

The Communist Party

WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR PARTY: – The line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the Third International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy in Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalition of resistance groups – The tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personal politics and electoralist manoeuvres

Lessons from the five month miners' strike in South Africa

After a long five month battle, the momentous strike of 70,000 platinum miners in South Africa, led by AMCU (Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union), ended on June 23, 2014. Especially because of its duration and intensity, it has much to teach workers throughout the world, and not least in its further confirmation of the communist programme.

It was the longest strike in the history of the South African working class, much longer than the two most significant up to now: the strike in Durban in 1973, launched by the dockers but which spread to almost every sector; and the strike of 360,000 miners in 1987, which lasted three weeks and was led by the NUM (National Union of Mineworkers). As we have recently had cause to mention (see article in Communist Left no.33) the class struggle in South Africa, a modern industrial country, is intensifying. This struggle doesn't represent an exception but is rather one more manifestation of a general historical process: peace between the classes is impossible; it is a false and hypocritical notion used to keep the proletariat down. Class struggle remains the motor of history and the key to understanding its development, as expressed in Communist theory.

This strike has confirmed another fundamental communist position: the ending of apartheid and arrival of democracy haven't altered the wretched condition of the working class and it is still being exploited. And it couldn't be otherwise because the underlying cause is capitalism, not a particular form of government. In South Africa, as in the rest of the world, the underlying cause of all social contradictions is not race, religion, democracy or dictatorship, but the current mode of production, which is based on the division of society into the class of salaried workers on one side, today's proletarians, and the class of owners or managers of Capital on the other, the bourgeoisie. The fake workers' parties, in all countries, always try to convince the exploited masses that it is just one particular aspect of capitalism which needs sorting out, after which this society will finally be OK, even for them.

Apartheid

In South Africa as long as apartheid existed it was easy to get black proletarians to believe their miserable condition was due to the whites' racism and not the economic laws of the capitalist mode of production. But the fact is that after the ending of the racist regime in 1994 the situation of the workers failed to improve and the growth of the class struggle over recent years confirms it beyond any shadow of a doubt. Notwithstanding this, opportunism, which can be depended upon to lie, explains low salaries as a yet to be tackled legacy of the past regime, defining them as the "colonialist wages of apartheid": a typically ideological view which conceals the clear economic reasons which give rise to this condition. It is capitalism which pushes down wages! Today, in this rich and important country, a bourgeois government, made up of blacks, manages the interests not of

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whites but of national and international capital.

The magnificent battle fought by the miners also confirms our theses on trade unionism. As mentioned in earlier articles, COSATU is evidencing its pro-regime nature, same as in the other countries with large trade union organisations. With the ending of apartheid, and as a consequence of its reformist political line, which aims for an impossible reconciliation between the requirements of capitalism and the needs of the working class, it has become a pillar of capitalism, guaranteeing moderation of the workers' demands. A regime union like the CGIL in Italy or TUC in Great Britain.

500,000 workers

South Africa is a great agricultural and industrial country which produces a third of Africa's wealth. In the mines 500,000 workers are employed and many more indirectly. They are thus highly concentrated and due to extremely harsh working conditions they are the most combative sector in the country. This has made it easier for them to recognise the pro-bourgeois nature of the NUM, and of COSATU as a whole.

In 2009, Piet Matosa, president of the NUM, intervened to try and shut down a strike at Impala Platinum Holdings Ltd., the biggest platinum mine in the world, and was chased off under a hail of stones. In May 2011, in Karee Mine, the miners went out on strike not against the company but against the regional leadership of the NUM, which had suspended the strike

leaders at the mine. The AMCU thus became the main trade union in that mine. In January 2012, 4,300 rock drillers at Impala Platinum struck against a union agreement signed by the NUM which awarded a pay increase only to the higher grades. The rock drillers asked for a substantial increase to take their net pay up to 9,000 Rand. The NUM accused them of stopping others from going to work.

Machine gun fire on strikers

The struggle which marked the turning point in relations between the proletarians in the platinum mines, the NUM and the AMCU was the struggle in the following August, in which the rock drillers of the Lonmin mine in Marikana took strike action in support of a demand for a basic wage of 12,500 Rand. The NUM, which along with the mining company had declared the demand to be "unsustainable", did everything it could to break the strike, and during the first three days of the strike there were ten casualties. On 16 August, the sixth day of the strike, the police opened fire with machine guns and killed 34 workers. The bloody massacre serves as a clear demonstration of the bourgeois continuity from the previous regime through to the new post-apartheid regime: a black government with a black police force repressing the black working masses. The only difference is that democratic South Africa can no longer disguise class oppression as racial discrimination.

Despite the 'Marakana Massacre' as it has since become

known, the strike continued for a further four weeks, spreading to other mines, and not just those mining platinum. On September 18 the Lonmin miners of Marikana accepted an increase of 22%, taking their pay up to around 5,500 Rand (\$485). This result, which however would only be partially conceded by the company, fell far short of the workers' demands, but the courage and determination shown by the miners was such that their sense of unity would remain intact despite the only partial nature of their victory. As the 1848 Communist Manifesto explains, the most important result of workers' struggles is not the contingent economic benefits they bring, but rather the strengthening of proletarian unity and organisation.

The democratic electoral circus is useful to the bourgeoisie because it disguises the underlying dictatorship of capital, persuading the workers they have a say in things

It marked the end of the NUM in the platinum mines. The AMCU became the biggest union in the Amplats (60%), Impala and Lonmin mines (66%).

In 2013, from the strikes in May at Lonmin to the strikes in September at Amplats, both led by the AMCU, there was a steady stream of victims in the Marikana area in the struggle between members of the NUM and those of the AMCU.

On 23 January of this year, a year and four months after the Marikana Massacre, the miners went out on strike again to fight for their original objective: basic pay of 12,500 Rand. To begin with the mining companies

went out on strike again to fight for their original objective: basic pay of 12,500 Rand. To begin with the mining companies agreed to open a dialogue with the AMCU, but once they saw how resolute the union was, after it rejected their ridiculous offer, they shut down negotiations. On 29 April thousands of miners, summoned to the Wonderkop Stadium in Marikana by the AMCU, rejected the company's latest offer.

The NUM and COSATU openly declared their opposition to the strike and went about organising blacklegs. On May 1st, at the COSATU demonstration in the Olympia Park Stadium in Rustenberg, 30 kilometres to the east of Marikana, the president of the NUM declared: "We appeal to all workers to go back to work; this strike is against the economy of our country".

At the end of April the ANC office in Marikana was attacked and set on fire. The presence in the area of the President of the Republic, Zuma, campaigning for re-election, was confirmed right up to the last minute, to demonstrate there was nowhere in the country he couldn't go, but in the end the visit was cancelled. The provincial head of the ANC declared that the decision was made in order not to favour "anarchists and their initiatives". On 5 May, for the first time since the struggle had begun, Zuma got directly involved in the matter and issued a condemnation of the strike. On 7 May the elections went ahead and the ANC-SACP governmental coalition was confirmed.

Electoral circus

The democratic electoral circus is useful to the bourgeoisie because it disguises the underlying dictatorship of capital, persuading the workers they have a say in things, but once it was over the anti-proletarian front composed of Government, State and bourgeois trade unions passed openly on to the attack. The platinum mining companies sent telephone messages to the miners in which each of them were asked if they accepted the pay agreement rejected by the AMCU or not. This was a way of circumventing the union by dealing with the workers individually and then, justified through their use of the ideological weapon of democratic consultation, putting themselves in a better position to organise blacklegs. The companies' declared intention, backed by the NUM, was to see the majority of the miners return to work by 14 May. The AMCU stood firm. It urged the workers not to allow themselves to be intimidated and organised demonstrations to block the roads giving access to the mines. This led to the first confrontations with the police, resulting in injuries and arrests. On 14 May thousands of miners once again filled the Wonderkop Stadium in Marikana, providing a great show of strength.

There have been various battles resulting in casualties between the striking miners and the NUM blacklegs. In the platinum mines this union's power is now compromised but it continues to exert an influence in the coal, gold and diamond mines. This has prevented the strike from

spreading to other miners, which would surely have allowed greater success. The same goes for the rest of the working class, controlled by COSATU, in which there have been no cases of organisation and struggle outside and against this confederation comparable to AMCU's initiative.

The 70,000 platinum miners have thus struggled heroically for five months on their own, isolated from the other miners and from the rest of the working class. The attempt by AMCU to extent the strike to the gold mines was blocked by the Labour Court which declared the action illegal; just one more fact confirming the bourgeois nature of the South African, democratic post-apartheid regime.

The Court's sentence was condemned by the leaders of the NUMSA, the metal-workers' federation within COSATU, which was expelled from the Confederation last November. This is a matter of no small importance which we will return to in the future. After the NUM's loss of more than 50,000 of its members to the AMCU, the NUMSA had become the biggest federation within the COSATU, organising around 270,000 workers. In December 2013, in anticipation of the political elections in the following May, it withdrew its support from the ANC-SACP governmental alliance and thus lined up against its own confederation. After the elections, which confirmed the previous government in place, the NUMSA called for an extraordinary congress of the COSATU, which never took

place.

NUMISA calls off strike

The NUMSA's conduct was ambiguous. In the refinery and smelting works of the Amplats (Anglo American Platinum) mine, where the workers had still not gone out on strike with the miners, on 2 February the NUMSA initiated a strike of 1,800 workers but instead of taking up AMCU's demand for a basic salary of 12,500 Rand it called for a lower increase. On 17 March it called a general strike in the sector but again for demands which were extraneous to the ongoing miners' struggle. Three days later, on 20 March, The NUMSA called off the strike after it accepted a deal agreeing pay increases for its members in the Amplats refinery and smelting works. In a communiqué in early April it declared that due to the length of the strike an unspecified number of miners were abandoning the ACMU in order to join not the NUM but the NUMSA.

During the five month miners' strike the NUMSA did nothing to support them. In May it declared, in the face of rising tension, that it would consider the possibility of calling a strike in solidarity with the miners, but first it wanted to take the proposal to the COSATU's central committee. A move, therefore, which was more to do with promoting itself than anything else. Insofar as the NUMSA is the biggest federation within the COSATU and organises an entire sector, the metalworkers' which, along with the miners, represent the core of the working class, it thus caused a rup-

ture within the working class and isolated the strike. This appears even more evident if we consider that the NUMSA waited for the miners' strike to end, which eventually happened on 23 June, before launching its own general metalworkers strike on 1 July! The unity of the two struggles would have inflicted a mortal blow to the resistance of the mining and industrial companies and ensured a great victory for all workers. The NUMSA was careful to prevent that unity from occurring. And that counts for much, much more than all its bombastic declarations and professed eagerness to take part in congressional debates. Facts are stubborn, as Lenin used to say.

There is something else that is important. Since 2012 the platinum miners, organised first in struggle committees than in the AMCU, have been demanding a basic salary of 12,500 Rand, around 890 Euros. The NUMSA called the metalworkers out on strike on 1 July for a basic salary of 5,600 Rand. This indicates two things: firstly the modesty of the claim, compatible with capitalist interests, and indeed supported by COSATU; secondly that the metalworkers' are paid about the same as the miners, and therefore the battle for a basic wage of 12,550 Rand was entirely their battle as well.

This situation and the trade union struggles in South Africa confirm both the tendency of the trade unions to submit to the bourgeois regime, a defining characteristic of capitalism in its imperialist phase and considered by our party to have be-

come more or less entrenched in the post-Second World War period; and the consequent spontaneous reaction to reconstruct the trade union organisation through class struggle, either by means of an internal struggle within the unions subservient to the regime, or through an organisation outside and against them. The party cannot always predict which of these two roads the movement will take but the activity of the militants within the movement enable it to study at close quarters the spontaneous defensive stance which the class takes, the aim being to predict the difficulties and modalities which might occur in subsequent phases of the class's contingent defensive battle and to prepare for it in advance, and to chart a course that doesn't contradict with the general revolutionary deployment directed by the Party.

“Anti-communist”

To the AMCU goes the great merit of having led with great courage and determination the longest strike in the history of South Africa, refusing to give in to the intimidation of the mining companies and the bourgeois regime. This union has earned the trust of the miners. The trade union committees in the various mines, which were associated with the NUM to begin with and then detached themselves in order to conduct the struggle on their own, eventually joined the AMCU. About this union however we still know very little. Due to the fact it is fighting against COSATU, and in particular the NUM, which is influenced by the fake South

African communist party, it is held to be 'anti-communist'. Its leader, Joseph Mathunjwa, is a fervent Christian. The political line which a trade union takes cannot but influence its actions, for good or for ill. The leadership of the AMCU declares itself to be 'apolitical'. But 'politics' is just the expression of the conflicting class interests: there can be no 'apoliticism' in a society divided into classes. Anyone who declares him or herself to be apolitical, and thus rejects communist political principles, ends up embracing bourgeois principles. For example, at the end of the strike Mathunjwa addressed thousands of workers gathered in the Rustenberg Stadium with the following words: "Comrades, you have made South African history: this victory is not ours alone but the entire country's". This is already a political declaration, in which a bourgeois political principle is enunciated.

Strikes "damage capital"

Maybe the head of the AMCU was responding to the industrialists who accused the strikers of damaging the national economy. But the strikers were right to do precisely that! Strikes always damage companies and countries, in a word, they damage capital. On 16 June the international finance agency Fitch lowered its forecast from stable to negative because "the prospects for growth in South Africa are threatened above all by the miners' strike which for five months has been weakening the platinum industry". A few hours later the sister agencies, Standard & Poor's and Moodys, did the same. In the first quarter

of 2014 the GDP fell for the first time since the recession in 2009, by 0.6%, with manufacturing activity down by 4.4% and mining by 24.7%.

The miners' struggle undoubtedly did contribute to the economic recession in South Africa, but, rather than being a negative factor for the working class this in fact serves to demonstrate its power and strength, confirming the communist argument that the workers' struggle shouldn't defend the national economy because it is necessarily opposed to it: national economy equals capitalism. The only honest, consistent and effective response to the inevitable bourgeois anger against the strikers, who have been publicly vilified as defeatists as regards to the national interest, lies not in trying to deny the evidence for this accusation, but in defending the assertion that if the national economy is hit by the workers' struggles it can only be to the workers' advantage because it favours the political collapse of the capitalist regime and therefore the revolutionary conquest of power. To defend this view means stepping outside the sphere of 'trade-unionism', which doesn't actually exist in isolation. But the fact remains: only after the system as a whole has been brought down and replaced will it be possible to finally respond properly to the needs of working humanity rather than those of the profit mongers; and this will involve subverting the function of productive activity and organising it in a rational way, according to a global plan, and certainly not restricting it within national borders, which for a long time have

been far too restrictive for capitalism itself and used by the latter merely to divide and oppress the working class.

A victory for the international working class

This victory of the miners, but even more the actual struggle itself, has taken on an importance that goes way beyond the particular workers who took part in it, the platinum miners, but it certainly won't be 'the country' – all the classes in South Africa, that is -- which will have cause to celebrate it; rather it is a victory for the entire South African and international working class.

It could be that the AMCU's failure to extend the strike beyond the platinum belt to other mines was due to timidity or a lack of decisiveness. We certainly haven't come across any appeals by AMCU inviting other miners to join the strike. If their stance derives from a wish not to cause too much damage, through the mobilisation of other workers, to the national economy, then we can already see how the union's policy of wishing to remain apolitical is affecting its actions: by effectively blocking the unification of the working class struggle. Clearly the AMCU will have to solve this knotty problem soon, and the way it does so will see it either continuing on the path of defence of working class interests, or taking the path of defence of capital's interests, onto which the COSATU has already turned.

Compromise

The strike was concluded with a

a compromise, presented as a victory by the AMCU, although it appears it has met with a positive response from the strikers. The original demand for a basic wage of 12,500 Rand, involving a pay hike of 125%, wasn't achieved. Instead it was agreed there would be an incremental agreement stretching over three years, at the end of which basic pay would be 8,900 Rand (630 Euro), a 46% rise. The increases are greatest for the worst paid categories, which is a positive thing because reducing wage differentials helps to unify workers (In Italy Cisl, Uil and Cgil, including Fiom, are applying the opposite principle: bigger increases for the workers who are already earning more, and less for those on a lower wage).

Beyond the economic outcome of any workers' struggle we should always remember that the fundamental result is whether there is a lessening or increase of workers' unity, i.e. in their organised strength in view of the battle to come. This unity will soon be put to the test in the struggles already announced, after the Lonmin mining company declared on 25 August, in response to the recent pay increases, that it would be sack- ing 5,700 workers, which corresponds to 21% of the company's labour force in South Africa. This is not long after the latest unemployment figures were announced on 29 July, now risen to the highest ever of 29.5%.

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In response to the sharpening of the class struggle this bourgeois regime in democratic garb is preparing to take remedial action, and already various of its representatives have expressed themselves in favour of a law to limit the duration of strikes, with State arbitration being imposed after a certain length of time: Mildred Oliphant, the minister of labour, declared that "The government has to intervene. We cannot have strikes of this length in our country; where mediation isn't possible it must be imposed by arbitration". As we can see, when it's a matter of class struggle, democracy quickly reveals its true, bourgeois nature.

On 1 July the NUMSA strike began. This too was a long strike, which held out for four weeks until 28 July. The works of Toyota in Durban, Ford in Pretoria and General Motors in Port Elizabeth, to name just the biggest, were shut down. Contrary to what happened in the Miners' strike, which had every possible obstacle placed in its path, the strike received the support of the COSATU and its federations, amongst which the NUM, which naturally limited its involvement to solemn declarations. This may be explained by the sense of responsibility its leaders feel towards Capital,

and this, as we have seen, emerges from the very modest nature of its economic demands.

Another sign of this emerges from the declaration of the NUMSA's National Executive Committee at the start of the mobilisation: "The strike was a painful, not an easy, decision. "Organising a strike was never on our agenda; it was imposed on us. We use the strike as part of a tactic whose aim is to put pressure on the bosses to return to the table with an offer which is acceptable to our members". A conciliatory tone analogous to that of the trade unions in Italy.

Rebuild class-based trade unions

The NUMSA fights against what it calls "colonial apartheid wages", following an opportunist formulation which attributes the cause of low salaries not to capitalism but to a worse form of it, even if it was liquidated twenty years ago. The problem for workers, in a nutshell, is their pay, which national and international capitalism is forcing down. And the workers certainly won't be able to fight against low pay if they are led by unions who are scared of using the strike weapon!

In South Africa, then, same as everywhere else in the world, the struggle between wage labour and capital involves the rebuilding of a trade union organisation which expresses the interests of its working class membership, not those of capital and the nation.

Workers have nothing to lose but their chains and a world to win

May Day 2015

As capitalism prepares for a new world war it has nothing to offer the proletariat but poverty. The workers must defend their standard of living today so they can destroy the global power of capitalism tomorrow!

May Day is the day on which workers throughout the world, overcoming the barriers of nation, race and religion, confirm that they are joined together as one class, are united by the same interests, and are fighting the same battle to free themselves from exploitation and poverty.

May Day 2015 finds proletarians everywhere in a situation which has been getting worse and worse for years due to the crisis of world capitalism.

Bourgeois propaganda is keen to exaggerate the small signs of recovery in industrial production emerging in the United States and has announced that the crisis is over, when in fact it is only just beginning; already it is spreading and deepening and now it is hitting China. All the financial measures carried out by the United States, Japan, China and Europe to 'kick start' production will only result in a new financial bubble that will burst in a few months' time, and which will be much worse than the one in 2008, which made the comatose state of the capitalist economy abundantly clear in the middle of a major crisis of over-production.

This crisis, which has been forecast and expected by revolutionary Marxism as an inevitable consequence of the capitalist system of production, has already thrown tens of millions of proletarians out of work throughout the world, pushed down wages, and resulted in the dismantling of the so-called 'Welfare State'. And competition between workers will keep on making the situation worse if the class proves unable to prevent it by mobilising against it, by means of reorganisation and class struggle.

The economic crisis is also intensifying the clashes between imperialist states, great and small, who are competing to: acquire new markets where they can sell off their surplus production; to control the areas rich in the raw materials needed to reproduce capital; and to position themselves strategically in anticipation of the third world war. The war to control the sources of oil, which the 'terrorists' are fighting, financed by the opposing imperialist centres, has devastated the entire Middle East, and in particular, Iraq, Syria and Libya, and has forced tens of thousands of refugees to abandon their homes fearing for their lives. The contest between the old and the new imperialist powers is also spreading to Africa.

Europe has seen war return to its eastern borders. A few years ago national and religious divisions served as the pretext for the partition of Yugoslavia. Today, the fragility of the Ukrainian state has allowed the United States to interpose itself between Germany and Russia and provoke bloody clashes, which yet again seek to divide the proletariat and harness it to the interests of the various bourgeois States.

In the Far East the arms race embarked upon by bourgeois and capitalist China, which is committed to gaining control of an area commensurate with its economic power by shattering the equilibrium established at the end of the second imperialist war, is bringing it into conflict with the neighbouring states of Taiwan, Japan, the Philippines, South Korea and Vietnam; and in open defiance of the United States, which dominates the surrounding seas with its atomic fleets.

The bourgeois myths of progressive disarmament and of peaceful coexistence between states, which have somehow survived two deadly world wars, are belied by the continual increase in armaments production, including atomic weapons, and by the increasingly violent clashes between the imperial juggernauts, even if for now they are being conducted as proxy wars between mercenary and irregular forces, such as the Islamic State militias.

The small States are the first to pay the price of this power politics; however, the proletariat in these countries, and internationally, mustn't allow itself to get drawn into the defence of national interests, as for example the 'left-wing' government is attempting to do in Greece, by stoking up patriotism and resistance to the economic aggression of Germany, or as the Chavist government is attempting to do in Venezuela, against United States imperialism. And when a war is already taking place the proletariat shouldn't feel it has to line up on one of the two opposing bourgeois fronts as is happening, for example, in Palestine, where the only revolutionary perspective is that of a single working-class State opposed to both the Israeli and the Arabic bourgeoisie, who have been using proletarians as cannon fodder for decades, although mainly Palestinian proletarians for sure.

Only with its own party, founded on a sound theory of its own, which encompasses a comprehensive vision of the world which we call Marxism, will the working class be able to repel these opportunist influences and the corrupting ideologies of the enemy classes; only then will it be a class that can fight for its own interests. This party is the revolutionary and internationalist Communist Party, which from the very outset rejected all the bourgeoisie's false principles, above all democracy, in the knowledge that the engine of history is powered not by opinions, but by class struggle

The bourgeoisie will never relinquish its miserable privileges unless forced to do so. It prefers war, so it is up to the global proletariat to take up the challenge: by engaging in an economic war to defend wages, organised in genuine class trade unions, against the economic war of the bourgeoisie to defend its profits; by engaging in the revolutionary class war against the wars between bourgeois national states, and organised and led by its own united and disciplined international communist party.

We don't know how long the death throes of the capitalist beast will last, but what we do know, drawing largely on the lessons of the past century, is that the organs of the revolution, that is Party and trade union, must have prepared themselves well before the revolutionary crisis breaks out, in order to be recognised and utilised by the class. Working to form the political and defensive organs of the working class today, in the midst of the enduring counter-revolution is already communism, is already revolution.

This party already exists in embryonic form today, as the International Communist Party.

International Communist Party

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Pioltello (Italy), 8 June, 2014

For the Territorial reorganisation of the Working Class

When workers set out on the road of class struggle – which is what the workers organised by the SI Cobas at Dielle, at Caat in Turin, at IKEA in Piacenza, at Granarolo in Bologna, at Carrefour, at SDA and in many other battles have done – it soon becomes very apparent that an entire anti-proletarian system has been installed to bring proletarians into submission to capitalist exploitation: the various businesses respond to the struggles with reprisals and sack trade union militants; the regime trade unions support them by trying to break strikes, dividing the workers and organising blacklegs; the bourgeois State sends in its police force to break up the picket lines.

Against all these enemies the workers can count only on their own forces. These forces, when restricted to within one company, may temporarily get the better of their bosses in the odd battle here or there, but they can never achieve victory in the long-term. CLASS UNITY is the way to working-class victory, which starts in the workplace but can only be achieved by

breaking out of it, by extending beyond the narrow confines of the firm, and of the sector, and by breaking down the barriers of sex, race and nation, all of which are divisions which only serve capitalism.

UNITY OF THE WORKERS becomes a reality when there is UNITY DURING STRIKES: when workers express solidarity with other sections of workers when they are under attack and take action to support them; at which point a strike is no longer considered a private matter of employees in a particular firm, but rather as a flame to ignite the struggles of more and more workers.

For this to happen there has to be an organisation which is fit for purpose, a trade union which can express class demands, a CLASS TRADE UNION. One which:
– Puts up an intransigent defence of workers' interests, that is, which doesn't subordinate them to either the firm or the national economy (that is, to national and international capitalism);

– which doesn't accept limitations on the use of the strike weapon in exchange for so-called rights (recognition, representation): the bosses only negotiate with a genuine trade union if they are forced to do so; they'd far prefer to sit round the table with their official union accomplices.

In order to develop the unity of wage-earners, whether working or not, the class union must as far as possible be organised not at the level of the workplace or company, but at the territorial level, as in the glorious tradition of the original Camere del Lavoro. A Centre for the Proletariat:

– In which workers meet as members of one class, not as employees of a firm, so they can strengthen the ties of brother/sister hood;

– Which functions as a meeting place for the many workers who work for small companies, the majority in fact, who are isolated from those in the big and medium firms; and also for the ever more numerous unemployed, and thus rekindles their sense of belonging to a class;

– Which becomes the organisational centre for territorial mobilisations of the working class;

– Which becomes point of reference for the many struggles occurring in crisis-hit firms which are today pre-

vented from linking up by the regime trade unions.

– Which promotes the proletarian united front from below through the formation of struggle committees in each firm, which workers can belong to whatever union they are in, and which is tasked with wrenching the leadership of struggles from the regime unions and from the domesticated representative bodies (RSU).

The network created by these territorial structures of the proletarian struggle will form the effective living body of the re-born CLASS UNION.

– LONG LIVE THE STRUGGLE OF THE DIELLE WORKERS!

– FOR THE EXTENSION AND STRENGTHENING OF THE SI COBAS!

– FOR A CENTRE OF THE PROLETARIAT IN PIOLTELLO!

– FOR THE REBIRTH OF THE CLASS UNION!

A Report on Rank and File Movements in Italy

Dear M.

In response to your very reasonable comment that there needs to be more focus on the 'difficulties of organisational steps on the shop floor', a comrade sent me the following commentary and update which hopefully you will find addresses that point to a certain extent. We hope you find it useful.

The SI Cobas was born as a split from another Rank & File (R&F) union - the SLAI Cobas - in 2010.

The SLAI Cobas had already organised some workers in a couple of warehouses but not much more.

The SI Cobas has been able to build up a workers movement in the logistics sector, spreading to a good number of warehouses in some regions of Italy: mainly in Lombardia and Emilia Romagna (North Italy); then in Turin; more weakly in Lazio (centre Italy) and Campania (South Italy).

In another region in the North East of Italy, the Veneto (of which the regional capital is Venice) we have a similar R&F union, the ADL Cobas, based in Padova.

We can consider this union 'a sister' of SI Cobas since they co-ordinate their strikes, demonstrations and national agreements.

But the ADL Cobas arose many years earlier, in 1992, and it seems less combative than the SI Cobas.

In spite of having been around since 1992, it isn't achieving the same success as the SI Cobas, only spreading across the Veneto and a bit into Romagna (the eastern part of Emilia Romagna) and to a warehouse in Parma (Emilia)

The SI Cobas R&F union managed to achieve what no one other R&F union had been able to achieve before (with the partial exception of COMU in the railways): it started to organize strikes in a substantial number of companies and managed to organize a first general strike in March 2013 and then another four, really af-

fecting the sector.

On 19th February of this year the SI Cobas achieved a national agreement with three big international corporations (TNT, GLS, Bartolini).

This is a result no other R&F union has ever managed to achieve before: to obtain a national agreement on its own, without the regime unions; and, what is more, to obtain a signed agreement that improves workers' conditions in the midst of an economic crisis in which agreements in all other sectors have agreed to worse conditions.

How has it been possible to achieve this result?

The first reason is the workers themselves. These workers, mainly immigrants (although there are also some Italians), want to fight, are ready to go out on strike and hold out, to picket, and fight the police.

They belong to that part of the Italian working class whose conditions are worst.

So the SI Cobas achieved a success because it organises workers' energies effectively; an already existing workers' strength and energy.

Our direct experience in Turin in the CAAT (agroindustrial market) confirms this view: the SI Cobas' militant just went up to the entrance of CAAT and gave flyers to the workers.

Many workers stopped to speak with these militants because they were fed up with their awful working conditions. A spontaneous meeting took place.

Then a meeting in the SI Cobas headquarters was organised with some of these workers and a strike was decided upon. It was May 2014 (http://www.international-communist-party.org/Partito/Parti366.htm#RG_Sind). After this successful strike (involving clashes with the police) a group of about 40/50 workers of CAAT began to attend meetings at the SI Cobas HQ on a regular basis and affiliated to this union.

But why did SI Cobas achieve this result and not the other Italian R&F unions?

That is the question!

Also after the SI Cobas began to spread in the logistics sector (in 2010), showing that it was possible to organize a working class

fight there, the other R&F unions somehow weren't able to keep up with it, to do the same. I think the reason is that the SI Cobas has been ready to organize really determined strikes, with picket lines, as opposed to what the other R&F unions have been doing, which is saying they want to organise workers struggles but being too frightened to actual do it.

The strikes organized by the SI Cobas really get results.

In some warehouses workers improved their really awful conditions.

These workers began to talk about these achievements with their friends.

And thus SI Cobas began to spread.

Workers go to SI Cobas and explain their problems.

The SI Cobas sends a letter to the company, but usually the company doesn't reply to a union it doesn't recognize.

So the SI Cobas organises a strike with a picket line.

The SI Cobas attempts to organise the picket line not just with the workers of the particular company but with workers of other companies, to build class unity, to lend more strength to the picket line.

But there is not always a happy ending! Sometimes the strike is won and the SI Cobas is recognised by the company and a satisfactory agreement is signed.

But more often than not the companies, once the agreement is signed, fire the workers organised in the SI Cobas.

For this reason SI Cobas has organised a number of fights against these layoffs.

Some times it has won. Sometimes not.

To support these fights the SI Cobas has created a fund so it can give money to the workers who have been fired, but this has created financial problems.

Another problem is about the nature of the national agreement achieved this February.

It is a success as far as the economic part is concerned: workers improve their conditions with it.

But the agreement also includes a section that limits the freedom to strike.

That, clearly, is a compromise.

And we aren't necessarily against certain compromises.

But not all compromises are acceptable.

We need to know more about the situation.

Linked to these two problems - the financial one and the issue of compromises - is the question of the way workers' pay their monthly subscription to the union. This is the the well known question of the DELEGA.

The SI Cobas is certainly different from other R&F unions in terms of its readiness to take strike action, etc - as I have tried to explain - but is not so different as regards 'the delega': it too wants to utilize this facility, the payment of the monthly quota through the company .

So there are two problems:

1) the companies know who is affiliated to the SI Cobas and therefore know who to fire; as they have done on many occasions;

2) there are some companies that won't pay organisation the collection of union dues through the Delega system..

On the 1st, 2nd and 3rd May there will be the first national congress of SI Cobas.

For Contact:and details of the Party's publications, including **Communist Left** our review in English, and our press in Italian and Spanish

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