

# The Communist Party

Paper of the International Communist Party

40p / 60c / 6Kr

***What distinguishes our party:*** the line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the III International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy at 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 personalized politics and electoralist manoeuvrings.

## SDA – Roma            The CGIL attack picketing strikers

Against the background of the bitter struggle, from 22 April to 20 May, in which the organised porters in the SI Cobas clashed with SDA Express Courier (a company within the Italian Postal Group) and in particular in one of its three main national hubs (logistical centres), that of the Sala Bolognese, a strike would be organised on the night of the May the 18<sup>th</sup> in their two Rome warehouses. In the larger one – which is the other national hub, along with the Carpiano hub in Milan – most of the porters are organised in the SI Cobas. In the smaller one, called Roma-1, the Si Cobas is instead in the minority.

The workers assembled in front of the warehouse at around four in the morning. At seven O'Clock, a large group of drivers, headed by the managers from the cooperatives and an SDA official, launched an attack on the picket line, armed with telescopic truncheons, crash helmets and other gear. The striking workers fought back and a harsh struggle ensued, with injuries on both sides, the most serious of which was to a striker, who risks losing an eye. The blacklegs managed to break the picket line, interposing themselves between it and the main gate. Nevertheless the strikers didn't disperse and occupied the street. The forces of order then stepped in and after an hour or so forced the porters to fall back. The strike however continued to the end of the shift, forcing the drivers to load up their vehicles themselves.

It isn't the first time that workers in a strike organised by the SI Cobas have found themselves facing attacks by gangs of blacklegs. It happened recently at the Rhiag di Siziano (Pavia) on 26 March. On that occasion the blacklegs, who were forced back, were led by some UGL delegates. But this time most of them were members of the CGIL, *something which the FILT CGIL Lazio - the CGIL's drivers' union - has admitted and defended*, and which the higher echelons of the union haven't denied.

In response to this attack the SI Cobas organised a demonstration on 8 June at the SDA warehouse with a very successful procession which was mainly composed of workers. The following leaflet was distributed during this demonstration:

**Rome, Monday, June 8, 2015**

## Defending and organizing the workers' struggle

When workers are really fighting – with **hard strikes**, to the bitter end, with pickets to block goods and strike-breakers, joining together outside and above the level of the firm – it becomes immediately clear who their enemies are and also who are their false friends.

**Inside: P. 3 First Congress of SI Cobas – Our Comrade's Intervention: P. 10 Our leaflet at the SI Cobas demonstration in defence of migrants: P. 11 Germany – GDL betrays train drivers**

The workers in the cooperatives in the logistics sector, organized by **SI Cobas**, have learnt this by harsh experience: in five years of struggles they have faced retaliation by the employers and repression from their state with dismissals, beatings by the police, and by the bosses' hired heavies, arrests, trials, and even expulsions orders on activists and leaders of the union. Nevertheless, the movement of workers' struggle, thanks to the generous struggles of workers, has been constantly strengthened.

This shows which side these false trade unions are on. But it is also proof of their weakness, confronted with the workers movement in the logistics sector and its union, in a phase of rapid expansion.

The FILT CGIL accused the SI Cobas – in its struggle which began on April 22 and concluded, for the time being, on May 20 – of jeopardizing the jobs of SDA direct employees, and causing heavy losses for the company. Instead of taking advantage of the struggle of the porters to get other workers in the group to go on strike and achieve improvements for all, the CGIL counter-posed the interests of workers who were relatively better off to those of the lowest paid, who are the ones in struggle.

Not only that. SDA is owned by the Italian Post Office which is about to conduct an attack on its employees through a restructuring plan. A true working class trade union would try to get not only the drivers of the logistic cooperatives and direct employees of SDA to join with the porters' struggle, but also the post office workers. The action of the SI Cobas has taken this road, giving support in Bologna to the regional postal strike proclaimed by the SLC-CGIL. In Rome, the response of the FILT CGIL has been to defend those of its members who have not hesitated to attack striking workers with batons.

The silence of the confederal CGIL, local and national, as of its territorial structures in the different categories, from which not a single voice of condemnation has been heard, confirms this union's approval of the leaders of the FILT CGIL Lazio in defending the actions of their members' pickets. This is yet another example, and a very serious one, which should serve to show those few,

Workers have also had to fight against an even more insidious enemy: the **regime unions** (CGIL, CISL, UIL, UGL). These false unions are agents of the employers in the ranks of the working class: using every means to break up the fight, organizing strike-breaking, relying on false divisions among workers.

At Rhiag Siziano (Pavia), at the end of March, the tinpot leaders of the UGL led an attack on the picket of striking workers. At SDA in Rome the assailants were members instead of the FILT CGIL Lazio, which infamously defended and justified their shameful and cowardly action.

within the minority current of the CGIL, who gave their support to the strikers of the SDA in Rome, and that the CGIL is irreversibly a regime union and that the class-based union will be reborn **OUTSIDE** and **AGAINST** the present union.

For the workers the way forward is that taken in recent years by the SI Cobas, which to its great credit has united in struggle workers regardless of differences of race, nation or religion, and promoted unity and solidarity among workers: the strike as the one way to defend oneself; unity of the struggles over and above the divisions of the shop, company and category! participation in strikes regardless of the union that calls them, even if by the CGIL, because the unity of the workers is the best weapon against the regime trade unionism! What is more, there must be an uncompromising rejection of any pact with employers which links the *recognition* of the union to the limitation of the **freedom to strike**; a pact which he **Confederation Cobas**, the **ADL Cobas** and, lastly, the **USB**, have already, criminally, made.

If today the SDA drivers accept the divisions instigated by the company and by the CGIL, tomorrow (as the GLS Rome drivers already have done) they will join the struggle of their class, organized in a real **UNION OF THE CLASS**, which organises proletarians above every company division, and above class, race, nationality, religion and political opinion.

This organization of struggle, to fulfil the immediate economic needs of the working class, is the best and necessary precondition for victory on the political level, for the overthrow of the capitalist system, which necessitates instead the **revolutionary and internationalist Communist Party**.

# First congress of the SI Cobas

## Our comrade's intervention

The first national congress of the SI Cobas (Sindacato Intercategoriale Cobas) was held in Bologna, the 1, 2 and 3 May 2015. It was preceded by provincial congresses in Milan, Brescia, Turin, Bologna and other cities. Our comrades attended the provincial congress in Turin, and took part in the national one on May 2nd and on the afternoon of the final day, which was dedicated to the work of political organizations, trade unions and social movements outside the union.

In Turin, the union's activities locally began in October 2011, but it really took off with the strike in the general markets (CAAT) on 22 May 2014. At the provincial congress one of our comrades intervened, stressing the necessity, as we have done repeatedly up to now, of the need to act on the proposal of forming a provincial coordination of the union's most active workers and delegates, giving priority to inter-company meetings, as against meetings limited to the employees of a single company. The historical experience to which we are drawing the attention of the organized labour movement is that of the original Chambers of Labour, which arose and developed in the late nineteenth century and first two decades of the twentieth century: territorial entities in which the defensive struggle of the workers is organised and where they meet as members of a single class, strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and burying one of the main obstacles to class unity: 'companyism', that is, putting the firm's interests first.

In our intervention at the congress in Bologna on May 3, we confined ourselves to a few essential points:

1) the merits of the SI Cobas: real willingness to organize the class defensive struggle, trade union activity aimed at overcoming 'companyism', tactical policy of united front from below;

2) the need to give greater impetus to trade unions in overcoming 'companyism' by basing the union's structure on its territorial organisations, and ratifying this line by replacing section 5.1 of the SI-Cobas Charter, which states "*The Base Committee (Cobas) is the backbone of the SI COBAS*" with the phrase "*The union was founded in the workplaces in which the Cobas arose, but its backbone consists of its inter-regional bodies, the provincial committees*";

3) direct collection of union dues, abandoning the anti-class method of entrusting their collection to the company, by deductions from the pay packet ('check-in').

For reasons of time, and above all due to the tiredness of those present as the end of the third day of the Congress approached, we shortened our intended contribution, which is given in full here, and adapted it

after listening to the closing speech of the National Coordinator of the SI Cobas; which, in response to around twenty of the afternoon's interventions, and without referring to issues which had already been covered, explained clearly the characteristics which the leadership intends to impress on this trade union movement.

\* \* \*

In our Party press, which is international too, for some time we have been reporting on the activity of the SI Cobas – about the struggles at Esselunga of Pioltello in late 2011 and early 2012, which led to the first national demonstration on 1 May of that year in Pioltello, and the strike in Basiano and clashes with the security forces in the following June – and how it has developed, commenting on the major battles. Many comrades remember our interventions in them.

We are very enthusiastic about this organized movement of a part of the working class in Italy and attach great importance to it.

## The SI Cobas and class trade unionism

For the first time in the history of the difficult process of the rebirth of the class union – which for nearly 40 years

we have been saying may happen outside of and against the regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL and UGL) – from

its first steps in the latter half of 1970, which then bore fruit in the emergence of various Base Unions in the 80s and early 90s, one of these organizations, the SI Cobas, which emerged as recently as 2010, from a split in the SLAI Cobas, has at last managed to organize an authentic labour movement across an entire category of the working class, the logistics sector.

Despite its positive experiences, and there has been no lack of them, it is only now that the grassroots unions movement has achieved such a result, either because its power base was restricted to a small number of companies, such as the SLAI Cobas in Alfa at Pomigliano and Arese, or because, after slow organizational growth, the result of episodic and rarefied waves of working class struggle over the past three decades, there followed decline and stagnation. In general, the grassroots unions failed to take over the leadership of the struggle from the confederal unions, or only episodically.

The general strikes in logistics organized by the SI Cobas have really hit the activity of the sector as whole, unlike those of the rest of the grassroots unions, whose strikes have almost always been minority ones, reduced to mere demonstrations of opinion rather than trials of strength with the employers.

The SI Cobas has not only proved capable of organising these mobilisations. It has achieved a result well beyond what the grassroots unions have managed to achieve up to now, forcing international companies, such as SDA, TNT, GLS and Bartolini, to negotiate with it, and to sign a national agreement which replaces and wins greater concessions than the previous agreement, signed on February 13, 2014 by the confederations - Filt-CGIL, FIT-CISL, UIL Uilt - with Fedit and Confetra, two bosses unions in logistics.

What is interesting, apart from the results themselves, is how they came about.

It is true that the other base unions are organized in sectors of the working class which are currently less combative than the one in which the SI Cobas has taken root, sectors within which the oppression of the regime unions is far more suffocating. This same SI Cobas, where it is present in other sectors – such as the tram drivers, metalworkers, hospital workers, civil servants, post office workers - hasn't managed to organize protests comparable to those in logistics.

The SI Cobas's strength lies in its capacity to fight with the methods of genuine class struggle: all-out strikes, pickets - who have engaged in harsh battles with the

police - creation of a resistance fund to support striking and sacked workers. The SI Cobas has not been afraid to organise such struggles nor allowed itself to be intimidated by the reaction of the bosses with layoffs, threats, beatings from their henchmen, and those of their state, with massive deployments of security forces at the work-place gates, denunciations, arrests, trials, and expulsion orders issued by the management. The other base unions, though all of them say they are committed to class struggle as opposed to conciliation, haven't, in general, managed to summon up resistance on this scale.

Regarding SI Cobas action, we note two other merits of great importance.

The first is the desire to overcome one of the biggest and most insidious obstacles to the unity of the working class: companyism. This necessity, this fundamental notion of class struggle, of working class organisation, emerged from the interventions made at the conference on Saturday. To this end the SI Cobas has acted mainly on two levels: on the one hand by calling on workers in other companies to join the picket lines; on the other by promoting the formation of provincial committees of delegates, that is, territorial trade union organisations not company based ones.

The second merit, equally important, is the adoption of the tactic of the united front from below, referred to in the conference document. This line has always been advocated by our party, and by the current of which we are the expression, the Communist Left, which based its activity among the proletariat on this line for as long as it held the majority in the Communist Party of Italy in the first half of the 1920s, the years when class struggle lit up Italy and spread throughout the world..

In this, as well, the SI Cobas stands out from the rest of grassroots trade unionism, which supports the opposite, anti-classist tactical line of organising separate actions to those of the regime unions, with the component, multi-acronymed, base unions often organising separately as well. The base unions have almost always, with few exceptions, sabotaged strikes by the regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL, UGL), promoting mobilizations in competition with them. In this way the 'tricolour' unions are not weakened but strengthened. Strikes held separately are weaker, and they also weaken the morale of workers. The strength of the confederal unions rests on the weakness of the working class. The masses of workers which the CGIL CISI and UIL are able to mobilize are still much greater than

those set in motion by the base unions, whose actions appear clearly as those of a minority.

In this way, the part of the working class organised in the base unions, in general coincident with the more combative part of it, is kept separate from other workers, who are protected from its influence in the street demonstrations of the confederal unions. When the base unions strike alongside the regime unions they will not be confused with them by the workers if their members take to the streets in clearly defined contingents, and distribute their own material. On the contrary, they will be contributing to the success of the protest, and boosting the morale and confidence of workers, who tend instinctively to embrace the more radical slogans and demands.

This has been confirmed in recent days by the successful school workers' strike on 5 May. Initially proclaimed by the Cobas Confederation, it was joined by CUB and Unicobas, then the confederal unions FLC-CGIL, CISL-Scuola, UIL-Scuola and the independent Snals-Confsal and Gilda-Unams union, and finally the Coordinamento Autoconvocati Scuole Roma. The confederal unions called the strike on the same day to 'hide' the action of the grassroots unions and to take over the direction of the movement. But since the strike grassroots unionism's demand for complete opposition to school reform - has emerged with greater vigour. The USB, which had gone on strike together with the CUB and UNICobas on April 24, unlike these did not support the strike on 5 May.

Grassroots unionism needs to differentiate itself from regime unionism not by striking on different days, but launching longer and more determined strikes, with well-organised pickets and demonstrations which reject the principle of social pacifism. It needs to clarify the fundamental difference between "trade union unity" and "unity of action of the working class".

The SI Cobas, since its foundation, has embraced the principle of the unity of action of workers. We read, for example, in the statement it issued before the general strike of the base unions on 15 April 2011 and the general strike called by the regime unions on 6 May: *"We call on the struggle committees, on the workers and the more combative delegates, to commit to start building a common and collective mobilisation, one in which enrolment in this or that union doesn't matter, one which aims to establish a national network for the defence of their own working conditions and standard of living (with common platforms and demands in the*

*various places of work) and for the general strike. In order to succeed it is necessary to try and get the "base unions to make no more proclamations of separate "general" strikes ... urging 'base unionism' as a whole to collectively proclaim... an 8-hour general strike on May 6."*

The greatest success of this line of action was the demonstration in support of the FIOM general strike in Milan on November 14. The metal workers were able to see with their own eyes the existence of an organized force outside of the CGIL, with an SI Cobas contingent over a thousand workers strong taking part, as well as the unionisation of migrant workers, their own fellow fighters and class brothers, giving a rejoinder to the bourgeois division of the working class between Italian and foreign workers. The SI Cobas has also participated in the general strike called by the CGIL and UIL on 12 December. Another very positive action was their participation in the demonstration outside the gates of FIAT SATA Melfi on Saturday, March 24 - supported by base unionism as a whole - in support of the strike against overtime organised by a minority of the FIOM Factory delegates and sabotaged by the regional and national FIOM. This tactical line was fully upheld by the national coordinator of the SI Cobas in his closing speech of the Congress on Sunday, May 3rd. \*\*\*

These three factors described above – class struggle methods, working for class unity against companyism, tactic of the united front from below – are in our opinion the SI Cobas's strengths, which have allowed this development on the basis of engagement with the workers who want to fight, a condition without which no class trade unionism is possible.

With the deepening of the crisis of capitalism, which is only just beginning, fresh layers of the working class will awaken from the passivity and resignation which has infected them for so long. To the extent that the SI Cobas can maintain these characteristics it will be able to extend beyond the confines of the logistics sector (there have already been some encouraging cases) and take the path leading to the reconstruction of the Class Syndicate, the economic union of of the Working Class.

The leadership of the SI Cobas, however, has also expressed two lines which in our view will slow or impair this development: 1) the claim to be building an organisation which is not just trade unionist but rather a hybrid between a union and a party; 2) the wish to unite the workers' movement with the so-called social movements.

If up to now these trends have had little impact on the substantive industrial action, we nevertheless believe that because they are considered by the leadership of SI

Cobas to be the union's strengths – we take the opposite view – they will remain a danger, and ones which will probably increase.

## Trade Union or Party

As had already emerged in several statements and speeches by the SI Cobas leaders which appeared in the pre-congress documents, and which were further clarified by the national coordinator in his speech at the conclusion of the Congress, the SI Cobas does not want to be a "simple" trade union. In the congress document we read: *"The lack of a political force capable of leading the struggle for economic defence has imposed on the union the task of standing in for it, in order to ... conduct the proletariat onto the terrain of class autonomy"*. Elsewhere, and often, the limitations of a "purely trade-unionist" struggle have been denounced by the SI Cobas and the need expressed to "move on to a political level". For example, in a statement made in March 2014, on the fight against Granarolo of Bologna: *'It is a case of ...creating conscious cadres, otherwise we risk limiting ourselves to a struggle which is radical but still strictly trade unionist, without a general perspective ... The workers lack of political consciousness can be a strength initially but a weakness in the long run: they put up a tough fight, they enrol their friends who work for the same company, but we must also link up the struggles. For this reason the Si-Cobas has started in-house training, not only about pay packet issues, but also examining the political aspect. We cannot follow a gradualist conception, which would have us first engaging in trade union struggle and then politics: where we have made this mistake, it has been more difficult to resume a general battle"*.

These passages, chosen from other similar ones, demonstrate an incorrect conception of the relationship between trade unions and political parties, between trade union struggle and political struggle.

First of all we must say it is a mistake to maintain that politics has nothing to do with the unions, that the two camps can be separated, that there can be a trade union independent of political parties, or that trade unionism comes "before" politics. On the contrary, every union line derives from a political line. The trade unions whose leaderships define themselves as apolitical, in Italy generally the autonomous unions, are just as dominated by the ruling ideology, that of the ruling

class, the bourgeoisie. In general they can be characterised by their narrow companyism.

But talking about being strictly linked together explains nothing about what that link is, between two organisms which are necessarily separate and different. A union can arise spontaneously, willed into existence by a group of rebellious workers, but as it grows it finds itself increasingly having to deal with wider issues, concerning its relationship with other classes, with the bourgeois parties, with the State; issues which are dealt with and resolved in many different and often opposed ways by the various workers parties.

We do not expect parties within the Union to hide their political views, and nor do we expect them to not propagandise within it, as they do outside it. But the workers' syndicate, that each of them wants to direct, is necessarily made up of workers who hold the most diverse political opinions, even reactionary ones, and who in general, in the vast majority, do not agree at all with the general principles and assumptions of this or that party, especially communism, much less Marxism.

The specific, feasible and necessary task that also Communists devote themselves to within the union is therefore not "teaching" Marxism to the organised proletariat but rather the principles and methods of class trade unionism; how one should conduct the fight today and struggles in general. These principles and methods of struggle are not exclusive to one party, or to revolutionary communism, but common to many of the ideologies that exist in the class and they are immediately understandable by anyone who is exploited.

The mishmash of various workplaces, situations and phases gives rise to the illusion of somehow being able to place oneself above, in whole or in part, the functions of the party and the union. This is not being pedantic, it is about setting limits, about a fundamental approach which needs to be stated clearly in order to achieve important purely practical effects, and which actually condition what we want to build; which needs to be clarified if we are truly to be capable of expressing what the workers, whether explicitly or not, ask and expect from us.

A trade union based around an ideology, or, even if it is not enshrined in the statutes, which imposes general political restrictions on membership, which could be Marxism, anarchism, or democracy for instance, undermines thereby its capacity to become a really broad trade union of the working class in the future. The trade union syndicate of the future, like all the glorious examples from the history of our class, will be characterized by its unconditional openness to all of the exploited working class. On the other hand the project of creating a party trade union is definitely doomed to failure, or at least to a very stunted existence.

The bourgeois parties at the head of the regime unions get the workers, for example, to fight for the national constitution and democracy. This is an exploitation of the workers' struggle, diverting and weakening it: in fact, as the struggle develops, it is led inevitably to confront the democratic and constitutional order. To prevent this the bourgeois workers' parties put a brake on the workers' struggle and degrade it by telling the workers they should rely on the democratic state, which we know is bourgeois, to protect their interests, that is, on the machine used by the ruling class to dominate the proletariat.

Today, however, communists have no need to utilize the levers of the union to mobilize workers behind their programmatic slogans, for example, the overthrow of capitalism and of the dictatorship of the proletariat. The defence of the working class on a class basis is the road which will conduct the workers *in practice* towards this supreme task, on the condition they are led by the Communist Party.

The growing unity and strength of the proletariat is a process which progresses, although not in a linear way, from the struggle within the company, to the struggle within a particular sector, to the union of the struggles for wage increases, to the union of the struggles for demands which unify the whole of the working class, i.e. reduction of working hours, pay for unemployed workers.

This ascending curve of class power expressed in class-based unionism intersects with the descending one of capitalism in crisis, less and less able to feed their wage slaves. At a certain stage the historical struggle for the defence of wages, for wages for the unemployed, for the reduction of hours becomes an inherent part of trade union struggle, but its demands and strength are no longer sustainable for the capitalist regime, thus bringing the decisive battle closer. It then becomes

possible to pass from the struggle for defence of wages to the destruction of the wage system and for the social emancipation of the working class. The strike turns into insurrection. This transition is "political", in the sense that the question of state power is posed, and therefore a revolutionary party is required.

This process would instead be inhibited if, after succumbing to the temptation of taking short cuts to hasten the formation of the working class into a revolutionary camp, it was thought that the leadership positions in the trade unions could be exploited in order to bring the membership to embrace a particular political doctrine, using the tools of propaganda or indoctrination, or enlisting these for totally unrealistic programmatic purposes.

Each party has its own rules of action, which are the translation of its political principles into the realm of economic struggle. Workers, however, will be persuaded to accept or reject them not for theoretical, ideological or moral reasons, but because they have shown that they fulfil the practical requirements of class struggle.

Communists involved in the struggle make a point of how their approach to trade union action is also the most effective one for achieving the class's immediate ends. In this sense they "*have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole*" (The Communist Manifesto).

The Communists do not intend to subjugate the trade union *function* and its *organizational instruments* to political propaganda, discriminating against workers with programmatic slogans which will only be relevant in future situations, or by imposing party theoretical training on them: for if the intention of this was to "conduct the proletariat onto the terrain of class autonomy" it would in fact have quite the opposite effect, because one would *actually* be acting against the essential principle that the workers organised in the union are organised as such not only above company and category divisions, and those of class, sex, race and nationality, but also above political opinion and religion.

Failure to respect the inherent nature of the trade union means alienating the workers who are not communists, or not anarchists, or not democrats from the trade union of the working class and abandoning them to the regime unions.

Our critique, therefore, is not about "politicking" but just wants respond to the practical needs of proletarian organization and struggle.

We must dispel some prejudices. A trivialization of the problem would have it that the division between the union and the party is typical only of reformism, and serves its purposes. To restrict the function of the syndicate to just trade-unionism, they say, helps those who do not want to bring the workers into the revolutionary camp. A lot of the SI Cobas communiqués specify the need to rise above trade unionist struggle and get on to the political level. If by political level they mean united action of workers over and beyond the company, and by trade unionism they mean companyism, then we can agree. But it would be more correct to say that companyism is part of an anti-classist trade-union position and the fight to unite the workers' struggles against companyism is instead one of the fundamental principles of our union.

Certainly everything is "political", including taking steps to strengthen and unify the class. And that is what the SI Cobas, in the generality of its industrial action, has done, and done well. But to call this "a raising of the political level of the labour movement" expresses an erroneous conception of the relationship between trade union struggle and political struggle. A trade union that has managed to become a category or inter-category trade union hasn't thereby become a half trade union, half party.

To facilitate the understanding of the problem we list three examples in which the trade union organ has been portrayed inaccurately.

1) We agree with most of the pre-conference document. It is the first time that a rank-and-file trade union, which moreover has achieved great practical success, has expressed positions which are largely correct. But in some passages it is more like a document of a Marxist party than that of an organisation of workers. In it there is far more Marxist theory than there is discussion about the operational and organizational rules of the union whose intention it is to draw up.

Despite all the claims, there is, in the end, not much said about *trade union policy*.

2) In his closing speech the National Coordinator recounted how in some SI Cobas branch meetings they have started giving lectures on Marx and Engels' *Communist Manifesto*. Implicitly excluded from these

meetings are members whose views are anti-Marxist; which, we must all recognize, is a lot of workers and a lot of members, too; in fact almost all of them if you include those who are merely indifferent.

3) On May 1<sup>st</sup>, the SI Cobas took part in the No Expo demonstration in Milan along with various political groups of miscellaneous social origin. This was a demonstration of non-workers and within it they had linked up with its political components. Thus they exchanged the correct union tactic of the united front from below for that of the political united front. Written on the banner was: "*For an Internationalist May Day. Capitalism cannot be reformed, overthrow it instead*". An impeccable concept as far as Communists are concerned. But what would the SI Cobas look like to other workers? A new union that fights for the defence of the immediate interests of the working class, or a group, a workers' one if you will, but one formed on the basis of the affirmation of the revolutionary communist program? They would not see before them a class union, but – in the wake of the trade union of the bourgeois parties, of the Social Democrats, and then the smaller unions of the syndicalists, Stalinists, anarchists, etc – yet another party union, this time a Marxist one. On their banner they might have written instead, for instance: "For the international unity of the working class", a concept that expresses a need to fight which is understood and shared by all workers, or "For the reduction of the working day", both slogans which go back to the original May Day itself, as well as encapsulating the objectives of communism, and which are therefore, in themselves, exquisitely "political".

The historical absence of a visible and recognizable Communist Party will not be resolved by taking shortcuts or new directions, which in fact are not new at all. The trade union cannot substitute itself for the party, even temporarily.

Trying to build a hybrid organisation which is part trade union, part party, damages both the union and the party:

1) it alienates non-communist workers from the union, weakening it and strengthening reformist trade unionism; 2) it deters workers from joining the communist political party (which is not "a workers' party" in terms of its composition, that is, it is not made up solely of proletarians), to the advantage of the opportunist parties.

## Workers' movement and social movements

The SI Cobas propagates an alliance between the workers' union and the so-called social movements. These movements are called "social" because they are not "workers" movements; they include elements of different classes and strata. What is being proposed is therefore an alliance of the proletariat with inter-class movements. Social strata such as students or squatters cannot be described as belonging to the proletariat. In both these categories there are workers and children of workers, but they also include those who are not part of the proletariat. It is therefore correct to define these as social, and not proletarian, movements, along with the environmentalists, campaigners against cuts in health spending, etc.

The trade union, and the labour movement in general, are not hostile to these movements, which react against and oppose the various barbarities of capitalism, and they do not consider them enemies of the working class, to the extent they do not cut across the class struggle.

The solidarity of the young people, students, and that part of the social movements which sense that the working class is the real force in society, and so participate in pickets and demonstrations, are to be welcomed, but on the condition that it means *placing themselves at the disposal of the proletarian movement*, whose decisions must be taken by its class organizations, not by coalitions with non-proletarian organizations, or, as they like to be called, social movements.

However, in Article 11 of the SI Cobas Charter provision is made for *federal pacts* with "*trade unions or social organisations*", while safeguarding "*their respective political and organisational autonomy*".

The working class, organized in its trade union, accepts solidarity from social strata outside of its ranks, but to establish an organic pact with them would alter its specifically working class character. The expression "preserving their political and organizational autonomy" (so what kind of "pact" is it? What is agreed?) doesn't alter the inter-class nature of the alliance or its objectives. Entering into it, and incorporating these non-proletarian social strata in the mistaken belief that greater numbers necessarily equals greater strength, would instead weaken the labour movement, which is already having to fight an internal battle against the predominant influence of bourgeois ideology, which

would be strengthened by jumbling up the organized proletariat with the non-proletarian social movements.

At the union level, which, we repeat, is inextricably linked to the political, the rejection of the alliance between the labour movement and social movements can be explained by the need to devote the energies of workers to seeking solidarity with the rest of the class, to connecting with groups of workers fighting on this terrain and fighting to emancipate themselves from companyism. Because it is on this ability to engage in ever wider and more unified strikes that the real strength of the labour movement relies. But urging workers to join in the mobilizations of the social movements means, as well as giving the trade union ambiguous connotations, diverts precious workers' energy from the vital task of extending and strengthening class unity.

In addition it should be noted how the SI-Cobas, by allying with the social movements, instead of clearly distinguishing itself from them on the grounds of its class characteristics, is adopting a policy followed by the other grassroots unions as well, and also the left wing of regime trade unionism, namely the FIOM. The latter, in fact, supports the so-called Social Coalition. The USB (Union of Base Committees), instead, calls it the Social Confederation. The basic idea is the same: a hybrid movement which is popular, labour and social. What is changing is the audience it addresses: the FIOM is casting an eye to the Catholic left; the USB to the so-called "movement"; the SI Cobas to its "left-wing". Evidently it is a political criterion, at which point we come back to the problem of the confusion between the trade union and the party.

The SI Cobas needs to pursue the policy of the united front from below in a thorough and consistent manner, and seeking alliances with the social movements acts in contradiction with this.

To return to May Day we can say that rather than participating alongside other political organisations in a demonstration such as NO Expo, which was non-working class, both in terms of its content and its participants, the Si Cobas should have joined the street demonstrations organized by the regime trade unions, such as those in Milan or Turin. It would have then shown other workers how strong the SI Cobas already is.

## The Housing Movement

A specific aspect of this question is housing. The labour movement has to deal with this question essentially in terms of capital/wage relations: if wages are not enough to pay the rent then workers must fight for a wage increase. As far as the workers' struggle is concerned, the question of rent levels is a matter between the capitalists and the landed proprietors: faced with battles to increase wages it will be the capitalists who insist on a reduction of that slice of the surplus value extorted from the working class which is expropriated by the landlords.

Similar, for example, to the conjectures made during the recent struggles inside the SDA, where it was proposed that, if the employer remained intransigent, a general strike of the entire category would be called in solidarity with those struggles. Alongside one group of workers a much broader part of the working class rallied: it is one of the best practical realisations of the principle of class unity that a trade union can possibly offer. Thus the result of intransigence on the part of the SDA, at the back of which is the Italian Post Office, i.e. the bourgeois state, is that the other multinational companies in the sector will also have to pay.

The organized labour movement fights to protect wage levels, rather than fighting to reduce rents; and neither does it struggle against the high cost of living. Certainly

it doesn't fight against interclass movements of this kind but it doesn't go about organising them, directing all of its energy into the struggle to win wage increases, wages for the unemployed, and a reduction in the working day.

As for the movements fighting for housing they cannot be characterised as proletarian because they organise, as a matter of principle, on the basis of a need which transcends class, and which is of concern not only to workers, whether employed or not, but to the ruined petty bourgeoisie, students and the lumpenproletariat.

Just as the SI Cobas rightly states in its conference document that it is wrong to demand an "income for all", to which it opposes the demand for a wage for unemployed workers, so it is not justified to fight for "housing for all".

If there are proletarians within the housing movements, it is the union which must organize them and lead a fight against evictions and for the allocation of housing for workers. Tenants should not be organized within an inter-classist framework but by the union, as proletarians. Similar to what has to happen with the unemployed. Only an organizational formula such as this can ensure a class movement on this front as well; and it is certainly totally inadequate to append the adjective "proletarian" to movements which, to all intents and purposes, are not organised on a class basis.

On Saturday 16 September, the SI Cobas organised a demonstration in Bologna in defence of migrants. This is the leaflet our comrades distributed there in the Italian, French, Spanish and English languages.

***For the international solidarity of the exploited of every race and country!***  
**For the adoption of a single platform of defensive demands**  
**against the common front of the capitalists and all of their States!**

**For a real Class Trade Union which organizes the struggle of all proletarians!**

**For the establishment of an internationalist and revolutionary communist programme and party!**

That a mass of proletarians and semi-proletarians are currently fleeing poverty, unemployment, and war is not an exceptional event but rather the umpteenth confirmation of the real, and permanent, nature of the present system, which is based on profit.

**Capitalism**, under which the market in commodities and capital has become fully globalized, cannot avoid the same happening as far as the **labour power commodity** is concerned. That waves of people in search of wages are crossing the boundaries between North and South, East and West, and clambering over State and national borders, is very sad, but it is also a progressive factor, insofar as it demonstrates the international nature of the working class, **a single global class of the exploited**.

**Workers have no country.** Capitalism has turned the proletariat in all continents into a class of emigrants. Uprooted from countries that are no longer their own, the disinherited, the wage earners and the small producers have nothing more to lose, although their loss is compounded in the West, where they live under the conditions of the **modern proletariat**, propertyless and living off their wages, but nevertheless with a world to win from the destruction of the most modern, concentrated and putrescent of capitalisms. History, and the revolution, often travels on foot.

The current wars – in which each State and imperialist alliance seeks to strategically position itself in view of the impending third world war, which all of them are preparing for – are accelerating this epic emigration and making it difficult to contain.

In the West so-called public opinion is cleverly manipulated – drugged and hypnotised as it is by capitalist society – and frenzied debates are whipped up between the supports of a generic humanitarianism, whether lay or religious, on one side, and racism and nationalism on the other: **a bourgeois right and bourgeois left united in their opposition to and fear of genuine, organised and effective class solidarity.**

The global economic crisis of capitalism, which originated in the rich countries and is concentrated there, is an irreversible crisis of over-production which is only destined to get worse. Capitalism is saturated with commodities and capital, and there is no policy of the bourgeoisie, whether liberal or statist, that can alter that ineluctable fact.

But capitalism, even in crisis, continues to produce enormous quantities of commodities and it always needs labour. **Only labour power produces profit.** The wealth of capitalism depends entirely on the willingness of proletarians to engage with it. This is why the boss class has a vested interest in replenishing the industrial reserve army with proletarian immigrants.

It will depend on the balance of forces between the classes whether the bourgeoisie, in order to maintain its economic regime and petty privileges, will manage to *increase the exploitation of the proletariat, increase working hours, lower wages and increase the intensity of work.* **What weakens the working class is not “competition” from immigrant class brothers but submission to false workers’ parties and trade unions who have sold out to the bourgeoisie, because wages are regulated only by hard class struggle, and weight of numbers is a positive factor in strength terms, not a weakness.**

That is why the bourgeoisie is using its countless regime-supporting spokesmen to stir up indigenous proletarians against foreigners. **Racism** is not a “prejudice” from which the present society can be cured, but **a weapon used by the bosses to divide the workers**, same as nationalism. Fighting racism in the name of a generic “humanitarianism” is impotent and dangerous since it is based on an tacit endorsement of the division between exploiter and exploited.

**The one real fight against racism is the CLASS STRUGGLE** for the defence of wages, against sackings, against the division between old workers in ‘guaranteed’ employment and young workers deprived of any protection, against the super-exploitation by gangmasters in field and factory, against the use of co-operatives as a cover for exploitation, and *for* the generalized reduction of the working day with no reduction of wages.

Only **the class struggle against the bourgeois “race”** unifies the workers above ethnic, national and religious differences and brings about a sense of brotherhood, leading them inevitably to direct their struggle against capitalism and to join together to overthrow it.

Only **communism**, after obtaining victory everywhere, can resolve the problem of how to distribute people across the planet in the most favourable way, with movement taking place not on the basis of terror or need, but of the best collective and individual development for all.

**WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE!**

## German union betrays train drivers

**The defeat of the GDL union, which ended in the union agreeing to a strike ban effective until 2020, must be understood as a clearly planned and skilfully executed exercise by the employers to intimidate the entire German working class, but one that could have been avoided with the right political response on the side of the workers.**

Following an unprecedented ten months’ dispute and nine strikes, including the longest in the history of German Railways (Deutsche Bahn, DB), the train drivers’ union (Gewerkschaft Deutscher Lokomotivführer, GDL) threw in the towel on 22 May, conceding to almost all of the employers’ demands and submitting the dispute to “independent” arbitrators, drawn from SPD and Left parties. This has had far-reaching consequences for German workers as it was the government’s aim to adopt a new labour law called *Tarifeinheit*, that is to say contract unity, and that was summarized with the formula “Ein Betrieb, ein Tarifvertrag”, one company, one contract: it establishes that in one working place only one contract will be in force, the one with the union with that has most members. This law consolidates the control of the corporatist DGB (Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund – German Confederation of Trade Unions) over unionized workers in both private companies and public services. In future, DGB-affiliated unions will exercise a virtual monopoly

over the negotiation of pay agreements and will assume responsibility for maintaining labour discipline.

Throughout the dispute, the media has presented it as a power struggle between the “dictator” Claus Weselsky, leader of the GDL – and incidentally, a member of the ruling CDU party – and DB, which refused to recognize the union, and as an attempt by the GDL to increase the wages of train drivers at the expense of other DB workers. Certainly, there is competition between GDL and the Eisenbahn und Verkehrsgewerkschaft (EVG, affiliated to the DGB) for members and influence. But the underlying cause of unrest was DB’s attempt to shift jobs from train drivers to so-called locomotive drivers, who basically do the same work, but on lower pay and with far fewer restrictions on working time: “internal wage-dumping” as the GDL termed it. In an interview with Germany’s *Die Zeit*, Jan Wenske, a train driver from Frankfurt am Oder explained his reason for striking:

“What am I fighting for? For better working hours, a less burdensome workload and a limit on overtime. And for an independent wage settlement for drivers and guards. For me, it is not so much about higher wages, as I can get by on my money. Of course, it could always be more, but the limit on my working time would be more important for me. There are weeks in which I work 30 hours, then in the next week 60 hours, and the week after that again 50. How long you work and how – as a train driver you can never say for sure.

“That’s because of shift work. The timetables and rosters are so arranged as to bring maximum benefit to the employers. We have no say in it. Therefore we drive night shifts that last 12 hours, and repeatedly have idle time when we sit around for hours on end. We have to do a lot of overtime because of maintenance work on the tracks, changes in the roster or because colleagues are off sick. Then you get a call asking you to fill in. Quite frequently we have ‘availability weeks’ when you have to be ready to fill in at a moment’s notice and the employer can assign duties when there is a shortage of personnel. And these shortages are all the time: across Germany there are 600 to 800 too few drivers. In fact, you are permanently on duty for them.”

With such working conditions, which also include weekends and public holidays, since DB runs an almost full schedule on non-working days, a healthy family life is of course impossible, especially if the driver’s partner is also a shift-worker.

There existed a clear potential to extend and broaden this struggle. As Wenske went on to say, he was aware that many people, including friends, had been persuaded that the train drivers were “holding Germany hostage”. But when he explained why they were in struggle, they said, “Actually you are right. Carry on!”

With the Federal Government planning to introduce labour reform (that would make militant action more difficult than ever within the confines of the law, the DB was prepared to play a waiting game and hold firm. By contrast the GDL made concessions, for example reducing its demand for a cut in working hours to a measly one hour a week. But this only encouraged DB to further toughen its stance. On 17 April it told the GDL that it intended revoke all existing agreements.

As we have said under the terms of the new labour law, if there are several trade unions active in an organisation and no agreement exists over the workers they represent, only the agreement reached with the largest union will apply.

However, not only their actions will be weakened by the prohibition of striking it is concretized in a collective agreement; beyond that, we read in the “Comparative European Trade Union Law” published in January of this year that: “According to the consolidated orientation of the German Federal Court, industrial action is exclusively

complementary to collective bargaining. In other words, collective action is allowed only if its aim is the conclusion of a collective agreement. The important implication of this interrelationship between collective bargaining and collective disputes is as follows: the collective conflict can be legally brought into being only by the parties entitled to conclude a collective agreement. From the perspective of the workers this means that a strike can be declared only by a union. The implication being that strike action taken by groups of workers who are not supported by the union – i.e. spontaneous or wildcat strikes – are illegal.” And, we might add, so too are general strikes of all workers, as well as political ones, such as those against war.

With the deadline for the new law approaching, the GDL buckled and called off its last strike, which was due to take place over the busy Whitsun weekend, putting the fate of railway workers instead into the hands of two arbitrators, both of whom have helped the Grand Coalition to roll out its austerity policies: Matthias Platzeck, former SPD President of the State of Brandenburg nominated by DB, and Bodo Ramelow, nominated by GDL. As President of the State of Thuringia, Ramelow presided over a Left-SPD-Green coalition committed to a stringent austerity programme.

Having secured the end of the GDL’s strikes, a few days later, on 26 May, DB concluded an eighteen-month pay deal with EVG, designed to eliminate any possibility of workers taking joint action between now and September 2016. EVG settled for an annual pay rise of 3.5%, having earlier threatened warning strikes if the offer fell short of 6%. Both DB and the EVB stated that the GDL arbitration had no impact on the settlement, a rather dubious claim since DB and EVB had been in talks for months. But even if true, it has clearly further strengthened the employers’ hand.

By calling off the strike, GDL signalled its willingness to work entirely within the legal framework. What it was clearly *not* prepared to do was to broaden the struggle to disaffected workers in other sectors (in recent months there have been strikes in Germany’s airlines, postal services, children’s care centres and hospitals) who would see their own situation reflected by the train drivers’ miserable lives and whose unions (for example Cockpit, the pilots’ union) are in a similar situation to the GDL. They will now see employers and the DGB cooperating even more closely to impose tougher working conditions.

Such a broad-based struggle would of course go far beyond the control of union leaders such as Weselsky, whose objective was essentially to win the state’s recognition for the GDL and little else. Moreover, such a struggle would unquestionably have a political dimension, posing an existential threat to the cosy relationships between employers and union leaders that are essential to the management of capitalism in Germany, as elsewhere.

For Contact:

Internet website:

<http://www.international-communist-party.org>

Email: [icparty@interncommparty.org](mailto:icparty@interncommparty.org)

Details and down-loadable files of our publication in other languages are available on our web-site. Our publications in Italian, *Il Partito Comunista* and *Comunismo*, as are other texts, as well as our publication in Spanish, *El Partido Comunista*.

Annual Subscription to *Communist Left* is £ 2.00p (including postage), € 3, \$ 3 or equivalent. Please double the subscription to also receive regular copies of *The Communist Party*. Please let us know if you can help in the circulation of our press.

The Party's Postal addresses:

**ICP Editions**  
**c/o 96 Bold Street**  
**Liverpool L1 4HY**  
**UK**

**Associazione La Sinistra Comunista**  
**Casella Postale 1157**  
**50121 Firenze**  
**Italy**