

To the Internationalists
Attending the Prague
Week of Action



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To the Internationalists Attending the Prague Week of Action

Capitalism is past its sell by date and is dragging the planet and humanity towards an existential crisis. The system has been lurching from one expedient to the next to avert the consequences of the crisis that emerged with the end of the post-war boom in the early 1970s. But each expedient, whether it be de-localisation of production to low wage areas, the concomitant globalisation of trade that followed, or the increasing financialisation of economic activity which has widened the gulf between rich and poor across the planet, has only added to the contradictions of the system. The fictitious capital of the financial institutions led to massive speculation which mortgaged the future. Predictably this ended in tears in 2007-8 and the system has only survived through the state converting private bankruptcy into sovereign debt to save those “too big to fail”. Now such debt is so large that the mere repayment of interest paralyses the same governments from real investment. Instead they have continually cut the social services they created to buy off workers in the post-war boom thus adding to the misery of the lowest paid. Meanwhile those “too big to fail” continue to make their billions which they use to ensure that state policies favour their interests. This is why there never will be a capitalist plan to really deal with the looming existential crisis posed by climate change. After almost 30 years of feeble schemes agreed in climate conferences the planet is continuing to warm at a rate even faster than originally predicted. Capitalism unchecked means the end of all planetary life within decades rather than the three and a half billion years astronomers predict before the sun expands so much we all become toast. And in the very short term it means misery for millions from environmental disasters which are themselves the cause of wars around the world.

Global capitalism has now gone through almost six decades of declining growth rates and the consequence is the rise of imperialist tensions to a level not seen since 1939. And history never stands still. With the start of the Ukraine War it took a new turn towards generalised war. It did not come out of the blue. For years the USA has been playing up the danger of the rise of China (which originally came about due to US investment in its “Special Economic Zones” which brought cheap Chinese goods to mitigate lower wages in the USA) whilst its hubris after the collapse of the USSR has not created a “new world order” but advanced its alliance system to encircle the Russian rump of the old USSR. By its sanctions regime (itself an act of war) it has created an alliance of convenience in Eurasia between Russia, China and Iran who are not only putting their differences aside but are helping each other avoid the effects of US sanctions (which it can also bully its allies to impose). With Sweden and Finland joining NATO there is no sign of a pause in US policy. And with the same coming from the Kremlin there is also no prospect of any armistice any time soon. Like the two previous world wars, the next will demand the “unconditional surrender” of one of the contending parties first. Total war is the fruit of the imperialist stage of capitalism and the populations of Ukraine and Gaza are already feeling the consequences.

We have long argued that the one force that can allow humanity to avoid the black hole into which capitalist rivalries will drive us is the world working class. As the universally exploited class we share with our class sisters and brothers everywhere a common condition. We have no property to defend and we are only linked to the present system by “radical chains”. In other words, we are the concrete expression of the whole of humanity. Our class interests embody the interests of humankind as a whole. But currently we are not in a great shape to organise the fight back.

Impending imperialist war comes at a time when the working class has been in retreat in the face of four decades of capitalist attacks on living standards. On top of that we have been faced with a battery of ideological weapons from identity politics to the biggest identity con of all – nationalism. This is the banner under which workers will be recruited to be cannon fodder to slaughter each other to defend the “nation”, or rather, the property of those who actually own the nation’s wealth – our exploiters. After such a long period of retreat workers have to reacquire the confidence to struggle, not only against wage cuts, unemployment and austerity but now against the greater danger which capitalism poses to us all. It cannot be under-estimated that building class unity is the most important task facing revolutionaries.

We thus welcome the Prague Week of Action and all other serious attempts to bring genuine internationalists together to fight the growing drive of the world capitalist system towards barbarism. These conferences and initiatives could be a first step, provided that we all recognise the extreme danger of the situation and as a consequence **concentrate on what unites us rather than what has divided us**. In this respect the call of the Prague Action Week is not different in essence from the five basic points which those of us in the No War but the Class War (NWBCW) initiative adhere to. These are:

- 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.

None of the eight points in the description of who the Prague call is aimed at contradicts the basic aims of NWBCW. Indeed we could quite happily expand those five points to encapsulate the Prague eight (see below) as they both define the framework of genuine working class internationalism. NWBCW already includes comrades from the anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist tradition plus different groups of the communist left as well as individuals who belong to no specific organisation. It is present in several countries from South Korea and the US to the UK and Europe. It has no central body and each local

committee decides on the basis of its local situation how best to carry out the five basic points which were originally adopted by the first committee to be formed (in Liverpool in the UK). It is still in its infancy and, like all the other initiatives, its weakness is that it is composed solely of those who are already politically committed in their opposition to capitalism and the state. Unless we can reach the wider working class — which is only now beginning to stir from the onslaught of the last forty years — then we will achieve nothing. This can only be done if we reach some “critical mass” which enables us to organise to combat both imperialist propaganda and the fake schemes of the “part-time internationalists” who always support some existing state or want to create another.

Some organisations who are in NWBCW, like members of the AnarCom Network (ACN) and the Anarchist Communist Group (ACG), have been specifically invited to Prague. Others have not, including the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), yet we shall be present alongside the other comrades as we accept all eight points of the invitation. It is in this spirit that we attend the Prague Week of Action which we hope will be a success and open out to other internationalist initiatives in an attempt to draw us all closer together.

Internationalist Communist Tendency

April 2024

Prague Week of Action (20-26 May 2024)

This call is addressed to:

- To anyone in the world who is struggling against the attacks of capital, against all wars and against all bourgeois states with the aim of destroying capital and all social relations resulting from it, as well as all forms of exploitation.
- To all those who are aware that there is no such thing as a just war or a defensive war. There is no camp that represents barbarism while the other represents civilization, there is no camp that is more aggressive than the other, and there is no democratic camp against a dictatorial or fascist camp. All wars are capitalist wars, where different bourgeois factions are pitted against each other. Every war is a war of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat!
- To those who do not support either faction of the bourgeoisie against the other, but fight against each of them. Those who do not defend or participate in inter-class fronts.
- To those individuals, and groups, who fight against the policy of “defense of the national economy”, and “sacrifice in favor of the war economy”, to those who do not accept the expansionist tactics of their own bourgeoisie, even if it faces an economic, political or military attack.
- To all those who do not consider themselves pacifists but revolutionaries. To all those who do not aspire to a bourgeois peace where the exploitation of our labor force can continue in slightly different conditions.
- To all those who want to turn the inter-bourgeois war into a revolutionary war, the war between states into a struggle for the destruction of all states.
- To all those who recognize in their practice that the proletariat has no fatherland to defend. Our enemy is not the proletarians driven into the trenches on the other side of the front, but the bourgeoisie – in practice, above all, the bourgeoisie “in our own country”, “our own” bourgeoisie, the one that directly organizes our exploitation.
- And finally, to those who, according to their strength and situation, fight against the bourgeoisie by promoting the development of the proletariat as a revolutionary class and contributing to the building and development of proletarian internationalism.

Marxism and Anarchism

Based on a talk delivered by the CWO-ICT at the 2013 London
Anarchist Bookfair

The Real Divide Amongst Revolutionaries

When we first suggested a public meeting on “Marxism and Anarchism” someone on Facebook immediately changed the title to “Marxism versus Anarchism” so we had to quickly point out that this was not a repeat of the sloganised bunfights of the past where one side would counter one Kronstadt with two Barcelonas or whatever. Nor do we wish to investigate the origin of the split between Marxism and Bakuninism in the years of the First International (useful though that can be). No, our starting point came from reading *Fighting for Ourselves* by the Solidarity Federation (SolFed) which we bought here last year. We’ll refer to this later but what struck us in that work was the course of anarchist and anarcho-syndicalist history politically has certain parallels with the course that Marxism has followed. Our starting premise is that of Daniel Guérin: “Anarchism and Marxism at the start, drank at the same proletarian spring”. And anarchists today quite happily quote the *Communist Manifesto* that we are aiming for a society of “freely associated producers” although if you are the likes of David Graeber you don’t acknowledge that this is Marx. Where we hope to end up is that the history of the working class up to now has refined the meaning of what its revolution is, and the real divide is not so much between Marxism and Anarchism per se, but between those revolutionaries who see a future as a cooperative collective one without classes and without a state and those who claim the title of Marxist or Anarchist but either defend a distorted version of capitalism, or are quite happy to pursue a lifestyle within it without challenging the bases of the state or class rule.

Marxism and the State

There is no doubt that the Marxists have had the greater baggage to ditch in this respect. For many so-called Marxists of Trotskyist and Stalinist persuasion the only work they have really read and understood is the *Communist Manifesto*.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx and Engels laid out the basic premises of a communist society as a system of “freely associated producers” but surprisingly wrote nothing about the state, even if its disappearance is implied in the phrase. On the contrary, they argued that the State could be used to arrive at communism. Having stated:

We have seen above, that the first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy to wrest, by degree, all capital from the

bourgeoisie, to centralise all instruments of production in the hands of the State, i.e., of the proletariat organised as the ruling class; and to increase the total productive forces as rapidly as possible.

Then follows a list which includes:

5. Centralisation of credit in the hands of the state, by means of a national bank with State capital and an exclusive monopoly.
6. Centralisation of the means of communication and transport in the hands of the State.
7. Extension of factories and instruments of production owned by the State; the bringing into cultivation of waste-lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.
8. Equal liability of all to work. Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.

However, the method of Marxism, as we understand it, is historical materialism and this means also learning from the real experience of the proletariat. This equally applied to Marx and Engels. After the Paris Commune Marx and Engels quickly recognised two things. Firstly, that the programmatic list at the end of the *Communist Manifesto* was inadequate.

The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II.

Marx went on to add:

That passage would, in many respects, be very differently worded today. In view of the gigantic strides of Modern Industry since 1848, and of the accompanying improved and extended organisation of the working class, in view of the practical experience gained, first in the February Revolution, and then, still more, in the Paris Commune, where the proletariat for the first time held political power for two whole months, this programme has in some details been antiquated.

Secondly, Marx and Engels' conception of the state had changed.

One thing especially was proved by the Commune, viz., that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made state machinery, and wield it for its own purposes."

Or as Engels put it in *On Authority*, “the political state and with it its political authority will disappear as a result of the socialist revolution”.

Social Democracy and Statism

But this was not understood by their followers in Germany and France. They elevated the conquest of political power via parliamentary means to the main aim of their activity. They ignored what Marx and Engels amended in the *Communist Manifesto*. Marx later remarked about the French Parti Ouvrier that all he knew was that if they were “Marxists” then he was not. In the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* of 1875 (but not published in German until 1891 when the Social Democrats could say it was out-of-date as they now had the new Erfurt Programme – a programme which elevated reformism whilst revolution was relegated to a distant future) Marx laid into the reformism of the German Social Democrats especially in accepting the Lassallean notion of a “free People’s state” as a contradiction in terms, But Marx and Engels both thought that time and experience would alter the course of Social Democracy. It did not; and Engels, in one of his last writings in the 1895 complained that the editors of *Vorwärts* had edited out everything revolutionary in what he was writing. Indeed he died not knowing that Kautsky had also edited out his call for “streetfighting” to attack the bourgeois state.

The debate in Social Democracy was thus mainly about how to achieve state power for the parties of the Second International. The best, revolutionary, elements in the Second international were more concerned about internationalism and the threat of imperialist war than anything else and they were in a minority.

It was only the failure of the revolutionary wave and in particular the erection of a state capitalist regime in the USSR that forced some Marxist minorities to reappraise the role of the state in the revolutionary process. The publication of more of Marx’s writings on the state and revolution AFTER the First World War also assisted in this but the biggest inspiration for re-examination came with the formation of workers’ councils in Russia and other places after 1905. Here was a historically discovered solution to the question of how to smash the bourgeois state without re-erecting a permanent repressive body. Unfortunately the Bolsheviks, despite being the most revolutionary of the Social Democrats followed the example set by the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries (SRs) who had imposed a cabinet (the Provisional Government) on top of the soviet structure in the period of so-called “dual power”. The founding of Sovnarkom (the Council of People’s Commissars which was going to be called Ministers until Trotsky suggested “commissars” sounded more revolutionary!) meant that the Bolsheviks carried on the same process. At the time the Bolsheviks were not worried as they assumed that the revolution in Russia was only the first step in the international revolution. Many Bolsheviks leaders stated that without such they were doomed. *The April Theses* may have led the Bolsheviks to ditch their old Social Democratic two-stages programme but they had not replaced it with another and responded to situations rather than had a programme. However, as the Russian proletariat

remained isolated the Social Democratic idea that the party takes power on behalf of the proletariat and decrees socialism re-asserted itself and continued to be the basis on which the Third International operated. Indeed for Stalinists, Castroists, Maoists and Trotskyists it remains true to the present but it is no longer true for those who base themselves on Marx's revolutionary method and principles. We should not forget too that it was the Left Communists in Russia who published five issues of the paper *Kommunist* (now available in French), from March-May 1918, who were the first to condemn the direction of the revolution as heading towards state capitalism (something with which Lenin agreed but he argued that this was a good thing). In the person of Radek (later to abandon Left Communism for National Bolshevism) they even voiced the idea that a military victory which did not bring about socialism would be a bigger disaster than outright defeat. Their principled opposition though died a death with the onset of the very civil war they feared.

After the failure of the Russian Revolution many Marxists (particularly those coming from German Left Communism) now rejected the party form and insisted that the only route to revolution was via councils. Today there are few who call themselves Councilist but Councilism has had an effect on both Marxists and Anarchists since then. Italian Left communism was slower to come to an understanding of the role of the state and the nature of revolution. Bordiga had always argued for a party dictatorship even in the councils so it was not until the Internationalist Communist Party (PCIInt) emerged in the aftermath of the Second World War that a full reappraisal was made. The party eventually split with a Bordiga who still denied that Russia was state capitalist. In its *1952 Platform* it declared that the working class does not delegate to anyone not even to its revolutionary party the task of establishing socialism. Revolutionaries might lead the way, might fight in the class-wide organs for an autonomous proletarian perspective but they cannot finish the process since socialism demands the active participation of everyone if it is to function at all. The working class internationally will have to establish whatever bodies it can (factory committees, local bodies, councils or whatever). It really will be a society stripped of class antagonism, patronage, money, national frontiers, and standing armies. Mass activity is the only guarantee against the revival of a statist repressive organ.

Anarchist Agonising

Anarchism too has had to struggle against reformist tendencies. We won't go into those earlier mutualists who thought you could have a socialist society based on money like Alfred Darimon but focus on the later and openly revolutionary Anarcho-Syndicalist movement which arose most strongly in those countries where the class war was so naked that Social Democratic gradualism made little sense. To take the example from France, the Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT) from 1895 seemed like an antidote to Social Democratic reformism. Intransigent bosses meant this was the era of the mass strike and you fought to win or lose but this was to change. To quote from the SolFed pamphlet *Fighting for Ourselves*:

... in the early 20th century bosses and the state began to react to the gains of the CGT with a more conciliatory attitude. This increased the space for reformists to operate as class collaboration could be seen to bear fruit. By 1909 the growth of the union had put the revolutionaries in a minority (the CGT grew from 100,000 members in 1902 to 700,000 in 1912, out of a population of 7 million [It was over 35 million – CWO]). Victor Griffuelhes resigned as general secretary amidst machinations against him and Émile Pouget left the union disillusioned. The slide into class collaboration, reformism and bureaucratisation was crowned by the CGT's support for the national war effort in 1914. This was the most decisive break with its revolutionary internationalist origins.

The CGT was not alone. Kropotkin like the vast majority of the so-called Marxists of the Second International came to the support of his country of Russian Tsarism as a counter to German militarism in 1914. And if Kronstadt was to be the greatest demonstration that proletarian revolution was nothing to do with statism then the Spanish Civil War demonstrated that abstract anarchist principles in themselves are not enough. Spain in 1936 was as isolated (perhaps more so) than revolutionary Russia had been in 1918. Because Spain had not taken part in the First World War its historical trajectory was different to most European states. A growing revolutionary movement came full square up against the impending imperialist war. A proletarian revolutionary situation was thus rapidly and dramatically turned into an arena for imperialist rivalry. Under the pressure to support a Stalinist Popular Front against fascism (i.e. to take sides in an imperialist conflict) the FAI-CNT leaders famously abandoned opposition to the state to join first the Barcelona and then the central Madrid government. The revolution was called off (despite what was happening on the ground in the collectives) and in supporting the supposed anti-fascist popular front dreamed up by the Third International the Spanish working class was handed over to Russian imperialism.

Revolutionaries for the Revolution

The weakness of both those Marxists and Anarchists can be traced back to an inadequate understanding of both class and the class struggle. If you don't apply class criteria to any issue you end up in reformism. Today the statist "Marxists" still make their calls for nationalisation, for united or even popular fronts with this or that national movement to find a quick fix to arrive at what they call socialism (but we call state capitalism). As Marxists we have nothing in common with them. They do not even share our vision of a communist society. Unless we get rid of money alongside exploitation (and exploitation is not about extra-low wages but about being denied the product of your own labour), unless we create structures which replace the repressive apparatus of the state, unless we have a revolution on a world scale we cannot arrive at communism.

And this seems to be more of the real issue. Reformism is currently rearing its head in many different forms. Obviously we still have the traditional trades' union fair days' wage

demands but there is also the reformism of those who think that we can build communist economic or social bodies without destroying the power of the capitalist state.

In the current global capitalist crisis the goal of human emancipation may not be as far away as we think. Although it is possible to talk of anti-capitalism now without being seen as certifiable, as a class we have hardly started in the process of opposition. What we now have is a rich experience of 200 years of struggle. It is an experience which remains unknown to most people today. It certainly has not yet been absorbed by the majority of the world working class.

The continuing high organic composition of capital means that years of austerity will reduce still further the ability of capitalism to integrate new generations of well-educated workers into production. This will provide opportunities for revolutionaries to take that awareness of our own past to wider and wider layers of the working class. This does not mean that all we have to do is pose the question of communism as a nice idea for the future and do nothing today. Theory and practice are not separate. We have to link the struggle for communism with the deprivation that capitalism is imposing now on workers. We have to make this link to the widest possible layers of the working class. There can be no real revolutionary movement which is not solidly based in the working class itself.

But this emphasises another real divide between revolutionaries and reformists. Whilst revolutionaries are calling for us not only to fight the cuts but to fight the system that causes them the reformists at best say only “fight the cuts” or “defend the welfare state”. They don’t raise the question of the nature of the system. For the majority of those in the old labour movement from the Stalinists to the Trotskyists this is no accident. They want to support some electoral alternative to the right-wing, not a revolutionary alternative to capitalism. They still support the state as the bulwark of their socialist credentials.

And this seems to be where the real divide exists today. Anti-state and anti-capitalist revolutionaries share a similar vision of a communist society. It is time that revolutionaries recognised this distinction and recognised each other. What we don’t share is the way that might be arrived at but that is up for debate (and until there is a real class movement worthy of the name then it is an open debate). To finish with something appropriate from the SolFed pamphlet, they quote an alleged remark of Bismarck in the 1870s: “*Crowned heads, wealth and privilege may well tremble should the Black and Red ever again unite.*”

Communist Workers’ Organisation

October 2013

What We Stand For

The Communist Workers' Organisation (CWO) is part of the Internationalist Communist Tendency (ICT), which stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers' councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: we call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world working class political organisation - a 'party' for want of a better word - not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

The Internationalist Communist Tendency

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Italy: Il **Partito Comunista Internazionale** produces *Battaglia Comunista* (a monthly paper) and *Prometeo* (a quarterly theoretical journal)
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Germany: **Gruppe Internationalistischer KommunistInnen** produces *Socialismus oder Barbarei* and *Germinal*
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Canada: **Klasbatalo** produces *Mutiny/Mutinerie*, a broadsheet in English and French
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CLASS WAR

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GLASGOW

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