

# 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 manoeuvres

## Leaflet distributed to Unione Sindacale di Base (USB) congress September 2022 The First Step to Stop the Imperialist War is to Strike to Refuse to Pay its Costs

World capitalism is entering a new recession. This is happening without most of the capitalistically mature – so-called Western – countries having recovered their pre-2008 crisis production levels.

These countries are sinking into the crisis of overproduction that began in 1973-74, which they have been able to survive, for half a century now, thanks to an increasing attack on the achievements of the labor movement. State and private indebtedness, and the full development of capitalism in the so-called “developing” countries, which, with their low labor costs and their rates of growth of young capitalisms, have fielded back the fall in the profit rate.

But the inexorable economic laws of capitalism – which only Marxism has been able to understand and explain – are also driving those capitalisms, no longer youthful, into the crisis of overproduction, a historical fact of which the recent bursting of the real estate speculative bubble in China was a symptom.

World capitalism is marching toward its inevitable economic ruin, increasingly plunging all of humanity further into barbarism every day. The worst and most peculiar product of the capitalist economic crisis is imperialist war. Points of friction between world and regional imperialisms, and between their vassal capitalist states, are increasing in number and getting hotter: the Middle East, the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Indo-Pakistani border, South Asia, Taiwan,...

Inevitably, war breaks out, and capitalism as a whole is the real culprit, despite the fact that every bourgeois regime tries to pin the blame on its adversary. Russian imperialism must react to the capitalist

economic crisis that grips it internally. The US one – no less decadent and worn down by the crisis – works to curb its decline as a dominant power by provoking conflicts that harm its adversaries: the emerging Chinese imperialism, as well as the old imperialisms of Europe, hiding behind the cloak of a unity that in capitalism is impossible and false.

The imperialist powers all operate on the basis of the same economic drive, as do the smaller capitalist states, which are, however, only clay pots inside iron pots.

Of Ukraine's independence and the living conditions of its people, like those of the people of the Donbass, the bourgeois regimes on either side of the conflict don't give a damn. The imperialist war is only a matter of the economic and political interests of the bourgeoisie: democracy, resistance, independence and anti-fascism are just lies waved on both sides of the front to fool workers into going to the front to kill and die for the interests of their exploiters.

Because, finally, the deepest historical reality of imperialist war, maturing again before our eyes, is class struggle: war is a product of the crisis of capitalism and at the same time the only means capitalism has of surviving, at the cost of a blood sacrifice, against the working class and against communism.

The real “aggressed” in the imperialist war is not this or that capitalist state, or a front states, but the international proletariat, the workers of the whole world, sent to be massacred to make this inhuman and reactionary mode of production survive.

But the workers, if framed in their class-based union and led by their revolutionary party, have the strength to stop the

new world slaughter to which the bourgeoisie is pushing them in order to save itself.

The imperialist war for the world bourgeoisie is a matter of life and death: it must break out and be as devastating as possible, because only by destroying factories, infrastructure, cities and commodities of all kinds, including the commodity of labor-power, can capitalism restart a new cycle of accumulation.

The economic growth of the 1950s and 1960s of the past century was made possible by the 50 million victims of World War II, which was also – like today's war – imperialist on both fronts.

The watchword of the revolutionary Communist Party in the face of imperialist war is – as it was in Russia in October 1917 – revolutionary defeatism: to support and organize the refusal of the proletarian-soldiers to fight, to call for and foment fraternization with the workers of the opposite front, to call for and work for the military defeat of one's own country.

The only way to stop the imperialist war is for the workers in one national sector of the front of a war, which will once again be world-wide, to set an example by beginning to turn their guns, not against their class brothers in different uniforms with whom they are forced to fight by their respective bourgeois governments, but against their own military command and government.

For such an example will infect the whole front, all soldiers, all national armies. This was attempted in World War I, after the example set by Russian soldiers, by Russian imperialism, communist, working class party.

But it is also necessary for workers to be trained to and organized to fight for their

immediate, essential needs: for wage increases, for reduction of working hours, for wages for unemployed workers.

Because these needs, and the struggle for them, unite workers above all false divisions between companies, categories, ethnicity, gender and finally nations, they are already defeatist towards the goals and interests of the bourgeoisie: more profits, more exploitation, sacrifice of workers for the sake of the company and national capitalism, war.

That is why the first step of proletarian and revolutionary defeatism in the imperialist war is to organize the struggle for the economic, essential, needs of the workers: the first step to stop the imperialist war is to strike to refuse to pay its costs.

To this end a genuinely class-based union is needed, still absent in Italy as in all countries of the world, the result – like the weakness of the revolutionary party of the long historical course inaugurated by the Stalinist

counterrevolution, which destroyed and distorted the organization and the principles of communism, condemning proletarians all over the world to the torment of another century of putrid capitalism.

In Italy, the grassroots unions have for years represented an attempt to build a class union, but divisions resulting from the opportunism of their leaderships only help the regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) maintain control of the workers, which helps prevent their mobilization.

In the past year, important united actions have finally been taken: the general strike on October 11th last year and the anti-war strike on May 20th.

Faced with the serious rise in inflation eroding wages, the militants and workers of all the rank-and-file unions must fight for the organization of a united struggle – including class-based oppositions inside the CGIL – which has at its center the demand for strong wage increases.

In many countries of the world, of young as well as old capitalism – from Pakistan to the United Kingdom, from Latin America to the United States – strong strikes for wage increases are already under way.

No energy should be wasted instead in the semile and lying bourgeois electoral theater! A strike movement of hundreds of thousands of workers is able to win wage increases that will concretely improve their lives while millions of votes achieve nothing. Tens of thousands of workers framed in the revolutionary International Communist Party in the major countries of the world, at the head of a class union movement, is what will be needed to take political power away from the ruling class and give it to the working class.

Today, a united class union front to organize the struggle for wages increases next fall is the first concrete step to build a real class union and oppose the imperialist war!

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our comrades and only modified to a small extent, entitled “Against the rising cost of living a united action of militant unionism is necessary for the construction of a general movement for strong wage increases.”

This document takes up and reiterates the indication given by our party, expressed in the leaflet distributed in Genoa on Sept. 1 at a national assembly of the USA against the war, titled “The first step in stopping imperialist war is to strike and refuse to pay its costs.” This party leaflet was distributed in Genoa at the subway station in a proletarian neighborhood of the city over several days.

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The party leaflet and the CLA leaflet were distributed at an assembly in Rome on Saturday, Sept. 17, called the “Proletarian Anti-Capitalist Assembly.” Two of our comrades and two union militants from the CLA were present at it.

This assembly is intended to be a body with a permanent character and is what remains of the Anti-Capitalist Action Pact that was created three years ago by the SI COBAS leadership, finding mainly support outside the union in the Stalinist political group Communist Youth Front.

This operation of the SI COBAS leadership was strongly criticized by us, because it tended to create a hybrid body between party and union, even before the political positions expressed.

We had also expressed the easy prediction of a premature death, of such a Pact of Action, which invariably occurred, at the behest of the two forces that had promoted it, SI COBAS leadership and FGC.

Some smaller forces that had joined it, more correct in conduct but equally confused and opportunistic, didn't want to abandon the project, and with much smaller forces renamed it the “Proletarian Anti-Capitalist Assembly.”

We can then characterize this proposal as having the same flaws as the Action Pact promoted by the SI COBAS leadership, with the only difference being that it declares more clearly that it wants to constitute a union-party body.

One of our comrades intervened by reiterating, in a very well articulated speech, the need to keep the two spheres, union and party, distinct.

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The day after the Roman assembly at which we spoke, a national assembly of SI COBAS was held in Bologna. Neither our

comrades nor any CLA modified to a small extent, entitled “Against the rising cost of living a united action of militant unionism is necessary for the construction of a general movement for strong wage increases.”

Compared to similar assemblies organized by SI COBAS in past years, this one was not convened behind the screen of the so-called “Assembly of Combative Workers.”

The latter was nothing more than an instrument of the Action Pact to try to give it a broader base of support. It had to forcibly remain subordinate to the directives of the Covenant of Action and, where this was not possible, as in Rome, it was made to die by its promoters, i.e., the leaders of the SI COBAS and the FGC.

The fact that the assembly this year was convened not in the name of this body but of the SI COBAS is confirmation of the death of both the Covenant of Action and the Assembly of Combative Workers, but above all – what only matters to us – of the short-sightedness and opportunism of the leadership of this union.

The Bologna assembly saw on the one hand less participation than previous editions in years past, and on the other a heightened characterization in a party sense, with a more evident presence of the front of political groups that directs SI COBAS, called Revolutionary Internationalist Tendency.

This is yet another confirmation of the persistence of these leaders in their opportunism, in the error of wanting to overcome the difficulties of the class struggle with the illusory shortcut of building a half-union, half-party organism.

## Belgian Rail Workers Strike against Cuts

The crisis in capitalism is a global one and workers in all countries face similar challenges. Rail workers are taking action in parallel disputes in many countries, which now include Belgium. The politicians everywhere mouth pieties about global warming, yet in practice they are cutting back on investment in railways, one of the most environmentally friendly forms of travel. In Belgium, a small but relatively wealthy country,

budgetary cuts mean that without additional resources, 700 km of railway lines are threatened with disappearance, along with 2,000 jobs. Belgian railway workers, who also face cuts in real wages, have had enough and are organizing the resistance.

Belgian railways are already under strain. 22,000 trains were canceled over the last year. That's one train out of 30, a record number. Punctuality has also gone down, after an upturn during the Covid period. The reason is disinvestment and a glaring lack of staff. The government has promised a wholly inadequate package of support for SNCB (which runs the trains) and Infrabel (which manages and maintains the tracks). But the package also involved closures of ticket offices, price increases and an end to the ticket for large families, which encourages people to get off the roads and onto trains.

The Belgian government's answer is a familiar one: workers need to do more with less. The package proposes a reduction of 2,000 jobs, while increasing the number of timetabled journeys 1% per year for the next ten years, even though it cannot manage to provide 100% of its services now.

According to SNCB and Infrabel, the railroads would need an additional 3.4 billion euros (over 10 years, or about 340 million euros per year) to meet the government's objectives. The railroads have also been hit by rising energy costs, amounting to about 100 million euros to date.

Belgian rail workers are increasingly expected to bear the burden. They have not received a pay rise for 14 years and are being hit hard by the rising cost of living. Inflation in Belgium was running at 11.27% in September, up from 9.94% in August.

National rail strike  
Consequently, the

The law on the wage standard, which was reinforced by the government of Charles Michel in 2017 (Charles Michel is now President of the EU Council of Ministers, a typical career progression for Belgian Prime Ministers!) makes it

impossible for unions to negotiate real wage increases with the bosses. The Belgian “wage standard” is set every two years and determines the margin for increasing wage costs. Its aim is to hold wages at or below the expected wage rises in Belgium's larger neighbors (France, the Netherlands and Germany) but is used as a means of wage restraint. As the government website states, “If Belgian labor costs increase faster than those of our neighbors, the competitiveness of our economy decreases, which has a negative impact on employment.”

However, even this wage indexation is being attacked by employers' confederations! The net effect with the rise in the cost of living is that some Belgian families have to choose between heating and feeding themselves.

Consolidated action by workers in Belgium is often impeded by divisions. Alongside the socialist ABVV/FGTB, there is also the Christian confederation, ACV/CSC and the liberal ACLVB/CGSLB confederation. Bourgeois politicians also exploit the division between the French, Dutch and German-speaking parts of the country. However, there are positive signs that in the crisis, class unity is being strengthened.

“Railway workers are exhausted because of a lack of staff,” said Anthony Signorino, regional secretary of the General Union of Public Services (ACOD/CGSP), an affiliate member of the FGTB federation.

General Strike  
Planned for  
November 9

### Party Meetings in the US

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Party Meetings:

- email icparty@interncommparty.org to arrange meeting or let us know you will be attending.
- Denver, CO - First Saturdays at Therizo Cafe, 2890 Fairfax St, Denver, CO 80207; 11 am.
- Minneapolis, MN - First Saturdays at Hard Times Cafe, 1821 Riverside Ave; 3 to 5 pm.
- Portland, OR - First Saturdays at Honey Latte Cafe, 1033 SE Madison; 11 am.
- Pittsburgh, PA - First Saturdays at 61C Cafe, 1839 Murray Ave; 4 to 5 pm.
- Yakima, WA - Every Saturday - Northtown Coffee - 32 N Front St - 3pm
- Meetings can be arranged in: Akron, Charlotte, Raleigh, Salt Lake City.

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icparty@interncommparty.org

# American Railroad conflict approaches climax

The bourgeoisie loudly proclaims its victory: a national rail strike has been averted. Overnight talks between representatives of the unions and the carriers, with officials of the federal government acting as mediators, leading right up to the publicly announced strike deadline, have resulted in a last-minute deal. Depending on whether this tentative agreement is ratified by the rank-and-file, a strike may still occur, but the emergency round of negotiations has at least postponed it.

The latest events are the culmination of years of collective bargaining which has stalled on several occasions over various issues including wages, healthcare, and scheduling. Most recently, the government intervened by appointing a Presidential Emergency Board. After hearing both the unions and the carriers make cases for their own proposals, the board released its recommendations. Indicative of their bias in favor of the carriers was the latter's unqualified support from day one, while the unions hesitated to even put them to a vote; where they did so, based on the scant publicly available information, the rank-and-file overwhelmingly rejected the recommendations.

Further intervention by the state was necessary to resolve the crisis. President Biden met and spoke with both sides to ensure that the conflict remained within the bounds of order, preventing any extension or intensification of the struggle, while one of his highly-touted "pro-labor" appointees, Secretary of Labor Marty Walsh, himself a former union official, acted as the mediator in the overnight talks.

With the expiration of the thirty-day cooling period following the release of the board's proposals, which would have allowed the unions to strike, only hours away, the carriers agreed to concede a few minor changes to the board's proposals, such as employee healthcare contribution caps and the right to request in advance (but not necessarily be granted) one additional day off per year.

The current government is a quintessential example of the "collaborationist" strategy of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. Its "progressive" mask serves the propagandistic and ideological function of making the state appear as a neutral mediator between labor and capital, or even as the benevolent, protective father of the working class,

while also perpetuating the illusion that capital can be peacefully and legally made to actually improve the living and working conditions of the working class. In reality, however, as we can see in the terms of the tentative agreement, capital need not make any serious concessions even under the pressure of a "left-wing" regime, so workers see few substantial changes in their everyday lives.

Although the "pro-labor" government does indeed support unions, which return the favor by calling upon their membership to support said political leaders at the ballot box rather than striking, its support is conditional on the unions' "good behavior".

Conservative, collaborationist unions receive favorable treatment, while militancy continues to be repressed and independence is sabotaged at every opportunity. Moreover, the benefits offered by the state mostly accrue to opportunists in the upper echelons of the union bureaucracy, who may, for example, be offered a lucrative, cushy job in the federal government in exchange for cooperation.

Existing unions have largely embraced the role of the parasitic middleman between labor and capital, extracting dues from members and bribes from the company; at the same time, they blackmail the state with the fact that, as the representatives of the workers, they're the only ones capable of containing class struggles and thereby ensuring social peace – a threat that's especially persuasive in the face of the potential outbreak of war between great powers.

The degeneration of the unions is a sign of the present weakness of the working class, which the corrupt seek to perpetuate. However, at the same time, the machinations of opportunists in the unions as well as political leaders in the government are signs that they are haunted by the potential resurgence of the labor movement, following a militant, independent class line. A revived working class could easily stop the fragile schemes of internal and external enemies.

Arrayed on all sides are forces – corporations, union officials, and the government – trying to stop a mass strike on the railroads at all costs. Let's examine some of their arguments:

Conditions aren't that bad

There are issues with wages, healthcare, and more

as well, but let's just take a look at scheduling for now. Railroad workers are on call 24/7. While a typical worker in the United States gets two days off per week plus two weeks vacation per year, adding up to 118 days, railroad workers usually get 30 days off per year. They are so overworked that, despite extensive applications of science and technology, as well as the regulations put in place to prevent accidents which are very costly to the companies, train derailments due to operator fatigue are remarkably common. In addition, there have been multiple instances of "Positive Train Control", a system that automates some aspects of train operation and which has been used by employers to justify cutting the transportation workforce, "working" as intended and still derailing trains.

If the job really is that bad, why don't you just quit and find a new job? The challenges of changing jobs hardly need to be mentioned here. But quitting also means giving up on the state, implicitly acknowledging defeat. It means leaving your coworkers behind in a situation that you couldn't stand. In any case, the job needs to be done by someone, so your future replacement would suffer just as you did. Lastly, quitting means forfeiting the retirement that is arguably the number one reason long-time workers (i.e., those employed over ten years) remain in the industry. Individual action cannot address a social problem; collective action is necessary.

What of the dangers of escalation, retaliation on the strike, etc., implicitly threatening the potential outbreak of war between great powers. Certainly, more organization, more preparation, and leadership that is more ready to take the struggle to the very end, even to a revolutionary conclusion, would be good. However, if a critical mass of workers decides to strike, we must not refuse to take action in solidarity with them, let alone sabotage their movement as some false friends of labor do. Neither should we prioritize the survival of union institutions over the purpose of their existence: to facilitate the struggles of the working class.

The public would oppose a strike. Perhaps, but not necessarily. Public support for unions is at a high-point compared to previous decades. Further, there are measures the unions can take to win support for the strike from broader sections of the working class. For instance,

they can advance universal demands that would meet the needs of the entire working class, such as wage raises for all categories of workers, not just railroad workers, or a law for more rigorous limitation of the working day. The collective actions of a particular industry underscore the need for generalized industrial action across all sectors of the economy.

Striking will damage the national economy.

What's the point of a strike if not to damage the economy? That's workers using their only leverage: namely, the obvious truth that if nobody worked, then society would collapse in a matter of days. Unless failing to meet the workers' demands would result in even greater harm, why would their opponents even listen to them?

Profits belong to capital, not labor.

According to the Presidential Emergency Board's report, the carriers insist that profits are due to investment and risk, not labor; hence, workers do not deserve raises simply because profits have increased. Even if we leave aside the fact that the capital invested and put at risk by the companies is nothing more than the accumulated product of past labor appropriated by the owners of the means of production, the claim is patently nonsensical. If labor isn't responsible for making profits for the company, then why don't they fire their entire workforce and save all the unnecessary expenditures on the wage bill? By striking, the workers would practically be doing their employers a favor; so why oppose the strike?

The steering committee of Railroad Workers United, a rank-and-file organization promoting combativeness and association of workers within and between the rail unions, adopted the following resolutions on the potential national rail strike: We reproduce it here:

Whereas, the major freight rail carriers continue to refuse to bargain in good faith, leaving national negotiations with the unions at a standstill; and Whereas, these same carriers – represented by the National Carriers Conference Committee (NCCC) - have been making record profits for years, including all through the pandemic; and Whereas, Precision Scheduled Railroad, firings and furloughs; increased discipline and harassment; massive job cuts, short-staffing, and chronic fatigue; together with unpaid claims and wholesale abrogation of the union contract has left railroad workers frustrated, angry, and ready to fightback; and Whereas, countless workers in an array of

industries nationwide are fighting back, organizing, striking, and winning; and Whereas, current conditions appear to be ripe for railroad workers to mount a successful national strike, including but not limited to:

A general labor shortage where the rail carriers are unable to recruit and retain employees in the various crafts, including train and engine service.

Supply chains in crisis, as goods in transit are hampered at every turn.

Public opinion that has sided with striking workers throughout 2021.

The record profits generated by the carriers, together with their alienation of shippers, passengers and communities, which suggest that railroad strikers would enjoy vast public support.

Rail unions of late that have been largely standing together.

The fact that the carriers have attacked ALL rail workers, solidifying workers from all crafts, unions, and carriers.

The existence of a sitting President who claims to be "the most pro-labor President you have ever had."

Whereas, such favorable conditions for rail workers outlined above have not existed for decades – if ever – and will not continue indefinitely;

Be it Therefore, Be it Resolved that RWU urges all railroad workers to consider the strike option, and to prepare for such a strike; and Be it further Resolved that RWU urge the rail unions to educate their respective memberships on:

• The Railway Labor Act (RLA) under which our actions are governed;

• the history of rail strikes;

• the benefits and risks of taking such action with webinars, printed materials, presentations at local union meetings, and other means of communication; and

Be it further Resolved that RWU urge the rail unions to poll their respective members for a strike vote so as to ascertain the willingness of the respective memberships to take such action; and

Be it Further Resolved that RWU urge the rail unions to undertake informational picketing, "practice" strikes, and other high-profile activities to mobilize the membership, put the carriers on notice that we mean business; to educate the public as to our cause; and to mobilize our allies; and

Be it Finally Resolved, that the rail craft unions put aside their petty differences and take this opportunity to consummate a single bargaining coalition of all rail labor in order to achieve the greatest possible solidarity, unity, and power.

This assembly allowed us, through this commentary, to reiterate some important points of our trade union direction, with regard to what the true characteristics of a class movement are and to the relationship between the economic struggle and the

political struggle of the working class.

Here we add only one consideration that ties in with the above. The Factory Collective of the former GKN managed to aggregate around its struggle against the closure of the plant a movement of a certain size, such that it deployed several demonstrations, well attended, the most successful with over ten thousand participants.

The May 15 assembly was also successful, with over three hundred in attendance. These numbers have – rightly - attracted the attention of all rank and file unionism, its militants, and even the CLA.

However, in spite of the participatory mobilizations, to the extent that the leaders of the former GKN Factory Collective attached more importance to uniting their struggle with interclass movements – such as the student or environmental movements – than to uniting with other workers' struggles and, even more importantly, that to unifying the action of militant unionism, the prospects of the small movement to which they gave birth are shorter-range, compared to those of the united actions of basic unionism, albeit for now less striking in terms of participation.

The work, the effort, on the part of our party, in the union sphere, and through the CLA, has been to explain how the former GKN Factory Collective's ability to mobilize originates in the union work carried out in the past years, up to the announced closure of the factory by the ownership, and how the only future perspective is outside the factory; in the construction not of an interclass movement but of a working class one, working for the union of workers' struggles and of militant unionism.

The commitments made by the ex GKN Collective for demonstrations planned in the months ahead, all of which are interclassist in character, and the absence of any initiative aimed at directing and strengthening the movement of class-based union struggle, confirm what had already been observed in the evolution of the characteristics of the demonstrations and demands from the beginnings of the dispute from July 2021 to the present.

Contributing to the dissipation of these energies of workers' struggle in the quagmire of interclassism, once again to the detriment of the necessary work of rebuilding class union strength, were the opportunist political approach of the Collective's workers' leaders and their membership in the CGIL.

These two factors led them, on the one hand, to belittle the value of

the unions' struggle action, is an eminent factor of restraint, which helps maintain the regime unions' control over the workers, of maintaining their state of passivity.

Moreover, the direction of the unity of action of militant trade unionism, agitated at the rank and file of its bodies, is useful in sustaining and organizing the struggle against the trade union leaderships and their opportunism; expecting that such persistent and organic unity of action, leading to a permanent united class trade union front, can only be had against and to the detriment of them.

In the past two years we have witnessed a partial change of course on the part of the leaderships of the rank and file unions, especially those of USB and SI COBAS. It first showed itself with the nation-wide unified strike in logistics held June 18, 2021. It should be recalled that in this very category there was a few years ago the hardest clash between the two basic unions. Then the united course led to the October 11 general strike, a mobilization still far from being a true general strike but the most successful compared to similar actions in previous years. Then there was the general strike against the war on May 20. Finally, as we will report later, the union demonstration in Piacenza on July 23 in response to the arrests of USB and SI COBAS leaders.

This unitary course has taken place, and is likely to continue, amidst limitations, hesitations, backtracking: one step forward and two steps back.

We cannot claim this result to be a direct result of the union battle action carried out by our party, through the CLA. But it's the results of the maturing of the conditions of the class struggle, which exacerbate it and make it more and more necessary for the direction of the unified action of militant trade unions advocated by us, and thus making the rank and file unions' opportunist leadership vulnerable to the trade union action of our party, both direct and through the CLA.

Again in the June issue of the Italian newspaper we published a commentary on a national assembly convened in Florence on May 15 by the former GKN Factory Collective, in which we participated as CLA representatives.

This assembly allowed us, through this commentary, to reiterate some important points of our trade union direction, with regard to what the true characteristics of a class movement are and to the relationship between the economic struggle and the

political struggle of the working class and to seek instead the building of a people's movement, and on the other hand, not to act as a force for promoting the unity of action of militant trade unionism, so as not to jeopardize their place within the CGIL.

To really and thoroughly pursue the unity of action of conflictual unionism in fact, can only lead the areas of opposition within CGIL to break with the internal discipline of that union, which would reveal the impossibility of a class orientation within the CGIL and the need to organize outside and against it.

Confirming what has been said so far, about the vacillations and reluctance of the leaderships of the rank and file unions to persevere and improve unitary action among the various trade union organizations, after the May 20 anti-war strike, the unitary course – contrary to what we had hoped for and called for – appears to have stalled, if even, perhaps, taken steps backward.

There were other meetings between the union leaderships but this time reserved for them, which the CLA therefore could not attend.

To date there is serious confusion about the general initiatives that will be promoted in the fall months. There is a call for a SI COBAS, USB and CUB led general strike registered with the Guarantees Commission for Oct. 21; a notice sent on July 15 had not been promoted among member workers of these unions.

As if this were not enough, last Sunday - Sept. 18 - the SI COBAS held a national assembly in Bologna, titled "Let's relaunch proletarian opposition to the bosses' plans of misery, militarism and policies of social

butchery," from which it launched a general strike for Dec. 2, which evidently implies the withdrawal of adherence to the Oct. 21 mobilization.

Some leaders seem to be waiting for the national general elections on Sept. 25 before they start propagandizing and organizing any mobilizations. Or, which is even worse, they are too busy competing in the elections, as in the case of the USB leadership.

This confusion and inconclusiveness on the part of the leadership groups in the rank and file unions evidently only does harm to the work of reconstructing the class union movement, at a time when the issue of high living costs is posed with increasing gravity, and which should see rank and file unionism take an initiative to defend workers from it

This, all the more so

autonomous action by the working class and to seek instead the building of a people's movement, and on the other hand, not to act as a force for promoting the unity of action of militant trade unionism, so as not to jeopardize their place within the CGIL.

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This confusion and inconclusiveness on the part of the leadership groups in the rank and file unions evidently only does harm to the work of reconstructing the class union movement, at a time when the issue of high living costs is posed with increasing gravity, and which should see rank and file unionism take an initiative to defend workers from it

This, all the more so

given that, in view of a likely victory of the right-wing bourgeois parties, the CGIL will return, as it has always done, to give itself to some activism through mobilizations. A first sign of this is the Fiom national demonstration in Rome called for October 8th, convened without even waiting for the passage of the elections. At this demonstration our comrades will speak.

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In between the ineptitude of the opportunist leaderships of the rank and file unions manifested in recent weeks and the May 20 anti-war strike, in July there was the affair of the arrest in Piacenza of 8 local and national leaders of SI COBAS and USB.

The arrest took place as part of an investigation by the Piacenza prosecutor's office. This is the third attempt to judicially attack the class union movement in logistics: twice by the Piacenza prosecutor's office, once by that of Modena.

In the first two cases, all charges were dropped along the trial process. This third attempt, for the first time involves not only SI COBAS but also USB.

Even in this third attempt, the most serious and central charge of the investigation, that of "criminal conspiracy," came down less than two months after its initiation.

Reading the excerpts of the investigation compiled by the prosecution, indeed it seems blatant how it does not stand up judicially, and is characterized as a mere attack with anti-union aims, to curb strikes in the logistics sector and destroy the rank and file unions that organize them.

The reaction to the arrests was quite positive in terms of participation in the local demonstrations and the July 23 national demonstration in Piacenza, considering that they took place in the middle of the summer vacations period.

The most positive aspect was the united reaction of SI COBAS and USB: in Piacenza the workers of the two unions marched not only in the same procession but also mixed, that is, not divided into two sections.

We intervened by distributing a leaflet that was promptly translated into four languages.

The CLA also intervened with a leaflet titled "Unite with struggle and organization what the State wants to divide and intimidate with repression".

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The Coordinamento Lavoratori Autoconvocati, in addition to the national demonstration in Piacenza on July 23, intervened in the summer months with two leaflets.

The first was on August 2, at Piaggio in Pontedera, where on July 27 there was a strike compactly joined by workers, with a procession inside the factory, following a serious injury to a female worker.

In this factory there was traditionally a robust minority of delegates from the opposition area in CGIL, as metalworkers members of Fiom (CGIL's metal workers union).

Several years ago, these delegates had been suspended from Fiom CGIL but had not left that regime union, and had finally been readmitted to it.

Six years ago, a minority of these delegates left Fiom to join the USB. Between the delegates from the opposition within CGIL who remained in that union and those who switched to USB there was from the beginning a climate of discord.

A few months ago, delegates from the opposition groups in CGIL who had remained in that regime union also decided to leave it, and switched to a small rank and file union called SIAL COBAS. So now at Piaggio in Pontedera there are two rank and file unions.

In the nearby former Continental factory, now called Viteco, a few years ago some of the Fiom delegates, also members of the opposition area in CGIL, had left the regime union to join USB.

However, these delegates came into a bitter clash with the local USB leadership, including USB delegates at Piaggio.

In this clash, the USB delegates at Viteco sought support within the union, and thus came into contact with us, who are known to be in opposition to the positions of the national leadership.

In the relationship that was established, the bad conduct of the local USB leadership in the Viteco and Piaggio factories emerged.

The USB delegates from Viteco, along with a member of the USB provincial executive, finally decided to leave that rank and file union and also joined SIAL COBAS.

Nevertheless, the relationship with us was maintained and these delegates came closer to the CLA.

The second leafletting carried out by the CLA was on September 9 at a postal center in Ponsacco (Pisa) where a worker had died a few days earlier.

Finally, on September 12, a document was published, drafted by one of

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

The current crisis has hit workers in Bosnia and Herzegovina especially hard. The inflation rate as of September is 16.8%, the highest of all ex-Yugoslav states. Analysis done by the Union of Trade Unions of Bosnia and Herzegovina tells us that the minimum wage covers only 19% of the cost of living and that the average wage covers only 38% of it. The crisis of course led to a modest but not negligible resumption in class struggle.

### Health care workers

Over 5000 healthcare workers in Tuzla Canton had started a general strike demanding wage increase from 2.51 KM/h (\$1.25/hr) to 2.81 KM/h (\$1.40/hr). This strike resumes one that was held in May where the government had at first agreed to demands but later opted to offer a lower increase. As soon as the new strike was announced, the canton government ruled to make it illegal. The workers continue to struggle for better pay.

In May, healthcare workers in Canton 10 held a similar strike. The strike was led by three unions representing doctors, nurses and help staff (e.g., hospital cleaners). On 26 September, unions signed a collective agreement despite the help staff's union's claims that they weren't invited to negotiations and that the signed agreement wasn't beneficial to them. A day later, however, they decided to strike on their own.

### Education workers

High school teachers in western Herzegovina held a one hour warning strike continuing their two year long struggle for a collective agreement. On 21 September, 430 kindergarten workers started a strike in Banja Luka, the capital of Republika Srpska ("Serb Republic" within Bosnia and Herzegovina) for a 50 KM (\$24.94) pay increase after wages having remained stagnant for 17 years.

### Miners

Miners are historically and currently one of the most militant sectors in Bosnia and Herzegovina. After mass protests in late 2021 and in May of this year, miners working in 7

mines owned by state electricity company Elektroprivreda BiH held a warning strike because the company had paid all its workers except the miners a one-time 750 KM (\$374) payment. On the next day the company announced that the miners would be getting the payment too.

Miners employed by the private mining company ArcelorMittal in Prijedor also held a warning strike after their coworkers in Zenica were promised an 1100 KM (\$549) one-time payment after Zenica's city government allowed a tax-free payment to workers. Strikes are set to continue in all other mines owned by ArcelorMittal's until all workers get the payment.

### Elections

All of these strikes are happening in the backdrop of a general election which is, once again, considered the "most important in the history of the country". After three and a half years of bloody imperialist war in the 1990s, to quell nationalist tensions, the Dayton Accords set up one of the most complicated political systems in the world. The country was divided into two entities, Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with 3 constituent peoples – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. The state has three presidents, each entity has two assemblies and the Federation also has 10 cantons which have some degree of self-government. On Sunday 2 October citizens voted on all of these.

The elections come after years of tensions between Bosniak and Croat parties. To give a better picture, only Croats can run for seats reserved for Croat representatives, but voters of every nationality can vote on them. This enables voters of one nationality to elect representatives of other nationalities. For example, Komšić, the current Croat member of the presidency got most of his votes in areas where Croats are a minority. This led to massive backlash from Croat parties led by the Croatian Democratic Union of Bosnia and Herzegovina (HDZ) and Dragan Čović, the Bosnia Croat president of HDZ, and then a campaign calling for national unity, drawing on fears that Bosniaks will turn Croats into a minority nation and that Croats will lose their constitutional rights. It is true that Croat numbers are shrinking, but this is primarily due to Croat bourgeois, anti-worker

economic policies that force thousands of workers to migrate westward into Europe. Negotiations between the sides mediated by the Office of High Representative, a controversial body elected by the UN Security Council that is supposed to safeguard the implementation of the Dayton Accords, have continuously failed.

The Serbian side is dominated by the Alliance of Independent Social Democrats, or SNSD, and is led by Milorad Dodik. Even before the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Dodik and his fellow other heads of government of Srpska were under Western sanctions for their support and constant threats of to secede Srpska from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Since the invasion, Dodik has become known as Putin's number one man in the Balkans, which lead to EUPOR increasing the number of soldiers stationed in the country.

The situation faced by the proletariat today, not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina but in all countries, is one of constant crisis, threats of military intervention and constant divisions. What then is the path the workers must take to escape this vicious cycle of crises? The answer lies neither in nationalist politics, nor in the liberal utopianism promoted by the so-called "civil" parties. The working class can only save itself by struggling for itself, within its class organs, and learning through this struggle to overcome all divisions – national, religious and sectoral.

## The ICP's UNION ACTIVITY IN ITALY

report from ICP General Meeting 144 September 2022

Currently, the party's trade union activity in Italy can be divided into four areas: the drafting of notes, articles and leaflets; direct intervention in demonstrations and strikes; activity inside trade unions, which currently is limited to the rank and file union USB; and activity within the Coordinamento Lavoratori

Autoconvocati (CLA).

For nearly 10 years – since the January 2013 issue – the party has returned to include in the Italian newspaper a fixed page of "action and theoretical party address" titled "For the Class Union." (Per il Sindacato di Classe.)

In the June issue, accompanying the leaflet we circulated at the demonstrations for the May 20 general strike against the war, called by all the rank and file unions, we published a commentary about its progress and preparation.

We were able to follow the preparation of the strike closely through the Coordinamento Lavoratori Autoconvocati (CLA), which was invited to participate in the preparatory organizational meetings, as well as all the bodies – including non-class bodies – that supported its promotion, since the first national assembly in Milan on April 9, which we attended and at which we spoke, both by disseminating party leaflets and by a speech on behalf of the CLA.

While we saw there were limitations in the preparation of the strike and the low participation in it, our judgment of this action was not negative, since we emphasized:

- The value in the attempt to organize working class action against imperialist war, which is under way in Ukraine, in the face of the bellicose uproar deployed by the bourgeois regimes in Italy and the rest of Europe, and the immobility of the regime unions aimed at preventing any such movement by the workers; - to the fact that, even amidst hesitation and wavering, all the rank and file unions eventually joined the strike.

This judgment, even when placed in context with the previous united general strike of October 11, 2021, distinguishes us, among workers' groups and parties acting in the labor movement. Most of the latter – including the leaderships of rank and file unions – either expressed a negative judgment or minimized the importance of the actions taken by rank and file unionism against the war.

These differences from our judgments are due to two factors, united by, firstly, giving too much importance to the numerical weakness of the present demonstrations and, secondly, giving too little importance to the characteristics that make them likely to have a wider future development.

The first of these two factors is the scant regard in which the autonomous action of the working class alone is held, the result of an opportunistic political approach which considers a popular, interclass movement

to be of greater value provided – at best – that the working class is "at the center."

According to this approach, for example with regard to opposition to the imperialist war, a large part of these opportunistic workers' groups place much more value on large pacifist demonstrations of the queen's death and the regime's unions using the event as a convenient excuse to cancel in progress and upcoming strike actions to "mourn", there has been another resurgence in wildcat strikes across different sectors and 4 different unions, the Communication Workers Union (CWU), National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), Unite and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), calling for a concurrent "Anastrike" on 1 October, mainly involving transport and mail workers.

We, on the other hand, know that only the mobilization of the working class is capable of preventing or stopping the imperialist war, and that this is what the bourgeois regime really fears.

Thus a first attempt at mobilization on the trade union, i.e., class, level of the workers against the imperialist war is of great importance, in the certain prospect of the maturing of inter-imperialist contrasts and the consequent pressure of the bourgeois regime on the working class to bend it to exploitation and militarism.

The second element which seems to us to underlie the different judgment from that expressed by our party on the merits of the strike against the imperialist war and the previous one in October 2021–is the lack of importance given to the unified character of these mobilizations, that is, to the fact that all the rank and file trade unions joined them.

This, we believe, inasmuch as this unitary character does not appear, in the immediate term, to have been a condition that led to substantial advances in the numerical participation of workers in the strikes thus called.

As we have explained repeatedly in our articles and leaflets, the united action of the bodies of militant unionism – the rank and file unions as well as the class oppositions in the CGIL – is not in itself a magical solution to the current state of passivity of the working class.

This state of passivity is the result of a series of complex factors concerning the century-long cycle of counterrevolution that began in the mid-1920s.

The united action of the militant trade unions, pursued consistently and organically, that is, at all levels of trade union action – corporate, territorial, categorical, national and confederal – is the subjective condition such as to foster the most rapid return of workers to struggle when objective conditions become favorable in this regard.

Conversely, the persistence of the opportunistic conducts of the leaderships of the rank and

## The Cascading Strike Wave in the UK

Despite the efforts of the capitalist media to smother talk of the cost of living crisis with endless coverage of the queen's death and the regime's unions using the event as a convenient excuse to cancel in progress and upcoming strike actions to "mourn", there has been another resurgence in wildcat strikes across different sectors and 4 different unions, the Communication Workers Union (CWU), National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT), Unite and the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), calling for a concurrent "Anastrike" on 1 October, mainly involving transport and mail workers.

### Britain's ruling class knows economic collapse is coming – and is preparing for confrontation

Whether it was done for ideological reasons or out of pure cynicism is neither here nor there. The British ruling class knows that a deep recession is virtually unavoidable and used a "fiscal event" to shift as much wealth as possible from the working classes to the ultra-rich before a complete economic collapse happens. "Fiscal event", the Tory government called it, because a "budget" is always accompanied by impact analysis by the Office of Budget Responsibility (OBR). And if the OBR had run the figures through its computers, it would have totally undermined the government's rhetoric that the measures would promote the "economic growth" needed to pay for the massive tax cuts, reduce the national debt and pay for investment in infrastructure and the health service.

Politically, the replacement of Prime Minister Boris Johnson by Liz Truss and her new Chancellor Kwasi Kwarteng allowed the bourgeoisie to present this as a "change of direction" even though the Tory Party has been in power for 12 years.

The stoppage of strike action has already allowed for a desirous, below-inflation pay deal of 9.25% to be slipped through with low levels of member support, with the "Unite" union even going as far as to present the deal as being 10% with some creative accounting methods over how back pay will be calculated.

There have also been more open clashes between the interests of workers and regime unions: a wildcat strike by oil and gas rig workers across 17 different locations, all coordinated through social media.

The 24-hour strike on 14 September has been condemned by all the main trade unions meant to be representing the workers involved, who released a joint statement reading: "Our concern is that unofficial action risks everything [that could be achieved through the ESA.] Trying a smash and grab job for short term gains we fear will only put the whole thing at risk."

Also on 23 September there was a simultaneous strike of delivery workers in Luton, employed by

Just Eat, Uber Eats and Deliveroo, apparently organised through a large WhatsApp group chat.

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also announced the removal of a cap on bankers' bonuses, in an effort to attract back bankers who have moved abroad in the wake of Brexit. (In reality it is easy to get around the cap, which limits bonuses to twice the annual salary, by simply increasing the annual salary. But the change sent a clear signal to the super-rich.)

The financial services sector got another bonus: the threshold for stamp duties (taxation) on home purchases will rise from £125,000 to £250,000. With the base interest rate raised to 2.25% (and set to rise further, perhaps as high as 6%) mortgage interest will rise significantly, so the reduction in stamp duty will eventually mean a lot more money to be pumped back into the banks via mortgage repayments. (We say eventually, because a short-term effect of the uncertainty is that banks and building societies started withdrawing some mortgage products altogether.)

The theory behind all this is "trickle-down" economics, the fiction that if you give loads of money to the rich, it will eventually reach the poor. Nobody in the ruling class, not even the keenest advocates of this theory, actually believes it. But it provides ideological cover that is trumpeted in the yellow press.

Even the broadcast media have trouble reporting the claim that the budget will deliver growth of 7% plus an amount in a serious and objective manner. Framed by the Houses of Parliament, two BBC commentators became barely audible as the Abba song, "Money, Money, Money, it's a Rich Man's world", boomed out from a protester's portable speaker. Cut back to the newsroom, where the newsreader acknowledged there had been quite a lot of background noise "although it was not without relevance".

Other measures are that the proposed rise in National Insurance contributions will be scrapped, and the basic rate of income tax will be reduced from 20% to 19%. These measures might see a few pounds drifting the way of those on low incomes, but they will be more than swallowed up by food and fuel inflation and the increased price of all imported goods.

For people on the very lowest income, the reduction on tax brings no gain whatsoever, as they are below the tax threshold. What's more, the benefit rules are being further tightened to make

it harder for part-time workers on Universal Credit. This benefit will be withdrawn from people working less than 15 hours a week. Claimants will also need to prove they are job hunting, or else be forced, kicking and screaming, into badly paid, or unsuitable, jobs; this is notably the case in the care sector where there is a massive shortage of workers, mainly due to the paltry wages, tough working conditions and the lack of immigrant workers from the EU following Brexit.

Many such jobs are now in the shadowy sector of the "gig economy" where a worker is categorized as "self-employed", freeing their de facto employers from costs such as sick pay. (In the absence of any effective political opposition, the predicament of such workers gets scant attention, limited, for example, to the portrayal of delivery workers to Ken Loach's most recent film, Sorry we Missed You.)

To try and assuage the working classes and petty bourgeoisie, a part of the massive borrowing the Government has agreed to (variously estimated at between £60 and £100 bn) will be spent on subsidizing energy costs. However, this will not be financed, as many had hoped, by a windfall tax on the energy companies (who are making money hand-over-fist on sky-high fuel prices). Instead, the subsidy is another addition to national debt, to be paid out of taxation by present and future generations of workers.

Preparing for the class war

Finally, and highly incongruous to find in a budget speech, the transfer of tens of billions to the financial aristocracy was accompanied by a declaration of war on the working class, who are expected to pay the price with the biggest fall in real wages on record.

Chancellor Kwarteng ranted: "At such a critical time for our economy, it is simply unacceptable that strike action is disrupting so many lives. Other European countries have Minimum Service Levels to stop militant trade unions closing down transport networks during strikes. So we will do the same."

"And we will go further. We will legislate to require unions to put pay offers to a member vote, to ensure strikes can only be called once negotiations have genuinely



broken down.”

This comes against a background of working-class militancy on a scale unseen since the strike wave of the late seventies and eighties. Members of the Rail, Maritime and Transport union (RMT), Aslef, the Transport Salaried Staffs Association and Unite will strike on Saturday October 1, with further action planned on October 5 and 8. This is significant, as all railway workers including train drivers and office staff will all strike in union.

Members of the Communications Workers Union (CWU) will strike on 28 September. Criminal law barristers are on an indefinite strike. There is industrial action in the container ports.

Discontent is rife in the National Health Service, too. The Health Secretary announced, on the day before the “fiscal event”, that general practitioner doctors, who already have to meet 72 targets, will now face a 73rd: they must undertake to treat any patient within two weeks, regardless of the urgency of the case. A GP writing in the Guardian reported on the serious shortage of healthcare workers, largely due to the lack of funds: “The NHS faces its worst workforce crisis in history, with 132,000 posts currently vacant, including more than 10,000 doctors and 47,000 nurses. Recent figures from the Health Foundation show a shortage of about 4,200 trained equivalent GPs.”

On October 3, at the start of the Conservative Party’s annual conference, Kwasi Kwarteng suddenly announced that the headline-grabbing proposal to reduce the top rate of tax was being (temporarily) withdrawn. This was a tactical retreat following opposition from within the Party. Many in the ruling elite felt it was a step too far, too soon, and this had unnerved the financial markets. But this does not mean it is off the agenda, and the tactical retreat provides cover for all the other anti-working class measures.

Be in no doubt, this assault on living standards sticks in the craw not only of active trade unionists and militant workers, and those resisting this law, but broad swathes of the working class. This could well provide a rallying point in the struggle for higher wages to address the steeply rising cost of living. It will also raise class consciousness.

However, the ruling class has an answer to this. The Labour Party is now a “government in waiting”.

Waiting for what? To force further austerity on the working class to pay for the crisis, of course.

And this is precisely why the ruling class believes it can get away with the current all-out assault on the proletariat.

Communists regard it as a truism that in order to get elected in a bourgeois democracy, a party must demonstrate to the ruling class that it can be trusted to govern. According to The Economist (and reported in The Guardian), the Labour Treasury team “has had about 250 meetings with CEOs of major companies, who are now so eager to talk to the opposition that tickets sold out in July for a business meeting with the shadow cabinet, months ahead.”

The Labour Party is investing money from subscriptions paid by members (who are mostly drawn from the lower middle and working classes) and trade unions (whose membership is falling) to buy out the millionaire elite. There are, of course, some decent, class-conscious individuals in the Labour Party. But they are being sidelined and silenced as the leadership instructs members not to support strikes at all and certainly not to join picket lines. All in an effort to make a Labour government palatable to the bourgeoisie.

The decision of the Labour Party leadership to sing the national anthem, “God Save the King” at its conference, rather than the traditional Labour Party rendition of “The Red Flag” was of more than symbolic significance!

To those involved in the future resistance to the anti-working-class measures in the “fiscal event”, we say:

- Don't Struggle Alone In Your Individual Sector
- Unite With Other Sectors In Struggle
- The Corporative Interests Of Trade Union Structures Must Take Second Place To The Defense Of The Working Class As A Whole
- The State Represents The Employers And The Capitalist Class
- Your Own National Capitalism, As Represented In Your National State, Is Your Main Enemy
- The Labour Party And The “Left” Are Part Of That Enemy

## 1877 American rail strike: an historical lesson for today’s working class

Because so many railroad workers are enraged by the latest Tentative Agreement

Because so many railroad workers are enraged by the latest Tentative Agreement reached by union leaders and rail carriers with the mediation of the government; because the rank-and-file wants to strike, and is interested in the history of national rail strikes in the United States of America (one piece of evidence among others is Railroad Workers United calling upon the rail unions to educate their respective memberships on labor history) so that they can utilize the lessons of past victories and defeats to strike as effectively as possible against their class enemies, we have decided to reproduce some excerpts on the Great Railroad Strike of 1877 from our study of the history of the American labor movement in order to meet the demands of the rising working class, of which we are a faithful servant.

Some of the conclusions we drew from analyzing the militant action of American workers in 1877 include:

- The importance of extending the struggle geographically – note in the passage below that almost every time local strikes were repressed, the workers’ cause was saved by outbreaks in new cities, new states, etc. – and across crafts and industries, which in some cases enabled the working class to take control of entire cities, as was the case with the so-called St. Louis Commune.

• The critical importance of organization —without access to large strike funds or the accumulated union dues of members across the nation, and without the ability to mobilize huge swaths of the working class in unison by means of directives from national and international leadership, the strike was doomed to fail in the end.

- Finally, the fatal absence of a class party, which could have facilitated the generalization of the struggle – for example by advancing demands of interest to the entire working class, such as the eight-hour day – and the organization of the workers, in addition to acting as a gathering place for the most advanced workers and as a

repository for the lessons of history, the seed of a future revolutionary movement.

For the railroad workers considering a national rail strike today, these conclusions must be applied to our current situation. Since the struggles of workers in any one industry or locality can always be crushed by the bosses and their state, it is imperative that the association and action of workers transcend industrial and geographical boundaries. Moreover, the support or opposition of the unions and their leaders – from the union locals, through the national unions uniting all workers of each craft, to the international union federations (e.g. the AFL-CIO and the Strategic Organizing Center) – will play a crucial role in determining the outcome of the strike; if workers cannot win the support of these organizations,

then it is time to consider the organization of a new alternative unions. And lastly, the most conscious and resolute workers must learn to recognize their historical mission, the unique political program of their class, and form a class party to achieve both their immediate and ultimate aims.

We wrote about the immense 1877 national rail strike in Chapter 8 of our study, The History of the Labor Movement in the United States of America, (COMMUNIST LEFT 44/45) which we reproduce here:

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But the most significant event of these years was the 1870s, which left a permanent dread in the memory of the bourgeoisie, was a series of strikes that manifested themselves in the course of 1877, in the final period of the economic crisis, which, due to its broad scope and duration has received various names. “The Great Strike of 1877”. “The Great Railroad Strike”. “The Great Upheaval”.

It all started on July 16 at Martinsburg, West Virginia, when it was learned that the local railroad company had lowered wages by 10 percent, the second reduction in eight months. The workers had no more leeway; many were unemployed, huge

numbers only worked a few hours, the payment of wages was sometimes delayed by months, hunger was their families’ constant companion. The bosses wanted, among other things, to destroy the workers’ unions which, apart from being few in number and small, were extremely submissive and anything but combative; the union leaders were on blacklists, negotiations with the Unions were not accepted, and the Pinkerton spies were so active that the workers even avoided speaking among themselves.

The great upheaval was in reality preceeded by a period of apparent inertia among the workers. The managing director of one of the railroad companies wrote on June 21, “The experiment of cutting back wages has proved successful for all the companies that have done it recently, and I have no reason to fear that there can be agitations or resistance on the part of the dependents if this is carried out with the necessary speed.”

But the workers on our side and if they realize that they must accept willingly or leave”. Even on the day of the Martinsburg strike itself the Governor of Pennsylvania affirmed that the State had not known the calm of this period for years. Within a few days the State would be at the center of the revolt.

On July 16, 40 railroad workers went on strike and blocked a goods train. The police did not succeed in getting them to back down. The next day a detachment of the militia arrived. In the attempt to allow the train to depart the first clash took place, and a worker was killed by a soldier. At this point the soldiers desisted, also because they did not find anyone willing to maneuver the train, and withdrew.

Now the strike spread along the entire line, the Baltimore & Ohio, all the way to Baltimore in Maryland. The Governor, being disappointed by the National Guard which, largely composed of railroad workers, fraternized with the strikers, turned to President Hayes asking for Federal troops to be dispatched; the President satisfied this request. It was the first time that Federal troops had been used to repress a strike in peacetime on the metropolitan territory of the United States. General French, in command of

the troops, arrested the strike leaders and informed Washington that everything was now tranquil. But the General was mistaken. The strike had already extended to the rest of West Virginia, Ohio and Kentucky, to the bargemen, miners and other categories, all united by the inhuman living conditions and the bosses’ attacks. At Baltimore the workers sought to impede the departure of the soldiers, who opened fire, killing 12 and injuring many others.

Repression was detailed: whoever attempted to win over a scab was immediately arrested; any group of workers who attempted to stop a train became a target for the fire of the soldiers. On the 22nd, after arrests and killings, with the army joining in the action along with private troops, militia, police, press and courts, the strike on the Baltimore & Ohio was broken.

But meanwhile the strike extended: the railroad workers of Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Ohio, Missouri, Illinois and California were brought to a halt by the strike.

At Pittsburgh the struggle was especially hard; the workers refused a ridiculous agreement by a yellow union, and organized themselves in a secret union, the Traimmen’s Union, one that finally embraced all categories of railroad workers, and not just the drivers, often jealous of their own interests. The tactics were similar in this struggle to those adopted at Martinsburg. The Governor decided to send the Philadelphia militia, counting on a certain local rivalry. The maneuver worked, with the soldiers firing on the people that did not back off, causing 20 dead and 29 injured. In the face of this massacre, rather than being discouraged, the crowd grew with the influx of workers of all trades, also from the surroundings, and also the local militia; the anger was uncontainable, buildings and rolling stock were set alight; the troops had to withdraw. There were also 11 deaths in Reading, Pennsylvania.

Hayes asked the troops to protect Washington. The press sounded the alarm: “Pittsburgh ransacked (..) in the hands of men controlled by the diabolical spirit of communism” wrote the New York World. Newspapers, clergy, public functionaries: they all denounced the strike as a new Paris Commune: “an insurrection, a revolution, an attempt by communists

and vagabonds to subjugate society, to put American institutions in danger”. The newspapers openly called for the spilling of blood. The strikers, declared the New York Tribune, only understand the logic of force: therefore it is useless to show mercy towards “the ignorant rabble with greedy mouths”. For the New York Herald the crowd “is a savage beast, to be cut down”. The New York Sun recommended a diet of lead for the starving strikers, while The Nation called for the use of snipers. And from this period the infamous utterance from billionaire Jay Gould: “I would give a million dollars to see General Grant as dictator or emperor”.

Despite this, after Pittsburgh the militia, wherever it was utilized, fraternized with the strikers and proved useless, if not counter-productive.

In Chicago a street battle between police and strikers on the 26th ended with 12 workers slashed to death; the workers subsequently prevailed for a few days, then to give up in face of the reinforced forces of reaction.

The recently reconstituted Working Men’s Party had had scarce contacts with the railroad workers before the strike. But from the first days it was highly active in the attempt to extend the struggle both geographically and across categories. Any form of supporting the struggles it also attempted to provide them with subjects of general interest, such as the eight-hour day and the abolition of anti-union laws. In Chicago it played a leading role. In St. Louis the party managed to organize the strikers directly: on the 29th, even though some of the bosses had conceded the requested wage rises, the strike was total, and the workers were in charge of the city.

But reaction did not hold back, and the combined forces of the bourgeoisie, which raised \$20,000 to arm a force of one thousand mercenaries, of the militia, the mounted police, Federal troops and other volunteers had the upper hand over the proletarians: their quarters were devastated, tens of their leaders arrested and condemned to huge fines and custodial sentences. On August 2 the strike ended.

As was to be expected, given the level of organization of the American proletariat, the Great Strike ended in defeat. Not entirely however, because in many

cases the bosses indeed conceded wage increases, or withdrew the threatened wage cuts. But for sure, the average American worker had learned at least two fundamental lessons: in the first place they understood the great power that the class was able to exert when it moved in unison; and moreover that this great power could come to nothing without an organization that gave it continuity, networks and the ability to resist. This provided the decisive impetus towards the formation of national labor unions, capable of moving great masses and of supporting strikers for prolonged periods, thanks to the number of contributing members.

**Class War with No Class**  
Notes on Anti-War United Fronts, Activism and sad attempts at Recruitment

There is no shortage of political groupings anticipating a progression of world capitalism into an imminent world war. The problem, as always, isn’t interpreting what’s happening, but what to do about it.

Usually big umbrella activist groups are formed to front for political organizations. Because of their “big tent” structure, these groupings are unable to sum up their problems of, often, decades of similar anti-war activity. They exist primarily to identify and draw in isolated activists while the mother organization prepares them as its own cannon fodder.

“The Marxist thesis states: it isn’t possible, first of all, for consciousness of the historical road to appear, in advance, within a single human brain. This is for two reasons: firstly, consciousness follows, rather than precedes, being, that is, the material conditions which surround the subject of consciousness itself; secondly, all forms of social consciousness – with a given delay allowing them time to get generally established – emerge out of circumstances which are analogous and parallel to the economic relations in which masses of individuals find themselves, thereby forming a social class.

Historically the latter are then led to “act together” long before they can “think together”. The theory of this relationship between class conditions, and class action and its future point of arrival, isn’t required of persons, in the sense it isn’t required of a particular author or leader; nor is it asked of “the class as whole”, in the sense of a fleeting lump sum of individuals in existence at a certain time or place; and much less can it be deduced from an extremely bourgeois “consultation” of the class.

The False Resource Of Activism, ICP General Meeting n. 6, Milan, September 7, 1952”

The activist group puts the cart of consciousness before the horse. It sees in these small isolated groups the first attempts at revolutions, leading, acting, as in the failure of the anarchist’s propaganda of the deed. Anti-war work requires international centralism, otherwise all efforts become centrifugal, laden as they are by the weight of local demands and imagined local group specificities.

“The Party must be able to control every aspect of its life, carry out each of its organizational roles in such a way that nothing strikes it as unexpected, incomprehensible or mysterious. Passing off as positions of the Left that terrorism is a “gleam of light” for the proletariat; that the folksy political traditions of extremist factions, with their lumpen-intellectual student base, represent a “revolutionary camp”; that the idea of “workers committees” is fanciful and that working within them is “activism” or “economism”, and then immediately to state exactly the opposite, not because anything has actually changed but due to impatience and disappointment that no immediate gains have been made; that such oscillations represent the “tactics” of the Left only disorientates militants, sows discord in the Party, erodes the organization, and compromises decades of hard-earned, consistent work.

The Party Does not Arise from “Circles”

The small activist circle is the practical equivalent of the united front seeking to include wide swathes of individuals, not into a

cohesive and thought-out party, but into an action for action’s sake scheme. The activist circle aims to draw in numbers to make up for its political incoherence.

“From the fourth congress, which took place at the end of 1922, the Left stood by its pessimistic prediction and its vigorous struggle to denounce dangerous tactics (united front between communist and socialist parties, the slogan of “workers government”) and organizational errors (attempts to increase the size of the parties not simply through an influx of those proletarians who had abandoned the other parties with a social democratic programme of action and structure, but by means of fusions that accepted entire parties and portions of parties after negotiations with their leadership, and also by admitting to the Comintern, as national sections, parties claiming to be “sympathizers”, which was clearly an error in its drift towards a form of federalism. Taking the initiative on a third issue it was from this time that the Left denounced, and ever more vigorously in the years that followed, the growth of the opportunistic danger: this third issue was the international’s method of internal working, whereby the centre, represented by the Moscow executive, resorted not only to the use of “ideological terror” in its dealings with the parties, or the parts of them that had made political errors, but above all to organizational pressure, which amounted to an erroneous application, and eventually a total falsification, of the correct principles of centralization and absolute discipline with no exceptions.

Theses on the Historical Duty, Action and the Structure of the World Communist Party, According to the Positions that for more than Half a Century Form the Historical Heritage of the Communist Left” (“Theses of Naples”, July, 1965)

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## Strikes and elections in