederation of Labour (CGL).
- Foreign capital investments and waves of European immigration boosted Argentina's economic development

following the Long Depression of 1873. Workers from countries like Spain, Italy and Germany brought with them radical ideas and new ways of organising, helping the creation of the first workers' societies. In the 1890s there were some failed attempts to create a workers' federation by socialists around the journal *El Obrero*, who would soon found the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOI). Finally, in 1901 the Argentinian Workers' Federation (FAO), the first real national trade union centre in the country, was founded through combined efforts of socialists, anarchists and trade unionists. Already in 1903 however, political tensions resulted in the split of the more moderate unions and the creation of the General Workers' Union (UGT). A year later, the FOA changed its name to the Argentine Regional Workers' Federation (FORA) and endorsed "anarchist communism". On the ground however, the FORA continued to work with the UGT, and a number of splits and unification efforts between the two unions took place in the following years.

- Other noteworthy developments took place in Sweden with the Central Organisation of the Workers of Sweden (SAC), in Uruguay with the Uruguayan Regional Workers' Federation (FORU), in Brazil with the Brazilian Workers' Confederation (COB), or the Netherlands with the National Labor Secretariat (NAS).

Even though initially syndicalist unions were not necessarily seen as rival organisations to the Second International itself (whose members were often actively involved in their creation), they inadvertently came into conflict with the reformist wing of social democracy which saw syndicalism

as a challenge to their gradualist methods. This hostility only created more of a hearing for anti-parliamentary and anti-political perspectives within the syndicalist movement. Anarchists, who in the previous decades had become associated with insurrectionism and individual acts of violence, were now increasingly gravitating towards syndicalism. This anarchist influence did not mean there was agreement, even on questions like the role of the union: while the Argentinian FORA notably recognised that "a union is merely an economic by-product of the capitalist system ... to preserve it after the revolution would imply preserving the capitalist system that gave rise to it" (Pacto de Solidaridad, 1904), others generally wanted unions to become future units of "production and redistribution, the basis of social reorganisation" (Charter of Amiens, 1906), to build "the new society in the shell of the old" (Preamble to the IWW Constitution, 1908), echoing Bakunin's proposals for the First International, of an expanding international workers' association which would eventually replace the state. The legacy of Proudhon's mutualism – an orientation towards federalism, cooperatives and mutual credit societies – also continued to exert its influence to some degree. In this way, the syndicalist movement represented an uneasy coming together of various Marxist, Bakuninist and Proudhonist perspectives.

In 1901 an International Secretariat of National Trade Union Centres (ISNTUC) was formed, attached to the Second International. Social democratic, syndicalist and reformist perspectives clashed at its congresses. In response, in 1913 the Dutch NAS and the British ISEL attempted to organise a purely syndicalist international centre and to this end called a International Syndicalist Congress in London. Delegates from the German FVdG, the Swedish SAC, and the Italian USI, all

attended the congress and so did members of the Spanish CNT and the IWW though not as official delegates. The congress established an International Syndicalist Information Bureau and adopted the bulletin of the Dutch syndicalist Christiaan Cornelissen as its own. However, the French CGT, the largest and most influential of the syndicalist unions, rejected the initiative as it refused to abandon the ISNTUC (which had an international membership of millions, rather than thousands). With the outbreak of war, the movement splintered further.

War and Revolution

The Second International famously collapsed in the face of the First World War. Its most influential party, the SPD, voted for war credits and sided with its own state. Leading trade unionists like Carl Legien supported the war, and the ISNTUC disintegrated. The syndicalist movement, despite its radical intentions, faced similar problems. The International Syndicalist Information Bureau was dissolved. Leading syndicalists like Cornelissen came out in support of the war, as did a minority within the Italian USI and a majority within the French CGT.

The reformist minority of the old days has become the majority. ... The old leaders who invoked the thought of Bakunin and advertised the formulas of Proudhon, who adopted the conceptions of Georges Sorel or of Kropotkin, speak today in the dialect of Gompers.

Boris Souvarine, *The French Syndicalist Movement*, 1920

However, if within the Second International there were parties which refused to abandon revolutionary perspectives, parties which when faced with

imperialist war reasserted their internationalist credentials rather than cast them aside – like the Russian Bolsheviks, Bulgarian Tesnyaki, the Serbian and the Polish Social Democrats – there were also many internationalist voices among the syndicalists. In particular, the German FVdG and a minority within the CGT opposed the war, as did the Spanish CNT and Argentinian FORA (though their governments remained neutral in the conflict). Individual syndicalists, such as Alexander Schapiro, co-signed the 1915 *International Anarchist Manifesto* on the War. Syndicalists opposed to the war organised congresses in Spain (El Ferrol, April 1915) and Brazil (Rio de Janeiro, October 1915), while the French CGT minority also attended the Zimmerwald Conference (which, for the first time, managed to bring together representatives from not only neutral but also belligerent countries). However, Alphonse Merrheim, one of the CGT delegates and a signatory of the Charter of Amiens, took a pacifist stance at the time and criticised the revolutionary internationalists around Lenin and Karl Radek, who argued for turning the imperialist war into class war. It would take the outbreak of the Russian Revolution in 1917 to further breach the gulf that separated the revolutionary wing of social democracy and the more internationalist syndicalists.

In the Russian Revolution trade unions played a relatively insignificant role. Instead, it was the factory committees and especially the workers' councils, or soviets, discovered by the working class in 1905, which took centre stage. Not on the eve of a general strike, as theorised by syndicalism, but through these class-wide organs which spread across the former empire between February and October and guided by their own class party, workers brought down not only the Tsar but also the bourgeois Kerensky government and took power into their own hands.

Nevertheless, the revolution found wide resonance within syndicalist circles outside of Russia, even anarchist ones, who saw in it the beginning of the end of the war and a refutation of social democracy, embracing it as their own. A militant of the Spanish CNT later recalled:

For many of us – for a majority – the Russian Bolshevik was a demi-god, the bearer of liberty and general well-being ... The splendour of the Russian conflagration blinded us ... Who, being an anarchist, disdained to call himself a Bolshevik?

Manuel Buenacasa, *El movimiento obrero español*, 1928

The revolutionary wave unleashed by the events in Russia unified the avant-garde of the workers' movement around the slogan "all power to the soviets". In Germany, the FVdG even began to call for a "dictatorship of the proletariat" (Karl Roche, *Was wollen die Syndikalisten?*, 1919), and fought side by side with the newly formed Communist Party of Germany (KPD). But it was not until 1919 that a Communist International, which Lenin declared was needed already in 1914, finally held its founding congress. And many syndicalists joined it:

The Communist International has recruited among the syndicalist ranks – perhaps anarchist syndicalists, more likely communist syndicalists – the elements that we have always considered "the best," and without which certain sections of the Communist International would not exist. In America, it was among the syndicalists (William Foster, Andreychin, Bill Haywood, Crosby), among the left socialists around The Liberator sympathetic to the IWW

(John Reed, Max Eastman), among the anarchists (Robert Minor, Bill Chatov), that it found most of its communists. In England and Ireland, it was among the syndicalists (Tom Mann, Jim Larkin, Jack Tanner) and in the movement of the Shop Stewards' Committees, of a syndicalist nature (Murphy, Tom Bell, etc.), that it recruited. In Spain, it was among the syndicalists and the anarchists that it found Joaquim Maurín, Arlandis, Andrés Nin, Casanellas, and many others. In France, finally, the Communist International drew from the syndicalist ranks those who, alongside the new militants who emerged from the war, should, according to the CI, exercise decisive influence, and gradually eliminate that of the social democrats inherited from the old party, of obsolete Jaurèsism and null Guesdism.

Boris Souvarine, *Expelled, but Communist*, 1925

In 1921, in reaction to the pre-war social democratic ISNTUC being revived as the International Federation of Trade Unions (Amsterdam International), the Communist International founded its own Red International of Labor Unions (Profintern). The Spanish CNT and the American IWW were both invited. By this point however, news was gradually spreading that within Soviet Russia not all was as it seemed. The Red Army had won the Civil War but at a great cost – working class self-activity had dissipated (and where it was still showing signs of life, it was being actively curtailed), rival political groups were repressed (including syndicalists), and instead of the soviets, the party bureaucracy was now making all the important decisions, with famine and economic ruin all around. The failure of revolutions in Germany, Hungary and Finland left Soviet

Russia isolated and having to turn to capitalist countries for trade. Those anarchists who were always sceptical of Bolshevism found in these facts the ammunition they needed to reaffirm their ideas. The fact that the Profintern was to be subordinated to the Communist International was only the final nail in the coffin – the American IWW refused to join it, whereas the Spanish CNT withdrew its participation in 1922, though communist minorities remained active within the ranks of both unions.

Splits along ideological grounds were now taking place within much of the syndicalist movement. Members of the FVdG, disappointed with the KPD leadership under Paul Levi, either left to join the General Workers' Union of Germany (AAUD) associated with the left communists of the Communist Workers' Party of Germany (KAPD), or fell under the influence of the anarcho-syndicalist Rudolf Rocker in what became the Free Workers' Union of Germany (FAUD). Many workers from the compromised French CGT left to form the United General Confederation of Labor (CGTU), and although at first dominated by anarcho-syndicalists, it soon came under the influence of the French Communist Party (PCF). In this way, after the war and the Russian Revolution, the trade union movement became divided across three main international centres: the social democratic Amsterdam International, the communist Profintern, and the anarcho-syndicalist International Workers' Association (IWA). The latter was born in 1922 when syndicalist unions like the Italian USI, Argentinian FORA, the German FAUD and (a year later) the Spanish CNT, came together, this time under an increasingly "libertarian communist" banner. Already by then however, the syndicalist movement was on the decline, due to a number of factors: the waning of the revolutionary wave, the domination of

the workers' movement by social democracy on one hand and soon Stalinism on the other, and the rise of various authoritarian regimes which attempted to crush working class organisations and integrate them into the state. Syndicalism's last breath as a mass movement was drawn in Spain.

With the notable exception of some anglophone countries, where the IWW model was more popular, in the years 1906-1914 syndicalism was primarily influenced by the French CGT. The bankruptcy of the CGT during the war changed all that. In its absence, it was the Spanish CNT which became the leading organisation within the anarcho-syndicalist IWA. This was not immediate. In the 1920s the CNT was forced underground by the brutal repressions under the dictatorship of Primo de Rivera. Only in the 1930s, with the birth of the Second Spanish Republic, was the CNT able to reorganise and grow to more than a million members, becoming by far the biggest union in the IWA. Already then however it was shaken by an internal conflict between the reformism of Ángel Pestaña and the *Treintistas*, eventually expelled forming their own parliamentary Syndicalist Party, and the insurrectionary anarchism of the Iberian Anarchist Federation (FAI) which led the CNT into a series of localised revolts in January 1932, January 1933 and December 1933, where each time "libertarian communism" was proclaimed only to be crushed by the intervention of the Republican state a few days later. The confusions of this period only became more pronounced with the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936.

We have dealt with the Spanish Civil War in more detail elsewhere; here we can only summarise. While the self-managed workplaces and rural collectives demonstrated workers were able to take over production, they could not abolish money and wages in isolation (a fact which led sections of

the CNT to make virtue out of necessity). These experiments were dissolved once the Republican government, which had not been smashed, inevitably moved against them. The CNT-FAI, by joining the Republican government, by politically capitulating to anti-fascism (i.e. support for the Popular Front), helped to disarm the working class at key moments. Sections of the CNT rank-and-file opposed this, as did certain voices within the IWA who denounced the "*serious errors and betrayals for which [the CNT-FAI] were responsible*" (Manuel Azaretto, *Pendientes Resbaladizas*, 1939). But ultimately, if 1914 saw the bankruptcy of the French CGT, 1936 saw the bankruptcy of the Spanish CNT. Syndicalism proved itself not immune to siding with the capitalist state. For us, this calls for a deeper analysis of the character of mass parties and trade unions in the imperialist phase of capitalism.

The Marxist Critique

There is no doubt that the actions of the socialists, syndicalists and anarchists who sided with their own capitalist states in the first half of the 20th century represented betrayals of principles on their part. However, to leave it at that would be a purely idealist interpretation. There were real material reasons which led them down that path. In the years prior to 1914, workers had managed to build their own mass parties and trade unions, but these very bodies ended up integrating themselves into the capitalist state. This internationally uneven process, which started with the introduction of the first labour laws and continued with the granting of legal status to combinations of workers, culminated in trade unions becoming part of the capitalist state's regulatory and planning apparatus. As we have seen above, syndicalism was both a product of, and a reaction to, this.

From the 1890s onwards capitalism, thanks to its inherent tendency towards accumulation and centralisation of capital, created a world economy in which national economies now violently competed against each other. The state became increasingly involved in production and distribution, while monopolies, cartels, syndicates, and trusts proliferated. Mass parties of workers, in order to survive and retain their membership and property, adopted reformist solutions and attempted to control class struggle. In return, in times of crisis they were called upon to take seats in government. Capitalists, who had previously fought unions bitterly, now saw the possibility of using them to discipline the working class. The rise of business and state unions, which subordinated the interests of workers to the national interest, was the most pronounced expression of this. Syndicalist unions, with their emphasis on direct action and the general strike, could only for a time hold off this tendency. They were either crushed and replaced by rival national trade union centres (as happened to the American IWW after the First World War) or ended up disciplining the working class themselves (the French CGT during the First World War or the Spanish CNT during the Spanish Civil War). Following the arrival of the crisis in the 1970s, as Keynesianism was abandoned in favour of sweeping attacks on working class conditions, anti-trade union laws were also extended. This, despite making an opening for all kinds of "base" unions in new or no longer unionised industries, has not changed the fundamental role that unions play within capitalism.

Revolutionary Marxists have always been clear that: 1) revolution has to involve the conquest of political power by the working class, and 2) the role of trade unions, however radical, is to regulate the sale of labour-power, to act as mediators between labour

and capital. Already in the 1860s, when unions were still illegal in most of the world, Marx made the following observations:

Trades 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 guerilla war against the effects 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, *Value, Price and Profit*, 1865

At the time, Marx thought the participation of trade unions in a political movement could help overcome these limitations. To that end, he argued for their affiliation to the First International. In this way, he hoped trade unions, which previously shunned political engagement in favour of local and immediate economic struggles, could eventually become levers in the struggle of the working class against the political power of the ruling class. Some 40 years later, a new generation of revolutionaries had to grapple with changing realities:

Trade union action is reduced of necessity to the simple defence of already realised gains, and even that is becoming more and more difficult. Such is the general trend of things in our society. ... In other words, the objective conditions of capitalist society transform the two economic functions of the trade unions [influencing the situation in the labour-power market and ameliorating the condition of the workers] into a sort of labour of Sisyphus, which is, nevertheless,

indispensable. ... [However] trade unions are totally incapable of transforming the capitalist mode of production.

Rosa Luxemburg, *Reform or Revolution*, 1900

In response to the reformist wing of social democracy, which sought a gradual transition towards socialism through the expansion of parliamentary democracy, cooperatives and trade unions, revolutionary Marxists recognised this would instead result in a gradual accommodation to capitalism. When the First World War saw mass parties and trade unions embrace *Burgfriedenspolitik* and the *Union Sacrée*, it was the organisations which could not establish a relatively comfortable existence within capitalism, which had a relatively small membership and little if any property, that actually stuck to their internationalist principles. The revolutionary wave which started in Russia ultimately failed and the Communist Left had to critically reflect on the reasons why as well as the changes now taking place within capitalism. Our political ancestors began to criticise the idea of forging mass parties altogether and no longer saw the unions as “schools of socialism”:

... in the current phase of the totalitarian domination of imperialism, the unions are an indispensable tool of this domination, to the extent that they even pursue goals that correspond to the bourgeoisie's aims for its own preservation and war. Therefore, the party rejects the false perspective that these organisations could, in the future, fulfil a proletarian function so that the party would have to do an about turn and adopt a position of winning positions within their leadership.

Political Platform of the
Internationalist Communist Party, 1952

For us in the ICT, it is the self-organisation of the struggle which today serves as the real “school of socialism”. This does not mean we completely reject union membership, which is a tactical question, but we refuse to accept any positions within the union officialdom, and, whether in or out of unions, always argue for going beyond the limiting framework of trade unionism. The era of mass parties and trade unions as tools of developing class consciousness is over.

Today, syndicalist unions, despite arguably being more geographically wide-spread than ever before, are a shadow of their former selves. The biggest ones, often with legal recognition and less emphasis on anarchism (generally using the revolutionary syndicalist or industrial unionist labels), have a few thousand members at most. Others, often with no legal recognition and more ideologically anarchist (generally using the anarcho-syndicalist label), have often been reduced to propaganda groups with little workplace presence. Over the years, this contradiction between accepting more workers into the union regardless of their political stance, and only accepting those workers who agree with certain anarchist principles, has resulted in many splits. Consequently, the international syndicalist movement is divided across three organisational poles: the anarcho-syndicalist IWA relaunched in 1951; a 2018 split from the IWA called the International Confederation of Labor (ICL) which refers to itself as both revolutionary and anarcho-syndicalist; the remains of the industrial unionist IWW, some of whose branches have now joined the ICL. Furthermore, the federalist nature of these groups combined with an entrenched aversion towards programmatic political approaches, means that one branch of the very same organisation may express contradictory views to other branches, even on such crucial matters as internationalism.

In response to such contradictions, some anarcho-syndicalists have attempted to re-orientate their activity away from attempts to build permanent economic bodies, to the point of even questioning the meaning of a "union". For example, in an internal debate within the Solidarity Federation, the British section of the IWA, we find the following argument:

For us, a revolutionary union is necessarily non-permanent because it is an expression of a given wave of class struggle. It cannot outlive the struggle of which it is an expression without becoming something fundamentally different, something counter-revolutionary, precisely because anarcho-syndicalist unions are defined by militant participation, direct action, solidarity and rank-and-file control. The particular form such unions entail is mass assemblies open to all workers (minus scabs and managers), and mandated recallable delegates forming delegate councils to co-ordinate the struggle.

*Strategy & Struggle, Brighton
Solidarity Federation, 2009*

Here, the "revolutionary union" is simply used as a synonym for strike committees, mass assemblies or workers' councils. This perspective was ultimately repudiated within the Solidarity Federation, because, we quote, it "rejects the idea of revolutionary unions" in favour of the "Marxist idea of spontaneous working class organisation" and would make an anarcho-syndicalist group "resemble a council communist organisation." However, these are precisely the kind of questions that syndicalists, those who have reflected on the role of trade unions over the past century and do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past, should be asking themselves.

To conclude, our differences with both historical and modern day syndicalism can be summarised as follows:

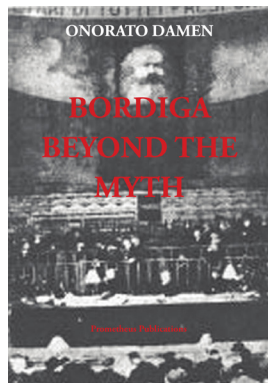
- To the degree that "direct action" is a synonym for working class self-organisation, we have no objections. However, where today it often means voluntarist activism, an attempt by political minorities to artificially transcend the actual level of class struggle, that is where we part. We also make no particular fetish of the general strike, which is but one episode of the class struggle.
- While we recognise that self-managed workplaces may emerge in the course of the class struggle, we reject the notion that islands of self-management can be gradually built up under capitalism as a step towards communism. It remains the case that the working class cannot just seize the factory, it has to seize power in order to make way for the social and economic transformation of society.
- The role that syndicalist unions once ascribed to themselves, that of uniting workers of different political persuasions and across different sectors into one revolutionary organisation, will have to be played by class-wide organs (strike committees, mass assemblies or workers' councils) which arise at exceptional points of the class struggle. Today, by the "conquest of political power" we understand the process of smashing the capitalist state, and replacing its structures with such new class-wide organs, rather than unions (which are always limited by their membership and tied to the logic of mediation between labour and capital).

Finally, while we see the coming together of workers as a class-for-itself to be indispensable, it is not enough: revolutionaries need to

actively work for the promotion of genuinely communist and internationalist perspectives. The political organisation, or future international, that we are trying to build has to be able to present a coherent political programme within the wider working class. Such a political organisation cannot be a

Some Further Reading:

1. Our book, *Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution, 1905-1924*, and pamphlet, *Spain 1934-9: From Working Class Struggle to Imperialist War*, sum up our analysis of the failures of 1917 and 1936. On how we understand the relation between the party and the class, see *Class Consciousness and Revolutionary Organisation*.



Bordiga Beyond the Myth

£5

Amadeo Bordiga led the fight to form the Communist Party of Italy as a "section of the Third International" in 1921. No sooner was this achieved than he found himself leading the fight of the Communist Left in Italy against the same International's abandonment of revolutionary politics. Arrested and imprisoned whilst awaiting trial in 1923, Bordiga opted to stand aside from the party's leadership in Italy allowing free reign for Comintern manoeuvres to introduce a 'centrist' leadership under Gramsci. Even so, as Fascism took hold the Communist Left — in both exile and fascist gaols — did not disappear. Bordiga however did. He retreated from political activity for almost 2 decades. The significance of this volume is that it demonstrates that the "Italian Left" was not just Bordiga but a living movement that has responded to the reality of the class war throughout its history.

Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism

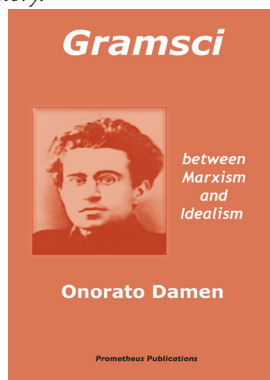
£7.50

Antonio Gramsci was to become the tool of the Comintern in manoeuvring the Communist Party of Italy out of the hands of the revolutionaries who had founded it. His tragic death in Fascist custody has made him a martyr to many of the reformist left. Damen's considerations on Gramsci's shortcomings as an analytical and practical Marxist are an antidote to that. This volume also contains the Platform of the Committee of Intesa (Alliance) of 1925 which Gramsci had condemned.

government in waiting nor a replacement for the state itself (as mass parties and certain syndicalist unions saw themselves in the past); it must remain a revolutionary reference point through all the highs and lows of the class struggle.

Dyjbas

2. Anarcho-syndicalists have written their own histories. For a modern perspective, see the works of Vadim Damier; for an earlier exposition, see Rudolf Rocker. Certain academic works, such as those edited by Marcel van der Linden and Wayne Thorpe, provide a more inclusive (i.e. not only anarchist) history of syndicalist unions.



The Internationalist Communist Tendency

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

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

USA: The Internationalist Workers Group
IWG, P.O. Box 14485, Madison, WI 53708

Germany: Gruppe Internationalistischer KommunistInnen
produces *Socialismus oder Barbarei* and *Germinal*
de@leftcom.org

France: *Bilan & Perspectives*
produces a journal of the same name
Michel Olivier, 7 rue Paul Escudier 75009 Paris

Canada: Klasbatalo
produces *Mutiny/Mutinerie*, a broadsheet in English and French
www.facebook.com/Klasbatalocollective klasbatalocollective@gmail.com

Our Books

Bordiga Beyond the Myth £5
New reduced price as these final remaining copies contain a small errata slip on p.73

Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism £7.50

Russia: Revolution and Counter-Revolution 1905-1924 £12
The "socialism" that eventually emerged from the 1917 Russian Revolution had nothing in common with the vision of Marx. This history explains how a genuine workers' movement from below degenerated into a new form of state capitalism. Its legacy remains the discovery of workers councils (soviets) as the basis for a new social organisation, alongside the need for a revolutionary programme to politically unite the class, against all the distortions of the various defenders of the existing order.

About the Communist Workers' Organisation

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.

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Capitalist Crisis: Survival of the Richest

Months of soaring inflation and stalled wages are the latest effects of the crisis inherent to the capitalist system. The ruling class' attacks on our living and working conditions are just one more attempt to make us pay for it. As winter approaches the havoc wreaked by the failures of the system show no signs of letting up.

Workers Getting the Worst of a

The rise in the prices of basic food and drink items has been steady and unrelenting. In the 12 months leading to September 2022 they have increased 14.6% – the sharpest since 1960 – as every single month seeing a new increase. In the same period, the cost of motor fuel rose by 26.5%, while transport costs rose by 10.9%. Water, energy and housing-related costs rose by 20.2% – although “luckily,” we could be set to save untold amounts on gas and electric costs over winter when, according to the National Grid, the supply of energy could fall short of demand by up to a sixth, meaning potential “managed blackouts” in January and February.

As more households face the choice "eat or heat" over the winter, already 90% of food banks report an increase in the need for their services since the start of the year. Homelessness is set to continue its exponential rise (having increased by 19% in the first three months of 2022 alone). As costs of energy, rent,



A Crisis with a History

the so-called "cost of living crisis" is not simply due to rising inflation. The pandemic and the war in Ukraine have only exacerbated a crisis decades in the making. Inflation has been fuelled by soaring, debasing, and austerity-driven financial class has been able to continue to exploit the working class. Since the early 1970s we have been on a downward spiral, with whole sectors of education and jobs dismantled and wages slashed. The 1980s saw the financial investment in the real economy" gave way to financial speculation based on evermore ingenious ways of multiplying debt. The 1990s saw the rise of the "subprime mortgage" loans. The crash of 2007/8 led to a few big financial names crash without state intervention, but the working class and pensioners were worse than after the 1929 stock market crash. As it was, the whole economy was in a state of stagnation. In the 1970s they had been told capital class was a thing of the past. Now it is only a sign of things to come. In fact, it is the only class that has been able to create precarious jobs with no future worth thinking about, we are facing the longest recession since records began.

As the working class and workers' resistance to the capitalist class has been rightly on defensive grounds, each time trampled by the bosses and their

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stamped addressed envelope to our
London address.*

Class Struggle is Back on the Agenda!

The capitalist crisis is intensifying as it comes the inevitable attacks on the working class. Cost of living and food protests have broken out in more than 20 countries already and the UK is no exception here. Nearly 2 million workers (one in sixteen) are expected to

balloted for strike action in the coming months. The struggle for wages to keep up with inflation is on. Even before the pandemic, which killed more than 200,000 in the UK, finally eased up, and the Covid-19 restrictions were lifted in February 2022, the first signs of the coming resistance were making their appearance.

In January there were strikes by scaffolders calling for better pay. February then had more strikes over pay at schools and universities, and saw protests about the threat of closing of schools. In March, a strike by teachers over the situation in the NUT, and the London Tube strike began over threats to jobs and pensions, and there was a strike in support of sacked RMO workers. April saw strikes by oil refinery workers over an insulting pay offer. In May, post workers went on strike as they had their wages frozen for the previous year followed by a wave of wildcat strikes. Refuse collectors in Walsley suffered construction workers in stall, although

workers in the North Sea, workers at a food plant in Bury, all took matters into their own hands and did not wait to

through the official process. In June, there were more strikes in the Royal Mail, barristers' strike against stagnant fees and, of course, railway strikes.

At this point the establishment movement began to warn of "class war" and ran a virulent campaign to discredit strike workers. In July, BT workers started a strike, the first nationwide action at a company in 35 years. There were strikes on the buses, and further action on the Royal Mail and on the railways. In August, council workers went on strike and there were further scenes of violence.

action, was won by American workers' unions, after a bitter contract war including scaffolders and maintenance workers, at several refineries and chemical plants. In September, offshore oil workers in the North Sea, despite condemnation from both the unions and the employers, went on strike again, organised by their own strike committee. That month there were also strikes by dockers at Felixstowe and Liverpool ports (with impressive pickets). Finally, October saw continuation of many of the previous mentioned strikes, and the resignation of Liz Truss as her government collapsed following the unveiling of the disaster.

mini-budget for the rich. And more is yet to come this winter, as rising energy bills bite at home.

Workers Can Pose their Own Alternative

Appeals to the capitalist state to resolve its crisis are bound to end up in disillusionment. All over the world the ruling class parties, whether left or right-wing, are out of ideas – the political class in the UK is not unique, it is only a symptom of a system in freefall. The ruling class has only two things on offer: new attacks on workers to boost their profits, and, ultimately, war. Dreams of a return

The current resistance is an important starting point. But if we let the ruling class isolate us sector by sector, workplace by workplace, we will lose. The offensive must be led by the bosses, who have money and the links on their side, calls for thinking outside the box. We can already see examples of this when unions in the North Sea were reluctant to take action, workers set up their own strike committee to lead the strike and when ships were rerouted from Liverpool to break the strike, dockers in Southampton refused to handle them. It

users (which, as we saw during the union's funeral, can suspend our actions without even consulting the membership). In picket lines across the country the rank "workers united will never be defeated" is resonating, but if it needs to become more than a slogan, *And if it does*, then workers need to be doing more, then workers need their own political movement. Without such a vision, we are looking at a future of gradual immersion into a planet of collapsing societies and ecosystems. We believe that only in a world without classes, states, wars, and borders, can economic crises, wars, and climate disasters be averted. To that end, we are building a political organization fit for the task, a reference point for the global working class. If workers play by the rules (set up by the bosses) or delegate their power away (to parliamentary parties)

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- Capitalism and the Environment (by Mauro Stefanini)** £2
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- Platform of the Committee of Intesa 1925** £3
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Analysis of class relations in the period after the fall of apartheid thrown into relief by the strike wave which followed the Marikana massacres.
- 1921: Beginning of the Counter-Revolution?** £1
Kronstadt, adoption of the NEP, banning of factions, the failure of the March Action in Germany and the adoption of the united front policy, made 1921 a highly significant year in the degeneration of both the Russian and international revolution

