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Revolutionary Perspectives 22

The No War but the Class War Initiative: What it is and What it is Not



The Wagner Group Revolt

**Amadeo Bordiga's Prison
Manifesto**

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

**1848: The Working Class
Bursts onto the
Scene of History**

Revolutionary Perspectives

Magazine of the Communist Workers' Organisation
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The State We Are In	1
The Wagner Group Revolt and Future Course of the War	3
The No War but the Class War Initiative	6
What it is and What it is Not	6
Capitalism's Economic Foundations (Part III)	12
Introduction to Amadeo Bordiga's Prison Manifesto	29
Amadeo Bordiga - Prison Manifesto (1923)	35
1848: The Working Class Bursts Onto the Scene of History	41

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The State We Are In

This issue goes to press as the UK celebrates 75 years of its National Health Service. But it's difficult to see what there is to cheer about. Despite politicians' assertions that more money than ever is spent on the NHS, British spending on healthcare in relation to GDP comes well behind most of the OECD rich countries. Before the pandemic the UK had the lowest number of doctors, nurses and hospital beds per capita in this comparison and there were 100,000 unfilled posts.

The NHS came into being as part of the tendency of the state to absorb more and more of social life which began with the First World War. The third part of our **Capitalism's Economic Foundations** series, which we present in this issue, deals with how this tendency came about. In the epoch of imperialism, wars are total wars which means states have to take the population with them. In the UK, after the First World War, "homes fit for heroes" saw the massive expansion of council housing. The Second World War provoked an even wider recognition that state welfare provision would have to be expanded if there was to be no return to the "hungry Thirties". After the war, bourgeois minds were occupied by a series of strikes and the squatting of empty properties all around the country, alongside the threat from the supposedly "communist" Soviet Union. The modern welfare state was born in response. It worked (not without problems) because the war had opened a new cycle of accumulation which lasted until the 1970s.

The end of the post-war boom seriously hampered state revenues and the first attempt to make workers pay led to a worldwide resistance. In the UK, printing money to cover future production created inflation which, as

the article explains only created more social strife. In 1977 the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, announced to the TUC that the state could not "spend its way out of the crisis". The first serious cuts in spending not only on the NHS but on all public services began. We will turn to this in our next issue.

In the meantime capitalism has brought us a new round of inflation and interest rate rises which are bringing misery to millions. This has led to scores of strikes in the UK and elsewhere in an attempt to redress the balance. As long as they remain within the framework of accepting the current system of wage slavery the system is safe. But that is not the only threat capitalism poses. In the longer term, as we argue here, the need is for a massive devaluation of capital in order for a new boom to take place. Even the mainstream monetarist economists are calling for a "Schumpeterian moment" to get out of the "secular stagnation" the system has been in for years. But living in the Victorian past, as they do, they assume that a mere economic crisis will be enough to devalue capital and restart accumulation on a new basis. The fact is that since 1914 only an all-out imperialist war can achieve this, given the already existing accumulated mass of capital.

In this context the **war in Ukraine** is not just about Ukraine alone. As we have seen in previous issues this is just one more episode on the road to a wider war between the two really dominant powers on the planet, the USA and China. The war in Ukraine has intensified trade wars (China and the USA are trying to prevent each other from access to raw materials needed for computer chips, for example), galvanised an arms race, and solidified the alliances on both sides behind the dominant nuclear powers. There is no

space for compromise – only for an extension of the current war to a wider arena.

Falling living standards and the threat of global war are both a product of the economic crisis, but without working class action and organisation there is no alternative. In this issue we take note of two other anniversaries. It is 175 years since the **1848 Revolutions** brought the working class on to the stage of history, and 100 years since the trial of the Left Communist leaders of the Communist Party of Italy (PCd'I). The articles on them are not an academic exercise in nostalgia but an attempt to bring back the memory of class resistance even in the direst of circumstances. Whilst in prison in 1923 Bordiga wrote his **Manifesto** criticising the steps the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was taking in the International to adopt the united front with the social democrats who had already gone over to the side of capitalism. At the same time they were already “bolshevising” all the other parties of the International. In the process they were removing the Left Communists who had founded the PCd'I and who held a majority in it even when they were being expelled in 1926-8. The lesson of this episode is that a real International has to exist in advance of the revolution and not be dominated by any

one national party.

Today we are a long way from having that vital working class political body, thanks largely to the ideological weight of the counter-revolution which still equates Stalinism and Maoism with communism. But that is not to say that the process has not already started. In taking part in the resistance to cuts in living standards and the threat of imperialist war, we have joined with others to form local committees under the banner of No War but the Class War. Instead of rancorous debate about the past amongst those who already side with the working class, our aim is to find common ground where we hope to work together around the essential questions facing humanity (including the question of an increasingly uninhabitable world). We are well aware that No War But the Class War cannot, of itself, be the International, but it may help pave the way for the kind of positive dialogue amongst revolutionaries that can lead to a new International, that much-needed body which can give a clear purpose and unity to the world working class beyond all sectional and national struggles. We have no idea how much time we have left to get politically organised but the article on **what No War But Class War is, and is not**, is intended to be a contribution to that process.

The Wagner Group Revolt and Future Course of the War

In January 2022 (and before the Russian invasion of Ukraine) it was clear that Russian imperialism was operating from a situation of fear. We wrote in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 19 that Putin was:

aware of Russia's relative weakness against the combined forces of NATO. The Ukrainian conscript army itself is the third largest in Europe (over 170,000 frontline troops with many more in reserve), and is undergoing reform and reorganisation, which, with new and sophisticated weaponry from NATO powers, will make it more effective. Putin worries that Ukraine may soon be strong enough to recover the Donbass.

The failure to capture Kyiv in the “special military operation” at the beginning of the invasion lies at the root of the recent Wagner “revolt”. Apart from the reasons mentioned above, the logistical incompetence of the Minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu, and the commander of the Russian Army, Valery Gerasimov, has also been a factor as the Wagner boss, Yevgeny Prigozhin has made clear. Shoigu is not a soldier but a trained civil engineer who had a record of success in dealing with civilian emergencies. The previous Defence Minister was sacked in 2008, after the Russian Army struggled in Georgia, but what also recommended Shoigu to Putin was that he was not controlled by any of the oligarchic clans vying for power at the head of the Russian state.

But if Shoigu was Putin's man, so too was Prigozhin. Prigozhin, as is well known, had long been given free rein by Putin.

The ex-convict and street food seller had eventually become a caterer to Putin in St Petersburg. Although no military expert himself, he teamed up with ex-members of Russian military intelligence to set up Wagner (the name epitomises the neo-Nazi and racist views of the founders). Wagner was not the only private military company (PMC) or mercenary group employed by the state. For example, Ramzan Kadyrov's troops have fulfilled a similar role in pacifying Chechnya, but Wagner is by far the largest.

The recent privatisation of war is also not new, nor unique to Russia. In the US invasion of Iraq, military “contractors” like Blackwater (notorious for a massacre of civilians in 2007) and Halliburton (logistical and catering support to the military) were used extensively. The appeal for both the USA and Russia was that they did not have to use conscript armies which caused them their problems with their own societies in Vietnam and Afghanistan respectively. A war fought by professionals, who sign up to kill and be killed, rather than compulsory conscription of the eligible population, is a safer option from the point of view of the system, as the movement against the Vietnam War demonstrated in the 1960s.

Nor are such mercenary units just confined to the USA and Russia. In Syria, Yemen and Sudan, the state has used irregulars to carry out their dirty work. This is not without its consequences, as the current war in Sudan between the regular Army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under the command of Mohamed “Hemedti” Hamdan Dagalo, is a direct result of that policy. If the definition of a state is to have a recognised

governmental regime with a monopoly of arms within its own territory, then Prigozhin and Hemedti are Frankenstein monsters, created by the system itself only to get out of control and challenge their masters.

The Wagner Group forces have been an important part of Russian imperialism for a decade, especially in doing its dirty work in Africa where they operate in 13 countries to support the local dictator, as in the Central African Republic. In a snub to the West they have also replaced the French Army in Mali as the chosen forces of the local regime to take on the jihadists. Until the current Ukraine war, Putin and the Russian government denied any connection to this mercenary outfit. PMCs are illegal under Russian law but Prigozhin has set up a network of shell companies to camouflage its activities. In Africa it usually takes payment in local economic assets which in Sudan means control of the gold mines. Prigozhin has become a billionaire on the strength of this. After its brutal operations in Syria and Libya, it first made itself useful in Ukraine in 2014 by bolstering the local pro-Russian militias in the Donbass, and aiding in the takeover of Crimea.

In the current war they have morphed from being a support unit (carrying out brutal atrocities against civilians) into the main Russian assault force. Although Wagner have been given equipment equivalent to the regular army, Prigozhin constantly criticised the Russian high command over the lack of logistical support as thousands of his troops died in Bakhmut.

In fact, it seems that Wagner were no longer useful. Shoigu had already decided that the next phase of the war would be defensive, to retain all Russia held east of the Dnieper. The Wagner Brigade were no longer essential, and even become a liability. This is why Shoigu wanted to integrate them into the

regular Russian Army (where they would be paid a lot less – even though the recruitment posters have been offering 7 times a workers' wage for signing up for the regular army since the war began). Prigozhin was given a deadline of 1 July for this to take place. The approach of this deadline was the fundamental reason behind the Wagner Brigade's capture of the Russian Southern Command HQ in Rostov on 23 June, whilst 2,500 of them headed in convoy towards Moscow. Prigozhin alleged the Russian Army launched a missile at a Wagner base as the spark for the revolt but it is clear that, whether that is true or not, Wagner's plans to take over Rostov had to have been made some time before.

It certainly was well-coordinated, and it took the Kremlin and its supporters in the military off-guard. Putin may now be able to congratulate the regular Army for avoiding a civil war, but there were serious attempts to halt the Wagner column as it got to the border of the Moscow gubernia (region). Many sources state that 6 attack helicopters and an Ilyushin bomber were brought down (using the sophisticated anti-aircraft weaponry supplied to Wagner by the Russian Army) and 13 of the pilots are thought to have been killed. At this point the deal (allegedly brokered by Belarus' President Lukashenko) was announced in which Wagner would pull back its troops and accept integration into the Russian Army (if they had committed no crime) whilst Prigozhin and the Wagner rebels would go into exile in Belarus although whether this is actually happening remains unclear. Much has been made by the Western press about how a "traitor" with an arrest warrant out for him could get off so lightly. It has certainly undermined Putin's previous image as the strong man holding the Russian state together, but he may have wider geopolitical concerns.

The complicating factor for Russian

imperialism is that Wagner still represents its interests in Africa where, as we noted, it has extensive holdings. This means just crushing it was not so simple. There is ambiguity about the terms of the deal with Wagner. It is not clear what integration into the Russian Army may involve, and whether some of them would carry on working for Wagner in Africa for the benefit of Russia. However, it seems that a purge is also underway there too as several top Wagner officials are said to have been arrested in Sudan already.

Zelensky, of course, has missed no opportunity to use the Wagner revolt for his own propaganda purposes, and is now claiming that Ukraine's long awaited offensive has begun and claims some small gains. With a new phase opening in the war in Ukraine, amid Western claims that the Wagner episode reveals the fundamental division and demoralisation in the Russian Army, the coming months will be critical. Change in the Russian high command is already apparently underway but not the one Prigozhin called for. It seems that Sergey Surovikin, the butcher of Syria (who tried the same tactics of mass destruction in Southern Ukraine last year) gave his support to Prigozhin, and is now under arrest. Ironically this may even be Shoigu's time. His engineering training is now likely to be put to the test in Ukraine in the next few months as the Russian Army has dug in with massive defences. It will be a lot easier to maintain fighting morale in a defensive war than in an offensive which at times has been almost suicidal on both sides. If they hold off the long expected Ukrainian counter-offensive then Shoigu will be safe. If not, there will be yet another reshuffle at the top of the Russian military.

For the West of course there has been much speculation about the debacle in Moscow and that Putin's time is up. Taking a leaf from Putin's first speech on the Wagner

revolt (Putin blamed the Bolsheviks for making Ukraine independent before the war and now he is turning historical fact on its head by blaming them for undermining the Russian war effort in 1917) they obscenely compared it to the October Revolution as another "coup" attempt. However, Western politicians have themselves been more cautious. Biden announced that the US had nothing to do with it and this (for once) is probably true. This had "made in Russia" stamped all over it. EU Commission President Josep Borrell went further and openly stated that the dysfunction at the head of a nuclear power could be dangerous for the world. Although Western propaganda rested on the demonisation of Putin (and why not?) the fact is that, if Putin goes, there are even more nationalist figures waiting in the wings. Wagner was greeted with water and flowers by some Rostov residents and there seems little doubt that Prigozhin is more popular than any of the liberal opposition who might seek peace in Russia. Any Ukrainian gains in the Donbass would be far more of a threat to Putin than the protest of the Wagner Group.

On the international front nothing has changed. The same tendency towards the formation of two armed camps that the war brought about is continuing. It is significant that China re-affirmed its support for Russia during the crisis and, with other BRICs like South Africa and Brazil not joining in Western campaigns of condemnation, the alliance remains firm. Imperialist interplay goes on, with the USA weaning Modi's India away from Russian arms dependence due to its fears of China, whilst Iran has finally entered the Shanghai Cooperation Council as a full member. Those who thought the Wagner Group revolt would lead to peace in Ukraine are going to have to wait a lot longer as the globe becomes even more dangerous and divided.

The NO WAR BUT THE CLASS WAR Initiative

The following document was agreed upon by the International Bureau of the ICT on 21 May. There is nothing like an imperialist war for revealing the real class basis of a political framework, and the invasion of Ukraine has certainly done that. The response of the Capitalist Left (Stalinists, Maoists, Trotskyists, etc.) has either been outright support for one or the other of the imperialist fronts (NATO or Russia), or a fake pacifism which hides the same positions. It has deeply divided anarchism between true internationalists who materially identify with the working class, and moralist defenders of the “independence of Ukraine” who cannot see that behind Ukraine stands NATO, and the losers are the working class everywhere. The pro-Ukraine anarchists cannot see that this war is in Ukraine but not just about Ukraine. For them it is simply about a bigger power taking over a smaller power, when in fact it is the latest round of a crisis-ridden system’s developing global conflict which will engulf not only the present actors but the entire world as the real fight for hegemony between China and the USA deepens. The suffering of Ukraine follows similar conflicts further afield, but this one indicates that the

options for global capitalism have narrowed as the stagnation of the system has no clear economic solution.

The Communist Left across the world has remained solidly behind the international interests of the working class and denounced this war for what it is. For our part, the ICT has taken the internationalist position a stage further by trying to work with other internationalists who can see the dangers for the world working class if it does not get organised. This is why we have joined in with the initiative to develop committees at a local level across the world to organise a response to what capitalism is preparing for workers everywhere. We are only at the start of this work and not all internationalists have yet joined it. Many have not understood what is at stake and some have not understood that we need to pave the way to practical organisation now while we still can and before it is too late. The following document is not only a balance sheet of what we have experienced after one year of No War but the Class War (NWBCW), it is also a clarification of what it is about and hopefully will go some way to banishing doubts and misunderstandings.

What it is and What it is Not

Before the war in Ukraine started we were warning that new imperialist tensions were already growing across the world.¹ Two months later the Russian invasion of Ukraine began, and everything that has happened since has only confirmed our original analysis that this is not just about Ukraine but about the threat of generalised

war. Fifteen months on, the current war has only deepened the fault lines in the global capitalist order.²

It has led to an open conflict between the USA and its allies against Russia. This followed the USA arming Ukraine from 2014 on, in response to the Russian seizure of Crimea and the setting up of pro-Russian

entities in Luhansk and Donetsk. This programme of rearmament became a serious threat to the separatist provinces, and led to the invasion, which in turn has led to even more Western weapons arriving in Ukraine to bolster its resistance. As we have written elsewhere, this has unleashed a new and unstoppable arms race which is not confined to this theatre of war.³ The USA has missed no opportunity to condemn the ambitions of China and both sides have stepped up hostile manoeuvres in the South China Sea. And whilst Putin has united the West in NATO, the sanctions regime against the regimes in Russia, China and Iran has driven them all closer together.

The war in Ukraine has thus become a defining moment which threatens to become critical for humanity. Given that workers are the only class which has the global presence and the ultimate power to stop the headlong drive into the abyss that capitalism is engaged in, it is time to try to raise the political awareness of workers everywhere as to what the stakes are. Lower living standards today are only the warm-up act for the heavier blow of generalised imperialist war tomorrow. The working class for the last four decades has been a class to whom history has just happened. It needs to transform itself from the object of capitalist games into the subject of a struggle for a new society. This was why, in April last year, the ICT launched its appeal⁴ for genuine internationalists in all political organisations, or none, to form local committees under the banner of NWBCW. The first local committee made up of CWO members and others, whether in organisations or not, was formed in Liverpool in March last year⁵ on the basis of the five principles below:

- Against capitalism, imperialism and all nationalisms. 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 and the coming together of genuine internationalists.

Since then a number of committees have been formed on a similar basis in places across the world including Glasgow, Paris, Montreal, Toronto, Chicago, Miami, San Francisco, Turkey and South Korea, some with ICT members and some without. To have seen so many arising so quickly was very heartening but we are not deluding ourselves that all we are building here is anything more than a framework for an international intervention. As we wrote in our original appeal we have a longer view:

It is inevitable that ... some workers will come to recognise the dead-end of capitalist existence before others. It is imperative that the former organise politically on an international level in order to offer a clear way forward. This will not come about immediately, especially not after decades of decline in workers’ struggles in the face of the capitalist onslaught. However, the situation today in Ukraine is a warning of what governments have in store for workers everywhere and we need to

*respond, not only to daily exploitation, but to the political plans of “our” leaders. In the current situation of humanitarian disaster we have no illusion that a movement of the class can arise soon, even if history has now taken a new and desperate turn. We need to build something together opposed to both exploitation and war. Even if the current crisis in Ukraine ends up in some patched up deal, this will only sow the seeds for the next round of imperialist conflict.*⁶

We were also aware that any new initiative would face new problems and that setbacks would be inevitable. The first problem came from the fake internationalism of various opportunists of the Capitalist Left (Stalinists, Maoists, Trotskyists, etc.) who will adorn their documents with NWBCW images or slogans but emptied of any internationalist content.⁷ They are flying “under a false flag” (ours!) but can only do so by hiding their real politics which is to support the “underdog imperialism” of “oppressed peoples” (in short, nationalist struggles) or any state opposed to the USA. There is no nation or national struggle which the working class can support today.

The second problem has been those who signed up to NWBCW without understanding what it really was about, or rather, who saw it as the extension of their previous radical reformist activity. This happened in both Portland and Rome⁸ where certain elements saw NWBCW as something to immediately mobilise a class which was still recovering from four decades of retreat, and which was only just beginning to find its feet in the fight against inflation. Their immediate and ultra-activist perspective only led to the demise of those committees.

Nor is NWBCW anything like the factory groups of the original Internationalist

Communist Party (PCInt) conception in the 1940s. These were, and are, organisations made up of members and close sympathisers of the PCInt. They were originally called “union factory groups” because they were designed to fight politically inside the unions, which by this time had been integrated into the state apparatus to institutionalise the wage fight, and keep it within the bounds of capitalist legality. Unions had by then long since ceased to be “schools of socialism” (Marx) and now had become managers of negotiations with the exploiters, always within the legal bounds with which the state constrained any strike movement. Any permanent economic organisation of the class was therefore doomed to become just another arm of the existing status quo (which is why rank and file unions also end up going down the same road in the end). However, millions of workers were enrolled in them and this could not be ignored. The solution was to politically and organisationally oppose them in the factory in these groups. They thus became the weapons of the PCInt in the struggle. They were not attempts to organise the class but attempts to organise communists in the class, in resistance to the conformism of the unions. In the 1980s the restructuring of industry and the new composition of the class led to the idea of workers in different workplaces coming together in “territorial” groups where the possibility of organisation was greater.

But these were, and are, tools of the PCInt (and by extension the ICT). NWBCW is not in the same category as it is not confined to ICT members but tries to bring together internationalists from different traditions to build an international network of committees to organise and propagandise against the effects of the capitalist crisis in all its aspects. Its task is thus to link today’s fall in the standard of living to the future threat of a more general

war. NWBCW will face practical problems (and as we have noted, already has had them in some places) and groups will rise and fall, but our commitment as internationalists to it as a long term perspective will not change. As we have said many times before, NWBCW will only take proper shape as part of a larger class movement.

NWBCW committees are also not simple struggle groups since these arise from particular struggles in the workplace. The latter are organs created in the struggle for the struggle and are open to all. They are not created from above, they have no membership cards, no platform, or even a list of basic points of agreement (like those of the NWBCW committees). They are open to every worker and those who want to take part in the struggle. They are like other unitary organs of the class such as mass meetings, strike committees, workers' councils, etc. They are organs within which those seeking to expose the capitalist system have to fight, to widen the basis of the struggle.

One of the problems of workers' struggles currently is that they are episodic (a struggle now here, now there) and when the struggle in a particular section dies down they disappear. NWBCW can offer a longer term purpose by focussing on the bigger picture of where capitalism is taking us. NWBCW is an attempt to build a wider initiative (while we are still free to do so) in the sense that it reaches out to other internationalists to build a network in anticipation of wider struggles to come (and it won't really take off unless, and until, they arrive).

NWBCW is thus openly political, and some comrades have compared it to the anti-war and anti-capitalist spirit of the Zimmerwald Left of 1915. This arose in opposition to the main Zimmerwald Manifesto which did not mention that the fight against war was also a fight against the system that

engendered imperialist wars. We can thus say that NWBCW shares this aspect of the Zimmerwald Left (which would later become the basis in 1919 for the foundation of the Third International). However, we should not carry this historical comparison too far, as the context in which we operate is vastly different to our ancestors at Zimmerwald over a century ago. Back then, the First World War had been going for almost a year when socialists met at Zimmerwald. They were trying to repair the damage done by the betrayal of the Second International's social democratic parties leadership which had largely supported their "own" governments (with only the Russian, Polish, Bulgarian and Serbian parties calling for a revolutionary opposition to the war). That betrayal was all the more massive because the Second International at the time regrouped millions of workers across the world, and had passed resolution after resolution that it would prevent imperialist war by striking against it everywhere. Today our task is not to try to give a new lead to a decrepit movement, but to bring an old and tested working class anti-war position to any new movement that does arise.

It is clear that not all internationalists yet understand the seriousness of the current path capitalism has embarked on, and remain stuck in the polemics of the past. As a result they have deeply misunderstood what NWBCW stands for. We don't doubt their sincerity as internationalists, and thus will not respond to their polemics which are the same old ones we have heard so often. There are some issues on which we have to agree to disagree if we are to forge a real anti-capitalist movement for the future and trust to material reality bringing revolutionaries together as we face an increasingly desperate system.

At the same time, NWBCW is not a regroupment scheme as it does not ask for

total political agreement but just an internationalist position as per the five points above (which recognises that NO state anywhere can be supported whether it is a great imperialist power or a wannabe underdog imperialist country – they are all fighting for a national stake in the global capitalist order). Obviously we understand that participation in a positive movement with a clear aim will stimulate political discussion and encourage exchanges which enlarge and deepen the movement but the question of political regroupment in a future international will only arise once a real class movement has started, and that is not in our gift. Only a wider class movement will pose new challenges to revolutionaries and render past differences obsolete – this will then potentially pave the way for a more fruitful political process which will see internationalists working towards the creation of a cohesive international organisation capable of providing programmatic guidance in the class war against a system that has long since lost its usefulness. It is thus not only an initiative for the here and now but an orientation for the whole period to come.

However, for the ICT, NWBCW is, in one sense, part of our tradition. It is in line with the Appeal for a United Proletarian Front the PCInt put out in 1944.⁹ It was open to all “proletarian and non-party political formations” who accepted the internationalist position of opposing both sides in the Second World War. It concluded with two basic organisational provisions:

1. On the basis of these positions, workers (what political label they use does

Notes

1. See <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-02-06/ukraine-and-taiwan-flash-points-in-an-uncertain-imperialist-world>

2. The latest expression is in the ICT May Day 2023 statement <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-04-30/>

not matter) should spread the call of our party, and, having debated and clarified and accepted the ideas which are its justification, they should make themselves the initiators of the first contacts and the first organic groupings in the workplace. After all, the workers have clearly demonstrated that they are now masters in the art of organising themselves in defiance of the bosses and their fascist servants. The workers' united front brings together and cements the forces destined to fight on the class barricades against the war and its leading political forces, both fascist and democratic.

2. Its greatest and most urgent task is to prevent workers from being plagued by war propaganda, to unmask imperialist agents disguised as revolutionaries, and to prevent the spirit of struggle and sacrifice that animates the proletariat from being exploited for the aims of the war and its continuation, even under the banner of democratic freedom.

Today **No War but the Class War** makes the same appeal to all genuine internationalists who can accept the five basic positions at the top of this article to set up their own committees, or join existing ones, so we can build a fight against all the threats the trajectory of capitalism poses to our continued existence.

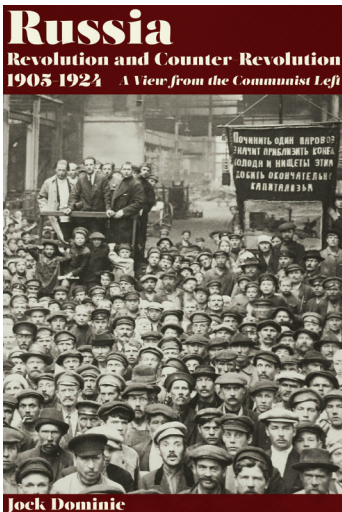
The International Bureau of the Internationalist Communist Tendency

may-day-2023-there-is-no-right-side-in-an-imperialist-war-no-war-but-the-class but there are many other articles on our site such as this one from our North American comrades <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-03-14/us-ramps-up-anti-chinese-aggression-amidst-maneuvers-over-ukraine>

3. See <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2023-02-24/one-year-since-the-invasion-of-ukraine-on-the-road-to-world-war-three>
4. Our original appeal is here <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-04-06/no-war-but-the-class-war-a-call-for-action>
5. See <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-05-02/no-war-but-the-class-war-state-ment-from-nwbcw-liverpool>
6. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-04-06/no-war-but-the-class-war-a-call-for-action>
7. A classic though more sophisticated example from Italy is this one [https://pungolorosso.word-press.com/2022/11/01/no-to-imperialist-war-joint-statement-adopted-by-the-organizers-of-](https://pungolorosso.word-press.com/2022/11/01/no-to-imperialist-war-joint-statement-adopted-by-the-organizers-of-the-16-october-c)

the-16-october-c But in Britain the Stalinist YCL will also sometimes use it even though their position is entirely pacifist and does not link the fight against war to the fight against capitalism (at the same time avoiding criticism of Russian imperialism) <https://ycl.org.uk/2023/02/25/one-year-on-ukraine/>

8. A fuller account of the Rome Committee is to be found at <https://www.leftcom.org/it/articles/2023-01-03/sul-comitato-di-roma-nwbcw-un-intervista>
9. <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-10-31/1944-appeal-of-the-internationalist-communist-party-for-the-creation-of-a-united>



**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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Capitalism's Economic Foundations (Part III)

Introduction

Regular readers of *Revolutionary Perspectives* will know that we have been republishing, with minor additions, the article "The Economic Foundations of Capitalist Decadence". Originally published in 1974 this was one of the founding documents of the *Revolutionary Perspectives* group which became part of the Communist Workers' Organisation in 1975. Written half a century ago its central premises have stood the test of time, and in the first two parts we have only made light edits to the original.

However, in this part we enter the period through which, for all the turmoil and change of the last half a century, we are still living. Given that turmoil, we have naturally developed a longer perspective than that posed in the original. In fact, as early as 1976 we had already decided that the coming of the crisis and the revival of the working class resistance across the world to its consequences meant that though the question of "war or revolution" was now on the agenda, it was not necessarily in the immediate sense. The economic struggle of the 1970s ("money militancy" as we called it amongst ourselves) did not automatically give rise to a class consciousness of the need to get rid of the system, even if that system was exhibiting more and more contradictions. Our explanation of the causes of the crisis that emerged then has remained, but after half a century it would be an admission of sterility, if we did not take in subsequent events, as well as expand on those issues where we have since developed our analysis further. This, and the next part of the series, will thus be more heavily edited than the first two. This one will end in the

period in which it was originally written, the end of the post-war boom. This was when the working class, faced with attacks on living standards, initially through a huge hike in inflation, responded with strikes and insurrections across the world. These led to the birth of new organisations of the Communist Left like the CWO, and the rejuvenation of already existing ones like the Internationalist Communist Party (Battaglia Comunista). For our new generation, it led us to Marx's analysis to explain the material reality through which we were living. However, what we could not see in the early 70s, was how the system would react both to the end of the cycle of accumulation. and to the resistance of the working class to the attempt to make it pay for that crisis. The next, and final, part of this series will summarise the articles we have written since about all the twists and turns of the subsequent capitalist response to the end of this cycle of accumulation – a cycle whose central problem, the need for massive devaluation of capital, still has not been resolved.

One other thing we have had to do over the years is define the term "decadence" against misinterpretations which suggested it meant that capitalism was bound to collapse in short order. Modes of production take centuries to rise and fall and their contradictions can lead to new developments, and sometimes even apparent expansion, before they finally fall. Even then economic contradictions alone do not end class rule. As we wrote in *Internationalist Communist* 23:

We are dramatically living through the decadence of capitalism, we can identify certain phenomena in which

it can be seen but we obviously cannot foresee when this period will historically end. In the absence of an alternative capitalism could still carry on its mad course for centuries. The decadence of capitalism doesn't mechanically lead to socialism. It is a methodological error to foresee the natural end of capitalism and the arrival of socialism without revolutionary action by the proletariat. Socialism isn't the natural outcome of capitalist decadence but the fruit of the victorious struggle of the proletariat guided by its international, and internationalist, party.¹

Decadence is thus only a useful shorthand term to describe all the features that characterise capitalism in the era of the tendency to monopoly, imperialism and state capitalism, but the basic goad of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall remains the material driving force of the cycles of accumulation which remain in place, albeit in a different form. They remain critical for understanding where we are today, which is at the end of the third cycle of accumulation of capitalism's decadent period. This one though poses a bigger threat than ever. The journalists of the ruling class talk of a "polycrisis", with economic stagnation, pandemics, imperialist war, environmental degradation and global warming all threatening, not just the future of capitalism but potentially the future of humanity itself. There is no guaranteed outcome. We are entering one of the periods described by Marx in the Communist Manifesto where we will be faced with either the victory of the "contending" i.e. working class, or the common ruin of us all. Knowing where we are though is only the first step. Neither revolutionary minorities nor the wider working class can wait with folded arms to see what happens. The time to get

organised, both collectively and politically, is already long overdue. This series is intended as a contribution to that effort.

The Age of Imperialism and State Capitalism

The Era of Capitalist Decadence

The outbreak of world war in 1914 was the decisive manifestation that capitalism was henceforward a decadent mode of production. But since we have already explained that the falling rate of profit is the basic motive force of capital accumulation, during both capitalism's ascendancy and its decline, how are we able to assert categorically that world capitalism is now a decadent social system and has been since approximately 1914, although it has still managed to continue to accumulate and even "expand" the productive forces? Let us first emphasise that we say "approximately 1914" as the date for the beginning of capitalism's decline. A mode of production does not suddenly become decadent overnight, and it can be argued that capitalism had fulfilled its historic task of creating the world economy and establishing the material foundations for communism some time before 1914. However, with the development of monopoly capital and the world economy, a point is reached where the strictly economic crisis of the cycle of accumulation is no longer sufficient to rejuvenate the accumulation process. Centralisation of capital has proceeded too far and there are now too few small, unproductive capitals to fall by the way side. Devaluation of capital as a result of the devastations of world-wide imperialist war is the only solution to the crisis of global capitalism.

In the previous parts of this study, we have seen how the counter-tendencies to the falling rate of profit prove to be ineffective or

else lead to imperialism, and eventually world war, once capital is established as the dominant world mode of production. The rise of global capital means the end of laissez-faire or classical capitalism. The accumulation of capital after World War One could only take place on the basis of constant and growing state intervention in each national economy and the gradual absorption of civil society by the state — hence the existence of the tendency towards state capitalism throughout the world. This, besides involving increasing state ownership and control of the means of production, fiscal policies which attempt to control the economy, also involves the stimulus of waste production (i.e. production which, from the viewpoint of global capital, cannot lead to further capital accumulation) of which the most pronounced expression has been arms production. With classical competition now subsumed under a situation of permanent inter-imperialist rivalry, the booms and busts now present themselves as world economic crises, often accompanied by growing arms production since ultimately the mammoth devaluation of capital needed to enable a new round of accumulation can only be resolved by war, itself a prelude to a new period of reconstruction. The history of capitalism since the start of the twentieth century has been the history of this cycle of crisis — war — reconstruction.

The two World Wars served as means of devaluing capital and permitted a realignment of the imperialist powers², but this in no way affected the relative position of the less advanced states who henceforth have been mere pawns in the manipulations of the inter-imperialist rivalry of the advanced states, it is difficult for the so-called “developing” countries to compete on the world market independently of the imperialist powers.

From the viewpoint of the proletariat, on the other hand, the existence of global,

decadent capitalism means also the existence of the material possibility of world revolution and the institution of communism as a higher mode of production. The world revolutionary wave of 1917-21, in spite of its defeat, proved that communism was no longer a utopian ideal, but a practical possibility. But more than this, the First World War proved that the continued existence of the capitalist mode of production was a “fetter” on the development of the productive forces and the institution of communism by the proletariat is essential if society is not to sink into barbarism.

Statification Immediately Before, During and After the 1st World War

We saw in the discussion of imperialism that state expenditure was increasing as a proportion of the total national income of the advanced states from about 1870 onwards. Armaments, as we saw above, comprised the largest single item of state spending, but other important items were education and public utilities (services with a high technical composition, such as gas and water supply). In 1909 the British Government indicated how far the needs of decadent capitalism were sustained by the State with the formation of British Petroleum (BP), with a government controlling share.

It was in the US however where the tendencies to monopoly of the “Gilded Age”, noted in the previous part³, threatened not only to kill off the development of new capitals via monopoly pricing but even to distort the political process. In response to protests from organised labour, farmers in the “Granger Movement”, the founding of an Anti-monopoly Party, the first anti-trust law, the Sherman Act, was passed in 1890. Under the laissez-faire (and Social Darwinist) regime of President McKinlay it remained largely unused. It was only after his assassination

that his successor Theodore Roosevelt, an enthusiastic supporter of an American Empire, would apply the act to bring the likes of JP Morgan and Rockefeller to heel. It was bizarre that a government had to act “to protect competition” (which capitalist claim comes naturally to the system) but it was the beginning of a process where even today markets are regulated and even “made” by the state.⁴ Roosevelt though did not go so far as to nationalise actual industries but forged a relationship with them where government contracts became the main source of national planning and capital. The seeds of the post-Second World War “military-industrial-Congressional complex” had been sown, and by that time, and in the post-war boom, industry leaders would seamlessly pass in and out government service.⁵

The outbreak of war in 1914 accelerated this development towards statification in all the leading capitalist powers with central governments taking more or less direct control over production for war purposes. In Imperial Germany after 1916, Rathenau’s control of the economy was so great that it was called “state socialism”, whilst Lloyd George, describing the men who helped run his Ministry of Munitions, said,

*... “All the means of production, distribution and exchange” were aggregated at their command.*⁶

Many specific aspects of this state intervention were revoked after the War but others remained and state capitalism as a tendency of all capitals was firmly established. The tendency towards statification of the economy is not just the result of the need for production within national states to be geared to the military requirements of war, although this need accelerates and emphasises the trend. A more important reason

can be traced to the chronic lack of surplus value as a result of the crippling high organic composition of capital. Faced with stagnating industries (whose surplus value is too low to provide for a further increase in constant capital) the state has been forced to try and avoid collapse of the economy by adopting what had hitherto been the function of the market, i.e. promoting the formation of an average rate of profit by redistributing surplus value throughout the economy.

*In the course of capital concentration, more surplus-value comes to be divided among relatively fewer enterprises, a process by which the market loses some of its functions. When the market mechanism ceases to “square” supply and demand by way of capital expansion, it complicates the formation of an average rate of profit, which is needed to secure the simultaneous existence of all necessary industries regardless of their individual profit rates. The average rate of profit, ... implies the “pooling” of surplus value so as to satisfy the physical needs of social production which assert themselves by way of social demand. Capital stagnation, expressed as it is as defective demand, hinders an increasing number of capital entities from partaking of the social “pool” of surplus value. Control of surplus value becomes essential for the security of capitalism and the distribution of profits becomes a governmental concern.*⁷

Hence the reason for the marked increase in state control over banking, credit, etc., government subsidies and outright nationalisation of many basic industries after the First World War, particularly with the onset of the 1929 crisis. Thus, for example, the French Government lent money to nearly all

its shipping lines, to civil aviation companies, to insolvent banks and nationalised the railways. The British Government:

... achieved the amalgamation of the railways (1921), the concentration — indeed the partial nationalisation of electricity supply (1926), the creation of a government sponsored monopoly in iron and steel (1932) and a national coal cartel (1936)...⁸

In Nazi Germany, despite Hitler's rantings against Bolshevism, state control of the economy proceeded apace. Capitalists were organised into the "Estate of Trade and Industry", the workers into the Labour Front, whilst in February, 1938 Goering was made economic dictator in order to realise the "Four Year Plan".

The measures ...introduced were not the product of a specific Nazi ideology of economics. They were rather the type of scheme adopted, though with much less vigour, in many countries in the 1930's nowadays summed up in the term 'Keynesianism'. They were in part based on the 'war socialism' introduced in Germany during the First World War.⁹

In Italy in 1933 the Fascist Government set up the Institute for Industrial Reconstruction (IRI)

... a permanent industrial holding-company to aid the government's programmes of autarchy and rearmament, it continued to limit its operations to industries and services in which private enterprise was willing to invest sufficient funds.¹⁰

In both Italy and Germany economic

recovery was based on armaments production and savage exploitation of the working class, though in fact total social output of both countries fell between 1929 and 1938.¹¹ We shall see below how this mechanism "aids" accumulation under decadent capitalism. However, statification (in the sense of state ownership of industry), although on the one hand assists the redistribution of surplus value and the general propping up of the economy, on the other, further reduces the profitability of the private sector, since it is mainly by directing surplus value from the latter that the state is able to finance its enterprises. The same process whereby the state attempts to equalise profit rates between industries with high rates of surplus value (which tend to be in Department II) and those with low rates of surplus value (which tend to be in Department I) operates in fully state capitalist economies (so-called "communist" states), but here it is easier to transfer funds from one industry to another, since the state, acting as one huge entrepreneur, is in direct control of the total national capital. In all modern capitalist economies the unprofitable sectors which are maintained by the state represent an increase in the cost of production from the point of view of the economy as a whole, and thus contribute to further lowering the rate of profit.

The accelerated efforts to 'rationalise' production after the First World War by means of 'scientific management', 'labour-saving' devices, introduction of bonus systems, etc., were desperate attempts to offset the falling rate of profit by increasing the rate of exploitation in those industries which were still profitable. In Britain and France the decline in the standard of living of the workers is apparent by the fact that real wages fell to below the level at the beginning of the century, whilst in Germany, the "share of wages in the national economy dropped

from 64% in 1932 (itself a significant drop from the 1928 level) to 57% in 1938.”¹²

Nevertheless, attempts to increase both relative and absolute surplus value helped to increase the growing numbers of the unemployed in all the advanced capitalist states, and central governments again stepped in with further nationalisations, social security schemes and public works to try and maintain production. F.D. Roosevelt’s New Deal in the United States was the most ambitious of these. New Deal measures never actually “primed the pump” of capitalist accumulation despite the propaganda claims, but socially it helped to hold the system together through the Great Depression. By 1937 it was already clear that state spending alone would not be enough to end it. Instead imperialist tensions that had mounted during this economic crisis led to more “beggar my neighbour” policies as tariffs rose and “autarky” or “imperial preference” were proclaimed as national imperatives. Rearming in the face of these tensions may have raised profit rates for armaments manufacturers but only added to the drive to all out imperialist war in 1939 and 1941. It would be this which would ultimately destroy capital values in such massive quantities that would be the signal for the start of a new round of accumulation and the longest secular boom in capitalist history after 1945.

In the USSR the isolation of the 1917 revolution to a single country produced not socialism but a different variant of state capitalism. With world revolution now seen as years away, the New Economic Policy (NEP) was adopted in 1921. Lenin was perfectly frank that it was a step backwards to “state capitalism” but he always held the illusion that state capitalism would provide a halfway house to socialism. Even the Russian Left Communists, who had denounced any attempt to establish western-style (later to be called “the mixed economy”) state capitalism

in Russia, did not see that total state ownership of the productive forces did not equal socialism (although Engels had warned of that). Throughout the 1920s the debate in the USSR was about what direction to take in accumulating capital. Bukharin emerged as the defender of continuing NEP (and building up agriculture first by concessions to the peasantry) whilst his former left communist colleague, Preobrazhensky called for more rapid industrialisation (a policy supported by Trotsky). These “super-industrialisers” of the Left Opposition were defeated by Stalin through his control of the Party apparatus but that did not stop him stealing their policy in 1928. This was not, as Stalinists and most Trotskyists have maintained ever after, the start of the drive to socialism, but was in fact the initiation of another model of state capitalism. It was one which would later carry out a lot of appeal for states which had been under the yoke of colonialism and sought a way to accumulate without having to rely on the capital investments of their former imperial masters, especially after the Second World War. Stalin made it quite clear that the motive for the Five Year Plans was not to create a better life for Russian workers (whose exploitation would provide the surplus value for these plans) but to create a military machine which would be able to resist the attacks of the Western powers which, even in 1928, he was convinced were preparing to attack the USSR. It was, as the Nazis were to say a little later, “guns not butter”. During the 1930s though when mass unemployment was ravaging the Western economies after the Wall St Crash the Five Year Plans gave the impression that a fully planned command economy (wrongly dubbed “socialism” in the USSR and “communism” in the West) was superior to the traditional capitalist economies. Alongside of a strike wave and housing occupations in the immediate post-war

period, it was to play some part in the adoption of welfare and social security measures in the so-called “free world” as the economic and ideological competition between the two dominant powers after the Second World War developed into the Cold War.

The Post-War Boom

Thus after World War Two there was no relaxation of wartime control of the economy as had happened after World War One. In fact state capitalist tendencies became more and more emphatic. State expenditure as a percentage of GNP grew dramatically. (See Table on page 20) In the USSR the fourth Five Year Plan was inaugurated in 1946; France adopted the “Monnet” Plan and nationalised Renault, coal, gas, electricity, the bank of France, the large commercial banks, Air France, and the largest insurance companies, whilst Britain’s list is no less extensive. Whilst state capitalism in the US has, as we have already noted, largely taken the form of government defence contracts, German, Italian and Japanese recovery in the post-war period of reconstruction was initiated by Marshall Aid from the US and maintained by making use of pre-war state control. In Italy, IRI (see above) grew enormously, producing 60% of the country’s steel, owning Alfa Romeo and employing 200,000 engineering workers, besides controlling most public utilities and works; whilst in Germany,

“Far more than in any other capitalist country during this period the bourgeoisie ... made use of the state apparatus, and the monetary and fiscal system to force capital accumulation...”¹³

This growth of state capitalism meant that even in the supposedly free enterprise West, the public sector now universally emerged as

incomparably the largest employer (see table below). It should be noted that direct government control was largely in the basic industries which require a high mass of profits to maintain capital renewal and accumulation. The fact that the state was forced to take them over is indicative of the historic crisis itself where the tendency towards equalisation of the rate of profit was breaking down. This explains why the trend towards nationalisation initially intensified further when the post-war boom ended at the beginning of the 1970s. With the state controlling UCS and Rolls Royce, and further statification in the form of the National Enterprise Board, and the nationalisation of British Leyland and the shipbuilding industries imminent, Britain led the way in this universal development.

**Number of Public Sector Employees
as % of Labour Force**

Country	Total general government	Public enterprises	Total public sector
UK	11.9	10.1	22.0
Canada	9.9	2.0	12.0
USA	16.7	0.04	16.7
Venezuela	12.4	1.2	13.6
Chile	10.1	N.A.	10.2
Argentina	11.5	3.5	14.9

Source: Finance and Development Volume II No 1. March 1974

Inflation as a Permanent Feature of Decadent Capitalism

A large part of government spending which accompanies statification of the economy is in fact unproductive — i.e. expenditure which does not lead to a further accumulation of capital. The whole of the tertiary sector (social services, etc) as well as arms production (see the following section) can be subsumed under the same heading

of unproductive expenditure. Nevertheless, this increase in unproductive spending does not in itself lead to inflation (i.e. to rising prices). If we remember that at the level of the economy as a whole, total prices tend to equal total values, then it is clear that from the point of view of total social capital, such spending represents a drain on the 'pool' of surplus value and hence contributes to a further lowering of the rate of profit. Inflation, however is the result of an expansion of the money supply without a corresponding increase in the amount of value produced.

In other words, rising prices, which mean no more than the fact that a larger amount of currency must be exchanged to purchase any single commodity, are a reflection of the devaluation of money as it seeks to re-establish its own real value in the face of an expanding supply of money. The consequences of an increase in the money supply without a corresponding increase in the creation of value can be illustrated in terms of bourgeois classical economic theory, where M = volume of money, V = velocity of circulation, P = prices and T = output, and where, under equilibrium conditions, $MV = PT$. Clearly, any increase in M without an equivalent increase in T would lead to P (i.e. prices) rising. Unproductive expenditure as such does enter into the equation. The key factor in an inflationary situation is the expansion of the money supply at a rate faster than the increase in production of new value (or "output" in classical terms). Thus, no matter how unproductive capitalism was, there would not be inflation if there was no expansion of the money supply. There would, however, be a very big crisis of unemployment.

In the post-war period the state has been increasingly forced to resort to expanding the money supply partly in order to avoid direct

attacks on the wages of the proletariat and attack them indirectly by undermining real purchasing power. Although direct attacks have been, and still are, an important source of government revenue, they are unable to provide the full amount of revenue necessary for the growing number of state responsibilities and deficit financing (i.e. a situation where the state spends more money than it receives from taxation) has been a common feature of all "mixed" economies since the First World War and particularly after the early 1930's when the gold standard was finally abandoned.

In order for the state to be able to control the supply of money it is necessary for each national economy to be free from the constraints of a metallic conversion standard. Throughout the nineteenth century the money supply of national economies had been closely tied to the amount of actual gold or silver (bullion) held within the state boundaries. Paper notes issued were legally convertible into metal coinage and the extent to which notes could be issued was limited by the obligation to 'back' paper money with metal coinage held in banks and convertible at a fixed legal rate. Thus the supply of money was limited by the stock of bullion held by the banks within each national state. The outbreak of the First World War saw the abandonment of the international gold standard as the belligerent states met the gigantic costs of financing the war largely by the simple method of printing money. Thus, by 1918, increases in the issues of paper money in Germany were five times the 1914 figure, in Britain, four and a half times the pre-war figure, and in France, almost four times the 1914 sum. Since this increased supply of money was financing the waste production of war and not leading to the production of new capital, prices soared — 245% in Germany, 230% in Britain and 353% in France.¹⁴ The

devaluation of currency which accompanied the abolition of the gold standard within the various national states provided a short-term increase in competitiveness for the commodities of the devaluing country sold on the world market, as prices were lowered in relation to commodities from other states. Such an effect could only be temporary, since it only encouraged competing states to go off the gold standard and devalue their currency. By 1936 all those ‘gold bloc’ countries which had previously tried to maintain the gold standard had abandoned it and devalued their currencies.

In the 1930’s, just as during the First World War, going off the gold standard enabled central governments of the advanced capitalist states to increase the money supply and further expand their intervention in the economy. As we shall see below, the greatest increase in government spending was due to the massive increase in arms production, but the fear of “political unrest” by the proletariat in a situation of mass unemployment also led the state to extend existing welfare services and engage in the construction of public

Country Total State Expenditures and Public Debts

Country	Total State expenditures (in national currencies, current value 000,000's omitted)		Public Debts (as percentage of national income)	
	1928 or 1929	1937 or 1938	1929	1937 or 1938
France	44,248	68,971	114	171
Italy	20,519	34,100	N.A.	N.A.
UK	782	1,134	174	163
Germany	8,187	N.A.	12	25*
Belgium	12,299	13,546	77	85

* Exclusive of undisclosed amounts of special bills
Source: Clough and Cole “Economic History of Europe” p.819

works.
This huge increase in waste production which was largely financed by deficit spending could only lead to increasing inflation and a growth in the public debt, as evidenced by the table above.

The tremendous cost of financing the Second World War was again met largely by central governments borrowing from banks in return for government bonds or treasury bills, thereby expanding the money supply. the table below clearly shows the increase in note circulation during the Second World War. This huge increase in the money supply in order to finance the war led to rampant inflation in all the belligerent states towards the end and immediately after the war as measures to fix prices became ineffective. The policies adopted to overcome inflation again could only be temporary solutions to the problem.

**Increase In Note Circulation
(From July 1939 To Dec 1944)**

Country	Month	Increase by %
Germany	Dec 1944	435
Belgium	Aug 1944	339
France	Dec 1944	369
Italy	Dec 1944	1,034
USA	Dec 1944	259
UK	Dec 1944	160
Canada	Dec 1944	318

Source: Clough and Cole “Economic History of Europe” p.847

In the West the implementation of Keynesian measures saw the more or less conscious extension of policies which the state had been forced to adopt since the First World War. Keynes thought that the periodic crises of capitalism could be averted by manipulation of interest rates to encourage

investment and by means of deficit spending and public works to maintain employment during times of depression — the resultant increase in the national debt would be repaid during the ‘boom’ period. In fact what has occurred is a permanent increase in the national debt of all the advanced states and inflation has proved to be a permanent feature of decadent capitalism. For instance,

Prices in Western Europe rose by 66 per cent between 1947 and 1957. This was a compound rate of increase of more than 5 per cent per year, a rate roughly equal to the yield of government bonds (before taxes).¹⁵

According to Keynesian theory, gradual inflation is a healthy rather than an unhealthy feature of national economies, since it encourages businessmen to invest and increases the competitiveness of exports on the world market. Nevertheless, if we remember the reason for the existence of inflation in the first place (expansion of the money supply at a faster rate than the production of new value), then it is obvious that inflation must become more than a ‘gradual’ process if the rate of expansion of the money supply continues to outstrip the rate of value production. As we shall see, this was the case in the Seventies, with the development of a world-wide “recession” which brought to an end the long boom of the “thirty glorious years” as it is dubbed by French bourgeois economists.

Imperialism and Underdevelopment

To Keynes the Second World War proved that any economic system could have full employment if it so wished and he was frightened that the end of the war would

only bring back unemployment on the scale of the Thirties. However, in the immediate term he need not have worried. The massive destruction of the productive forces during the Second World War provided a new basis for economic recovery.

“Throughout Europe railroad lines, marshalling yards, and port facilities lay in ruins. Machinery had been worn out through constant use and under-maintenance. Mines had been exploited so mercilessly that a super-human effort was needed to restore them to their pre-war efficiency. Agriculture had suffered from over-cropping... And the labour force of most countries had sustained substantial losses.”¹⁶

Whilst Germany, Japan and Italy had been devastated by the war the same could be said of the economic basis of most of the “victorious” powers. The USSR had lost twelve million soldiers and a further 8 million civilians, the U.K. 11,800,000 tons of shipping, and France 45% of its entire wealth. The exception was the USA where the war had provided a massive boost to production but left its industrial base untouched. Although the war had produced a massive devaluation of US constant capital which had been unable to accumulate during the war, there had been no physical destruction of means of production. This gave it the power to dictate the economic shape of the post-war new world order. It was to be a world divided between two very unequal imperialist blocs: the USSR and the Eastern European satellites it occupied on the one hand, and the USA with its Western European associates, eventually suitably stripped of their colonies, on the other. Even before Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin met to divide up the world at Yalta in February 1945, the US had strong-armed

the other Western states at Bretton Woods (New Hampshire) into accepting the dollar as the new yardstick for international trade. In the new world order member states would peg their currencies to the US dollar, and to ensure no return to the beggar my neighbour currency devaluations of the inter-war years, the USA would peg the dollar to gold, at a price of \$35 per ounce. Part and parcel of the arrangement was the setting up of the World Bank, charged with acting as creditor to the IMF with transactions inevitably in dollars.

The USSR did not ratify the final agreements and in 1947, at the UN General Assembly, the Russian delegate, Andrei Gromyko denounced the Bretton Woods institutions as “branches of Wall Street” and the World Bank as “subordinated to political purposes which make it the instrument of one great power”. Whilst the USSR and its satellites now controlled a territory spanning most of Europe and a huge part of Asia it was the weaker imperialism to emerge from the war. Its only way to escape from the hegemony of the US dollar was to ensure that the currencies of the territories it occupied remained non-convertible.

Whilst the USSR was reduced to dismantling and transporting to Russia all the constant capital it could lay its hands on from East Germany, the USA had a different problem. As the only power with its productive base intact, its problem was that its Allies were no longer in a position to buy US commodities, unless their economies recovered too. There was a threat of recession here too with all its consequences. From November 1945, through 1946, the biggest strike wave in the history of the USA, fuelled by a rapid rise in inflation and involving more than 5 million workers, largely outside of the trade unions, occurred. The challenge for US capital was to find a way to improve the situation of the working class by reviving

both its own domestic economy, and the economies of its allies. Thus in 1947 the USA began to implement the Marshall Plan for its allies in Europe. Essentially this meant financial aid to countries like Italy and France where Communist Parties loyal to the USSR were rising in popularity but even in places like the UK with no large Communist Party (in 1945 the CPGB had one MP) Marshall Aid was accepted by a Labour Government which used it to pay off some of the bankrupt British Empire’s war debts. New York now definitively replaced London as the financial centre of the world. The USSR to escape dollar domination refused the not entirely disinterested offer of aid, and would not allow its satellites to accept Marshall Aid either. Instead it founded the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Comecon) in 1949, not only to discourage countries in Eastern Europe from participating in the Marshall Plan but also to counteract trade boycotts imposed by the USA, Britain, and other Western European countries.

Such was the economic basis not only for the bi-polar imperialist division of the world but it would also lead to the “longest secular boom” in capitalist history. It was not the short-term aid of the Marshall Plan which created the conditions for this boom but the massive devaluation of capital brought about by the war itself. The whole world, especially the United States, the Soviet Union and Western European and East Asian countries, experienced unusually high and sustained growth, together with something that had seemed previously unachievable – virtually no unemployment. It was a dramatic contrast to the 1930s and given its length it posed the question as had the “Roaring Twenties” in their day – had capitalism escaped from the cycle of boom and bust which had characterised its history?

But reconstruction had its limits and by

the 1970s the rise in the organic composition of capital had brought back the crisis, though not in the form of the nineteenth century business slump.

“The business-cycle as an instrument of accumulation had apparently come to an end; or rather, the business-cycle became a “cycle” of world wars... Wars are not unique to capitalism; but the objectives for which capitalist wars are fought are. Aside from all imaginary reasons, the main objective, made patent by the policies of the victorious powers, is the destruction of the competitor nation or bloc of nations. In its results, then, war is a form of international competition. It is not so much a question of competition by “extra-economic” means as an unmasking of economic competition for a bloody and primitive struggle between men and men.”¹⁷

This explains why the method of regenerating accumulation under decadent capitalism has been inseparably linked to the growth in the production of the means of destruction. The table below merely indicates the growth of arms expenditure in Britain and the U.S.A., but by 1962 £43 billion was being spent annually on military budgets and arms expenditure “Corresponded to about one half of gross capital formation throughout the world”.¹⁸ Arms production is waste production in that it does not lead to the production of new value for total social capital. True, one national capital can ease its economic problems by selling arms to another, but the money used in the transaction represents the crystallised form of value produced by the labour of the country’s workers. And what can it produce with the arms once it has got them?

**Public Expenditure, U.K. and U.S.A.
1913-1969**

Year	Military expenditure as percentage of GNP		All state expenditure as percentage on GNP	
	UK	USA	UK	USA
1913	3.0	/	13.5	10.5
1923	4.7	/	27.5	11.0
1933	3.8	/	30.0	16.5
1938	4.9	1.5	31.2	19.5
1948	7.4	8.0	37.0	24.0
1953	8.9	13.2	35.0	27.5
1958	6.4	10.1	31.5	29.0
1960	6.2	9.0	32.5	28.0
1965	5.8	7.5	34.0	28.5
1969	5.3	9.0	39.0	32.0

Source; M. Barratt Brown “The Economics of Imperialism” p.216

Given that a sophisticated nuclear weaponry is not purchased for hunting, it can only be used for the purpose of destruction: that is, arms production destroys value rather than leads to its creation. Hence this imaginary “counter-tendency” to the falling rate of profit is no solution for global capital and in the end can result only in a further crisis, which, under decadent capitalism, ultimately means war.

We have already outlined the main features of capitalist imperialism in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Capitalist competition is now between nation states subordinated to imperialist blocs rather than individual firms. But, whereas under ascendant capitalism it was possible for individual firms to grow through a purely economic competitive struggle, in the age of imperialism the centralisation of the economy at the level of the nation state has taken this process

to its ultimate limits under capitalism. Imperialism is the internecine struggle of each capitalist state to carve up as much of the globe as possible, whether as sources of raw materials, investments, markets, or as a strategic base from which to better secure these benefits. Imperialist competition has in its armoury all the tactics of diplomacy, trade wars, sanctions and favoured nation agreements, but ultimately these only have meaning when backed with sheer force of arms. Since the crisis of decadent capitalism has its ultimate expression in inter-imperialist war, it is therefore understandable why capitalists prefer “guns not butter!”, armaments expenditure rather than social benefits like education and housing, as the particular form of waste production.¹⁹

Since 1914 imperialist war has stretched in an almost unbroken chain, though the most striking example obviously remains World War II, which followed a period of massive expenditure on arms to prevent a renewal of the crisis of the early 30's. Even leaving aside Britain, France and the USSR, arms expenditure rose by 144%, 142% and 103% respectively between 1937 and 1939.²⁰ Whilst the First World War completed the destruction of British capitalism as the most dominant world imperialism, the Second World War clearly established the USA as the leading capitalist state in the world, though faced with an increasingly dangerous rival in a USSR which had seized much of the industry and territory in Eastern Europe in order to fund its own post-war reconstruction.

The history of the post-war world was one in which both major imperialisms have attempted to gain greater control of the globe in an attempt to offset the decline in the rate of profit through an influx of a mass of profits from abroad. Hence in the Cold War imperialist conflict largely took the form of proxy wars from the Korean War, the War in

Vietnam, the wars in Africa, and the various Middle East crises right up to the USSR's invasion of Afghanistan, all shattered the uneasy “peace” of decadent capitalism. Imperialism is the product of a world economy dominated by a few advanced capitals of a high organic composition. Before the First World War it was thought that this also meant the physical domination of territory – colonialism. The dominant powers at the time thought that they had to take direct control of territories in order to extract whatever value they could from them. Although Lenin correctly thought that the export of capital was the main driver of imperialism he also considered that anti-imperialist struggles of national liberation would cut off the imperialist powers access to super-profits in the colonies and would thus deliver a major economic blow to capitalism. He was wrong on two counts. Firstly, as anti-Marxist historians²¹ have easily demonstrated, with the notable exception of India, colonies in general were not very profitable for imperialism. What they fail to note is that, at the time, the expectation was that they would become profitable, whilst the other motive for occupying lands in Africa, and elsewhere, was often a negative one – to deny rivals the use of a particular territory. Secondly, the administrative and military costs of colonialism were such that more subtle and vastly more profitable methods of dominating these countries after independence (soon to be dubbed “neo-colonialism”) came to be developed after the Second World War. Although nominally independent in a political sense the ex-colonies of the ‘new’ “developing” “Third World” state have found it difficult to break significantly onto the world market. After the Second World War the gap between the leading imperialist powers and the “developing” countries has widened. In 1952-54 US per capita output was \$1,870, to India's \$60 and Egypt's \$120.

In 1969 these figures were \$4,240 for the USA, \$110 for India and \$160 for Egypt.²² In 2022 the figures were \$70,246.6 for the USA, \$2,256.6 for India and \$3,698.8 for Egypt.²³

The failure of the developing world to follow the “take-off” path of the earlier capitalist states as this time cannot be divorced from the interests of the imperialist powers. Having failed to extract enough surplus value from their own labour force, the imperialist powers must attempt to extract surplus value from the underdeveloped regions, but by doing so they prevent that surplus from funding accumulation in the underdeveloped countries, and thus further destroy the basis of reproduction of capital in those areas. Thus, the imperialists are faced with a dilemma:

*To keep on exploiting the backward areas will slowly destroy their exploitability. But not to exploit them means to reduce even further the already insufficient profitability of capital.*²⁴

“Aid” as an attempt by the advanced states to try and alter this situation has merely exacerbated it, given the dominance of the law of value. No “aid” is given unconditionally and, since it is capital, it therefore functions as capital, i.e. it is lent on the merits of its expected returns in terms of profits and interest. One calculation has reckoned that after payment of interest and debts on previous aid, all Latin American countries (excluding Cuba) made a net loss of \$883 million in 1965.²⁵ Cuba, at this time, was favoured more than any other country in a world dependent upon imperialism and was the recipient of \$3,000 million in “aid” from the USSR. Despite receiving better terms, Cuba’s economy continued to stagnate. Because the USSR was the weaker of the major imperialisms, it offered lower interest, longer

term loans to undercut its competitor in the “aid” market. There was nothing munificent in this, as Cuban and other workers whose surplus value is used to pay off the interest on their countries debt already know. The other weakness of the USSR in the post-war imperialist game was that it could support national liberation struggles by supplying weapons but could do little to help them economically once they had achieved independence as the fate of Vietnam clearly demonstrated.

The most telling reason, however, for the difficulty of underdeveloped economies in the twentieth century to establish a firm industrial base is the domination of the world market by capitals of a high organic composition. As we explained earlier, because competition forces each capital to sell at roughly equivalent prices, there is a constant drain of value from capitals with a low organic composition to those with a high composition. Further, because profit rates have a tendency to equalisation, those states with a low organic composition find that they do not have a sufficient mass of profits to fund renewed accumulation. As Rosa Luxembourg saw quite clearly in her “Social Reform or Revolution”,

*It is the threat of the constant fall in the rate of profit, resulting not from the contradiction between productivity and exchange, but from the growth of the productivity of labour itself... (which) has the extremely dangerous tendency of rendering impossible any new enterprise for small and middle sized capitals. It thus limits the new formation, and therefore the extension of placements of capital.*²⁶

Thus, it is not surprising that underdeveloped countries have fallen heavily into debt in an attempt to borrow the capital which

they cannot produce, so that,

*The external public debt of the developing countries rose by about 14% p.a. in the 1960's. In June 1968 the recorded debt stood at \$47.5 billion.*²⁷

Some saw the rise of command economy regimes in the less developed states modelled on the USSR as an alternative state capitalist solution to the problems of the chronic effect of the insufficiency of surplus value production in these areas.²⁸ However, its adoption in such places as Cuba and the much-vaunted China represented, not a solution to the problem, but a further indication of its existence. "Foreign capital" having failed, local bourgeoisies attempt to harness the centralising power of the state to concentrate sufficient surplus value for accumulation. Hence they hope to achieve "national liberation" from imperialist domination. Cuba we have already mentioned. China, however has a large population and large resources, it had developed an atomic bomb and launched satellites in the 1960s, but even Sinophiles recognised that:

*In spite of exceptional advances, China is still far from a decisive economic take-off...The supply of grain per head of population remains the same now as that which statistical calculations show obtained in the 'belle époque' of the Kuomintang...*²⁹

The law of value operated here just as anywhere else. Not even the centralisation of a planned economy could direct enough surplus value into the independent development of capitalism. And just as the post-war boom was coming to an end in the "free world" in the early 1970s the indications are that the USSR and its satellites were also

facing a downturn. We cannot of course calculate the rate of profit for those economies at that time, but we can infer from growth rates that all was not well. In the period 1951-5 growth rates throughout Comecon were twice what they were in the Sixties and none of the major targets set in the Five Year Plan (1971-5) were met.³⁰ For both sides in the Cold War "detente" was not about taking real steps towards peace but came from a desire to reduce the arms race. Whilst the costs of the Vietnam War had contributed to the collapse of the Bretton Woods system by 1973, for Comecon arms production was taking up such a large portion of its slowing GDP growth that it was becoming unsustainable. This was the Brezhnev era in which corruption and low labour productivity were coupled with rising rates of alcoholism and a dearth of consumer goods. Attempts to alter course would have to wait until his death in 1982 by which time the USSR was embroiled in its own Vietnam after desperately invading Afghanistan in 1979.

Meanwhile the economic problems of both China and the USA had brought about the first steps in their rapprochement after Nixon's visit to China in 1971. The new approach was a result of the failure of Chinese attempts at autonomous development such the Great Leap Forward in 1958 and the subsequent stagnation after the break with the USSR in the mid-60's. However by the end of the 1970s (Mao died in 1976) and start of the 1980s both the Chinese Communist Party and Western leaders and businesses stumbled on a mutually beneficial way to deal with their separate problems. For Western capitalism it provided a way to defeat a working class which had stubbornly resisted attempts to make them pay for the crisis throughout the 70s without producing a solution of their own. Restructuring of industry in the West (often taking the simple form of

capital right-offs) would be accompanied by massive investment by Japan. South Korea and Western finance capital in China (and smaller places like Mexico) where millions of workers on very low wages could be put to

Notes

1. See <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2005-06-01/refining-the-concept-of-decadence>
2. See, for example, this table of *The Organic Composition of Capital in the US Economy*

The Organic Composition of Capital in the US Economy

Year	Composition	Year	Composition
1905	3.16	1935	4.92
1910	3.18	1940	4.09
1915	3.51	1945	2.64
1920	3.65	1950	3.45
1925	3.95	1955	3.64
1930	4.47	1960	4.20

Source: *The Law of the Falling Tendency of the Rate of Profit*

S M Madge, Columbia Univ. Ph.d. in *New Left Review* No. 84 p.72

3. See *Revolutionary Perspectives* 21 p.29
4. For a more detailed account of this change in US Government action see Tim Wu *The Curse of Bigness – Antitrust in the New Gilded Age*
5. The most famous being the boss of General Motors, Charles Wilson who entered the Eisenhower Administration in 1953. At his Senate hearing it is alleged that he could see no conflict of interest between his huge shareholding in General Motors and the interests of US imperialism. Journalists reduced this to the famous phrase “What’s good for GM is good for America”. Wilson did, in the end, sell his shares to get confirmed.
6. *War Memories of Lloyd George Volume I* p.147
7. P. Mattick *Marx and Keynes*. pp.115-6
8. E. Hobsbawm *Industry and Empire* p.242
9. D. Childs *Germany Since 1918* p.59

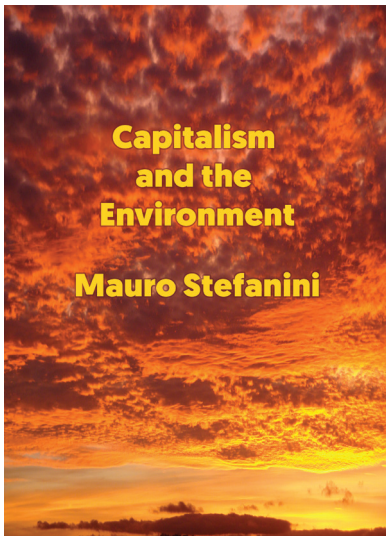
work. It is to the economic consequences of deregulated currencies, financialisation and globalisation, plus the simultaneous collapse of the USSR, that we turn in our next issue.

10. E. Tannenbaum *Fascism in Italy* p.112
11. Clough and Cole *An Economic History of Europe*. p.764
12. See “On the analysis of Imperialism in the Metropolitan Countries: the West German Example” by E Altwater et.al. in the *Bulletin of the Conference of Socialist Economists* Spring 1974 p.6. A useful explanation of the German “economic miracle”, though we do not share the author’s view that Eastern Europe and the USSR are anything but capitalist.
13. *ibid* p.9
14. Figures taken from Clough and Cole *op.cit.* p.734
15. Quoted in Mattick *op.cit.* p.147. From J O Coppock *Europe’s Needs and Resources*
16. Clough and Cole *op.cit.* p.851
17. Mattick *op.cit.* p.135
18. M. Kidron *Western Capitalism Since the War* p.49
19. Despite the realisation by at least a section of the world bourgeoisie of the obvious political advantages to be gained by keeping the workers happy.
20. Figures from Clough and Cole *op.cit.* p.818
21. The classical example is D.K Fieldhouse *The Theory of Capitalist Imperialism* (Longman 1967)
22. *Key Issues in Applied Economics*, 1947-1997 Economist Intelligence Unit
23. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.CD>
24. Mattick *op.cit.* p.262
25. T. Hayter *Aid as Imperialism* p.174
26. R. Looker (ed.) *Political Writings of Rosa Luxemburg* p.69 Though later Luxembourg was abandon value theory. See <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2007-08-13/the-accumulation-of-contradictions-or-the-economic-consequences-of-rosa>
27. *Partners in Development* (Pearson Report) (Pall Mall Press) p.72
28. Including Mattick, who, despite his erudition, fails to fully comprehend the law of value and has no concept of

decadence. Thus he sees state capitalism as progressive. See *Revolutionary Perspectives* (Second Series) No. 19 which can be found online at <https://libcom.org/article/revolutionary-perspectives-first-and-second-series>
29. G. Padoul "China, 1974" in *New Left Review*

No.89 p.74 & 76

30. See "The Crisis of Comecon" in *Revolutionary Perspectives* 7 (First Series) which can also be found online at <https://libcom.org/article/revolutionary-perspectives-first-and-second-series>



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Introduction to Amadeo Bordiga's Prison Manifesto (1923)

Even in our so-called 'Communist Left' circles, it is a little-known fact that Amadeo Bordiga spent most of 1923 (February 3rd – October 26th) in a Rome prison cell where, as well as preparing his own defence and that of his thirty or so fellow-accused, he drafted a political manifesto on the crisis facing the barely two year old Communist Party of Italy, a manifesto he intended for discussion by the whole membership.

Although Bordiga's own arrest had been followed by a veritable wave of arrests and persecution of Party militants¹ which inevitably weakened the organisation, this was not the crisis Bordiga was alluding to. As he makes clear in the Manifesto, the more serious crisis was the growing rift between the "whole framework of principles" of the Party in Italy with what he politely calls "the majority in the International and its Executive organs", i.e. the Russian Communist Party which was steadily using its position of authority within the International to turn its constituent parties into bureaucratic 'yes-men' for the foreign policy objectives of an increasingly counter-revolutionary USSR. This, of course, is easy to spot at a distance of 100 years. Bordiga at the time was simply calling for a full and open debate within both the International and the Party in Italy over the increasing dissonance between the tactics adopted by the International and the political framework and policies which the Italian party in particular had adopted since it broke away from social democracy in January 1921.

The main issues of contention were a) the original complaint from Moscow that the Livorno split had been too far to the

Right and that it must be redressed by fusion with the PSI 'maximalist' majority; b) how to interpret the policy of the 'united front' initially formulated by the Executive of the International in Moscow in December 1922 and which Bordiga had chosen to understand as a 'united front from below' (i.e. for collective workers' action, not a basis for the Communist Party to compromise its policies with political deals with whatever other party); c) stemming from this there arose the question of the 'Arditi del Popolo', anti-fascist resistance fighters, dubiously modelled on the proto-fascist bands of d'Annunzio who had occupied Fiume just after the war; and finally, d) the reduction of The Rome Theses, mainly drafted by Bordiga and accepted by a large majority at the 2nd Congress of the PCd'I, to a "consultative document" by the Comintern Executive.²

None of these issues seriously undermined Bordiga's standing in the PCd'I, even if the rest of the Italian delegates to the International were 'persuaded' to accept in principle fusion with the PSI at the 4th World Congress (Nov/Dec 1922) while he himself threatened to resign from the Party leadership, a threat no-one appears to have taken seriously. When Turati's reformists were expelled at the PSI's Congress (October '22) the Russian-desired political fusion seemed to be on course. The policy was pushed by Zinoviev, Comintern Chairman, who argued it would enable a united front against Turati's party. Thus, a 'fusion' commission was set up, minus Bordiga of course. (He was replaced by Gramsci who had been in Russia since the Enlarged Executive meeting on the 'Italian question' the previous June.)

In the event the PSI Congress of April 1923 rejected the policy.³ Despite constant bullying by the Russians in the more or less permanent 'Enlarged Executive' meetings of the International over the need to comply with the united front, the only crack in the political resilience of the PCd'I to the Russians' manoeuvrings had appeared back in May 1921. This was over an article in *L'Ordine Nuovo* on the Arditi del Popolo where Gramsci's enthusiasm had run away with him and he had been obliged to publish a Party resolution explaining that membership in another political organisation was incompatible with the Party's statutes.⁴ Back then the International had intervened in the shape of Bukharin, who declared that the PCd'I was making one of its greatest mistakes, in turn provoking further discord.⁵

In any case, there was only so long that an increasingly Russian-dominated, mainly Russian-financed, albeit international, political body, was prepared to tolerate the constant non-compliance, essentially with the united front policy, from the Italian party. And if Bordiga would not become more compliant then ... Gramsci was welcome to extend his stay in Russia beyond the length of his medical treatment, out of reach of Mussolini and always available to attend meetings of the 'Enlarged Executive' of the Comintern to consider the Italian question — a question increasingly perceived as a question of Bordiga, to whose trial we now return.

The whole processo ('trial' in Italian) was a long one. Bordiga and his 31 co-defendants were accused of conspiracy and plotting to overthrow the State. There was a long preliminary hearing, at least in the case of Bordiga, a record of which was produced by the PCd'I in Rome in 1924. Bordiga was arrested outside a block of flats in Via Frattina, where the Party was intending to set up underground headquarters. He was carrying around 3,000 lire

and about £3,000 in sterling: a considerable sum in 1923. Bordiga was at pains to explain that he was not in the pay of a foreign state, i.e. that he was not involved in any foreign conspiracy, though he did not deny that the £3,000 had been remitted by a "Russian representative" called Krasin.

President: *Does the Moscow Executive Committee have no relations with the Russian Government?*

Bordiga: *No: it is not to be confused with that Government and now I'll tell you what the difference is between these two entities.*

The Communist International Executive Committee may also reside in other countries. For example in Rome, if there weren't a police force so skilled that they can even discover our headquarters in Via Frattina, which suggests against moving the headquarters of the Executive here. The old Internationals had their headquarters in Brussels, Geneva and elsewhere: thus the Third International has its headquarters in Moscow. The International includes the Russian Communist Party which is one of the most important parties, the one that has had the most success and for which we have the highest esteem and also the greatest envy especially given the situation we are in now.

The Government of Russia, the Communist Party of Russia and the Third International are entirely separate entities. The remittance of funds came from the Budget Commission of the Third International, which is made up of comrades from various countries and precisely this Commission, by chance, had an Italian President. So whoever had decided to send us that sum was really an Italian. He could have been Russian

or Greek or whatever but this was all the same to us.

The difference between the International and the Russian Government is evident. We are a communist party affiliated to the Third International to which communist parties from all over the world are affiliated. In Russia the Communist International finds itself in a different situation than in other countries. In this sense: not that it is an organ of the Government, but in the sense that the Government is an organ of the International, or at least, that there is a relationship of subordination not of the International to the Government but of the Russian State to the Communist International.

... Not only does the Russian government and its various bodies have no authority to act in matters of the international communist movement, as only the International can do this; but the policy of the Russian Government which is dictated by the Congress and the leading bodies of the Communist Party of Russia, can be discussed and modified by the International.

So I could not have any interchange with Krasin who is nothing more than a diplomatic representative of the Russian government: he is a comrade of mine whom I appreciate and respect, but who had no organisational relationship with us, just as there can be no relationship between us and any other diplomatic representative of the Russian state.⁶

In his trial in a bourgeois courtroom, it was in Bordiga's interest to stress the separation between the Communist International and the Russian state. How far he believed this is another matter but his Manifesto clearly indicates that he thought an open

debate, not just on the 'Italian question' but on the "*programme, the organisation and the tactical question of the International, fighting any deviation to the Right*" could still be held. In fact events in 1923 proved just the opposite. Ever since the 3rd Congress the Russians had been using their political weight inside the International to impose bureaucratic changes to ensure that the 'correct' decisions were made, i.e. decisions favouring the survival of the Russian state in a capitalist world. We have seen how Gramsci was simply substituted for Bordiga on the committee to discuss fusion with the PSI at the end of 1922, but more generally the members of the Russian controlled Executive Committee of the International, which looked after things between congresses, was now 'elected' from the floor of the Congress instead of beforehand by the membership of the constituent parties.⁷ Moreover, in between Congresses a pattern of twice yearly meetings of an 'Enlarged Executive' [ECCI] was established which, from the middle of 1923 — around the time when Bordiga was writing his Manifesto — included co-opted members. As the counter-revolution took hold in Russia the fundamental aim of 'the party of Lenin' was to ensure the survival of the newly-daubed USSR and what was now the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). We cannot go into the resultant erratic foreign policy: on the one hand of trying to engineer revolutionary uprisings in order to break the isolation of the Russian state, notably the debacle in Bulgaria and the still-born German October engineered in 1923; on the other, cementing trade deals and reaching rapprochement with capitalist powers. Not only was loyalty of the parties in the Comintern becoming vital for Russia's standing in the world, the dogfight for leadership of the CPSU was increasingly being fought in the Comintern. There could hardly have been a sharper contrast with

the Russia depicted by Bordiga in the Italian courtroom.

***“The Government of Russia,
the Communist Party of Russia
and the Third International are
entirely separate entities.”***

No matter that the Left were by far the majority of the Communist Party of Italy, it was only a matter of time before the Russia-dominated Comintern moved to sideline Bordiga and, if need be, the whole party leadership. As Russian in-fighting over the political direction and future leadership of their own Party increased, the Italian question became entangled in the manoeuvring. Bordiga's imprisonment was a golden opportunity for the ECCI. In June, along with Scoccimarro, Tasca, Terracini, Fortichiari and Vota, Gramsci took part in a meeting of the ECCI and made a speech on the “Italian question.” The upshot was the appointment of a new PCd'I ‘mixed’ Executive Committee which included representatives of the right wing minority and which Fortichiari declined to join. This new Executive comprised Togliatti (who had previously not even been on the Central Committee) Scoccimarro, Tasca, Vota, and Gennari (as substitute for Fortichiari) In August, when news of the new Executive reached Bordiga and Grieco in their prison cells, they resigned.

Now Bordiga was counting more than ever on winning as wide support as possible for his Manifesto, both inside the Italian Party and beyond. Surprisingly, being locked up in prison didn't prevent him constantly communicating with the outside world which he did using a simple code and a compliant warden. The latter passed messages on mainly to Togliatti who in turn was the go-between with other Party members in Italy, the Comintern, including Zinoviev

and Bukharin, and, apparently unknown to Bordiga, ... to Gramsci. A Gramsci who had already been persuaded of the need for a new leadership for the Italian Party, a leadership more compliant with the ECCI and the Comintern, not too far to the Right (as represented by Tasca), but more ‘moderate’ than Bordiga and the old Executive. And if Gramsci's first moves to undermine Bordiga had been undermined by Zinoviev's pronouncement in the ECCI that “You (i.e. the entire PCd'I) are responsible for the victory of fascism” as Gramsci himself put it, he was learning how to “slither like an eel”; how to manoeuvre in a war of positions in which, unlike Bordiga, he saw no reason to resign from any position of authority in the Party. Bordiga meanwhile argued that since fractional work meant open and head-on opposition to Moscow's directives it could not be done from a position at the head of the party. After he was released from prison, towards the end of 1923, the Praesidium of the ECCI demanded that Bordiga once again join the PCd'I Executive Committee. Bordiga retorted that it had no authority to do that and in any case the whole of the previous Italian Executive would have to be reinstated, which he knew the Comintern Executive would not approve. By then though, Bordiga had been totally out-manoeuvred by the one who knew best how to slither. Gramsci from the first had refused to sign Bordiga's Manifesto and continued to do so, even when Togliatti drew up a modified version. By the time Bordiga was released from prison a different game was being played. Moves were afoot to reshape the Party in Italy according to the Russian model. Already in September Gramsci had informed the Italian party's Executive Committee of the Comintern decision to start publishing a new workers' daily in Italy. He proposed the title of *L'Unità*. This was duly set up in February 1924 and

became the vehicle for the Comintern's Bolshevisation campaign against the Left in the run-up to the 3rd Party Congress in 1926. Before then, though, there was much work to be done. Just how much work, Gramsci was able to gauge at the bizarre Como conference held in May 1924, just after his return to Italy. In a kind of dress rehearsal for the stitch-up at Lyons, three sets of theses were presented, for the Left (Bordiga the only representative of the Left present and without the right to vote), the Centre (Togliatti), and the Right (Tasca).

Out of 65 votes cast (14 from the Central Committee, 49 from federal and interregional secretaries, as well as the youth federation and representatives of the party press and propaganda organs, 41 voted for Bordiga, 10 for the right and 11 for the centre. Two abstained and one was considered lost. These numbers, still in favour of the Theses of the Left, were obtained despite the fact that Bordiga, Fortichiari, Repossi and Grieco, who were nonetheless members of the Executive elected in Congress, although they had resigned, were thus not recognised as having voting rights, while the votes in favour of the Centre by three absent members of the Central Committee

Notes

1. "In a letter addressed to the Executive of the Third International, dated February 13, 1923, Umberto Terracini wrote:

"In the space of a week the police arrested over 5,000 comrades ... Our Party has not folded and does not give in: a quarter of its membership have been arrested, its sections dissolved, deprived of its leader, comrade Bordiga, its members threatened with death and torture, the Communist Party of Italy has already resumed its function and its work."

Amadeo Bordiga and almost all the other members of the Executive Committee have

(Gennari, Ravera and Leonetti), were counted.

Had these procedural decisions not been taken, the result would have been 45-8 in favour of the Left.⁸

As even the pro-Gramsci author of the above has to admit: *"It was clear that the party as a whole remained, with few exceptions, Bordigan. A completely different start from what Gramsci had imagined."*

More work to do for the one who had learned how to "slither like an eel". For more on this, see our pamphlets on the Committee of Intesa and Gramsci.⁹ It is enough to say here that, while Bordiga's active political resistance to the degeneration of the International diminished and ceased round about 1930, the fight of the Communist Left in Italy carried on without him.

Finally, we have to stress the main lesson we can learn from this largely obscured, but significant, historical episode. Next time round the world's workers will be much better placed if they have already in place at least a strong framework for a revolutionary International, one grounded in more than one country, whose membership is based on individual adhesion, and thus less easily in a position to be controlled by any one section.

E. Rayner

been arrested (in addition to Terracini, Bruno Fortichiari and Antonio Gramsci are fugitives) and are indicted before the Criminal Court of Rome, accused of crimes such as criminal conspiracy, excitement to revolt and desertion of the army, conspiracy to overthrow the established powers of the state and incitement of class hatred. The trial took place from 18 to 26 October 1923 and ended with the acquittal of the defendants due to insufficient evidence."

From PCInt Introduction to Quaderno no. 1, *Il processo ai comunisti italiani*, 1923, p.5.

2. For more on this and the differences between the PCd'I and the Comintern, see the

Introduction to our pamphlet, *Platform of the Committee of Intesa*, 1925.

3. Serrati went on to be expelled and formed the Unitary Communist Fraction with a couple of thousand members which in 1924 joined the PCd'I en bloc. He was elected to the PCd'I Central Committee. He died of heart failure in 1926 aged 54 on his way to a clandestine meeting of the Communist Party.

4. In *L'Ordine Nuovo*, 31 July 1921. "Are the Communists against the *Arditi del Popolo* movement? Quite the opposite: they aspire to arm the proletariat, to create a proletarian armed force capable of defeating the bourgeoisie and overseeing the organisation and development of the new productive forces generated by capitalism." (our translation) The question of the *Arditi del Popolo* is a knotty one. With their undoubted anti-fascist motive force (albeit copying organisationally the proto-fascist *Arditi*), and close links with anarchism it's not surprising that the PCd'I was sceptical about having formal ties, much less joint membership. On the other hand, it is the case that in working class areas like Oltretorrente in Parma, PCd'I and *Arditi* members often fought together against

Mussolini's thugs.

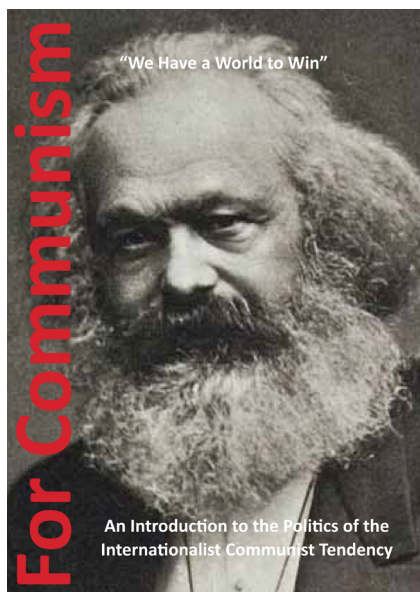
5. Grieco's reply included a criticism of Argo Secondari, an anarchist and one of the founders of the *Arditi del Popolo*, who never fully recovered from an attack by fascists not long after Mussolini's march on Rome, to which Bukharin responded, "... and while Secondari was committing these anti-marxist errors, where were the communists?"

6. Translated from *Il Processo ai Comunisti Italiani*, 1923, [PCd'I, Rome 1924] pp 79-82.

7. This had been decided at the 3rd Congress, held in Moscow from June 22 through July 12, 1921. Even more significantly, the Russians managed to establish that the number of ECCI delegates be decided according to Party size, ensuring a Russian majority. In any case while all other parties were entitled to a consultative voice on the committee, only the Russian Party held a decisive vote!

8. Luciano Beolchi, *Dal Partito di Bordiga al Partito di Gramsci*, p.248

9. *Platform of the Committee of Intesa*, 1925 and Onorato Damen, *Gramsci between Marxism and Idealism*; both available from the CWO address.



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Amadeo Bordiga – Prison Manifesto (1923)

To All the Comrades of the Communist Party of Italy:

With a clear conscience and after long deliberation, we believe we are carrying out our duty as communists by directing the present appeal to comrades. The party is going through the kind of crisis that can only be resolved by the participation of the whole membership. We are not alluding to the crisis of efficiency and organisation which is the inevitable consequence of the victory of the anti-proletarian forces in Italy. That crisis also deserves full attention, and if it were not for another crisis the party's leading bodies would be able to respond.

Here the issue is a different crisis, one which unfortunately exacerbates the consequences of the first: an internal crisis of our general direction, a crisis which has now broadened from individual tactical questions to include the whole framework of principles and the party's political frame.

This crisis has not sprung from internal disagreements, but from differences between the Italian party and the present majority in the Communist International and its Executive organs. Precisely because the crisis is of such an absolutely abnormal character it could lead to paralysis in party life and to sterile activity if the question is not put before the (whole) party, with the comrades being fully informed,[for] a discussion over basic issues, and a final and definitive judgment on what the platform of thought and action of our party should be. Despite being unable to hold open party meetings and the absence of a free press, this document proposes to begin that task.

The platform on which our party was

established at the Livorno congress is known to the comrades. They know it is the result of criticism carried out within the Socialist party in response to its essential shortcomings, especially in the post-war years.

How did those who were entrusted with its leadership see the situation of the party, and its tasks, immediately after Livorno? The party's theory was clearly established on the revolutionary and Marxist basis brought to light by the Russian Revolution and the founding of the Third International. The Italian proletariat's new organisation of struggle, distinguished by the strength of its international links, had to develop progressively in a way that avoids the pernicious and traditional defects of superficiality, disorder, and personal cliques, which were fatal in the old party. New criteria of seriousness and cool reflection were combined with the unlimited dedication of all the individual militants to the common cause. So, the enormous problem of our activity is the tactics to apply in the specific Italian situation in order to reach communist goals.

At the beginning of 1921 the proletarian struggle was so compromised by the deficiencies of the Socialist Party that a revolutionary offensive seemed impossible on the part of a minority party like ours. But the party's activity could, and should, have been conceived in terms of obtaining the greatest possible resistance of the proletariat to the offensive of the bourgeoisie, and in the process concentrate workers' fighting power in the best possible condition, around the banner of the party: the only party with a method capable of ensuring preparation for a recovery.

The communists saw the problem in this

way: how to assure the maximum of proletarian defensive unity in the face of pressure from the industrialists' offensive, yet at the same time prevent the masses from falling into the delusion of apparent unity through a sorry mixture of contradictory instructions which had already been the sad experience of the Italian masses. We will not repeat here the history of the communist attempt to build a united front of workers' organisations against reaction and fascism. The attempts failed due the behaviour of other parties with a following in the proletariat, but at least our criticism of this failure, based on the facts, means we may gain the advantage from an increased tendency of the militant proletariat to gather around the communist party.

Our propaganda has never been silent about the fact that the proletariat can only win if it has clear communist guidance, even if – precisely to reach that goal – the communists offer to struggle together with workers of any other political party. The results of this experiment, in a period of extraordinary historical importance, must be discussed by the party and the International, sifting through exactly what happened and drawing up a complete balance sheet.

But now the danger is that this question is quashed by saying, *'The tactics of the party were wrong and caused the proletariat's defeat'*! Here the point is not to defend the work of any one individual, to whom nobody in the other parties denies goodwill and even other qualities, but something quite different: to reach a verdict on the significant parts of the whole experience, a thing of vital importance for a Marxist party, and only made more important by the international significance of the present phase of Italian history. It is also a question of asking whether the party, after the outcome of such an experiment, should review and modify the foundations on which it was constituted.

Such a question demands the involvement of the whole party, as well as a much more mature examination by the International as a whole. And, after stating what is obvious to any witness of Italian politics over this last year – that there is no way the Communist party could have prevented the course of events which stem from causes too deep and long-standing to reverse – it should be pointed out immediately that the line which we established at Livorno could only be followed for a brief moment. Here we are only presenting the outline of the question in the hope of persuading the comrades of the necessity for a profound discussion. Three facts need to be considered:

1. The Italian party's opinions regarding the "international" communist tactic differs from those of the International.
2. The disagreement regarding Italian things is even more serious, since it goes beyond the limits of "tactics" to touch upon the very basis of the constitution of the party.
3. The International has modified, and apparently still is in the process of modifying, its policies with regard to tactics, but now, apparently, it is also modifying its programme and its fundamental organisational norms.

We won't deal with the first point here. This is well known through the discussion at our party's Congress in Rome (March, 1922), and is spelled out in the theses on tactics which were approved there.

The second point deserves more attention since the party membership is not very well informed about it.

On the question of the tactics to be applied in Italy within the proletarian movement, the differences emerged late and very slowly. Even though the Italian delegation

to the Third Congress was already in opposition over the matter of the tactics of the International, the concrete work of the party up to that time, and beyond, was still approved and praised.

Later, faced with the slogan of the “united front” and the “workers’ government” — our party’s line was based on the criterion of avoiding a collision between tactical means and the essentials of propaganda, not only theoretically but based on the fact of two fundamental cornerstones: “the proletariat can only defeat the bourgeoisie by upholding the policy of the Communist Party and its leadership”, and “proletarian power can only be built by revolutionary dictatorship”, and consequently we took part in the “united trade union front” and openly campaigned against any shade of opportunism — it was never precisely clear what the International would have had us do instead.

From time to time, the International did make specific criticisms, but even in June 1922 it merely asked the party to launch the slogan of a “workers’ government,” but so defining it as to make it a “pseudonym for the dictatorship of the proletariat,” whereas afterwards it was said that it was really about ministerial and parliamentary participation. On the questions of the trade unions and fascism it was never precisely clear what the Internationale would have had us do instead.

But then, with the question of fusion with the Maximalist party the divergence deepened and widened to a field of substantial importance. Whereas we viewed the “pedigree” of the party as having been established historically when it was founded in Livorno, and always maintained that the influx of other proletarian elements — the chief goal of the party — had to be by drawing them out of other movements and introducing them into our political framework, we were against any idea of a mass fusion with other

parties, or any attempt to create fractions of sympathisers within them, instead of getting them to join our own ranks (that is, we were against “noyautage” or cell building), it is clear today that the International considers Livorno to be a transitory solution and is aiming to get the mass adhesion of another “slice” of the Socialist Party. According to it, the maximalists were divided from us solely by the fact that they hesitated to split from the reformists. According to us, maximalism is a form of opportunism just as dangerous as reformism and, in accordance with its traditions and leading bodies, will never be revolutionary, but will continue to lead the masses astray by deceptive words which disguise the most pernicious cultivation of a state of impotence and inertia. The International, on seeing the Italian proletariat lose ground and the consequent reduction in the membership of our party, believed it could change the situation and achieve an international success by admitting the maximalists. We wanted to openly denounce this as defeatism (caused by the despicable leaders of their own entourage), and — even with the inevitable retreat of the militant proletariat — to retain the predominant position of the communist party reinforced by the liquidation of the other parties.

The facts demonstrate the maximalists’ political resistance to putting their organisation onto a revolutionary footing and loyally accepting adhesion to the International. It used to be thought that this was due to Serrati (preventing the appearance of a general communist tendency) yet we have seen Serrati himself liquidated by his own party, or rather by a few dozen leaders who do everything in the name of the maximalist workers, whereas the latter can only be won over by breaking the net in which they are caught. And they say ... that the communists have prevented the fusion!!

What have been the consequences in Italy of this stance by the International? The tactical work of the party in the united front was impeded, providing the other parties with a diversion from a situation where they had been bound by our tactics. They proposed a “political” coalition to conceal their repugnance for acting in line with communist proposals. Inside the General Confederation of Labour and the Alliance of Labour the maximalists could play the reformist game and deceive the workers right up to the very end – thanks to the fact that Moscow invited them to adhere, thus perpetuating the old and fatal mistake. Let us simply remember that the last chance to eliminate the trade union leaders and re-establish the movement of August 1922 on very different ground occurred at the conference of the Confederation [of Labour] in July [1922] at Genoa. There the reformists were a minority, yet the maximalists got them to remain at their posts in return for a declaration against parliamentary collaboration, which was no less pernicious than their do-nothing formula: *neither proletarian action nor collaboration*. Evidently, besides the old distaste for struggle, Serrati and others were playing a game, trading bit by bit their position and influence in return for re-admission to the International. The formation of the Third Internationalist faction, where those who might have come over to us were invited to remain, basically served to perpetuate the ambiguity. In conclusion, the maximalist party – which should have disappeared after its split from the reformists – whilst mocking the International and its repeated overtures, and without making any commitment, exploits the situation through casual opportunism. Unfortunately at this difficult time it also exploits workers’ tendency towards inertia, to some extent winning them over to its banner of passive

and simulated allegiance with a few revolutionary phrases. Whether or not the situation changes, it is a force destined to exhaust itself in the worst impotence.

And, even without obtaining the merger, the International’s policy prevented the Communist Party from benefitting from certain situations where workers tended to gravitate towards it, albeit in a “relative” sense, since numbers were declining anyway for more serious reasons. Thus, after the strike in August, the most notable fact for the International was still the possibility of a socialist split, and also, in a certain sense, even after the advent of fascism and the reaction unleashed against our party. Instead, our party has been subjected to an abnormally inactive parliamentary regime which is undergoing profound structural change, and where there is a growing state of malaise which contradicts every probability of a turn for the better. Moreover, the differences with the International have led to the formation of a current — the so-called “minority” — which, while posing as orthodox communists, in reality gathers up those who have remained somewhat attached to the old socialist methods after Livorno, and don’t really agree with the (new) clumsy systems of work and responsibility: they have supported the theses of the International, not with lofty and well-founded arguments, but with recalcitrance and sometimes quiet gossip.

As a result of all this, the party is suffering and a remedy is called for. The outcome of this “fusionist” approach threatens the “liquidation” of the party which arose at Livorno and which has fought for over two years, not without honour. This would plunge the Italian proletariat back into the entrails of the most vile maximalist “centrism” and the Italian working class would not even have a useful experience to draw on for the future from this ordeal.

It may be said that the alarm should have been sounded earlier. But, as we have said about the tactical question, in practice the disagreement was elusive. The method of the International was to present its particular slogans one at a time, whereas we wanted them spelled out and defined in broader relief. Something similar occurred with regard to the fusion itself, and the various alternatives presented by the successive socialist congresses. For example, after the one in '21, it seemed that fusion was no longer being considered, and even relations with the Third Internationalist faction were, as far as we knew, at least not considered to be official. It was only at the end of '22 that the divergence appeared in all its seriousness, and only later events revealed that it had developed in a way that the party was scarcely aware of. And, most recently, any hope has been lost for a solution by means of a genuine, broad discussion within the International, as opposed to palliatives contrived in long and painful dealings and with expedients of hardly more than a personal character.

Let us at least refer to a typical point which we proposed to examine.

The meaning of the new tactical slogans of the International, which appeared after the Third Congress — and the Fourth did not have time to discuss tactical theses — has not yet been very well clarified. They bring with them the danger of changes to the programme and principles, a danger now evident in the repeated postponements of the question of the programme and the statutes to 1924. At the same time, the serious problem of organisational discipline has become a desultory and often discontinuous expedient resulting in unpleasant internal crises in many parties and in their relations with the centre.

We are referring to a danger that can become very serious. We are perhaps on the eve of a crisis in the international camp; as the

Italian party we are in the depths of a crisis. These abnormal conditions explain why the questions must be put before every militant, without interrupting for an instant the discipline carried out by the central organs.

Driven by all these serious considerations, which we promise to further illuminate as far as possible, we intend to gather the support of the comrades on these conclusive points:

1. Despite the obstacles presented by the present situation, to provoke a broad discussion and consultation within the party about the value of the experiences of struggle for the party and its programmatic and tactical focus.
2. To provoke, in the appropriate organs of the International, a similar discussion on the conditions of recent and current proletarian struggle in Italy, with a wide scope and beyond contingent and transitory situations that (often) stifle examination of the most important problems.
3. To participate in the discussion of the programme, the organisation and the tactical action of the International, fighting against any revision to the right, and above all reaching the utmost clarity in deciding the directives.
4. To achieve, through these debates, a concerted assessment of the fundamental problems, so that a complete and clear plan is drawn up to guide the work of the party. On this basis an active effort will be initiated to intensify the work and efficiency of the party, on a line understandable to all the militants and with the most rational participation of all their energies, having thus overcome the reasons and causes of the previous serious state

of malaise.

5. If this debate does not result in substantial consensus with a set of decisions built on common principles — while remaining in our place in the ranks as communist militants according to the will of the majority of the International — we will not take part in the party's leading bodies, since we know that these must be constituted in line with the directives they are called on to apply. (This is to say that these must be drawn up in a consistent way and by comrades who are perfectly convinced of the directives they are called on to apply).

Important

Would comrades who receive this

document make copies of it and distribute them to the party members, also copying this postscript.

Each comrade is asked to send their agreement, or even their opinion, however dissenting, and any communication concerning this document by means of the same comrade who gave them this copy. The reply will travel the same road in a reverse direction.

This document has been sent to the central committee of the party and to the International.

It would also be of great interest to spread it abroad. We would be very grateful to anyone doing this in the form of a translation.

*The Initiators
written in prison, summer 1923.*



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1848: The Working Class Bursts Onto the Scene of History

"Peace to the huts! War on the palaces!" (Georg Büchner, The Hessian Courier, 1834)

The revolutions of 1848 belong to a now bygone era. Yet, the events of 175 years ago have inevitably shaped the modern world. For our rulers, they leave behind a contradictory legacy. For workers, they represent the dawn of a new movement.

"Springtime of Nations"

"The times of that superstition which attributed revolutions to the ill-will of a few agitators have long passed away. Everyone knows nowadays that wherever there is a revolutionary convulsion, there must be some social want in the background, which is prevented, by outworn institutions, from satisfying itself. The want may not yet be felt as strongly, as generally, as might ensure immediate success; but every attempt at forcible repression will only bring it forth stronger and stronger, until it bursts its fetters." (Friedrich Engels, Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany, 1851)

The Europe of the mid-nineteenth century was a society coming apart at the seams. The rapid development of means of production (the industrial revolution) was gradually outstripping an ossified political superstructure. The monarchies of Europe were being pressured from all directions: the interests of the bourgeoisie, the proletariat and the peasantry coming up against the vestiges of

feudalism. The need for the transformation of the existing system was being variously expressed by calls for a democratic republic, for national independence and national unification. But the years 1845-7 were also a time of economic crisis. A shortfall in basic food supplies (caused by poor harvests and the potato blight) led to price spikes. Since grain produce and potatoes were essentials in poorer households, living standards deteriorated. In areas directly affected, famine and hunger riots followed (Ireland, Flanders, Silesia). Meanwhile, a boom in railway financial stocks – fuelled by low interest rates and high profits – created a speculative bubble on British stock markets. The shock to the agricultural sector, in conjunction with the collapse of the speculative boom known as "railway mania", set the stage for the Panic of 1847, a commercial and banking crisis in Britain. Though capitalism was not yet a world economy, its unceasing search for profits was driving forward the growth of international economic connections, integrating local and national markets. In other words, the crisis soon spread to the continent, particularly Prussia and France.

In the lead up to 1848, there were a number of events which already signalled the upcoming upheaval. From the 1830s onwards, there were a series of uprisings among silk weavers in Lyon, coal miners in Wales, textile workers in Brno and Prague, and weavers in Silesia, whilst the Chartist movement in the United Kingdom saw workers raise their own political demands. Additionally, the failed Kraków insurrection of 1846 attempted to connect the struggle for independence with

the emancipation of the peasants whilst the Sonderbund War in Switzerland pitted progressive and conservative forces against each other in 1847. Finally, revolt in Sicily in January 1848 broke out after an anonymous manifesto was distributed, calling the people to arms. However, it was not until February 1848, when mass protests broke out in Paris, that a revolutionary domino effect truly spilled across Europe. Over two years, over fifty uprisings, big and small, took place – we only summarise the key events below:

- Following the July Revolution of 1830, the **Kingdom of France** was ruled by the July Monarchy under King Louis Philippe. Nicknamed the “Citizen King”, he attempted to find a middle ground between the absolutist monarchists and the republicans, but was unable to satisfy either faction. The ban on political meetings enacted by Prime Minister François Guizot led to mass protests in Paris on 22 February 1848. The King was forced to abdicate, and a provisional government was installed on 24 February, made up of moderate and radical republicans, as well as the socialists Louis Blanc and Alexandre Martin. On the streets, revolutionary clubs led by the likes of Louis Auguste Blanqui and Armand Barbès agitated for work for the unemployed, and the postponement of elections to a Constituent Assembly (which, they rightly predicted, would marginalise the radicals). Under pressure, the provisional government granted the creation of “national workshops” and delayed the elections, but only to 23 April. Dissatisfied with the pace of social reforms and the elections which brought reactionaries to power, a

demonstration on 15 May in solidarity with the Polish national cause turned into a riot. A second, more organised, revolt – the “June Days” – began in response to the closure of the “national workshops”, but it was crushed by military force. The path was then cleared for the re-establishment of law and order. In the presidential election of 10 December, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte became President of the Republic – he swept aside the remains of the domestic opposition and intervened militarily against republicans in Italy. In 1851 he completed his rise to power in a coup d’état.

- Made up of 39 sovereign states, the **German Confederation** was only overseen by a loose Federal Convention. On 1 March 1848, in the Grand Duchy of Baden, a crowd led by Friedrich Hecker presented a petition to parliament calling for, among other things, the abolition of feudal rights and popular government. A few days later, peasant revolts broke out across the German Confederation, and there were riots in Berlin, while on 20 March the King of Bavaria, Ludwig I, was forced to abdicate. That same day a Polish uprising against the Kingdom of Prussia started in Posen. As demands for a unified parliamentary republic proliferated, a federal election was held on 1 May for the German states to appoint a so-called Frankfurt Parliament, in which Arnold Ruge represented the radicals. On 12 July, the Federal Convention dissolved itself and power passed into the hands of a provisional government of the Frankfurt Parliament, which however could not gain the recognition of all the German states. In September, revolts in

Prussia and in Baden were defeated. On 28 March 1849, the Frankfurt Parliament finally drafted a new constitution which declared the formation of a unified German Empire under King Frederick William IV of Prussia (a position he turned down). Revolts continued in Saxony, the Rhineland, the Palatinate and Baden, but they were all defeated. The rump of the Frankfurt Assembly, fearing repression, moved to Württemberg on 31 May 1849, only to be dispersed by the local army there. The Federal Convention was resurrected in 1851.

- The **Austrian Empire** was the other major power of the German Confederation, next to the Kingdom of Prussia. Although Emperor Ferdinand I was its head of state, due to physical and mental difficulties his duties were often delegated to a Regent's Council. The revolution kicked off with an uprising in Vienna on 13 March 1848, and that same day Chancellor Klemens von Metternich (one of the Emperor's closest aides) was forced to resign. On 15 March mass demonstrations broke out in Pest and Buda. In response, the Emperor promised a constitution, and accepted the creation of a Hungarian government under Lajos Batthyány. Thanks to the efforts of Lajos Kossuth, the Hungarian government decreed the abolition of serfdom and the introduction of a constitutional regime. But a rejuvenated Hungary was seen as a threat by the newly proclaimed Serbian Vojvodina and Slovak National Council, which organised their own uprisings, while the Kingdom of Croatia under Josip Jelačić marched on Pest. The Emperor, while initially

suspicious of Jelačić's aims, soon began to assist his military advance, seeing it as an opportunity to squash Hungarian aspirations. On 6 October, Austrian troops refused to fight the Hungarians and revolted together with the population of Vienna; the Emperor had to flee. Order was only restored with a siege of the city by troops still loyal to the Emperor and the help of Jelačić. On 2 December Ferdinand I was convinced to abdicate and was replaced by Franz Joseph I. Attempted Czech revolts were crushed and concessions to the Hungarian government were revoked. In April 1849, Kossuth declared Hungary an independent state but the military intervention of Tsar Nicholas I of Russia put an end to the struggle. Hungary was deprived of constitutional rights.

- The **Italian peninsula** was divided into a number of states. Most of the North was controlled by the House of Habsburg of Austria, the House of Bourbon held the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the South, and the Papal States covered the centre of the peninsula. Following the January uprising in Sicily, disturbances spread to Naples, Tuscany, Lombardy, Venice, and Rome. The remaining land of Piedmont-Sardinia was ruled by the House of Savoy. Its King, Charles Albert, marched into Austrian-controlled Lombardy on 23 March 1848, thus beginning Italy's first war of national independence. By August, he was repelled and forced to sign an armistice. A Tuscan Republic was proclaimed in February 1849 after the Grand Duke Leopold II had fled, only for him to be invited back in fear of an

Austrian invasion. That same month, the Pope fled and a Roman Republic was proclaimed by Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi, but was besieged by France, despite previous promises it would not intervene. The fall of the provisional government of Venice to the Austrian Empire, the city plagued by cholera and hunger, put an end to the war of national independence in August 1849.

- In the Netherlands, Belgium, and Switzerland constitutional reforms were made without any street fighting. In Ireland, a small rebellion was easily crushed. In Britain, the events on the Continent briefly revived the Chartist movement but it was to be its last gasp. Outside of Europe, there were some reverberations in Brazil and Colombia.

If February and March were the months of revolutionary excitement, in May and June the interests of the bourgeoisie and the proletariat diverged, and by autumn the counter-revolution was in the ascendant throughout Europe. To this day historians continue to debate whether 1848 was a “success”, because it eventually did bring some constitutional change, or a “failure”, because for the most part monarchies were restored and revolutions repressed. Either way, 1848 left its mark on all modern political ideologies, left and right.

“So: progress — association — moral law — freedom — equality — brotherhood — association — family, community, state — sanctity of property — credit — education — God and the people — Dio e popolo. These phrases figure in all the manifestos of the 1848 revolutions, from the French to the

Wallachian ...” (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, Review: May-October, Neue Rheinische Zeitung, 1850)

Yet, beyond the quagmire of liberal, democratic, republican, and nationalist interpretations, thanks to which today 1848 is mainly remembered as the “Springtime of Nations”, a seed of something else was planted.

“La République démocratique et sociale”

While it was mainly the bourgeoisie that took their seats on the various provisional governments, whether it was Paris, Vienna or Berlin, it was the workers, the artisans, the peasants, the unemployed, and the troops who refused to follow orders that constituted the masses on the streets and the barricades. The French liberal aristocrat, Alexis de Tocqueville, who had been elected to the Constituent Assembly on 23 April 1848, was horrified by the atmosphere in Paris which preceded the “June Days”:

“One thing was not ridiculous, but really ominous and terrible; and that was the appearance of Paris on my return. I found in the capital a hundred thousand armed workmen formed into regiments, out of work, dying of hunger, but with their minds crammed with vain theories and visionary hopes. I saw society cut into two: those who possessed nothing, united in a common greed; those who possessed something, united in a common terror. There were no bonds, no sympathy between these two great sections; everywhere the idea of an inevitable and immediate struggle seemed at hand. Already the bourgeois and the people (for the old nicknames had been resumed) had

*come to blows, with varying fortunes, at Rouen, Limoges, Paris; not a day passed but the owners of property were attacked or menaced in either their capital or income: they were asked to employ labour without selling the produce; they were expected to remit the rents of their tenants when they themselves possessed no other means of living. ... Meanwhile, a gloomy despair had overspread the middle class thus threatened and oppressed, and imperceptibly this despair was changing into courage. I had always believed that it was useless to hope to settle the movement of the Revolution of February peacefully and gradually, and that it could only be stopped suddenly, by a great battle fought in the streets of Paris.” (Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, 1896)*

In fact, Paris – with the experience of 1789 and 1830 at hand, with the richest socialist tradition at the time, with a working class that had already flexed its muscle in previous years – was the stage for the pivotal confrontation of 1848. The provisional government brought to power in February had created the “national workshops”. It resulted in thousands of workers flooding into Paris in the hopes of finding employment; the lucky ones were offered low-paid, menial jobs. The closure of the overwhelmed “national workshops” was the spark that lit the fire; it now became clear the “Democratic and Social Republic” that the masses had fought for had been betrayed. They went from house to house, rallying in the workers’ quarters, they seized armouries, built barricades, flew the red flag, and marched on the City Hall (Hôtel-de-Ville). The squabbling republican and monarchist factions united as one class in order to crush the rising of the “plebeians”.

The fighting went on for four days, some 3,000 insurgents were killed and many more injured or deported. The “June Days” were over, the bourgeoisie had re-established its grip. The working class was defeated.

As with every defeat, however, there came important lessons. If, for the most part, in 1848 the working class was still constrained by the political traditions of the past and not yet able to raise demands independent of other classes, individual Forty-Eighters began to reflect on what their experience meant for future revolutionary movements.

*“February 25, 1848, granted the republic to France, June 25 thrust the revolution upon her. And revolution, after June, meant: overthrow of bourgeois society, whereas before February it meant: overthrow of the form of government.” (Marx, *The Class Struggles in France*, 1850)*

From the Bourgeois to the Proletarian Revolution

Though it hardly made a ripple in 1848 (it was not until the 1870s when it gained more recognition), the most influential document published that year was undoubtedly the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. Authored by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, and released the day before the February Revolution in France broke out, it was produced on behalf of a small organisation – the Communist League – whose membership likely did not exceed 300. The *Manifesto* predicted that society was “*more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other – Bourgeoisie and Proletariat.*” – and the latter would eventually become the “grave-diggers” of the capitalist mode of production.

It criticised the various strains of socialist thought popular at the time, those who did not understand or intentionally obscured the role of the working class in the “revolutionary reconstitution of society”.

However, the document was in many ways ahead of its time. In 1848 industrial capitalism was still an emerging system and the working class hardly existed outside of a few industrial hubs in Europe. Therefore, the *Manifesto* recommended that communists, those who “represent and take care of the future of that movement”, should for the time being ally themselves with “the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy”. This is what members of the Communist League who took part in the events of 1848 did. Engels organised the barricades in Elberfeld and fought in Baden, while Marx was the chief editor of a popular daily newspaper – *Neue Rheinische Zeitung* – which attempted to track and influence the course of the revolution. Although it called itself an “organ of democracy”, and sought the creation of a “democratic German republic”, it published a number of economic essays (later collected and released as *Wage Labour and Capital*), openly expressed solidarity with the “June Days” uprising, and its last issue, as it was being suppressed by the Prussian state, proclaimed itself in favour of the “emancipation of the working class”.

Marx and Engels initially thought bourgeois revolution would be swiftly followed by proletarian revolution. The experience of 1848 made them revise their perspectives:

“History has proved us wrong and all others who thought similarly. It has made clear that the status of economic development on the Continent was then by no means ripe for the abolition of capitalist production; it has proved this

*by the economic revolution which, since 1848, has affected the entire Continent and has introduced large industry in France, Austria, Hungary. Poland, and, more recently, in Russia, and has made of Germany an industrial country of the first rank ... Thereby has the struggle between these two great classes, which in 1848 existed outside of England only in Paris and, perchance, in a few large industrial centres, been spread over the whole of Europe, and has attained an intensity unthinkable in 1848. ... And if this powerful army of the proletariat has not yet reached the goal, if, far from winning the victory by one fell blow, it must gradually proceed by hard, tenacious struggle from position to position, it proved once for all how impossible it was in 1848 to bring about the social transformation by a sheer coup de main.” (Friedrich Engels, Introduction to Marx’s *Class Struggles in France*, 1895)*

1848 also revealed the need to adopt new forms of revolutionary organisation:

*“With the defeat of the revolution of 1848-49 the party of the proletariat on the Continent lost use of the press, freedom of speech and the right to associate, i.e. the legal instruments of party organisation, which it had enjoyed for once during that short interval. ... After 1849 just as before 1848, only one path was open to the proletarian party — that of secret association. Consequently after 1849 a whole series of clandestine proletarian societies sprang up on the Continent, were discovered by the police, condemned by the courts, broken up by the gaols and continually resuscitated by the force of circumstances.” (Karl Marx, *Revelations Concerning the Communist**

Trial in Cologne, 1853)

In light of this, for Marx the task now became “forming not the government party of the future but the opposition party of the future”. An independently organised political organisation for the struggles ahead, one which could not be misled by other classes. This led to a fallout with the group around Karl Schapper and August Willich who, in Blanquist fashion, wanted to plot new insurrections. Divided amongst themselves, infiltrated by the secret police and facing trial in Cologne, the Communist League finally dissolved in 1852.

In exile, Marx and Engels dedicated their efforts to elucidating a theory and practice for the proletarian movement. It was not until 1864 that they became involved in another revolutionary organisation (the First International), and it was not until 1871 that the proletariat faced its next big clash with the bourgeoisie (the Paris Commune). When they republished the Manifesto in 1872, they did so with a note that “in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution (1848), and then, still more, in the Paris Commune (1871), where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details been antiquated.”

Today, we continue with Marx by

Some Further Reading:

1. Is the Communist Manifesto Still Relevant Today? <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/1996-03-01/is-the-communist-manifesto-still-relevant-today>
2. 150 Years On: The Split in the First International <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2022-09-02/150-years-on-the-split-in-the-first-international>
3. 1871-2021: Vive la Commune! <https://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2021-03-18/1871-2021-vive-la-commune>

building on the experience of another century of capitalist development and working class struggle. Capitalism is a world economy, and the bourgeoisie has ceased to act “in a revolutionary way”. It is now a class only concerned with the perpetuation of a system which – through imperialist war, environmental degradation, and economic crisis – is bringing the planet and humanity closer and closer to catastrophe. Organised into nation states and would-be states, the bourgeoisie rules everywhere; it has divided the world among themselves, and now simply wrestles over its redivision. Alliances with the supposedly “progressive” faction of the ruling class – whether in China 1927, Spain 1936, or Iran 1979 – have only led to defeat. The programmes for a “democratic revolution” that Marx formulated in 1848, and Lenin in 1905, are now obsolete.

“The epoch of imperialism is the era of the universal nature of capitalist domination and this demands a more direct and universal revolutionary strategy. ... The era of democratic struggles ended a long time ago and they cannot be repeated in the present imperialist epoch.” (ICT Platform, 2020)

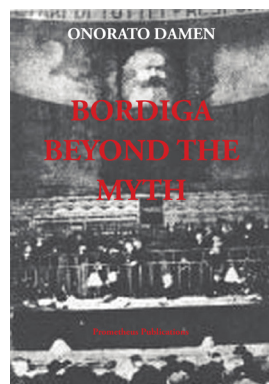
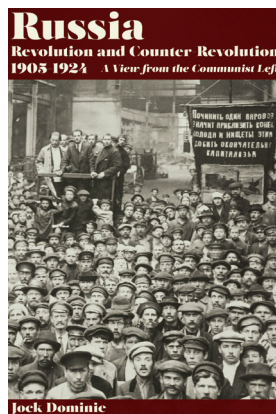
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17 June 2023

4. *The Class Struggles in France* (1850) by Karl Marx
5. *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Germany* (1851) by Friedrich Engels
6. *Revolutions of 1848: A Social History* (1952) by Priscilla Robertson
7. *A History of Socialist Thought, Volume I: The Forerunners 1789-1850* (1953) by George Douglas Howard Cole
8. *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (1975) by Eric Hobsbawm

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



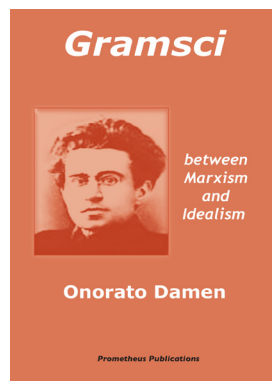
Bordiga Beyond the Myth

£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.



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 Russian Revolution remains a landmark event in history. For the bourgeois historians, the October Revolution is thought to be a tragedy that set back the achievements of the "democratic" February Revolution, and allowed the Bolsheviks to wreak havoc on their citizens and the world. For the Stalinists, the events of 1917 paved the way for the birth of the USSR, which they point to as a prototypical example of "socialism in one country". In reality, the February and October Revolutions were both part of the same proletarian revolution

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.

Join us! Support the Internationalist Communist Tendency

Free Bulletin of the
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Internationalist Communist Tendency
No 61 Autumn/Winter 2022
Donations Welcome



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 goods, 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 food prices, devaluing and austerity measures which have left the working class barely able to continue to pay their mortgages. 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 privatisation of public services as the government in the "red economy" gave way to financial speculation based on evermore ingenious ways of multiplying debt. This led to the collapse of mortgage loans. The crash of 2007/8 did for a few big financial names what without state intervention, would have done to hundreds more. Since then we have seen worse than after the 1929 stock market crash. As it was, the whole system has been crumbling since they had been told capital markets were a thing of the past. Now it is only a sign of things to come. In fact, it is a warning that there are no precarious jobs with no future worth linking about, we are facing the longest recession since records began.

The working class has workers' resistance to the capitalist boss that has sprung up defensive groups, each time trampled down by the bosses and then

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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 pace 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 saw strikes over pensions and wages by the steelworkers and protests about the cost of living and a desperate situation in the NHS. In March the London Tube strike began over threats to jobs and pensions, and there was a protest in support of sacked RBO workers. April saw strikes by oil refinery workers over an insulting pay offer. In May, power workers went on strike as they had wages frozen for the previous year followed by a wave of wildcat strikes. Refuse collectors in Walsley Hepton construction workers in Hull, offshore

workers in the North Sea, workers at a food plant in Bury, all took matters into their own hands and did not wait to go through the official process. In June, a

were more strikes in the Royal Mail, barristers' strike against stagnant fees and, of course, railway strikes.

At this point the establishment began to warn of "class war" and revolutionary campaigns to discredit strikers. In July, if workers started a strike, the first nationwide action at all plants would be a 24-hour stoppage of trucks on the buses, and further action the Royal Mail and on the railways. August, council workers went on strike and there was another wave of wildcat action, this time by Amey workers. In September, contract workers, including scaffolders and maintenance workers, at various refineries and chemical plants. In September, offshore oil workers in the North Sea, despite condemnation from the TUC, went on strike. The month of October saw a wave of nationwide strike committees. The employers were also taking action. The month of October saw a wave of nationwide strike committees. The employers were also taking action. The month of October saw a wave of nationwide strike committees. The employers were also taking action.

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

the crisis are bound to end in a stalemate. All the while, the ruling class continues, whether left or right, to exploit the workers. The ruling class, are out of ideas – the political culture in the UK is not unique, it is a symptom of a system in freefall. The ruling class has only two options on the table. One is to continue to exploit the workers, and, ultimately, war. Dreams of a return to past, of decent wages and welfare for the post-war boom, are in the current era, a pipe dream. So what is to be done? The current situation is an impasse. The ruling class has no ideas. But if the ruling class isolate us sector by sector, workplace by workplace, we will lose. The offensive will be on. The ruling class will be the bosses, who have money and the law on their side, calls for thinking outside the box. We can already see examples of the ruling class isolating workers. The ruling class is reluctant to take action, workers are not. Their own ship crews continue to load the ship. When ships were resorted from Liverpool to break the strike, dockers in London refused to handle them. The ruling class is reluctant to handle them.

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 a vision. It is a daunting task, but workers need their own political alternative. 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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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