

# Communist Left

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# The Epidemic Condemns Capitalism and Signals its Demise

Initial contributions from across the party

*The article below was written in the first half of April. In early July, at the time of writing this preface, many countries had entered the phase of 'relaxing' the lockdown or of re-imposing it locally after a second wave of infections. But even if the original article refers to an earlier phase of the coronavirus outbreak, and is set against the particular response of the Italian bourgeoisie, actually not that much different to that of other bourgeoisies, the points raised continue to resonate well into the period of getting back to the so-called "new normal"; a "normal" just as pernicious as the old one.*

## Viruses and capitalist mode of production

The pandemic, spread throughout the planet, is having a psychological effect on both the intellectual elite and normal citizens, whatever class they belong to. A society that once boasted of having solved all its problems, with a bright future of progress and well-being, finds itself vulnerable to an invisible quasi-organism, unable to move and do anything outside of reproducing when it is in the right conditions, in the human body.

The current pandemic is only one of many aspects of the degradation of the environment in which we live. But it is a "degradation" that has very ancient origins, from the Neolithic revolution, with the birth of agriculture, then of cities and class societies. It would certainly be useful to write a parallel history of class societies and the spread of disease, instructive on man's attitude towards the environment around him, until it ended up being considered an exclusive prerogative, almost created especially for human enjoyment, a belief comforted and nourished by political, religious and scientific culture.

This Covid-19 epidemic could be defined as a super-influenza. Flus are perhaps the most common and persistent form of disease in natural history. They originate among animals, which are often able to tolerate them; animals then transmit them to man, with consequences of varying severity. The virus responsible mutates very easily and rapidly, with ever new strains forming. The mortality rate is usually low, 1% or less, the most vulnerable being the very young and the elderly, and of course the organically weak, such as the undernourished. It is obvious that if society is composed of a very high percentage of vulnerable individuals, the death rate rises. Unfortunately, having contracted the flu does not guarantee immunity, precisely because of the ease of mutation.

The first mentions of influenza date back to 1510, and the following years of the century; in the seventeenth century they were less common, but they exploded again in the eighteenth century. In the following century there were three important epidemics: 1830, 1833 and 1889.

But the most serious one occurred in 1918, at the end of the First World War. It was transported to Europe by American troops and had more waves in the following two years. 80% of the losses in the United States army were due to this flu, incorrectly called Spanish flu. It spread throughout the world, from the Arctic to the Pacific islands. It was made more deadly at the time by conditions of poor nutrition in the poorer classes and promiscuity among the troops in the trenches. But the most important cause of the enormity of the contagion (the most recent estimates range between 50 and 100 million deaths in the world, when the population was a quarter of the current population) was the lack of information, due to military secrecy, which delayed the containment measures. Then as now, these consisted in avoiding contact, and the wearing of face masks. This was one of the many crimes of the bourgeoisie, more attentive to its business or military objectives (which are the same thing) than to the health of the poor classes: a proletarian is easily replaced, whereas a lost profit is lost forever.

That virus was identified in 1933, and all subsequent pandemics in the last century (with one exception) were its mutations: 1933, 1957, 1968, 1977. The deaths on those occasions were not catastrophic. Perhaps that is why governments did not attach much importance to the appearance of Covid-19.

This, however, perhaps applies to the first country that saw the epidemic manifest, even if in that case the delay was the main cause of the rapid contagion. Less forgivable was the behavior of the other countries, Italy in the lead, followed in the same indifference by Spain, France, UK, USA, etc. For the bourgeoisie everywhere, the stoppage of production means loss of profits, and above all the risk of losing markets, or market share, to competitors. For this reason, the bourgeoisie is ready to start wars, so it is hardly willing to stop production because of the death of a few thousand proletarians.

Incidentally, the dead are almost all elderly. A lot of pensions owed to old workers that will no longer burden the pension funds! The ideal situation for the bourgeoisie: proletarians who retire and die soon after. The fact that the average lifespan is too long has been one of the main concerns of States, which have long since started to delay retirement age.

At the local level, the behavior of those responsible for healthcare systems has not been far from planned extermination, with the sending of patients who are still contagious to retirement homes, with delays in taking security measures and in providing the necessary health care. As well as allowing companies to carry on with production and to reopen factories.

On the other hand, the government is there because the bourgeoisie has put it there, certainly not because of the “will of the people”, whose vote can only choose from among the servants of the bosses, and it is the bourgeoisie that commands, and demands

to be obeyed.

But let us be realistic: a dead proletarian is easily replaced, but without profits, capitalist society dies.

And healthcare only gives profits to private companies; the public system is a burden, and every year is subjected to cuts. Those life-saving medical devices and intensive care units, cost a lot to produce and make little money and are in fact almost absent in private institutions, as well as proving insufficient in public ones, to the point that often, perhaps more than we know, the doctor had to choose between who could live and who was to be left to die.

A ruthless and criminal society, no better than the one described by Frederick Engels and Jack London, the same in the South of the world, but dominated by the same logic also in the “rich” North.

It is easy to identify the responsibility for the spread of modern pandemics, and for all the threats to the very survival of the human species in the world. The capitalist mode of production does not aim to guarantee the good of all humanity over the long-term perspective, without exhausting the environmental riches that guarantee man’s survival.

On the contrary, Capital is blind to everything but its continuous increase and accumulation; what matters is to make a profit. To this end, capital, which is not a single body but a community of companies, of “corporations”, and also of individuals, does not stop at anything, sees only that particular process of reproduction of capital, which must be achieved at all costs, breaking down all the obstacles that arise. The capitalist is alone, and stands against everyone, first of all the other capitalists, national and international, and against the proletarians, who must produce the surplus value that allows him to accumulate wealth, destined to create further capital. The capitalist sees no other purpose, and he doesn’t give a damn about everything else.

It is a completely anarchic system of production: anyone is free to borrow capital, set up a business, hire workers, consume raw materials; if it goes wrong sometimes, tough! That precious resources have been destroyed is not his problem. This way of being of capitalism, more than all previous class societies, has always caused damage, but extended to a planetary level, as happened during the twentieth century, has led to exaggerated consequences that can no longer be denied, if not by some head of State for electoral reasons.

The first myth, now debunked, is that of growing prosperity. World hunger has not diminished: despite a high level of agricultural productivity, one billion human beings are undernourished, including part of the population of the western metropolises, and the figures are rising. Yet production is there. The United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) estimates that enough food is produced to feed 9 billion people. Too bad that a large part of it is wasted for various reasons, including irrational feeding in rich countries, which is responsible for a large percentage of diseases and deaths, and poor food storage facilities in poor countries.

The way food is produced is intertwined with other serious environmental prob-

lems: meat-based food is the cause of many diseases and a more balanced diet based on plant foods would be healthier. Livestock farming is also responsible for deforestation to make room for pasture and now 70% of the land is cultivated for feed, fodder, but also maize and soya and others. But most importantly, the nourishing capacity of one hectare of land cultivated for direct human consumption is ten times greater than that of one hectare cultivated for fodder that is then transformed into meat.

These are not accidents on the path of the capitalist economy but fundamental to its very nature. They are not random but inevitable or even essential to this system of production, which could not survive without them.

What is the future? Faced with the evident failure of capitalism, it is now clear to all classes, in an almost apocalyptic climate, that far-reaching solutions are needed, which could solve all problems at root. The intellectuals, by definition enlightened, although well paid by the bourgeoisie, raise their cries against the selfishness of this society. Let's stop harassing nature! We need a different economy! Less social injustice! More public health, less private! No undeclared work! No tax evasion! We need a brotherhood between States and nations! A cultural revolution!

Well, why not? But the problem is: all this is demanded, but only so long as it is compatible with the preservation of the capitalist mode of production and the privileges of bourgeois and landowners. Does anybody believe that it is possible to convince the international class of capitalists to sacrifice themselves for the future of mankind, to make them wake up and say: by golly, we hadn't thought of that, come on, let's do it?

The bourgeois has only one religion, that of profit; without it he sees only death and despair. Not only must production not stop and profits not decrease, his condemnation is instead the search for a continuous increase in production, to maintain the same profits, these are the elementary economic bases of Marxism, of its critique of capitalism. Production is not enough, development is needed: everything must grow, the production of goods and their sale. For this reason, the bourgeoisie is ready to do much more than let pandemics spread, which in any case mainly affect the poorer classes; it is fine with wars, even the largest ones, it is fine with the ruthless exploitation of labor, even child labor, it is fine with destroying the environment. The profit will be there tomorrow, the effects on the environment, one can hope, the day after tomorrow! So, what does the capitalist care? On the other hand, he objects, "If I stop producing and making profits, someone else will".

Which is true; communism is not, indeed, a corporate issue.

But how can a finite world accommodate a socio-economic system that has to grow infinitely? The communists say; Capital, for more than a century in the West and today everywhere, has lived well beyond the time that history has given it, thanks to wars, disasters, corruption, religious and "media" manipulation, unequal development that has made people in a few countries believe that the table was set for them too.

A society is now possible in which a technical body will regulate production ac-

ording to what will be needed, without the market mechanisms of prices and profits, without excesses, without waste, without unnecessary production. Everyone will participate in all activities without constraints, by virtue of a deep and widespread social consciousness.

Even the predisposition of defenses, preventive and curative, against epidemics would be obvious and easy.

That society is called Communism.

But the bourgeoisie, which lives on those profits, is well armed in its States, and will never give up power without a fight. That's why ever since Marx's time we know that the working class will have to wage the last war for the new society. That is why History has produced the Communist Party, the only one capable of leading the proletarian forces to victory and the birth of classless society.

## Bosses at war, at the workers' expense

Finally we got there. After thousands of deaths as a result of the pandemic, the government of the Italian bourgeois State finally had to admit – in a general sense only – the impossibility, at least in the short term, of fulfilling its main purpose: ensuring at all times the valorisation of capital through the extraction of surplus value from wage labour.

The high death toll, due to the rapid spread of the virus, makes it increasingly difficult to justify the fact that millions of workers shall continue to risk their lives by going in to work to produce products that are entirely unnecessary for the survival and health of human beings. Thus, late on Saturday, March 21, the president of the Council of Ministers, Giuseppe Conte, was forced to announce a ban on non-essential production.

However, the decree not only exempted those activities related to the agricultural, food, and health supply chains, as was reasonable in an abstract sense, but it dwelt on an over-detailed classification of commodities which was so ambiguous, so fragmented and so incomplete that it actually conceded considerable leeway to the various businesses to do whatever suited them: those that have surplus stock or who can't obtain raw materials will "let their workers go"; others will just keep going... The production of arms, for example, has had no restrictions placed on it.

Nevertheless, the government was essentially forced to adopt measures in line with what the most combative of the rank and file unions, which have called for strikes to halt non-essential production, were demanding.

The proletarian class, for the most part without realizing it, has shown it is the bearer of a mode of production – communism – that alone is capable of defending and protecting human life. Already it is opposing capitalist society and its State which, as well as failing according to the standards of its own economic laws, are in an advanced state of material and moral decomposition, and no longer able to portray themselves as having an

interest in the pursuit of the “common good”.

Since the “red zone” in Bergamo and Brescia was introduced, we have witnessed the intense pressure the government has been under from Confindustria (the Italian employers’ federation) to delay any restrictions on the movements of workers that would in any way impede productive activity. The industrialists have put before the protection and defence of the lives of their workers their worries about yielding ground to competitor capitalists in other countries and the exportation of their goods being interrupted. And still workers continue to die, spreading the deadly disease among the population so the extraction of profit can continue.

They temporarily abandoned this pretext only after the suspension of non-essential production in countries whose supply chains were integrated with Italy’s.

Also elsewhere pressure from workers has halted production: at Melfi, the workers at the FCA factory in Windsor Ontario in Canada, like their class brothers in Italy, brought the production of cars to a standstill.

The interview released by the head of Confindustria to the daily newspaper *La Stampa* on 21 March is very revealing. When asked if he had expected the pandemic which hit the people of Bergamo to be so virulent, the leader of the industrialists replied, «It is said that the companies didn’t close down partly due to pressure from us. We didn’t expect an epidemic of this sort. But then we aren’t virologists, it is not our job. Did we underestimate the situation? Maybe. It seems to me the problem is now someone else’s». Crystal clear: “they aren’t virologists”, they are bourgeois, and “their job” is to generate profit, with or without the virus; that alone is “their problem”!

Our boss of bosses continued: «Lombardy is the pulsing heart of the Italian economy. If businesses have stayed open until now, it was to avoid getting cut out of some very important global manufacturing networks. Now we have entered a new phase: the emergency is continent wide». A complete and open confession. He was effectively saying the Italian bourgeoisie is at war with the companies in central Europe; in that war the cannon fodder are the workers; and unless their competitors disarm, they will not close down Italian factories.

The head of Confindustria also wrote to Conte to ask him to “mitigate” the production stoppage and allow activities which, although non-essential, “allow those that are essential to function” and not just for purely “technical reasons”. Technically, for the “technician” of Capital, everything is essential! He also asked for the process of getting permits to continue production to be made simpler: it should be the boss who decides if, how and when workers should risk their lives.

As in wartime the laws of capital continue to function, even when governments adopt the measures of “war communism”; whose aim, even if in conflict with the immediate interests of individual members of the bourgeoisie, is to save the process of capitalist accumulation in the long term, and with it, the society divided into classes.

## The virus in the USA

In the United States as well, Capital – faceless, lacking in humanity and devoid of compassion – forces proletarians to put their lives at risk and carry on working. Indeed for most proletarians the risk of losing their job and their pay is too great to refuse to go to work.

The government only seeks to slightly mitigate the impact of the pandemic. Since the law on sickness absence approved by the Democratic Party only covers one worker in five, a universal basic income of 1,000 dollars per person is presently in the process of being allocated. In any case, this is just one more among the many ephemeral fixes with which the capitalist system tries to adapt to their umpteenth crisis. Another one is the scheme for compensating those on reduced wages by issuing them with a credit card to use for essential shopping, trapping these victims of capitalism in a never-ending spiral of debt.

Between March 20 and three weeks later, the stock market lost 35% of its value. To draw a comparison: the fall at the beginning of the Great Depression was 24.8%. And, as happened then, the State will try to save the failing businesses which incautiously inflated the price of their shares with fictitious capital. But already 20 million workers have lost their jobs and their pension payments will now be annulled. Having spent their entire lives just trying to get by, they will now lose everything. And those who get ill won't be able to afford the payments for private health insurance, and won't even be able to see a doctor.

This, then, is the protection from the disease that the most powerful capitalist State in the world has to offer!

## Pandemic and medicine

To deal with this current pandemic what is really needed is for all the available medical knowledge to be pooled, and for there to be a concerted research into this pathogen and how to beat it. Under capitalism this is not possible because every human activity is directed towards profit-making, in an anarchic ruthless competition that amounts, in practice, to everyone and everybody against everybody and everyone.

A lot has been written over the course of this Covid-19 crisis of the need for more efficient public health infrastructures. Where these do not exist, as in the United States and most of the rest of the world, the pandemic has amplified social-democratic calls for general assistance managed by the State.

But the modalities of medical and pharmaceutical research are often ignored. The current infection shows that even a hypothetically efficient State health service isn't enough to protect human health, because *all* of the components of medical science – research, experimentation, pharmaceutical industry, hospital infrastructure, theoretical instruction and clinical practice – need to interact, and be integrated according a single,

centralized strategy, rather than medical science just pursuing its higher aims in isolation.

Both in the research for effective antiviral drugs and a vaccine, the bankruptcy of bourgeois medicine has been demonstrated. At the present moment there are at least 20 different companies working on it, as well as various academic institutions, also in competition among themselves for the necessary funding. Each has profit as its driving force and maintains secrecy as regards its methods, its research, and its results in order to defend its “intellectual property”.

In short, capitalism in every country, not caring about the exponential growth of the infection and the death-toll, continues to adhere strictly to its property-based regime and its commodity fetishism; and it could not be otherwise.

Such apparently nonsensical and heartless egotism is repeated at all levels, up to and including those States that not only do nothing to combat the spread of the virus but actually take advantage of it, and who continue to engage in their incessant industrial and commercial battles to defend their national capitalism, at the expense of all others.

This is the inevitable product of capitalism’s anarchic production of commodities.

The coronavirus serves to remind us of the necessity and urgency of communism, in which a humanity freed from the arbitrary tyranny of the market and wage labour will be able to take control of all the hitherto diverse schools of study and research, and of the resulting interventions deemed appropriate according to the art of medicine. Only then will the discoveries of science truly become the common possession of humanity and be applied in practice as part of a vast, organic project which takes a long-term view, and aims to serve everyone without distinction.

## The farce of face masks

That national pride should suffer as a result of a shortage of surgical masks is just one more paradox that lays bare the improvident and irrational division of labour in the world of capital. The second manufacturing power in Europe for many years, Italy doesn’t produce surgical masks for the simple reason that producing them doesn’t generate much profit, and it is simpler to acquire them abroad.

This would not, however, have prevented a society that was not based on making a quick buck from stocking up on them, from ensuring that there would be enough of them to cope with a health emergency, should it arise. But that is something the people responsible for national policy evidently weren’t aware of: “Who could have predicted the spread of such a horrible, contagious virus?”

So, after a month and half of contagion, no remedy has yet been found. Only towards the end of March, after the lockdown had already been in force for a couple of weeks, did none other than the “special government commissioner for the Covid-19 Emergency” ascend to the podium, proudly announcing that the full force of national industry “was preparing to adopt a plan to embark” (*to make haste slowly!*) on their produc-

tion, by adapting certain businesses. Lamborghini, they say, is switching from luxury cars to the production of 5,000 masks per week (a job for which three workers are sufficient!).

But the production and sale of masks becomes, at the peak of the storm, the business windfall that in quieter times “no-one would ever have imagined”.

Needless to say that even by the middle of April in many regions it is still far from easy to get hold of suitable masks.

## Fake news goes *viral*

An old adage goes that the first victim of war is truth. And yet during periods of bourgeois “peace” truth can hardly be said to be in a healthy state either. In fact even now, at the very peak of the contagion, the media machine in the hands of the ruling class gives no quarter as its over-production of lies continues unabated; and its alleged aim of informing public opinion is revealed in fact to be that of duping and confusing its audience, and keeping it credulous and ill-informed.

In these times we are living through, in which the global quarantine imposed by the spread of the virus has accelerated the general economic crisis of the capitalist mode of production, we see a proliferation in the amount of *fake news*, at a rate in inverse proportion to that of the manufacturing sector.

The “cake” of global production of surplus value is shrinking, so the struggle to get hold of a bigger share of the market and consequently of a bigger “slice” of this unearned income becomes even more ruthless. Thus jingoism proliferates as well. The “oppositions” of the “sovereignist” right, just as much as the “politically correct” mob in charge of the State, are stirring up distrust and suspicion of “foreigners”, while the so-called statesmen of the old continent, the paladins of Europeanism, the left of capital, are not averse to adopting a protectionist stance with ministers of the “progressive” governments, and call on people to buy products produced within the national border to bolster “our” tottering economy. (British readers might remember the famous “I’m Backing Britain” campaign in the 70s and the accompanying “Buy British” slogan. It is irresistible to mention here that that campaign wasn’t initiated by some bulging-eyed patriot, but by a common or garden entrepreneur with a warehouse full of mouldering Union Jacks he needed to sell!)

In any case, it is against such a backdrop that there is a proliferation of “conspiracy theories” on how the coronavirus arose, which either heap the blame on the alien oriental power where it first broke out, or, alternatively, on the major super-power, the USA, later itself transformed into a land conquered by the contagion.

A credulous population, fed for years on rabbleroxing TV programmes, finds itself today in the grip of a major panic and, not knowing who to trust, it seeks solace in

news stories, even crazy unverifiable ones, which allow it to offload their malaise on to some incarnation of all evil, some enemy who can be blamed for everything. And the easy availability today of social media multiplies a million-fold not the truth, but confusion. There we find miraculous cures which governments and doctors don't want to use for dark, sinister reasons.

The relentless bourgeois propaganda machine does everything it can to deprive the lower classes of any critical sense in order to conceal the reality of their social oppression behind nationalist and racial sentiments, channelling their discontent about their worsening standard of living, caused by the failure of capitalism, towards false objectives.

We do not expect the working class to be better informed or to be able to get more accurate information from less corrupt scientific and intellectual sources, whether mainstream or alternative, because all of the various types of bourgeois culture and science can only ever portray natural and social reality in a distorted manner, since they themselves live and act in ignorance, prey as they are to outdated superstitions.

The bourgeoisie first of all lies to itself, deceiving itself even more than the proletariat. Commercialism and science – individualism and knowledge – are incompatible.

Through the fog which emanates from the bourgeoisie, floundering around in its dishonest propaganda, only the Communist Party can detect and denounce their greatest lies, and indicate to the working class their path to redemption, which broadly speaking first goes through a phase of politics and revolutionary war, then of science and knowledge.

## Democracy, social health and anti-worker repression

The States in all countries affected by the pandemic, regardless of whether “democratic” or “authoritarian”, are putting measures in place to contain the spread of the virus. The upshot of these measures, based on isolating people, is to restrict people's movements. It is estimated that around half the world's population is remaining at home, with social distancing, with restrictions put on gatherings, and many commercial and recreational activities prohibited.

Even in the “democratic” West these measures, restricting freedom of movement, have met with the approval of the politicians, journalists and various experts, lined up in a row in the TV studios, in the war against the coronavirus. A campaign against the plague spreaders, seen as those citizens who violate the quarantine, surely follows.

Most people accept such restrictions on individual liberty in the name of protecting health. But the de facto state of emergency being imposed everywhere, and the use that governments are making of exceptional powers, raise fears about the sacrosanct foundations of the political regimes in the West being endangered, namely: individual and political freedom, representation, democracy... Over and above the health crisis and the

economic and social emergency, there is also the “crisis of democracy” to worry about: democracy is in quarantine, they say, parliament is stripped of its power; a new authoritarianism; one man in control; rights of privacy suspended, etc, etc...

What has particularly scandalized the politicians and hack-writers of democratic Europe are the measures recently adopted in Hungary, where, under the pretext of the health emergency, parliament conceded full powers to the government, for as long as deemed necessary, to issue decrees without parliamentary approval, to close parliament, postpone elections, and imprison anybody deemed to be spreading false or distorted information about the virus or government decisions. A drift to authoritarianism, they cry, it’s a coup, a dictatorship.

The spread of authoritarianism is feared in countries further afield, in South-East Asia, in the Philippines, where the government has authorized the police to fire on those who violate the quarantine... Not to mention the measures said to have been adopted in China, where the isolation was supposedly accompanied in ways straight out of a sci-fi movie, with relentless use of modern technologies to enable the recognition and control of citizens.

The progress China is making in addressing the emergency is causing much inner conflict among our democrats. On the one hand they admire the efficacy of the measures they have adopted over there, to the extent they have become a model to imitate, on the other, embarrassed, they feel compelled to continue instructing us in the difference between our democratic, multi-party, institutional order, and the “communist regime” in Beijing.

In reality “democracy” over here and “communism” over there is just an empty slogan, a fable, faded window dressing. It says nothing about the actual running of the State, and whether there is any real difference between the way political class rule is conducted over here and over there.

And it says nothing, as regards the specific and contingent issue under discussion, about how the health emergency is being managed, about the fact that in every country, regardless of how a capitalist regime chooses to present itself – and, in truth, in any type of society, past and future – will inevitably have to impose clear rules of behaviour, in an authoritarian manner,.

The trouble with the capitalist regime, both “democratic” and (so-called) “communist” is that it doesn’t, and in fact cannot, do this, because it is unable to discipline individual bourgeoisies and their autonomous enterprises, big and small, which do whatever the hell they want. Their State is thus rendered impotent and colludes with them in this anarchy and lack of discipline, which during an epidemic has particularly dire consequences.

As regards the class struggle, the present measures adopted in the fight against the coronavirus are an example and an anticipation of the restrictions and repression always kept in reserve, and which will become more obvious with the advancing social and economic crisis which looms on the horizon.

But the real danger hanging over the proletariat isn’t the repressive measures im-

posed by bourgeois States; there has always been a military apparatus in the hands of the bourgeois class to perpetuate its power and subjugate its historical adversary. Rather it is the attempt of the false workers' parties and the regime unions to channel proletarian revolt into defending democracy and constitutional liberties; objectives that are *entirely compatible* with the continued existence of capitalist production. In order to conceal the substance of its dictatorship, the bourgeoisie alternates between donning a democratic or a fascist mask as required. To the bourgeois dictatorship the working class has to oppose its own dictatorship, not a call for greater democracy.

Even under the exceptional circumstances of the global epidemic, there is complete unanimity among the ruling class that the proletariat need to be kept in their place. Bolstering this objective is the government rhetoric, similar to that in wartime, which has been gaining widespread exposure in the media over the past weeks. A relentless, repetitive, propaganda aims to establish a sense of national solidarity. The bourgeoisie also uses the health emergency to ensnare its true enemy, the proletariat, in anticipation of an economic crisis, which the pandemic is certainly bound to aggravate, but which existed before it and originates from the senile phase of capitalism.

This is demonstrated by the fact that the same measures are taken by every government: the rhetoric of “you must stay home” doesn't apply to those proletarians who are forced to work. It is tantamount to declaring that it is OK if the virus circulates in the families of proletarians, who must continue producing profit for their bosses. Today the governments are appealing to proletarians for solidarity in the war against the virus; tomorrow they will ask for it, and seek every available means to impose it, to fight against “foreigners” in the war between States.

Therefore from now on the proletariat must reject every appeal to national solidarity, to the Holy Alliance, and resolutely affirm that: Yes! We are at war; but it is a war of class against class.

## A political lesson

The new president of Confindustria, itching to remove any obstacles to the reproduction of capital by getting the factories up and running again, along with the mad cycle of consumerism to get the products off the shelves, has accused politics of paying too much attention to science: it is time it stopped following the advice of doctors and started attending to its responsibilities!

We perfectly agree: politics might keep itself informed about science, but its overall perspective is the general and historical requirements of the class it represents, and to adapt it according to the time and place.

Today science says: if you reopen factories and shops now, this will cost the world

an enormous number of human lives.

Confindustria politics, and that of the bourgeoisie in all countries, says: let them die, it's the price humanity must pay to safeguard our profits.

Working class politics says: even if you find doctors prepared to tell us we are in no danger, we proletarians today, indifferent to your profits and what your commercialized science and your politics tells us, will struggle by every means to protect our lives.

And communist proletarians will certainly not accept any advice based on medical reasons when tomorrow they generously risk their lives in the revolutionary class war to tear down the State power of the bourgeoisie, and to free the world from the increasingly deadly rule of capital.

## Conclusion from the working-class perspective

In this period of profound darkness and uncertainty the working class mustn't retreat into a narrow individualism, but stay together and keep united. It is not just the huge numbers of proletarians that are going to lose their jobs that need to be protected, but those still in work who will see their conditions worsen. Workers must get organized and act together.

Just as the coronavirus isn't stopped by State borders, and its effect on the working class doesn't stop there either, so will the class response in fighting against capital have to be co-ordinated on an international scale, as in the glorious tradition of our class.

For their own safety's sake, and for the safety of their families and associates, workers must meanwhile demand that they *do not work* during this pandemic, but continue to receive a living wage.

Whereas the ruling class today still only cares about its own interests, in its arrogant, stupid and reckless way, the working class must learn the lesson of this pestilence and work towards curing not it alone, but eradicating the pestilence that afflicts the whole of society: capitalism. Only by uprooting capitalism can the future health of the human species, indeed of all species, be assured.

The working class, by organizing in its own genuine trade union and led by its true communist party, will rediscover its historical, revolutionary impetus and clear the way for the birth of international communism; a society that will at last give priority to human needs, and also, indeed in particular, prioritize the prevention and combating of natural calamities.

# The Course of World Capitalism and its Crisis No Future for Capitalism

*From a public meeting in Paris, November 23, 2019*

The massive destruction and massacres of the Second World War allowed world capitalism to emerge from the crisis of 1929 and start a new cycle of capital accumulation, almost without a crisis of overproduction: the famous “Glorious Thirty” [the French economic boom of 1945-75] of economists and journalists. But this cycle ended definitively with the first crisis of international overproduction in 1974-75. Since then, following a cycle of 7 to 10 years as in Marx’s time, capitalism has experienced, after a phase of growth, an international crisis of overproduction: international and national trade plummet, bankruptcies of commercial and industrial enterprises explode, the national and international markets are engorged with goods which are difficult to buy. Bankruptcies lead to mass unemployment and restructuring. As arrears accumulate, the banks themselves go bankrupt and bond and share prices fall in turn, capital enters a deflationary spiral.

Faced with a crisis of the economic system which guarantees it immense privileges, the bourgeoisie, both industrial and financial, responds by systematically resorting to subcontracting, outsourcing, and making workers ever more precarious. Monopolies, which are the multinationals, respond with massive offshoring to countries where cheap labor can be exploited without restraint, such as in China. This “globalization”, as economists in the service of the bourgeoisie call it, has given world capitalism about thirty years of security.

To this is added frenzied speculation in all areas: on raw materials (like oil and gas), cereals, housing, etc. This is accompanied by general deregulation and the destruction of public services that capitalism is no longer capable of providing. This is all good for profits. The bourgeoisie does not care about the suffering it inflicts on workers through its policies. What worries the bourgeoisie and its governments are the social outbursts caused by its worldwide economic policy, and the general crisis of capitalism.

But the economic policy led by the bourgeoisie and its governments does not solve anything! On the contrary, from crisis to crisis, the situation worsens: from cycle to cycle, growth only slows down, while the debts of companies, families and States become so gigantic that they jeopardize the system itself. Even the central banks themselves hold trillions in debt in the form of bonds, many of which will never be repaid, bringing the crisis to the heart of the financial system.

However, a solution exists: capitalism, by socializing the productive forces, has developed on a considerable scale the economic bases of communist society – this is its great historical role. The crisis of capitalism exposes the need to transition to a communist soci-

ety: a classless society, communal and without commodity production, where the goal of production will be the satisfaction of human needs. The goal of production under capitalism is only the accumulation of capital.

Capitalism – and the bourgeoisie with it – has become a parasitic organism that hampers the development of humanity, drawing it into pointless wars and inflicting excruciating pain on a large portion of humanity, while destroying nature in the process.

The monstrous course of this economic system cannot be stopped peacefully. The transition to communism requires the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, its expropriation, and the abolition of wage labor and capital, by replacing the management of production and distribution for profit with a communist management, that is to say, a management that is based on physical and not monetary accounting and on human needs, while taking into account the protection of nature.

# Zionism and anti-Zionism

On July 16, 2018, to commemorate the roundup of the Jews in Paris in 1942, President Macron, in the presence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, “mon cher Bibi”, who had been invited for the occasion, said: «We will make no concessions to anti-Zionism because it is the new form of anti-Semitism». Then Macron cautiously backtracked on his proposal for a law to prosecute anti-Zionism.

This was followed by the usual fuss about anti-Semitism, anti-Zionism, stirring out of all context the horrors of the Shoah, the “return” of Fascism, etc., etc., etc. Against this media chaos it is necessary to return at least to the Marxist definition of the terms Judaism, anti-Semitism, Zionism, anti-Zionism.

On July 19, 2018, the Knesset adopted a new Basic Law of the State of Israel which defines the country as “the nation-State of the Jewish people”, thus formally establishing the apartheid of its Arab population (20% of the Israeli population, not counting the occupied territories), and once again confirms Israel as “the homeland of all Jews”.

The question therefore becomes again a current one: the visions, both bourgeois, of a secular State, “of the citizens”, for whom religion is a private matter, and that of the “State of the Jewish People”, which, to tell the truth, nobody can understand what it means, but which serves very well to camouflage an anti-proletarian and counter-revolutionary State of capital, like all States.

## Judaism and anti-Judaism

Rather than “anti-Semitism” it would be more exact to say “anti-Judaism”.

The Protestant Reformation in the 16th century rediscovered the roots of Christianity in the Jewish Bible. The term Semitic was then invented in 1781 by the German Orientalist August Ludwig von Schlözer, derived from the name of one of Noah’s sons, Sem, to designate the kinship, established since the Middle Ages, between the Hebrew, Aramaic and Arabic languages, of populations living mainly in the Middle East, North Africa and East Africa.

The philological discoveries of the 19th century led to the denomination of contemporary Jews as Semites, the racial descendants of the ancient Jews.

The term Semite was taken from the propagators of the conception of races, to which the Frenchman Ernest Renan contributed greatly: the superior race being the Indo-European, or Aryan, while that of the Semites, Jewish and Arabic, was considered inferior. Racial theories have spread up until today, extending to the human species the same laws applied to animals. These theories soon spread throughout Europe, including England.

## On the definition of the Jew

When the peoples of Europe were divided into nations, the Jews became “one nation within a nation”, one State within a State as was the case when the German nation was born.

But is there a “Jewish people”, a human group with the same geographical, linguistic and religious origin?

What today is called the “Jewish people” has different geographical origins because of its historical dispersion, just as in the case of Christians or Muslims. Biologically, the majority of those who are considered Jewish have little or nothing to do with the tribes of Palestine and the Palestinians of today are certainly much closer in a genetic sense to the ancient peoples of the region than the present-day inhabitants of Israel and the Jews of the world.

Recent studies on the Ashkenazi population, that of the Jews from Eastern and Central Europe, have shown that on average 80% of their genome is of European origin and that only a small portion comes from the Middle East. The Jews of Europe have in fact crossed with populations from the north and especially from the east and the centre of the continent: Moravia, Poland, Lithuania, as well as Slavs and Kazars (Turks from the steppes converted to Judaism). And also mixed with all populations, from Mesopotamia to Spain.

These Jews spoke Yiddish, coming from many Germanic dialects grafted on Jewish and Aramaic bases, incorporating Slavic and Romance phrases, but written in Hebrew characters. Some historians have thus evoked the existence of a “Yiddish people”.

The “Jews” therefore do not form a race, as the Israeli bourgeoisie, which practices ethnocracy like the “racist” Europe of the 19th and 20th centuries, still asserts today!

Consequently, anti-Semitism does not apply against a race or a geographically settled population, but against a religion and, more generally, a culture, a philosophy. On the other hand, the notion of the “Jewish people” behind the creation and constitution of the State of Israel in 1948 has no objective basis. That does not mean that the State of Israel does not exist! Every State, concealed oppression of one social class over another, needs its myths, even the most senseless and ridiculous.

What, then, is the definition of the term or noun “Jew”? Of course it indicates a culture, a relationship with the world, and not an ethnic group, let alone a race, which does not exist.

## Bourgeoisie and racism

Until the bourgeois revolution, throughout history populations were often divided into separate “communities”. For example, the Ottoman Empire, while defining Islam as the State religion, tolerated other religions, organized into separate and recognizable “communities”, with their own quarters in the cities, each governed by its own “council” and laws.

But still today in some very bourgeois and democratic States citizens are registered

on the basis of their belonging to a “religious community”, as in Switzerland, Germany and other northern European countries, to which they sometimes have to pay money by law, and even if the individual declares himself an atheist or completely indifferent.

Even in France, the separation of church and State dates back only to 1905 and the solemn “principle of secularism” proclaimed in the Constitution has not completely cancelled the reality of a “Christian” nation, distrustful of other religions, of the “Jew”, taken as a symbol of usury and international finance, and today of Islam followers, for example.

In Germany, Nazism did not only discriminate against the Jewish population. It was born in reaction to the class struggle and one of its essential functions was the extermination of the communists. Then, among other “rationalizations” of the bourgeois German nation, it committed itself to the elimination of an overpopulation that weighed on the reproduction of Capital. In addition to the Communists, this included Jews, Gypsies, homosexuals, the mentally ill, Roms and Slavs. The “Holocaust” must therefore include the tens of millions of dead “without label”, exterminated by the two world wars. All these deaths, in concentration camps, under the bombs and on the battlefields, served to safeguard the capitalist order and give new life to the capitalist system.

Centuries of democratic regimes and solemn Constitutions have not made racial, national and religious prejudice, and persecution and discrimination, legal or de facto, disappear. Racism is a valid instrument that the ruling classes will always use to divide the proletariat and divert it from its historical tasks.

## Birth of Zionism

Where nation-States had established themselves in the 19th century there had been a weakening of the previous medieval institutions of the communities, particularly the Jewish ones, and the demand for the same rights as other citizens.

The Haskalah, “education”, was a Jewish movement of thought inspired by European Enlightenment, which emerged in Germany in the 18th-19th centuries. It expressed the desire to integrate Jews into secular societies, abandoning Jewish culture and the Yiddish language, thus opposing tradition. The Haskalah sought to break the hegemony of the Orthodox rabbis over the Jews of small eastern European cities and to renounce everything it perceived as “medieval” Jewish culture in favour of modern secular European culture. A reformed, Protestant Judaism emerged from the bosom of Haskalah. This assimilationist program aimed at integrating Jews into European modernity.

But with the pogroms of 1880 it lost ground as a way of integrating the Jews.

Zionism was undoubtedly born as a reaction to the pogroms. They multiplied, especially at the end of the century in Russia and Poland, where most Jewish communities lived. From here, during the century, a strong emigration had developed, mainly towards the United States, which would continue to be welcomed until the 1930s, while a small part of it headed towards Palestine.

But the Dreyfus affair in France in 1898 also had a remarkable echo in the Western world and accentuated the development of the Zionist movement.

It was a Zionism aimed at creating a State for the Jews, unlike previous Zionist, spiritual or cultural currents. It fostered a national feeling for the creation of a territorial centre or State populated by Jews in “land of Israel”, the Palestine of the modern world, which was then part of the Ottoman Empire, where the Jewish population had lived in antiquity.

Its theorist was the Austro-Hungarian Theodore Herzl, born in Budapest and living in Austria, an assimilated and secular Jew. As a journalist he had followed the Dreyfus affair, and in 1896 he published a work “Der Judenstaat”, “The State of the Jews” (not “The Jewish State”, as it is often translated), in which he considered that Jews would never be integrated into other countries and that they needed their own State. Zionism therefore called for a return to Zion, which is one of the hills surrounding Jerusalem. No mention is made of the existence in that land of an indigenous population.

It was in fact a colonialist project, placed in the context of colonialism and European imperialism.

After all, in the past centuries, did not the Protestant refugees colonize North America? In the middle of the twentieth century, in 1938, Mussolini also advanced the possibility of the formation of a “Jewish homeland”, which he was to establish in the African colonies, in the Migiurtinia. This is what Galeazzo Ciano wrote in his “Diary” on 30 August: «The Duce also communicated to me one of his plans to make the Migiurtinia a concession for international Jews. He says that the country has considerable natural reserves that the Jews could exploit». It should be noted that three months later Italy would issue the racial laws. A contradiction? Of course not! It shows how true it is that Zionism and anti-Semitism go hand in hand.

Herzl boasted among the western bourgeoisie the interest that they could gain from seeing a poor population leaving and moving from East to West.

In 1897 Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel. He approached the French banker Edmond de Rothschild, who had already started buying land in Palestine in 1882.

Realizing that his plan for the future of European Judaism was in line with what the anti-Jewish movement wanted, Herzl quickly developed a strategy of alliance with the latter. He wrote in “Der Judenstaat” that «the governments of all countries affected by anti-Semitism will be very interested in helping us obtain the sovereignty we want», adding that «not only poor Jews» would contribute to an emigration fund for European Jews, «but also Christians who want to get rid of them». Herzl confided in his diary that «the anti-Semites will become our most trusted friends, the anti-Semitic countries our allies».

In 1902, Herzl contacted the British government, in particular Secretary of State Chamberlain, and obtained the support of the very rich Lord Walter Rothschild, a partisan and financial supporter of Zionism. In 1903 he met well-known anti-Semites such as Russian Interior Minister Vyacheslav von Plehve, who had organized anti-Jewish pogroms

in Russia, and deliberately sought an alliance. And he also turned to another famous anti-Semite, Lord Balfour who, as Prime Minister of Great Britain, promoted the Aliens Act in 1905. The purpose of the Aliens Act was to curb immigration to the United Kingdom of Jewish refugees from the Russian Empire fleeing the pogroms, in order, as he openly declared, to save the country from the «unquestionable evils of essentially Jewish immigration». Racist and anti-Semitic theses had and have had much following in England.

The Socialist Bund, the General Union of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, which was founded in Vilnius, in Russian Lithuania, on October 7, 1897, a few weeks after the first Zionist Congress was held in Basel, became the most open enemy of Herzl's Zionism. The Bund found itself aligned with the existing coalition of rabbis, Orthodox and Reformists, anti-Zionists as mindful of the article of faith that the Jews would not have their own land before the coming of the Messiah.

But the political situation in the Middle East progressed in the direction Herzl wanted. From the end of the 19th century the imperialist powers, such as France, Great Britain, Russia and even Germany were preparing to divide up the rapidly decaying Ottoman Empire. But at the same time Arab nationalism was also emerging, embracing European ideological conquests.

The birth of the workers' movement in the Middle East took place before 1914 with trade organizations where indigenous proletarians mixed with the European colonial proletariat.

British imperialism, in order to further weaken the Ottoman Empire, encouraged the independence movement, initially composed of Christian Arabs and Muslims, but still weak due to tribal hostilities and competition between the regional bourgeoisies. Moreover, "perfidious Albion" obviously preferred to rely on Sunni religious organizations, as the Ottomans had done before, in a region where Shiites were very numerous. British diplomacy therefore encouraged Arab nationalism, while trying to divide it, with the promise made in 1915 to the Sunni Sheikh of Mecca Hussein and his Bedouins, as to Ibn Saud, in exchange for their participation in the war against the Ottoman Turks, to «recognize and support the independence of the Arabs» and to encourage the creation of a large independent Arab State.

But already in 1916, the United Kingdom signed the secret agreement with the French called Sykes-Picot, which divided between the two imperialist countries the great kingdom destined for the Arabs (without providing for any Jewish National Home). Keeping the promises made to Hussein was out of the question!

The great Arab revolt led by Emir Hussein and his sons from 1916 to 1918 allowed London to open a front south of the Ottoman Empire. Once the mission was accomplished, the danger for British imperialism was now Arab nationalism: the strategy was to create weak and opposing States from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire. Divide and conquer, an old device but always current.

After pretending to support Arab nationalism to weaken the Ottoman Empire, it was

now a question of finding a way to oppose this Arab nationalism! In the middle of the world conflict London turned to the Zionist movement. Promising it a “National Home” could – British strategists thought – turn the Jews into a resource: in Palestine, where they would support General Allenby’s troops; in the United States, where they would accentuate the country’s commitment to war; in Germany, in Austria-Hungary, in Russia, where the imperialists hoped that, being many Bolshevik and Menshevik leaders of Jewish origin, they would be diverted. Without forgetting that it was also a matter of opposing the French presence.

In recent decades, colonies of Jews had already settled in Palestine, mainly from Russia since 1878 as a result of pogroms. But still at the beginning of the 20th century, Tsarist Russia, bogged down in political unrest, in the Russo-Japanese war, then in the revolution of 1905, had a new wave of pogroms; there were almost a million Jews who left the country, and 40,000 of them, including many socialists, headed towards Palestine, the “Holy Land”.

In 1917 the British occupation of Palestine began. The famous Balfour Declaration of 2 November 1917 was published. The date of the letter was that of the British army’s decisive victory in Gaza against the Ottoman forces. The Balfour Declaration consisted of an open letter, typed, which Lord Arthur James Balfour, then Minister of the Foreign Office, had sent on 2 November 1917 to Lord Walter Rothschild, “head” of the “British Jewish community”, financier of the Zionist movement, and which was published in the Times on 9 November in the insertion “Palestine for the Jews - Official sympathy”. The letter is short and worth quoting in its entirety.

*«Foreign Office, November 2, 1917*

*«Dear Lord Rothschild,*

*«On behalf of His Majesty’s Government, I am pleased to send you the following declaration of sympathy for the Jewish Zionist aspirations, which has been submitted to and approved by the Cabinet.*

*«His Majesty’s Government welcomes the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will make every effort to facilitate the achievement of this goal, it being clearly understood that nothing will be done that will prejudice the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine and the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

*«I will be grateful if you will bring this statement to the attention of the Zionist Federation.*

*«Arthur James Balfour».*

The Christian promoters of Zionism, Lord Shaftesbury since 1839 (in that year he had bought a full page of the *Times* to publish an article suggesting the return of the Jews to Judea and Galilee: “a land without people for a people without land”) and Lord Balfour in 1917, thus thought to get rid of the problem of Jewish immigration to Britain. Lord Arthur James Balfour was in fact supported by a “Christian Zionism” that supported the “return” of the Jews to Palestine in order to clean up the country with a Christian majority.

Edwin Samuel Montagu, a Jew, was the only member of David Lloyd George’s

cabinet, of which Balfour a member, to oppose the Balfour declaration, considering it, and the Zionist project as a whole, to be anti-Semitic. Montagu warned against the prospect that the Zionist enterprise would result in the expulsion of indigenous Muslims and Christians from Palestine and that it would also strengthen the currents in all other countries that wanted to get rid of the Jews.

The notorious Balfour Declaration nullified the commitments that London had previously made to the Arab nationalists, who cried out against betrayal. Lawrence of Arabia could go and change his clothes!

The United Kingdom therefore declared itself in favour of the creation of a Jewish nation in Palestine, which should not, however, harm existing non-Jewish communities! A contradiction whose bitter harvest would soon be reaped.

In 1917 the British favoured Jewish immigration to Palestine. According to the instructions of the League of Nations, an autonomous political system responsible for the Jews was created in 1922, around an elected assembly and a Jewish agency in charge of executive power. The latter was a branch of the World Zionist Organization founded in 1897 in Basel by Theodore Herzl (the seat was later moved to Berlin, London, New York and today is located in Jerusalem). The Jewish Colonial Trust (Jewish Colonization Fund) was founded by Herzl in March 1899 and collected the capital received from the entire Jewish diaspora; in 1901 the Jewish National Fund managed to buy the land put up for sale in Palestine, first from the Ottomans then, after 1919, from Arab landowners, in different to the fate of the farmers who lived on those lands and cultivated them. This fund became an Anglo-Palestinian bank and then the National Bank of Israel in 1951.

The Jewish population of Palestine went from 94,000 in 1914 (with 525,000 Muslims and 70,000 Christians) to 630,000 in 1947 at the end of the British mandate (with 1,181,000 Muslims and 143,000 Christians); 80% of the Jewish population was made up of Ashkenazis from Europe. In 1926, 100,000 Jews arrived in Palestine, since the United States had restricted the entry of Jews in 1925: in 1924 there were 50,000 Jewish immigrants to the United States and 14,000 to Palestine, the following year the opposite. In 1931, the Jewish population in Palestine reached 164,000 people (16% of the population of Palestine), a quarter of whom were of Eastern Europe origin; in 1938 there were 217,000, mainly from Russia, the Baltic States and Central Europe; the rate of emigration to Palestine doubled from 1933.

The rise of Nazism, of course, caused an acceleration of Jewish immigration from Germany: from 1932 to 1939 there were 247,000 arrivals, or 30,000 a year, four times more than in the years following the First World War. Representing more an escape from persecution than a “Zionist choice” this transfer to Palestine benefited from the agreement called “Haavara”, concluded by the Zionist Organization with the Nazi authorities in Berlin on August 25, 1933 and which worked until 1939. This agreement facilitated the emigration of German Jews to Palestine; in exchange they would pay money to buy German goods for Palestine, thus bypassing the British embargo. 20,000 German Jews be-

nefited from it. Many of them would have preferred to migrate to other more prosperous areas of the world, but most European countries (Great Britain in particular) and the United States were quite hostile, even after the Second World War.

In the Middle East, the discontent against the English betrayal and broken promises, already alive in 1917, grew in the interwar period while the construction of the Jewish National Home took place, whose development violated the clause of the mandate that should have theoretically protected the “non-Jewish” populations that constituted the great majority.

Hence the increasingly massive and violent uprisings, with a United Kingdom concerned above all not to let its power over the region be questioned.

After the clashes of 1920, on the eve of the San Remo Conference, (five Jews and four Arabs killed) and those of 1921 in Jaffa (47 Jews and 48 Arabs killed), there was the much more serious explosion of 1929: the clashes took place everywhere, even in Jerusalem, around the Wailing Wall, and in Hebron, where part of the Arab population killed dozens of Jews while another part protected them. In total, in one week in August, the riots cost the lives of 133 Jews and 116 Arabs. In the end, in 1936, there was a real Palestinian insurrectionary strike, which lasted almost three years.

From 1945 to 1947, the 100,000 British soldiers stationed in Palestine fought the activity of Zionist groups that had become very aggressive. The tragedy of the ship *Exodus*, during the summer of 1947, when survivors of the extermination camps were prevented from landing in Palestine, covered Her Majesty’s government with ignominy, but the responsibility had to be extended to all bourgeoisies that had emerged victorious from the war.

In any case, World War II had sounded the death knell for British imperialism, which had to hand over to the United States. Her Majesty’s government estimated that the United Kingdom, exhausted by World War II, could no longer afford to station 100,000 men in Palestine – a tenth of its forces abroad – or spend £40 million a year for its mandate. Let us not forget that London survived only thanks to the loan of £39 billion from the United States (a debt that would not be repaid in full until 2006!)

The best solution still had to be found to preserve British interests.

An equally decisive factor for the region was international pressure, particularly from the US and the USSR. In addition to the urgent need to resolve the issue of the survivors of the genocide, Washington and Moscow shared the same strategic calculation, each of them for their own benefit, of course: to drive the British out of Palestine in order to weaken their grip throughout the region. Still the two great victors of the world war had not moved on to the so-called “cold war” – this began in February 1948 with the seizure of power by the “communists” in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

On 18 February 1947, the Foreign Office had to hand over its Mandate to the United Nations. Make way for the victors! On 14 May 1948, the State of Israel was proclaimed on the radio by Ben Gurion.

The British army left Palestine. The Jewish terrorist groups used atrocities against

the defenceless Palestinian population to drive them out. The State of Israel was immediately recognized by the United States and after two days by the USSR. Turkey was the first Muslim country to recognize Israel in 1949. The two major imperialist powers of the time, the USA and the USSR, had understood the counter-revolutionary importance of this small State to counter nationalist and decolonization movements not only in the Middle East but throughout the world.

After 1948 many Jews continued to immigrate to Israel, as they were not welcome in Europe or even the United States. In the first years after the end of the war, hundreds of thousands of Jews, who no longer had a home, were still living in concentration camps. Palestine was also closed to them by the British. For the Poles, returning often meant losing their lives. The United States, a land of migrants, already in 1921 had reduced immigration through laws limiting the quota to 3% for each country; in 1924 a restrictive law concerned immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe; very few Jews had been received during the war; a new law against immigration was passed in 1952 (the United States did not sign the 1951 Geneva Convention on refugees from countries where they were persecuted). Instead, one million Jews arrived in Israel from the Maghreb, either because they had been expelled, as in the case of Egypt, or because they were persuaded to do so by Jewish propaganda organizations.

At the end of the 1970s, emigration resumed by the USSR, which was going through a serious economic crisis, and accelerated with Gorbachev in 1988.

The Russian community of Israel is today the largest, more than a million. The Russian Jews, who were first on their way to the United States, turned to Israel in 1990 after the tightening of immigration policy in the United States. For economic reasons, more than ideological, they have also settled in the settlements of the West Bank and Gaza: the Russians are 96.6% of the population of the colony of Ariel, 84.9% of Ma'ale Adunim, 74.5% of Kiribati Arba. Rents in these settlements, "dormitory cities" near the working areas of Tel Aviv, Jerusalem and more generally along the Green Line, enjoy State subsidies.

Israel currently has a population of 6.5 million Jews (75% of its total population), while the world population of Jews is estimated at 15 million, of which 6 million are in the United States.

## The first Anti-Zionism

Zionism from its inception in the 19<sup>th</sup> century quickly encountered hostility within Jewish communities, whether religious, reformers or conservatives, or lay people, many of whom were professed socialists. The majority of the world's Jewish population then lived in the Russian Empire, not in Russia but in Lithuania, Poland, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova. It can therefore be said that anti-Zionism was above all widespread and majoritarian among the Jewish communities in Europe and the United States, who continued to see Zionism as an anti-Jewish movement until the 1940s. For these Jews it

was a matter of fighting to stay in “their” country, not to be sent to a territory they did not recognize as their homeland. This is also why, when the State of Israel says it is the “State of the Jews”, it refers to Zionist Jews, and in fact it needs and feeds on anti-Semitism.

Jewish religious circles considered, and consider, Zionism even a blasphemy, idolatry, because in their doctrine there cannot be a homeland for the Jews without the previous coming of the Messiah.

The organization of the Bund, the General Union of Jewish Workers of Lithuania, Poland and Russia, created in 1897 in Lithuania, was a secular Jewish socialist movement, fighting for the rights of Jewish workers, demanding the use of the Yiddish language and opposing Zionism, seen as an accomplice of British colonialism. It was recognized as a fraction of the Social Democratic Party of Workers of Russia in 1898 and was close to the Mensheviks. In 1905 the Bund was at the forefront of the protests in Belarus; in 1917 it did not pass to the Bolsheviks, but several of its members eventually joined the Bolshevik Party. Let us remember that the bundist Marek Edelman, one of the leaders of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto revolt, openly declared himself anti-Zionist.

So, anti-Zionism was born historically as Jewish opposition to a project that denies that an individual who declares himself Jewish can be integrated into the country and a citizen of equal rights in the State where he was born and lives. Anti-Zionists were the Jews who did not recognize Palestine as their country.

Even today, the majority of Jews, who live outside Israel, consider the possibility of their “alià”, “ascent” (to Jerusalem) only when they need to emigrate from the country they have lived in for centuries, except in cases of religious idealism.

This is clearly completely independent of the anti-Zionism of those who disagree and condemn the Israeli bourgeoisie’s policy of colonizing the Palestinian territories and oppressing the Arab Israeli population, frantically shaking the Shoah’s alibi.

We Communists, as we have always written, are not anti-Israeli, as we are not anti-American, for example. We define the policy of the Israeli bourgeoisie as colonialist, a policy of oppression against its Arab population and also against the proletariat, Jewish and Arab, of Israel. We are equally critical of the Palestinian bourgeoisie, an accomplice of the Israeli bourgeoisie in the oppression of the Palestinian proletariat. And we hope for the union of the Israeli and Palestinian proletarian classes to fight their common enemy, the Israeli and Palestinian bourgeoisie united and subjugated to the international bourgeoisie.

We are internationalists and our fight is that of the international proletariat against the international bourgeoisie.

We are anti-Zionists just as we are enemies of all bourgeois States. In particular, in the region, we prefigure a subversion even of the present State institutions, which can go far beyond the “two-State” solution and towards a federation of republics born from the revolutionary uprising of the working classes.

What is of interest to the Israeli government and many of its supporters is not

fighting anti-Semitism and the “rebirth of Nazism”, as the flirtations with right-wing forces in Europe and the United States show, continuing to apply the recipe of Theodore Herzl. Who will finally defend the Jews (the Jewish proletarians) from the Jews (the Jewish bourgeoisie)?

But we not only denounce the colonialist policy of Israel, we denounce the connivance of the great imperialist States before the Second World War in the creation of the State of Israel, in a Palestinian land shattered by Arab national movements, and the connivance after the war, and also the present one, of all the bourgeoisies, including the Arab ones, to control any movement of the Arab proletarian masses and of the Israeli proletariat itself.

Imperialism offers its unconditional support to the policy of Israel, a small State but strongly supported by the American giant. Today the State of Israel is one of the U.S. military strongholds in the Middle East, which guarantees the maintenance of order over the Arab nations around it and in North Africa over Egypt, but above all over the proletariat of all these nations whose unity has so far been prevented.

The Israeli proletariat, crushed by the propaganda that its bourgeoisie is daily administering, has no other solution but to escape this oppression with the class struggle against its bourgeoisie, which materially exploits it, oppresses it with increasingly despotic and fascist laws, morally weakens it with war propaganda and inculcates hatred against an alleged aggressor to separate it from its Arab and Palestinian class brothers.

In the face of the global economic crisis, attacks against workers continue to multiply, and any excuse is good to stir up hatred among the various “communities” and divide the proletariat.

Only the international proletariat, by following the path of defending its living and working conditions in its economic organizations, conquered under the leadership of the Communist Party, will be able to save not only itself but all humanity from the atrocities of the capitalist system by establishing, first of all with its dictatorship over the other classes, the foundations of a new society in which the exploitation of man by man will no longer exist, where the division into classes, salary and capital, individual property and hatred for “the other” will no longer have any place!

# The Labor Movement in the United States of America

*(Continues from last issue)*

## Part 10

### The Knights of Labor

The origins of the Knights of labor date back to the days of the National Labor Union; established 1866. The organization, however only began to have a broader existence many years later. In 1869, after the break-up the previous trade-union, the order was founded in Philadelphia by a small group of Garment workers as the 'Noble and Holy Order of the Knights of Labor'. At the basis of their organization was the belief that the precious trade-unions had failed because of their lack of secrecy. Thus the structuring of a secret society began, accompanied by extravagant titles for people who had become adept at the heights of the organization, Great Master Worker (general secretary, first filled by Uriah Stephens), Venerable Sage, Unknown Knight, Worthy Foreman, etc.

At the time there were many unions with pompous titles for their leaders and their members conducted elaborate ceremonies. None came close, however, to the rituals of the Knights of Labor. When a candidate was invited to join them (and up to 1878 this person could only be a salaried worker). They would attend a secret meeting in which the person would first have to answer three questions: 1) Do you believe in God, creator and father of us all? 2) Do you obey the universal rule of God, so you will have to earn your bread with the sweat of your brow? 3) Do you wish to make a solemn oath of secrecy, obedience and mutual assistance?

The candidate was then asked to commit himself to the laws and regulations of the order, as well as to «defend the life, interests, reputation and family of all the authentic members of the Order: help and assist the Brothers, employed and unemployed, unfortunate or in disgrace, and procure work, guarantee a just remuneration, relieve discomfort by inviting others to help them, so that all the brothers and their families can receive and enjoy the rightful fruits of work and exercise their art».

After the oath, the new member was taken to the Sanctuary Base, the meeting room, to receive instructions from the Worthy Foreman. Here they were explained that the organization of the workers was made necessary because, in every productive sector, capital «unites and, consciously or not, crushes the many prospects of the workers, trampling into dust the poor of humanity». However, the Knights of Labor did not advocate for «any conflict with the legitimate enterprise of, nor antagonism with capital». They only neglected the rights of others «and sometimes even violated the rights of the defenseless». To prevent such violations, they intended «to create a healthy public opinion of labor (the only creator

of value), and how right it was that it received the full, fair share of the value of capital created». They would therefore have supported all the laws aimed at «harmonizing the interests of labor and capital (...) and also those laws aimed at mitigating the harshness of employment». Though they did not approve of general strikes, if it were «rightly necessary to solicit the oppressor, we will protect and help every one of our initiate who could receive harm, and, as far as possible extend our help to all sectors of honest labor».

After being instructed on the objectives of the Knights of Labor, the candidate was entrusted to a Venerable Sage; who explained to them the secret organization of the Order, controls, passwords, and teach the meeting dates. The meetings, often held in the woods, were called by writings on sidewalks or fences that could only be understood by initiates. Until 1897 the name of the Order was never spoken and was called “Five stars” because they signed with five asterisks.

## Utopianism and Religion

To better understand the objective of the Knights of Labor. It will be Useful to follow the thought of U. Stephens, who was among the founders of the Order and a Master Worker until 1878. The word “solidarity” was fundamental; the labor movement had to be powerful and unified to face the strength of organized capital. The only working-class organization capable of dealing with the power of capital would have been the one that had united the workers of all trades, and had universal objectives”.For him, the unions were too narrow, both in composition and scope. Instead of uniting all the workers, they excluded the unskilled, Blacks, and other worker groups. Since, according to him, all workers had common interests, they should logically belong to a single association and be united by bonds of “universal brotherhood”. A unity to be achieved through the application of three principles: secrecy, cooperation and education. Secrecy served three purposes: it would protect the worker from persecution by the master who was hostile to the unions; it would prevent the discovery of the workers’ plans by the masters; and finally, secret rites would emphasize for the adept the importance of the organization he had just joined. In the secret of the meeting rooms, all differences of trade, religion, nationality, race and politics disappeared.

On the other hand, Stephens was not satisfied with the improvements that could be achieved within the wage-based system; an important goal of the Knights of labor was to achieve «a complete emancipation of wealth producers from the enslavement and suffering of paid slavery». Through cooperation, the Knights of Labor could guarantee better living conditions, and gradually replace capitalism.

A deeply religious inspiration was at the base of the Order; in the very words of Stephens: «The association must base its claims on something higher than participation in profits and wages and the reduction of hours and labor fatigue. These are nothing more than physical effects and goals of a coarser nature and, even if they are fundamental, they are only the starting point for a higher, more noble cause. The ultimate reason, the true

reason, must be based on the highest and most divine nature of man, his noble capacity to do good. Excessive effort and limited pay reduce, obtundate and degrade these divine faculties, in the likeness of which man was created so that, according to the plan of his Creator, he could always exhibit them».

It was for various activities including not so much struggle as education, that the eradication of prejudices and antagonisms that divided the working class was made possible; education also played a key role to ensure the accomplishment of the Knights of Labor's own goals, both in the short and in the long term. In this sense, the meetings were very active, and political economy a relevant field of discussion and training, also in view of the participation of the members in political life. Stephens' aim was therefore to unite all the workers in a general mass organization without distinction of creed, sex, or race. «I don't pretend to possess prophetic powers – it seems Stephens said – but I see in the future an organization that will cover the world. It will be composed of men and women of every profession, creed and color».

Surely Stephens' vision was very progressive compared to the workers' organizations of the time, as these were the ones that survived, locked in narrow horizons of category or even factory; nor did the topics discussed go beyond the purely trade union ones such as wages and working conditions. The Knights of Labor were a structure that was more suited to the party form, without however having the theoretical and material basis; Stephens' thought could therefore be ascribed to the rich category of utopianism. The consequences of the birth of the Knights of Labor, especially in the years that followed his retirement, was much greater and different from that prophesied by its theorists.

In the early years, only proven clothing workers, in particular the cutters, were admitted to the sections of the Order. Their meetings resembled in all respects normal trade union meetings. However, employers were also included in these groups of workers. Although the bourgeoisie component could not exceed a quarter of the workforce in each section, with the exception of bankers, doctors, coupon cutters and liquor producers, who were considered non-productive members of a society; which reflects the idea of the founders, that there was a fundamental commonality of interests between employers and workers, even if the bourgeois component could not exceed a quarter of the staff of each section, provided that the bourgeois actually participated. Women were admitted only starting in 1882, while Asians, especially the Chinese, were not accepted. The rules of the working class remained valid until the Order extended to the coal and steel industries of Western Pennsylvania, during the long depression. Only then did the Order begin to take hold of the class.

## Aims and Methods

The Knights of Labor remained in the shadows for several years not so much for their secrecy as for their poor penetration into the working class. It was the years of the depression that slowly made them rise in popularity among workers. Between 1873 and 1875 their activity extended from Philadelphia to the neighboring States and towards west of

Pennsylvania, an area of iron and steel mines.

It was an irregular growth: Groups of workers joined and then often left when they understood that the Knights of Labor did very little to help them gain better wages. The nature of the organization made it look like a national organization at a time when the traditional trade unions were being put into crisis and vanished because of the depression. However, since until 1878 the Knights of Labor did not have a platform, a statute, or any list of principles to inspire them, their activists (called “preceptors”) could promise the workers concerned that all their problems would be solved by a strong organization; since the accession was often followed by bitter disappointments, departures were as frequent as arrivals.

In any case there was still growth: at the end of 1877, following the great railway strike, the Knights of Labor were present in 8 States, from Illinois to Massachusetts, to West Virginia; by 1880, the number of States concerned had risen to 26. During the strike individual members of the Order acted militantly, while the Order itself had only recommended moderation, peaceful methods and isolation of the most radical elements. The need for rules and an organizational structure worthy of the name was felt as the organization expanded. The abandonment of their secrecy seemed prudent as it was a weak point in the image of the Order and made proselytism and union action difficult.

At a convention in 1878 a “Preamble and Declaration of Principles” was drafted. These would remain the only programmatic document of the Order throughout its entire history.

After denouncing the danger and aggressiveness of the great capitalists, for their tendency to impoverish and degrade the working masses. The document states that this unjust accumulation, and the powers that derives from it, must be cured if one wants to fully enjoy the blessings of life. A task that only workers can perform.

The document continues: «We have established the Order of the Knights of Labor, with the aim of organizing and directing the strength of the workers’ masses not as a political party», even if when voting support should be given to candidates in favor of measures «that can only be achieved through legislation», regardless of which party they belong to.

Among the aims of the order the most significant were: II. To ensure the workers can fully enjoy the wealth they create and sufficient free time to develop their skills.

In order to guarantee these results, the Order asked of the State: III. A statistical Office to know the real conditions of the working masses; IV. That public land is reserved for those who work it; V. The abrogation of all laws that do not bear equally upon capital and labor; VI. Measures for the health and safety of workers; VII. Recognition, by incorporation, of trade unions and the like; VIII. A wage to be paid each week by law; IX. Abolition of the contract system in public enterprises; X. The establishment of compulsory arbitration; XI. The prohibition of the employment of children under 15 years of age; XII. The prohibition of the employment of forced labor; XIII. a progressive taxation; XIV. Creation of a national monetary system; XVI. Prohibition of import of contract workers from abroad; XVII-XVIII. Nationalization of all important services and a currency valid

throughout the country.

The Order pledge commitment to: XIX. Create cooperative institutions that could overcome the system of wages; XX. Guarantee equal salary for equal work for men and women; XXI. Eight hours of work a day; XXII. Persuade the bosses to accept arbitration, so that sympathetic relations can be established and strikes would become superfluous.

At this point it is worth remembering that the term “arbitration” for a long time in the United States had a different meaning from that which is attributed to it today. At that time it meant “employment contract”, any agreement reached by collective bargaining. It was not easy, in those times of trade union battles, really worthy of the name, to force employers to negotiate, something in which the yellow unions then became masters, with very different results from those achieved in those heroic times.

In reality the strike was abhorrent, and the reference to appropriate legislation to improve the living conditions of the working class says a lot about the warlike nature of the Order. The proposal to organize the whole class remained, as did the program to abolish “gradually” wage slavery, with methods that were not only inadequate, but counter productive.

A governing body was established, the General Assembly, which in theory had total power. Even if the Order appeared to be highly centralized in its statutes, in reality the local assemblies and sections were autonomous and acted as they pleased. This meant that they moved according to the real needs of the trade unions and fighting structures that were present locally, and therefore often along very different theoretical lines from the Order’s leaders. A conflict between the base and leadership of the Order soon became apparent. While the real proletarians did not need to be taught that conquests were only achieved through strikes and other types of direct action, the leadership only repeated how futile strikes were, and that only through self-employment could lasting victories be achieved. «Strikes could not solve the problems of the working class», the 1879 successor of Stephens, Terence V. Powderly said in 1882, because «strikes cannot change the apprenticeship system, a strike cannot change unfair rules in the administration of justice; nor can a strike regulate the law of supply and demand, because if it blocks supply it also cuts demand, with workers losing their jobs and thus their purchasing power».

Clearly questionable considerations, generated by the defeats of the seventies, but on the basis of which the management called for funds to be allocated to create cooperatives rather than in support of trade union struggles. A consultation mechanism was also devised that was so complicated that it was impossible to support a strike. For example, since 1886 no strike could take place if at least two thirds of the votes were not reached in a secret ballot; strikes could only take place after a member of the executive committee had attempted arbitration, and the strike had to be called by the same executive. But all this was not enough to convince the members of the uselessness of the strikes; also because, if in the seventies the struggles were resolved in defeats, the thing began to change in the eighties. Even the bosses understood it, and they did not hesitate to lock themselves up and fire members of the Knights of Labor. No less insecure was the Order’s attitude to-

wards the trade unions. From the beginning Stephens defended the idea of a large general association, considering the trade associations historically outdated; but eventually groups organized by category were admitted within the Order. In the following years, the positions on this subject fluctuated several times, reflecting the contrast between the ideas of the management and the need for organization of the proletariat. In the end, the acceptance of trade union federations prevailed, also thanks to the emergence of a rival organization, in 1881, the Federation of Organized Trades and Labor Unions of the United States and Canada, which would become the A.F.L. after a few years.

Shortly after the convention that approved the “Declaration”, in 1882, the Order became public by presenting itself openly to the workers of America and informing them of its objectives. Initiation ceremonies and rituals were abolished. The Order saw its membership grow rapidly: from just over 9,000 members in 1878 to over 28,000 in 1880, jumping to almost 52,000 in 1883; but this was only the beginning.

## The Class meets the Knights of Labor

Yet the situation in those years was not entirely favorable. In 1883, a new depression had begun and the class struggle was coming to terms with a series of defeats. The real take-off would take place following two events that took place in 1885, the success in boycotts and the victorious strikes against three railway companies of Jay Gould, one of the “robber barons”, unscrupulous plutocrats, such as Carnegie, Morgan, Rockefeller, who represented the rapacious and ruthless capitalism of America at the end of the century.

The boycotts consisted in the refusal of the members of the proletarian organizations to buy from companies, newspapers, shops that took positions or acted against their interests. They also worked to keep the workers together when a strike could not be declared or to continue a minimum of mobilization after a strike had failed. It was a wave of activism that managed to force some companies to change their attitude towards workers’ organizations.

The Knights of Labor, however, obtained the great leap in the organization’s membership thanks to their role in the strikes, a weapon that the leaders did not like but that they had to grasp and brandish under the events and pressure of the working class.

Of all the robber barons, Gould was by far the most hated, Marx calls him “the sprawling king of railways and fraudster of finance”. His union philosophy was summed up in the phrase: «I can hire half the working class to kill the other half». He also boasted of his habits of hiring workers on starvation wages, and keeping them at that level as long as he needed them.

In 1883 the Knights of Labor successfully led a telegraph strike, some of whom were employees of Western Union, a railway company controlled by Gould. The trade unions of the company had been brutally repressed and the workers forced to sign demanding oaths. This, however, drew the Orders attention, who focused their attention on a number of categories of railway workers; mainly workers not represented in the strong

unions, who protected the drivers, firemen, brakemen and drivers. When in February of 1885, Missouri Pacific Railroad and other companies in the South-West reduced the wages of the workers in workshops and warehouses by 5%, after having lowered them by 10% in the previous October, the response to the change was immediate and extended to the whole railway systems of Texas, Kansas and Missouri. The local sections of the Knights of Labor, were ready to support the strikers and the support of the unions of the other categories was decisive. Freight traffic in the region came to a complete halt, and all that was left for Gould to do was take back all the wage cuts.

The main consequence of the resounding victory was the rise in the prestige of the Order, which resulted in the joining of thousands of individuals and entire local workers' societies. Gould did not resign himself, and tried to hit the Order's members that were more active among the railwaymen, firing them and closing the workshops. The answer was a further mobilization in the whole railway sector that threatened a repeat of the 1877 uprising. Which did not take place because Gould was as smart as to understand that it was time to radically change his attitude: he even claimed to believe in worker unionism and arbitration, and that he had been misunderstood by ill-intentioned people. The previously dismissed trade union activists returned to their posts, and the company made promises to not use discriminatory tactics against them. For the first time a workers' organization had been treated on an equal footing to the most powerful of capitalists in the country.

Once again, the success resulted in a wave of enrollments into the Order: sections were born everywhere, and the number of members increased. Between July 1885 and October 1886, membership increased from 110,000 to 700,000 (some estimates say one million). At last the humiliations received by the class during the past depression were canceled by that imposed on Gould by the KL. The Knights of Labor summarily forgot its series of failures, even important ones, dealt in the previous two years. A mere increase in numbers negated the humiliations experienced by the working class during the last depression due to the Orders unconvincingly combative attitude.

Sections of the Order were established in other parts of the world as well; Australia, New Zealand, England, Ireland and even in non-Anglo-saxon countries such as France, Belgium, Italy, and of course Canada.

## The Attitude Towards Minorities Within the Working Class

Although the Knights of Labor had as characteristic the attitude to accept all workers, without distinction of sex, race or nationality, the attitude towards Asians, and in particular the Chinese, was quite different. Grandmaster Workman Powderly stated that Asians could not become members of the Order, and that they should not even reside in the United States. Representatives of the Order even dared to argue before Congress that the Chinese should be expelled from the country. These Representatives however claimed credit for passing an anti-Chinese law in 1882. Some of the Order's membership on the

west coast even boasted of fomenting xenophobic terrorism. Claiming responsibility for the Rock Spring Wyoming attack on a Chinese community by white miners, killing dozens and setting houses ablaze. Instead of denouncing them, Powderly attacked the Chinese workers, and blamed them for causing the violence, while deploring violence in general.

A reaction came from workers within the Order who did not admit that, under the banner of the Knights of Labor, such atrocities were committed against proletarians with whom they shared struggles, toil and misery. A minority within the Order's Executive committee tried to pass a resolution that allowed the organization of Chinese sections (they had already been organized to fight in New York, and Philadelphia). A majority of the membership did not allow it, while admitting the existence of mixed sections. On the other hand, the Chinese had shown that they were capable of expressing combativeness, as in the case of the strike that resulted in higher wages by hop-gatherers in California; the strike was successful because, when the bosses tried to replace the Chinese with blacks, they refused to become scabs.

Taking up a position of the National Labor Union, dating back to 1868, point XX of the 1878 Order's Declaration of Principles stated: «Guarantee equal pay for equal work for both genders». However, at the same time there was no provision for women to join the Order. The solution to the problem dragged on until in 1881 a completely female section was established. The question was concluded in 1882 with an amendment to the Statute. The influx of women soon became significant, largely due to women being excluded from all other unions. In 1886 women were estimated to make up 8-9% of the members. Women soon provided significant contributions to the Order: as well as being determined in the struggle, they actively participated in pickets, humiliated scabs and gave moral and labor support to other strikers. Women were so significant that Powderly had to admit they were "the best men in the Order". Despite their uncertain beginnings, the Order soon began inviting women to meetings, where their input had the same weight as the men, and much like them were listened to.

There was just as much resistance towards Black workers as there had been for Chinese and women workers from within the Order. So much so, many of the leaders were opposed to organizing them. This attitude betrayed the Order, as black and white workers held common interests within the workplace. Both groups of workers had to defend themselves from the arrogance of their employer. The Order's attitude towards black workers worsened considerably in the years of its decline.

## The Knights of Labor in Action

The sheer size of the human mass that put their trust in the Order, was a never before counted number of proletarians, and would be one of the characteristics of the epic of the Knights of Labor. It was not a fully unfolded potential, as the leadership of the organization used this mass almost always unwillingly. The leadership was never in tune with

the real needs of the class, and always found itself for some reason in conflict with its own base. Often the Order was in conflict with officials closest to it. This is because, as we have seen, the ideology of the Knights of Labor did not appreciate the trade union struggle. Rather preferring to hope for cooperation as a model of a future society, and education as a means to achieve it.

Conferences and libraries were favored, even in the most important centers, there was often a “Temple of Work”. where much of the social and cultural life of the community took place. Though nothing bad, cultural activity tended to replace direct action in defense of the proletariat’s conditions. «Basically ours is an educational organization. Our holiest mission, to which we should devote our efforts in the years to come, is to propagate sound economic doctrine... We ask nothing more [of our members] than to study the truths of social and economic science. And when they have studied the lesson well, then action».

The workers’ base, however, did not see education as a function of a distant future, but as a guide for action in the struggles that they had to support on a daily basis. Powderly considered the struggles for wages “a short-sighted job”, which aimed to “earn a few extra cents a day”. «Talking about reducing working hours is also a waste of time. What you earn by reducing working hours will be recovered by the bosses in another way». The immediate and sure way had to be cooperation, even if it had long proved to be a utopia in various experiences, even on American soil, as we have seen. And talking about it during the era of the development of large corporations was either madness or betrayal.

The energies invested in the cooperative programs took away precious energy from the real struggle. Anti-union prejudice was widespread, theorised by elements linked to Lassallian socialism. Despite this fact, trade unions had to be permitted admission into the Order. The trade unions, it was said, would be made obsolete by the widespread introduction of machines; they were therefore incapable of effectively fighting the then nascent monopolistic capitalism. The industrial revolution would have reduced, thanks to the specialization and simplification of the process, the number of workers needed. And because of this also a need for the trade unions. Moreover, the strictly economic, categorical and local horizon of the trade unions would have also made the struggle ineffective. Since the members of other trade unions could have continued to work, carrying out the tasks of the strikers. The unions were only interested in immediate improvements; higher wages, shorter hours and better working conditions. As was said at a General Assembly in 1884: «Our Order foresees a radical change, while the unions (...) accept the industrial system as it is, and try to adapt to it. Our attitude is instead of war on the current system».

The outdated trade unions were to be replaced by territorial bodies, with indefinite class boundaries. Within which everyone would receive the necessary education to put an end to the ailments of wage servitude. Such incorrect conclusions, but consistent with the bourgeois nature of the leadership within the Knights of Labor. Who were intolerant of the realities and needs of the proletariat, represented by the semi-skilled and unskilled, black, women and immigrant working masses.

The confusion of the union form with the party form was already historically outdated. Although there were few trade unions in the 1880s, thanks to Marxist propaganda, they contemplated in the future of the class “radical changes in the current system”, and worked for “bringing about change”. Clearly it was a question of framing the workers’ vanguards around the communist political program, without renouncing to unite all workers into economic struggles. On the contrary, every time the Order would succeed in imposing their utopian and inter-class convictions, they would damage the solidarity within the struggles of the class. Only Marxism had succeeded in correctly set up the dialectical relationship between the levels of class consciousness and action, at the political and trade union levels. We can already anticipate that this connection, achieved through glorious events in Europe, was never able to take place across the Atlantic.

Very significantly, while the leaders insisted on minimizing the importance of the trade union struggle, and that lasting solutions could only come from political action, in section meetings it was forbidden to talk about politics, a subject that clearly was reserved for the leadership: an anticipation of Stalin’s “Bolshevization”. Of course, the prohibition had little effect, often where the Order was strongest, delegates would be elected to various positions as representatives of the State. Contrary to the bombastic statements on principle, the political action of the Knights of Labor as a unified organization was almost non-existent.

## Start of decline

The beginning of the end of the Knights of Labor can be dated to 1886, the year in which they reached peak membership. Boss Gould was not at all resigned to surrendering to the workers, despite the promises of the previous year. Wages were not brought back to the levels before the strikes, and trade unionists were discriminated against and persecuted. So the workers of the South-West Railway went on strike again; but the more specialized labor (drivers, conductors, etc.) did not join as they had done the year before. This was a weakness from the beginning. But the strike was not lost yet. That is, until Powderly came on stage in person: while he acted as great negotiator, Gould continued his anti-worker action, with all means at his disposal. In the cities where the strike took place, the struggle was very fierce. Each side led with their typical instruments: the workers with boycotts and picketing, and the bosses with a large deployment of public and private armed forces, trained judges, and scabs.

While the bosses were much better organized than in 1877, and intervened with greater unity and effectiveness, the workers did not find in the Knights of Labor the support they could, and should have had: while the sheriffs, the militia and the private troops beat, imprisoned and killed dozens of workers, the Order could do no better than to preach peace. Waiting messianically for the Great Master Worker to convince Gould to negotiate. In the end, betrayed by privileged labor, abandoned by the leadership (obviously

those of the lower ranks took to the streets with the workers), persecuted by the forces of law and order and masterly reaction, the workers gave in; the strike was defeated, and the workers also had to endure the revenge of Gould. He did not rehire most of the strikers (all registered with the Knights of Labor), putting them on blacklists that made them undesirable to other employers. The only one who felt relieved was Powderly.

A few months later the same Grand Master Worker performed another betrayal against the striking workers of the Chicago slaughterhouses. Perhaps worse because he intervened with all his pomp just when the bosses were about to give in. Suddenly he ordered the workers to abandon their eight-hour request and return to work. After an initial loss, the workers refused to obey, and Powderly threatened them with expulsion from the Order. Of course, the bosses learned, and their attitude changed from resigned to belligerent as they interrupted negotiations with representatives of the struggling workers. In short, the strike was defeated, and the bosses took advantage of it to ask the workers to resign from the union if they wanted to continue working. Which at the time, to tell the truth, many wanted to, at least as far as the Knights of Labor was concerned. At a meeting the workers adopted a resolution in which they explicitly accused Powderly of having played the bosses' game in full. To which the interested party replied: «You can't play lightly with the laws of business», and «the men who have accumulated capital are not our enemies. Otherwise, a worker today, could become the enemy of his companion tomorrow. After all, what we all try to learn is how to acquire capital and use it in the right way». Evidently, Powderly expressed the thought of the overwhelming majority of the General Executive Board in the Knights of Labor, which always rejected his resignation.

## End of Working Class support

The anti-union attitude of the Order's leadership did not change during the years of rapid growth of the movement, and this attitude would be the main cause in their decline, as the trade unions strengthened and united in a strong Federation.

The occasion for an irreparable split in the Order with the working class, rather than with the Unions, was the tolerance of an attitude of betrayal on the part of a structure within the Order towards the Cigar-makers union: while these (6,000 workers) were on strike, the union linked to the Knights of Labor offered labor at lower salary compared to the demands of the strikers; all when the struggle seemed to have defeated the resistance of the employers.

This behavior of a section of the Order was only the last of a long series, and served to alienate many who were sympathetic to the Knights of Labor, both from the member unions and individual workers: both began to leave the Order, especially after a Richmond General Assembly in October 1886. By July 1887 the number of members had already fallen from 700,000 to just over 500,000, falling to about 220,000 by mid 1888.

Historians sum up the reason for the decline of the Order essentially:

1) The harsh opposition of the bosses, especially when the organization, as the case was with the Order, tended to unite all workers, without distinction of trade, qualification, race, sex, religion and nationality.

2) The difficulty of keeping together an organization so heterogeneous in composition, purpose and meaning.

3) The type of organizational structure the order utilized. While it was suitable to move many workers from different locations in mass actions, the Order was unable to follow adequately the particular daily problems of specific trades and cities.

The inevitable conflict between the Leadership and the base membership over the minutiae of every action the Knights of Labor undertook, resulted in tactics and strategies almost always contrary to the true interests of the struggling proletarians. Moreover, more and more non-worker elements were taking their place at the highest levels of the organization, which, as we have seen were admitted freely into the Order.

The imposition of a non-proletarian orientation of the struggles lead to workers fighting simultaneously against the bosses as well as the leadership of the Order. Each time Powderly invited the strikers to get rid of the “radical elements”, and to reassure the bosses of their willingness to live in perpetual peace with capital. The defeated workers, in addition to returning to work under the hard conditions they had fought against (provided they had not been blacklisted, which was often the case for militants in the Knights of Labor.), were also forced to leave the organization.

This attitude of renunciation reinforced the arrogance of employers. Which provoked fierce outburst of anti-worker sentiment, particularly in the southern States, where class struggle concealed itself under racism, which regained in its vigour: There were many attacks, murders and lynchings. All culminating in an assault of hundreds of armed whites on a community of striking blacks, leading to the massacre of at least 30. Powderly, who never denounced the massacres in the South, boasted that «the labor movement has never been respected as at this time».

What mattered most was “harmonious relations” with the bosses and the Catholic Church, thanks to a relentless struggle against radical elements in the Order. At the 1887 Convention in Minneapolis, Powderly dedicated his intervention to the question of “anarchy within the Order”. Attacking the sections that had taken a stand in favor of the Haymarket martyrs he also accused them of endangering the entire Order, only because they demanded the commuting of death penalty sentences in favor of imprisonment. This attitude earned him open accusations of “moral cowardice” from a large number of sections, as well as applause from the bourgeois press. By now, Powderly’s only political line was the hunt for anarchists, and purging the Order of unfaithful elements; that is, the officials who, at any level, adopted class union initiatives.

This sparked an exodus of trade unions and territorial sections towards the only existing alternative, the American Federation of Labor. This emptied the Knights of Labor of their proletarian component, leaving behind only a miserably small bourgeois section,

increasingly focused on their educationist and conciliatory vision. Gradually the Order was reduced to mostly small rural centers, and a majority of the membership was self-owning farmers. By 1893, the number of members was 73,000. The Order scraped along in an agony that came to an end towards the end of the century.

## A Balance Sheet

Certainly the first thing that can be said is that the Order of the Knights of Labor was prominent during a given period in the history of the American labor movement. This is in spite of the Order's leadership and ideology of false emancipation. Its end was determined by the conflict between this bourgeois approach and the defense of the real needs of the working class.

The Knights of Labor, despite their own actions, succeeded in channeling the natural tendency towards brotherhood between the exploited and the need for a single organization during a time of great growth in the militancy of the working class. One of the reasons, perhaps the main reason for the success of the Knights of Labor in organizing so many workers and creating so many sections, compared to the unions that preceded them, was that previously it had been difficult to put together a sufficient number of proletarians of the same trade locally, due to the intrinsic characteristics of North American society and its capitalism. The Order overcame the problem by creating inter-branch sections accepting semi-specialized, non-specialized and day labor, as well as being open to women and blacks. The word "He who strikes one, strikes all" ignited large masses of the working class throughout the country. When the Order was at its height the rapacious monopolistic capital of the USA, in those years in full development, found itself for the first time successfully challenged with strikes, boycotts and a minimum of political action.

However, the leadership of the Knights of Labor succeeded in a very short time in destroying both a vast national structure that had no precedent, as well as the morale and hope of a generation of proletarians; who had nevertheless succeeded in expressing the need for a general organization of the class. The negative experience the Order led to the search for ways different and more straight from those preached by politicians, bourgeois trade-unionists, priests and intellectuals. The class was now ready to accept the socialist verb, which in those years was coming to America from Europe.

Together with the organisation of the Knights of Labor, vanished forever its search for praise from the masters and the intolerance never sufficiently hidden towards the workers' struggle. But with that left, to return only after several decades, the positive aspects of the movement, which did not find acceptance in the A.F.L., first of all the opening to all proletarians. The trade jealousies, which put groups of workers in contrast, and above all the exclusion of large proletarian masses, returned to be common. Conditions which would have given the bourgeoisie a divided proletariat which, in the following years, would have been easily tied to the necessities of the national economy, of the bourgeois wars, of deprivations in the greatest capitalist crisis in history.

*From the Archive of the Left*

# The Revolutionary Program of Communist Society Eliminates All Forms of Ownership of Land, the Instruments, and the Products of Labor

*From the Turin Meeting of the International Communist Party June 1-2, 1958*

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## Engels and the Agrarian Programs of the Socialist Parties

In September 1894, at its Nantes Congress, the French Workers Party (the party of Guesde and Lafargue) adopted an agrarian action program. In October, in Frankfurt am Main, the German Social Democratic Party of Engels was engaged in addressing the same issue; near the end of his long life, Engels remained in contact with the movement of the Second International, founded in 1889, after the death of Marx. He expressed his vehement objections to the French resolution, while he was more satisfied with the German Congress, where a right wing tendency similar to the one that prevailed at Nantes was rejected.

Engels dedicated an article to this topic that is of the utmost importance, published in the journal *Die Neue Zeit* in November 1894. A somewhat unfaithful translation of this article was published in the November 1955 issue of the Stalinist journal, *Cahiers du Communisme*. The editors of this journal say in their preface to the text that a packet of correspondence of great interest between Engels and Lafargue was discovered in the house of a descendant of Marx (Lafargue was his son-in-law). In these letters, Engels did not try to hide his disapproval, and his formulations are truly important; only the Stalinists would have the gall to write a preface to a historical document that so blatantly exposes them.

You – he says with true bitterness, despite the seriousness of his tone, the old Engels addressing Lafargue – you, the intransigent revolutionaries of yesterday, have taken a little more to opportunism than the Germans. In a later letter, Engels stresses that he wrote his critical article in a friendly spirit, but did not hesitate to repeat that, “you have allowed yourself to be dragged too far down the slippery slope of opportunism”. These quotations are also useful in order to show just how far back the terminology of our discussion goes, to which we have always granted the greatest importance. Even before the death of Engels, the left wing Marxists (who, at the Congress of Rouen in 1882, had split from the “Possibilists”, who advocated participation in the ministries of bourgeois governments) defined themselves as intransigent revolutionaries, and the same term was adopted, in the first decade of this century, by the left fraction of the Italian Socialist Party, which was opposed to the reformism of Turati and the possibilism of Bissolati, and from which the Communist

Party was born after a subsequent process of realignments and splits.

The word, opportunism, which many young people think was first coined by Lenin in the indomitable battle he waged during the First World War, had already been employed by Engels and Marx in their writings. On other occasions we have noted that, semantically, it is not the most felicitous expression, since it is susceptible to being interpreted as a moral judgment, rather than a social-deterministic one. Nonetheless, the word has the historical right to exist, and in our view expresses what is despicable and depraved as opposed to what is healthy in Marxism.

In that letter written in order to “deal considerately” with Lafargue, whose revolutionary credentials were beyond reproach, Engels provided a definition of right wing opportunism that was as sharp as a razor. In the sentence in which he says, «you have gone too far down the slippery slope of opportunism», he also writes the following words: «In Nantes, you were on the road to sacrificing the future of the Party for one day’s success».

This definition is still relevant: opportunism is the method that sacrifices the future of the Party for one day’s success. Shame on those who have practiced it, then and now!

Now is the time to get to the crux of the problem and take a look at Engels’ text. He concluded that, for the French, there was still time to stop and he hoped that his article would help them to do so. But where are the French (and the Italians) of 1958?

## Socialists and the Peasantry in the late 1800s

The study of Engels follows a picture of the general situation of the agricultural population of Europe during his time. The bourgeois parties had always judged that the socialist movement would have to develop only in the milieu of the urban industrial workers, and were surprised when the peasant question found a place on the agendas of all the socialist parties of the time. The response of Engels is relevant to every stage, such as, for example, when we demonstrate that right in the middle of the twentieth century the social questions of third world countries and of the industrially undeveloped countries cannot be constrained within the rigid dualism, capitalists-proletarians, but, always and everywhere, Marxism must have doctrinal and practical answers for the whole multi-class, rather than two-class, panorama of society.

Engels is in a position to allow only two exceptions to the fundamental presence of one large class of peasants who are not wage workers or entrepreneurs: Great Britain and Prussia east of the Elbe. Only in those two regions had the owners of large landed estates and big industrial agriculture totally liquidated the small farmer who worked for himself. We shall observe that even in these two exceptional cases, there are three classes (as always in Marx, even when he addresses the question of a model bourgeois society): urban or rural wage labor, industrial or agrarian capitalist, and bourgeois, rather than feudal, landowner.

In all other countries, for Engels and for every Marxist, «the peasant is a very essen-

tial factor of the population, production and political power». Therefore no one can say: the peasants, as far as I am concerned, do not exist, as an excuse, or that the movements of the colonial peoples, as far as I am concerned, do not exist.

That the theory of the function of these social classes, however, and the way the Marxist party should approach them, should be a copy of the corresponding positions of the petty-bourgeois democracy, is the other outrage against which Engels unsheathed one of his “corrections”. We must however say that this second position is just another way of formulating the same outrage.

Since only a mental defective could doubt the statistical weight of the peasants in terms of demography and the economy, Engels rapidly touched on the sore spot: what is its impact as a factor in the political struggle?

The conclusion is obvious: most of the time, the peasants have only demonstrated their apathy, based on their isolated lives in rural areas. But this apathy is not itself without effects:

«This apathy on the part of the great mass of the population is the strongest pillar not only of the parliamentary corruption in Paris and Rome but also of Russian despotism». Not we, but Engels, mentioned Rome, and he did so no less than 64 years ago.

Engels showed that since the birth of the workers movement in the cities, the bourgeoisie had never ceased to galvanize the peasant landowners against the workers movement, depicting the socialists as those who would abolish property, and the same thing was done by the landowners who rented out their lands, who pretended to have a common interest to defend alongside the small peasant landowner.

Must the industrial proletariat accept as inevitable the fact that, in the conquest of political power, the whole peasant class will be an active ally of the bourgeoisie that is to be defeated? Engels introduced the Marxist perspective on this question, rapidly admitting that such a perspective must be condemned, and is just as useless for the cause of the revolution as that for which the proletariat would never be able to conquer before the disappearance of all the intermediate classes.

In France, history has taught us – as is incomparably presented in the classical texts of Karl Marx – that the peasants, with their weight in society, have always tipped the scales of confrontations in favor of the side that was opposed to the interests of the working class, in the First and Second Empires and against the Paris revolutions of 1831, 1848-1849 and 1871.

How, then, can this relation of forces be shifted in favor of the workers? How should we address the small peasant landowners and what should we promise them? Now we are at the heart of the agrarian problem. But the goal of Engels is to discredit as anti-Marxist and counterrevolutionary any defense of the preservation of small-scale property. What would the venerable and great Frederick have said if someone had proposed, as they are doing today in Italy and France, that the agrarian program must advocate the extension, over the entire rural population, of the full ownership of all the land that is under cultivation?

## The French Programs

Already in 1892, at the Marseilles Congress, the French Workers Party had drafted an agrarian program (this was the year when the anarchists split from the socialist party in Italy and the Italian Socialist Party was founded in Genoa).

This first program is not subject to the same degree of condemnation on the part of Engels as the Nantes program, because the latter program, as we shall see below, had misappropriated theoretical principles for the purpose of obtaining the support of the party for the immediate interests of the small peasant landowners. In Marseilles the party limited itself to suggesting practical goals for agitation among the peasants (at the time it defended the famous distinction between the maximum and the minimum program, which later led to the whole historical crisis of the socialist parties). Engels highlighted the fact that the demands made on behalf of the small peasant landowners – those which, at the time, were more attentive to the demands of the sharecroppers than to the working landowners – were so modest that other parties had already proposed them and that many bourgeois governments had already implemented them. Wholesale purchasing cooperatives formed by rural municipalities for the acquisition of machinery, favored by the State so that central garages and depots could be established, prohibition of the seizure of the harvest by the landowner for non-payment of debts, revision of land assessments, and so on...

The list of demands made on behalf of the agrarian wage workers is given even less consideration by Engels; some are obvious, because they are the same as for the industrial workers, like a minimum wage; others are tolerable, such as the establishment, on municipal land (municipal property), of agricultural production cooperatives.

This program, however, led the party to such significant electoral success in the elections of 1893 that, on the eve of the next Congress, some elements in the party sought to continue to push ahead on the road of championing the interests of the peasants. There was nonetheless a feeling that this was dangerous ground, so they wanted to pave the way by drafting a theoretical preamble that would show that there was no contradiction between the maximum socialist program and the protection of the small peasant landowner, and even the protection of his property rights! It is at this point that Engels, after having summarized the program's contents, directed the full force of his critique. They wanted, he said, «to prove that it is in keeping with the principles of socialism to protect small-peasant property from destruction by the capitalist mode of production, although one is perfectly aware that this destruction is inevitable».

The preamble's first premise says that, considered in terms of the general program of the party, the producers will not be free until they possess the means of production. The second premise says that, if in the industrial domain one can foresee the restitution of the means of production to the producers in a collective or social form, in the agricultural domain, at least in France, the means of production, the land, is in most cases individually

possessed by the worker.

The third premise says that whereas peasant property «is irretrievably doomed», «socialism must not, however, hasten its doom, as its task does not consist in separating property from labor», but, to the contrary, «in uniting both of these factors of all production by placing them in the same hands».

The fourth premise says that, just as the industrial premises must be seized from the private capitalists in order to hand them over to the workers, so also, and in just the same way, the large landed estates must be given to the agricultural proletarians and therefore it is always the duty of “socialism” «to maintain the peasants themselves tilling their patches of land in possession of the same as against the [tax collector], the usurer, and the encroachments of the newly-arisen big landowners».

The fifth premise was the one that Engels found most scandalous: while the first four created a tremendous doctrinal confusion, the fifth one directly annihilates the concept of the class struggle: «it is expedient to extend this protection also to the producers who as tenants or sharecroppers (*metayers*) cultivate the land owned by others and who, if they exploit day laborers, are to a certain extent compelled to do so because of the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected».

## The Unfortunate Conclusion

From the above premises arose the practical program that is intended «to bring together all the elements of rural production, all occupations which by virtue of various rights and titles utilise the national soil, to wage an identical struggle against the common foe: the feudality of landownership».

Here, as Engels demonstrated, although with the obvious intention not to treat old self-professed Marxists like idiots, all historical differentiations are thrown overboard, confusing, in the France of 1894, the feudal landowners, annihilated a century before by the Great Revolution, not with the large capitalist landlords, the industrialists of agriculture, towards whom today’s national-communist traitors directly issue invitations to join a broad-based bloc, because they improve the soil (!), but with the bourgeois agrarian landowners, who do not engage in administration or management of the agricultural estate, but who live off the rent paid by sharecroppers or large tenant farmers. This third class of capitalist society has nothing to do with the old feudal nobility; the former bought its territorial goods with money, and can sell them, since «the bourgeois revolution transformed the land into an article of commerce»; the latter (that is, the feudal class) had an inalienable right not only over the land, but also over the workers who populated it. Engels would remind these sluggish disciples that a bloc did arise, «for a certain time and for definite purposes», against this feudal class, but it is clear that in this historical bloc – whose heyday in France was in the remote past and in Russia was still underway – it was

these same “bourgeois landlords” who took part.

Such a noxious error still beclouds the European proletarian horizon due to the triumphant opportunism of Stalinism. The doctrinal weapons to counteract its ruinous effects do not have to be sought in the data supplied by the period that has elapsed since 1894, but in the very same arsenal that Engels utilized in his text on the peasant question.

This agrarian policy, totally subordinated to coalition politics, kills the class struggle, and insofar as it is implemented by the same party that embraces the factory workers it kills it exclusively for the benefit of the industrial capitalists, and guarantees the survival of the bourgeois form of society until these elephantine parties are destroyed.

Continuing in the doctrinal vein, before we consider the political side of the question, it is necessary to make another equally pessimistic observation, one that would be pointless to omit, consisting in the fact that today, unlike the situation in 1894, opportunism is not at the stage of posing a threat; it has already sucked all the energy from the working class. Many – almost all – of the groups that challenge the big Stalinist or post-Stalinist parties, and which have split from them, have demonstrated that they have ideas concerning the “*contenu du socialisme*” that are just as un-Marxist as those presented in the Nantes Program (since our narrative relates to France, we shall refer to the group, “Socialisme ou Barbarie”). We would have said anti-Marxist if we were not in the presence of the sober discourse of Frederick Engels, who, evidently, knew from experience, and from the effects of many sharp reprimands from Papa Marx, that the French do not like to be *choqué* (wounded), and that they do not even like to be *froissé* (offended). In the first instance they assume the visage of a D’Artagnan, in the second that of a Talleyrand, as was the case later with Frossard (a world champion of un-Marxism), who at the Second Congress of the Communist International was ridiculed thus: *Frossard a été froissé*. And who dared to say so was Lenin!

## A Series of False Formulas

False formulations are extremely useful for the purpose of clarifying the real “content” of the modern revolutionary program. The old social ideologies assumed a mystical form, but were nonetheless still condensations of the human experience of the species, of the same nature as the most highly developed notions attained in the era of capitalism and in the struggle to overthrow it. We could say that the old mysticism assumed the form of a series of affirmative theses. Modern mysticism, the norm of action of the destructive forces of contemporary society, is instead organized in a series of negative theses. The degree of consciousness of the future, which cannot be attained by the individual but only by the revolutionary party, is forged in a more expressive way – at least until a society without classes has become a reality – in a series of norms of this kind: don’t say this – don’t do that.

We hope to present in a modest and accessible form a remarkable result that is the

product of some rather arduous labors. With this goal in mind, we shall proceed to examine, following in the footsteps of Engels, the master of this method, the mistaken formulas of the Nantes premises.

Engels began by saying, concerning the first premise, that it is not correct to deduce the formula, «that freedom of the producers presupposes the possession of the means of production», from our general program.

This same French program immediately adds that this possession is only possible in the form of individual possession – which has never been generalized and which industrial development is making increasingly more impossible – or in the form of possession in common, the preconditions for which have been created by the stabilization of capitalist society. The only goal of socialism, in that case, said therefore Engels, is «the common possession of the means of production and the collective conquest of them».

Engels considered it to be of great importance to emphasize the fact that no conquest or preservation of individual possession of the means of production on the part of the producers can possibly be a goal of the socialist program. And he adds:

«Not only in industry, where the ground has already been prepared, but in general, hence also in agriculture».

This is a fundamental thesis for the entire classical corpus of Marxism. The proletarian party – unless it has openly declared that it is revisionist – cannot advocate or defend for even one second, a form of unity between the worker and his means of labor that is achieved on an individual scale, in subdivided personal allotments. The text under examination here repeats this again and again.

Engels also refutes the concept expressed in the erroneous formula concerning the “freedom” of the producer. This freedom is by no means assured by these hybrid forms, bound up with contemporary society, in which the producer possesses the land as well as a share of his instruments of production. In today’s economy, these factors are quite precarious and are not guaranteed for the small peasant proprietor. The bourgeois revolution has undoubtedly conferred upon him the benefit of freeing him from his feudal bonds, and from the personal servitude of giving a feudal lord part of his labor time or a share of his products. But this freedom in no way guarantees, with the advent of an era when everyone gets his little plot of land, that he will not be separated from the latter in a hundred ways, which Engels enumerates together with the concrete part of the program, but which are inseparable from the essence of capitalist society: taxation, mortgage debt, destruction of rural domestic industry, foreclosures and seizures to the point of total expropriation. No legislative measure (reform) will be capable of preventing the peasant from spontaneously selling everything he owns, including his land, rather than letting himself die of hunger. Here, the critique of Engels verges on invective: «Your attempt to protect the small peasant in his property does not protect his liberty but only the particular form of his servitude; it prolongs a situation in which he can neither live nor die».

## The False Chimera of Freedom

We shall denounce the diseased formula of the first premise, which, from one error leads to another greater error, with less generosity than was displayed by the great Engels; we do not have a Paul Lafargue before us, in whom Marxism has momentarily gone dormant and who only needs to be reawakened, but a despicable gang of traitors and defeatists whose souls are already damned.

The premise seems to respond to this question: when will the producers be free? And it responds: when they are not separated from their means of production. On this slippery slope he gets to the idealization of an impossible and impoverished society of small peasant landowners and artisans, and the master did not desist from hurling the bitter accusation of reactionary at this position, since such a society is much more backwards than the society of proletarians and capitalists. The error, however, one that is completely metaphysical and idealist, which has completely erased any determinist and historical-dialectical perspective, consists in that of assuming a stupid position, professed today by many self-proclaimed “leftists” on both sides of the Atlantic, i.e.: socialism is a struggle for the individual liberation of the worker. This premise embeds certain economic theories within the framework of a philosophy of Freedom.

We repudiate such a starting point: it is stupidly bourgeois and only leads to the degeneration whose spectacle is unfolding throughout the world in the form of Stalinism. The formula would be no less a distortion if one were to speak of the collective liberation of the producers. For it is a matter of establishing the limits of this collectivity, and it is on this reef that all the “immediatists” founder, as we shall see below. The domain enclosed by these limits is so vast that it must include manufacturing and agriculture and every form of human activity in general. When human activity, which embraces much more than production, a term that is linked to mercantile society, has no limits in its collective dynamic, nor any temporal limit between generation and generation, it will be understood that the postulate of Freedom was a transitory and obsolete bourgeois ideology, once explosive, today only soporific and false.

## Property and Labor

In the third premise mentioned above, its proponents thought they could base their arguments on something as incontestable as the fact that the mission of socialism consists in uniting, rather than separating, property and labor. Engels did not want to be too vicious, but he repeated that, «from a general point of view this – is by no means the task of socialism. Its task is, rather, only to transfer the means of production to the producers as their *common possession*».

If one loses sight of this fact, Engels said, it is clear that one «imposes upon socialism the imperative duty to carry out something which it had declared to be impossible in

the preceding paragraph, i.e., to ‘maintain’ the small-holding ownership of the peasants although it itself states that this form of ownership is “irretrievably doomed”».

Here we must dig even deeper, mindful of all the Marxian-Engelsian precepts and our whole doctrine. Above all, the question of this “separation” is not metaphysical, but historical. It is not a matter of just saying that the bourgeoisie has separated property from the worker and that we, intending to annoy the bourgeois, will reunite them. This would be pure foolishness. Marxism has never depicted, in the revolution and in bourgeois societies, a process of separation of property from labor, but a process of the separation of the men who labor from the conditions of their labor. Property is a historical-juridical category. The aforementioned separation is a relation between very real and concrete elements: on the one side, the men who labor; and on the other, the possibility of having access to the land and to the use of the tools of labor. Feudal servitude and slavery united these two elements in a very simple way: they imprisoned both elements in the same concentration camp, from which a portion of the products (another concrete, physical element) was extracted at the whim of the ruling class. The bourgeois revolution broke up this self-enclosed circle and said to the workers: you are free to leave; then the circle was once again closed and the separation we are discussing was carried out. The ruling class monopolized the conditions to open the barbed wire and to allow production, keeping the whole product: the serfs who fled to hunger and impotence are still paying homage to the miracle of Freedom!

Socialism seeks to abolish, for everyone (individual, group, class or State), the possibility of creating barbed wire barriers; but this cannot be expressed with the meaningless phrase, reunite property and labor! It means that socialism works to bring about the end and final destruction of bourgeois property and wage labor, the final and worst of all servitudes.

When the text of the Nantes Program then says that labor and property are the two factors of production, whose separation leads to servitude and poverty for the proletarians, it commits a yet greater outrage. Property as a factor of production! Here Marxism is forgotten and completely renounced. In the description of the capitalist mode of production, the central thesis of Marxism is that there is only one factor of production, and that is human labor. Landed property, and property in the form of tools and buildings, is not another factor of production. To call them factors of production is to regress to the trinity formula that was annihilated by Marx in the third volume of *Capital*: this trinity formula maintains that wealth has three sources: land, capital and labor, and this vulgar doctrine justifies the three forms of compensation: rent, profit and wages. The socialist and communist party is the historical form in struggle against the rule of the capitalist class, the class whose doctrine holds that capital, with just as much right as labor, is a factor of production. In order to trace the doctrine that defends the right of the third term, the third factor of production, we have to go even further back in time, beyond Ricardo, to the Physiocrats of the feudal era, whose doctrine provided the historical justification (pay a little attention here) for precisely the hated rule of the feudal lords!

To reunite the land with labor is therefore a grave Marxist heresy, and this is just as true with regard to collective labor as it is for the individual laborer.

## Industrial and Agrarian Enterprise

It is precisely the slippery fourth premise that contains the trap of the defense of the small plot of cultivated land, a defense that is based on the comparison of the big industries that «must be seized from their lazy owners», that is, the urban bourgeoisie (who were not so lazy, however, during the times of the “*Maître des Forges*”), with the large landed estates that must be “collectively or socially” handed over to the agricultural proletarians. In a later passage, Engels makes a very different comparison between the socialist and revolutionary expropriation of the factory owner and that affecting the agrarian landowner. The Nantes Program, besides the fact that it did not elaborate on the essential distinction between “collective” and “social” management, a question that it barely addresses, sidesteps the no less important distinction between large landed estates or large scale landownership and large scale industrial agriculture. Where the management of a unit of production based on wage labor constitutes a single form of technical exploitation – even when part of the wage is paid not in money form but in the form of products – a form that Marx defined as a medieval remnant and which is “protected” by the Italian Togliattian “Marxists” in order to more closely bind the rural proletariat to the wretched form of sharecropping – then there is no reason not to treat this productive unit the same way we would treat the factory of Mr. Krupp, to employ the example used by Engels.

Difficulties arise, however, when there is a large rural property owned by a single individual, which is nonetheless divided into a large number of separate parcels cultivated by many technically independent family-based units, composed of small sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In this case, expropriation will not possess the historical character of the expropriation of large concentrated industry, but will be reduced – if feudal forms still survive, as was the case in Russia in 1917 – to a liberation of glebe serfs that will not yet surpass the inferior condition of the distribution of many small plots of land. In a consolidated bourgeois regime, such as the French regime of the late 19th century, the programmatic formula must not be limited, in the opinion of Engels, to the transformation of the tenant farmers who pay their rents in money or in kind into “free” worker-landowners; the socialist parties must resolutely propose as a goal for the peasants – those who can be accepted by the party and those who are under its influence – the formation of agricultural production cooperatives under unitary management, which is also a transitional form insofar as it will have to be gradually transformed into a “Great National Production”. This formula is employed by Engels to stigmatize, with proper severity, any inclusion in the program – even the immediate program – of any partition of large landed property and its distribution among the peasants in order to reduce it to so many small individual or family parcels.

Concerning this point another consideration must be added – a consideration that must be linked to other Marxist texts – with regard to the destination point of the socialist program. The collective management of enterprises that have already been unified under the ownership of the bourgeoisie could be conceived as a transitory expedient if one thinks

about the collectivity of the workers of the enterprise as the subject of such management. But such a consideration must not cause one to think that socialism is fulfilled with the replacement of capitalist or individual ownership of the factory (which is already collective today in the form of corporations) by collective working class ownership. In the correct formulation of this position, the word we encounter is not ownership [property], but possession, that of taking possession of the means of production, and even more correctly, that of the exploitation, of management, of direction, to which terms we have to add the exact subject. The expression, social management, is better than cooperative management, while it would be completely bourgeois rather than socialist to refer to “cooperative ownership”. The term, national management, can be used to attempt to express the hypothesis that the expropriation of the industrial means of production and the land might be carried out in one country but not in another, but it recalls State management, which is nothing but a form of State capitalist ownership of enterprises.

While we are still discussing agriculture, we would like to make it clear that – according to the communist program – the land and the means of production must pass into the hands of society, society organized on new foundations, foundations that can no longer be called commodity production. Consequently, the land and the rural productive apparatus pass into the hands of all the workers as a whole, whether industrial or agricultural workers, and the same is true of the industrial plant. It is only in this sense that one can interpret Marx when he speaks of the abolition of the differences between city and country, and of the overcoming of the social division of labor, as pillars of communist society. The old propaganda slogans: the factories to the workers and the land to the peasants, and those of an even more insipid variety – the ships to the sailors – even though they are all-too-often employed even in recent times, are nothing but a parody of the formidable power of the Marxist revolutionary program.

## The Most Extreme Aberration

Before we proceed to explore other texts by Marx for early anticipations of the principles we have just recalled, we shall conclude our comprehensive examination of the study published by Engels with a reference to his indignation, because it is so relevant to our time, at the last of the five premises, the one that attributes to the party the duty to help the peasant sharecroppers and tenant farmers who exploit wage labor! We shall pass over the subtle destructive critique directed by Engels at the details of the Nantes Program, which include reform measures that either have no chance of being implemented or else would lead the peasants themselves to the very condition that had constituted the origin of their poverty and brutalization, in France and elsewhere, by the misuse of the lever with which those who drafted the Nantes Program sought to mobilize the peasantry.

We shall also omit the final part about Germany, where, fortunately, the party had not committed similar mistakes, and where it was demonstrated that the party had to rely

on the dispossessed peasantry of the east, semi-serfs of the Prussian Junkers, instead of the peasantry of the west, which was devoid of any revolutionary potential.

We are disappointed not to have found any reference in this text by Engels to Italy, where during that time the party, with a high degree of class consciousness, led the struggle of the agricultural day laborers, in the Romagna and Apulia, for example, against the wealthy bourgeois tenant farmers, a struggle that assumed the most violent forms, embodying what Engels presents as the correct goal, that is, that the peasant wage workers should be in the socialist party and the tenant farmers and sharecroppers should be in some other, petty bourgeois party, which in Italy was the Republican Party. Today, meanwhile, to the contrary, the “communists” are pursuing the same policy that was shamefully incorporated into the French program of 1894, that is, crushing the class struggle of the wage-workers employed by the middle class peasants and sharecroppers, as we have mentioned.

The words of Engels apply to today’s traitors:

«Here, we are entering upon peculiar ground indeed. Socialism is particularly opposed to the exploitation of wage labor. And here it is declared to be the imperative duty of socialism to protect the French tenants when they “exploit day laborers”, as the text literally states! And that because they are compelled to do so to a certain extent by ‘the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected’!

«How easy and pleasant it is to keep on coasting once you are on the toboggan slide! [*Oh, father Engels, you could not imagine the extremes to which this lust for demagogic success and betrayal has gone!*]. When the big and middle peasants of Germany now come to ask the French Socialists to intercede with the German Party Executive to get the German Social-Democratic Party to protect them in the exploitation of their male and female farm servants, citing in support of the contention the “exploitation to which they themselves are subjected” by usurers, tax collectors, grain speculators and cattle dealers, what will they answer? What guarantee have they that our agrarian big landlords will not send them Count Kanitz (as he also submitted a proposal like theirs, providing for a State monopoly of grain importation) and likewise ask for socialist protection of their exploitation of the rural workers, citing in support ‘the exploitation to which they themselves are subjected’ by stock-jobbers, money lender, and grain speculators?».

We may conclude with one last quotation concerning the peasants and their relevance to the party that truly constitutes a rule that we must never forget:

«I flatly deny that the socialist workers’ party of any country is charged with the task of taking into its fold, in addition to the rural proletarians and the small peasants, also the middle and big peasants and perhaps even the tenants of the big estates, the capitalist cattle breeders and other capitalist exploiters of the national soil... We can use in our Party individuals from every class of society, but have no use whatever for any groups representing capitalist, middle-bourgeois, or middle-peasant interests».

This is how to defend the party, its nature, its doctrine which is not for sale, its revolutionary future! And this is why the political party is the only form that can prevent the degeneration of the class struggle of the urban and rural proletariat of all countries.

## Marx's Great Pronouncement

Our French comrades brought to us in Turin a text by Marx: the note on publication is as follows:

«This manuscript, found after the death of Karl Marx in his archives, is possibly an addendum to the work on the nationalization of the land that Marx had written at the request of Applegarth. This work has remained undiscovered until now. The title of the notebook is “On the Nationalization of the Land”».

This welcome development comes to the aid of our modest reiteration that Marxism does not modify the forms of property, but radically negates the appropriation of the land. We shall begin by quoting a theoretically less-difficult passage:

«At the International Congress in Brussels, in 1868, one of my friends said [*this was the First International and the way he expresses himself indicates that he was not a Bakuninist libertarian*]: “Small private property is doomed by the verdict of science; great private property by justice. There remains then but one alternative. The soil must become the property of rural associations, or the property of the whole nation. The future will decide the question”. I [Marx] say, on the contrary: “The future will decide that the land can only be owned nationally. To give up the soil to the hands of associated rural laborers would be to surrender all society to one exclusive class of producers”».

The content of this brief sentence is gigantic. Above all, it proves that it is not in accordance with Marxism to dispose of difficult questions by referring them to the revelation and decision of future history. Marxism knows quite well, from its beginnings, how to definitively resolve the essential characteristics of the future society, and explicitly enunciates them.

Secondly, the terms, national and national property, are only adopted for the purposes of engaging in a Socratic dialogue with the first formulation. In the positive thesis he speaks of transference and not of property; not of the nation, but of all of society.

Finally, one may further explicate the proposition, which is so masterful in the highest sense of the term, in the following way: The socialist program is not expressed as either the abolition of the surrender of a sector of the productive means to a class of individuals, or to a minority of non-producers who live in leisure. The socialist program demands that no sector of production should be ruled by any single class, not even a class of producers, but by all of human society. As a result, the land will not be transferred to associations of peasants, nor will it be transferred to the peasants as a class, but to all of human society.

This is the pitiless condemnation of all immediatist distortions, which have hounded us incessantly for so many years, even among alleged left wing revolutionaries.

This Marxist theorem strikes a fatal blow at all communalism and syndicalism, as well as all “enterprise-based socialism” (see the relevant chapters of our “Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism”), because these old fashioned programs, superannuated and rotten, “surrender” indivisible energies of society to limited groups.

This fundamental postulate annuls any definition, whether advocated by Stalinists

or post-Stalinists, of socialist property in accordance with the agrarian forms in which the Kolkhozes, as – a particular class of producers, have been delivered all of society, the material life of all of society.

Furthermore, not even the handing over to the state of all the industrial enterprises, as is the case in Russia today, merits the name of socialism. This state, due the very fact that it is in the process of being transferred to “particular groups of producers”, by farmstead or by province, is no longer a historical representative of the integral, classless society of tomorrow. A character of that kind can be realized and maintained only on the plane of political theory, thanks to the party form, which brutally thrashes all immediatism and which is the only form that can exorcise the opportunist plague.

But we shall return briefly to this passage from Marx, which shows us how all attribution of ownership, indeed all material transfer of the land, to limited groups, cuts off the royal road to communism.

«The nationalization of land will work a complete change in the relations between labor and capital and finally do away altogether with capitalist production, whether industrial or rural. Only then the class distinctions and privileges will disappear together with the economical basis from which they originate and society will be transformed into an association of 'producers' [*note that these quotation marks have been inserted by Marx, and that one here is to be read as unique*]. To live upon other people's labor will become a thing of the past. There will no longer exist a government nor a State distinct from society itself».

Before continuing on these essential, immutable and never changing principles of Marxism, we shall state for the record that Marx never hesitated to resolutely depict the communist society, assuming an unlimited responsibility for the entire revolutionary movement of a historical stage.

This is the solid metal of original Marxism that sparkles so brightly from underneath the rime of a thousand subsequent incrustations, and which will tomorrow shine directly in the light.

## Marx and Landed Property

In the text by Karl Marx referred to above, the program of the communists is defined under two aspects. Historically and economically, it defends big agricultural estates, for which the term “cultivation on a large scale” is used, as opposed to the small farm and plot of land. In addition, the communist program calls for the disappearance or, as it is often less correctly expressed, the abolition of every form of landed property, which also implies every subject of property, whether individual or collective.

Marx did not spend a lot of time addressing the traditional philosophical and juridical justifications for man's property relations as they affect the land. These justifications go back to the old triviality that property is an extension of the person. The rancid syllogism begins to be false in its very premise, which is passed over in silence: my person, my

physical body, belongs to me; it is my property. We deny even this, which is at bottom nothing but a preconceived notion born from the hoary forms of slavery, in which land and human bodies together were seized by force. If I am a slave, my body has an alien owner, the master. If I am not a slave, I am the master of myself. It seems crystal clear and is also pure foolishness. In that development of the social structure in which the odious form of possession of another human being underwent a process of decline, instead of heralding the decline and fall of all subsequent forms of property, it was logical that the ideological superstructure – in the illustrious Ultimate of all real processes! – should only take this tiny little pygmy step: for it merely registered a simple change of the master of the slave, something that poor humanity was all-too-accustomed to. Before, I went from being a slave of Titus to being a slave of Sempronius; now I have become a slave of myself.... Perhaps that was not such a good deal!

This vulgar, anti-socialist mode of reasoning is more foolish than the myth that there was an original solitary man who declared himself king of the universe. According to the Biblical construction, it must even be admitted that, due to the multiplication of humans, the system of relations between the ego and the others only became more dense, and the illusory autonomy of the ego became ever more dispersed. For us, Marxists, every step from simple to new and more complicated modes of production augments the network of multiple relations between the individual and all his kind, and reduces the conditions currently designated by the terms autonomy and freedom. This is how all individualism fades away.

The modern, atheist bourgeois who defends property sees the course of history according to his class ideology (whose debris are today the patrimony of only petty bourgeois and so many alleged Marxists). He sees the process upside-down, as a succession of stages of a ridiculous disconnection of the individual-man from social bonds (while, in reality, the bonds between man and external nature are becoming more and more dense over the course of history). The liberation of man from slavery, liberation from servitude and from despotism, liberation from exploitation!

In this construction that stands opposed to ours, the individual loosens his bonds, breaks free and constructs the autonomy and greatness of the Person! And many people interpret this series as the stages that lead to the revolution.

Individual, person and property all go well together. Given the false principle that we just examined (my body is mine, and so is my hand), the tool with which our powers are extended for the purposes of labor is also mine. The land, too, is a tool of human labor (here, the second premise logically follows). The products of my hand and of its various extensions are also mine: Property is therefore an indestructible attribute of the Person.

Just how contradictory such an argument really is, can be seen in the fact that, in the ideology of the defenders of the private ownership of agricultural land who preceded the enlightenment and the capitalists, the Earth is itself productive of wealth, before and even without the labor that man applies to it. How, then, is the right of possession of man over parcels of land converted into a mysterious “natural law”?

## How Marx Responds

Asked for his view on the nationalization of the land, right from the start Marx liquidated all such impotent philosophical formulas.

«The property in the soil – that original source of all wealth – has become the great problem upon the solution of which depends the future of the working class.

«While not intending to discuss here all the argument put forward by the advocates of private property in land – jurists, philosophers, and political economists – we shall only state firstly that they disguise the original fact of conquest under the cloak of “natural right”. If conquest constitutes a natural right on the part of the few, the many have only to gather sufficient strength in order to acquire the natural right of reconquering what has been taken from them.

«In the progress of history [*Marx means that the first acts of violence created ownership of the land which, at the beginning, had been free, and which was later held in common*], the conquerors attempt to give a sort of social sanction to their original title derived from brute force, through the instrumentality of laws imposed by themselves. Finally comes the philosopher who declares those laws to imply the universal consent of society. If indeed private property in land is based upon such a universal consent, it evidently becomes extinct from the moment the majority of a society dissent from warranting it. However, let us leave aside the so-called “rights” of property».

Here, our proposal is to follow Marx’s thinking to the negation of “any kind” of property, that is, of any subject of property (private individual, associated individuals, State, nation, and, finally, society) as well as of any object of property (the land, concerning which we are speaking here, the instruments of labor in general, and the products of labor).

As we have always maintained, all of this is contained in the initial formula of the negation of private property, that is, in the consideration of such a form as a transitory characteristic in the history of human society which is destined to disappear in the present stage.

Even from a terminological, etymological point of view, property is only conceived as *private*. With regard to the land, this is most obvious since the characteristic of the institution is the enclosure within which no one may trespass without the consent of the owner. Private ownership means that the non owner is deprived of the right to enter (from Latin *privatus* ‘withdrawn from public life’). Regardless of the identity of the subject of this right, a single person or a multiple-person entity, this “deprivation, negation” character survives.

## Against All Divided Property

Marx then goes on to take a position against the practice of agricultural production on small, individual farms.

Leaving aside the philosophical question, and after making a few sarcastic remarks, he continues as follows:

«We observe that the economical development of society, the increase and concen-

tration of people, the necessity to agriculture of collective and organized labor as well as of machinery and similar contrivances, render the nationalization of land a “social necessity”, against which no amount of chattering about the rights of property will avail.

«Changes dictated by social necessity are sure to work their way sooner or later, because the imperative wants of society must be satisfied, and legislation will always be forced to adapt itself to them.

«What we require is a daily increasing production whose exigencies cannot be met by allowing a few individuals to regulate it according to their whims and private interests or to ignorantly exhaust the powers of the soil. All modern methods such as irrigation, drainage, steam plowing, chemical treatment, etc., ought to be applied to agriculture at last. But the scientific knowledge we possess, and the technical means of agriculture we command, such as machinery, etc., can never be successfully applied but by cultivating the land on a large scale. Cultivation on a large scale – even under its present capitalist form that degrades the producer himself to a mere beast of burden – has to show results so much superior to the small and piecemeal cultivation – would it then not, if applied on national dimension, be sure to give an immense impulse to production? The ever growing wants of the people on the one side, the ever increasing price of agricultural products on the other, afford the irrefutable proof that the nationalization of land has become a ‘social necessity’. The diminution of agricultural produce springing from individual abuse ceases to be possible as soon as cultivation is carried on under the control, at the cost, and for the benefit of the nation».

It is obvious that this text was intended to serve as propaganda and was aimed at a milieu that was not yet converted to Marxism. Very soon, however, he will arrive at the radical theses that we have denominated under the subheading of “Marx’s Great Pronouncement”. Here we can see displayed his preference for a national management of a State character, when he speaks of costs and benefits. Further along he will clarify that the bourgeois State will always be incapable of providing the necessary impulse to agriculture.

The author still deals with contemporary issues of his time, and it is interesting to see how he in 1868 poses them exactly the same way Engels did in 1894 (as discussed in the first part of this study). How can anyone today usurp the name of Marxist who has come to maintain that, first the sharecropper, and then the tenant farmer and finally the day laborer of the countryside, must become landowners, as the present-day “communists” of Italy and Europe do? For us, this essential part of Marxism, just as it was between 1868 (actually, even before that) and 1894, remains completely valid today.

## The Agrarian Question in France

Marx goes on to refute the cliché of the “rich” small-scale cultivator in France. His words require no commentary. The reader will discern their relation not only to the propositions of Engels, but also to those of Lenin, whose strict orthodoxy as an agrarian Marxist we have already demonstrated in depth in our study of Russia.

«France has often been alluded to, but with its peasantry proprietorship it is farther

off the nationalization of land than England with its landlordism. In France, it is true, the soil is accessible to all who can buy it, but this very faculty has brought about the division of land into small plots cultivated by men with small means and mainly thrown on the resources of the bodily labor of both themselves and their families. This form of landed property and the piecemeal cultivation necessitated by it not only excludes all appliance of modern agricultural improvements, but simultaneously converts the tiller himself into the most decided enemy of all social progress, and above all, of the nationalization of the land. Enchained to the soil upon which he has to spend all his energy and life in order to get a relatively small return, bound to give away the greater part of his produce to the State in the form of taxes, to the law tribe in the form of judiciary costs, and to the usurer in the form of interest; utterly ignorant of the social movement outside his petty field of action; he still clings with frantic fondness to his spot of soil and his merely nominal proprietorship in the same. In this way, the French peasant has been thrown into a most fatal antagonism to the industrial working class. Peasantry proprietorship being thus the greatest obstacle to the 'nationalization of land'. France, in its present state, is certainly not the place where we must look for a solution of this great problem.

«To nationalize the land and let it out in small plots to individuals or workingmen's societies would, under a bourgeois government, only bring about a reckless competition among them, and cause a certain increase of "rent", and thus lend new chances for the appropriators for feeding upon the producers».

The hypothesis advanced in the above paragraph foresaw the possibility that State measures in favor of nationalization would produce a class of tenant farmers who would take advantage of the wage laborers, and exploit them.

## Classes of Producers

It is at this point in the manuscript where Marx inserted the fundamental passage on the debate at the international congress of 1868. Regarding this passage, we placed enormous emphasis on the thesis that the land is to be handed over to the 'nation' rather than to the associated agricultural workers. The latter formula is anti-socialist because it would «surrender all society to one exclusive class of producers», an observation that we must always keep in mind. Socialism excludes not just the subjection of producer to owner, but also that of producer to producer.

The Russian agrarian formula, with its Kolkhozes, is spurious communism. The Kolkhozniki form a class of producers who have in their hands the subsistence of the entire "nation". Their rights with respect to the "State" are expanding every year: exemption from price control, "economical", i.e., at the whim of the associations, calculation of prices, etc. We shall clearly distinguish between the terms, State, nation and society; for

now we have the right to say that, economically, competition and rent have reappeared in the Russian structure.

In the Sovkhozes, which will soon be liquidated, the agricultural workers are reduced to pure wage workers, like the industrial workers, without any rights over the disposal of the products of the countryside (to this date), and do not form a class of producers erected against society, just as the industrial workers do not form such a class, the industrial workers who are acclaimed as the owners (although this term makes them blush for shame in Russia!) of society itself, that is, as possessing hegemony over the peasants (!).

The classic Russian discussion concerning the question of the land was posed in three ways: Repartition (populists); Municipalization (Mensheviks); and Nationalization (Bolsheviks). Lenin always defended nationalization in revolutionary practice and in doctrine, just as Marx defended it in the passage quoted above. The repartition of the populists, an abject peasant ideal, is at about the same level as the policies of the modern communist parties, in Italy for example, where they adorn themselves with the adjective popular and are just as deserving of the adjective populist. Municipalization corresponds with the program of giving the monopoly over the land not to society, but only to the peasant class. The Russian municipality, as this theory views it, is understood to be the rural village whose entire population is composed of peasants and which has tenuous links to the communitarian tradition of the primitive *Mir* (see our series on the economic structure of Russia). The system of Kolkhozes is neither Marxist nor Leninist, and could very well be defined – especially in view of the “reforms” that are currently being implemented – as a provincialization of the land, over which the cities are increasingly losing all influence. This deformation, accentuated by the historical events of 1958, is in total contradiction to the doctrinal position of the party of 1868, according to which the land must not be given to “one exclusive class of producers” (the associates of the Kolkhozes), but to the entire collectivity of rural and urban workers.

The thesis of nationalization must not be understood in the manner of Ricardo: the land to the State, along with all the rent of the land. This means: the land to the industrial capitalist class or to its representative, the industrial capitalist State (like the Russian State). Marxist nationalization of the land is the dialectical contrary of its division into parcels and allotment to peasant cooperatives and associations. This dialectical opposition is just as applicable to the structure of communist society, without classes or State (see the fragment quoted above), as it is to the political struggle, with respect to both the party and the class, within capitalist society, where the demand for the division and re-allotment of the land is much more indecent than it was when it was advocated under the Czarist regime. When the theses of the doctrine of the party are established as invariant and inviolable by both the party center and the militant rank and file, they constitute the defense against the future threat of the opportunist plague, and the thesis of nationalization is an appropriate and typical example.

## Nation and Society

The term “nation”, however, presents an advantage with respect to the term “society”, whether it is employed in the context of theory or agitation. As an extension in space, it is well known that we consider socialist society international, and that internationalism is a concept that is firmly rooted in the class struggle. Marx advises us, however, whenever he engages in the critique of the capitalist economic structure, that he will be speaking of the nation in his study of the dynamic of the economic forces, even though society spans the different nations, but never with the intention of imprisoning the revolutionary transition to socialism within strict national limits. Furthermore, although it might be useful to speak of the nation rather than the State, we must not forget that, as long as the class State which expresses the rule of the capitalist class exists, the nation will not constitute the unity of all the inhabitants of a territory in a homogeneous complex, and this will not even be realized after the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in one or more countries.

The term “nation”, restrictive with respect to class, internationalist and revolutionary demands, is still useful as an expression of the position against the surrender of particular spheres of productive means (the land, in this case) to isolated parts and classes of national society, to local or enterprise-based groups, or to professional categories.

The other advantage that we mentioned, is reflected with respect to the limitation in time. “Nation” comes from latin *nascere* (to be born), and it includes the succession of living generations, future and even past. For us, the real subject of social activity becomes more extensive, in time, than the same society of living men at any given date. The idea of progeny (keeping in mind, of course, that we are referring to the progeny of the whole human race, the species, a word that was employed by Marx and Engels, and which is more powerful than the nation and society) goes beyond all the bourgeois ideologies of power and juridical sovereignty that are professed by democrats.

The concept of class is enough to refute the idea that the State represents all the living citizens, and we laugh at those who propose to draw such a bold conclusion from the grant of universal suffrage to all adults. We know quite well that the bourgeois State represents the interests and power of one single class, even when general elections give plebiscitary results.

There is more, however. Even if a representative or structural network is enclosed in the limits of a single class, that of the wage labor force (it would be worse if it assumed the generic designation of people, as the Russians do), we are not satisfied with a construction of sovereignty based on the mechanism of consultation of all the individual elements of the rank and file (assuming that this mechanism could exist). And the same is true both under bourgeois power, in order to direct the revolutionary struggle, and after it has been overthrown.

We have often proclaimed, especially in the “Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism”, that only the party – obviously a minority within society and the proletarian

class – is the form that can express the historical influences of successive generations in the passage from one form of social production to another, in its unity in space and time, in its doctrinal, organizational and strategic unity.

Consequently, the proletarian revolutionary force is not expressed by a consultative democracy within the class, neither during the stage of the struggle nor after its victory, but by the uninterrupted course of the historical line of the party.

Obviously, not only do we admit that a minority of the living and present generation can direct, against the majority (even of the class), the historical advance, but, even more importantly, we think that only this minority can place itself on the track connecting it to the struggle and the efforts of the militants of past and future generations, acting in the capacity as guides of the program of the new society, as has been exactly and clearly pre-established by the historical doctrine.

This construction that, in spite of all the philistines, leads us to proclaim the frank demand, dictatorship of the communist party, is undeniably contained in the system of Marx.

## Not Even Society Will Own the Land

In the third volume of *Capital*, edited by Engels after the death of Marx, Chapter 46 bears the title: “Building Site Rent. Rent in Mining. Price of Land”. Its conclusions are especially striking in the powerful doctrine of land rent, reiterated line by line by the great combatant Lenin throughout his life. Since it is maintained and proven in our economic science that the rent extracted by the landlord has the character of an aliquot part of the surplus value that the class of wage laborers produces and which is converted into capitalist profit, it is clear that our adversaries may pose this objection: there are business transactions in which the owner receives the rent, as in the case of residential and commercial property transactions, while the land lies sleeping under the sun and not even one worker puts a shovel to it. From what labor, and from what resulting surplus value, does this owner’s profit derive?

Our economic science, however, is not invalidated by this objection. We are not an academic department, but an army formed in battle order, and we defend the cause of those who have worked and died as well as those who have not yet worked and have not yet been born.

If you seek to reason following the bureaucratic formulas of the debts and assets of corporations, or if you deduce legal power within the limits of the names and results of elections, please leave now.

Marx responds by bringing future generations onto the scene of the battle (this is an old aspect of our doctrine and not a clever invention on our part to make our thesis seem more correct, since, in opposition to the theory and practice of the revolution, the majority of the currently existing proletarian class could also be mistaken and could find itself in

the ranks of the enemy):

«That it is only the title of a number of persons to the possession of the globe enabling them to appropriate to themselves as tribute a portion of the surplus-labour of society and furthermore to a constantly increasing extent with the development of production, is concealed by the fact that the capitalised rent, i.e., precisely this capitalised tribute, appears as the price of land, which may therefore be sold like any other article of commerce».

Is this clear? If I think that a piece of land, which in the future will presumably yield five thousand liras per year to its owner, can be sold for one hundred thousand liras, I have converted into an active force the surplus labor of the workers who will labor not twenty years from now, but in an infinite number of years from now.

«In the same way, the slave-holder considers a Negro, whom he has purchased, as his property, not because the institution of slavery [*which was a gift to him from past generations*] as such entitles him to that Negro, but because he has acquired him like any other commodity, through sale and purchase».

He will pay money for the future years of the negro and his descendants!

«But the title itself is simply transferred, and not created by the sale. The title must exist before it can be sold, and a series of sales can no more create this title through continued repetition than a single sale can”. [*This allusion of the Doctor of Jurisprudence, Marx, refers to the fiction of the bourgeois legal codes which hold that the “proof of ownership” is obtained by presenting the documentation of title conveyances reflecting the chain of ownership for a certain number of years, twenty or thirty, for example*]. What created it in the first place were the production relations. As soon as these have reached a point where they must shed their skin, the material source of the title, justified economically and historically and arising from the process which creates social life, falls by the wayside, along with all transactions based upon it».

For example, we shall add, in order to clarify the concept for the reader, when the slave system of production collapsed because it was no longer profitable and due to the revolt of the slaves, all the latter became free men, and all previous contracts of sales of slaves were nullified! Here, however, we shall invite the reader, once again, to read this powerful passage of the brilliant and original interpretation of history of human societies, which is no less applicable to the society of tomorrow:

«FROM THE STANDPOINT OF A HIGHER ECONOMIC FORM OF SOCIETY, PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF ANY PARTICLE OF THE EARTH'S GLOBE BY SINGLE INDIVIDUALS WILL APPEAR QUITE AS ABSURD AS PRIVATE OWNERSHIP OF ONE MAN BY ANOTHER. EVEN A WHOLE SOCIETY, A NATION, OR EVEN ALL SIMULTANEOUSLY EXISTING SOCIETIES TAKEN TOGETHER, ARE NOT THE OWNERS OF THE GLOBE. THEY ARE ONLY ITS POSSESSORS, ITS USUFRUCTUARIES, AND, LIKE *BONI PATRES FAMILIAS*, THEY MUST HAND IT DOWN TO SUCCEEDING GENERATIONS IN AN IMPROVED CONDITION».

## Utopia and Marxism

Marx's method is also clearly displayed in this decisive passage. Our forecast of the death of property and capital, of its disappearance (which is a much higher goal than its inept transference from the individual subject to the social subject) and also our refusal to attribute it to the decision and the will of the individual-subject (even if it is the subject of the oppressed class), but only to the party-collectivity, a collectivity whose energy does not derive from quantity, but from quality, are constructed on the basis of a total scientific analysis of today's society and its past. The capitalism that we want to hang from the gibbet and kill, must first be studied and understood with regard to its structure and its real development. It is a duty, not in the moral and personal sense, but an impersonal function of the party, an entity that is superior to the changing opinions of men and the confines of successive generations.

It is this point that provides the response to a possible objection to our acceptance of Marxism, the only one that captures its power and scope. The Marx that has been presented for decades by the revolutionary current when the latter champions the maximum program of the communist social structure, is precisely the Marx who went beyond, fought against and left behind all utopianism.

The opposition between utopianism and scientific socialism does not reside in the fact that the Marxist socialist declares that, with regard to the nature of the future society, he is looking out the window waiting for its forms to pass by before he describes them! The error of the utopian lies in the fact that, after verifying the defects of contemporary society (which, in some of the utopian masters, Marx respectfully praises), he does not deduce the framework of the future society from a concatenation of real processes that form a chain that links their previous course to the future, but from his own head, from human reason and not from the social and natural reality. The utopian believes that the destination point of the course of social evolution must be contained in the victory of certain general principles, innate in the spirit of man. Whether it is God the creator that has induced them in the spirit of man, or the introspective philosophical critique, it is ideological systems composed of Justice, Equality, Liberty, etc., that compose the colors of the palette in which the socialist idealist dips his paintbrush to depict the world of tomorrow as it should be.

This naïve, but not always ignoble, origin, causes utopianism to expect its utopia to come about from a labor of persuasion and emulation among men, according to the word that is so fashionable today to express in a truly inappropriate way the conflagration of history. The utopians, impelled by their good intentions, once thought they could be victorious by winning over the existing power centers to their rose-colored projects. Their preconceived ideas prevented them from participating in the process of the struggle and the social conflict, of the overthrow of power and the use not of persuasion, but of unmitigated force, in the work from which the new society will emerge.

Our conception of the human problem is completely the opposite. Things are not

the way they are because someone made a mistake, or was deceived, but because a causal and determinate series of forces has entered into play in the development of the human species: it is first of all a matter of understanding how, and why, and by what general laws; and then, to deduce its future directions.

Marxism, then, does not shrink from declaring in its battle programs what will be the characters of the society of tomorrow and, specifically, how the rigorously individualized characters that comprise today's capitalist and mercantile social form measure up against each other. Marxism makes it possible to explicitly describe them with much greater validity and certitude than those who sketched out the pallid depictions of utopia, even if they were sometimes quite bold for their time.

To renounce the effort to engage in such anticipation of the features of the communist social structure is not Marxism, nor is it worthy of the powerful corpus of classical writings of our school. It is truly a regressive and conservative revisionism that parades as objectivity what is nothing but mean-spirited cynicism, that is: waiting for the revelation, on a virgin background, of a mysterious design that would be a secret of history. In its philistine pride, this method is nothing but the alibi prepared in advance by the professional cliques that have never experienced life on the heights of the party form and have reduced it to a stage for the contortions of a handful of activists. If these features are to remain secrets, one might just as well wait for the fortunate turn of events in the sacristies for the revelation of the divine will, or in the antechambers of the powerful, for the lucky moment in which he will be allowed to lick the plates.

## Property and Usufruct

One proof of the total opposition between Marxism and utopianism, which we have sought to highlight on the terrain of doctrine, is the passage where Marx traces the outlines of the future structure, a passage that is just as obligatory as the one that describes society as not being the owner of the land.

The administration of the cultivation of the land, in reality, must not be conducted in such a way as to only satisfy the appetites of the present generation. Marx's accusation, constantly invoked against capitalism, that the prevailing form of production exhausts the resources of the soil and renders the problem of feeding the people insoluble, is correct. Now that people are becoming increasingly more numerous, "scientists" are studying – with the seriousness with which we are so familiar – new ways to end hunger among the inhabitants of the planet.

The management of the land, the cornerstone of the whole social problem, must be oriented in such a way that it will correspond to the best future development of the population of the globe. Human society today, even if we were to understand this term to transcend the limitations of States and nations (and when will be established a "superior form of organization", to transcend classes; then we shall not only have advanced beyond the somewhat

vulgar opposition between “leisure classes” and “productive classes”, but also beyond the opposition between urban and rural productive classes, and manual and intellectual classes, as Marx teaches), this society, which will consist in the aggregate of several billion men, will always be a set restricted to the “human species”, even though it is becoming increasingly more numerous due to the extension of the average lifespan of its members.

The management of the land will be voluntarily and scientifically subordinated, for the first time in history, to the species, that is, it will be organized in the forms that most effectively respond to the goals of the humanity of the future.

This is not fantasy – heaven preserve us from science-fiction! – or utopia, but is instead based on the realistic and practical criteria that Marx used: the difference between ownership and usufruct.

In modern legal theory, property is “perpetual”, while usufruct is temporary, limited to a pre-established number of years or the natural life of the usufructuary. In bourgeois theory, property is defined as “*ius utendi et abutendi*”, that is, ownership confers the right to use and abuse. Theoretically, the owner could destroy the thing he owns; for example, irrigate his fields with salt water, sterilizing it, as the Romans did to Carthage after having burned it to the ground. Today’s jurists engage in subtle discussions about a social limit to property, but this is not science, only class fear. The usufructuary, on the other hand, has a more restricted right than the owner: the right to use, yes; the right to abuse, no. Once the term of the contract of usufruct has expired, or when the usufructuary dies, in the case of a life estate contract, the land reverts to the owner. Positive law requires that it be returned in the same condition that it was in when it was delivered into the power of the usufructuary. Even the modest peasant who rents his little piece of land cannot neglect its cultivation, but must administer it like a good *paterfamilias*, just as the good landowner does, for example, for whom the perpetuity of its use or enjoyment consists in its hereditary transmission to his children or heirs. In the Italian Civil Code, the sacramental formula of the good *paterfamilias* may be found in Article 1001 and also in Article 1587.

Therefore, society will have only the use and not the ownership of the land.

Utopianism is metaphysical, Marxist socialism is dialectical. In the respective stages of his gigantic theoretical construction, Marx can successively support:

a) large-scale property (even capitalist large scale property, although the wage workers employed in such property are mere beasts of burden) against small-scale property, even when the latter does not hire wage labor (no reference is made, for the sake of decency, to the small farm, like that of the French tenant farmer of 1894 or the Italian tenant farmer of 1958 who, by employing human beasts of burden, adds to the reactionary trend of micro-parcelization);

b) State property, even if it is capitalist, against large-scale private property (nationalization);

c) State property after the victory of the proletarian dictatorship;

d) for the higher organization of integral communism, only the rational use of the land by society, and putting the disgraced term of property in Engels’ museum of old rubbish.

## Use Value and Exchange Value

The fundamental thesis of revolutionary Marxism easily extends the negation of individual ownership and then social ownership of the land to the other instruments of production that are the result of human labor, and to the products of labor, whether they are production or consumption goods.

There are capital goods on agrarian properties that are essential for their exploitation. One fundamental case, which is the source of the word, capital (as Marx frequently reminds us), is that of the draught animals and cattle. In Italian we call this, *scorta viva*; in French, *cheptel*, which is the same word as capital. The term for pigs raised commercially comes from *caput*, which means “head” in Latin. But the bourgeois do not delude themselves when it comes to the human head, and lead us to prepare another natural law: Capital, as the extension of the Person.

This is the head of the bull. The extension of the head of the bourgeoisie is not the eternal principles of human law, but only the horns.

It is clear that the person who administers the land cannot eat all his cattle – we have seen historical examples of this – without destroying that special instrument of production, capable of reproducing itself if it is wisely cared for.

Society will be the usufructuary, rather than the owner, of the animal species. In the book by Engels there is an amusing passage about the ludicrous proposal that the peasants should be allowed unrestricted rights to hunting and fishing in France, with regard to the danger posed by the destruction, which subsequently did take place, of certain species of game animals.

It might take some time, but it would not be difficult, to extend our deduction to all private capital in agriculture and industry. But we shall attempt to proceed by sketching the broad outlines of our position.

In his magisterial chapters on the land, Marx demonstrates that its price and value, derived from capitalized rent, does not enter into the working capital of the agrarian enterprise because, if there is no unfortunate devastation of the fertility of the soil, it will be intact at the end of the annual cycle. He also draws the obvious comparison with the “fixed part of industrial constant capital”, the part that only enters into the calculation of the circulating capital by the part that is expended in one cycle and is reintegrated (amortization). The land renews itself; and this is also true of the cattle (with a certain amount of labor on the part of the farmer). In agriculture, dead stock are replaced to a large extent each year from the total value of the products. In industry, on the other hand, they are only replaced annually to a very small extent.

Setting aside the quantitative examination, we want to draw attention to the fact that humanity also has dead stock or fixed capital that is amortized over very long cycles, as is the case with Roman bridges which, after two thousand years, are still in use. Crim-

inal capitalism seeks to amortize its investments in very short terms and attempts to rapidly replace – at the expense of the proletariat – all the fixed capital. Why? Because it is the exclusive owner of the fixed capital, while over the circulating capital it only enjoys rights of usufruct. We refer the reader to the distinction between dead labor and living labor that is elaborated in the reports of Pentecost and Piombino.

Capitalism insists on the frenzied activation of the labor of the living, and makes the labor of the dead its inhuman property. In the communist economy we shall limit ourselves to what the bourgeois theoreticians call amortization, that is, replacement of fixed capital goods, in an opposite way, by revivifying them.

The antithesis between property and usufruct corresponds to that between fixed capital-circulating capital; and to that between dead labor-living labor.

We are on the side of the eternal life of the species; our enemies are on the sinister side of eternal death. And life will sweep them aside, synthesizing the opposed terms in the reality of communism.

We must add one more formula under this same antithesis: monetary exchange and physical use. Mercantile exchange value versus use value.

The communist revolution is the death of the world of mercantilism.

## Objectified Labor and Living Labor

Our comrade readers, who, according to our method of work, collaborate in the common activity of the party, should refer at this point to the entire second part of the Piombino meeting, where the *Grundrisse* of Marx is thoroughly presented.

In this vast construction, economic individualism is annulled, and Social Man makes his appearance, whose confines are identical with those of Human Society in its entirety, or rather, those of the Human Species.

In the capitalist form, industrial fixed capital is counterposed to human labor, which is converted into a measure of the exchange value of the products or commodities. Fixed capital is the monstrous enemy – whether or not the capitalist as an individual person lies behind it, and with reference to this question our quotations from Marx have been innumerable – that weighs on the mass of the producers and monopolizes a product that not only concerns all, but is also of concern to the entire active course of the species for millennia, to Science and Technology elaborated and deposited in the Social Mind. Now that the capitalist Form is descending down the developmental scale into degeneracy, this Monster is killing Science itself; it mismanages it, it criminally administers its usufructuary rights by destroying the patrimony of future generations.

In these pages we see the current phenomenon of Automation predicted and theorized for the distant future. What we shall permit ourselves to call the Romance of objectified labor has its metamorphosis for an epilogue, by means of which the Monster is trans-

formed into a beneficent force for all of humanity, which will not allow the extortion of useless surplus labor, but will reduce necessary labor to a minimum, «for the total benefit of the artistic, scientific, etc., training of individuals», who will from that point on be elevated to the status of Social Individuals.

Here we would like to draw from the classic and authentic materials, which are more valid and obvious today than they were when they were first conceived, another no less authentic formulation. Once the proletarian revolution has put an end to the destruction of Science, which is the work of the Social Mind; once labor time has been compressed to a minimum that will be transformed into a pleasure; once Fixed Capital – today’s Monster – has been elevated to human forms, that is, once Capital – a transitory historical product – has been abolished, rather than conquered for man or for Society, then industry will be like the land, once the productive machinery, equipment and buildings as well as the land have been liberated of all ownership, regardless of the owner.

It would not be much of a conquest if the productive apparatus ceased to be a monopoly of a clique of non-workers, which is a rather hollow phrase insofar as the bourgeois were, at first, a bold class that constituted the bearers of the Social Mind and the most advanced Social Praxis. For its part, society organized in a higher form – international communism – will not possess the productive apparatus in the form of property and Capital, but in usufruct, saving the future of the Species with each step it takes against the physical needs caused by Nature, which will be the only adversary then.

Once property and Capital have died out in both agriculture and industry, another commonplace, i.e., “individual ownership of consumer products”, which was a concession to the arduous task of traditional propaganda, must be tossed on the ash-heap of the past. In reality, any revolutionary transformation will fail if every object does not shed its commodity character, and if labor does not cease to be the measure of “exchange value”, another form that, together with monetary measures, must die along with the capitalist mode of production.

Here we shall provide some textual citations: «As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labour time ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchange value [must cease to be the measure] of use value».

Taking pity on the mediocrity of Stalin and the Russians who persist in claiming that the law of value prevails in socialism (!), we were led to conclude: May the lightning of the Final Judgment fall upon your heads!

The drunk who waves his bottle, saying, it’s mine, I bought it with the money from my wages (paid by private or State institutions), while he is a victim of the Capital form, is also a usufructuary traitor to the health of the species. And so is the idiot who smokes cigarettes! Such “property” will be eliminated from the higher organization of society.

The debasement of the wage slave reaches new lows in the crisis of unemployment. Engels wrote to Marx, on December 7, 1857: «Among the Philistines here, the crisis drives

them terribly to drink. No one can endure his life at home, with the family and all its worries. The circles become agitated and the consumption of spirituous liquors undergoes a steep increase. The deeper they sink into boredom, the more they want entertainment. But on the next day they present the most discouraging spectacle of physical and moral complaints». 1857 or 1958?!

Therefore, man will not consume himself as a beast-person, in the name of the infamous ownership of the object of exchange; use, or consumption, will be conducted in accordance with the higher requirement of social man, the perpetuation of the species, and no longer under the influence of drugs, as is the rule today.

## The Death of Individualism

It is not possible for the proletarian class party to orient itself in the correct revolutionary direction if its agitational material does not totally correspond with the stable, invariant foundations of the theory.

The questions of everyday action and the future program are only the two dialectical sides of the same problem, as has been demonstrated on so many occasions by Marx right up until his death, and by Engels and Lenin (“April Theses”, Central Committee of October!).

These men did not improvise or rely on revelations; they grasped the compass of our action, which is too easy to lose.

This clearly indicates the danger, and our questions are well posed when they go against the general mistaken directions. Its formulas and terms can be falsified by traitors and mental deficient; but their use always provides a sure compass when it is continuous and consistent.

If we employ the language of philosophy and history, our enemy is individualism, personalism. If we employ the language of politics, our enemy is democratic electoralism, regardless of the camp. If we employ the language of economics, our enemy is mercantilism.

Any tactic that seeks to utilize these insidious methods in an attempt to achieve an apparent advantage, is equivalent to the sacrifice of the future of the party to the success of one day, or one year; it is equivalent to unconditional surrender to the Monster of the counterrevolution.

# Summaries of the ICP General Meetings in 2020

Roma, January 24-26 [GM136]

## The coherent party battle stands out on a decaying bourgeois world

After 60 years we returned to Rome for the general meeting of the party.

A heartfelt and choral thank you went to our local comrades for the really perfect organization and the wonderful welcome and hospitality, everything had been carefully prepared and then everything proved to be punctual and impeccable.

The work was carried out in a bright, spacious and quiet environment, in the same building where we were also accommodated for the night, which prevented us from wasting any time.

There were four sessions: from Friday afternoon to Sunday morning, in which we were barely able to take into consideration the great amount of work that our small organization is able to produce, a really remarkable one as quantity, topics and areas.

The harmony and coherence of the various contributions is based on a spontaneous and firm centralization which we have always been accustomed to, with a dense and continuous correspondence, exchange of information of the comrades with the center and within the working groups, which is made possible, and works in fact, because we all draw on the same principles, an undisputed univocal program and well-tested tactical rules.

We are convinced that the good empirical results of this communist method of ours, rigorously and happily impersonal, fraternal and anti-democratic, which ignores the competition between groups and the instrument of polemics, will naturally extend, in a less unfavourable tomorrow to the revolutionary class struggle.

### *Saturday session*

- 1. Trend and considerations about the strike in France against the cuts in pensions*
- 2. The recent development of the world economic crisis*
- 3. The study of the military question, the proletarian opposition to the wars of the Italian bourgeoisie in the early twentieth century*

*4. Update on the current trade union activity of the party*

*5. The endless clash between States and classes in the Middle East*

### *Sunday session*

*6. The function of the proletarian leaders Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht reaffirmed against Stalinism in the magazine "Bilan" of 1934-37*

*7. About the Hungarian Revolution of 1919: the contrasts, in June 1919, between the Socialists and the Communists*

8. *History of the movement in China: the origin*
9. *How the PCd'I faced the civil war in Italy: the armed clashes in Florence and Empoli in 1921*
10. *First national wars in independent India.*

Of other studies we have only given an outline and postponed to one of our next meetings.

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Meeting Online, May 29031 [GM 137]

## Party work continues in spite of the vicissitudes of the collapsing bourgeois society

We must be really proud of this party of ours for the great work we do. It is a small party but that manages to present the program of communism to the world, the original and non-degenerate program of communism, the only beacon in the darkness of a bourgeois world in dissolution, increasingly dark, increasingly melancholic and disconsolate.

It is a small party. But what defines a party is not its size, the number of followers; it is what it says that is important, its theses are important, as well as how it behaves in practice, on the social scene, both towards friends, that is, the working class, and towards the enemy classes.

We Communists cannot decide the size of the party, and its following within the working class, it is a fact that is determined by history, and varies according to the tension of the clash between the classes. In the counter-revolution phases, the party can only be small. In some decades of the mid-nineteenth century it was reduced to Marx and Engels.

But the party, big or small, must remain coherent to itself, on the correct and unique well-marked path of revolutionary communism: when the international working class will start moving again, driven, forced by the storm of history, then it will feel the need for its battle of the conscious and expert leadership of its party. And it will be able to identify it, among the many parties, even among those that call themselves workers and communists, through its daily experiences of struggle, and by instinct, recognizing the unique one that speaks in a certain way, different from those referring to the ideas and interests of the bourgeois classes and sub-classes, which speak of reforms and not of revolution, of democracy and not of communism.

We Communists, by joining the party, let ourselves be carried away by the current of the revolution that leads us, and sometimes it even shakes us a little. It drags us, but not unconscious and devoid of will: we know where that historical flow is taking us, we know its laws, and the timing, we know that sometimes it slows down, widens and seems to almost

stop and that at other times it accelerates, becomes impetuous and overwhelms every obstacle.

The communist sentiment and the will to make possible the revolutionary burial of this society move us and unite us in this goal.

But sentiment and will are not enough for the existence of the party. We need a program, which is impersonal, goes further, is above individual militants. The program means an unchanging historical doctrine and a consolidated plan for action. Only on this basis is it possible to have a real communist party. An international party, which must move towards revolution with a perfect unity of aims, where within it all contrasts, misunderstandings, all uncertainties are overcome, where, in fundamental questions, we all think in the same way and where everyone is well aware of both the ultimate goal of our battle, classless and stateless communism, and the road that leads to it, that one road and no others: the overthrow of bourgeois power, be it democratic or fascist, the revolutionary, party-led, State of the proletariat.

This true and profound unity of thought and action of the party is not a spontaneous fact: it is acquired, recovered, defended in the real life of the party. With study on the one hand, and participation alongside the proletariat in its daily struggles on the other.

For this reason we devote a lot of our time to the study of theory, history and economics. Because the party must know it in order to live, a collective knowledge, not of individuals, not only of some great leaders, which we can do without, because that knowledge is the substance and strength of the party. Therefore, the reports that we are about to present also at this meeting, the result of the hard work of our comrades are not intended to come here to exhibit the discoveries of brilliant men, original things; it is study work, fully respectful of the doctrine of scientific communism and the now almost two centuries old tradition of the party.

All this work, which converges in general meetings, is not limited to study and research but includes all party activities, from the drafting of the press organs, to propaganda, to the intervention in the unions, etc.

This great work is the proven demonstration of the presence and strength of the revolution and communism, and that the working class is not only a class of workers, but a class that no longer wants to be only workers', rather the last class in history, aiming at canceling the very existence of classes.

Finally, we must thank the comrades who prepared this meeting, for whom the meeting has in fact started several days before, developing the telematic connections, preparing the translations of the reports, which allowed every comrade connected, anywhere in the world, to actively participate.

#### *Saturday session*

*1. Military question, In Russia: "Land, peace and freedom" - Kerensky government - End of the war*

*2. The condition of the working class in Venezuela and Latin America*

3. *The current trade union activity of the Party*
4. *History of India, Birth of Bangladesh*
5. *Civil war in Italy and the PCd'I*
6. *Hungarian revolution of 1919*

*Sunday session*

7. *The recent strike wave in France*
8. *Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in our press of 1964*
9. *Proletarian dictatorship in Russia; on trade unions*
10. *Report on the recent racial riots in the USA*
11. *Course of the world economic crisis*
12. *Origins of the workers and communist movement in China*
13. *The union issue in the UK at the II congress of the III International*
14. *The war in Lybia*

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In this issue n. 47 of Communist Left we report the summaries of only some of the reports. Since the magazine has become biannual, the remaining report summaries will be published on issue n. 48.

Below are the summaries of the reports in the two meetings:

- *The condition of the working class in Venezuela and Latin America*
- *Hungarian revolution of 1919*
- *The recent strike wave in France*
- *Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg in our press of 1964*
- *Proletarian dictatorship in Russia; on trade unions*
- *Report on the recent racial riots in the USA*
- *Origins of the workers and communist movement in China*

## 1919 Revolution in Hungary

At the January meeting we talked about the Party Congress held on June 12, 1919, which records the opposition between the Socialists and the Communists: the Right wants an agreement with the Entente, the Left wants the fight to the bitter end.

The rupture emerged at the moment of renewing the leadership group: the proposed list was rejected with the clear intention of excluding the Communists. Only the threat of the Communists to use force forces and imposes the original list.

The episode highlights how the Party dissolved in the State, as well as in the State of Councils, where trade unionists and bureaucrats of the old regime predominate, of which the social democratic right is the natural political expression.

The Social Democrats insist on softening the measures of the dictatorship of the

proletariat, while the Communists want to radicalise them.

At the Congress, a compromise changed the name of the party: “Party of Socialist and Communist Workers of Hungary”, whose leadership includes eight socialists (Kunfi, Böhm, Weltner, Garbai, Landler, Bajáki, Bokányi and Nyisztor) and five communists (Kun, Pór, Rudas, Vántus and Vágó).

At the Congress of Workers’ and Peasants’ Councils in Budapest on 15 June 1919 the new Constitution of the Republic of Councils is discussed and approved. After the “general principles”, the document, which is highly articulated, establishes in detail the “rights and duties” of the citizens, the powers of each electing body, the electoral system and finally the federal structure of the State. For the fifteen national minorities there are autonomous National Councils represented in the central government, and a new name is also adopted: Socialist Federative Republic of the Councils of Hungary.

We then read Eugen Varga’s report to Congress, a report that touched on the main points of the revolution: «Our work was immediately divided into three parts: one for destruction, one for conservation and one for reconstruction. The destruction consisted in expelling the former owners from the possession of the means of production; the work of conservation imposed on us the duty not to annihilate production, while destroying the forces of capitalism; the work of reconstruction consists in replacing the capitalist administration with the proletarian administration, that is, with the administration of the workers both in the particular managements and in the general body of the State.

«Our first act was the expropriation of banks, i.e. their passage to proletarian administration; this work is almost fully completed and concerns about eight hundred credit institutions with their branches. With this measure we have been able to hinder counter-revolutionary tendencies; but for economic life proper the expropriation of the banks is of little importance.

«As a second task we have set ourselves the socialization of large estates. As far as form is concerned, socialization is largely completed; but basically it could not be implemented in many cases and many big owners, many directors of big industries, factories, etc., continue to occupy their place. Their expulsion has been made impossible by the fact that in many places there is a lack of a conscious working class capable of taking over management. About 1,200,000 hectares of land have been socialized; 3,780,000 hectares continue to be managed by private owners. The socialization of industrial companies is more advanced than land socialization. The socialization of mines and many industrial companies is already completed».

Varga goes on to talk about the limits of socialization: «As far as land is concerned, properties of less than 60 hectares will be kept under private ownership. Even the farms where no more than twenty workers worked must remain private property. These limits were observed in rural property, but it was practically impossible to enforce them in industrial enterprises. It was not we who socialized the farms with less than twenty workers, but the workers themselves (...)

«One of the most serious mistakes made in organizing industrial enterprises was not

having clarified enough the reciprocal relations between the Production Commissions, the Workers' Control Committees and the technical directorates. In many companies the Production Commissioners believe that their office consists of technical direction, which is by no means the case. In elementary and smaller companies, such as packaging and furniture manufacturing for example, this is still possible. But in larger companies, where technical management requires special, in-depth knowledge and a lengthy preparation, it cannot be entrusted to the Production Commissioners, however good proletarians they are.

Next Varga speaks of the organization of the State.

«To replace the 20 or 30,000 capitalists who organized production, it was necessary to create a bureaucracy. Without this bureaucracy our work would have wrecked and anarchy would have reigned. It was impossible to maintain the old bureaucracy; it would have been too dangerous. The old bureaucracy had been constituted solely to serve capitalist interests; it was absolutely imbued with a "legal spirit", which is limited to execution on paper (...)

«I must admit that the new bureaucracy is by no means the ideal body we had hoped for. Many people are not in the right place and many are inexperienced, politically immature young people who have changed their political beliefs too easily. As Lenin said, referring to the same phenomenon that occurred in Russia, we must free the Revolution from these elements, who are lice and leeches».

The comrade concluded this report with an ample mention of Kun's speech to the Congress itself, a report that dealt with the foreign policy of the Republic of Councils.

At the next our meeting, in May, the report is on the end of the Republic of Councils.

All the events are against the proletarian Republic: the Social Democrats and trade union leaders reveal their true face as traitors and instruments of the bourgeoisie against the power of the Soviets; the counterrevolution of the expropriated whites, aristocracy and clergy, that arms itself and counterattacks; the forces of the Entente surround militarily Hungary and invade it; the marauders of Versailles with the economic blockade decree its death by starvation.

On July 15 the last Central Executive Committee is held. The Republic of Councils has to deal with food shortages in particular. The crisis also becomes political because of the betrayal of the Social Democrats, always inclined to favor the bourgeoisie and not to apply the communist program of the proletarian dictatorship. Some passages from Béla Kun's speech have been read.

«The dictatorship of the proletariat is currently experiencing a period of crisis in Hungary. This crisis is threefold: of power, economic and moral. The crisis of power is manifested in the hesitation of central and local powers in the face of the counter-revolution; the powers no longer show the firmness that should always characterize the dictatorship of the proletariat (...). In Hungary the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was not the result of a bitter struggle for power. The concomitance of some fortunate international political circumstances had the merit of bringing the proletariat to power (...). The idea that there is no need to continue the class struggle here has derived from this

(...). This idea, which pushes for clemency towards the bourgeoisie, was therefore able to spread easily and had the effect of weakening class consciousness and combativeness of the proletariat (...) The task of the dictatorship consists in intimidating the exploiters; it is a matter of making impossible, through the means at the proletariat's disposal, any counter-revolutionary manifestation and of eliminating the enemies of the proletarian revolution (...) The bourgeoisie must tremble because only by this means is it possible to avoid bloodshed».

On 24 June 1919 the Treaty of Versailles is signed but on 30 June the Bucharest government refuses to withdraw the Romanian troops as promised in Clémenceau's note of 13 June. Counter-revolutionary preparations intensify. The Romanian government prepares an attack by the end of July. On 20 July the troops of the Red Army start an offensive against the Romanian Royal Army. But the Hungarian counter-revolutionaries have sent the plans for the offensive to the enemy in advance. The Social Democrats from the center and the right fully cooperate with Gyula Gombos, a member of the Szeged counter-revolutionary government. Betrayed, the Red Army, after the victories of the first week, ends up in a trap and is forced to retreat with huge and bloody losses.

On July 19, the Executive Committee of the Communist International appealed to workers all over the world: «The Executive Committee of the International appeals to workers and soldiers from Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia. Comrades, stop playing the role of forced executioners of Hungarian workers! (...) Workers and soldiers of France! The bourgeoisie in your State must be strongly condemned for the campaign of the executioners against the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Raise your voices of protest! Take power from the hands of the greatest evildoers the world has ever known. Blow out of the hands of the murderers the knife they lowered on your brothers, the Hungarian workers».

But the strike fails and the bourgeois manoeuvres are successful. However, in Vienna on 21 July the majority of the workers parade through the streets, the large industrial companies in Berlin stop working, in Erfurt, in Kiel, in Nuremberg, in Dusseldorf and also in Halle some companies stop, in Italy, in France and in England there are movements, the strike bursts also in the Romanian capital and even Pecs goes on strike against the Royal Yugoslav occupation troops. From this strike we have read the balance sheet that Lenin drew from it on July 31, 1919 at the First Congress of all Russia Workers of Socialist Education and Culture.

The Hungarian proletariat therefore remains alone in the fight against the defeatist agitation of the Social Democrats. Trade union leaders and even Social Democrat People's Commissaries start to deal with the military missions of the Entente, behind the governing Council, in exchange for a few wagonloads of food. They openly declare that, if the proletariat renounced the Government of the Councils, the blockade would be lifted and welfare and abundance for the working class would return.

The last offensive of the Hungarian Red Army, at the same time as the international strike, despite its inferiority over the enemy, is initially successful. But the Romanian army launches the counter-attack that strikes the 1st Hungarian Army Corps and

annihilates the International Brigade, which sees half of its troops captured by the enemy.

On 26 July the powers of the Entente appeal to the Hungarian reaction to overthrow the Republic of Councils. The Communists try to mobilise the working class in Budapest, but the right-wing Social Democrats demand the resignation of the Béla Kun government, with the illusory claim that the creation of a trade union government would allow the most important social achievements to be preserved.

On 28 July Béla Kun wires the Hungarian representative in Moscow Endre Rudnyánsky: «I draw Lenin's attention to the fact that our territory is so small that there is no room for a tactical retreat». Lenin in response to Kun: «We know the difficult and dangerous situation in Hungary and we do everything we can. But immediate help is now materially impossible. Try to hold on as long as you can. Every week is precious. Stockpile supplies in Budapest, strengthen the city».

On 29 July, Béla Kun sends the following desperate appeal via the telegraph: «To the proletarians of all countries! The bourgeois governments of the powers of the Entente, by force of arms and hunger, want to force us back under the yoke of capitalism..»..

On August 1 the Revolutionary Government Council meets for the last time and Kun proposes to defend Budapest to the bitter end with the workers' militias, but their commander, the Social Democrat József Haubrich, argues that it would only be unnecessary bloodshed. Kun accepts Weltner's proposal: resignation of the government and transfer of power to a group of trade union leaders in charge of negotiating peace.

The Party leadership and the Revolutionary Council resign. The union government suppresses the power of the dictatorship of the proletariat and starts arrests with the password "pay the guilty!".

But its existence is very short: on August 6 a coup d'état overthrows this government to replace it with the one presided by István Friedrich, behind whom Archduke Joseph plots, with the objective of the return of the monarchy. On August 12, the Archduke sends a telegram to Clémenceau to tell him that the government he supports is committed to annihilating Bolshevism.

## The Failed Revolution in Germany and the Role of the Proletarian Leader

In deepening our analysis of the attempted revolution in Germany, recent meetings of our Party have examined the figures of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, two leaders tragically murdered shortly after the foundation of the German Communist Party, in January 1919.

Fifteen years after those events our Fraction defended the legacy of Luxemburg and Liebknecht, who had already been diminished in their greatness as communists by Stalinism and were accused of being personally responsible for the defeat of that revolution. Our French theoretical review, *Bilan*, like other organs of the Fraction, dedicated several art-

icles to “Rosa and Karl”. In the issue of January 1934 we find the article “The meaning of the proletarian leader, concerning the commemoration of Lenin-Liebkecht-Luxemburg”. We summarize the salient points of this article:

Leaders of the Party follow a path marked, impersonally, by history and definitively foreseen by class doctrine; but they are still real fighters, with their strengths and capabilities, even if these are out of the ordinary.

Faced with an embalmed and exposed Lenin outside the walls of the Kremlin (“voilà du pharaonisme”, Trotsky noted) *Bilan* stated: «The canonization of the proletarian leader represents the annulment of his work, his role, his life. Neither Lenin, nor Liebkecht, nor Luxemburg, represent ‘accidental’ geniuses, isolated individuals with intrinsic virtues, gigantic supermen who suddenly burst into the social arena to change their appearance according to their intentions and according to the ability of their genius. These great leaders, whose anniversary we commemorate today, and the proletarian leader in general, do not represent mysterious and transcendental entities, which escape interpretation, but are the products of a historical period, the clearest expression of the revolutionary forces of a given era”.

The victory of the communist revolution requires the presence of a party and uncorrupted leaders. «In times of supreme danger, it is not violence against the working class in particular that will save the bourgeoisie, but rather it is the corruption of the Party of the working class and its leaders that will save it».

The conservation and sharpening of weapons for the proletarian struggle, doctrine and programme, are entrusted to the party and its hierarchy. «Weapons for the proletarian struggle are found in a series of central formulas that will allow the proletariat to intervene victoriously in all mass movements determined by social antagonisms. The production of these central formulas represents a laborious work that lasts several years (...) We need an organization where all these efforts are condensed”.

«The theoretical development of the working class is an international outcome, which matures and is refined through the combination of communists from different countries. “The working class in Russia was developing under special conditions: the co-existence of a feudal power and a highly concentrated young capitalism, a backward peasantry and an extremely compact proletariat, in industrial centres and large cities. This proletariat could draw inspiration from the experiences that workers had made in other countries during their struggle against capitalist power».

In a situation of profound crisis of the communist movement, the claim of the by now Stalinised International to be able to create cadres, a general staff and leaders with sheer force, all at the same time, is false. «The revolutionary problem is not one of individuals, but of the class, and the change of situation can depend only on the reconstruction of the organism of the working class».

The Party will then be reborn in the footsteps of Marx, Lenin, Liebkecht, Luxemburg. Both the programme and the tactical plan are invariant. Only the second provides different solutions in the face of different general historical situations. The task of the re-

volutionary leader is to maintain in the Party the coherence between tactical directives and the real historical framework.

«As for Marx and Engels, so to for Lenin and Luxemburg, one could ‘find’ a flagrant contradiction between their declarations of principle and their political statements corresponding to particular contingencies. In fact, there are no contradictions at all: the declarations of principle that span an entire historical era, culminating in the uprising of the proletariat, the contingent political formulations and agitation, which serve to connect around the communist vanguard, the mass of workers and the middle classes».

Another noteworthy article that *Bilan* published in January-February 1936 is entitled, “Who are the heirs of Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht?” It responds vigorously to the shameful speculations that were spreading in the workers’ movement regarding Lenin, Luxemburg and Liebknecht.

«We will recognize neither “Leninism” nor “Luxemburgism”, but only a method of historical investigation bequeathed by Marx and which, at different periods of the class struggle, allowed a Lenin or a Luxemburg to systematize or express the lessons learned from these stages in a set of principles. These principles are milestones for advancing and not formulas empty of content».

So it is we, our Party, who are the heirs of Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht; such is the conclusion to the article published in *Bilan* of January-February 1937, “Lenin-Luxemburg-Liebknecht”.

«Addressing present-day reality with the work of those who were our leaders and teachers is to reconnect the threads of historical evolution that their detractors, those who mummified their bodies and principles, hope to have broken forever in the name of the survival of the capitalist world».

On the other side of the controversy, in total consistency with what was written in the past and with what we will write in the future, the article strongly emphasizes that we offer the *only* historical continuity with that heroic era, against the “extremists” who make Lenin responsible for the degeneration of the Communist International with his conception of the centralized party.

The article concludes by reiterating that the fractions of the Communist Left are their heirs. «Today, Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht are to be found in the fractions of the International Communist Left, which are their legitimate heirs, their successors to whom history has entrusted the difficult task of moving forward».

## Lenin and Luxemburg on the First Imperialist War

*Il Programma Comunista* paid homage to Rosa Luxemburg both by remembering, in the right perspective, her theoretical and practical battle and by reporting complete texts or extracts from the great revolutionary. In issues 6 and 7 of 1960 it published an article entitled “The catastrophic crisis of the Socialist International in the 1914 war - The posi-

tions of Rosa Luxemburg and Vladimir Lenin in the battle against opportunistic betrayal and for the new International”.

The article consists of a Preamble, followed by the translation of the circular of the Group Die Internationale Group “On the vital questions of socialism”, a text that Rosa added at the end of *The Junius Pamphlet*, preparatory to the “Thesis on Socialism and War”, which were also translated and reported by us in full in 1960.

Therefore, also preceded by an introduction, Lenin’s article of 1 October 1916 in response to Luxemburg’s pamphlet is also reproduced. We can see the vigorous internationalist position. But, as always, Lenin’s effort is aimed at eliminating any possibility of error in the theory or even of ambivalent interpretations of a correct thesis, defects that could be reflected in real and serious practical errors. For Lenin, theoretical rigour is the precondition for the ruthless rigour of revolutionary action.

And there is no doubt that Luxemburg, sometimes to put the opponent on the ropes by taking her theses to the extreme, and sometimes because of an insufficient development of her own argumentation, leaves in her pamphlet – which is so vibrant with passion and revolutionary indignation – some room for misunderstandings, dangerous with regard to demarcation from “centrism” on national struggles and on the “defence of the fatherland”.

Despite this polemic we are at high altitudes among revolutionaries who are refining the theoretical and practical weapons of the class struggle, high above the swamp of immediatism.

It is important to stress that it is highly probable that Lenin, when he was writing his article, had not yet read the circular.

The Preamble summarizes and analyses the respective positions of Rosa and Lenin, and the circular itself, which, although brief, proves to be on the right path of Marxism.

Let’s read from the Preamble.

«On the infamous date of 4 August (...) the first resistance from the great German party, considered to be the leader of the world socialist proletariat in the Second International, was weak and suffocated (...) An opposition to the politics of national patriotism was organized in the early months of 1915. An “International” group was formed for which Rosa Luxemburg wrote, under the pseudonym Junius, a booklet (known as the “Junius Pamphlet”) first made public in January 1916; it had to be printed illegally, given the inflexible censorship in force. While still in Switzerland, Lenin published a critique of the Junius Pamphlet, whose vigorous tone did not signify that he was not expressing his solidarity with the most determined group of German revolutionaries (...)

«Lenin disagreed with Junius on three points of substance. The first concerns political action in the fight against traitors and for the establishment of the new International; the other two concern questions of principle, which are not clear in Luxemburg’s theses. They are arguments of the utmost importance. Lenin refers to Marxist dialectics, and few fail to recognize how powerful it was in his hands. From the current point of view –

without even thinking of today's wretched "Marxist-Leninists" who are on the level as those who voted for the fatherland in 1914, and in 1919 killed Karl and Rosa – it would seem that on the first theoretical point Lenin was to the right, and on the second to the left of Rosa. But woe betide those who stop here.

«The first point is a point of doctrine. Rosa was wrong to say that the era of 'national' wars was closed in 1914. This was correct, Lenin said, if you were referring to the warring States, all of which were imperialists and brigands on the same level, but it was not correct to deny the right of rebellion and separation of nationalities without autonomous States from the oppressor State. Lenin cited Turkey, China and Persia, to which Rosa had not referred, as he himself admitted. He anticipated the national theses of the Moscow congresses on the East (...)

«On the second point, Lenin called for – not only for Russia but also for Germany, as for any other belligerent country, and this should be pointed out to today's lowlifes – the essential thesis of Bolshevism and the Communist International, that is, the condemnation of all defence of the fatherland, even if invaded by the enemy, and the revolutionary defeatism that wishes the defeat of the indigenous bourgeoisie, and uses and hastens it with insurrection.

«What would Junius have missed on this ultimate and splendid point of Leninism? Lenin cites a polemical passage about the traitors who said they could not leave their homeland in the hour of danger. According to Rosa, in her passionate refutation, the vote of war credits was not a service rendered to the fatherland, whose future depended not on the victory of the feudal Kaiser but in a republican pantheon of the people. It was not a happy formula, and Lenin was hurt by the fact that Russian social-patriots speculated on it. However, we do not see in Rosa the error of doctrine as much as an unhappy polemical urge which must be judged by reliving the harshness of time and place.

«Of course, what was Lenin's greatest word is still the heritage of intangible revolutionary Marxism; not defence of the homeland but sabotage of the State at war from within, without fear of favouring the enemy (...)

«Let's make another small note on the starting point for action against the traitors to be overthrown outside the International. Since the end of 1916 Lenin had classified them into two groups; the social-democratic right assassins and accomplices of the bourgeoisie, and the centre, personified by Kautsky, perhaps even more dangerous to the correct revolutionary position of the proletariat.

«Rosa's memory does not need defenders, but it seems to us that the accusation here is unfair. Perhaps Lenin had read the pamphlet but did not know about the text that followed and was appended to the theses. Just reread the part that fiercely criticizes the concept of "opposition" and invokes not a single front but a true homogeneous unity of principles and action, to see how Luxemburg already predicted that there would be a break between centre and left and not between right and centre, many and many years before the famous discussions of the German question in the Third International».

# The uprising of Black Communities in the USA

## Tale of Three Cities

### - Minneapolis

The answer to the murder of George Floyd by the police in Minneapolis, MN, on May 25th, 2020, began with the site being turned into a makeshift memorial. Protesters began gathering at the site, and hundreds of people eventually marched to the Police 3rd Precinct. A small group broke away from the main body and began vandalizing the Precinct building as well as police cars parked there. The police deployed tear gas and bean-bag rounds (“less-than-lethal” rounds consisting of mesh bags full of lead pellets which are intended to stop targets without killing them) as well as flashbang grenades.

Wednesday, May 27th a large gathering occurred. The police forcibly broke up this gathering without warning. Numerous businesses were vandalized and looted, including a bank, various groceries and an under-construction apartment and retail/office building. Protestors used items looted to build barricades.

On Thursday night the 3rd Police Precinct was evacuated; it was breached and burnt, and riot gear was reportedly seized. 500 soldiers from the Minnesota National Guard soldiers were deployed.

The local bus system announced that it was suspending operations. Many drivers, with the support of their union, refused to drive their buses to transport prisoners arrested by the police.

A curfew was imposed throughout the metro area, and the Minnesota National Guard was fully mobilized for the first time in its history.

Unrest has since spread to many other cities in the US, as well as internationally.

The majority of the property destruction abated over the weekend since the National Guard deployed, but nonviolent protests have continued, even in defiance of the curfew.

On Monday, June 2nd, the third-degree murder charges against the officers who killed Floyd were upgraded to second-degree murder. All four officers face up to 40 years in prison. This is nearly unprecedented. The behavior of the police is a consequence of its social function, objective conditions that act to encourage a kind of predatory, violent mindset. So long as there exists a society divided into two great, antagonistic camps, there exists a need for an apparatus of those in that camp that rules over the other, a State, and the increasing need to squeeze more surplus value from the proletariat produces a reaction that must be contained by ever more violent means.

In the unions there is a great deal of discussion about pressuring the AFL-CIO to expel police unions, although it’s noteworthy that the Police Officers’ Federation of Minneapolis is not a member of the Minneapolis Regional Labor Federation.

The background to these events is the weakness of the US economy, and the Midwest in particular. Although average income growth has exceeded the average increase in

housing costs, most ethnic and racial minorities continue to spend most of what they earn on rent. But the average income of non-Hispanic whites, the wealthiest category, is also below the 2018 average.

Equally important to explain the origin of the riots is the spread of Covid-19. Although the largest field of employment for blacks graduates in Minneapolis is health care, many of the others work in companies in sectors that impose closure or restrictions: even George Floyd had lost his job as a result of the virus.

Employment in the Minneapolis area was 11.7% lower in April than in March, with the restaurant and hotel industry recording the sharpest decline: -53.6%.

While the arrival in April of the \$1,200 “stimulus” was a boon, most other relief measures, such as extended unemployment insurance, whose benefits are commensurate with the previous year’s income, are much smaller and another “stimulus” is unlikely to come.

## - North Carolina

On Saturday, May 30th the first of a series of daily protests was held in Raleigh, NC. The protest started late in the afternoon with a gathering of a few hundred and growing outside the Courthouse. A few people spoke, at least one paying passionate lip-service to capitalism being the core issue. However the messages of each individual speaker were highly disorganized from each other. Any sort of unity on issues, causes, or necessary action outside of the most surface level analyses on the horrid situation of US law enforcement were not to be found. Even the Raleigh Chief of Police was allowed to speak at this initial address.

After the initial speaking, the protest would carry on to marching. The demonstration was loud and peaceful for at least an hour or two, but the Raleigh law enforcement showed out in full riot gear very early. Stun grenades and tear gas were first deployed well before the sun even began to set. All this was instigated by the law enforcement. The most “scathing” criticism to the contrary tells of protesters throwing a few empty water bottles and saying mean things to the full-armored police which “caused” them to assault the crowd. The situation would decay rapidly from this point onwards. People became agitated and would begin throwing things other than mere plastic bottles.

The Law Enforcement-led assault would continue for the rest of the night and escalate in severity. Reports were of a couple to a few thousand protesters in the streets, with much of the action centered on the nucleus of downtown Raleigh; while also jumping around to the peripheries of downtown. Reports of broken business windows came in early, as well as an attempt by a group to breach the Raleigh Police Department. The confederate monument at the Capitol building was vandalized. Prisoners in the downtown prison could be seen waving at the protesters from their tiny windows in solidarity. Basically every single business in the center core blocks of the city had their windows broken and some destruction in the front facing areas.

When things kicked off again Sunday night, it was much more of the same. The National Guard was activated this night. The courthouse and NC Archives building suffered broken windows.

Curfews were put in place by Monday morning, the National Guard presence was now full. Protests have continued up to this point very consistently and still with strong numbers, but nothing coming close to the scale of events seen on Saturday and Sunday. Overall there have been dozens of arrests. The leadership of the protests are extremely nebulous and disjointed, most are not radically focused at all and are pitching class-collaborationist efforts and State-sanctioned reforms or electoralist solutions.

## - Portland

While there have been continuing protests and riots throughout the US, the largest and most continued protests have taken place in the “whitest” city, Portland. As of writing, July 30th, between 4 and 15,000 people have been attending nightly protests and riots.

The Trump administration has decided to use Portland, a port city of nearly 700,000, as a demonstration of its “law and order” strengths.

The alleged protest leaders were taken directly from the streets by border and customs police officers, who seem to be the only ones available to Trump. The others remain in reserve. The army was not considered reliable and the General Staff refused to use it as an internal police force.

Obviously this has shifted the focus to legality, elections and democracy, with the accusation of fascism for Trump. But they pointed out that he merely applied the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, signed by Barack Obama, which legalized the detention of Americans suspected of being terrorists.

There’s everything in the movement, from churches and families leaving home on summer evenings to those who get rowdy and destructive late at night. The Black Lives Matter is practically a collection of NGOs for fundraising, in competition with traditional churches and civil rights movements, for economic support to black communities, for the defense of their culture, etc. The small bourgeoisie are asking for economic support to Negro-owned businesses.

The “blocs” have appeared, ephemeral embryos of organizations: of the health operators, of the brewery workers, of the unemployed, as well as a front among the trade unions. The bosses also belong to them, although it would be the workers who would direct them.

But 50 nights of protests have not stifled the propaganda of democratic deception: on the one hand Trump’s bombastic shots and on the other the expressions of “solidarity” of the mayor of Portland, accompanied by tear gas. While the bourgeoisie, as a class, exercises its dictatorship.

The protest movement on the Portland streets sees Trump, the police and the Republican party as a hegemony arrayed against them. This is partially true, but arrayed against them are also the other factions of the ruling class. The “nice guy” Obama author-

ized the detention of Americans, Candidate Biden sponsored bills for mass incarceration on levels greater than the Gulags in the USSR.

Further left, Social Democrats, Senator Bernie Sanders, the DSA's so called "Squad" of congress members – identified primarily with Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez – in Washington, DC, Seattle City Council Member Kshama Sawant and activists in their midst. All making amends with the various repressive forces of capital class rule – notably Sawant's aid in passing police budgets used against later protestors.

## Origins of the Chinese Communist Party

The Communist International had decided not to speak of bourgeois democratic movements, but of revolutionary nationalist movements, which indicated a precise revolutionary policy for colonies and semi-colonies that distrusted the alliance with the indigenous bourgeois class, inclined to agree with foreign oppressors in order to maintain their privileges, and addressed those national movements that were really on the ground of a revolutionary struggle. As far as China was concerned, the revolutionary nationalist movement expressed itself in the so-called 4th of May Movement. They were precisely the most radical elements of this movement among the first to join communism.

In his report for the Executive of the International, dated September 1, 1920, Vilensky, who ran the East Asia Secretariat, a newly formed body for the leadership of revolutionary activity in the countries of the Far East, wrote that the organizational task of the Secretariat was to carry out the work of organizing the Party in China.

The first communist group formed in Shanghai, where the presence of a strong industrial development had allowed the formation of a large and concentrated working class. The Shanghai group became the hub of communist work in China, already functioning as the center of the party since 1920. Subsequently, communist groups were also formed in Beijing and Canton, where, however, initially some anarchists had also joined communist organizations. Other communist groups of even smaller size and importance than the others were formed in Wuhan, Jinan and Changsha. There were also two other groups abroad, one in Japan and another in France.

These were small groups formed by a few comrades, who had not yet completely severed their ties with the student and intellectual groups that had arisen previously. In spite of this, the constitution of the Communist Party in China did not take place on the basis of compromises on theory or tactics between the various groups, but the maturation in the Party was conformed to the one doctrine and the one program of Communism, since «with the advent of the Third Communist International, with a single world center, the working class has acquired what Lenin called "organizational consciousness", the programmatic, tactical content, the planetary dimension, the pyramidal structure of its political organization» ("The Party Does not Arise from 'Circles'").

At this early stage there was a substantial presence of anarchists but within a few months they abandoned communist organizations because of the blatant incompatibility between Marxism and anarchism. The unavailability of anarchists to any organized work, and above all, the aversion to the necessity of the dictatorship of the proletariat, soon determined the definitive separation between anarchists and communists. Chinese Marxists were on the same ground as Communists in all countries.

The dictatorship of the proletariat as the basic principle of communism was solemnly affirmed in the Manifesto of the Chinese Communists of November 1920, a document used as a basis for the accession of new members to the party. It was not theoretical improvisation and compromise with similar political movements that united the first communist groups, but, under the leadership of the International, the birth of the Party in China took place along the lines of historical doctrine.

The first CCP Congress was held in Shanghai after July 23, 1921. It was attended by 12, perhaps 13 delegates from 7 groups from as many cities, representing 53 members of Communist organizations in China and abroad, and with the participation of two International envoys.

The whole debate developed around two positions. That of the minority maintained that the working class was not yet prepared and that Marxism was practically unknown to it and therefore the Communist Party would have to go through a long period of study, education and proselytism towards the masses to increase their level of consciousness. The second position, that of the majority, will express all the documents resulting from the congress. The small communist party was compact and sure of the development it would have through practical and theoretical work aimed at the working class, its central point of reference.

The basic points of the draft were approved by all participants. Diverging positions appeared on the question whether party militants could hold official government positions and be members of parliament. The two points of view confronted each other but did not arrive at a final decision and postponed the question to the second congress. One argued that it was possible only and exclusively under the leadership of the party and with the permission of the Executive Committee, the other definitely denied participation in the bourgeois parliament.

On the question of the attitude that the party should have taken towards other parties or factions, two positions also emerged and a heated debate ensued. One side argued for «the need to cooperate with all elements that oppose our common enemies, the warlords, who are enemies of all other classes of society». The second position recognized the need for joint action and collaboration with other classes for the sole purpose of strengthening the party for the revolutionary seizure of power as soon as conditions were favorable. The question of the relationship with other parties or factions was certainly of capital importance for the young Chinese communist movement, which acted in a prevalently pre-capitalist context, where industrial development was just at the dawn and the young in-

dustrial proletariat was extremely inferior in number to the immense peasant masses.

The issue had already been discussed, and resolved, by the world communist movement. The International had clearly identified in the oppressed countries the presence of two distinct movements: on the one hand a “bourgeois-democratic nationalist movement” with its program of political independence and bourgeois order and development, and on the other “that of the uneducated and poor peasants and workers”, who fought for their emancipation from all kinds of exploitation. It was necessary to “fight vigorously” all the attempts of those pseudo-revolutionary movements that were born in the colonies masquerading as communists (like the Kuomintang in China), recognizing as an indispensable condition for the support of the revolutionary movement that was developing in the colonial countries the grouping and organization of the true communists of those countries with the clear orders to fight the bourgeois and democratic movement. For the International, mergers with those movements had to be avoided and it was necessary to maintain “always the independent character of the proletarian movement also in its embryonic form”.

It was on these premises that the nascent, small and weak communist party was built. Unanimously adopts the basic elements of the Party Program: «1) The proletariat and the revolutionary army must overthrow the State power of the capitalist class (...); 2) Introduce a proletarian dictatorship until the class struggle is over and all class distinctions abolished; 3) Destroy the system of private capitalist property and expropriate plants, land and factories and transform the means of production into public property; 4) Ally with the Third International».

Within a few years the social dynamic polarized the forces in the field, directing the Chinese proletariat to militate under the flags of the CCP and communism.

#### - Struggle and organization of the Chinese working class (1919-22)

The movement of May 4, 1919, of a nationalist character, had been preceded by a series of claims of an economic nature of the working class, which prepared its entry onto the political scene, potentially already independently from the other social classes.

The worsening of the economic condition of the Chinese workers at the end of the First World War was at the basis of this intensification of the strikes compared to the entire previous period.

The First World War is considered to be the golden age for Chinese national capitalism, as the Chinese bourgeoisie managed to take advantage of the temporary lack of competition from western capitalists to extend its economic activities and increase profits.

The strikes of 1919-21 achieved significant results with wages rising significantly from a minimum of 10% to peaks of 40%.

The strike, lasted 56 days, started with the maritime workers and quickly spread to other categories that went on strike in solidarity with their class brothers, releasing a force that won against British imperialism.

The maritime workers strike was an economic struggle for wages but in fact also a

workers' struggle against imperialism and the victorious conclusion of this struggle gave a vigorous impulse to the entire Chinese workers' movement and paved the way for the 1st National Congress of Trade Unions, which was convened in Canton on May 1, 1922.

The strike had highlighted at least two fundamental aspects concerning the course of the class struggle in China.

First of all, its victorious conclusion had been possible because the fight had not been confined to the maritime workers category alone, but in support of their strike the whole Hong Kong proletariat had come down in the fight, which could count on the support of the class brothers of the other Chinese industrial centers.

This strike had clearly shown that an all-out strike, without a fixed deadline, which goes beyond the boundaries of the company or category, can beat the bosses and in this case also the powerful British imperialism.

The other aspect that emerges from the strike is the conduct of the Chinese bourgeoisie, which, although interested in greater autonomy and in striking at the interests of foreign capitalists in China, was still tied to foreign powers both by economic interests but above all by the need to repress the struggling proletariat, which could wipe out not only imperial power, but the entire bourgeois order.

Hence the contradictory attitude of the bourgeoisie, that of a class forced to struggle between the aspiration to its own independent national development and the fear of no longer being able to control those social forces which, set in motion by a struggle for liberation from the foreigners, might not stop at the ousting of the foreign oppressor.

But the way ahead for the young Chinese working class was still long, the Chinese working class still had to form its own class organizations.

Indeed, at the threshold of the 1920s, the first workers' organizations suffered from the delay of Chinese capitalist development and were still linked to the corporative past and other traditional forms of organization, such as corporative guilds, regionally based associations and secret societies.

While traditional corporations still exerted a direct influence on the working class and in particular on skilled workers, more "modern" organizations began to emerge alongside them, supporting national ambitions of "industrial promotion".

This trend took on enormous momentum from 1912 with the establishment of the Republic, which opened the possibility of economic and political progress for the Chinese bourgeoisie, which tried to bind the working class to the industrial development of the country with the creation of mixed industrial organizations.

Another moment of expansion of these organizations was given by the First World War with the easing of Western pressure on China that allowed a rapid expansion of Chinese capitalism and consequently many other initiatives to bring workers together.

These organizations were still structured on the basis of trade and not industry, and among the main activities were still education and mutualistic aid, but they were independent from the employers' component and led by proletarian members and conducted

labor struggles. Shortly afterwards, with the great wave of strikes that hit China from 1921 but especially in 1922, these organizations will become real classist unions.

The favorable situation for the workers' struggles that arose after the victorious strikes at the beginning of 1922 led to the convening in Canton, on May Day that year, of the first National Congress of Trade Unions, open to all trade union organizations, without party or political restrictions.

The initiative was promoted by the Chinese Communist Party, which at its founding congress in July 1921 indicated among its priorities the need to support the economic struggles of the working class and the creation of working class unions.

There were 160 delegates from 12 cities, representing over 100 trade unions and about 300 thousand members.

Several tendencies competed for control over the Chinese working class. At least four may be identified: in addition to the Communists, there were the anarchists, who still had some influence in the Canton region, the supporters of corporatism, who exercised their influence with the various types of industrial promotion organizations, and finally the Kuomintang, which in Canton had forged links with workers' sectors.

Some shared resolutions were agreed upon, such as the claim of the eight-hour working day. The main resolutions of the congress were definitely a success for the communists' trade union policy: industry and not trade based organization, solidarity strike and struggle against deviated elements of the union movement, against those supporting the bosses' interests. The principle of a unique nationwide Chinese federation of trade unions was established which would find its complete expression three years later.

The trade union congress testified the growing strength of the Chinese proletariat which soon took a position on the field of the international proletarian army.

## The Situation in Latin America (mid May, 2020)

The economic crisis continues to advance throughout Latin America, with the rise in unemployment, with the increase in the prices of basic products and services, with the devaluation of currencies against the dollar, with the fall in real wages, converting the suffering caused by the Covid-19 contagion, not only into a torment for the wage-earning masses but also into the great excuse for the implementation of different anti-worker measures by each of the bourgeois governments.

In Ecuador, the government and parliament approved a Law of Humanitarian Support that expresses an austerity program that gives a set of facilities to capitalist entrepreneurs not only to fire workers but to operate with a general reduction of wages.

On Monday, May 18, a day of street protest against this law was held, demonstrating their opposition to the salary being reduced to \$180 per month.

The Act provides for several measures already approved in different countries to protect tenants of homes and small businesses and to provide for some tax exemptions.

But its body is focused on satisfying the demands of the International Monetary Fund and previous agreements of the Ecuadorian government with this institution and, therefore, incorporates measures to reduce or eliminate subsidies, to reduce salaries and to make labor more flexible (extension of the working day, etc.).

The mobilizations presented show an inter-classist face and the electoralist intervention of bourgeois opposition movements, among which the former president of Ecuador stands out.

In Venezuela, the government increased the nominal minimum wage from Bs 250,000 to Bs 400,000 per month and additionally increased the “Cesta Ticket” or food voucher from Bs 200,000 to Bs 400,000 per month.

However, this salary, which was equivalent to 3 dollars, went to 2.3 dollars per month and with the behaviour of inflation during the month of May, this salary was located at 2.2 dollars per month.

If the “Cesta” is included, the minimum income of an employee is \$4.4 per month.

The bags or boxes of meals can represent a contribution of about \$ 7 per month or bimonthly and there are bonds of different types distributed by the government, which can range from \$ 0.5 to \$ 5 (not always monthly).

In March, the cost of the food basket alone was estimated at US\$ 236.66 per month; 108 minimum wages were needed to access essential foodstuffs.

Even adding to the minimum wage the other supplements provided by the government and the companies, the minimum monthly income of a worker would be in the order of 16 dollars per month, 7% of the cost of basic food required by a family.

Within the mass of workers, we will find workers who receive double and even triple the minimum wage, but as can be seen, even a salary of \$22 per month (4,026,000 bolivars) would represent 9% of the cost of food.

Retirees and pensioners only have an income ranging from \$2.2 to \$4.4 per month.

Informal and self-employed workers may have slightly higher, but irregular, incomes.

In this way, the salary is so dramatically low that the situation of active and unemployed workers is practically the same.

But the Basic Basket, which covers not only food but also expenses for hygiene and cleaning products, health, medicines, tickets, services, housing rent, etc., has reached an estimated value of \$600 per month so that even the highest salaries have been turned to dust.

The influx of remittances sent by migrants from other countries has benefited a segment of the working population, but the great mass survives tormented by this severe depression in their wages.

That is why several groups of workers, unions, and trade unions have been raising the demand for a minimum wage equivalent to \$ 600 per month.

The employers’ role of the unions has been exposed by the inaction of the workers.

The Covid-19 pandemic came to employers, the government, and the unions as a perfect fit to stop the mobilization of the discontented wage-earning masses.

But already the demobilizing political component of the confinement is beginning to wear off and we can see how different sectors of the workers are beginning to demonstrate and try to communicate in order to agree to protest actions with the demand for a salary increase.

The ruling classes, their parties, and their government, which make use of all resources, in addition to repression, to stop the outbreak of the workers' struggle, stun the masses with different distractions from the media and social networks.

The media show of the disjointed "military incursion" of a sector of the opposition with US support, the DEA and drug trafficking stands out.

But media fences also tend to show some signs of wear and tear.

All the parties on the right and left, together with the unions, are working to channel discontent into an electoral solution.

In order to take away the Venezuelan government's resource of its TV programs, the North American government propitiated the exit of DIREC TV's signal.

Workers in the health sector, mainly the College of Nurses, have been demanding a minimum wage of \$600 per month.

Court workers, educators, retirees and pensioners, and public sector workers, in general, have been coming together to try to articulate actions of struggle with the demand for wage increases.

Some petrochemical workers have been demanding wage increases.

And in all cases it is relevant that these actions of the workers, even if they are incipient, have been emerging from the base, with no or very little intervention by union leaders.

## The French Social Movement – December 2019-March 2020

The dismantling and privatization of public services, the attack on labor laws and social rights in general began at the world level with the neoliberal turn of the 1980s.

The social movement of December 2019-March 2020 in France, interrupted by the eruption of the Covid-19 pandemic, is part of a series of protest movements in France, including the Yellow Vests (ongoing since 2018), and other actions organized by the unions (hospital workers, teachers, students, etc...). Above all, it is occurring in the midst of an economic crisis of overproduction in the world.

The social movement 2019-20 will affect not homogeneously all of France, in many sectors (mail, energy, road, teachers, etc.) but will be mainly led by the rail transport sectors SNCF, national company of railways (142,000 agents throughout France), and buses in the Ile de France region RATP, an autonomous network for Parisian transport (46,000 agents in the Paris region).

## - The French unions

According to the Ministry of Labor, the unionization rate in France hovers around 11% – against 30% of working people in 1950 – for all employees, the lowest in Europe. The representation of the confederations among salaried workers is based on professional elections. These professional elections are hardly used by workers (50% abstentions); indeed, the French system of social dialogue employee-employer (“paritarisme”) does not encourage membership since union centers are generously remunerated by this system.

The 5 union confederations representing employees (over 8% after elections) are the CGT, CFDT, CFTC, FO, and CFE-CGC; they are all affiliated with the European Trade Union Confederation, which is coordinated and financed from Brussels and advocates a “dialogue” between workers and employers favorable to employers. The CFE-CGC, the French managers’ confederation, has long been openly reformist, but due to the erosion of the standard of living of its members, has become more critical and joined the movement of 2019-20. The CFDT, the French Democratic Confederation of Labor, comes from a split in 1964 from the CFTC and affirms its secularism. It is openly reformist, having got rid of its left wing activists in the 1980s, who first joined Solidaires, unitaires, démocratiques (SUD), and later the CGT and FO. The CFTC, the French Confederation of Christian Workers, like the CFDT, is openly reformist. The CGT, created in 1895, was controlled by the PCF between the 1920s and the 1990s. After having practiced excessive “social dialogue”, it took a turn in 2015 with the arrival of Philippe Martinez, the first secretary not to be a member of the PCF, and who claimed to want to initiate a new fighting spirit, a trade unionism of struggle, with a little centralized organization which leaves to its federations, its unions, the job of opposing management. – Far-left activists are active in many unions such as those of the Trotskyist NPA (New Anti-Capitalist Party), and LO (Lutte Ouvrière), the Lambertist movement; the latter are also active in SUD and FO. Internal battles are therefore virulent during the congresses, part of the unions pushing the leadership of the confederation to be more combative.

Force Ouvrière (FO), was created in 1947 by a split from the CGT with financial support from the American unions, in opposition to the PCF. It is made up of a mosaic of Trotskyist tendencies (the Lambertist current is part of the leadership of the confederation), anarcho-syndicalists, anarchists, Gaullists and even the party of Marine Le Pen who openly supports this union! Long openly reformist, it now ranks in “combative” confederations. Like CGT, FO is scarcely centralized, and many sections are critical towards the leadership.

The other non-representative unions (less than 8% in public-private professional elections) are the UNSA, National Union of Autonomous Unions (autonomous from – the other major confederations), a member of the CES, and the Union Syndicale Solidaires (SUD), formed in 1981, not a member of the CES. The latter appears, especially with the SUD unions, in social struggles as the most combative, but most often joins the CGT during negotiations. The results of “official” representativeness in 2017 for the two

public-private sectors had the CFDT leading with 26.39%, CGT 24.85%, FO 15.60%, CFE-CGC 9.48%, UNSA 5.35%, SUD 3.46%, and others with 3.99%.

- The “Coordinations”

Born during the workers’ struggle; a structure that operates democratically through general meetings of union members of various unions and of non-union members, often of various professions.

The appearance of this type of organization was a concern both for the government and the employers as well as for the confederal leaderships linked to the system of social dialogue. They appeared in the years 1980-90, to start and organize social movements that the federal directions refused to carry out. Then the confederations took often the bandwagon to ensure negotiations with the government and employers.

- The workers movement September 2019-March 2020

The trigger of the outbreak of struggle was the announcement of the pension reform project in July 2019 which provides for a single public-private plan (presently there are more than 50 different plans), drastic reduction in pension payments for all, delayed retirement (at 62 in 2018), encouragement to capitalization of savings to the detriment of mutualization, abolition of many provisions for the most difficult jobs (early departure from SNCF, RATP, and other “problematic” professions).

1. RATP workers start without the confederations on September 13

A strike day is organized on Friday, September 13, 2019 organized by 7 unions of the RATP, under the pressure of the workers: UNSA RATP, CGT RATP, FO RATP, CFE-CGC RATP, SUD RATP, Solidaires and a small union. This strike is followed by 90% of drivers and controllers.

5 of these unions without the CGT will call an unlimited strike for December 5.

From September 24, various groups within the RATP call for the creation of a national and interprofessional coordination to alleviate “the inert directions of the workers’ confederations”; they are joined by groups of railway workers, teachers, postal workers, and various collectives.

The result will be the birth of a railways-Teachers-Post office coordination in Ile-de-France demanding the total withdrawal of the project, without negotiation and the unlimited interprofessional strike from December 5.

2. The confederal directions follow the movement

On October 16, the confederations CGT, FO, FSU, Solidaires-SUD and student organizations called for a day of strike on December 5, but not an unlimited strike. They then form a national inter-union coordination. Those of the CFDT and the UNSA remain on the sidelines, the confederation CFE-CGC will join the inter-union coordination on December 6!

3. The movement spreads rapidly to other sectors, only partially mobilized

After teachers, hospitals, the post office come refineries, ports, automobile industry,

energy, firefighters, airports, garbage collectors, libraries, culture and radio workers. Regional or national coordinations are formed throughout the territory.

#### 4. 53 days of SNCF-RATP transport strike

The CGT-FO-SUD-CFE-CGC-FSU coordination, while participating with the CFDT and the UNSA, in “negotiation” meetings with the government, will organize 3 national days of interprofessional events until December 17. It accepts the Christmas truce imposed by the government to continue negotiations and does not call for a national demonstration until Thursday, January 9!

The Ile-de-France coordination takes over and from 18 December organizes the movement with actions in companies, in universities, in refineries, in automobile industrial sites, in bus depots to counter non-strikers, in stations, at CFDT headquarters, and for striking support funds.

A demonstration is organized on Thursday, December 26 joined by the yellow vests.

#### 5. Reflux

The fighting spirit of transport workers was remarkable, but they quickly found themselves isolated at the national level. This social movement will only partially affect the private sector (employer repression, job insecurity, threats of closure, as in the automobile industry), and in the public, only the SNCF and the RATP will mainly carry out the unlimited strike. In this movement, which we salute for its fighting spirit and courage, the level of mobilization remained lower than in 1995 when the public and private sectors were more active. The other strategic sectors mobilized only very occasionally: the refineries (which in 2016 during strikes against the El Khomri law had stopped, resulting in a shortage of petrol), ports, nuclear power plants, waste incineration plants – will participate in the movement, but by strikes limited and little followed, and without unlimited strike, and in general the manufacturing sector has mobilized little. Police violence already visible against yellow vests since 2018 has become more and more noticeable during the demonstrations and now targets strikers and journalists from alternative media. Union activists are arrested, disciplinary and legal proceedings against the most active strikers are launched by the bosses.

On January 17 a majority of metro drivers (UNSA RATP, the first to call a strike) voted to go back to work: all but three of the general assemblies of the various lines called for going back to work for the Monday January 20 for “pecuniary reasons”. The general assemblies of SNCF follow.

The coordination will still call for demonstrations in February but little followed.

The government passes the baton to the unions of workers and employer, for a “conference on the financing of retirement pensions from the reform” at the initiative of the CFDT. If no agreement is reached, the government will decide. On February 2, the reform project was discussed in parliament but the opposition asked for more than 40,000 amendments. On February 29 the government imposed the project using article 49-3 of

the constitution! And the generous movement of transportation workers will end in the fog and “chaos” of the March outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic that the government will use to pass “safe” decrees and orders!

- The Lessons

The workers engaged in a tough battle organized themselves in general assemblies, coordinations, and various organizations whose undeniable characteristics were their absence of corporatism within their profession, their interprofessionality, their combativeness, and the evidence of the need to go beyond union divisions and form a united front. The workers, in spite of a determined struggle, have been confronted with the irreducibility of the bourgeois regime, which is on the verge of collapse due to the economic crisis that has been eating away at the capitalist system since 2008.

They were once again confronted with the lack of fighting spirit of their union leaderships which, even while practicing an inter-union front essential for the effectiveness of the combat, did not want to organize and centralize the struggles, which abandoned them at the time of the Christmas truce imposed by the government and continued to negotiate with it, so to get some junk in order to calm social unrest!

In this fight to destroy the capitalist mode of production, provider of suffering and exploitation of man by man, the two fundamental instruments of the revolutionary class struggle are the International Communist Party, factor of conscience and will to the proletarian class, and on the other hand the truly class economic, trade union organizations united in a single class union front, within which the party can have a decisive influence. Let the United Class Union Front come up for the unions truly and authentically representing the working class! May the International Communist Party develop, without a single political front, thanks to the vigor of the class struggle which can now only escalate nationally and internationally! And may the International Communist Party, the guide of the proletariat, conquer the workers in class unions, in a single union class front! The real class fight will go through this unique revolutionary way!

## Theory and Practice of Dictatorship Lenin 1922, the NEP, the Trade Unions

With the NEP the role of trade unions, already complex in the proletarian State, becomes even more complex. On January 4, 1922 we have, from Lenin: “Draft theses on the role and functions of the trade unions under the New Economic Policy”

«As long as classes exist, the class struggle is inevitable. In the period of transition from capitalism to socialism the existence of classes is inevitable; and the Programme of the Russian Communist Party definitely states that we are taking only the first steps in the transition from capitalism to socialism (...) It follows from this that at the present moment we can under no circumstances abandon the idea of the strike struggle, we cannot, as a

matter of principle, conceive the possibility of a law that makes compulsory State mediation take the place of strikes. On the other hand (...) under the transitional type of proletarian State such as ours (...) the normal method of settling conflicts between labour and capital, between employed and employers, will more and more often find expression in the working people turning directly to the State authorities (...) The compulsory wholesale signing up of all workers for membership in the trade unions is no longer consistent with the present degree of socialisation achieved in industry or with the level of development of the masses (...) It is absolutely essential to revert for a fairly considerable length of time to the practice of voluntary membership in the trade unions (...) From all the foregoing it is evident that there are a number of contradictions in the various functions of the trade unions. On the one hand, their principal method of operation is that of persuasion and education; on the other hand, as participants in the exercise of State power they cannot refuse to share in coercion (...) The aforementioned contradictions will inevitably give rise to disputes, disagreements, friction, etc. A higher body is required with sufficient authority to settle the seat once. This higher body is the Communist Party (...) the Communist International».

The expression “building socialism”, which we do not like at all, and also that of “transition to socialism”, were then used by the Stalinist counter-revolution to argue that in Russia there was already socialism, even if with some parts still “under construction”: the doctrine of socialism in one country. Such expressions in Lenin have political, not economic meaning. In fact, he always reiterated that the first step that Russia could take towards socialism consisted of State capitalism, alongside which all previous forms, from large to small private property and even earlier ones, existed in Russia. Far from being socialism already achieved!

Obviously for Lenin this was only possible thanks to the existence of the proletarian State and the control of armed workers, waiting for the proletariat of the more developed countries of capitalism to seize power soon. Without this, it was clear for him that the first victorious revolution of the proletariat would have been defeated.

For the bourgeoisie of all schools and parties, on the other hand, the NEP is equivalent to one or more steps back from communism, the admission of its failure and impracticability.

In “Economic and social structure of Russia today” we read: «In Lenin’s mind and in the action of the Bolshevik party it is clear that socialism has two conditions: the degree of development of productive forces and the degree of development of the revolution in the advanced bourgeois countries. The productive forces do not rise from a patriarchal or medieval level without an economic mechanism that brings agricultural products to industry, and vice versa. This transport (...) can only be done in the forms of capitalist trade (...) Where there is small production there is mercantile exchange, there is capitalism, there is not socialism. But since without that double transport we have death, here it is that, by ceasing to prohibit it, one must let it play in the bourgeois forms. Bluntly: take it or leave it».

The difficulty was in controlling, on the part of the State and the party, the inevit-

able reforming of the small commercial bourgeoisie, a danger that the NEP would have fuelled. There was no alternative, if we wanted to try to maintain power. The two needs, to promote free trade and to control the bourgeoisie, with the consequent planning, although contradictory, had to be fulfilled simultaneously. As for the function of trade unions, we reiterate that in the State of the proletariat, trade unions of the non-proletarian categories would be prohibited, while trade unions of the workers, alongside the new functions of management and administration of the economy, (...) will always have their own functions, parallel but not identical to the action of the Party and the State: to defend the living conditions of the working class. All this for as long as wage labour and State capitalism exist, until the State of the dictatorship of the proletariat is extinguished to make way for communism.

The pyramid of proletarian power in Russia, starting from the bottom, is this: factory committee, within which the communist fraction is formed, trade unions, Soviets, Party.

In the First Congress of Trade Unions, in January 1918, to the Mensheviks who supported the independence of trade unions, Tomskij rightly replied that «the sectorial interests of groups of workers must be subordinate to the interests of the whole class».

For the Bolsheviks, therefore, trade unions should be subordinate to the Soviet government, as they themselves were part of the administration; no neutrality or independence. This did not mean that the trade unions could be statized, as when the Soviets demanded to submit them to their orders. The “drive belt” formula means a system of reciprocal transmissions of influence, in recognition of the party’s role as a brain-engine.

Trotsky’s controversy against the Mensheviks, proponents of “free work”, for the militarization of trade unions, while legitimized by the need to organize the so-called labor armies, comes up against the physiological and material limits of the productive forces, of a proletariat prostrated by an imperialist war and then by a civil war.

At the X Party Congress in March 1921 three resolutions were presented: one by Trotsky and Bucharin called for the “sterilization of trade unions”; one by the so-called Workers’ Opposition called for the trade unions to be entrusted with the entire economic administration. The first one insisted on the need for an almost military, compulsory organization of workers in order to increase their productivity, the second one was rightly accused of anarcho-syndicalism: the trade unions can only follow, late and with difficulty, the clarity of vision and the positions of the Communist Party, and if left to themselves by the Party they can only return under the influence of petty-bourgeois conceptions.

The third motion was that of Lenin and 9 other party members. In “Comunismo” No. 8, p. 32 we read: «Lenin’s position is included in the so-called “platform of the ten”».

It is not a generic compromise between Trotsky and the Workers’ Opposition, because the vigorous and lashing remarks he makes against the former only reconfirm point 5 of the 1912 programme, which provided for the transfer of the entire administration of the economy to the trade unions, but ruled out the advisability of statization as a measure capable of helping to improve the economic situation in Russia.

«Lenin, on the other hand, against the Workers' Opposition reiterated the need, in principle and in practice, for trade unions to be more closely subordinate to the government, in accordance with the need for centralization (...) It is necessary for trade unions to carry out their functions which they could not fulfil if they were absorbed by the State. They must provide – according to Lenin – the dictatorship of the proletariat exercised by the Party with a broad social base, the need for which is dictated by the peasant character of the country.

The ruling class, the proletariat, is a minority in the country and must be effectively organised in order to exert a firm political influence on the vast majority. Trade unions are and must be the largest voluntary organization of industrial workers. Absorbed by the State, they would become a pure bureaucratic machine. While trade unions must become the “school of communism” for their 7 million members. Communists should not attempt to impose themselves on trade unions through government appointments, but should strive to be accepted as leaders of the mass of workers in trade unions on the basis of their merits and leadership skills. Only then could they hope to turn the unions into a school of communism for the whole class. A lesson in dialectics valid yesterday and today”.

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[international-communist-party.org](http://international-communist-party.org)  
[icparty@interncommparty.org](mailto:icparty@interncommparty.org)

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