

The Communist Party

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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 manoeuvrings.

May First 2017 - International Workers' Day

In the Face of Threats of Imperialist War: Return to the Class Struggle, to October, to Communism

History repeats itself

Capitalism is leading a large part of humanity to misery not because it produces too little but because it is forced to produce too much. Just as in the Great Depression, which began in 1929, the crisis of capitalism that is currently engulfing the world from the USA to China has no way out. Capitalist accumulation slows, workers get fired, and unemployment spreads.

Because the cause of the crisis is the internal logic of capitalism itself.

The world market, which until now had managed to deal with overproduction, is becoming inaccessible to commodities from the oldest and most established capitalisms, which are repudiating previous agreements between states and returning to protectionism and customs wars. The working class is being conned by claims that a solution lies in the defense of the homeland, of the nation and its economy, or even of a particular factory.

The globalization of production, finance, trade, and labour migration, which first emerged under capitalism, creates the explosive material subverting its very existence. Wanting to stop, contain or reform this globalization is simply a reactionary illusion. The only possible negation of capital's globalization is communist internationalism.

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Grenfell Tower A Monstrous Crime against the Working Class

What value does capitalism place on a worker's life? For the sake of a measly saving of £ 5,000 Grenfell Tower was "refurbished" with cladding material that did not even meet the minimum standards of fire safety, resulting in the needless and horrific deaths of scores of working class tenants. Meanwhile the owner of the property, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC), sits on a surplus of £ 270 million and last year handed out a rebate of £ 100 in a clear electoral bribe to its wealthiest residents.

Words cannot adequately express our party's outrage at the utter callousness and brutality of our class enemies. Callousness that extends from the evasive blather and buck-passing of the politicians who should be held responsible, to the commercial greed of the network of contractors responsible for the grotesque cost and corner-cutting in the so-called "regeneration project" – not least the cladding supplier, which deleted references to Grenfell from its promotional website at 4 am in the morning, while the fire was raging.

RBKC is the richest borough in the United Kingdom, home to countless millionaires who have racked up their huge fortunes from proletarian toil in every corner of the globe. But bordering Shepherd's Bush and White City in the northwest of the borough, below the A40 Westway, it is also home to thousands of workers – both native British and recent immigrants – who live in cramped, poorly maintained and unsafe conditions. It is one of the poorest council wards in the country, and at the same time, an area with a rich tradition of working class struggle and culture that cuts across all ethnic and national boundaries.

INSIDE THIS ISSUE: BREXIT | Transport and Dock Workers

Grenfell Tower (contd.)

Inequality and class division is nowhere starker than it is here, at the heart of the UK capital.

There is nothing intrinsically unsafe about high-rise accommodation – after all, many of the world’s capitalist elite live in luxury skyscrapers. But when non fire-retardant materials are used, when there are inadequate fire exits, and when fires cannot be contained in a limited area, high-rise tenement blocks are quite literally death traps.

The tenants of Grenfell had been instructed to stay inside their flats while any fire was contained and extinguished. Instead, the non fire-retardant cladding meant the fire spread rapidly on the outside of the building. Some of those on the lower floors who disobeyed these instructions managed to escape. Those on the upper storeys had no chance.

Grenfell Tower’s direct landlord, the Kensington and Chelsea Tenant Management Organisation (KCTMO) supposedly exists to represent the interests of the tenants. Today, its so-called mission statement, “Delivering excellent housing services through resident-led management” makes sick reading. The reality is that KCTMO is a fraudulent front for the borough’s slum landlordism.

In December 2016 the Grenfell Action Group, set up in 2010 to protect the interests of residents against mistreatment by RBKC and KCTMO wrote prophetically:

It is a truly terrifying thought but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believe that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO, and bring an end to the dangerous living conditions and neglect of health and safety legislation that they inflict upon their tenants and leaseholders. We believe that the KCTMO are an evil, unprincipled, mini-mafia who have no business to be charged with the responsibility of looking after the everyday management of large scale social housing estates and that their sordid collusion with the RBKC Council is a recipe for a future major disaster.

Needless to say, Grenfell Action Group activists were bullied, branded as “troublemakers”, and some of the more vocal Grenfell residents even faced legal action. In particular, two young women, Mariem Elgwahry and Nadia Choucair, both of them feared dead in the Grenfell Tower tragedy, reportedly received solicitors’ letters ordering them to stop their campaign for improved safety.

The response of the authorities in the aftermath of the disaster was likewise pitifully slow and inadequate given that this blaze was the worst to hit London since the Second World War. It is difficult to imagine that this would have been the case if a similar disaster had occurred at the other end of the borough, in Sloane Square or on the King’s Road.

Nobody from central or local government took charge and the situation was made much worse by recent cuts to the London’s fire services – ten fire stations closed, and 27 fire engines removed and 552 jobs axed in 2014 alone. Consequently the emergency services worked under severe pressure, with many firefighters themselves suffering burns and injuries. “Put it this way, you’re meant to work on a fire for a maximum of four hours, we’ve been here for 12,” said one firefighter.

Volunteers stepped in where the authorities failed, providing what relief and help they could to survivors and the families of victims. They vented their anger against Prime Minister Theresa May and the leader of RBKC, who went out of their way to avoid residents.

It is also clear that the Government and RBKC have taken the opportunity to break an angry and potentially militant working class community. Modest proposals to requisition empty flats for temporary accommodation were rejected by the Government as an “attack on private property”. Rather than rehouse the survivors locally, RBKC chose to disperse them far and wide. It is likely that the authorities will, furthermore, use the land conveniently vacated as a result of the fire to build luxury flats rather than new social housing.

While little was done to contain the actual fire, the Government and its spin doctors swung into action to contain the burning anger. It was already clear to survivors and their supporters on the day after the fire that the death toll was enormous. But the Government, with the help of its lackeys in the media, did their utmost to play down the loss of life while spouting platitudes about “lessons to be learned”

The Grenfell Tower tragedy is an indictment of the growing inequality of capitalist society and the poverty that exists even in the world’s wealthiest cities. The victims were murdered in clear sight of some of the richest people in the world. Their deaths are the responsibility of a system that is driven by an insatiable need to thief off the proletariat by every means possible, not just at work but in their homes and in their social environment: for the accumulation of wealth at one end of the social spectrum through the accumulation of misery and degradation at the other.

The predictable response of those on the political left wing of capitalism has been, as ever, the demand for inquiries, more accountability, and more democracy. But these are all part of the swindle, as institutions like KCTMO, and previous “pubic inquiries”, demonstrate. They provide the ruling class with ideological cover until the next disaster – inevitably – occurs.

By contrast, genuine activism on the ground, within the working class, such as by the Grenfell Action Group, provide instruments for the immediate defence of tenants. Ultimate victory over the capitalist system and its horrors can however only be won when the party of the proletariat – the Communist Party – succeeds in unifying and leading all of the class’s struggles.

One Day Strikes and Solidarity on British Railways

Previously we had concluded that the instinctive solidarity of train drivers and guards on the railways, and resistance to the attacks on living and working standards of the workers on London Underground, provide a basis for a real rank and file movement, tending to overcome sectional and industrial divisions, and keeping their struggles out of the hands of trade union leaders who side with the bosses and their state.

There are three main unions involved in the railways – Aslef (Amalgamated Society of Locomotive Enginemen and Firemen), RMT (Rail, Maritime, Transport) and TSSA (Transport Salaried Staffs Association). As indicated by its name Aslef was formed in 1880 to represent all the workers driving steam engine trains. By their very nature they had to work together, and these roles have been consolidated into the present role of train drivers. The RMT was constituted by the joining together of the former National Union of Railwaymen, National Union of Seamen and Transport sections. TSSA represents and organises various jobs and grades across different rail services, stations and other parts of the railway network. Only Aslef organises a distinct workforce that is capable on its own of bringing the rail network to a halt.

The long-standing working arrangement was for both the train driver and the conductor/guard to be on board for the train to be ready to leave. If either one was delayed, or not available (because of rostering problems, or delays), that train service was subject to delay or cancellation. Previously there had been flexibility in train crews, if other staff are available as replacements. With staffing cutbacks this has been increasingly difficult. Now the pressure is on to get the train drivers to leave, if necessary, without the equivalent of a guard being present on the train.

The affinity of interest between the drivers and guards is based upon mutual concerns – the guards are fighting for their jobs (as well as their skilled roles) while the drivers are safe-guarding themselves from taking any blame if accidents or emergencies arise. The introduction of new trains, whether Driver Controlled Only (DCO) or Driver Operated Only (DOO), can hardly be resisted – it is the staffing arrangements and procedures which will be the battle-ground. The actions of both unions' leaders have been preventing a unified struggle from taking place.

A Second Train Drivers' Secret Ballot

After the eight-point TUC-brokered deal between Aslef and Govia (the Southern Rail franchise bosses) had been clearly voted down by Aslef members in a secret ballot in February 2017, Aslef went back to have further secret talks with rail bosses. This time there wasn't the "arbitration" conducted at the TUC but direct collaboration between the Aslef union leaders and the rail bosses. A second agreement was reached about circumstances in which "their" union members (train drivers) would take trains out without a second member of staff present – whether designated as a guard or as an On Board Supervisor (OBS). Ignoring the hostility of the rank and file Aslef members in taking out trains alone, the Aslef leaders wanted to show they could deliver a deal the rail bosses wanted – that they could be partners with the rail bosses in future reorganisations in the rail industry.

The second deal was quickly agreed but as a secret understanding (not to be made public) which would go to a secret ballot of Aslef members.

Unsurprisingly the nature of the Aslef/Govia deal was leaked to the media by photos on mobile phones. The latest deal involved a five-point agreement on when trains could leave without the second member of staff, based on a presumption that they could deliver the compliance of the train drivers. The five situations agreed were: Late notice of OBS absence; OBS delayed in getting to work; delays by late running services; OBS dealing with emergencies; error on the part of the driver or OBS in leaving the OBS behind.

Enormous pressure was brought to bear on Aslef members working on Southern Railways to vote for the secret Aslef/Govia deal, which was nevertheless voted down by an even narrower margin, of less than 4%. It proved to be a decisive rejection of Aslef leadership's collaboration with the rail bosses. After that the Aslef leaders abandoned further attempts to get the train drivers to leave without a second trained member of staff (equivalent to a guard) being present. Subsequently the Aslef drivers on Southern Rail voted to re-impose an overtime ban, which was due to commence in early June.

The RMT leadership warmly greeted the results of the second Aslef train drivers' ballot after almost a year of one-day strikes. This had removed a potential strike-breaking role by the Aslef leadership, which the train drivers in any case would not agree to. RMT general secretary Mick Cash followed up by writing to the TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady demanding that the TUC reconvene talks with Govia and Aslef, this time with RMT participation. This only shows that RMT, for all its declarations about being a "socialist trade union", will not face up to the class collaborating role of the TUC (of which it still is a member).

Further RMT One Day Strikes

Southern Rail management had been insisting that they required the change in the role of the guard because of the investment in the introduction of new DOO trains, whereby the train driver would be able to control the opening and closing of the train doors. The new trains will not be introduced for at least two years. But it is not just Southern Rail that wanted this change in the role of the train guard. It is clear that the Government had factored in the staffing reorganisation (the downgrading or elimination of the role of the guards) for any state investment in rail network modernisation programmes. The Government's Office of Rail and Road (ORR) recently stated: "ORR's view is that with suitable equipment, procedures and competent staff in place the proposed form of train dispatch intended by GTR-Southern meets legal requirements for safe operation."

Southern Rail was not alone in its insistence on forcing through changes, even though it will be two or more years before new trains are introduced; other train companies were also clamouring for similar staffing cuts. The RMT's one-day strikes were spreading across the North of England. Not only did that affect Northern mainline routes but also the regional Merseyrail (which is in the public sector and under the control of Labour-led local authorities – a similar situation to London Underground).

The RMT one-day strike on March 13th began as usual with a limited service across the rail networks affected. The usual assurances given by rail bosses, that trains could leave safely with only the train driver controlling the train doors, had a particularly hollow ring on Merseyside. During the day Aslef train drivers refused to cross RMT picket lines, in defiance of the Aslef leadership, bringing the whole network to a halt. At the same time an RMT Merseyrail guard, Martin Zee, was on trial at Liverpool Crown Court, prosecuted because of an accident which had happened at Birkenhead Hamilton Square Station in June 2015.

The accident and the court case that followed highlighted the importance of safety on Britain's railways.

The Acquittal of Martin Zee

At Birkenhead Hamilton Square Station there are three curved platforms as the tracks enter and leave the rail tunnel under the river Mersey. Access to the platforms is by way of lifts which were converted to passenger operated, with station staff being available usually just at the upper level. The safety of passengers on all three underground lines is left to the train guards.

The Liverpool line follows the outer side of the curve, which creates a blind spot for the guard at the rear of the train. Zee consequently has to walk further out onto and down the platform to ensure passengers have boarded the train safely. He then has to walk back to the rear carriage to close the train doors. On this particular day, while the train guard was returning to the rear carriage an 89-year-

old passenger had fallen out of the train door onto the platform ending up by the rail track. Having become aware of the incident Martin Zee (who was following all the procedures in which he had been trained) stopped and secured the train and together with the train driver was able to get the passenger safely back onto the platform. Had he not spotted the passenger and acted swiftly, she could have been trapped as the train set off. A rail management enquiry exonerated Zee of any fault.

However, the British Transport Police and the Crown Prosecution Service brought Zee before a Court using the archaic Offences Against the Person Act 1861. Even though the case against Zee was widely regarded as "threadbare" the RMT was hardly proactive in defending its member. There had been some leaflets issued by RMT close to the time of the trial suggesting a strike if he was jailed – it would have been a bit late then! It turned out that a rail industry expert had been present on the platform at the time of the incident and approached RMT offering testimony as an expert witness. Having heard nothing from RMT, he assumed the case had been dropped, couldn't believe it when he read in the local paper that it was going ahead, and approached the RMT a second time. This rail expert, along with passengers present at the time of the incident, gave evidence at the trial, ensuring that the jury threw out the case against Zee two days later (March 15th) with a unanimous verdict.

It was therefore clear that the CPS' decision to take Zee to court was politically motivated and vindictive. The response by rank-and-file railway workers and the travelling public put that of the RMT and Aslef leadership to shame.

RMT's Opposition to Foreign Control of Privatised Franchises

According to the RMT, three-quarters of the privatised rail franchises are now wholly or partly controlled or owned by foreign states or companies after a Hong Kong based company acquired a 30% stake in South West Trains. The foreign-owned franchises include some private companies, but others are German, French and Italian state enterprises. RMT's chief complaint seems to be that profits were being shipped abroad to subsidise commuters across the globe. This bout of patriotic flag-waving ignores the fact that the high price of train fares in the UK (significantly higher than other European countries) is the result of a deliberate policy of successive British governments to place as much of the financial burden of railway costs as possible on rail commuters, while allowing the train operators to rack up profits. The attacks on rail workers come from British controlled franchises and the public sector as well as foreign-owned operators. This is a continuation of the politics of former RMT General Secretary Bob Crow (a Stalinist who died three years ago) who was behind such campaigns as "Say No to the EU: Yes to Democracy". This kind of patriotic-democratic "left-wing" unionism has of course led the British working class to a number of catastrophic defeats,

notably the National Union of Miners under Arthur Scargill in 1984-5.

The RMT, in collaboration with some Trotskyist organisations, were the main sponsors of the Trade Union and Solidarity Campaign (TUSC) which stood candidates in various elections. Under Bob Crow's leadership the RMT disaffiliated from the Labour Party and campaigned on a platform of "left-wing" (in reality, nationalist) policies, although TUSC abandoned putting up candidates against Labour in the recent General Election, as Labour has itself embraced more nationalist policies (including rail nationalisation) under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn.

The open collaboration of the Aslef leadership with the rail bosses, and the disorientating tactics and campaigns of the RMT make it increasingly necessary for rail workers to take their struggles into their own hands and create their own rank-and-file organisations with a class-based political orientation. The existing trade unions (like all the rest) on the railways collaborate with the rail bosses, and the state, for the modernisation and efficient functioning of the industry. These unions divide the workers and prevent a real fight back against the state-organised attacks on wage rates and working conditions. Whether the rank and file workers will be able to establish more control of their struggles or establish breakaway union organisations will be determined by their own needs.

A Determined Bus Drivers Strike in Ireland

Workers at Bus Éireann (a state owned company) called an all-out strike from Friday 24th March bringing bus services across Eire, as well as some cross border routes to Northern Ireland, to a halt. Picketing was vigorous from the start, and there were complaints from government circles of "secondary picketing". [Secondary picketing is where picket lines are placed to spread the strike – forced other workers out on strike – or on other services which will damage the employers ability to function.] Initial picketing led to some Iarnród Éireann (Irish Railways) intercity train services being affected.

Bus Éireann had been reporting financial losses of 9m euros (£8m) last year and a further 50,000 euros (£43,000) a day this January. This financial crisis has not just arisen but has been an almost perennial problem, with the Irish state issuing free bus passes and cheap tourist-style tickets, leaving the three state-owned transport services (Bus Éireann, Dublin Buses and Irish Railways) to cope with the financial problems. Bus Éireann bosses saw the solution to the financial problems by attacking the wage rates and working conditions of the employees. The Irish Government was quick to deny any plans for privatising the bus company.

The Irish National Transport Authority (NTA) pays a subvention of €125,000 every workday and €75,000 for every weekend day. The NTA plan to impose fines in excess of €1m because of Bus Éireann's strike bound routes.

Unions called the strike over Bus Éireann's implementation of cost reduction measures without their agreement. Over 2500 Bus Éireann's workers were out on strike despite statements by the company's bosses that it would worsen its financial situation, which was already "perilous".

Official picket lines were formed outside Bus stations affected by Bus Éireann's strike with unaffected services moving bus stops, especially in Dublin, respecting the picket lines of the two main unions SIPTU (Services, Industrial, Professional and Technical Union) and NBRU (National Bus and Railworkers' Union). The role of the official picket lines is mainly two-fold, to prevent the use of Bus Éireann's buses for strike-breaking services on the one hand, and to keep the strikers in line on the other.

Unofficial Picket Action in Dublin

After a week of "official" picket-line duty in Dublin, being marginalised while the rest of Dublin's transport system was working, led to several hours of unofficial, secondary picketing on Friday 31st March. With their union banners and picket placards the strikers moved into the centre of Dublin bringing many of the transport services to a halt. These picket lines were readily respected by other transport workers, who could easily be on the firing line themselves in the future. It demonstrated what the strikers could do if they had to extend the strike.

It took many hours for the affected bus and rail services in the Republic of Ireland to return to normal after the now unofficial picket-lines linked to the Bus Éireann strike were lifted. Intercity and commuter rail services and Dublin Bus and DART services were seriously disrupted during the Friday morning. Rail and bus services crossing the Irish border were also impacted as a result of the action.

Having made their point the strikers returned to the official picket lines. After that, the condemnation of this form of wildcat picketing was not long in coming.

The NBRU said it had told its members that the unofficial pickets should be removed as they had not been sanctioned by the union. A NBRU official made it clear that all workers at Iarnród Éireann and Dublin Bus who are members of the NBRU should be at work as normal. He apologised for the inconvenience to travellers and said he was angered when he heard of the action, which his union would not support.

The Irish Taoiseach Enda Kenny also joined in the attacks on this type of unofficial picketing. "The wildcat action

that was taken last weekend was disgraceful, and discommoded hundreds of thousands of people," he said.

Union Officials Take Control

Having managed to reassert their control over the official picket lines the Union leaders quickly agreed to the strike going to arbitration at the Workplace Relations Commission, which began on the 5th April. It would be a condition of talks that the strike would continue and the pickets would remain in place. This was hardly an exercise in militancy, more of a way of keeping the strikers under control.

A SIPTU official made it clear that they could not back down from the strike, simply returning to work was not an option. This was because members had been dismissed in Munster and some workers had had their wages cut by substantial amounts.

SIPTU was then starting to lay out its stall in future collaboration, over the heads of their members "We know that there's inefficiencies to be driven out of the system in Bus Éireann, we're up for that task," said SIPTU spokesman Willie Noone.

"But one of the essential themes is that equity has to prevail, we believe that the management numbers have to be curtailed, we believe it's top-heavy.

"We believe that if there is going to be cost-cutting in payroll, management have to play a leading role in that."

The Bus Éireann strike ended on April 14th. They were called off by the unions after the Labour Court arbitration board ruled that the company was insolvent. Of course the board will hand down their recommendations and Bus Éireann workers are will vote on the proposals in early May.

Since Bus Éireann went back to work both the Dublin Bus drivers union and on April 28th the Iarnród Éireann (Railroads) staff and school-bus drivers voted to join with the Bus Éireann drivers if they decide to return to the strike.

SI Cobas: Class Conflict in Modena

Below is the statement on the events surrounding the trumped up false accusation of accepting bribes, and arrest of the National Coordinator of SI Cobas, who had gone to Modena for negotiations at the Levoni/Alcar Uno meat-processing plant, where 55 workers had been fired after the settlement of various strikes by members of SI Cobas.

This arrest triggered off ten days of events: about two hundred workers and union militants had remained for three days in a demonstration outside Modena prison,

until the freeing of the National Coordinator of SI Cobas. Meanwhile many strikes took place in various logistic warehouses in Northern Italy, really hitting hard sectors of the national activity of this branch of industry. Finally, on Saturday 4th February, a national demonstration was organized in Modena, where this statement was distributed.

For some hours before the demonstration was due to take place, the police refused permission for this march to go through the Modena Centre. In that event the many hundreds of demonstrators, the great majority workers, after being halted in a square for two hours during a down-pour of rain, with great enthusiasm marched off in another direction, until they reached Modena railway station, which they occupied for half an hour. After a brief clash with police the demonstrators left the rail station heading towards Modena Centre and partially marching through it.

LONG LIVE THE WORKING CLASS

***United and Organized in a Class Union -
Conducted by an Authentic
Revolutionary Communist Party - To
Break with our Enemies and this Regime
of Exploitation***

The arrest of the National Coordinator of the SI Cobas raises some important considerations.

- The reaction of the workers members and activists in the SI Cobas - with strikes in dozens of companies, has actually hit the productive activity of the sector, was promptly initiated with the news of his arrest, organizing also a strong garrison around the Modena prison that lasted two days- confirms that this union has gained the confidence of the workers and how it is teaching them to act according to the methods and principles of action of class struggle. In fact, the workers defended their union with the practical act of the struggle and not with generic appeals to the institutions of the bourgeois state or the so-called "civil society", like both rank and file and Regime unions almost always do.

- The fact that the police apparatus of the Italian bourgeois state has attempted to hit the national leadership of the SI Cobas confirms that their union's action is grounded in the class struggle. For that reason the SI Cobas worries the Italian capitalist class as already indicated by the hundreds of acts of repression occurring over the last six years: blacklists, layoffs, violent attacks on pickets, arrests, arrests and deportations.

- Almost all the so called free press, radio and television, has for years completely ignored the hard fought strikes organized by SI Cobas. Suddenly, when it comes to

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tarring the SI Cobas' prestige, its strength, SI Cobas has appeared all over the news, even being called "the most combative union," as to demonstrate to workers there is no hope of rescue for the working class. There is no "free press" in capitalism only a bourgeois press and a proletarian press. Workers, with the union, must also yield their own press and not rely on those outside their own organizations of struggle.

- The Emilia Romagna CGIL and Parma FILT-CGIL unions have not missed an opportunity to spit poison against the SI Cobas and proven once again to be servants of the ruling class regime and against the working class.

- Two major rank and file trade union confederations, USB and CUB, have distinguished themselves by their silence. Not only have they refused to take any action but haven't even expressed their solidarity with the SI Cobas. Worse, the national executive of the COBAS Confederation (another rank and file union) has asked the bourgeois press to avoid any association with it and the SI Cobas. Siding with SI Cobas only CUB Transportation, the Allca CUB, the SGB and CGIL minority group "The union is another thing". The miserable conduct of the leaderships of these base unions, which for years, with their sectarianism, have impeded the unity of workers action, confirms the need for workers and activists of these organizations to fight against their leadership, and impose a truly classist direction.

- This attack on SI Cobas was not the first and will not be the last. Capitalism sinks every day more into world economic crisis, and to slow its fall it must increase the exploitation of the working class by attacking the class' living and working conditions. For the bourgeoisie to prevent the rebirth of one big Class Union, attacking even small organizations moving in that direction, is a vital issue, because workers need to fight today in their own defence and for the union's quick and effective strengthening, if they do not want to be crushed by the weight of this dying mode of production.

- Capitalism's march is to the only bourgeois solution of its economic crisis: World War III. The reconstruction of the class trade union is required to focus the forces of the proletariat, internationally, by creating the fundamental feeling of brotherhood and unity, putting a stop to the most sinister exploitation. But it is not enough to prevent this perspective. The only way to prevent the imperialist war is its transformation into a revolution: to turn the gun that the masters will place in the hands of workers to shoot their class brothers in other countries, to turn it against their own ruling class regime. This task can only be accomplished by a genuine revolutionary international communist party, which fights mercilessly against all the opportunist parties, the false communist parties, and knows how to win the confidence of the workers with its methods and its practical conduct in the field of trade union struggle.

Saturday, 4th February 2017

The need for an International Organisation of Port Workers

Capitalism is trying to make shipping, stevedoring, logistics and product delivery as automated as possible. Massive amounts of capital are being invested in order to make this happen.

Massive attacks on working class living standards are as well. In order to implement this level of automation breaking any force for workers' interests will be needed. This will allow for the casualization of work and making workers struggles more difficult to wage.

Shipping companies and their economists are quite open about this. It is easier to run 24/7 automated ports than with workers. Also workers have ability to stop the flow of trade with job and strike actions. By disrupting ships getting in and out of port as well as container delivery times, job actions can raise costs exponentially.

This ability to raise significant disruptions to shipping gives port workers a great deal of power. Even short job actions can cost shipping companies millions.

Industry analysts estimate 40-50% reduction of work force in automated over contemporary container ports.

The Port of Rotterdam, Netherlands, is the shipping industry's model automated port. considered the most "advanced" in the world, with all three major parts of the container moving process automated. In Rotterdam's other terminals, almost every single transport vehicle and stacking crane are fully automated.

Some of the currently existing automated terminals are located in Rotterdam, Dubai, Hamburg, Odessa, Tanjung Pelepas (Malaysia), Hong Kong and Singapore. The largest American ports - New York (Atlantic) and Long Beach/Los Angeles (Pacific) are being automated now. In Italy the Port of Vado is being automated with investments from Danish and Chinese shipping companies.

Breaking Unions

Of course, shipping and terminal companies have been active in breaking dockworker unions for a long time. What we are seeing now is a more coordinated international effort which represents the capabilities of a more consolidated industry. For example, below there are many references to the Danish APM Terminal (AMPT) company, the 3rd largest operator in the world. APMT is

owned by the Maersk shipping company, the world's largest.

Some Examples

SPAIN: The European Court of Justice ruled in 2014 that the local Port Authorities set up to administer Spain's docks - and hire dockers - is in violation of the EU Treaty. The EU is demanding these agencies be dismantled and hiring be done by private Terminal companies. Currently, in early 2017, there have been a number of nationwide one day Port strikes. The European Dockers Union Council has also called for European-wide strikes.

SWEDEN: Swedish dockworkers are currently in ongoing battle with AMPT in Gothenburg, the largest Port in Scandinavia. The largest union at Gothenburg - the Swedish Dockers Union (SDU) - is not party to the national labor agreements. The government recognized Swedish Transport Workers Union (STWU) has been attempting to make agreements with AMPT to eliminate the 1972 split off SDU.

COSTA RICA in August 2014 Dockworker union SINTRAJAP joined in nation wide protests against the concession awarded to the Danish APM Terminals to operate the Moin Container Terminal. On 22 Oct, 2014 the union went on a strike which ended on 5 November when they accepted mediation. Strikers were accused of shooting AK-47s towards Riot Police.

GREECE: In 2016 the Greek government privatized the country's largest ports - Piraeus to the Hong Kong based COSCO and Thessaloniki's sale is being negotiated currently. All jobs would likely be casualized. The Dockers union called a strike to stop privatization plans. The strike seemed to have some success - hurting cruise ship income during the tourist season - but was called off just before the Parliament's vote.

ATLANTIC COAST USA: Port authorities have been reducing the number of union dock (longshore in US) workers. In most workplaces there is only one legal union. In the port of New York - the second largest in the USA, only 33% new hire workers are members of the International Longshore Association (ILA) union. Similar arrangements are being forced in other Atlantic Ports. The ILA has been conducting single day strikes to protest. There have also been a number of significant wildcat strikes especially in New York.

PACIFIC COAST USA - the pacific coast dockers' International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) is one of the most militant in the US. Several years ago they repeatedly shut down all Ports on the west coast to protest a non-union terminal in Longview, WA. The terminal was forced to agree to ILWU workers.

On the west coast there have also been many strikes by 1000s of the truck drivers who take containers from the Ports. These are very precarious jobs held mainly by immigrants from Mexico and India. Many of the strikes

have been spontaneous, non-official union and to the end shutting down the largest ports in the USA. And often successful. Proving that hard struggles can win

The Decline of the UK: the End of its Empire in a European Context. Brexit – the Long Goodbye

The “traumatic” result of the British referendum in June 2016 on membership of the European Union continues to reverberate. Irritated, the heads of state of the European Union immediately insisted the United Kingdom would have to adhere to the stringent conditions of the Lisbon Treaty’s Article 50, which stipulates a period of two years for a country to complete the process of revoking its membership. The United Kingdom is having difficulties imposing its negotiating position and many states, Germany included, have said that the UK cannot expect better treatment outside the EU than it enjoyed inside.

In order to reassure the “Brexiters”, the British Prime Minister has confirmed that the result of the referendum will be honoured, and that “Brexit means Brexit”. But still no-one has any idea what Brexit actually entails, least of all the Brexiters. The anti-Brexit camp then started issuing dark warnings to workers about how their condition will deteriorate if not protected by EU labour legislation (as we are now!), and the Prime Minister retorted with a few perfunctory comments, posing as the protector of the poor; which convinced no-one.

The economic, commercial, financial, political, diplomatic, military, regulatory and institutional links that constitute the European Union, to be dispensed with or renegotiated, have not only not been tackled but have not even been listed. The triggering of Article 50 was therefore postponed, only finally taking place on March 29.

What is certain is that the vote to leave has set in motion all kinds of dislocations inside the traditional party machines. The Conservative Party leadership hastily nominated Theresa May; Jeremy Corbyn sacked members of the Shadow Cabinet and faced a new struggle for the Labour Party leadership. The arguments of both the Remainer and Brexiter camps on sovereignty, immigration, etc, have stayed substantially the same – and they are all in any case meaningless from the perspective

of the working class in a world where capitalism is the sovereign power.

Theresa May's supposedly new "One Nation" policy is equally vacuous, while the suggestion that there could be an "Empire 2.0" blatantly harks back to the policy of Imperial Preference advocated by Joseph Chamberlain at the end of the 19th Century in defence of British imperialism and colonialism, which were even then already in decline. It is clear that the decisions on how to proceed and what type of Brexit it will be have not yet been taken.

Although the pound has been devalued, with some knock-on effect on the rate of inflation, so far there have been no major economic consequences, thanks largely to the intervention of the Bank of England lowering the interest rate to ward off recession after the referendum.
Europe after the Second World War

We made an initial assessment of the Brexit vote in the last Communist Left (no. 38/39) in the articles "Against the European Union Referendum!" and "The Tottering Framework of Capitalism". And here we continue our examination of the events which led to the present situation. In the second article we referred to the domestic and international events which in 1970-74 led to the fall of the Heath government, which was overwhelmed by strikes, in particular by the miners. The petrol shortage, which forced industry to introduce a three-day week and cuts to the electricity supply, contributed to the image of a country that was out of control. It was in these circumstances that the Heath government had hastened to join the European Economic Community.

New Geopolitical Realities

By joining the EEC the United Kingdom certainly didn't put a stop to the long decline of the UK economy; but it did provide an opportunity for the monetarists, in particular that loathsome variety gathered around Thatcher, to "restructure" the national economy. This represented a shift from the post-war Keynesian justification for the state planning of investments towards the opposite position, exalting the principles of the "free market". What finally appears today as an abandonment of monetarism doesn't signify a return to orthodox Keynesianism, but rather to a mishmash of the two ideologies.

In the period of Keynesian orthodoxy, the world had recently emerged from the Second World War. The USA was economically and militarily the dominant power, and the whole of Europe the spoils of war, with social upheaval a constant threat. A new panorama of capitalism had opened up.

The British Empire was over, its formal liquidation and the final acceptance of its inevitable demise only a decade away. New geo-political realities had been established, even if there were many in the ruling class deluded enough to think that Great Britain was still a global power

able to take on all comers, and that a British Prime Minister could still draw lines in the sand marking out British spheres of interest. The Suez crisis of 1956 confirmed the reality of Britain's decline and accelerated the process of decolonialization.

The new reality was a Europe divided between the imperialist powers of America and Russia; a division imposed by means of economic as well as military force. Early on America was the only atomic power and had overwhelming supremacy, even if Russia was still able to muster a huge number of boots on the ground. Later on, in the so-called Cold War period, which was characterised by its ploys and counter-ploys, by the nuclear arms race, by proxy wars (Korea, Vietnam), by the McCarthyist and Stalinist purges, by the NATO and Warsaw pacts, the two sides often seemed like grotesque reflections of one another in some vast distorting mirror.

With Europe divided in this way, the possibility of a threat to peace from a re-emergent Germany was removed. Indeed the Morgenthau plan, backed by France, which proposed the de-industrialization of Germany and its return to an agricultural past was rejected once and for all. Besides, the reconstruction of Western Europe had become both a geopolitical and an economic necessity for the Americans. For continental Europe there was the Marshall Plan; for Great Britain there were only loans, whose harsh terms demonstrated the reduced influence Great Britain now had on the world stage.

All this is ultimately reflected in the modern European Union.

The United Kingdom was bankrupt; the risk of social upheavals was significant. The 1942 Beveridge Report had set out a series of objectives for the post-war period that would be "worth fighting for"; in fact it was just propaganda to sustain the morale of the troops in time of war: issued by His Majesty's Stationary Office, millions of copies were distributed, and especially among the armed forces. Nonetheless, no parliamentary majority could possibly ignore the expectations that it raised. The Americans were horrified; when Beveridge was invited to the United States to attend a series of conferences he was declared an "undesirable alien".

Following the election of a Labour government, which made the Beveridge Report its own in the United Kingdom, and the implementation of the Marshall Plan in Western Europe, both Labour and Conservative governments embraced Keynesian political economy as a means of increasing "effective demand" to prevent economic collapse.

By contrast in America, where consumption was increasing, Keynes was branded as a "communist". It was only retrospectively that Roosevelt's New Deal would be recognized as Keynesian, and Roosevelt himself had only managed to get it through Congress in the thirties by convincing the Southern Democrats that the idea was based on the Mussolini's policies in Italy. Right up to the

moment America entered the Second World War, the State Department regularly sent researchers to Italy to learn about good practice in the efficient management of State and private enterprises.

The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank were set up on America's terms, rejecting any of proposals from Keynes that would have allowed America's economic policy to be subjected to outside interference. The IMF and WB became tools which America could use to impose its economic policies, to varying degrees, on all other countries.

The United States did, however, adopt other policies inspired by Keynes, even if this was never openly acknowledged. Whereas Keynesian economic policies had already been adopted by the mid-seventies in Europe, in the United States the accession of Lyndon Johnson to the Presidency, following the assassination of Kennedy, provided the right moment to increase government expenditure and reform the welfare system (with Medicare and Medicaid) bringing it into line with Europe.

Yet despite the claims of Johnson's "Great Society", in the midst of the Civil Rights movement and its demands, it was once again necessary to obscure the reality of the dominant role played by state intervention in the US economy (though in particular by the vast spending on the Vietnam war and other imperialist interventions) and disguise the causes of poverty. The 1965 Moynihan Report fulfilled that purpose, by as good as saying that anyone who needed welfare was lazy, criminal, immoral, mentally deficient or subhuman...

The Keynesian remedy of state intervention in the economy, or rather the intervention of the economy in the State, is a real necessity for capitalism in crisis. It is not simply a "policy" (and much less a "left-wing" one) that capitalism has voluntarily decided to adopt. Indeed it is not an alternative to the direct oppression of the working class by means of ruthless austerity, by coercive measures against the trade unions, or by bloody repression using the armed forces of the State. It is not "a step towards socialism" as the Social Democrats would have us believe. It doesn't automatically mean an increase in social and welfare benefits for the working class.

Rather, Keynesian economics calls for State involvement in the economy by footing the bill for infrastructure projects (in some cases using the unemployed as cheap labour) and nationalizing essential industries that have become too unprofitable for private capital. A key element of this perspective is the printing of paper money to pay for these investments and stimulate a flagging economy. This creates inflation and consequently reduces the standard of living of the working class. Here once again capitalism reveals its true nature, fully reflected in the policies of the Social Democrats (such as the Labour Party) which try to impose wage restraints and introduce anti-trade-union legislation. All of it leads to austerity and coercive control of the working class by other means.

The Keynesian school was therefore also very useful to British capitalism during the post-war reconstruction. It helped maintain social peace and provided a more influential role for the trade union bureaucracy.

But British industry's real problems were its lack of investment and its need to "restructure". British capitalists continued to use the old industrial plant left over from the war, with its outdated machinery and intensive use of labour power. Meanwhile, their more advanced European competitors, who had seen their industries razed to the ground during the war, had been compelled to rebuild them using the most modern techniques. In particular the increased efficiency of German industry allowed its bosses to compete effectively while granting (relatively) better conditions to their workers, who were in short supply. The so-called "Wirtschaftswunder" (economic miracle) occurred not in spite of, but because of, the destruction of capital and the need to restart the process of accumulation.

In the United Kingdom, harsh workers' struggles brought down the Labour government (1964-70) and Barbara Castle's anti-trade-union legislation *In Place of Strife* had to be shelved, though immediately re-introduced under the subsequent Heath government (1970-74). The devaluation of the pound under the subsequent Wilson government, in a brutal attempt to get the working class to foot the bill for the crisis, failed to obtain the economic benefits that the British ruling class had hoped for.

As the British economy stagnated in the late sixties and seventies, the British working class tried to combat austerity with a wave of strikes. The re-election of the Wilson government in 1974, which was already promising a referendum on staying in the EEC, did not resolve any of the fundamental problems which were facing the British bourgeoisie. The post-war consensus was about to end.

The United Kingdom was bankrupt. Sterling dropped below \$1.70 and Chancellor of the Exchequer Denis Healey was forced to abandon a flight to the IMF's September 1976 meeting in Manila and drive from Heathrow to Labour's angry Blackpool conference,¹ where he announced that "the country" had to live within its means. By December he and Prime Minister Callaghan had forced through enough spending cuts to secure a £1.9bn loan from the IMF (in return for £2bn worth of cuts!) to tide Britain over and appease the markets. This marked the end to the post-war consensus around Keynesian economic orthodoxy, and the emergence of a new consensus, around the new orthodoxy of monetarism!

Continuity of Left & Right

This demonstrates once again that there is no genuine opposition to be found in the economic programmes of the parties of capital; all of them change strategy whenever capital requires it, and elections have little or no impact. Thatcher pursued the monetarist policies initiated by Healey and Callaghan, as did the Blair and Brown Labour

governments. The so-called “alternative strategies” presented for example by the Bennite Left, which wanted to prop up British industry by imposing import controls, were never going to happen. They only succeeded in disorientating the British proletariat at moments of heightened class struggle.

The Thatcher government only stood out because it was more open in its attacks on the working class, creating in the process the myth that the Callaghan government had been too soft on working class militancy and too lax in managing public finances. Having fought the 1979 election under the slogan “Labour isn’t working” the Thatcher government then openly used “a dose of unemployment” to force workers to accept whatever they could get. A few decades and at least a generation later, British workers have suffered a series of defeats. However, while at times they may seem prepared to just accept the few breadcrumbs they are offered, there are mounting signs of resistance, as shown by strikes and protest actions, most recently by railway workers.

Thatcher’s line, continued under successive Labour and Tory administrations, was to try and keep the country solvent by promoting the City, the financial services sector, tourism and niche “creative” sectors etc. Making the City of London the EU’s main financial trading hub was a core part of this strategy while entire industries such as shipbuilding and steel manufacturing went to rack and ruin if they could not generate sufficient profits. They consoled themselves with the idea that “forging steel can always be done somewhere else”. In fact what occurred was a general running down of Britain’s industrial base. What was really keeping Britain “solvent” was unsustainable levels of credit expansion, leading to mounting public and private debt and recurrent crises.

By now even “neo-liberalism” seems to have run its course in the aftermath of the 2008 financial meltdown.

Brexiteers in the Ascendant

The Brexiteers, who now appear to be in the ascendant, advocate Britain’s withdrawal from the European single market and customs union, the re-forging of trade links with “the Commonwealth” (with echoes of Joseph Chamberlain’s Imperial Preference) and tough immigration controls which, they dishonestly claim, will help create “British jobs for British workers”. (Though the rhetoric might be different, similar “solutions” are still being touted by the Bennite anti-globalization left.) In this sense, rhetoric and false promises have been far outrunning practical realities. Expectations have to be held in check and some British political commentators are suggesting that in calling the election, Prime Minister May is hoping to return politics to “business as usual”. Which means: dashed hopes and more austerity.

No-one really knows what precisely will happen to the economy or what the government’s line will be now the Brexit vote has been triggered and an election called.

However, one thing is certain: the outcome of the election, whatever it is, will bring no benefits for the working class. It has been called in an attempt to build a consensus within the British bourgeoisie behind its Brexit strategy, and to strengthen its hand in dealing with any resurgence in working class militancy.

The ruling classes never reveal their true practical intentions and what lies behind them, especially when they themselves lack a clear consensus about what to do or how to do it. Instead, the British ruling class will stumble from crisis to crisis. Its policies will be dictated not by party manifestoes and even less by the so-called “will of the people”, but by the needs of the capitalist economy, and specifically, to keep the working class in check.

Tory or Labour, Brexit or no Brexit, the ruling class is planning further attacks on working class living standards. All of its parties will try to fool us into believing that the solution lies in the defence of the “national interest” (in or out of the EU) – but as we have seen, for the working class the national interest always translates into “living within our means”.

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continued from front page

MAY DAY 2017

But capitalism cannot turn back the clocks and shut itself within national markets: in order to survive it needs to devastate the World. There can never be a capitalism without crisis and without wars. On the contrary, bourgeois states increasingly reveal the conflicts of interests which divide them and which can no longer be concealed behind diplomatic etiquette. They are already competing with weapons in the endless Syrian conflict, but they are preparing a new and third global conflict, one that will far exceed the horrendous bloodbaths of proletarians in the First and Second World Wars.

This is unavoidable: all governments, whether right or left, warlike or pacifist, will throw themselves into the furnace of war. And they will throw the proletariat in with them, since war is necessary for the self preservation of the world's bourgeois class: in essence, war is an uprising against the working class and against communism.

Over the past few decades of capitalist peace, despite the enormous wealth accumulated by the bourgeoisie, the working class of the oldest industrialized countries has seen the withdrawal of the few scraps conceded by reformist corruption, pacifism, and conservative bourgeois "progress", while in more recently developed countries, hundreds of millions have poured into the cities from the countryside to become industrial workers and, drilled in the tough school of capitalism, have been swallowed into the immense army of the global working class, which is called to the communist revolution by poverty and by objective historical conditions.

For its defense against the devastation of late and moribund capitalism today, and for its liberation tomorrow, the proletariat can only count on its own strength, its longstanding and unceasing tradition of struggle, and the Communist Programme, whose only guardian is the Party. A programme that is mature and now urgently needed all over the world, as the destroyer of mercantilism and wage labour.

History can repeat itself

In May one century ago, just as the imperialist First World War was tearing Europe's proletariat to shreds, the Bolshevik Party was preparing to lead a revolution that would soon tear down the bourgeois state and its government in the name of proletarian internationalism, an end to the war, agrarian reform, and world communism.

The working class of the entire world attempted to follow that example, but was then beaten. The class wasn't defeated by the bourgeoisie's military but by its accomplice – the reformism infiltrated into the workers' movement.

But the proletariat will return to make its voice heard once again. It will give itself organizations for defensive

struggles, true class unions enabling it to struggle with ever longer and more determined strikes against the bosses' oppression. It will once again start to fight for better working and living conditions, against the national economy, which is nothing other than the capitalist economy, thereby setting itself already on the road to the destruction of capital's inhuman and obsolete laws.

This incessant battle will be a schooling in social war, whereby the proletariat will learn to recognize its own party, opposed to all the others. Through the Communist Party, the class will impose its own historical perspective on the deadly perspective of the bourgeois class and will assume the leadership of suffering humanity in its entirety through a revolutionary process that, as in Russia from 1917 to the early 1920s, will break down the power of bourgeois states to establish its own dictatorship – and ultimately lead to the abolition of wage labour, commodities, and of class-divided society.

Just as we did 100 years ago, today we reiterate that the class will oppose the inevitable wars of Capital with its slogan: Revolution!

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