

The Communist Party

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What distinguishes our party: – The line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the III International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy at Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalition of resistance groups – The tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personalized politics and electoralist manoeuvrings

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Questions from the USA on the SI COBAS and the Trade Unions

France: Demonstrations against the El Khomri law and the ambiguous attitude of the CGT

For decades, and especially since the 35-hour work week law implemented in 1998-2000, the issue of labour law has been regularly put on the table by both left and right governments; several changes have cut workers' rights and protections in France and in all industrialized countries, and this in a context of global economic crisis. The International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and other financial institutions and governments require “structural reforms” to increase the rate of profit of capitalism, which decreases inevitably. These measures have been designed in close collaboration with Berlin, and in particular with Peter Hartz, the Social Democrat, union bureaucrat and author of the Hartz laws which were implemented in Germany ten years ago to reduce workers wages and living conditions.

It is wholesale attack on the conditions of life and of the employees work in facilitating layoffs, in-

creasing the “flexibility” of the labour market by abandoning the industry wide labour agreements and promulgating agreements at individual company level by decreasing the legal protections and business and State costs in matters of social protection (health, family, pensions). Just as in the 1930s, the crisis of the global capitalist economy, which nothing can stop, pushes the ruling class in France and worldwide to war and to militarism, as well as to a new assault against the wage earning class, which produces all economic wealth.

It is in this context that the El Khomri law was announced, the purpose of which was to allow further freedom for businesses. Introduced in 2016 by the Minister of Labour, Myriam El Khomri, on behalf of the Socialist government of President François Hollande and Prime Minister Manuel Valls, the project follows a report written in January 2016 by a committee chaired by Robert Badinter, advocating an overhaul of the labour code.

On 24 May 2016 the International Monetary Fund declared that “The El Khomri law is another necessary step towards a more dynamic labour market” !

While a wave of protests was developing in Belgium, more or less participatory strikes occurred in France, in oil refineries, ports, civil aviation, railways, energy, transport and construction, under the leadership most of the time by unions CGT, FO and the SUD, but without causing a real paralysis of the economy.

The CGT is presented as the most combative organization and the leadership of the movement, actually plays a role of firefighter – deadly to the class struggle – working to prevent the spreading of the independent working class action and the radical unification of its struggles.

The CGT rides the struggles of workers against the labour reform, seeking to benefit from it in the competition with the other French regime unions. In the last union elections, in March 2013 (participation was very low, only 5.460.000 voted), the CGT received 26.7% of the vote, making it the largest trade union in France; the CFDT received 26.0% of the votes, FO 15.9%, CFE-CGC 9.4%,

CFTC 9.3%, UNSA 4.2%, and SUD 3.4%. But the CGT membership has continually decreased (now 676,000 members) and is likely to be overtaken by the CFDT by the beginning of 2017.

After his election in February 2015, Philippe Martinez, the new head of the CGT, has sought to reinvigorate an organization which has been in crisis for several years by organizing some national protests, which very few participants turned out to most of the time. On the occasion of the CGT's 51st Congress, held April 19th, 2016, Martinez disowned the policy of reconciliation with the CFDT, initiated by Bernard Thibault, Martinez' predecessor and ended the CGT's strategy of "Reunified Unionism".

He jumps today on the bandwagon of a movement against the El Khomri law started by a young people's movement. But the CGT doesn't call for a general strike, but for a "generalization" of the strike. In fact, the CGT opposes a general strike, that is, a struggle to mobilize and unify all movements.

Here is a timeline of the progress of the El Khomri Protests.

The El Khomri project is announced February 17th, 2016.

Ten unions (CFDT, CFE-CGC, FO, FSU, SUD, UNSA, UNL, FIDL) meet on February 23rd to demand the withdrawal of compensation rates in case of dismissal. The CGT, FSU and SUD are in favour of organizing demonstrations. In the Socialist Party, the text is criticized by dissidents who denounce its "liberal drift".

By March 3rd, the five so called "Reformist" central trade unions (CFDT, CFE-CGC, CFTC and UNSA) sign a joint statement in which they ask that the bill be amended, while the so-called "Protester" unions (CGT, FO and FSU) refuse to sign and ask its withdrawal.

The UNEF College Student Union and the UNL High School student union have joined the "Protest Unions", while the FAGE student union has joined the "Reformist Unions". The spectre of the youth protests against the 1994 Occupational Integration Contract and those in 2006 which spread against the CPE First Job Contract come back to haunt the government.

On March 9th the El Khomri Bill is submitted to the Council of Ministers, and the CGT, FO, SUD and student organizations (UNEF, UNL, FIDL) organize many local demonstrations. Estimates of protesters range from 224,000 (Police) to 500,000 (Unions) which is very small in comparison with the big protests of 2006 in which 2 million took to the street, forcing the withdraw the CPE laws.

On March 14th, after meeting with Trade Unions and Student Organizations, the government announced that it amended the draft law. The amend-

ment is welcomed by the CFDT, while the CGT, FO, and the UNEF continue to request the withdrawal of the project.

Three more days of demonstrations are announced: On March 17th and 24 protests called by the student organizations are attended by between 69,000 and 150,000 demonstrators depending on the source. And on March 31 a demonstration is also called by the CGT, FO, SUD and FSU unions.

This last protest sees a growing involvement, high schools and universities are blocked, clashes between youths and police occur in Paris, Nantes, Toulouse, Grenoble and Rennes.

In the capital, many demonstrators, mostly young, are found in the Place de la République and this becomes the "Nuit debout" [Rise Up at Night] movement that presents itself as a citizen and pacifist, inspired by the movement of the Spanish "Indignados" movement as well as the "Occupy Wall Street" movement from the USA.

Another two days of demonstrations take place on April 28th, with 209 marches numbering between 170,000 (Police) and 500,000 (CGT) demonstrators and on May 1st, in which the police broke up the march by cutting off the young, to the "indifference" of the CGT's security detail.

On May 10th Manuel Valls decides to invoke Article 49 paragraph 3 of the Constitution which allows for the adoption of a proposed law without going through a parliamentary vote. On May 12nd, as new demonstrations erupt, a motion to censure Valls is presented to the National Assembly and receives the favorable vote of a heterogeneous political array (right, Republicans, UDI, Left Front) but not of the dissident fringe of the Socialist Party. The vote does not get the required 288 votes. Therefore, the motion is rejected and the Khomri bill is adopted on first reading. The bill must now be reviewed by the Senate.

On May 12nd, dockers and oil and railroad workers take to the struggle in Le Havre, one of the nerve centers of the French economy, ushering in a real strike movement.

During the week of May 16th to 22nd, new demonstrations take place and workers take to the struggle all over France – truck drivers, railroad workers, refineries workers, airports and ports. But the movement, limited by the CGT, does not cause any crisis in transports.

The situation is better in refineries, where the strikes starting May 23rd cause partial interruption of fuel distribution in several petrol chains. The same day the police intervene by force to unblock the Gas terminals in Fos sur Mer [Port of Marseilles]. The next day, in reply, all eight French oil refineries are closed by strikes. On May 19th the

fuel depot of Douchy les Mines in the North is blockaded by about 80 trade unionists, mostly CGT but also some SUD. On May 25th access to the depot is cleared by the police.

On May 26th a “national day” of strikes is proclaimed by the CGT-FO union. In Paris, the government counts 18,000 to 19,000 protesters with union estimates of 100,000. The fuel shortages now cover over 20% of service stations while nuclear power plants reduce their electricity production. The CGT-Energy union announces that for two days, May 25th and 26th, the equivalent of five nuclear reactors out of 58 were removed from the French power grid. While this is not the first time that the strikes in power plants cause loss in production, it is rare for it to happen as part of a social movement not tied to the company’s specific internal issues.

On the same day the Typographers Union of the CGT stops the publication of the national newspapers which have refused to publish a statement by Philippe Martinez.

On May 28th between 150,000 and 300,000 people participate in protests; while continuing the blocks at service stations, fuel depots and in nuclear power plants. In Le Havre 10,000 dock workers march in the streets.

On May 31th, ten days before the European football championship begins, the three main trade unions (CGT, UNSA, SUD-RAIL) start an indefinite strike in the National Railway (SNCF) system. The CFDT, the fourth largest railway workers union, does not participate in these strikes, as it did in all former strikes, thus dividing the SNCF unions.

There are also negotiations occurring in the Railroads. in the final phase, on the project of reform of the Staff Regulations of railway workers, in particular on working time (more flexibility in view of the opening up to competition from 2020 onwards). The UNSA, the second largest SNCF union, is opposed only to the draft reform in the Railroads and doesn’t demand for the withdrawal of the Khomri bill, as do the CGT and SUD-Rail. The CGT has solid strongholds of engine drivers and controllers, the two trades most able to block train traffic. However, the strike seems to have had limited participation.

According to the Transport Minister 60% of the high-speed trains (TGV) have circulated, as well as 50% of the Parisian regional trains and 45% of intercity. The Paris Transport Authority has also been called to strike, but has limited participation; the CGT has instead called for an unlimited strike.

In the meanwhile, Sunday, May 30, Philippe Martinez celebrated that the Prime Minister had called him, confirming that, despite strikes, the CGT has continued behind the scenes meetings with the Socialist Party and wants to reach an agreement for

the approval of the law. On the evening of Monday 31, during a radio interview/debate with the head of the CFDT, Martinez claimed to be “ready to re-discuss” with the government without requiring the withdrawal of the Khomri Bill. He only listed four points of disagreement: the reversal of the hierarchy of the contracts with the preeminence of corporate ones on organization of work; the definition of economic layoffs; the holding of a referendum in the event of a minority agreement and finally, the reform of occupational medicine.

In Belgium, May 31st was another day of demonstrations and strikes in public services. The movement, which affects public transport, schools, post office, was long planned. Other actions, demonstrations and general strikes have already been planned for June 24th and October 7th.

It is obvious that the state of emergency put into place in France and Belgium shortly after the terrorist attacks in Paris last year was meant for not just Islamic terrorist networks, but also for the developing social opposition.

Workers across Europe are closely following the struggles in France, Belgium, Greece, and must reject any attempt to divide their struggles along national lines.

Rather, they should seek to unite their struggles on their territory and beyond national borders. But none of the existing trade union confederations will help do this ! Quite the contrary.

Italy: Ikea workers divided in struggle

Introduction

In Italy we have three big trade union confederations, all ‘regime unions’; the CGL is the main one, and is historically considered the most combative of the three; the CISL and the UIL arose in the period immediately following the Second World War after splits in the CGIL and they are still more openly collaborationist than the latter. These trade union confederations are composed of various federations, that is, of *sindacati di categoria*, trade unions that unite a particular category or trade. For example the Filcams CGIL for shop workers and Fiom CGIL for metal workers.

In the second half of the nineteen seventies, in reaction to the definitive incorporation of the CGIL into the capitalist regime, groups of workers started to struggle outside and against them. This movement led to the birth of various *sindacati di base*, rank-and-file or base unions. Today in Italy the main

ones are: *l'Unione Sindacale di Base* (USB), the *Confederazione Unitaria di Base* (CUB), and the *Sindacato Intercategoriale Cobas* (SI Cobas).

From the end of the Second World War up to the birth of the rank-and-file unions our party advised workers to militate and fight within the CGIL. Since then our line has been that workers should organize "outside and against the regime unions (CGIL,CISL,UIL)"

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In our Italian language paper, "Il Partito Comunista", we dealt with the fierce attack being waged against the freedom to strike:

- in Italy, with an agreement reached between the regime unions and industrial bosses, called *Testo Unico sulla Rappresentanza* (TUR, or Consolidation Act on Representation), which puts one of the two types of company union representation, the most widespread one, the RSU, under the strict control of regime unions.

- in Germany, with a special law for Uniform Contract, ("*Tarifeinheit*"), i. e., according to which the agreement made by the union with most members must apply to all workers; as to the formula "*Ein Betrieb, ein Tarifvertrag*" (One company, one contract).

- in Turkey, where the government made use of existing legislation in the past two years against powerful workers' strikes.

We explained how this political action is due to the bourgeois regimes' awareness of the fact that the crisis will force them to relentlessly worsen the working class living conditions and that this will inevitably cause a revival of workers struggles. This is already ongoing, with growing, although limited, strikes, in Germany and England.

In Italy, an example of this process is last year's strike at IKEA, which has been a model company for peaceful industrial relations for 25 years; wage cuts averaging 20% led workers to strike to the bitter end, for nine consecutive days.

Class struggle was not born out of a theoretical view of society, with communists propagandising it amongst workers, it is rather the product of the material contradictions of capitalism, which Marxism has studied with scientific method. The national bourgeoisies consequently erect new walls, reinforce the old ramparts in defence of their regime, against the gathering wave of class struggle.

Such actions are caused by the internal laws of the capitalist economy and are implemented in the most diverse countries by the bourgeois governments of all colours, proving our point. On a global scale, the laws of capitalism are the same, same are the solutions of capitalism's governments, and consequently same is the need for workers to fight.

One of the fortes of Regime Unionism has al-

ways been to nurture the so-called company bargaining, rather than national bargaining. Thus, in the past, thanks to these contracts some workers, usually in large companies, obtained better wages and conditions than the rest of the working class. This has aggravated the division between such workers and the rest of the class.

The interest to fight for a good national labour contract has therefore diminished, while mobilizing workers for a good company contract was favoured. Workers were therefore encouraged to company loyalty, at the expense of class interests. Over time, the share of wage perceived thanks to company contracts has grown, at the expense of that coming from national contracts.

With the advance of the crisis, however, it is the share of wages tied to company bargaining that is questioned; company contracts are repudiated, and draconian cuts are imposed.

If those pay rises had been won on the nationwide industrial labour contract, the bosses would encounter difficulties in imposing wage cuts, having to deal with entire categories. It is evident, therefore, how the Regime Unions have facilitated their task.

The examples are numerous, in public transport, health, Electrolux... but here we'll report on IKEA.

In late May 2015, IKEA announced to the unions a unilateral cancellation of the company contract, effective September 1st. In response, *Filcams CGIL*, *Fisascat CISL* and *Uiltucs UIL* (belonging to the three main regime union confederations) called for a 16 hour strike, of which 8 were to be conducted on a local level, at the local store discretion, and the remainder on a national level. On June 6, local actions were conducted in more than half of the stores. Participation was high, and determination too. This is explained by the not insignificant stakes: wage cuts averaging 20%! This through the review of the pay for Sunday and holiday work, and the transformation of the company bonus, from a fixed salary item into a flexible one.

The attitude of the regime unions so far is explained by the national secretary of the CGIL *Filcams*: "There is a section, which amounts to approximately 10% of the workforce, which has the most favourable conditions; they work in the older stores and have better deals than the bulk of the workers, who get 70% [of Sundays and holidays increase]. There are also some who get 50, 45, 40%, then the system is very varied." Originally the increase was 130% for all.

This differentiation was not created against the wishes of the unions, *Filcams CGIL* included, but in agreement with them. As a matter of fact, IKEA has been for twentyfive years a model of peaceful and collaborative industrial relations, without trou-

bles with its employees.

Let's read what the company says about its proposed wage cut: «IKEA's proposal is aimed at making treatment for work on Sundays and public holidays fairer than it is today, since it differs from store to store, and within the same store (between old and new employees). An example: currently an associate in Catania has to work 3 Sundays to earn the salary of a Corsico colleague». So, the T.U. confederations have favoured the "defence" of employees with greater seniority to the detriment of new employees, supporting the division of workers, encouraging the bosses' offensive today which can exploit the scarce interest to fight of the worst paid workers in defence of those in better conditions, which are those who have most to lose in this battle.

The exact opposite of what a class union should do: mobilize workers in a better position to defend the most vulnerable ones, because they thus also defend themselves from competition of the lower paid. Basic notions of class unionism, so elementary but also so daily trampled on by these anti-labour unions.

After several meetings that did not lead to any result a new 8 hours stop was called for Saturday, July 11, for all 6,000 employees of 21 stores in Italy. This strike was successful but did not produce any agreement. So it was announced another 24-hour strike – four days – to be managed locally.

In late July the strikes began, which in many cases were protracted beyond what had initially been established, to the bitter end, as in Genoa, Naples, Padua, Rome.

As a rule the unions indicated to organize ineffectual permanent pickets in front of stores, where workers, because they were not familiar with struggles, saw no need to conduct stronger action.

In this manner, those who wanted to cross the picket line were not in any way deterred by strength and unity of strikers. If there were not the conditions to operate a hard picket, which would prevent the entry of strikebreakers, it would however be effective to stand still in front of store entrances. In some cases marches were organized inside the stores, such as in Milan, which produced a significant effect on strikebreakers and foremen.

Another way in which the trade union confederations have weakened this great movement of struggle was the strategy of favouring the action of the various individual stores, limiting unified striking to a few exceptional cases. Thus, on the one hand it wore out most militant workers, and on the other hand the company was not hit by the force of a strike to the bitter end, carried out in all the stores. Although a chance existed for it to fail completely,

which can't be taken for granted, the fact remains that, given the determination of the workers of the main stores, this was the strike to be deployed, to bend an international giant like IKEA.

To win companies of similar size it would be needed to organize international strikes: call all IKEA workers in all European countries to fight, today in defence of those of Italy, tomorrow for those of France, the day after tomorrow for those in Spain... all for all. Regime Unions run in the opposite direction – choosing local actions!

In Genoa the strike, which lasted nine days, was conducted by a current of the CGIL which appears to workers to be more militant than the rest of the union and that is characterized by appealing for a European union. The distance between these words and the real union practices is measured in the stubborn defence by the CGIL delegate of the work of her union in the face of criticism by the militants of Genoa SICobas, during a flyer distribution at the picket, carefully placed by confederals fifty meters away from the entrance.

The conduct of CGIL, CISL and UIL is obviously not unique to IKEA. We saw these methods applied to bus drivers – in the historic strike of December 2002 – by dividing them by city and even bus depots in the same city; most recently in Fincantieri (shipyard) and Electrolux (household appliances). Divisions pursued with most petty and deceitful means. In Fincantieri, Electrolux, IKEA exist national union coordinating bodies who obviously have the express purpose of preventing any real coordination among workers!

Italian Base Unions still divided

In summer 2015, the major Italian Trade Union Confederations suspended ongoing strikes at IKEA due to the company being open to meeting. In view of this meeting, on 7 September, 2015 a National Coordination meeting was held in Rome of the RSA (Government sponsored workplace councils) and of RSU. USB Base Union delegates, active in the Carugate and Corsico IKEA Milan stores were prevented from attending.

This episode was correctly denounced in a statement by the USB union's Private Sector National Executive but they made no mention of the CUB union, which is in the same situation – for example in Rome's Anagnina store CUB is the largest union, with 150 members against 17 belonging to confederal unions, within a total of 350 workers – but it is not recognized, even at the individual store level.

This is an important detail because it shows a lack of will of the leaderships of the base unions to conduct unified action to offer workers an alternative to the collaborationist unions CGIL, CISL and UIL.

The attitude of the Base Union leaderships is one of competition between acronyms instead of unity of action. This competition was certainly one of the causes that held back the formation of a national coordination of the base unions, as an alternative to that of the Confederations, that would include USB groups of Milan (Corsico and Carugate) – and Sesto Fiorentino stores, newly formed, the self-organized committee of workers of Brescia IKEA, formed during this fight and breakaway from the Confederations, the CUB of the Anagnina store in Rome. Also the SI Cobas should be included, who led the harsh struggles in November 2013 and May 2014 in IKEA logistics warehouse of Piacenza, the most important in Southern Europe, of contractors' workers, whose involvement would give additional strength to the strike movement.

From late May to early September there was enough time, and even the necessary fight temperature, but, in spite of the will to do so by some delegates, there hasn't been any appreciable result. Even Friday, September 18, the Flaica CUB organized a strike at an IKEA in Rome which the USB IKEA Milan did not join.

This struggle has two elements which are very instructive. The Flaica CUB Anagnina organized strikes, even after the Confederations decided to suspend them on September 18, despite not having recognized their union representation by the company. The USB, which instead has had its delegates elected in RSU of Corsico and Carugate, had no such strength. This shows how, even today, being inside the official trade unions doesn't equal developing greater trade union strength. It probably plays a negative effect because grassroots/base unions delegates get entangled in wars and play games with the regime union delegates of the Confederations, and these with their territorial structures.

Think of what will happen in the future, when with contract renewal will also be enforced the Consolidation Act on Representation, which the USB has accepted. In these RSU the delegates of this union will not be able to strike against the unfavourable agreements signed by the Confederations.

This important element partly explains the inefficiency to set common action by these unions. The USB leadership must necessarily already set its action, and those of the delegates, aiming at the electoral race in the RSU. This is inevitably going to diverge with the action of those base unions that have not signed the Consolidated Act, like the CUB.

Class murder

On the night of Wednesday 14 September, a worker employed in the GLS depot in Piacenza was knocked down and killed by a lorry while on a

picket organized by his union, the USB.

Considering the weakness of the labour and trade union movement at the moment, the reaction provoked by the tragedy was a positive one.

Strikes were called not only in the GLS warehouses and in other firms in the logistics sector, but also in some engineering works, even if only for a few hours.

The most important aspect is that the SI Cobas, by far the biggest rank-and-file union in logistics, and the ADL Cobas acted jointly with the USB both in certain strike actions, such as at GLS Riano (Rome), and in the local demonstrations in Bologna, Pavia and Milan, as well as the national demo, which was organized in just three days and was where we distributed the leaflet, published below.

A grievous omission, on the other hand, was the absence from the national demonstration of the CUB and the Confederazione Cobas.

It should be made clear that the united action between SI Cobas and USB resulted from circumstances and was not prompted by a definite agreement between the leaders of the two unions. On the contrary – and it's not that surprising given its past conduct – it appears the leadership of the USB didn't really want any part of it.

However the latter certainly couldn't oppose it and it had to grin and bear it, not wanting to appear hostile to workers' unity of action precisely at a time when its necessity had been highlighted in such a dramatic way.

The decision of the SI Cobas to take part in the demonstrations organized by the USB, which meant it had to overcome the contrariness of the USB leadership, and rise above earlier disagreements between the two unions over fundamental points regarding the SDA dispute in Bologna, and then at the GLS at Piacenza, takes on, therefore, a still greater value. It was certainly a calculated decision, conscious that it tallied with organizational objectives, and also, we believe, spurred on by a sincere faith in the importance of the working class acting together. Both commendable qualities.

The unitary action resulted on September 22 in the joint signing by SI Cobas, ADL Cobas and USB of an agreement at the GLS depot in Piacenza. This agreement fully met the demands for which the USB had organized the picket: the permanent employment of temporary workers.

This important event – which has seen the death of a striker in Italy for the first time in many decades – confirms the correctness of our line on worker's unity of action, discussed here in relation to last year's struggle in Italy at IKEA, and shows how the natural course of the class struggle is heading in that direction, through creating better conditions in

which to defeat opportunism in the rank-and-file trade unions and in which to empty those which are inextricably linked to the regime.

UK: Brexit was no “working class revolt”

The British vote of 52% to 48% to leave the European Union left the future of the economic bloc uncertain, financial markets in freefall and the British political establishment in complete turmoil.

The outcome has been depicted by politicians and media on both sides of the debate as a “working class revolt” against the “elite”. It was nothing of the kind. While it is true that many working class people took the opportunity to turn the vote on the European Union into a protest against austerity, the government, globalism and international finance, and to register their sense of hopelessness, this protest was channelled by the pro-Brexit camp in one direction: against migrant workers, not only from the EU but beyond. The rallying cry of the Brexit camp was “We want our country back”. As if we, the working class, ever owned it! The Remain camp conceded to this argument, blaming the Labour Party for failing to “listen to its core voters” on immigration while issuing warnings of job losses and cuts in wages in the event of exit from the EU. As if the working class had not already suffered year after year of austerity! But the Remainers had no choice: the alternative to a phony “working class revolt” was, from their perspective, far worse: a real one!

In fact, far from being a “working class revolt” the whole issue originated as an attempt to heal a festering wound within the ruling Tory Party which goes back decades, and resulted in the fall of two previous Tory Prime Ministers, Margaret Thatcher and John Major. The divisions erupted into open civil war over the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, which began the process of ever-greater political and economic union.

The British bourgeoisie generally regarded these developments as broadly positive: they provided free access on equal terms to an increasingly large market and the ability to recruit workers and professionals from a bigger pool. Tories who opposed Maastricht – euphemistically called “Eurosceptics” wanted the EU limited to a free trade area with minimal or no political interference from EU institutions, in particular the European Commission, whom they portrayed as “unelected bureaucrats” intent on de-

stroying British sovereignty. As it became clear that they were fighting a losing battle, they demanded Britain’s complete withdrawal from the European project – “Brexit”.

Those who were frustrated with the lack of progress within the Tory Party set up a new one, first named the Referendum Party, to demand a plebiscite on the issue. However the party’s leadership was captured by the nativist supporters of Nigel Farage, who put the party’s entire focus on immigration. The United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) gained in popularity and influence following the financial crisis of 2008 and the collapse or near-collapse of the economies of Greece, Spain, Italy, Portugal and Ireland that ensued.

The rise of UKIP

Brexit has always been a revolt of the petty-bourgeois foot soldiers of the Tory Party. These are the utter dregs of British society, the kind of people who begin every sentence with “I am not a racist but ...” and then say something racist. Many of them, having become frustrated with the Tories, now characterized the three main ruling parties – “LibLab-Con” in UKIP parlance – as an anti-patriotic bloc. Like most petty bourgeois movements, it was essentially a desperate and ultimately doomed revolt against modernism by a class that has no future in a globalized economy in which the divisions between capital and labour are ever-sharpening. The people who for years stuffed envelopes and canvassed on doorsteps on behalf of their “betters” in the Tory Party hierarchy, the people who put out bunting for royal weddings, the people who believe everything they read about the European Union in *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* – they wanted the glory days of the British Empire back and they did not want to hear foreign languages being spoken on “their” streets.

As this was too narrow a social base to achieve a political breakthrough, and UKIP failed to gain any representation in the British parliament, it became clear to the circle around Nigel Farage that in order to make progress, UKIP had to broaden its appeal by turning working class voters against migrants. This demagoguery succeeded in winning support in those areas of the United Kingdom that have seen the decline of heavy industry, such as the North East of England and South Wales, although ironically, for the most part these regions have experienced low levels of immigration.

UKIP also gained ground in rural areas such as Lincolnshire where farmers have taken advantage of agricultural labourers arriving in large numbers from Eastern Europe: UKIP claimed that these workers were making access to schools and the

health service more difficult for the indigenous population. While this may be superficially true, the reality is that it is the UK's mounting debt burden and the consequent lack of funds for public investment that are the true cause of tensions. The taxes paid by migrants to the British Exchequer were just paying off interest on debt and bailing out failed banks rather than building new hospitals and schools, while Britain's transport and sanitation infrastructure sank into ever greater disrepair.

LibLabCon and the "political correctness" of the "liberal elite", it was argued, made it impossible for "ordinary people" to get a hearing. Their concerns about immigration, UKIP argued, were being ignored by the elite. Liberal Britain responded by giving ground to this argument. Prime Minister David Cameron promised to cut immigration to tens of thousands – a promise he could not possibly keep, because the EU's single market guarantees freedom of movement, and because many sectors of the British economy, especially in London and the South East, were suffering a labour shortage. It was easier to recruit skilled workers from Poland, or experienced agricultural labourers from Bulgaria, than to retrain workers from England's North East and West Midlands.

Confident of winning a majority, David Cameron therefore took a massive gamble by declaring in the Tory Party's 2014 General Election that he would renegotiate the UK's terms of membership of the EU and put the issue to the country. He believed he would get a majority remain vote and thereby heal the rift within his own party. As we now know, he failed.

Ranged against him in the Brexit camp were not only UKIP and the grassroots supporters of the Tory Party, but several prominent Tory Ministers of State such as erstwhile ally Michael Gove and, most prominently of all, his old chum from Eton and the ultra-privileged Oxford University Bullingdon Club, former Mayor of London Boris Johnson. Johnson had left it to the last moment to lead the Brexit campaign: clearly an unprincipled and opportunistic bid to oust David Cameron and capture the leadership of the Tory Party. Until relatively recently, he had been singing the praises of the EU, claiming that Britain had the best of both worlds being a member while outside the Euro bloc and the Schengen area, which allows travel between countries without border checks.

Opportunism aside, politicians such as Johnson and Gove were giving expression to sections of the British bourgeoisie who were hoping for "Brexit Lite": not a complete exit from the EU, but a further weakening of the regulatory environment that Brussels is imposing on Britain. Under this heading fall

medium and large sized enterprises that are not export-oriented (an example of which is the Wetherspoons chain of pubs, which employs 35,000 low-paid people, many of whom, ironically, come from Eastern Europe); sections of the financial services industry that find the costs of regulation already imposed, or to be imposed at some future date, too onerous to bear; enterprises whose bosses feel that have been put at a competitive disadvantage by Brussels legislation on issues such as environmental standards (a prominent example being Dyson, the manufacturer of energy-inefficient vacuum cleaners) and finally but most decisively, some large enterprises based in non-EU countries, most notably media empires, which exercise huge influence over the public through their control of the yellow press and TV.

Being more closely tied to American than European capitalism, advocates of both Brexit and "Brexit Lite", and even some in the Bremain camp, tend to see Britain's future as more closely aligned to US imperialism than that of Europe. They are especially hostile to the idea of a European army. On the international stage, therefore, Russia sees the political crisis in Britain as an opportunity: its role in strengthening the anti-Russian faction in Berlin will be diminished. Poland and the Baltic States have every reason to be worried.

Racism for dividing the oppressed

In the course of the campaign, the promises made by the Brexit camp became increasingly outlandish. Grossly exaggerating Britain's economic clout and political influence in the wider world, they asserted that capitalists in countries like China and "our Commonwealth" would beat a path to Britain's door once it threw off the shackles of Brussels. They claimed that the £350 million "sent to Brussels" every week could be spent on the NHS (in reality, Britain's net contribution is half that amount). The same money was promised time and time again for myriad other projects. They said that immigration would be cut to a trickle, and wages would rise for indigenous workers. Naturally, they have since backtracked on these and other commitments, though the speed with which they did so shocked many who were conned into voting for Brexit. For its part, the Bremain side, dominated by the Tory hierarchy with vocal support from business and financial leaders, as well as foreign potentates such as IMF President Christine Lagarde and German Finance Minister Wolfgang Schäuble, showed just how divorced they are from everyday reality. The entire Bremain campaign was dominated by threats of economic Armageddon in the event of Brexit: yet for huge numbers of British workers who

have lost their jobs or seen their pay and conditions worsen over eight years of austerity, economic Armageddon has already happened.

In the last few days the campaigns got increasingly heated on both sides. Many on the Remain side believed that the killing of Jo Cox by a pro-Brexit fascist, and UKIP's overtly racist poster campaign, together with claims that 75 million Turks were about to descend on Britain, might fill enough people with revulsion to win the day. But it was not to be.

Britain votes out

You need to listen carefully to what bourgeois politicians say, and equally important, what they don't say. Thus while Nigel Farage and UKIP were declaring that 23 June was Britain's "independence day", there were no celebrations or popping of champagne corks at the morning-after press conference given by Johnson and Gove. If you did not know better, you would think they had lost. What they said was pure waffle; there were no specifics on what should or would happen next. Johnson even laughably claimed that the Brexit vote made Britain "more European than ever". Significantly, they made no mention of next steps to get out of the EU.

Johnson and many of his business supporters were clearly hoping for a narrow Remain majority: a vote to stay in, but a big enough to weaken Cameron's credibility, allowing Johnson to make a leadership, and big enough to give the UK further leverage over Brussels in order to further roll back regulation.

The plain fact is, the bourgeoisie as a whole does not want Brexit and woke up on 24 June in a state of shock. The genie was out of the bottle and could not very easily be put back. The value of sterling tumbled, with the Governor of the Bank of England needing to set aside £250 billion in foreign reserves to prop up the currency. Billions were wiped off share valuations. The reverberations were felt worldwide: with share prices falling as far afield as Singapore and Hong Kong. The biggest impact, however, was felt in the weaker members of the Eurozone such as Spain.

What happens next?

The simple answer to that is we don't know what will happen in the short term; but it is unlikely that Brexit will actually happen at all.

It is clear that the UK's political establishment is trying to kick the referendum result into the long grass. Whether the other EU leaders are prepared to tolerate prolonged uncertainty to get David

Cameron off the hook is quite another matter. UKIP will go on the offensive, stirring up even greater resentment against migrant workers. We will see violent attacks against them – of that there is no doubt, in fact it is already starting.

Britain is in no position to negotiate

Soon after the Brexit vote Britain's most senior diplomat, the EU Commissioner Jonathan Hill, tendered his resignation. Hardly surprising: the task of renegotiating Britain's relationship with the EU will be Gargantuan. Austerity measures have meant that the British civil service has been pared to the bone and the EU could drag out withdrawal discussions interminably over the detail if it so chose.

While some EU leaders, including Angela Merkel, might take a relatively soft line on the negotiations, others will want to play hardball in order to stop the Brexit contagion spreading and giving encouragement to their own "Eurosceptic" populist movements: most notably two core EU countries, France and The Netherlands.

This, however, cannot be done just yet because the bourgeoisie needs to give some credibility to the fairytale that "the people have spoken" and that the referendum really matters: otherwise the myth of "democracy" will be once again exposed. Therefore the "get on with it" message issued by Martin Schulz, Donald Tusk and others in the immediate aftermath.

The Disunited Kingdom

With the Labour Party disintegrating after the Brexit vote (more than half the Shadow Cabinet resigned) and Plaid Cymru's call for Remain rejected in Wales, the only bourgeois political parties that have emerged from this whole affair with a sense of victory have been the Scottish Nationalist Party and Sinn Fein. The SNP signalled its intention to hold a second referendum on independence, while Sinn Fein demanded an all-Ireland referendum on unification.

The threat of dissolution of the UK will provide a further incentive for the government to ignore the Brexit vote. On the other hand, it is likely that the EU will reject any application from Scotland for a fast-track admission: many countries (such as Spain) with strong separatist movements will veto such a move. In any case, the admission of Scotland will also take several years' negotiation. As to Ireland, leaders in the Republic intervened on the Remain side as Irish capital is inextricably linked to the UK and politicians in the South fear the growing populist appeal of Sinn Fein.

In short, there will be a period of intense volatility

and realignment within the ruling class as they try to grapple with the situation on multiple fronts.

For a number of reasons we therefore predict that a future British Prime Minister, whoever that is, will find some reason to avoid Article 50 notification and perhaps call a second referendum (though this is not necessary with 80% of parliament pro-EU). If there *is* a second referendum, the Remain side will win 60-40% at minimum. Alternatively, there could be a General Election.

Brexit and the working class

We can take some comfort from the fact that democracy has been revealed as a sham. But we cannot celebrate until we see a genuine working class response.

Whatever the outcome of this period of turmoil, one thing is certain: the working class will not get any of the “rewards” promised by either the Brexit or the Remain side. While the working class has an interest in following events and responding to the outcome should events prove favourable, it has absolutely no interest in taking sides in a bourgeois dispute. It is not the task of the working class to sort out the mess that the ruling class has made for itself! This has been true in all Western European countries since the late nineteenth century, and in Britain, the first industrialized capitalist country, at least since 1848 when Karl Marx and Frederick observed the scene across Europe and declared that “The workers have no country”.

Therefore, those who have fallen for the lie that “we have taken back control of our country” or that there will be some dividend from Brexit for the NHS will be sadly disillusioned. Those who think that immigration policy is determined by “the people” rather than business interests likewise. Those who think that wages will rise as a result of curtailing immigration are also in for a shock. The working class is never more vulnerable than when bourgeois politicians, of any party or current, succeed in persuading workers that the enemy is “foreign” workers rather than the capitalist system itself.

It goes without saying, therefore, that the Remain side, and especially Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, never once put a positive case for working class unity. The best Corbyn could come up with was a lukewarm defence of the EU’s legislation such as the Working Time Directive, which is largely ignored and at best only imposes uniform misery on the entire European working class. His role was otherwise to ensure that a class position never emerged among traditional Labour voters, and to attribute their economic difficulties to “Tory” austerity, as though austerity is an act of nastiness by a particular political party rather than a necessity

for capitalism regardless of who is in government. (Over the past 20 years it has been the job of political parties to focus on symptoms of economic malaise and offer phony solutions to capitalism’s problems without identifying the root cause: Farage blames Europe, the Tories blame Labour incompetence, Labour blames Tory austerity, the SNP blames the Westminster establishment, George Galloway blames defence spending and wars, and so it goes on. Just don’t, under any circumstances mention the fundamental contradictions of the capitalist system: that is strictly forbidden.)

A “working class revolt” only has any meaning when the working class embarks on its own struggles against that capitalist system, autonomously of other classes, in its own interests, and most importantly, as a class, not as atomized individuals in a bourgeois election or plebiscite. This cannot be achieved without unity across national, ethnic and other artificial divisions, including “traditional loyalty” to bourgeois and opportunist parties. The fragmentation of the working class can only be overcome by class-wide forms of organization, uniting workers on the shop-floor, in offices and services, and not allowing their struggles to be diverted by the Labour Party and trade union officials, who have a stake in the capitalist system. The working class can only protect its interests by means of its own organization – the international communist party – and by opposing attacks wherever they originate.

While the world’s attention was fixed on the EU referendum, workers were waging such struggles across Europe: rail workers, junior doctors and teachers in Britain, at fuel depots, ports and power plants in France, and in the Italian logistics sector, to name but a few. A true “working class revolt” consists not in casting a vote at the ballot box, but in extending and uniting such struggles across industrial sectors and across national borders. For this not only to happen but to be sustained right through to the final assault on the bastions of capital, an international class party is indispensable.

In or out of the EU, Britain is part of a global economic system that is overloaded with debt and on the brink of another crisis. Economic crisis is not, as the Leave campaign would have us believe, the result of “Brussels bureaucrats” or “over-regulation” or even the weakness of the Euro. Nor can an economic crisis be put off indefinitely by more political and economic integration within Europe or free trade deals between the EU and other economic blocs, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) supported by the Remainers.

No, the coming economic crisis is, like those that went before, inseparable from the inescapable con-

traditions of the capitalist system. Every country in the world is increasingly affected, even those that have until recently enjoyed rapid growth, such as the so-called BRIC countries.

In order to take these struggles forward, the working class must utterly reject the bourgeois idea of “popular sovereignty” or “the sovereignty of parliament”. The argument of the Brexiters that “we need to take back control” is meaningless as the working class cannot exercise control over the capitalist economy – its only option is to break the capitalist system and replace it with a new society. The argument of the Brexainers that “we have greater control by being at the EU negotiating table” is equally meaningless: the EU negotiating table is only there to regulate capitalism on across the continent, in the interests of European capital. In so doing, it can perhaps delay the next economic calamity, only to see it reappear worse than ever.

The simple reality is that there is no “we” – the idea of popular sovereignty is a fiction to masquerade the fact that there are only opposing class interests. The workers have no country – we cannot lose what we have never had. We will only ever exercise “sovereignty” as an international class, through the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Questions from the USA on the SI COBAS and the Trade Unions

From Communist League, Tampa

A) QUESTIONS REGARDING THE SICOBAS

Introduction

The party did not form the SICobas: the SICobas arose entirely independently of the party and there are no particular ties binding the two organizations. The party is not now, nor has it been in the past, in the SICobas executive.

1) *How did the SI Cobas come to be formed?*

The formation of the SICobas is described in the article “A Report on Rank and File Movements in Italy” published in *The Communist Party* (No.1) (international-communist-party.org/English/TheCPart.htm/TCP_001.htm#AReport).

2) *What are some of the more recent struggles they have been involved in?*

A survey of the SI Cobas’s recent struggles is included in the article ‘No “Christmas truce” for the struggles of the SI Cobas.: Against police and Con-

federates’, which is published in *The Communist Party*, No.3 (international-communist-party.org/English/TheCPart/TCP_003.htm#SICobas).

3) *You are a territorial union instead of a “company” one. What does it mean in practice? How are the SI Cobas different from the mainstream Italian unions, which are integrated into the State? What differentiates them from the other rank and file “base” unions?*

The reasons why a trade union organization on a territorial basis is to be preferred is explained in a leaflet, ‘For territorial reorganization of the working class’, which also appears in the first issue of *The Communist Party* (international-communist-party.org/English/TheCPart/TCP_001.htm#Territorial).

4) *What methods do you use in your struggles? Are you using “direct action” or are you also using lawyers and other legal means?*

This and other fundamental questions are covered in the speech made by one of our comrades at the First SI Cobas conference, which can be found in *The Communist Party*, no.2. (international-communist-party.org/English/TheCPart/TCP_002#FirstCongress).

5) *Do you cooperate with other organisations in your struggles? I saw you had joint general strike with USI-AIT.*

The SI Cobas doesn’t offer preferential status or collaborate on a permanent basis with any particular trade union. Indeed, during a strike, it has shown that it is prepared to unite the forces at its disposal with those mobilized by other trade unions, supporting the principle of unity of action. This has happened in conjunction with other rank and file trade unions, as was the case during the last general strike on March 18 last year, when it organized alongside the CUB and the USI-AIT. But also with regards to mobilizations organized by the CGIL, the biggest of the Italian regime unions: on 14 November 2014 a thousand SI COBAS logistics workers joined the march organized by the FIOM, the CGIL metal-workers’ federation and the main trade union in the category. A month later, on 12 December, it saw to it that the general strike in the category within which the majority of its members are concentrated – logistics – coincided with the general strike of all categories proclaimed by the CGIL.

In our view the latter policy is the right practical policy, and it is classist, because by uniting the workers it means strikes acquire greater force and that is the initial condition needed for them to break free from the control of the regime unions. Thus uniting with the mobilizations of these unions does-

n't in fact strengthen them.

This policy has been rejected by the other rank and file unions, which have always boycotted strikes when called by the regime unions, and organized their own ones in competition with them, on different dates, thus weakening the workers' mobilization.

In our eyes this practical policy adopted by the SI Cobas is one of the positive elements which distinguishes it from other rank and file trade unions, as we have explained on various occasions, for example during our speech at the first congress of the SI Cobas.

6) *A big debate amongst proponents of class struggle unionism here in the USA is on the use of paid staff. Do the SI Cobas use paid staff and if so for what functions?*

It is not a matter of principle at stake here: large trade unions will always need a certain number of full-time organizers. The prevalence of a conservative, self-serving trade-union bureaucracy isn't therefore the cause of the conciliatory policies pursued by the union and of its betrayal, but the effect: the bulk of its members and organizers have not proved strong enough either to prevent the leaders from betraying or to get rid of them and replace them with leaders they can have faith in.

7) *What does the organizational structure of the SI Cobas look like? How are decisions made?*

The SI Cobas is a young trade union which wants to equip itself with a more robust organizational structure. It is composed of committees [coordinamenti] and provincial and national executives. In the case of enterprises which are spread out over several sites across the country there are also Company National Committees. These organs are not always that effective.

The Provincial Committees are made up of delegates from the various companies in the province. The Committee elects a smaller group as its Executive. The provincial Comm. is supposed to meet at least once a month and the Executive once a week.

8) *As far as we know there are a lot of immigrant workers in your union. What is the union's position on the "European refugee crisis" and you act somehow to help people arriving in Italy?*

It is necessary to come up with a class, rather than a vaguely humanitarian, solution to the problem: the immigrants are workers and are doubly oppressed, as proletarians and as foreigners.

On 16 September the SI Cobas organised a national demonstration in solidarity with the immigrants and refugees. We distributed this leaflet: (international-communist-party.org/English/TheCPart/TCP_002#FirstCongress).

9) *What are some of the potential weaknesses of the SI Cobas? Any suggestions on how to deal with these potential weaknesses?*

The main questions were covered in our speech made at the First SI Cobas Congress, referred to above.

B) QUESTIONS REGARDING PARTY AND TRADE UNIONS IN THE USA

10) *While in the USA the situation of the unions is radically different, are there any lessons to be learned from the experiences of the SI Cobas for militants in the United States who want to build class struggle unions and connect this with the struggle for a Communist programme? Are there any developments in the class struggle here that have caught your attention?*

Communists do not pretend that the various forms within which the class struggle finds expression should conform to a fixed pattern. The history of class trade unionism has shown that the types of organization that most lend themselves to leading the working class against the bosses' State are the ones to be preferred, thus those open to all workers, independently of their ideas, political beliefs, party membership and religious faith. For the same reason are to be prefigured industrial trade unions as compared to those of a particular trade; those of a category as compared to those of a particular firm; and national as opposed to local ones. The vast majority of the base unions in Italy apply, or attempt to apply, these organizational models.

On the history of the American workers' movement we are publishing a long study in our English review Communist Left the 5th instalment of which will appear in the forthcoming issue. The general conclusion of this study confirms what the American working class has often lacked in its history is not trade unions, and examples of great mobilizations and bravery, but a communist party which is, 1) firmly founded on the uncorrupted doctrine of revolutionary Marxism, 2) which is committed to tactics which are intransigently anti-opportunist, and which, 3) lives according to a corresponding type of internal organization which is centralised, fraternal and anti-personalistic.

C) QUESTIONS REGARDING PARTY AND TRADE UNIONS

11) *In the USA many who identify with the Communist Left take a hard-line anti-union stance and argue that all unions inevitably become integrated into the state. The ICP, regarding the SI Cobas, takes a different stance. How did you come to this political conclusion?*

It is true that we have witnessed, since the end of the nineteenth century, the progressive submission of the trade unions to bourgeois ideology, to the nation and to the capitalist states, to the point that they participated in disciplining proletarians in two world wars and the defense of national capital in both peacetime and war. But this process, even if it has now become irreversible for many of the large existing trade unions, which have become virtually institutionalized as organs of the bourgeoisie, does not detract from the imperative necessity of workers' defense against the growing pressure from the ruling class; this will lead to the rebirth of new trade unions freed from bourgeois conditioning. And in fact, we are seeing this rebirth. Whether they succeed in maintaining their independence will depend on the balance of forces between the classes and the ability of capitalism to continue to hand out a few corrupting crumbs – something which today seems ever more unlikely.

12) *What kind of political work does the ICP do within the SI Cobas? How does the organization work to politicize workers within the union?*

This is the authentic Marxist position on the trade unions, summarized to the extreme.

The economic struggle is a necessary defensive and spontaneous response of those who sell their labor power: given the balance of forces between capitalists, who monopolize the means of production, and the destitute proletarians, if the latter stopped defending the level of wages and of working hours they would soon be reduced to conditions lower than those necessary for their own physical subsistence.

Since it soon became evident that this was not a matter of a dispute between capitalist and worker as individual citizens, but a clash between the opposing interests of two classes within society, from the very beginning trade union type organizations arose with the aim of defending more or less vast groups of workers.

These working class associations arose spontaneously, not through the will and intervention of a political party. The process by which the Marxist communist party, possessor of the doctrine and program of the working class, and the trade unions were born and developed was of no short duration, and though it happened side by side, it was not simultaneous as regards time and place. Over the course of the years there have often been situations in which the trade union movement and working class combativeness extended itself greatly on the level of economic demands, but there was minimal response to the communist party's directives within the class.

To anticipate revolutionary or communist trade

unions, as trade unions composed only of revolutionaries or communists, is to ignore the real historical revolutionary process. In the course of the transition from capitalist society to communism, that's to say in the period when the dictatorship is exercised by the party, the wage-earning class abolishes itself. Where there are trade unions there is no communism, and vice-versa. The trade union emerges as and remains a product of bourgeois mercantile society and remains subsumed within it, with many of its defects.

It is only when directed by the communist party that the trade union, functioning as a transmission belt between the party and the class in general, becomes a powerful and indispensable instrument for the revolutionary overthrow of bourgeois power; and, after the seizure of power by the proletariat, for the reorganization of production and the distribution of goods.

How the communist party relates to the trade union movement has been definitively outlined by Marx: 1871, London Conference of First International (www.international-communist-party.org/BasicTexts/English/IWMA.htm#Resolution_1871): «*Considering, that against this collective power of the propertied classes the working class cannot act, as a class, except by constituting itself into a political party, distinct from, and opposed to, all old parties formed by the propertied classes; That this constitution of the working class into a political party is indispensable in order to ensure the triumph of the social revolution and its ultimate end – the abolition of classes; That the combination of forces which the working class has already effected by its economic struggles ought at the same time to serve as a lever for its struggles against the political power of landlords and capitalists. The Conference recalls to the members of the International: That in the militant state of the working class, its economic movement and its political action are indissolubly united*».

In *What is To Be Done* (1901), Lenin wrote that «*Social-Democratic consciousness could only be brought to the workers from without. «The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness, i.e., the conviction that it is necessary to combine in unions, fight the employers, and strive to compel the government to pass necessary labor legislation, etc.*».

The Communist Left, 1957, *The Fundamentals of Revolutionary Communism* (international-communist-party.org/BasicTexts/English/57Fundam.htm): «*Syndicalists are actually far removed from Marxist determinism, and the interaction which occurs between the economic and political spheres is a dead letter to them. Since they are individualist and voluntarist, they see revolution as an act of force which*

can only take place after an impossible act of consciousness. As Lenin demonstrated in *What is To Be Done?* they turn Marxism on its head. They treat consciousness and will as though they came from the inner-self, from the 'person', and thus, in one deft movement, they sweep away bourgeois State, class divisions, and class psychology. Since they are unable to understand the inevitable alternative – capitalist dictatorship or communist dictatorship – they evade the dilemma in the only way that is historically possible: by re-establishing the former».

Therefore the specific and principal task of the party within the union is not to politicize workers. The communist party does not work to make the trade union a watered-down version of itself, nor, in the revolutionary process, does the party dissolve itself and blend in with the trade union.

The communist party, from outside, with the support of the communist fraction within the trade unions, which is composed of the minority of communists among the militants and members of the union, comes to conquer its leadership. The working class, as an army, is already organized in the trade unions: the party sets out to lead this army; first in its defensive economic struggle, and then, when the historical situation allows it, in its political and offensive struggle.

The guidelines for practical behavior that the party advocates inside the trade union, on how best to defend itself in a particular situation, entail no contradiction with the party's task of reorganizing the forces of the proletarian class towards the general and vaster end of the struggle for communism.

Propagandizing the party's general positions, the diffusion of its press, manifestos, invitations to public conferences, takes place, as in every other environment, but not at the same time as its trade union organizational work.

Only in this sense is "connecting class struggle unions with the struggle for a communist program" conceivable.

Some party comrades are militating within SICobas (as in other rank-and-file trade unions) and observing discipline to it: they bring their energy to bear as members and as communist sympathizers. Being known and respected, and openly declaring their allegiance to the international communist party, they regularly make the party's point of view known within the trade union with respect to the struggle under way, denouncing any possible strategic errors and indicating the best way to obtain the hoped-for results. They perform the organizational and propaganda work of the trade union: being present on picket lines, distributing the union's flyers, building links, and editing and distributing press releases.

For Contact:

www.international-communist-party.org
icparty@interncommparty.org

The Party's Postal Addresses:

- ICP Editions
c/o 96 Bold Street
Liverpool L1 4HY
UK
- Associazione La Sinistra Comunista
Cas.Postale 1157
50121 Firenze
Italy

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