

From the Archive: The Way Forward in North Africa and the Middle East

Theses by Balazs Nagy, January 2011

Workers International To Rebuild the Fourth International

Biased, fragmentary and very incomplete as the media reports are, some things are clear:

1. These movements are desperately short of revolutionary leadership. The long years of ruthless dictatorship have strangled even the more or less petty-bourgeois parties. There is no sign even of any bourgeois leadership independent of the ruling authorities, apart from groups and individuals tied to the dictators whom the workers have thrown out.

2. We offer the following considerations to Tunisian, Egyptian Libyan and other groups in Europe and by any means available to people in the countries affected. Workers in those countries are in a real state of confusion, not knowing what to do or how to do it. In general what they want is real democracy.

3. Indeed, that is not a bad place to start. But before thinking about what to do and how to do it, first a few words about the general situation. There is no doubt that this is a revolution, or rather several revolutions. Now, a revolution is a whole process, more or less long, and we are just at the start. That is the first thing we must explain to these workers who clearly believe those who tell them that it is already over. They have got rid of the dictators, but these were merely the personification of a whole economic and social system – imperialism – as it exists in these countries. To maintain its domination almost unchanged (in a different form

from the old colonial regime the workers long since rejected) imperialism has succeeded, with the help of reformists and the Stalinist bureaucracy, in turning these young independent states into military dictatorships and medieval monarchies by delegating its direct power of oppression to native political regimes. In its first phase the revolution has thrown out the dictators in two countries and started the same battle in many others (Yemen, Libya, Algeria, etc.). But in these first two countries, the revolution is now marking time. The politico-economic regime remains more or less intact and is preparing, at this moment, to demobilise, push back and repress the workers. It dare not go too far in the direction of bloody repression because it is weakened and does not yet feel strong enough. Soldiers would probably refuse to fire on the people. The army's apparent neutrality, as the fruit of this uncertainty, forces the generals in power to negotiate with the workers over their demands. The situation is a little different in Tunisia but remains essentially the same.

4. In this situation workers should push forward with their desire to achieve democracy. In continuing the revolution in that way and by concretising their demands, they can transform into facts their obvious vigilance and their distrust of the new people on power – both expressed loud and clear not least by their determination to stay put where they mobilised their movements. But all that is very fragile. If they are demobilised, it would certainly mean the first step towards a defeat and the re-installation of a new dictatorship, possibly veiled for a time.

5. We should propose to them that they continue their movement towards real democracy – a battle that is not even half won yet. Progress in this the only guarantee against a turn backwards in the situation: if you do not go forward you are condemned to retreat. The general slogan should be the conquest and strengthening of real democracy based on winning and securing democratic rights, as well as on the organisation

of the movement.

6. We can only sketch several essential points of a democratic programme which workers in those countries themselves, their political and trade union organisations, would need to work out in detail.

a. Immediately lift the state of emergency which has been in force for many years in all these countries (in Egypt, the new – military – authorities have only promised to lift it in 6 months time!)

b. Besides that it is important to demand and secure freedom of speech and of the press; freedom of assembly, freedom for workers to organise together democratically and, finally, freedom to demonstrate. At the moment the masses have spontaneously exercised these rights, but it is necessary to guarantee and codify them.

c. Complete and total separation of the church and the state (of all churches)

d. Immediate freedom for all political prisoners (already started in Egypt)

These are the immediate measures that directly flow from the current situation.

Beyond that, it is important to make progress towards complete democratic freedom for the working masses in the towns and the countryside. For this, political democracy must go hand-in-hand with economic democracy.

1. It is vitally important for the life of the country to nationalise the factories, mines and banks, particularly those owned by foreign capital.

2. One fundamental democratic measure is a radical agrarian reform, with the re-distribution of land to the poor farmers and their co-operatives without compensation to

the present owners. This is the very bedrock of democracy in the countryside and at the same time it breaks the power of the big landed proprietors who are pillars of support for the dictatorship, as well as of those leaders currently in power. All the generals in Egypt, like Mubarak and his family, are big landed proprietors, and the same is true elsewhere.

3. Democratic rights for workers at their workplace, codified in progressive social legislation (collective bargaining, defined working times, the right to strike, unemployment benefits, etc.)
4. Freedom to form trade unions and trade union rights. At the same time democratisation of existing trade unions, holding fresh elections to renew them..
5. Progressive social legislation for all workers (sickness insurance, laws protecting workers' housing, etc.)
6. Confiscation of all the material goods of the cronies of dictators already fallen and yet to fall: land, factories, buildings, businesses, wealth stolen from the people and monopolised during the decades of dictatorship.

But the most urgent task of the day, and therefore the main slogan, is – organise working people

1. So that they can make progress towards real democracy, guarantee the freedom which has been won and achieve all their demands, the most determined and conscious and therefore the most active elements must set up their political party, a workers' party, a sort of Labour Party. The job of this party from the very moment it is set up would be to work out and promote in practice the whole democratic programme, raising it in all workers' movements.

2. All of these movements in the country should unite in a political process aimed at setting up a new regime in line with the wishes and desires of workers. It would be a terrible mistake to put faith in the promise of elections. The whole country (all the countries), the whole of the working people, have rejected the dictators' bogus constitution. They need a new one, a constitution of the working people. They need to fix and codify the new order, i.e. the most highly democratic measures, rules and laws, which alone conform to the will of the people and its dynamism. They need also to prevent the possessing class, the pillars of the dictatorship, from cheating the people through a fraudulent electoral farce. Therefore workers need to prepare and hold a Constituent Assembly of the country. It is for the creation of that type of assembly that elections should be held, to select delegates drawn from candidates of the truly democratic parties, first and foremost of the workers' party.

3. Both to run the the elections – and to make sure they are run properly – and to prepare the Assembly to bring about their demands and under popular supervision, workers urgently need to form local committees of action and supervision in the workplace and in the local areas. In the countryside, one vitally important task for such committees would be to push forward agrarian reform and land re-distribution energetically. Poor farmers and agricultural labourers would form the majority of these committees in the countryside. Everywhere these committees, with the participation of housewives, should keep an eye on prices at markets and in the shops. This is all the more necessary since the international bourgeoisie could strangle and starve the infant workers' democracy through present and future speculation in cereals and other agricultural products.

4. One extremely important political task for workers and their organisations is a radical and immediate break with national isolation. A main condition for the success of their movement is to bring about an effective and living alliance
 1. with the other peoples engaged in similar movements in North Africa and and the Middle East. The people of Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Algeria, can already form permanent contacts and synchronise their demands and activities through their movements and political parties (once the latter have been established).
 2. also with the workers in the countries of Europe and their organisations, demanding their solidarity and collaboration to establish a broad united front against the forces of restoration in their countries and internationally.
5. Separately, I would like to make a particular point about the enormous importance of the following problem: Fraternisation with the army soldiers, especially in Egypt, has already born fruit fruit in the apparent neutrality of the army. But this is very fragile. It is necessary to continue and extend this fraternisation (which is a very important task in the other countries too), with the aim of forming stable contacts so that ultimately, at a stage which cannot be determined from here, soldiers' committees can be set up, especially since the soldiers are workers in uniform, or very often farmers willing to discuss a programme for the re-distribution of the land.

Here in broad terms and hastily sketched, are a a few points, hints rather, to serve as the basis of an programme for these movements. The determination and the dynamism are there. But

about the aims of their struggle and the means available to them almost total confusion reigns. That is where we should at least try to help.

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Inside [this issue](#):

of Workers' International Journal we reproduce a selection of the tributes paid to our founding secretary Balazs Nagy (Michel Varga) by present and former comrades.

Freedom for the Peoples of Africa! No to intervention!

*By **Balazs Nagy** February 2013 (First published in Workers International Journal No. 1)*

It would be very wrong to judge France's military intervention in Mali on the basis of the deafening and unanimous press and television chorus. They think this act of war was inevitable and celebrate it. It galvanised them unhesitatingly and pompously to laud President Hollande as a great leader – the very same politician they used to dismiss as flabby. But it would be even worse to put any trust this “leader's”

own pronouncements, or those of his aides and their allies in Europe and across the world.

And yet ... you cannot actually blame Hollande and co. directly for the long-drawn-out deterioration in Mali and the region, culminating in the present utter decay. But nor can you exonerate them either, since as loyal inheritors of the whole mess they took it on entirely and without a second thought. And in that specific sense the intervention was indeed as inevitable as the – joyful but perhaps over-optimistic – claims of “victory” and a job well done.

Despite the – to say the least – simplistic presentation of the situation in the Sahara and the Sahel as goodies vs. baddies, reality turns out to be incomparably more complex. Understanding it requires a brief review the more outstanding aspects of the historical development which prepared, shaped and conditioned the political and social scene – and the actors – which led to the current situation.

A glance at history

For a start, the immense revolutionary wave which swept across Europe in the second half and aftermath of World War II generally speaking hit the African continent a dozen or so years later. Within Europe, the leaderships of working class parties did everything they could to channel revolutionary movements into shoring up the bourgeoisie through conventional democracies. In contrast, French (and other) imperialisms had been deeply shaken and weakened by the war and were unable to withstand the colonial peoples' irresistible independence movement. After a shaky early start, first Tunisia and Morocco (in 1956) and then the Algerian people won independence in 1962 after eight years of gruelling armed struggle. The revolutionary shock wave travelled south, and De Gaulle, more clear-sighted than other leaders of an exhausted possessing class, was forced to accept the obvious need to re-vamp old-style imperialism and grant independence to a series of

countries in the region – almost all of them by 1960 (Senegal, Mauretania, Mali, Burkina-Faso, formerly Upper Volta, Niger, Chad, Ivory Coast – Guinea from 1958).

Hopes of a promising new start roused and inspired these countries. Borrowing from Algeria and even Tunisia in their search for a path towards a system leading to socialism, Guinea, Senegal and Mali all chose more or less the same route. After Bourguiba in Tunisia and Ben Bella in Algeria, Sekou Toure in Guinea and Modibo Keita in Mali and their governments carried out a series of nationalisations of property of the colonial power and its nationals. On this basis they initiated a policy of taking charge of their respective countries. Distrustful of the continually obstructive colonial power, they turned squarely towards the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe for desperately needed support and assistance. Senegal, too, worked towards a kind of socialism, but its president L. Senghor, whose attachment to the republican bourgeoisie in France was well-known, rejected the orientation towards the USSR, preferring a kind of panafricanism and so-called “third worldism”. The national struggle, first for independence and then for this take-over by a kind of “anti-feudal” socialism by Modibo Keita in Mali was particularly powerfully nourished by young people, who had previously languished in the kind of semi-slavery affecting a quarter of the population of the Sahel.

But these initial hopes and efforts and fruitful initiatives quickly came to grief on obstacles born of these countries’ extreme poverty and the cruel shortages of resources imposed on them by the former colonial power. On the other hand, the inadequacies and material shortages in the so-called “socialist” countries, trapped in the impoverishing constraints of “socialism in one country” and hampered by an oppressive Stalinism increasingly in debt to its capitalist creditors, meant that they could not provide the necessary assistance even if they had wanted to. Far from it. And so,

disappointed and discouraged, most of these Arab and African "socialist reformers" turned back to the former coloniser and towards a policy of oppression. This was all the easier since their origins and education separated them from the working masses, and in any case they could model themselves on how it was done in Eastern Europe. Not everybody can boast the strength of character or consistency of view of a Keita, a Lumumba or a Sangare. Nor is it a co-incidence that these three were all assassinated.

As for the leaders of the powerful workers' movement of the day in Europe, they did everything they could to bog these movements down in the swamp of deepening degradation, particularly since they everywhere resolutely drew this entire workers movement into the false and fatal path of "parliamentary cretinism" and collaboration with the bourgeoisie.

But from the outset, this bourgeoisie went in completely the opposite direction, determined to maintain and even reinforce its prerogatives and arrangements as a class. Forced to abandon the colonial methods of its imperial system, it adapted to the new situation through the bonapartist rule of De Gaulle. Run in secrecy by his secretary, Jacques Foccart, the General's shadow organisations worked feverishly to re-organise France's political, administrative and military networks and adapt them to the new political configuration. And so the wild beast of colonial imperialism clothed itself in the post-colonial lamb's skin of "co-operation". And that is how a whole system was forged, the sadly famous "Françafrique" which (under all Presidents!) continued the old imperialist practices under the cover of close collaboration with the African countries and lightly disguised within the forms required by the "independence" of the respective states.

A whole series of military coups very quickly expressed and made manifest the limits of "independence" in most of the African countries concerned. Even in countries which had been

better prepared by a long struggle, the dissident colonels Ben Ali and Boumediene resolutely put an end to the democratic scruples of Bourguiba and Ben Bella. Everywhere the military putschists installed a dictatorship resting on an oversized army and a single party, African regimes corresponding to the "Françafrique" system and symmetrically replicating it. Almost everywhere, independent regimes of the older generation of more radical bourgeois fighters gave way to corrupt regimes of dictators. Where the old guard did stay in power, their degeneration became inevitable.

This series of African countries was independent but had been impoverished and systematically, mercilessly, plundered in the course of the long preceding period of colonial rule. In the way of things, "co-operation" between them and a highly-developed great power like France simply maintained and exacerbated the monstrous economic and social inequality between such "partners". A hungry wolf in a sheep-fold comes to mind. It is very characteristic that from the end of World War II onwards the straitjacket that was the Franc zone tied the African countries to close dependence on France. On 25 December 1945, a special Franc of the African Financial Community (CFA) was created for use in these countries (including some further south) and its value was set outrageously low by the French government: 1 CFA Franc was only worth 0.02 metropolitan Francs. (N.B. following Sekou Touré of Guinea, Keita of Mali also took his country out of this Franc zone system in 1963. But faced with economic difficulties, he had to re-join it, shortly before he was overthrown).

These decisions to leave were fully justified, since the CFA Franc embodied the crying inequality between these economies – often kept excessively backward – and bourgeois France, one of the most highly-developed countries. Trade imposed by this "benevolent" France provided the latter with agricultural products and raw materials of all kinds at derisory prices,

even below world prices which themselves are traditionally low. Conversely, her own industrial products were sold off virtually risk-free at guaranteed high prices on these markets. So this system not only maintained flagrant inequality, but intensified it intolerably. Need we add that this imposed and legalised inequality has continued right up to the present? To be more accurate, it was pushed by the Balladur government (under President Mitterrand in 1994) to the point of an explosion when the CFA Franc was devalued by 50%! The French bourgeoisie carefully retained this shamefully super-exploitative rate when the euro was introduced: in 2011, 1 euro equalled 655.957 Francs CFA. And they insult our ears with fairly stories about the end of imperialism!

In this re-vamped framework of imperialism, these countries were put under pressure – both directly and through successive dictatorships – to abandon dreams of progress. But worse was to come. Within the modified political configuration of the imperialist system, they still had to maintain their traditional role as providers of very cheap agricultural products and raw materials. Open, violent force had been replaced with sly economic constraint. In this sense, these countries objectively contributed, kicking and screaming, to the ability of a thus reinvigorated world bourgeoisie to take on and sustain its “thirty glorious years”. And so the relative “social peace” that prevailed in the course of that expansion secured by that same bourgeoisie’s pact with powerful (reformist and Stalinist) bureaucracies, which kept the workers movement under lock and key, was largely paid for by super-exploitation of the former colonies. It led inevitably to colossal indebtedness on the part of these poor “independent” countries, over which even the bourgeoisie’s various nerve centres shed copious crocodile tears.

Economic, social and political deterioration

The situation got even worse when the bourgeoisie set its neo-liberal agents to work to reduce these debts overall. Starting

in the early 1980s, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank forced all the countries concerned to adopt massive “structural adjustments” in the form of drastic budget and expenditure cuts and extensive privatisations in return for “aid” in reducing these debt levels. French (and other) firms bought up a great number of local enterprises for peanuts, while huge companies like Total, Areva and a multitude of others made themselves at home. Catastrophic results quickly followed. (It is a remarkable fact that what is going on in Europe at present is not some novelty arising out of the crisis; the Latin Americans had painful experience of it even before the Africans).

In Africa, too, the first victims were the education and health systems, whose often remarkable initial achievements had been a source of legitimate pride to these young nations. Ever tighter budgetary constraints laid waste to these promising beginnings.

Merciless cuts in expenditure also deprived agriculture – bankrupt state farms as much as independent farmers ruined by lack of access to credit – of all aid. Across Africa, already low rural wages saw a general fall of 30% in those years. Mali’s agriculture, for example, which at the end of the 1980s contributed 67% of the country’s exports through cotton production, saw the latter smashed up and the peasantry crushed. Moreover, from the 1960s onwards a series of terrible droughts hit the whole region, resulting in a regular desert encroachments. The funds needed for big irrigation networks and effective water supplies were cruelly lacking, as were the cheap credits essential for small farmers.

These calamities led on the one hand to the terrible famines which periodically descend on the region and on the other to the massive rural exodus which drives tens and hundreds of thousands of people into the terribly overpopulated slums in the cities. The inhabitants of Nouakchott in Mauretania, extremely poor as they are, describe the slums in “their”

shanty-town as "rubbish dumps". As for famines, the hypocrisy of successive food-aid campaigns launched and supported by the bourgeoisie and beloved of right-thinking petit-bourgeois barely masks neither the formers' direct responsibility for these disasters and their organic inability to do much about them, nor the latter's deferential complicity. Having said that, no one would want to prevent good souls from helping the starving, but reality puts us on guard against this rather unreliable substitute which in no way attacks the root of the problem.

Chronic unemployment also affects the whole population, which has undergone geometrical growth in the period in question. By 1989 it exceeded 22% of the active population, including more than half of young people in Algeria, for all that this country is better off than Mali or other countries in the Sahara or the Sahel. A significant proportion of the population has persistently sought a way out of this social catastrophe in emigration. This explains the very high number of Malians (2 million) living in France around 1990, as many as a quarter of the whole population of the country! But vigilant France kept a close watch on the situation, and Charles Pasqua – a worthy successor to "Françafrique's" organiser Foccart – started forcibly repatriating hundreds of thousands of Africans. His successors, also under all Presidents, have virtually institutionalised this into a regular procedure. Following the regular expulsions organised by Guéant, Manuel Valls has most recently filled an aeroplane with several dozen immigrants. A veil is drawn over how they carry this out. Be that as it may, journalists estimate that there are currently still 120,000 Malians living in France. But who knows exactly how many of these working class pariahs there are who have escaped utter poverty over there only to be hounded and persecuted here for the lack of an all-important piece of paper?

While the people – especially the young – are fleeing the

country, businesses large and small, French and other, are settling in there as a kind of Eldorado to exploit the natural wealth of the country and its cheap labour. Apart from the odd kick-back, these businesses *repatriate the whole of their profits* and operate above the law. According to studies by comrades at *Survie* (a French NGO founded in 1984 to fight hunger and corruption in the “third world”), France’s trade surplus with Mali was over 300 million euros in 2010-2012, five times more than the derisory public “aid” she grants to that country!

Alongside these destructive activities went a long drawn-out process of reducing these states to subservience, adapting them more and more to the needs of capitalists in the French “protector”. Metropolitan agents of “Françafrique” carefully guided this convulsive change by remote-control. Enriched local cliques devoured each other in order to establish, in an endless series of coups, which one would seize control of a state which itself was reduced little by little to its repressive apparatus. Having laid its hands on the manna from the “co-operation” community and other so-called “development” loans, the winning group would set out to fulfil its role as a substitute for the former colonial power. As poverty grew in these states, their role was more and more reduced to one essential: securing, preserving and reinforcing power in order to consolidate France’s economic and political position and influence while maintaining a repressive regime against working people. Those currently holding power, such as the puppets Deby (Chad), Compoaré (Burkina Faso) and Touré (Mali) have nothing in common with the independent figures of the first generation of leaders. They are even the opposite of someone like Keita, for example. The most important, if not the only, means they use to achieve their objectives has been and is the army. Now, the rapid overall worsening of the situation has provoked a series of coups in which the impoverished masses’ role of detonator has become increasingly visible, reflecting the economic and social deterioration that

has been eating away.

Unpicking the tangled politics of North Africa

Above all we must reject the simplistic way the interventionist power presents the context and conditions in this part of Africa. Even if – and this goes without saying – it is so constantly and noisily parroted in the media that certain political tendencies and individuals, while uttering reservations about “neo-colonial ulterior motives”, nevertheless give this military action guarded support as a necessary “pre-requisite”. These include the French Communist Party parliamentary deputy François Asensi (*L’Humanité* newspaper 18 January 2013) who swallows the intervention whole but hastens to add: “...France must state clearly her aim to rebuild a democratic state”. He actually seems to think that is possible on the basis of this intervention!

Despite all the resounding statements and those who are taken in by them, there is no way that trends and programmes in this region of Africa, or the political formations and groupings to which they give rise, can be reduced to isolated groups of Islamic fanatics on the one hand and loyal government supporters on the other. Reality is much richer and more complicated. Before even attempting to sketch a few lines, with no claim at all to presenting the whole picture, it is enough to describe the interventionists and their accomplices as the famous bull in a china shop, especially given the brutal military aggression and lack of concern for “details” that are innate and natural characteristics of so-called “neo-colonial” imperialism.

As described above, after a very short period of national awakening in the aftermath of World War II, successive economic setbacks in the newly independent countries turned into a sustained social regression. The vast majority of the popular classes (workers, farmers, stock-breeders, pastoralists, etc.) have become considerably poorer,

particularly the many peoples and ethnic groups at the bottom of society. Their degradation provided the ground for the astonishing explosion of a whole series of programmes and the most varied social and national movements. It is impossible to list them all here, but in general they rested on previous currents and movements, some of them going back to the nineteenth century. Several great traditions of thought and social movements have remained alive to this very day. In the majority of cases, social and national demands have overlapped inextricably. The roots of some movements are to be found in the distant past.

The European workers' movement of the twentieth century in particular inspired by example a powerful trade-unionism among workers in these countries, as well as the appearance of labour and communist parties. The present-day UGTT union confederation in Tunisia, which opposes the Salafists, is one of the fruits of this co-operation whose powerful resurgence can be considered as an important opposition factor to the government of religious people, but also of a positive political change. We also know that Sekou Touré of Guinea (secretary of the CGT federation of black Africa in 1948!) rested on the Guinean trade unions for support in the national independence movement and spiced up his conceptions with socialism of a kind. The Algerian independence movement was also in large part influence by the French workers' movement.

It would therefore be unforgivable to look down on the movements for the social and national liberation of these countries from the heights of some imagined European supremacy. Often centuries-old traditions and a wealth of ancient experience also nourish the struggles of workers and people in Africa and its northern part. These movements exist, despite the extremely difficult situation they are in because they pay the price of the backwardness imposed upon their countries, suffering from isolation and repression which are bound to mark the immediate future of the region.

This social and national situation was essentially what we had in mind when we published the press release from the comrades at "Survie" in issue no. 1 of our journal, expressing the desire to "look at certain important aspects of the rebellion in a different light". Of course the comrades from "Survie" not only bravely condemn the intervention, but are also well-known for having brought together a mass of precious facts in relation to this part of Africa. But in the indignation which informs their timely and correct condemnation of the intervention, we believe they erred in losing sight, behind the inflated bubble of religious fanatics, of precisely these movements and their national and social base. But that is precisely the direction in which to look for the key to the situation, and a way out, and not at all the "armies" of corrupt regimes or their UN protectors. The "Survie" comrades talk about French intervention as "significant pressure on the Malian authorities" as if the latter actually existed independently of the former. They also say France "must respect UN resolutions as soon as possible".

But in the first place, rather than acting as "pressure", French intervention is **necessary to save** these "authorities". And not only the Malian authorities, but all the rest in the region, too! The comrades should not just see French (state) authorities, but also those of these countries, these African states, as the agents and representatives of a quite definite social class – the bourgeoisie. With the significant difference that the latter do not exist and act on behalf of their own bourgeoisie, since even the feeble shreds of that native class are merely a subaltern appendix of the metropolitan (and world) bourgeoisie. These states, therefore, exist and act as the local organ of the latter, even though they are endowed with the fig-leaf of independence.

From the 1980s onwards, when the capitalist-imperialist system started moving over to so-called ultra-liberalism, this remarkably intensified the exploitation of these countries and

revived all the traditions of struggle, and their direct and indirect heirs started moving. The great liberating risings of 2011 which journalists called “Arab revolutions” are also manifestations of these struggles, at the same time acting as a significant precursor to the European and world revolution that is gestating. The outstanding role of the UGTT union in the Tunisian revolution and the overthrow of the regime – even though it was itself contaminated by the latter – is well known. Less well known, perhaps, is the decisive action the Egyptian working class developed in its revolution, organising strikes and renewing its unions. Today its sporadic but incessant struggles constitute a significant element in defending and advancing that revolution. As for the UGTT, we can all see its decisive participation in the current mobilisation.

While the “Arab spring” is an integral component of the European revolution currently gestating and undeniably contributed to the still stuttering awakening of young people in Europe, it also lived on in the convulsive but still disorganised movements of the despoiled and deracinated masses of that region, of which islamist movements form a large but unfortunately distorted and adulterated part. Be that as it may, certain ancient and modern political movements and organisations have raised their heads again, often inspired by the European workers’ movement of former days, but also by their own old traditions, and – closer to home – by the revolutionary overturns of 2011.

“A people which oppresses another cannot emancipate itself” (Engels)

For centuries the immense Sahara and the Sahel regions of north and west Africa have constantly been disturbed by movements and rebellions of this or that nation or ethnic group living there. Its artificial division into separate countries by colonial powers only served, in the majority of cases, to reinforce national oppression by devastating and

wrenching apart ethnic or national units. During independence, some of these peoples, like the Kabyles in Algeria and their Berber relatives, the Touareg in Mali (and more or less everywhere) hoped to achieve national recognition in return for their participation in the anti-colonial struggle. But right from the outset, all of the newly independent states, based on the primacy of the dominant ethnic group (or tribe), refused to allow any concessions at all, still less any form of autonomy, to ethnic or national minorities. This serious defect left a profound scar on the democratic awakening of the bourgeois revolutions which shook these countries, even those who ventured furthest into a kind of proto-socialism. We do not have the space here to examine all these national movements in detail. Nevertheless the most important ones must be mentioned.

Categorically turned down by the new Algerian government, the Kabyle people started a prolonged struggle for autonomy. Not only was this refused from the very start, but the Kabyle people suffered repeated bloody repressions and a national oppression which continues to this very day.

Far away from there, in another region steeped in prolonged national-ethnic struggle, Casamance in Senegal has battled against oppression. The region has been demanding autonomy ever since Senegal achieved independence. However, despite L.Senghor's evasive promises, it has not been forthcoming. The region went into open armed struggle in the early 1980s, when Senegal was trying to ward off a massive debt crisis (almost 2 million dollars). The cultivation of ground nuts appeared to offer a way out, but when the government assigned land to colonists from the north for this, the inhabitants of Casamance, traditionally rice-growers, revolted. Ever since, cease-fires have alternated with fresh confrontations and the conflict has persisted, particularly since the Senegalese state, exactly like all the others also in its constantly growing poverty, has shown itself less and less able to

resolve the situation and has even imposed further burdens on the region.

When one considers the vast Sahara and Sahel territory from the point of view of the many different peoples inhabiting it, what becomes evident is a profound interweaving of the social degradation of the peoples – often linked to sudden changes in their mode of life also imposed by the neglect of nature – and the subordinate or even oppressed character of their ethnic or national lives. History teaches us that those who try to separate them from social difficulties, or with more reason to oppose them, have paid a high price.

For a long time now the nomadic Saharoui of the western Sahara have undergone a veritable calvary. While they struggled for autonomy, Franco's Spain would not allow them any rights. In 1975, following a call by King Hassan of Morocco, hundreds of thousands joined a "green march" to invade what they thought was "Moroccan Sahara". In reaction to this the Polisario Front, founded in 1973 by young Saharoui students, proclaimed the "Democratic Arab Saharoui Republic" under Algerian protection. The Algerian and Moroccan armies have confronted each other in a rivalry that has nothing to do with the interests of any peoples whatsoever. Algeria has protected the new Saharoui republic since Spain left in 1976, whereas she has never allowed Kabylia or the Touareg movement the slightest degree of autonomy.

Following a cease-fire in 1991, Morocco has controlled 80% of this territory, leaving 20% to the Polisario Front. But despotic King Hassan has installed a 2,500km (!) security belt called the "Moroccan Wall". (This is the nth "wall" built to contain some people to disfigure the world and bring the powerful into disrepute!) As for the new Saharoui Republic, what with recognition by a few countries and rejection by the majority of others – including the UN! – it has no legal existence at all.

The Touregs' problem is even more complex. Because of the arbitrary and fantastic division of this great region by the great colonial powers, the almost 2 million Touareg find themselves artificially split up between five different countries. They are just one of many peoples who, carved up between several countries, have no right to a legal existence and are often persecuted. When discussing them, one inevitably thinks of the Kurds or the Palestinians in the Middle East. If you want a shameful image of imperialist reality dragged down to the level of simple banality, then look no further. The Basques divided up between the north of Spain and the south of France might have a thing or two to say about this, or the Irish, with the north of their country still under the iron heel of Britain.

On the other hand, the break-up of several multi-national countries and the revival of virulent national feelings also testify to the growing contradiction between capitalism-imperialism and the facts of national existence. (To say nothing of the inability of the Stalinist bureaucracy to solve this problem in the former USSR and its criminal role in the break-up of several multi-national states it used to govern, like Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia).

Be that as it may, the Touareg people were among the losers in the post-war anti-imperialist wave of liberation. In a way, their fate contains just about all the problems of the national question in this part of the world in compressed form: – the capitalist nature of the states in which they live and the role played in this by religion, particularly Islam.

It is really remarkable that even the leaders of the first wave of bourgeois-democratic revolution just could not grasp this problem at all. And so as early as 1963 Modibo Keita severely repressed and Touareg revolt in Mali. He was helped by his Algerian colleague Ben Bella, who handed over to him the Touareg leaders who had fled to Algeria. One Touareg author wrote: "The thousands of deaths caused by repression

were met with general indifference”.

But we lack the space here to tell the full story of the many rebellions by this people, their lengthy negotiations with this or that state in the region, and the massacres and flights of thousands of their members which punctuate the life of these states which have degenerated into vassals of imperialism.

As a result of general economic decline and collapse and the consequent successive setbacks to the Touaregs' national struggles, they toughened up their behaviour and adopted a more radical attitude. All states in the area felt the effects of imperialist super-exploitation, but the Touareg people suffered it twice over (and they were not alone in that). Besides the dismantlement of services, there was no investment to assuage sufferings which were made greater by massive unemployment exacerbated as the introduction of lorries and the severity and frequency of drought put an end to caravans. Hundreds of thousands of them fled Mali and lived under extremely precarious conditions in Niger, Mauretania, Algeria, Burkin-Faso, etc.

As we know, after the overthrow of Ghadaffi, who enlisted many of them among his “protectors”, a significant number of these armed men returned to Mali. But this detachment did not start the armed struggle of the already strongly-radicalised Touaregs. All they did was to contribute a considerable force to a movement which had been present for a long time but, hardened by serial disappointments, was only waiting for the right opportunity. The extreme fragility of the Malian state, made worse by army Captain Sanogo's attempted coup fell apart, furnished the signal and the opportunity for attack. The “Azawad Liberation Movement”, formed some months previously, allied itself with armed islamist groups to bulk out its numbers. And so they were able quite rapidly to pulverise the Malian army and occupy the north of the country as far as the River Niger.

Of course this was a mistake, but a very understandable one, as the Touareg movement was very contaminated by its own islamist faction. Mistake though it is, this movement as a whole should not be confused with its islamist faction "Ansar Eddine", even if the latter has undoubtedly pushed the movement a long way in a radical direction. But it should never under any circumstances be identified with it, as French imperialism and its lackeys strive to do.

Contrary to all the claims of the propaganda machine, political islam – even the most radical kind – is not a recent foreign import to Africa. Even in the nineteenth century, locally-based islamists inspired great anti-colonial struggles. Exploited peoples sought refuge and consolation against all kinds of oppression in religion. Since Engels wrote *The Peasant War in Germany* we have known that religion serves to encourage and stimulate the resistance and struggle of oppressed classes when they are still insufficiently developed or – we may add – when their elder sister, the world working class, is on the back foot constantly.

If Islamism has in recent years – sometimes aggressively–taken the place of secular leaderships of social and national movements, it is a consequence of the considerable weakening and retreat of the international workers' movement. Over the last fifty years or so, the emphatic way social democratic parties have gone over from being supporters of the bourgeoisie to being its direct and settled political representatives has been one of the most outstanding features of this historic collapse. The other is the destruction of the Soviet Union and the dominant role played by the Stalinist bureaucracy played within it, followed by workers massively deserting communist parties and their inevitable retreat. A whole series of communist and non-communist parties and groups which used to lead social and national struggles have been marginalised across the world as a result. In their place, religious islamist movements have emerged from Afghanistan to

Morocco, by way of Palestine, Egypt, Tunisia, etc.

Obviously this “opium of the people” works like any other drug. While bringing temporary consolation and relief, it cannot cure the ailment but poisons the organism even further. The muslim religion (like any other) brings no improvements but on the contrary preserves the backward and desperate situation working people are in, as we see very clearly in Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Tunisia, too. Moreover, this religion contain within itself, as the cloud carries the thunderstorm, its radical Salafist wing with its medieval customs. The people of Tunisia have recently started to struggle even more powerfully against this “opium”, as have the people of Egypt. We should also note that there has recently been a significant internal split in the Touareg salafist group “Ansar Eddine”.

The situation is bound to get worse

Only recently forced to accept cuts in its material resources, the French army has become trapped in an inextricable tangle of intertwined difficulties which it cannot overcome. It is no coincidence that Hollande’s European and American allies have very parsimoniously calibrated their own symbolic rather than real “contributions”. They obviously have a better grasp of the implications and extent of their devastating setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan. They are more than happy to let the French bourgeoisie and its puppet Hollande have the more than dubious glory of pulling their shared chestnuts out of the fire. In fact the French “Socialist” Party has suddenly revealed itself to be the advance-guard not just of its “own” bourgeoisie but of world imperialism as a whole. Only recently the US vice-president conferred a metaphorical knighthood on Hollande, confirming him in this role with a lordly “well done!”

Obviously the forward patrols of world imperialism didn’t have a clue what they were getting into. Incredible but true: neither the army nor its political bosses had any idea of what

a simmering cauldron they were involving themselves in. Hollande kept saying they only wanted to stay in Mali a few days, then various unpleasant experiences made them change that to "... an indefinite period". It was brought home to these ardent interventionists that they would have to re-make the state and army, not just in Mali, but more or less across the whole region – a massive task far beyond the capacity of the French state.

The colossal expenditure such an undertaking entails massively exceeds the meagre resources of a French bourgeoisie mired in persistent crisis. There will be a growing contradiction between the no-doubt long-term financial cost of these involvements and their categorical refusal to allow even the slightest relief of the ever-increasing burdens placed on working people. Obviously, the latter will not tolerate the government making them bear not just the cost of the crisis, but also of the considerable expense of patching up the system oppressing their African brothers. If you believe the French Ministry of Defense (and their figures are almost certainly an under-estimate) the cost of the army alone up to 5 February 2013 is 60 million euros.

This will hardly scratch the monumental cost required by a situation of total breakdown. Everything has had to be re-created: all the machinery of administration, not to mention the health and education systems – all far beyond the reach of a French exchequer swamped and riddled by debt.

As for the army itself, it is quite unable to tackle even such priorities as safeguarding the civilian population. Journalists report several massive lynchings perpetrated by the depraved Malian army, protected by its French army "big brother".

These facts demonstrate not only the hatred and lust for revenge the country's ruling strata cherish for all Arabo-Berber peoples, but also the appalling values and moral

standards of the French army, which must have looked demurely away while these lynchings were being committed, as it did a few years earlier in Rwanda, so as not to notice the massacre of the Tutsi people. And as the Dutch UN Battalion did in former Yugoslavia, which let General Mladic's soldiers execute 7000 Bosnians in the town of Srebrenica without lifting a finger. Such are the execrable political and ethical standards of both these armies and the UN, swathed in hypocritical high-flown phrases.

There is not the slightest doubt that this intervention will get even more catastrophically bogged down than that in Afghanistan. The inevitable consequence will be that the situation in Europe and internationally will get even worse, with the recrudescence of an even fiercer international class struggle. For what is happening in and around Mali and concretely also in the mobilisation of working people in Tunisia and Egypt prefigures not only a considerable deterioration in their conditions of life but also, and above all, the mobilisation and emergence on the scene of masses of working people, broadening their activity and toughening up their struggle.

But when one reads the statements of those groups and parties which oppose French intervention, one is struck by their purely declamatory character. Of course given the massive number of dupes, the very fact that they condemn it at all is commendable, and we stand with them. But even when they resolutely condemn the military intervention, they confine themselves to verbal protest. To put it another way, almost all of these organisations (Communist Party, Left Party, Left Front, New Anti-Capitalist Party, etc.) adopt a position more or less clearly *opposed* to military intervention but steer well clear of stating the orientation or outcome they are *for*. I.e., these political formations adopt the profoundly negative attitude of rejection. At most, these comrades add a generalisation devoid of meaning, i.e. that what is needed is

to solve the (economic, social, national) problems these countries face. This great general truth is hardly brilliant in its originality, so much so that even the government has given up repeating it.

We need a clear orientation!

To tell the truth, most of these organisations and groups do point to what they think is a way forward. They say – indeed, often demand – that military intervention must be left to African states – Mali and her neighbours, under UN patronage. It is quite obvious that they think this would be a suitable solution since (and this is how shallow their thinking is) it would be a better fit with the African ethnic image and the sacrosanct authority of the UN. They are completely unperturbed by the fact that Hollande and his government have spent long months trying to achieve precisely that arrangement.

Such a “solution” amounts more or less to re-establishing the status-quo, i.e. the situation preceding the debacle of the Malian state and army. But trying to apply it without the French army is simply a bad joke, since the preceding state of affairs was precisely what brought about that debacle and ended up with the present disastrous situation. The French army intervened precisely in order to save the apparatus of the Malian state from complete collapse. Despite appearances, it was not directed against those Islamic terrorists. That pretext was blown up by propaganda to keep everybody happy. In truth they did it to shore up a native administrative apparatus in mortal danger – as it happened, from the Islamist attack. The delight the population of Mali showed and which was obligingly filmed by French TV was less at the arrival of a foreign French army than at getting rid of a cruel medieval dictatorship. To present it as enthusiasm for the arrival of a foreign army is to indulge in the same degree of mystification as the attempt to interpret the vote *against* Sarkozy as support *for* the plans of the Socialist Party.

So the French army stands there nakedly exposed as the only cement that can hold this feeble state together, or any of the others that share the same congenital weaknesses. In that sense it is not only the chief factor in that African Union, but also the only one that can put up any opposition and organise any resistance to its ineluctable decomposition. It is high time for the parties and groups and their leaders who speak in the name of the working class to break with the backward and grotesque way of thinking which takes African states as if they were an emanation of their peoples and formed a group by its nature independent of imperialism. Whereas in reality they form a quite specific – subaltern but essential – part of the mechanism of imperialism's world system, officially run by the omni-substitute, the UN.

The clear regression in these states in relation to fundamental problems of African society is the logical consequence and obvious indication of the manifest setback to the attempt by the bourgeoisie – even what were at first its most radical elements – to solve elementary tasks of the bourgeois revolution. The way these regimes are currently decomposing is a striking proof from the negative side of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution; specifically, that in our imperialist epoch the bourgeoisie of any country at all – even a backward one – is organically incapable of solving the tasks posed by such a revolution. Every orientation towards a so-called popular front, every policy of alliance with a wing of the bourgeoisie, has led to setbacks. That is the cruel lesson of events.

Thus, in the absence of a clear orientation towards the theory of permanent revolution and its application in order to mobilise the workers of the whole region, a catastrophic situation has got even worse even quicker. Indeed the choice put forward in the past by Rosa Luxemburg and taken up later by Trotsky: Either the working class succeeds in overthrowing capitalism and opening the road to socialism, or humanity will

fall back into barbarism – is today an immediate practical question.

In this respect, this part of Africa at least (like the Middle East) is a little ahead of Europe. That continent, too, is from now on confronted with the same direct choice. It is only the many and various reserves at her disposal which still retard the explosive maturing of the same historical dilemma, as well as the general lack of preparedness on the part of the workers' movement.

The working class in the region of Africa under discussion already has several political organisations, even if they are still weak and enjoy only minority support. But that can change quickly, not to mention the unions which, like the UGTT in Tunisia and in the big cities in the region, are sometimes powerful.

Without going into detail, there are a fair number and variety of organisations which described themselves as Marxist and/or working-class, and they have the capacity to work together for a united struggle in the region. The first pre-condition for such a struggle and for their own development is undoubtedly their ability to take fully into account the orientation offered by the permanent revolution and on that basis work out and apply democratic slogans for revolutionary change.

Revolutionary and working class organisations in Europe can and should do everything they can to help clarify this essential issue. That way they will be able to find their way back to their proper role, making the link with their history and tradition of supporting brothers and sisters in Africa. A precious contribution to this would be to adapt and develop the Fourth International's Transitional Programme, the only one to express concretely the orientation of permanent revolution. Although it needs changing in places, as a whole it remains valid. It is the one and only path to solving weighty problems which can at the same time correct wrong orientations

and go beyond passive contemplation of events when African activists need clear and active support.

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Sarkozy back in political activity and Beefing up the bonapartism! Warning of a

real danger! by Balazs Nagy

Not long ago, Nicolas Sarkozy was unceremoniously bundled out of office. Now he's back on TV in all his pomp and glory. France's second channel (chaine 2) is supposed to be a public enterprise run by the state, or successive governments, but in any case at taxpayers' expense. Now it gives Sarkozy the red carpet treatment. The way they transformed him from a duplicitous agent of the bourgeoisie into a messianic liberator was amazing and shockingly servile. One faithful retainer, Yves Jégo, was moved to comment in astonishment, and with some justice: "It can't be right to give 45 minutes on a current affairs TV show to a Presidential contender" (*Le Monde*, 23 September 2014).

Now, it was Sarkozy who appointed the boss of this channel, and the current President, Hollande, was daft enough to keep him in the job. This man virtually prostrated himself in front of Sarkozy, and the simpering nonentity who conducted the interview like a willing stooge more or less got down on all fours. It may not make much sense, but that's the way things go in this general political climate.

Trials and tribulations of post-war Bonapartism in France

The government of the so-called Socialist Party and its associates – what a lot of people still call "the Left", is visibly on its last legs. It is too closely tied to moribund capitalism, too definitively compromised in the twilight decadence which drags all down in its gloomy wake.

But, debilitated as it is by this decline, the bourgeoisie still has to do something about the fact that its social-democratic servant is bankrupt and too weak now to face the growing perils. This is what explains the growing strength of fascist organisations and the disproportionate extension of their influence right across the old capitalist countries. But Trotsky warned that between social democracy and fascism there is a whole spectrum of intermediate regimes which the

bourgeoisie can use to replace their failed social-democratic business managers without going straight over to fascism, with all the burdens and risks that brings. Fascism is an option they keep on a back burner, ready for use as a last resort, but at the moment they are hoping to get by without it, especially since the memory of the traumas it inflicted is still very much alive. But, above all, the ruling class lives in hope that the virtual vivisection that has been performed on the world working class means they can take refuge in less rigid intermediate regimes which might avoid the brutal shock of fascism. (Indeed, the changes the working class has undergone, the way it has been scattered and physically weakened, and its theoretical and political arms changed and perverted, plus a series of retreats and serious defeats, have disarmed the working class and considerably weakened it in action.)

Under these conditions the capitalists think that, for the moment, a bonapartist regime is the most appropriate political form in which they can secure their position. But even in modern France such a political system is nothing new. The French bourgeoisie originally created this type of regime. They have often had to face bold challenges to their power, and are all the more inclined to rely on this particular crutch because it can easily be used as a massive club. But the bourgeoisie had no easy job trying to dust it off after World War II. De Gaulle had everything it takes to do the job and solidly established the Fifth Republic as the prototype of modern-day bonapartism, but in the end even he got the boot in the aftermath of the powerful 1968 general strike. While he himself paid the price for trying capital's strong-arm tactics on the working class, the Fifth Republic itself survived the onslaught of the oppressed thanks to the connivance of Stalinists and reformists.

You don't need to look very hard at France's political history since De Gaulle's humiliating fall from grace to see that

French bonapartism, in the shape of the Fifth Republic, has followed a particularly chequered and contradictory path. None of the heirs to the Fifth Republic's bonapartist institutions has had anything like what De Gaulle had in terms of means, inclination and courage to destroy working-class gains in an open frontal assault. Every single one of them, without exception, has been steeped in the tepid pseudo-democracy of the Fourth Republic, imbued with the long tradition of flabby pacifism, compromise and unprincipled shilly-shallying as a way of evading or bypassing conflicts and difficulties. The majority of them are impregnated to the very marrow of their bones in the spirit of this bourgeois democracy, whose pillar and vital principle is precisely the *class collaboration* guaranteed by opportunist workers' leaders.

But above all they were terrified by very lively recollections of the 1968 general strike, especially since, as irremediably civilian bourgeois, their links with the armed forces have been ad hoc and ambiguous. Mitterrand and later others went on the attack, directly and across the board, on the gains working people have made, but it was under the influence of the general international turn to so-called neo-liberal policies, and it was done tangentially and with many reservations and in the shape of a sustained war of attrition. While what they did was already unbearable for the working class, it has still not been enough to satisfy the bourgeoisie.

So the reason why today's bourgeois politicians and ideologues bitterly reproach their predecessors for not thoroughly dismantling all the working class's previous achievements and taming that class is explained by the figures who embodied the Fifth Republic after De Gaulle. All his Presidential successors have liked to dress in the bonapartist lion's clothes, but have turned out to be pretty toothless in practice, even though they were quite prepared to get their claws into working people.

Hollande's political incoherence makes him look like a marionette with its strings cut

None of the civilian bonapartist Presidents of France have had what it takes to carry out the mission conferred on them by virtue of their office, but the last in line, Hollande has without doubt been the least competent for the job. Of course, his limited abilities, narrow mind-set and penchant for double-talk all mean he finds it hard to take the job on properly, but he is no more stupid or short-sighted than any of the others. Events have gone completely over his head because, as head of the Fifth Republic he has had to strain every nerve to reconcile the policy of class collaboration (normal in bourgeois democracy) with that of open confrontation between the classes (function of the Fifth Republic). And all the while, the stagnation of capitalism in its twilight prevents him from granting any concessions and insistently demands confrontation with the working class.

And so the wider conflict between these two choices faced by the bourgeoisie nowadays is concentrated in the person and policies of François Hollande. The outcome is the way real concessions are turned into broken promises in a series of pseudo-reforms on the one hand, and on the other the harsh daily reality of blows struck against working people, but which the bourgeoisie do not think are harsh enough. Hence the image presented of a government hanging in mid-air and pushed about by whatever wind is blowing at any particular time, as well as an irresistible sense of things finally falling apart.

When you look at the awful state social democracy's doctrine is in, what is most astonishing is that Hollande cannot somehow shake it off. Where he should give up on trying to square the circle between two bourgeois lines, one of which, class-collaboration, has already lost the battle to contain and calm class conflict, he has merely tried to alter the form within which he attempted to reconcile them. He did this by delegating a big part of his bonapartist task to that

Socialist Party mini-Napoleon, Manuel Valls, a man whose own natural inclinations have already converted him from a shamefaced social democrat into a pocket Bonaparte. But despite what a lot of activists on the so-called far left expected, the obviously lame form of bonapartism affected by the Socialist Party only served to intensify the obvious signs that the party itself is falling apart, testimony to the insurmountable difficulties involved in turning this party into a pliable instrument for a reinforced bonapartism without major internal shocks and crises. Every attempt along those lines will just drag it closer to ultimate decay.

This historic collapse of social democracy, which expresses both the increasing severity of capitalism's crisis and the bankruptcy of one of the counter-measures the bourgeoisie relied on, also gives Sarkozy a second chance. This simple fact exposes Hollande and co.'s social democracy as the midwife of fascism or, more likely, a more homogenous and resolute form of bonapartism.

Sarkozy's bid to be iron-fisted Bonaparte.

Sarkozy did not beat around the bush. He announced straight off that he was back on the scene as a serious candidate for the role of unbending Bonaparte saviour. He presented his political re-appearance as dispassionate obedience to the requirements of the situation, renouncing any personal ambition and explaining that he was responding to a higher, nay divine, call to help our suffering world. This marked reference to some quasi-mystical obligation as justification for his re-entry into politics and the clear-cut aspiration to be a supreme saviour are sure signs of a would-be Bonaparte. The odd journalist has noticed Sarkozy's occasional bonapartist tendencies, but none have pointed out that this re-appearance basically means he intends to set up a consistent and decisive bonapartist dictatorship.

Sarkozy's declared political project also exhibits all other

elements of that sort of bonapartism. All the main ingredients of a pure and harsh bonapartism are present, alongside the insistent and repeated evocation of a supreme call to duty on the part of some divine providence.

First of all comes the claim to be acting for the benefit of society as a whole, above classes. Obviously he could not use the word "class" because he has banished it from his vocabulary, but he explicitly stated he wanted to abolish party differences as outdated leftovers and unite everybody behind his flag.

A whole raft of proposals accompanied and filled out this decision to jump over whatever democratic constraints the bourgeoisie itself has been forced to impose on society in order to channel class contradictions. And, in line with his wish to banish differences between parties, Sarkozy again spoke out against organisations which come between the various classes and the authorities, above all independent trades unions. Moreover, as a consistent bonapartist, he was for regular referendums where class votes are short-circuited by plebiscitary consultations with the "whole of society".

Needless to say, two essential ingredients of properly-established bonapartism were not omitted from his political plans. One is the intensification of overt nationalism, which Sarkozy expressed in his plan to end the Schengen Agreement guaranteeing free movement around the European Union. The other is his decision to establish a political apparatus in the exclusive service of his bonapartism by radically transforming the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) into a homogenous and docile body under his personal control.

And this last point raises the important question: Will this clearly-formulated plan for an integrated, coherent, vigorous and determined bonapartism actually get the upper hand? To answer that, we need to look above all at the working people who are immediately threatened and targeted by this plan.

Workers disarmed in the face of this bourgeois dictatorship

Problems like this usually go straight over the heads of revolutionary and socialist organisations – because of their formalist and sectarian leaderships. To tell the truth, both their revolution and their socialism are no more than vague references to a rosy future; consequently they are quite separate from their day-to-day preoccupations and practical activities. That's why they see very little importance, or none at all, in the political and tactical changes the bourgeoisie introduce in the political form in which they try to rescue their system as the crisis worsens. Even if some of them do draw attention to the danger of bonapartism, as the Lambertist organisation did over De Gaulle's accession, their politics have never gone beyond defending traditional bourgeois democracy. So their day-by-day struggle has been limited by that framework and their commitment to socialism remained at the level of propaganda – necessary, obviously, but restricted to the realm of ideas. Later they supported Mitterrand against De Gaulle's bonapartism in the name of this democracy. But as we know and Hollande has proved most recently, this democracy is no more than the antechamber to fascism or, specifically, bonapartism.

Whether or not these organisations actually mention bonapartism today, their slogans in general do not go beyond defending democracy as a whole against the attacks upon it. But the fact that the bourgeoisie is going over to bonapartism, even in a form masked and softened by remnants of democracy like the Fifth Republic, means that this system is already at a complete dead-end. So the concrete threat to toughen up the current "soft" bonapartism makes it even more vitally urgent to apply a bold and appropriate programme which can open up a *practical and concrete* path to socialism. Sarkozy taking the field to stiffen and toughen up the regime is a signal, a warning of the need to formulate such a programme for a socialist alternative publicly and put it into

action. It is a challenge, a veritable tocsin calling all Marxists to reply in one voice, despite and independently of whether they belong to separate organisations, overcoming their divisions and clarifying what this alternative means theoretically and practically.

The Left Front has virtually ceased to exist

Sadly, the Front de Gauche (Left Front) stands out for its complete absence from this particularly agitated political situation. What forces it had have already been dissipated by a succession of defeats in recent (municipal and European) elections, just when violent political crises have shaken the supposedly-socialist Parti Socialiste (but also the bourgeois UMP), exposing their internal contradictions and driving forward their decomposition (or explosion). The Left Front's main components, the Parti de Gauche (Left Party) and Parti Communiste (Communist Party) are following different political trajectories corresponding to each one's specific character.

Representing a petty-bourgeois layer of a workers' aristocracy ensconced in local government and the trade union leaderships, the Communist Party is throwing itself into variously-configured alliances, above all involving Hollande's disappointed elected representatives and officials. The aim of these parliamentary-style manoeuvres is to re-establish good old bourgeois democracy with "fair" class collaboration using the well-known political method of the popular front. And this at the very moment when the great majority of the bourgeoisie, in its insurmountable torments, has gone far beyond this stage, which is both outmoded and tailor-made to shore up its power. Now this reactionary orientation on the CP's part is dangerous because, outdated though it is, it can still mislead workers (as it did in the past) and channel their anger into an obvious setback. The CP may have willy-nilly had to abjure Stalin, but it would be a serious mistake to ignore that they have not got over their Stalinist conceptions.

The Left Party, meanwhile has been disappointed by its (predictably) poor election results and seems to have backed out of political life completely, just when politics have got agitated and offer a fertile field for determined intervention by an organisation of workers. The party needs some inspiration to lift it from the demoralisation its defeats have caused, but they seem to be intimidated by how harshly reality has treated their rather broadly-drawn and inconsistent policies, and they have retreated into fantasy. Instead of a political programme, they have put forward a propagandist project for a Sixth Republic. But this demand has turned up all on its own, lacking both a head and a tail and completely detached from the concrete reality of struggles, about as appropriate in time and place as an ashtray on a motorcycle.

This demand is quite unexpected because it is on its own and, as it were, asexual. Nevertheless, at first sight it seems to be opposed both to Hollande's bastardised Fifth Republic and Sarkozy's project of consolidating this regime by reinforcing and accentuating its bonapartism. But if you look past the sentiments which animate it to what it concretely means as a demand, it turns out that this opposition is an illusory appearance, a mirage, and it does not really conflict with them at all. This Sixth Republic is not solidly located in a concrete programme for changing the whole of society; indeed, Melanchon scrupulously avoids any attempt to describe such a republic, so the vacuous nature of the project inevitably exposes it as an attempt to re-establish the old Fourth Republic. No amount of goodwill can change what this slogan ineluctably means. If it remains as it stands, this policy is condemned to rapid failure in this time of ever-intensifying class struggle.

(One cannot here pass over in silence Jean-Luc Melanchon's recent book: *L'Ere du Peuple* [The Age of the People] which marks a new stage in his theoretical and political regression.

This is exposed by his explicit shift from being a declared representative of working people to the retrograde and dangerous mythology that exalts the people in general. At the same time he achieves a parallel conversion to a sort of visceral environmentalism, that petit-bourgeois substitute for social struggles and lifebelt for capital. A fuller examination would exceed the scope of this article, but in view of its significance it will be undertaken shortly).

For all that, it would be a premature to reject the Left Party out of hand as a definitively lost cause where working people are concerned. Indeed, it is hard to believe that all its members and activists will blindly follow that sort of renunciation of the class struggle. It will take an internal struggle to decide the organisation's fate. But in the meantime this party, for now, like all the other far-left organisations, has shut itself out of the current political struggle in which the immediate stakes are capital's desire to reinforce its power using consistent bonapartism. The Left Party's general and summary denunciations of capitalism and/or its Fifth Republic are certainly not enough to make good the glaring shortcomings in their activity.

So an initial response to the question posed above, about whether Sarkozy's bonapartist project can succeed, is this: given the congenital and worsening maladies besetting the political organisations currently available to workers, as summarised above, they are hardly well-placed to prevent this big political shift, unless, of course, there is some unexpected outburst. So the answer depends on the outcome of the internal struggle currently underway between different political segments of the bourgeoisie distributed around the various bourgeois political parties (UMP, centrists, Front National, as well as the Socialist Party). They are in any case (with the temporary exception of the FN) ravaged by struggles between various factions precisely around problems relating to the profound need to transform the bourgeoisie's

regime of political governance.

Bourgeois parties' deepening internal crises and conflicts

A relatively strong element in the UMP (to whom the various centrist circles can be added) is lining up behind so-called moderate leaders such as Alain Juppé or François Fillon, who express and represent a wing of the bourgeoisie. This element is still attached to the very relative tranquillity of bourgeois democracy based on class collaboration and is alarmed by the uncertainties of a open, brutal social confrontation and the unforeseeable consequences of a fascist or even just a clearly more authoritarian regime. But their weakness from the point of view of the bourgeoisie arises from the situation itself, which is more and more conflictual and intolerant of any such compromise, and which they are no more fit to deal with than the Socialist Party is.

This segment of the political bourgeoisie is on the one hand taken aback by capital's need to beef up its power (which means they are impotent in the face of fascism) and on the other disarmed when it comes to breaking the resistance of working people (in particular by smashing the unions). It is true their leaders try to outdo one another in demanding even greater social destruction on their patrons' behalf than that announced and promised by Sarkozy, but this changes nothing fundamental in their position.

This is why, in order to remain in that body and/or advance their careers, more and more UMP leaders are rallying around Sarkozy, sometimes unexpectedly (Raffarin, De Villepin, Wauquiez, etc.). They are following or expressing the clear majority of the right both inside and outside the UMP who are massively opting for the tough solution to the crisis.

Analysis of the forces at work thus points to Sarkozy as the probable victor in a political competition already underway to provide weakening capitalism with a tougher and more stable

government more able to bring it the support it needs.

But life is much richer and more varied than even the best analysis, based as it must be on the available data. Imponderables arising from the multiplicity of human activities could shift and change the picture. However, such activities themselves do not fall from the skies, since they are already rooted in objective facts. We can point to some of them, even if it is impossible to predict precisely what the future will bring.

For a start, even if the bourgeoisie would like for the moment to avoid and spare itself the extra expenses (economic, social and political) incidental to fascism, and would be content just to toughen up its bonapartist regime, it is possible that their calculations could be upset by various factors within even their own ranks which might help the Front National to come to power.

It is also possible that the break-up and decomposition underway in the Socialist Party will provide another candidate for the role of Bonaparte in the person of Manuel Valls, politically converted and personally completely up for this job.

And who can tell with any certainty what the outcome of the various judicial inquiries underway, all threatening Sarkozy, will be. There is not adequate space here to describe in detail how widespread all the corruption among politicians is and explain what it means, nor how lenient bourgeois courts can be where politicians are concerned. However, it is not entirely out of the question that Sarkozy will be found guilty. That would smooth the path for another UMP candidate, or maybe someone from the Front National. In any case, the victor would be the one who offers the strongest guarantees to the bourgeoisie that he or she will tie working people down hand and foot and destroy the gains they have made in order to rescue exhausted capitalism in its death agony.

For the working-class solution!

Finally, and for that very reason, it is also possible that the masses of working people, including some of their political organisations, will rise in salutary fashion and come on the stage to overturn these machinations and change the situation from top to bottom. That will be much more likely if the activists in these organisations get involved in a decisive and unified struggle for the resolute defence of working people against the bourgeoisie's many-sided attacks; that would really lay the basis for a rising of that sort, which would be concentrated, and increasingly confirmed, in the struggle between the intensified attacks and resistance on the part of trade unions. Hence the vital importance of working flat out to link these organisations to the *workers' unions* and the struggles they are involved in. In any case, such a link is a major requirement of Marxism, as well as a precise measure of all these organisations' real relationship to this revolutionary theory.

This theory clearly states that they have a duty, and one moreover, which the social context itself urgently requires, to offer a way out, a political programme for this resistance by the trade unions, and to organise to get it successfully on the road. The main axis of this policy necessarily must be to bring the unions to a break with the deceptive conception and rotten practice which demeans them to the level of "social partners" with the bourgeoisie. And at the same time bring them back onto the path of struggle for the emancipation of the working class. In the absence of such an opening, embodied in everyday practice, those organisations which claim to stand for working people and the revolution will fail in their elementary duty and, like a blunt and rusty knife, end up at the rubbish dump. That is the decisive choice today.

Balazs Nagy, November 2014

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Euro-election shock by Balazs Nagy

The surprise results of the recent European elections mean all political organisations have to re-evaluate the overall situation and their own policies.

Complete bankruptcy of bourgeois Europe

Two highly revealing and significant facts stand out about these elections, as a whole and in each individual country. First, and certainly foremost, is the particularly high level of abstentions (approaching 60% in France!), concentrated, moreover, in conurbations where workers and working people live. Abstentions were clearly higher, it needs to be said, in the countries of Eastern Europe (more than 70% in the great

majority of them, over 80% in Slovakia and the Czech Republic). This clearly reflects their secondary position within European “unity”.

The second is the unprecedented and ubiquitous growth of fascist or semi-fascist oppositions, a far right which actually came first in certain countries (France, UK, Denmark).

Apart from anything else, the first and most obvious conclusion is that the vast majority of Europeans are turning their backs on and definitively rejecting that monstrous construct called “European union”. This central conclusion cannot be queried or challenged just by reference to the obviously broad range of views among those who abstained, or even voted for the far-right. Of course each of their various – and sadly all too often reactionary, retrograde or simply backward – motives is crucially significant in its own way. We should note, however, that many of those who voted for the far-right probably did so in protest against that Europe, rather than out of support for fascist ideology. Be that as it may, these results express an irrevocable verdict on the part of Europeans as a whole: They are absolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie’s pseudo-Europe, which they massively reject and will not tolerate.

Bourgeois leaders’ vicious and criminal intransigence

Late on 25 May, French TV channels ran the election results and what the various political party representatives had to say about them. The evening’s viewing provided a good opportunity to assess the immediate reactions of a whole range of the country’s political parties, from the conservative or social-democratic official spokespeople for the Euro-homunculus right through to the opposition, by way of the leaders of Front de Gauche (Left Front) and Front National (National Front) and everything in between. What they said made it blindingly obvious that literally not a single one of

the representatives of this bankers' Europe has understood what voters are trying to tell them, clear as that message has been. Not a single one of the social democratic leaders or their traditional bourgeois partner/opponents, nor the various subordinate currents which gravitate around them, had grasped what this means. That, of course, only surprised those incorrigibly naïve people who still take them seriously.

The main leader of the reactionary brain-dead in the Union pour un mouvement populaire (UMP) is [Jean-François Copé](#). All they could offer was the consolation that they had gained ground at the expense of Hollande's Parti socialiste (PS). Their noisy self-satisfaction, however, was tempered by regret at being overtaken by the National Front. They sadly resigned themselves to the fact that the rusty European hulk had just gone under, but had little to offer when it came to explaining why. Not that they even tried. Copé simply blamed Hollande's policies for this setback, obviously without realising that they are both in the same rather fragile European boat. Under these conditions, how could they have seen that the reason their European cockleshell foundered was design and construction defects rather than something the captain had done wrong (Even if the latter's incompetence did accentuate the more basic flaws). As a result, they were all equally baffled by the huge advances the far right made right across the continent, and just saw it as a minor passing accident.

Alain Juppé speaks for another wing of the same party, allegedly more thoughtful and moderate, but even he could not rise above the same cheap parliamentarism. Being a more serious politician than his less sophisticated colleague Copé, he at least made the effort to sketch a political line to beat the National Front. Quickly adding the 10% of votes won by the bourgeois centre parties to the 20-21 % the UMP got, he triumphantly declared that the resulting 30% of votes cast easily beat the National Front's 25%. All you needed to do was combine the UMP and centre parties' votes, and a thorny

political problem tuned into a simple parliamentary manoeuvre.

These recently-merged centre parties came in fourth place just in front of the ecologists, followed in 6th place by the Left Front. So they showed loud and overflowing satisfaction and were at pains to emphasise, in their enthusiastic congratulations, that their totally but critically pro-European policy is the way out of the current deadlock.

In fact all these good people were forced to acknowledge that current policy on Europe has suffered a resounding setback. What else could they do? They even bandied words like “failings”, “convulsions” and “chaos”. Oddly, but completely in character with their bourgeois political commitments, none of them could see that what causes it is this bourgeois Europe’s destructive nature. They simply could not see that what people were rejecting was precisely this Europe.

In general, they were all self-critical, although almost all of them more or less blamed the government and Hollande personally, except for the Socialist Party – and Green – representatives. But let’s not exaggerate. Any normal person – if he or she were childish naïve – would expect these politicians and journalists to apologise for carrying out the European policies that the voters massively rejected. Far from it! Every single one re-stated their commitment to those very same policies, then beat their breasts for not having done more to explain (?!) the setback their bourgeois Europe had suffered. But in fact this Europe has been so well explained, not only by pervasive and aggressive propaganda but also by an eloquently destructive practice, that voters rejected it precisely because they know exactly what it means.

Socialist Party leaders just as perverse

This sort of collective blindness on the part of politicians and journalists discussing the stinging rebuff their Europe

had suffered is truly amazing. It presents a striking and repulsive image of the system's so-called "elite" which absolutely captures its decadent nature. What it foreshadows – should its miserable existence be prolonged – is an uncertain future full of looming threats, convulsions, pain and repeated shocks.

But the (socialist) government promptly also went in for denial of reality. TV viewers saw a clearly shocked Prime Minister Valls nevertheless insisting that the measures he has been taking in recent times are exactly what the voters wanted. To tell the truth, he had to blind himself to reality so absurdly just to justify staying in government. But so contemptuous a distortion of the truth was contradicted not only by the facts but also the prime minister's haggard and extremely upset appearance and his dazed and lugubrious tone, which clashed oddly with the artificial joviality he sometimes affects in his new role. He really looked like he was falling apart under the seismic impact.

We should point out immediately that the very next day Hollande stubbornly and unblushingly confirmed that they would carry on with their criminal policies which, together with their "responsibility plan", he presented as if it was what the voters said they wanted! This shameless arrogance went much, much further than even Valls' insolent effrontery. The wily old politician's practised and cool cynicism in political lying made up for the panic his rattled minister showed. Just like all their pseudo-opponents, they both attributed the voters' general rejection of the bourgeoisie to the weakness and inadequacy of the propaganda explaining what they thought and what they were doing in relation to Europe. This brutal travesty of the truth foreshadows a swift deterioration in already difficult living conditions and even greater shocks in future.

Others make headway in the absence of working-class politics

The most telling feature of these elections has been the striking absence of genuine workers' parties. More exactly: none of the various political organisations which actually fight against the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe – and to their credit they undeniably do that – have managed to free themselves from major shortcomings which show their dependence on the bourgeoisie.

For one thing, they do not go beyond a very restricted level of simply criticising the bourgeoisie's policy on Europe. None of them has yet been able to open a concrete perspective of a working-class Europe radically opposed to the kind of Europe the bourgeoisie are concocting. For another, and bound up with this negative position, each of them has developed their criticisms over Europe firmly within the limitations of their own strictly national framework, except for a few sentimental rather than effective solidarity links and the occasional sprinkling of gatherings and resolutions left over from the past.

Altogether and in general, all these organisations are therefore captives of the given capitalist system and submit to its pressure. Here, too, they are still largely influenced, by the enduring ideology of social democracy and Stalinism, whose national, not to say nationalist, political horizon has always been a bulwark against internationalist Marxism. The few scattered allusions to the Socialist United States of Europe we get from certain organisations of Trotskyist origin do not change anything in this general picture, since these chance references are completely detached from daily reality, hanging in mid-air and placed as far in the future as religion's Kingdom of Heaven.

Under these conditions, the rout inflicted upon the bourgeoisie's policy over Europe has led to not only a spectacular resurgence of fascist and semi-fascist organisations but also the emergence and proliferation of petit-bourgeois formations in general. (We leave aside, for

the moment, analysing the considerable advances by UKIP in the UK and the People's Party in Denmark, both of which came first. They campaign openly for putting the bourgeoisie back in the driving seat and, in order to do so, they make abundant use of fascist ammunition against impoverished peoples and the migrants from their ranks and for the restoration of the national state).

As for the advances made by the fascists, it is significant that bourgeois commentators try to console themselves over the setback they have suffered with the thought that the fascists are unable to form a homogenous group in the European Parliament. Splitting hairs like this is pathetic in itself, since instead of explaining why the fascists are growing so strongly, they try to make it disappear by exploiting a problem that arises precisely from their growth. Nevertheless, it is true that there are differences, not to say considerable divergences between them. Maybe you cannot identify Nigel Farage's British UKIP with Golden Dawn in Greece modelled on Hitler's Nazi party, or even with the Front National in France. Nevertheless this UKIP, like the Danish People's Party, draws its politics from the same fascist arsenal. Their frenzied nationalism and clear orientation towards re-establishing a strong national state together with aggression against migrant workers and peoples of the former colonies and dependent states puts them in the same camp of semi-fascists and impels them in that direction.

From a different point of view, the idea that in the past all fascist parties stuck together in unity was always a myth invented by the bourgeoisie – and Stalinists. There were well-known differences and divergences, even between Hitler and Mussolini, for example and even when they were fighting on the same side, which tended to iron them out. To say nothing of the distinctions between Franco's party and Salazar's and others, or the military dictatorships drawn into Hitler's gravitational field.

This crying absence of genuine workers' politics is also what has allowed a set of straightforwardly petit-bourgeois political parties to flourish like mushrooms after rain. They, too, are distinguished from each other in various ways, but in a quite different fashion from the fascist or semi-fascist organisations whose open and resolute support for capitalism unifies them on the extreme right. At the same time there is a significant difference between the majority of the petit-bourgeois organisations developing a critique of bourgeois politics from the left of the political chess-board and others who try to maintain a pseudo-independence. What they all have in common, for all their often quite broad political diversity, is the attempt to camouflage society's division into classes. They replace this with secondary and sometimes quite odd problems on the basis of a shared and savage hostility to the conception of class struggle and Marxism in general.

Whether these organisations are right or left, older and larger, like the ecologists, or recent and local like "Podemos" in Spain, we can for the moment postpone their examination, necessary as it may be. On the other hand, there are, in France at least, organisations which claim to speak on behalf of working people about which it has become essential to reflect seriously.

Where do Left Front and its European partners stand?

The Left Front coalition, which took off big time in a left-radical way during the presidential elections and since, has quite rightly raised many hopes. It created confidence that a big, genuine workers' party could replace the old, compromised social-democratic and Stalinist parties mired in class-collaboration. Consequently it also embodied the concrete possibility of the re-birth and development of the new, big revolutionary party the situation requires. And that is why, despite the inevitable and tenacious residues of its origins which blemish its activities and retard its development, it

was necessary to encourage and support this initiative. It marked and expressed the possibility of a renewal of the revolutionary movement in the face of the opportunist decadence of the traditional workers' parties and also the sterile blind alley in which various organisations with a more and more blurred reference to Trotskyism find themselves. The fact that more or less identical movements came about and developed in Greece (Syriza) and Germany (Die Linke) indicated that the conditions for their existence were not only present in Europe but had also matured.

However, while supporting the Left Front, we have had to intensify our criticisms around the negative character of its political line, i.e. its reduction to a simple critique of current policy and striking lack of a workers' programme for fighting the bourgeoisie. After the municipal elections, our journal *Lutte des Classes* (no 22) wrote that in the absence of such a programme "the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers." (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014). A month later, just before the European elections, we anticipated in the same journal (no 24) that "Perhaps a pathetic result at the ballot box will shake these organisations' centrist outlook and unleash a movement for their renewal. It is a hope to cling to". (English translation printed in *Workers' International Journal* no 5, June 2014).

Indeed, the Left Front's disastrous election results fully confirmed these fears and our criticisms. In view not just of the much better results they had got in the presidential elections but also the much worse current situation, their miserable 6.3% of the vote represents an obvious decline. This real collapse exposes a disparity, not to say a contradiction, between the Left Front's programme on the one hand and the steadily worsening situation working people face on the other. But sadly, the initial reactions to this resounding defeat are

worse than disappointing, expressing a level of astonishment at the meagre results matched only by an inability to comprehend them.

The morning after the elections, J.-L. Mélanchon presented his party cadres and the media with the plaintive and tearful commentary of a beaten chief. He more or less repeated what he had said on TV the previous night (mentioned above). He was so grief-stricken that he could hardly hold back the tears and he drew his comments to a rapid close to avoid breaking out in sobs.

This physically awkward appearance itself revealed a man moaning on at his wits' end rather than a fighter reflecting on the lessons of a temporary defeat. Indeed, the lamentable way he presented his interpretation of the results completely matched the whining and recriminatory content of his remarks. Faced with the cresting progress of the National Front, he lost any sense of proportion and got bitterly distressed about this "end of civilisation" (?), just as over the top as a few days earlier when he had shown boundless confidence that the Left Front would amaze everyone with how well it would do. (Sadly, the phenomenon this exaggerated and one-sided judgement failed to address was the very high level of abstentions.)

He said absolutely nothing about the possibility that his own organisation's political line might be mistaken – any such idea seemed to be outlandish, not to say sacrilegious – so all that remained was for him to try to lay the blame on the situation and/or working people. Comrade Melanchon avoided saying it outright, but at the end of his breast-beating he couldn't stop himself from appealing to working people to take heart again and see where their real interests lay, which was a barely-disguised way of making them responsible for the setback.

Syriza in Greece, with visibly the same politics, did manage

to come out clearly on top in the elections with 26.6% of the votes, but that was solely because the situation there is different and more favourable. The bankruptcy of Pasok, the social-democratic party, already happened earlier. Together with the servile way the bourgeois New Democracy party fell into line behind Brussels and its Troika, this opened the door wide for Syriza, and this was extended even further by the openly and repellently Hitlero-fascist politics of Golden Dawn. However, these more advantageous conditions should not make us forget that the conservatives came hard on Syriza's heels with 23.1% of the votes, while here, too, abstentions amounted to more than 40% of the electorate. In Germany die Linke also saw their share of the vote drop to 6.5%, more or less the same as Left Front, given that quite a number of voters could see no difference between this formation and the SPD (Social-Democratic Party of Germany) in "opposition".

As for Tsipras (Syriza) standing against Barroso in the election of the new President of the European Commission, this was just opportunist grandstanding. By doing this, these parties justified and legitimated this instrument of bourgeois dictatorship for grinding the working people of Europe under the iron heel of its policies. Tsipras' political line, with a tinge of anti-German feeling (such is his nationalist resentment at the supremacy of German capital within the bourgeoisie's arrangements) clearly express the content of this opportunism. What it actually indicates is that he thought – and still thinks – that he can use the same rotten and anti-democratic organs ... for policies in favour of working people. This involves bourgeois policies without austerity, a big investment programme, a New Deal, he says credulously. So it's no surprise that now, instead of Barroso, he is backing Juncker from Luxembourg, the close and fervent friend of the big bankers, the initiator and boss of the hated Troika! There's only one way to describe this kind of clowning: going backwards.

Responsibility of the traditional far left

The general decline in these promising formations (with the exception of Syriza in Greece where it is prospering due to various objective factors) is completely mirrored by the spectacular advances the far right is making. Now such symmetry is not somehow caused by the balance of nature; the pitiful retreat by the former has directly conditioned the considerable progress the latter have made. But where is the so-called Marxist far left?

If one looks in France, for example – and also at a European level – , for reasons why it has not been possible to re-discover and develop a genuine workers' programme, there is no doubt that a significant share of the responsibility rests with the three biggest organisations which have come out of Trotskyism and profess that tradition. Without of course pretending to be able to describe them completely here, some general comments are required in relation to this responsibility.

First and foremost, for all the differences of outlook between the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot), Lutte Ouvriere (LO, Workers Fight, formerly of Arlette Laguiller) and the Lambertist Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party), differences due mainly to their respective histories, all these organisations have taken a negative attitude towards the Left Front. They have regarded this newcomer with a lot of distrust and not a little jealousy: after all, they come from the suspect milieu of social democracy and Stalinism and, what's much worse, trespassed on private hunting preserves.

From the outset they carefully avoid getting "compromised" with the Communist Party and Melançon's new party in the Left Front, which they treated with hostile suspicion. Moreover, they unanimously rejected the slightest sustained cooperation in struggle, a united front, indeed, and even any electoral

alliance with these plague-carriers who had come to disturb their established daily routine. In fact, after the last big battle of clarification in Trotskyist ranks in 1952-1953, they settled down comfortably into their special role of licensed public revolutionary, a role they practice according to an arcane ritual they call Marxism. In fact it was and remains a profanation of the Marxist method, opposed to it in every way and which, to put it briefly, consists in trying to separate and fix, restrict and freeze the conditions of struggle, in particular the activity and circumference of the revolutionary organisation.

How can you expect these organisations to apply the policy of the united front or join in this Left Front coalition or at least form an electoral alliance with it, when they have been virtually incapable of establishing such an alliance between themselves for the last 60 (!) years.

Since the 1952-1953 split, the ditch separating them has just got bigger and bigger and each on its own side has settled into the split in the Fourth International as an eternal destiny in which each one has its own special corner. They have demonstrated their complete incapacity to sort out rebuilding the Fourth International, considering the two other organisations to be enemies definitively and totally lost to that process of rebuilding. In the absence of any ability to resolve or even confront the problem at the base of the break (i.e. the problem of re-building), the split intensified further and dramatically the original cause of the separation, that is, Pabloite revisionism, systematising it into generalised opportunism via Mandel's "neo-capitalism" and finally culminating in the furtive abandonment of Marxism. But this fatalistic mutual acceptance of the break, on the other hand, also reinforced the sectarian isolation of the anti-Pabloite critics, fixed their sterile enclosure in the ivory towers of their verities singularly lacking in any perspective that offered a solution.

Where did this monumental historical deficiency arise from, a deficiency whose effects have gone on for decades and transformed what started off as a split into a veritable dislocation of the International, then into today's yawning abyss where, alongside false propositions, reaction too takes root?

Throughout their history, the French Trotskyist organisations (like the others) have been more or less intensely affected by the influence of Stalinist conceptions, often preponderant and always corrosive. Even while Trotsky was still alive, this defect was made considerably worse by the petit-bourgeois composition of the organisation, driven to the margins of the workers' movement by the Stalinists. After Trotsky's assassination, followed by the total collapse at the end of the war and then the split, whatever organisations emerged divided again, not between the real Marxists and the others, but along the lines of the various – but all equally mistaken – strategic versions which the Stalinists applied in the course of their history. The different Trotskyist organisations followed either Stalinism's right-wing orientation, or the ultra-leftism of the "Third Period". Very often they mixed the opportunism of the one with the sectarianism of the other.

But as concerns the method of political struggle in general and building the party in particular, the former Pabloites currently in the NPA, the Lambertists in the parti des travailleurs and Lutte Ouvriere invariably shared the same outrageous sectarianism, firstly towards the other "Trotskyist" tendencies and then in relation to the workers' movement as a whole. They looked at the Left Front in the same way.

Trotsky once commented that the Stalinists regarded Rosa Luxemburg with a great deal of suspicion, unable to tell whether she was a friend or an enemy. Now the NPA, with its Pabloite origins, looks askance at the Left Front in exactly

the same way (not, of course, that that makes the Left Front into any sort of Rosa Luxemburg). These hesitations have, nevertheless, already caused a number of splits in the NPA. First, a group led by Christian Picquet, then another one, split away and joined the Left Front. These breaks, however, have not led to the necessary re-awakening of the organisation as a whole. So the groups that split away have maintained their centrist character and remained unable to change anything at all in the Left Front., while the NPA has continued its unprincipled hesitation waltz.

As for Lutte Ouvrière, it has continued imperturbably on its solitary way, marked from its very origins by hostility to the proclamation of the Fourth International and by its nationalist seclusion. It persists in its isolation with an inveterate sectarianism in which both their behaviour and the arguments they use look strangely similar to the ultra-left politics of "Third Period" Stalinism. True to form, this organisation gleefully reported the Left Front's latest electoral setback as if this justified its hostility to the Front.

One can describe Lutte Ouvrière's sectarianism as intrinsic. That of the Lambertist organisation, on the other hand, is, one might say, "tempered" by its special and occasional opportunism (in contrast to the more generalised opportunism of the NPA). The Lambertist organisation is sectarian in relation to the Front de Gauche and the CFDT trade union and even the CGT, but flatly opportunist in relation to the Force Ouvrière trade union, which has been its privileged partner since that union came into being. Apart from its opportunism towards social democracy, which it likes to identify with the working class, the Lambertist organisation's Achilles' heel is its inclination to substitute the struggle for national sovereignty for the international class struggle. And so in 2013 the congress of their "International" suddenly decide to concentrate the international mobilisation of its militants in

the "defence" of Algeria against some imaginary threat of US military intervention! Obviously this "threat" never materialised, but the whole thing worked marvellously to distract the attention of activists from, for example, the problems of Europe.

So, with either an occasional or an intrinsic sectarian conception (which they claim to be Marxist) in relation to every other organisation such as the Left Front, they too took their own lonely, isolated stand in the recent European elections. Obviously (what is more) they lacked a clear working-class policy on Europe dealing with concrete and current problems. And of course they each in their own corner garnered about 1% of the vote – actually worse than usual, while the Left Front just got weaker.

Such sectarian outlooks, and the concomitant opportunism, are the natural products of an aristocratic conception of the party (their party!), separated from the workers' movement as a whole in a water-tight compartment, whose building is reduced to the rigorous and individual selection of the few elect into a separate elite. This sect conception, detached and distant from the masses, is only applicable at most to clandestine conditions, but it is disastrous in open political struggle. Right through modern history, it has been opposed to Marxism and its application. Since the Communist Manifesto, Marxism has clearly established, against any sectarian or elitist point of view, that it is the workers' movement as a whole, all the changes it undergoes and the methods it uses, that constitute not just the terrain but the very skeleton of the revolutionary party itself.

The Manifesto unequivocally emphasised: "The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole". Nor do they "set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement". And in conclusion: "the communists

everywhere support every revolutionary movement against the existing political and social order of things". Political – and theoretical – struggle unfolds within this framework as a necessary means of clarification, not as some sort of selection criterion.

Now isolated and besieged as it was, and giving way to the pressure of capital, Stalinism in the USSR perverted Marxism, including Lenin's heritage. They adapted it to the requirements of staying in power: conciliatory towards capital and violently opposed to the workers' movement as a whole. Once Trotsky was lost, his heirs in turn succumbed to this de-natured and corrupt "Marxism".

Concretely each and every one of these "Trotskyist" formations think that in and through itself the revolutionary party already exists, and building it is simply a matter of linear and progressive growth through recruiting individuals one after another. With strictly individual recruitment of this sort – which is normal in a secret society but absolutely alien to Marxism – they can denounce all other organisations, lumping their members together with their leaderships.

These organisations are condemned to decline, although this is masked and retarded by their prolonged vegetation, punctuated by successive electoral setbacks. It is a fact which should stir their members to study past and recent experiences very carefully and draw the necessary conclusions, especially since the long decades of defeats and setbacks the international workers' movement has suffered, made particularly worse by the liquidation of the USSR and the changes in the composition of the working class, have profoundly altered the habitually-known conditions for resuming the struggle.

The essential feature in these negative changes has been the general repudiation of Marxism and socialism at the same time as the Soviet Union collapsed and was disowned. Since this

workers' state was associated with the Stalinist bureaucratic regime, Marxism in turn was identified with the falsification of it at the hands of the same bureaucracy. The whole thing was greatly facilitated by the evolution and changing composition of the working class which was happening at the same time and the growth of petit-bourgeois intermediary layers. The results were not long in coming: On the one hand a shrinkage and ossification of living Marxism reduced to the level of dogma in ancient texts; on the other, a more and more flagrant contradiction between the growing size of the mass movements and their theoretical poverty, not to say the complete absence of any theory. Under these conditions, the masses' apprenticeship in struggle needs more explanations and time, and activists' development requires much more patience.

Ramblings based on impressions replacing theory

Flagrant impotence, therefore, is sadly what characterises all the organisations on the far left who oppose bourgeois politics and its Europe. Their impotence in a situation which should actually favour their development means we must undertake a serious critique of the theoretical arsenal underlying the political dead-end they are in.

We have already glanced at the way the organisations which arose out of the dislocation and often repudiation of the Fourth International share responsibility for the Left Front's stagnation. They have been through a long death-agony and floundered, inflicting their own death-blow by repudiating or diluting the Marxism that alone could provide a theoretical, either by simply and clearly dropping it (NPA), or by letting it ossify into a collection of classical assertions ("Lutte Ouvrière" and the Lambertists).

Consequently there has been no pressure on the Left Front on sharpen up its theoretical armaments by accepting and developing creative Marxism, so that it remains captive to profoundly mistaken theoretical considerations which it

peddles, like birth-marks inherited from its social-democratic and Stalinist parentage and which tie it to the existing social and political order. A recent work by the Left Party's leading economist, Jacques Généreux, provides a useful opportunity to evaluate concretely the dominant theoretical conceptions in the Left Front. *Jacques Généreux explique l'économie à tout le monde* (*Jacques Généreux Explains Economics for All*) is a 331-page book published quite recently (May 2014) by Seuil. It sums up rather well the theoretical nonsense the Left Front has strayed into, but which affects all organisations on the far left to one degree or another.

This economic inspirer of the Left Front thinks that the post-war period known as the "thirty glorious years" of the economy "... which persisted until the 70s, had very little to do with capitalism in the strict sense." (p.41), because "... the big industrial countries developed in a new system in which the holders of capital no longer had complete freedom or the powers which that confers". (p.42) It is important to note that as far as he is concerned, this "new system" is the goal for which we must strive.

To bolster this bold and surprising conclusion he lists some of the rules he claims limited the omnipotence of capital, although he carefully avoids putting a name to this "new system" which supposedly replaced capitalism. This prudent approach enables him later to note that during the 1980s capitalism returned in strength, simply thanks to various counter measures.

We should not waste too much time on this – to put it mildly – extremely cavalier way of dealing with the change of a whole mode of production, which in principle (and in historical practice) can only be the outcome of significant social factors accompanied by political overturns. We merely need to underline that this crude and simplistic view exposes total ignorance, not just of the real reason for the "thirty glorious years", but also of the resounding social struggles

that took place during those years. In fact it is fairly easy to understand the historical movement of powerful social and political forces whose interaction engendered these so-called "thirty glorious years".

Capitalism entered the war in order to suppress its insurmountable and prolonged economic political crisis which broke out in 1929. It came out of the war in 1944-1945 even weaker and more exhausted than at the beginning. In the course of the war the relationship of forces between it and the world working class had shifted strongly in favour of the latter. From the beginning of 1943, the proletarian revolution was spreading in several countries in Europe and Asia, stimulated by the Soviet Union's Red Army's powerful offensive.

The bourgeois political regimes which had been vassals of fascism or had fallen victim to it collapsed one after the other. The revolution was on the march – but enemies were at work within its own ranks. Above all, it was the active collaboration of the leaderships of the workers' movement, the Stalinist parties especially and in particular, which saved the capitalist system from total collapse, a powerful rescue operation prepared and orchestrated by the Stalinist bureaucracy in the Soviet Union as a resolute ally of the "democratic" bourgeoisie.

Now if this new-style Holy Alliance actually did strangle the revolution, which failed everywhere (except in Yugoslavia and China, where it was brought to an abrupt halt) it nevertheless left a deep impression on the bourgeois regimes which re-emerged after the war. In other words, the bourgeoisie's faithful servants who had sold the revolution for a mess of pottage had to be rewarded. Within a relationship of forces clearly in favour of the proletariat, this mess of pottage had to be paid for.

Such was the particular class configuration which formed the basis for the "thirty glorious years", whose backcloth was the

open and direct going-over of the Stalinist bureaucracy and its agents as a whole to the active counter-revolution. To be sure, they did not perform this immense service for free and without a recompense that let them justify and retain their influence. The extent of the concessions the bourgeoisie granted in turn reflected the degree of danger that menaced capitalism. It also demonstrated the bourgeoisie's great fear, since it went very far into these compromises in its concern to preserve the system, even so far as to grant concessions which altered its very appearance, and to adjust the form of its rule. It changed its face without altering its character. The capitalist wolf mutated into a loving grandmother who carefully retained her "big teeth".

A lot of people were fooled by this ability of the bourgeoisie to manoeuvre in order to stay in power. The whole of what they call the "Left" fell for it. The chief ideologue of the Left Party, the economist Jacques Généreux, expresses this fundamental and general error like this: "Between 1945 and 1975, many industrial countries were no longer within a real capitalist economy. What rescued the industrialised countries from the damage caused by capitalism ... is precisely the fact that they got out of the capitalist system as Marx described it. In place of this capitalism ... they substituted a mixed and highly-regulated economy in which salaried managers and civil servants had more power than the capitalists." (p.43).

Here, Jacques Généreux says openly what people on the "Left" and even many on the far left thought more quietly without daring to put it so crudely. This way of looking at things rests entirely on the firm conviction that this whole lucky mutation came from the bourgeoisie itself which, acting freely and of its own accord, decided to make capitalism more bearable out of its infinite wisdom and magnanimity.

The class struggle, indeed any sort of struggle at all, is totally conjured away in this imaginary society ruled by understanding and discernment. The theoretical crutch upon

which this conception rests presents itself as an obviously wrong interpretation of Marxism, which Généreux reduces to a few formulae, missing out the essential part. This is indicated already by the simple fact that throughout the whole 331 page book the word "class" (to say nothing of "class struggle") does not even appear!

The basis for this misunderstanding and, more concretely, the idyllic transformation of capitalism into a regulated and more humane (but undefined) system is, therefore, an obvious ignorance of capitalism itself. To be more exact, it is a total misunderstanding (or deliberate omission) of its nature and its historic evolution, as well as of their inner driving forces and content. Even more concretely, it is capitalism moving on from its classic, ascendant phase to its decline, death-agony and the manifold determinations involved which are missing in this fixed, immobile, capitalism. It is a well-known procedure frequently used by pseudo-Marxists who refer to Marx but deliberately leave out how Lenin and Trotsky developed his theory. This is how they strip Marxism precisely of its spirit as an analysis of living reality and petrify it into ancient immutable texts.

This is the method Jacques Généreux uses too when, claiming to present Marx's conception, he carefully excises Lenin's contribution. This surgical operation allows him to present the way capitalism was rescued from complete collapse by making concessions (1945-75) into proof that it had metamorphosed into a higher social order. Alchemists of old had a similar blind confidence in the miraculous ability of base lead to mutate into noble glittering gold. But in the end science taught us that that kind of transubstantiation exists in religious beliefs, but not among the natural elements, nor in social reality.

This kind of superstitious speculation abounds in Jacques Généreux's book when it comes to the desirability and possibility of a repeating the "thirty glorious years" in

today's base society. They replace any serious reflection of the programme which flows from the situation itself, since they are so pervasive that they simply push aside the harsh realities of everyday life. But essentially this unbridled speculation masks and hides above all the reality of the concrete and particular historical conditions of the "thirty glorious years".

The first condition for the really significant concessions made in those post-war years was the actual strength of the working class in the industrial countries, where revolutionary movements (and a series of revolutions) placed the capitalist order in mortal danger. But also the imperilled bourgeoisie, weakened as it was, had to be able to offer concessions, even on a temporary and cavalier basis, by digging even deeper into its own shrinking reserves. Finally, it also required that at the head of the revolutionary working class there should be degenerated and corrupt leaderships prepared to sell the revolution out cheaply in exchange for these concessions, while still able to produce arguments to justify imposing this abuse of authority.

Not a single one of these conditions is fulfilled today, or to be more precise, that are radically changed. The powerful and vigorous working class of then has suffered crucial successive defeats, and the endless retreats have merged into one general rout. Moreover, it has seen its forces drastically diminished, its make-up radically changed and its movement now only a shadow of what it was at the end of the war. Moreover, not only has it become impossible for the bourgeoisie to offer anything whatsoever to working people, its decline has grown even worse and impels it to violently and dictatorially destroy all past reforms and concessions, something it finds easier because of the weakening of the workers' movement. We should add that, following their open and brutal collaboration, the bureaucratic leaderships of the workers' movement have lost their former decisive position in the

workers' movement. The historic defeat of Stalinism and social democracy's open avowed and cynical role as a direct pillar of the bourgeoisie have practically put an end to their organisational grip on the working class. (Even if the influence of their conceptions is still rife and serves to muddle the political consciousness of the majority of left and far-left activists.)

And this is how it goes with the Left Front and Left Party, one of whose most significant leaders, Généreux, in his book not only heaps praises on the class collaboration of the "thirty glorious years" but advocates a return to these policies as the right and proper programme with which to oppose the devastation caused by austerity. But we have just seen that the very specific social and political conditions, historically determined by particular circumstances, which combined to give birth to this special form of class collaboration, have disappeared. More concretely, the quite exceptional relationship of class forces at the time, with a working class on the offensive against a bourgeoisie forced onto the defensive and retreat, has today turned into its opposite.

It is the bourgeoisie which has taken the initiative and developed a general offensive against a working class weakened and disarmed, destroying their previous gains. Trying to force the bourgeoisie to make significant concessions when it is developing an offensive against a working class in disorganised retreat, quite apart from betraying a petit-bourgeois expectation of alms from the master, is in any case a terrible nonsense which confuses two entirely different situations.

In concrete daily politics, this muddle inevitably appears as a serious mistake, as Généreux's book as a whole illustrates. The endless rambling about the possible and desirable changes in capitalism prevent him from even mentioning the current and real bourgeois offensive against all the gains that working

people have made. And so fundamental problems of the day, such as the growth in unemployment, the unbearably high levels of debt, the rapid fall in wages in the face of overwhelming price rises, and the continuous dismantling of rights and benefits, to mention only a few, are completely missing from this book. So it's no surprise that one looks in vain for any sort of programme that could respond to these problems which workers face every day. All you can hope for is that something (the Holy Ghost, perhaps?) will touch the bourgeoisie and inspire it to transform its offensive against the working class into a new version of the "thirty glorious years".

It seems little short of incredible that activists endowed with the capacity to reflect, the will to fight and solid experience should fall for such twaddle. But in the Left Front and certain other far-left organisations, it is nonsense of this kind that guides and orientates their struggles. There is, therefore, an absolute contradiction between their sincere commitment to changing the world and the skimpy, retrograde conceptions which tie them to this world. That is why the main task is to overcome this contradiction by adopting a conception and policies in total harmony with this real determination to change the world.

For a radical theoretical and political turn by the far left

Theoretical and political independence in relation to capitalism, its system and its bourgeois class, is the indispensable condition for establishing harmony between, on the one hand, sincere and ambitious aspirations and, on the other, limited objectives of the struggle. Only that sort of independence allows a concrete perspective to be defined which actually goes beyond the system. All past and recent history proves that, without independence of that kind, even the firmest determination to change capitalism is reduced to patching it up, and that in principle this can only work in the short term.

But this theoretical and political independence cannot be the fruit of disembodied speculation or mental play. It is rooted in the working class, whose existence and fate are tied to those of capital, but opposed to them in a profoundly contradictory way. Hence the indissoluble organic link between theoretical and political independence vis-à-vis capital and the struggle of the working class. Now, only Marxism expresses this cohesion and thus puts into words the necessary class independence in thought and action. All other theories are tied to this system or inevitably fall back into its well-worn tracks. That is why this theory alone clearly says that, instead of trying to patch up capital's dilapidated and unhinged system, the central and immediate task is to overthrow it and move on to socialism. In conclusion, the historic task of the moment is reduced to and concentrated in a vigorous return to Marxism and its reaffirmation as the theory and guiding thread of the political activity of all organisations fighting against the grip of capital.

However, as the election results have repeatedly and relentlessly confirmed, the prospects of the Left Front and die Linke in Germany have been broadly compromised. These two coalitions, in thrall to their reformist theories, are seriously threatened with disappearing or shrivelling into political insignificance. (Syriza in Greece still has the benefit of a respite due to the specific situation in that country.)

Sadly, the Left Front obviously lacks the internal resources which could enable it on its own to make the veritable leap that is necessary if it is to turn to Marxism. From now on it is useless and in fact damaging to hang around waiting for any such "cultural revolution" on its part. Instead of that kind of turn, it is attempting to avoid the more and more obvious fate that awaits it with a confused and many-hued mixture of inconsistent scraps and reformist recipes. Its recent political evolution proves this.

Within the structure of the Left Front, the weight of those formations which, formally at least, linked it to Marxism and the workers' movement has noticeably diminished and that of those which came from other horizons grown (obviously one is not speaking here of the Communist Party, which long ago silently dropped even the caricature of Marxism to which it used to lay claim). For example there were groups which broke away from the NPA (Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste – New Anti-capitalist Party) like that led by Christian Picquet and others, which have lost their role and significance in this coalition, whereas the frankly petit-bourgeois group "Ensemble" ("Together") of Clémentine Autain, a loose, obscure and indeterminate assemblage, is coming to the fore. This surely represents a political slide to the right on the part of the Front, despite the fact that the groups coming from the NPA have shown not the slightest aptitude to inspire anyone with Marxism. Faithful to their Pabloite heritage, they have continued their old politics of adaptation, this time not to triumphant Stalinism but the reformism pervasive in the Left Front. Nevertheless, their loss of influence has loosened even further the Left Front's already tenuous links with Marxist traditions.

Finally, like a drowning man clutching at a straw, the Left Front has clung even closer to the "enrichment" offered by the environmentalists and their doctrine. But environmentalism (and the politics of the "Greens" as a whole) is another way – different from the well-known, traditional, reformism – of asserting that it is possible to cure capitalist society, i.e. to maintain it, through ecological rather than socialist policies and measures. In this it is (if possible) more reactionary than traditional reformism: politically further to the right and intellectually inferior, since it squarely abandons the concrete social terrain to situate its struggle elsewhere, in man's (general!) relationship with nature – much to the delight of the capitalists! In line with this evasion, it turns its back on the workers' movement,

in particular the trade unions, to place itself in the heart of the urban petit-bourgeoisie. And then, since unlike traditional reformism, it has been and remains utterly incapable of producing a perspective, a general theoretical vision, it does not even have a coherent political programme and makes do with negative criticisms and repeating a few nostrums.

Now the Left Front (or concretely its political motor force, the Left Party) has turned even more closely towards these reactionary ersatz politics, decorating its wobbly political line with a few environmentalist trimmings. This highly-embroidered adventure it has baptised "eco-socialism", which strictly speaking is entirely devoid of meaning. What it does actually mean, very clearly, is that the Left Party (the Left Front), instead of drawing closer to Marxism, is moving even further away. Two very important political conclusions flow from this.

The first is that, despite everything, the Left Front's retreat and its slide to the right should not serve as an alibi for abandoning it or turning one's back on it. Despite all its growing imperfections, its petit-bourgeois and centrist character, it remains the only political formation which has not renounced its opposition to the policy of the bourgeoisie. It thus still has within it the real possibility of developing and improving that fight and the struggle for Marxism. It is the natural crucible par excellence for these battles.

The second conclusion is precisely the lesson that the initiative for a renewal of Marxism can only come from outside the Left Front, in particular those organisations linked to Marxism and the working class movement.

However, we have seen that the three political formations which claim to be Marxist are incapable, as organisations, of providing an impulse of that sort. Their Marxism, if they

still profess it, is nothing but a collection of bookish and formal references to old texts, detached from current reality. The politics they carry out alongside these references flagrantly contradicts them. From that point of view their policy on Europe and their attitude to other anti-bourgeois organisations are equally eloquent.

Under these conditions, the impulse can only come from an organisation (or organisations?) which, like Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, openly and publicly fight for the renewal of Marxism and for socialism cleansed of Stalinist dross. It goes without saying that such a struggle ought to rally and unite all those who, though they may be in separate organisations, wish to fight openly for genuine Marxism and revived socialism.

By *Balazs Nagy*, July 2014

Quelques problèmes de la IVE Internationale, – Et les tâches de sa reconstruction

Balazs Nagy 13.08.2014

Pour aborder ce sujet qui a de multiples facettes et couvre des domaines extrêmement variés, ainsi que pour en relever les points essentiels, il faut revenir bien arrière et examiner certains problèmes décisifs de l'histoire du mouvement communiste. Sans dresser un bilan rigoureux et objectif de l'activité historique de la IVE Internationale, même s'il ne prétend pas à la totalité, il est impossible d'établir correctement ses problèmes et de définir les tâches de sa

reconstruction.

Sans pouvoir entrer ici dans les détails du processus de la formation des partis communistes pendant et au lendemain de la 1ère guerre mondiale, on pourrait – et on devrait – constater qu'à part le parti bolchevik, aucun

de ces nouveaux partis ne correspondait à l'image d'un véritable parti communiste marxiste exigé par la situation révolutionnaire générale. Même le parti bolchevik, malgré sa rupture avec les mencheviks a dû passer par une crise profonde à son réarmement théorique et politique par l'appropriation des Thèses d'avril de Lénine afin de pouvoir accéder à la direction de la révolution.

En effet, l'histoire nous enseigne que tous les partis révolutionnaires doivent traverser une période plus ou moins longue semée de crises pour arriver à la maturité marxiste nécessaire à l'accomplissement de ses tâches historiques. Toute la IIIe Internationale léniniste était un immense école-chantier pour la compréhension et l'assimilation de ces tâches par la transmission des expériences bolcheviques. Mais c'est déjà tout au début de ce processus que la direction Zinoviev a dévié ce chemin, puis le stalinisme a complètement falsifié le développement en lui imprimant un contenu, une direction et des méthodes faux, puis réactionnaires. On pourrait dire que c'était, en quelque sorte, une revanche de la ligne opportuniste menchevique vaincue par les Thèses d'avril.

Il est à remarquer que, comme conséquence, déjà la lutte de l'Opposition contre Staline n'avait provoqué que relativement peu d'écho favorable à l'échelle internationale, et même une bonne partie de celui-ci s'est perdue dans l'impasse de l'opportunisme ou de l'ultra-gauchisme.

Toujours est-il que la lettre-rapport de Eleazar Solntsev à Trotsky, à l'automne 1928, a dépeint une situation chaotique d'une opposition faible et très bigarrée en Europe et aux USA.

Cette lettre rapportait qu'il existe « indubitablement... un début de formation (le tout début, malheureusement) d'une aile gauche dans l'I.C. » dont le « processus (de développement) sera long, difficile et très douloureux ». Puis, il complétait cet avis par l'affirmation suivante : « Il est... prématuré d'espérer d'avoir dans un avenir proche une gauche unie » (une gauche dans l'I.C.). Ensuite, il désignait la cause de cette diversité : « Les multiples groupes auxquels nous avons donné notre étiquette sont entrés dans l'opposition par des voies si variées et pour des raisons si diverses que l'on peut s'attendre aux combinaisons et aux regroupements les plus inattendus. » Pour cette raison, il préconisait : « Il nous faut, avant toute unification, nous délimiter en traçant nos frontières. » (« Cahiers Léon Trotsky », no. 7/8)

Nous savons qu'effectivement, au début de son exil, Trotsky a commencé son activité par une délimitation rigoureuse. Au cours de ces premières années de délimitation et de regroupements, les forces de l'Opposition marxiste ont perdu beaucoup d'anciens cadres expérimentés (passés à droite ou à gauche du mouvement ouvrier) et son renforcement venait surtout de jeunes inexpérimentés. Toute cette grande sélection s'est traduite, jointe à la fameuse « bolchévisation » de l'I.C. menée par Zinoviev, par la poussée de l'Opposition internationale à la périphérie de la classe ouvrière et de son mouvement et, incidemment, a détérioré sa composition sociale en faveur de la petite-bourgeoisie intellectuelle. Le triomphe du stalinisme accentuait encore plus cette évolution.

Trotsky était pleinement conscient de grandes faiblesses de l'Opposition internationale : de ses graves insuffisances de formation marxiste et de ses manques d'expériences, ainsi que de ses défaillances d'organisation. Le mouvement dans son ensemble était pratiquement dépourvu d'une continuité réellement communiste.

Encore au début de 1936, Trotsky écrivait que « ... même aujourd'hui, la IVe Internationale a déjà en URSS sa section

la plus forte, la plus nombreuse et la mieux trempée. » (Œuvres, vol.8, p.89), alors que sévèrement décimée, ses membres étaient presque tous dans les prisons et les camps.

L'ensemble de la lutte de Trotsky s'est concentré ainsi sur une activité incessante de transmettre le bolchévisme et ses enseignements sous toutes ses formes aux jeunes, et parfois moins jeune cadres et militants de la IVe Internationale naissante. Car il connaissait toutes les carences et le caractère politique immature de la majorité de ces jeunes. Le 25 mars 1935 en France, il notait dans son Journal : « je crois que le travail que je fais en ce moment... est le travail le plus important de ma vie, plus important que 1917, plus important que l'époque de la guerre civile, etc. » – Et plus loin, il ajoutait : « ce que je fais maintenant est dans le plein sens du mot « irremplaçable »...L'effondrement des deux Internationales a posé un problème qu'aucun des chefs de ces Internationales n'est le moins du monde apte à traiter... c'est une tâche qui n'a pas, hormis moi, d'homme capable de la remplir... » Puis, il évaluait le temps nécessaire pour accomplir cette tâche historique : « Il me faut encore au moins quelque cinq ans de travail ininterrompu pour assurer la transmission de l'héritage. » (Trotsky . « Journal d'exil », Paris, Gallimard, 1960, p.74-75)

Nous savons qu'il avait justement ces cinq ans jusqu'à son assassinat, mais les événements ultérieurs ont démontré que s'il a pu transmettre l'héritage bolchevik, ses élèves-dirigeants ne l'ont compris que d'une manière très imparfaite et ne l'ont pas assimilé.

En rétrospectif, il est indéniable que le grand schisme de la IVe Internationale en 1952/53 a désigné un événement beaucoup plus significatif qu'une rupture franche et ouverte d'avec les révisionnistes, contenu dans l'orientation et la pratique de Pablo et consorts. En réalité, il a marqué un tournant

historique, un point de démarcation à partir duquel la IVE Internationale est définitivement entrée dans la phase de sa rapide fragmentation et décomposition, sa désintégration en sectes dont un bon nombre ne s'en réclame même plus.

A la racine de cette dispersion et du déclin il y a l'incapacité des dirigeants anti-pablistes d'aller jusqu'au bout de leur critique, le caractère incomplet de cet acte. Elle s'est limitée – et c'était déjà un fait positif important ! – à la critique du révisionnisme pabliste tel qu'il a apparu, sans un examen profond des conditions qui, au cours de l'histoire de la IVE Internationale, ont rendu possible et favorisé ce révisionnisme. A tel point, que l'apparition brusque du pablisme a surpris tout le monde, y compris ses adversaires, alors que les conditions et les particularités de cette histoire ont, depuis longtemps, accompagné, fermenté et préparé toutes les déviations, pablisme compris.

Pourtant, c'est ce caractère partiel et inachevé de la critique qui a rendu possible le retour de l'américain SWP – suivi par plusieurs autres organisations – au giron de l'Internationale pabliste, en bloquant ainsi la voie au processus de toute clarification. Nous savons que cette volte-face du SWP et des autres avec lui, signifiant leur refus d'engager la critique (sans parler d'une critique encore plus conséquente) était, en dernière analyse, la base et la raison profondes de la dégénérescence complète et de la quasi-disparition de ce SWP et des autres.

En revanche, le grand mérite historique des deux principales organisations adversaires du pablisme, devenues plus tard l'Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) en France et le Socialist Labour League (SLL) en Grande-Bretagne, associées dans le Comité International de la IVE Internationale, réside non seulement dans le fait qu'elles ont donné une analyse marxiste du pablisme, rompant avec lui, mais aussi qu'elles ont entrepris en partie l'examen et la correction des conditions

favorables à son développement.

C'est ainsi qu'elles sont arrivées à déterminer l'une des racines de l'apparition du pablisme dans le manque et l'insuffisance d'enracinement des organisations trotskystes dans la classe ouvrière. Ce défaut reflétait et exprimait une composition sociale défavorable, notamment petite-bourgeoise des organisations trotskystes, surtout en France. Il est certain que la prise en compte de cette carence, que Trotsky a dénoncée plusieurs fois, et les mesures prises pour y remédier, constituaient un immense pas en avant que nous devons non seulement reconnaître mais développer encore plus.

Mais les mesures pour assurer la composition ouvrière des organisations, et pour l'implantation dans la classe ainsi que dans le mouvement ouvrier, bien qu'elles soient essentielles pour l'Internationale et ses organisations, et nous sommes encore loin de les assurer, ne garantissent rien en elles-mêmes, car elles relèvent de l'organisation et de son fonctionnement, sans en définir le contenu. De telle façon que, même la solution de ces problèmes pourtant indispensables pour une organisation marxiste, pourrait – et peut en effet – servir de buts variés y compris contraires aux intérêts de la classe ouvrière. Les organisations staliniennes de composition ouvrière en offrent des exemples multiples.

Il est donc nécessaire d'aller plus loin et de confronter le défaut politique fondamental qui était, d'après moi, à la source de toutes les insuffisances de l'activité de la IVE Internationale et formait la base de toutes les déviations qui ont surgi dans son histoire, telle que le pablisme mais aussi toutes les autres.

C'était l'incompréhension de ce qu'est la IVE Internationale, sa mission et de sa tâche et, partant, de sa nature. Pendant toute l'histoire de l'Opposition internationale, puis de la IVE Internationale, cette incompréhension était omniprésente et apparaissait clairement dans la différence, voire

l'opposition entre la vue de Trotsky à ce sujet et quasiment de toutes les directions et cadres de l'Internationale.

Cette différence fondamentale et importante accompagnait toute l'histoire de l'Opposition et de la IVe Internationale et revenait à la surface très fréquemment. Pour présenter l'opinion de Trotsky, je ne le réfère qu'à deux de ses textes les plus significatifs. Le premier (38 pages) est « La guerre et la IVe Internationale » d'octobre 1934. (Remarquons, en passant, cette caractéristique de l'approche de Trotsky qui consistait à parler de la IVe Internationale – et non pas de l'Opposition -, bien avant la proclamation formelle de la IVe Internationale.)

Après avoir constaté que « Sans une révolution prolétarienne, une nouvelle guerre mondiale est inévitable » (Œuvres, vol.4, p.49) – un jugement unique par sa clairvoyance dans ces temps-là, – Trotsky définissait que « Ce fait même fait de l'attitude vis-à-vis de la guerre qui vient la *question clé* de la politique prolétarienne. » (Ibid. p.53. – souligné par moi – B.N.)

Il a clairement désigné par-là, sans la moindre équivoque, la tâche de l'Opposition : « *La transformation de la guerre impérialiste en guerre civile* constitue la tâche stratégique générale à laquelle devrait être subordonné l'ensemble du travail d'un parti prolétarien pendant la guerre. » (Ibid. p.75. – souligné dans l'original.)

Pour Trotsky l'objectif central était donc la révolution prolétarienne et sa préparation et cela, notons-le bien, indépendamment de la force limitée des rangs de l'Opposition (plus tard, de la IVe Internationale). C'est pour cette raison que dans le même texte, il disait : « Ce n'est pas un révolutionnaire, mais un parasite impuissant, qui capitulera

Demain devant le fascisme et la guerre, celui que peut passer sous silence la tâche de l'armement des ouvriers. » (Ibid.

p.77.) – Il y développait donc largement les tâches de cet armement ! Puis, il affirmait : « Si le prolétariat se révèle impuissant à empêcher la guerre au moyen de la révolution – et elle est l'unique moyen d'empêcher la guerre -, les travailleurs, avec le peuple entier, devront *participer à l'armée et à la guerre.* » (Ibid. p.82. – souligné dans l'original.)

Et il terminait par ces mots : « Même si, au début d'une nouvelle guerre, les révolutionnaires authentiques devraient se retrouver en minorité infime, nous ne pouvons un seul instant douter que, cette fois, le passage des masses sur le chemin de la révolution se produirait plus rapidement, de façon plus décisive et plus acharnée, que pendant la première guerre impérialiste. Une nouvelle vague d'insurrections peut et doit vaincre dans tout le monde capitaliste. » (Ibid. p.85.)

Nous devons constater que l'ensemble de la guerre, et la révolution yougoslave en particulier – malgré sa direction stalinienne forcée par les circonstances – donnait une confirmation saisissante de cette stratégie, renforcée par les révolutions éclatées en Grèce et en Italie, par exemple, canalisées et étouffées par les staliniens et d'autres.

Un autre texte de fond (de 51 pages) de mai 1940 analysait cette même tâche centrale encore plus concrètement. Rédigé pour la conférence internationale, dite « d'alarme » à New York, même son titre la formule très expressément : « Manifeste sur la guerre impérialiste et la révolution prolétarienne mondiale ». (Œuvres, vol. 24, p.27.) On y lit que « Notre politique (celle de la IVe Internationale) dans la guerre n'est que la poursuite sous forme concentrée de notre politique dans la paix. » (Ibid. p.66.) Et ce programme « ...est formulée dans une série de documents accessibles à tout un chacun. On peut en résumer la substance en deux mots : *dictature du prolétariat.* »

(Ibid. – souligné dans l'original.) Autrement dit, le but est la révolution prolétarienne. Il est donc suffisamment clair que pour Trotsky la préparation de cette révolution constituait le but immédiat de l'Internationale.

Or, pour les directions aussi bien de la IVe Internationale que de ses sections ce but apparaissait dans le meilleur des cas, comme une perspective plus ou moins lointaine, mais aucunement en tant que la tâche du moment. Et cette déviation importante s'est brutalement révélée au cours de la 2^e guerre mondiale.

(C'est justement pendant mes investigations sur le développement de la révolution mondiale pendant et à l'issue de la 2^e guerre mondiale ; ainsi que sur le processus de sa canalisation et de son étranglement que ce bilan tragique m'est apparu le plus nettement. Cette investigation constitue le vol. 2. de mon travail : « Considérations marxistes sur la crise ».)

L'épreuve de cet événement historique a mis à nu et violemment accentué cette faiblesse principale de la IVe Internationale. C'est cela qui, dès le début, avait freiné le développement de l'Opposition internationale. En somme, cette incompréhension générale (confusions, compréhension fautive et/ou limitée des tâches, etc.) de la IVe Internationale et de sa construction a lourdement entravé son développement et, finalement, non seulement rejeté en arrière mais servait de base d'un changement profond de son objectif et, partant, de sa nature. C'est cette transformation relativement lente, – temporisée par la contradiction entre la pression de la classe ouvrière transmise par les militants appuyés sur celle-ci – qui formait le contenu exact de son impuissance, allant jusqu'au seuil de sa perte.

Pour faire ressortir cette véritable opposition entre l'opinion de Trotsky sur la mission de la IVe Internationale et celle de ces dirigeants et cadres, il suffit de voir

comment ces derniers voyaient les raisons de la proclamation et de la naissance de la IVE Internationale – même quelques décennies plus tard. Dans sa brochure « La quatrième Internationale », parue en 1969 chez Maspero, Pierre Frank réfutait les arguments des adversaires de la proclamation, selon lesquels celle-ci était « prématurée », par une affirmation non moins étrange. Selon Frank, « ...il ne s'agissait pas pour lui (c'est-à-dire pour Trotsky) d'une question de chiffres des effectifs, (etc.), mais avant tout et surtout de la perspective et de la continuité politiques. » (p.42.) Pour renforcer et étayer encore plus une telle incompréhension, proche de la mystification, il affirmait que « Après coup,... on peut se rendre compte que l'entrée dans la guerre sans que la IVE Internationale eut été proclamée aurait permis à toutes les pressions étrangères et à toutes les forces centrifuges... de s'exercer cent fois, mille fois plus intensément. » (P.42-43.) Et il nous assénait sans ambages sa certitude fautive : « Par la proclamation de la IVE Internationale Trotsky visait essentiellement à assurer cette continuité au cours d'une période pleine de dangers. » (p.43.)

Frank exprimait par-là une vue largement répandue parmi les dirigeants et cadres de la IVE Internationale qui la voyaient – et voient encore ! – dans la IVE Internationale une sorte de talisman de force surnaturelle qui les protégerait contre toutes les menaces d'un environnement dangereux.

Or face à cette vue du dirigeant pabliste Pierre Frank, en quoi voyaient alors ses adversaires anti-pablistes de 1952/53 la raison d'être de la IVE Internationale ? Pierre Lambert, porte-drapeau de la lutte anti-pabliste en France et pour une bonne part aussi à l'échelle internationale, publiait une brochure en 1970. Celle-ci a paru sous le titre prometteur de « Quelques enseignements de notre histoire ». (Remarquons que Lambert, dirigeant incontestable de l'OCI n'a pas osé pourtant d'en affirmer publiquement la paternité.) Néanmoins, sur la page 29 de cette brochure nous découvrons son opinion maintes

fois revendiquée, à savoir que Trotsky estimait « ... qu'il faut proclamer la IVe Internationale dans le but, justement, de permettre à l'avant-garde... de résister à la terrible pression qui va s'exercer sur elle avec la deuxième guerre mondiale... » Puis, il continuait : « ... précisément parce que les défaites et les reculs... vont inévitablement amplifier avec la nouvelle guerre impérialiste... que la IVe Internationale doit être proclamée ». Et à Lambert de poursuivre ses élucubrations : « La proclamation était l'unique moyen de permettre à la classe ouvrière... d'assurer l'héritage d'Octobre et de résoudre positivement les contradictions... », etc.,etc., suit une longue liste confuse et peu compréhensible. (p.29-30.) Il évoquait donc exactement les mêmes « arguments » que son adversaire pablisme Pierre Frank, et confirmait ainsi leur accord profond sur ce point décisif. Notamment, que les adversaires du pablisme ne sont pas allés jusqu'au bout de leurs critiques parce qu'ils étaient, et sont restés sur le même terrain de la négation de la mission de la IVe Internationale qui, en définitive, a permis la naissance du pablisme et a favorisé sa progression.

L'examen rigoureux et détaillé de l'interdépendance intime et la parenté proche entre le pablisme et leurs adversaires sont patentes et évidentes quant à leur refus commun d'assumer l'engagement franc et direct de la IVe Internationale pour la préparation effective de la révolution prolétarienne. Le pablisme s'est affirmé comme l'une des formes achevée de ce refus, tandis que ces critiques et dénonciateurs lambertistes en représentaient, et représentent encore, l'une des variantes dissimulées et plus subtiles. Il est indispensable de continuer encore et d'enrichir cette analyse. Mais pour le moment, nous devons poursuivre notre examen qui ne fait qu'esquisser les grandes lignes d'une critique, servant l'assimilation des leçons authentiques de notre histoire, en vue des conclusions susceptibles de réorienter notre activité.

C'était pendant la 2^e guerre mondiale que cette terrible contradiction entre la vue de Trotsky sur la mission et l'objectif immédiats de la IV^e Internationale et celle des dirigeants de cette même Internationale devenait une véritable antagonisme. De plus, favorisé par l'assassinat de Trotsky ce désaccord s'est gonflé démesurément et aboutissait, pendant la guerre, à la paralysie de la IV^e Internationale, contrebalancée à peine, sinon pas du tout, par une activité positive sporadique par telle ou telle section et de leurs militants.

Comme nous l'avons vu, Trotsky voyait la guerre comme la matrice importante de la révolution prolétarienne, un terrain fertile de sa préparation, ce qui nourrissait chacun de ses textes. Alors que les dirigeants et cadres de l'Internationale ne voyaient dans la guerre que le conflit inter-impérialiste – ce qui l'était effectivement ! – dans laquelle ils n'avaient rien à faire, à part l'expression et la défense habituelles du prolétariat, comme pendant le temps de paix. De la vérité incontestable que la guerre est celle des deux impérialismes et elle n'est pas la leur, l'écrasante majorité des dirigeants a tiré la conclusion formaliste et fautive selon laquelle les trotskystes n'ont rien à faire avec cette guerre. En général, ils ont refusé l'engagement militaire – sauf les britanniques et les américains – contre le fascisme en l'identifiant avec le service rendu à l'impérialisme anglo-saxon. Surtout, tous refusaient, dès le début, la lutte armée révolutionnaire pour le pouvoir qui s'est présentée alors sous la forme spécifique de la prise d'armes avec les partisans. Par cela même, ils ont radicalement mis en question le marxisme, en particulier l'enseignement de Lénine et de Trotsky sur l'époque en tant que celle de « guerres et de révolutions ».

Ainsi la IV^e Internationale se transformait de l'instrument de la révolution imminente en une sorte de l'icône sacrée, messagère d'un avenir radieux. Par cette méprise tragique de son objectif, ses pontifes ont émoussé la pointe acérée de cet

outil puissant de lutte pour en fabriquer une amulette. Et comme les anciens peuples dans un passé lointain ou les superstitieux de nos jours, ils croyaient fermement – beaucoup sont qui croient encore – que ce fétiche les protège contre les accidents de parcours et contre les maladies et les déformations.

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D'où venait cette vue mystique sur la destinée d'une organisation par excellence politique et combattante, renvoyant son rôle et son fonctionnement effectifs dans un avenir vague et incertain ?

L'une des sources puissante de cette perception devait être la méconnaissance de l'enseignement de Lénine sur l'impérialisme, un savoir sommaire et superficiel de l'agonie du capitalisme, de sa nature définitivement déclinante. Ils étaient bloqués ainsi par une compréhension partielle et lacunaire de la décadence impérialiste comme la base du rôle révolutionnaire immédiat de l'Internationale.

A l'exception des bolcheviks, l'ensemble du mouvement ouvrier mondial se nourrissait, en effet, des traditions réformistes transmises et renforcées par mille canaux. Toujours dans son « Journal d'exil » Trotsky remarquait encore au début de mars 1935 : « Après la guerre mondiale, Blum (il s'agit de Léon Blum – BN) considérait (et il considère en fait encore) que les conditions n'étaient pas mûres pour le socialisme. Quels naïfs rêveurs étaient donc Marx et Engels, qui dès la seconde moitié du XIXe siècle attendaient la révolution sociale et s'y préparaient !... Pour Blum il existe... on ne sait quelle « maturité » économique absolue de la société pour le socialisme, une maturité qui se détermine d'elle-même par ses seuls symptômes objectifs... J'ai mené la lutte contre cette conception mécaniquement fataliste dès 1905 (Voir : « Bilan et

Perspectives »). (p.60.)

On peut mesurer le ravage de cette incompréhension objectiviste, par le fait navrant que même après la 2^e guerre mondiale, la période de trente années de prospérité factice du capitalisme a été attribuée à la capacité supposée de ce même capitalisme de développer les forces productives par l'ensemble de la IV^e Internationale pabliste. Impulsée par l'économiste pabliste Ernest Mandel, la contamination de cette perversion spéculative était tellement profonde que même dans la Workers International à ses débuts nous avons dû mener une discussion âpre contre cette conception soutenue par l'argentin Rollo Garmendia et par l'organisation italienne « Gruppo Operario Rivoluzionario ». (A ma connaissance, cette organisation a disparu dans la catacombe générale des organisations ouvrières en Italie.) Toujours est-il que la force de résistance de la croyance de la capacité de l'impérialisme de réguler ses contradictions et de se régénérer est si vivace qu'elle devenait aujourd'hui la base de la plate-forme générale de tous les courants petits-bourgeois et des renégats du marxisme qui appellent au retour des mesures de Keynes et ses prétendues « trente glorieuses ».

La profonde influence de cette vue antimarxiste vient non pas directement seulement du réformisme ancien mais de sa reprise par le stalinisme et des « apports » complémentaires de celui-ci. Le nationalisme réactionnaire du stalinisme affirmant la possibilité du socialisme dans un seul pays, postulait le développement du capitalisme dans le reste du monde. Cette distorsion du marxisme s'appuyait aussi sur un autre aspect de la conception réformiste qui considère le système capitaliste-impérialiste mondial non pas dans son entité organique mais comme une sorte d'addition des pays aux systèmes différents. Cette vue d'ensemble dont la source était et reste la méconnaissance de la nature, du rôle et du fonctionnement du marché mondial qui, sur la base capitaliste, unifiait le monde depuis longtemps. Or déjà le Manifeste du Parti Communiste

disait déjà : « Par l'exploitation du marché mondial, la bourgeoisie a donné une tournure cosmopolite à la production et à la consommation de tous les pays. » Et plus loin : « L'ancien isolement... fait place à des relations universelles, à une interdépendance universelle des nations. » On ne peut pas être plus clair. Pourtant, cela n'a pas empêché la prolifération et la fréquence de vues réformistes sur un monde fragmentaire désigné plus haut. Mais je ne m'arrête pas ici plus longtemps sur cette question. Il suffit de dire que dans son analyse de l'impérialisme, même Rosa Luxembourg est tombée dans l'erreur de supposer un marché extérieur au capitalisme qui serait nécessaire pour la réalisation de la plus-value. (Rosa Luxembourg. « L'accumulation du capital » I-II, Paris, Maspero, 1967, pp.301+238.) Nous savons que Lénine a vivement réagi par ses notes critiques à cette rechute inattendue de Luxembourg dans les platitudes narodniks qu'elle a pourtant rejetées. Il suffit de dire ici que malgré cette faute de type réformiste, Rosa Luxembourg n'a pas suivi la trajectoire révisionniste de cette conception, mais elle s'affirmait comme révolutionnaire.

Nous avons vu qu'en critiquant la vue bornée de Blum sur une prétendue immaturité du capitalisme (alors qu'il était déjà entré dans sa phase déclinante de pourrissement), Trotsky a fait référence à son ouvrage « Bilan et Perspectives » paru en 1906. Au lendemain de la révolution russe de 1905, et muni de ses expériences riches, il arrivait dans ce livre à la conclusion qu'après le grand développement du 19^e siècle, la dynamique de la lutte de classes amènera le prolétariat, même dans les pays arriérés, à la prise de pouvoir avant même la maturité complète du capitalisme. Par conséquent, le prolétariat sera poussé par sa lutte à l'accomplissement de la révolution bourgeoise tout en continuant ses luttes pour ses objectifs socialistes. Trotsky donc écrivait contre les fatalistes d'un développement dit objectif que « ... toute la question est que les processus qui constituent les prémisses historiques du socialisme ne se développent pas isolément les

uns des autres, mais se limitent mutuellement ; lorsqu'ils atteignent un certain point... ils subissent un changement qualitatif ; leur combinaison complexe engendre alors ce phénomène que nous appelons révolution sociale. » (Trotsky. « 1905 » – Suivi de « Bilan et Perspectives », Paris, 1969, Ed.de Minuit, p.440.)

Il me semble inutile de détailler ici toute la théorie de la révolution permanente. Toujours est-il que par cette conception remarquable Trotsky a remis la lutte de classes, ses ressorts, ses éléments et combinaisons au centre, comme l'agent principal et le pivot du développement historique. Par cela même, il renvoyait les peseurs pointilleux de signes de degré du capitalisme parmi d'autres dogmatiques.

On peut dire sans exagération que ces deux œuvres absolument complémentaire: L'impérialisme de Lénine et La révolution permanente de Trotsky constituent un véritable renouveau et un enrichissement fondamental du marxisme. Ce n'est pas un hasard que tous les réformistes vulgaires et renégats d'aujourd'hui – même ceux qui tentent de se cacher derrière Marx – évitent soigneusement de faire face à ces deux monuments théoriques.

Bien entendu, on ne pourrait pas comparer les partisans de Trotsky aux réformistes vulgaires pareils au Blum. Même s'ils ne comprenaient que très sommairement et superficiellement l'analyse de Lénine sur l'impérialisme (en particulier sa nature décadent dépassé, son pourrissement et parasitisme), ils voulaient abattre ce capitalisme et croyaient sincèrement à la révolution socialiste. Sauf que cette croyance, cette certitude même restait au niveau d'une conviction scientifique et d'un espoir politique, mais ne devenait pas la pratique assidue de sa préparation concrète. De plus, un vieux préjugé proche d'une superstition s'est emparé de la majorité des trotskystes et les retenait dans une étrange passivité dans ce domaine.

Ils étaient convaincus, à juste titre, que c'est la classe

ouvrière qui fait la révolution, donc ils étaient hostiles, aussi avec raison, à toute idée aventuriste de « faire la révolution » eux-mêmes. Mais de cette compréhension correcte, ils tiraient la conclusion générale, fausse et antidialectique, qu'ils n'ont qu'à attendre que le prolétariat fasse la révolution. Or en 1902, Lénine a consacré tout un livre à la lutte contre une telle soumission à la spontanéité des masses prolétariennes. Il y écrivait, par exemple que « ... le mouvement ouvrier spontané, c'est le trade-unionisme...or le trade-unionisme, c'est justement l'asservissement idéologique des ouvriers par la bourgeoisie. C'est pourquoi notre tâche... est de combattre la spontanéité, de détourner le mouvement ouvrier de cette tendance spontanée qu'a le trade-unionisme à se réfugier sous l'aile de la bourgeoisie et d'attirer sous l'aile de la social-démocratie révolutionnaire. » (Lénine. « Que faire ? », Paris, Ed. Sociale, 1965, p.391-92.)

Malgré tout, l'influence de cet esprit de spontanéité était si forte sur les membres de l'Opposition, que Trotsky jugeait nécessaire de revenir publiquement sur ce problème. En 1935 il écrivait un article important « Rosa Luxemburg et la IVe Internationale. Remarques rapides sur une question importante. » (Œuvres, vol.6 p.34.) Il est nécessaire d'en citer abondamment. D'abord, on peut y lire que pour Luxemburg « ... la sélection préparatoire d'une avant-garde ne comptait pas suffisamment par rapport aux actions de masses qu'il fallait attendre, tandis que Lénine, en revanche,... réunissait inlassablement des ouvriers avancés en noyaux fermes... » (P.36.)

Et justement là, contre la spontanéité ! – la première fois il formulait : « On peut affirmer, sans la moindre exagération : l'ensemble de la situation mondiale est déterminé par la *crise de la direction du prolétariat*. » (p.37. – souligné dans l'original !)

Ensuite, il expliquait que « ...les grandes actions exigent une direction à leur dimension. Pour les affaires courantes les

ouvriers continuent à voter pour les vieilles organisations. Ils leur donnent leurs voix – mais absolument pas leur confiance illimitée. D'autre part, après le pitoyable effondrement de la IIIe Internationale, il est devenu beaucoup plus difficile de les inciter à donner leur confiance à une nouvelle organisation révolutionnaire. C'est précisément en cela que consiste la crise de la direction du prolétariat. Dans une telle situation, chanter un hymne monotone à la gloire des actions de masse d'un avenir indéterminé, en l'opposant à la sélection consciente des cadres d'une nouvelle Internationale, c'est faire une besogne profondément réactionnaire. » (p.38.)

Et il arrivait à la conclusion : »La crise de la direction du prolétariat ne peut évidemment être surmontée par une formule abstraite. Il s'agit d'un processus d'une très longue durée. Pas un processus purement « historique », c'est-à-dire des conditions objectives de l'activité consciente, mais d'une chaîne ininterrompue de mesures idéologiques, politiques, organisationnelles, en vue de fusionner les éléments les meilleurs, les plus conscients du prolétariat mondial sous un drapeau sans tâche, ces éléments dont il faut sans cesse augmenter le nombre et la confiance en eux, dont il faut développer et approfondir les liens avec de plus larges secteurs du prolétariat... » (p.39.) A mon avis, nous devons méditer chaque phrase de ce texte pour en assimiler le message entièrement valable pour notre activité d'aujourd'hui.

Mais en dépit de ces avertissements de Trotsky et de tous ses efforts, il ne pouvait pas redresser une tendance générale à la spontanéité qui marquait fortement l'activité de la IVe Internationale. Après son assassinat, les dirigeants internationaux ont carrément passé outre ses recommandations. Plus exactement, ils les ont interprétés à leur manière, comme ils les ont compris à leur façon schématique, formaliste, antidialectique. Ainsi pendant la guerre, – puisque Trotsky a prédit l'arrivée de la révolution – ils l'ont attendu avec

ferveur, comme le peuple juif jadis attendu la Messie.

Or la révolution était là. Mais ces révolutions de 1943-46 dans les pays européens, faute d'une direction appropriée et donc loin d'atteindre les sommets de la mobilisation des masses et l'intensité de leurs luttes comme dans la révolution de 1917, même leurs contours ne s'étaient qu'à peine dessinés. Elles commençaient alors à se renflouer rapidement. Alors beaucoup de révolutionnaires trotskystes, profondément déçus, ont exprimé leur chagrin : « il n'y avait pas de révolution ! » Leur désenchantement était si grand que toute une série de dirigeants a tourné le dos et déserté l'organisation en cédant la place aux plus jeunes, en exclamant que « Trotsky nous a trompé » et que « le marxisme ne peut rien expliquer » ! A personne parmi eux ne venait à l'esprit que la révolution n'est pas une fatalité et ne tombe pas du ciel. Elle ne vient même pas nécessairement et inévitablement de l'action des masses, – si les révolutionnaires conscients telle qu'une bonne accoucheuse ne lui préparent pas les voies, ne facilitent pas sa progression et n'organisent pas ses instruments, – mais lui tournent le dos en renonçant à la lutte armée contre le fascisme et aux Etats débilés à sa solde. Il n'y a pas de révolution ascendante sans révolutionnaires conscients !

Car il y a une relation, une interdépendance dialectique entre, d'une part, l'action révolutionnaire des masses et, d'autre part, l'avant-garde consciente de la révolution. Sans cette dernière, même si le mouvement spontané d'une révolution de masses réussit à abattre le régime haï, sans l'activité correspondante d'une avant-garde révolutionnaire, son reflux inéluctable ne ramène au pouvoir qu'un autre régime haï. Une multitude des révolutions atteste cette vérité, tout dernièrement l'histoire des révolutions en Tunisie et en Egypte. Le fait indéniable que ces révolutions n'ont pas encore dit leur dernier mot, n'y change rien.

Au fait, les dirigeants trotskystes d'alors n'ont rien compris

des « Thèses sur Feuerbach » de Marx, plus exactement, ils l'ont interprété de travers. Pourtant il y résume la philosophie marxiste dans une forme condensée en tant que « pratique révolutionnaire » et il a conclu par sa célèbre affirmation : « Les philosophes n'ont fait qu'*interpréter* le monde de différentes manières ; mais ce qui importe, c'est de le *transformer*. »

En tout cas, une bonne partie de ces dirigeants trotskystes de la première période 1938-1946 de la IVe Internationale, convaincue qu'il n'y avait pas de révolution, ont déserté la lutte. C'est en anticipant un tel bilan grave que la prédiction dramatique de Trotsky sonne comme un mauvais augure prophétique. Dans le Manifeste de 1940 déjà cité précédemment, il écrivait : « Si le régime bourgeois sort de cette guerre impuni, tous les partis révolutionnaires dégénéreront. » (Œuvres, vol.23, p.67.) Or non seulement cette anticipation extrêmement grave devenait une réalité terrible, mais elle en marquait aussi sa cause et son contenu.

Some problems of the Fourth

International – And the tasks involved in rebuilding it

By *Balazs Nagy*, August 2014

To approach this multi-faceted subject, which ranges over an extremely wide variety of topics, and to bring out the essential points, we have to go a long way back and examine certain decisive problems in the history of the Communist movement. Without a rigorous and objective reckoning, even an incomplete one, of the historical activity of the Fourth International, it is impossible to establish correctly what the real problems are or define the tasks involved in rebuilding it.

We cannot here get into detailed consideration of the process by which Communist Parties were set up during and just after World War I, but we can, and should, be clear that, apart from the Bolshevik Party, not a *single* one of these parties conformed to the image of the kind of real Marxist Communist party that the general revolutionary situation required. For all its break with Menshevism, even the Bolshevik Party had to undergo a profound crisis on the way to its political and theoretical rearmament by adopting Lenin's April Theses in order to arrive in the leadership of the revolution.

In fact, history teaches us that revolutionary parties have to undergo a more or less lengthy longer or shorter crisis-studded periods in order to arrive at the Marxist maturity needed to accomplish historic tasks. The whole Leninist Third International was an enormous construction-site-cum-school for understanding and assimilating these tasks by passing on the experiences of the Bolsheviks. But hardly had this process started when Zinoviev took it off course and then Stalinism completely falsified the development, lending it a content, direction and methods at first wrong and then reactionary. One

could say that this was in a certain sense the revenge of the opportunist, Menshevik line defeated by the April Theses.

We should note that one consequence of this was that even the Opposition's struggle against Stalin evoked only a relatively lukewarm response on the international scale, and that a large part of even this got lost in the blind alley of opportunism or ultra-leftism.

In any case, Eleazer Sointsev's report in a letter to Trotsky in the autumn of 1928 depicted a weak, motley and chaotic opposition in Europe and the USA. This letter reported that there "indubitably existed the beginnings of the formation (sadly only the very beginnings) of a left wing in the Communist International" whose "process (of development) will be long, difficult and very painful". He then rounded out this warning with the following statement: "It is ... premature to hope to have a united left (in the CI) within the near future". He went on to state that the cause of this diversity was "many groups to which we have given our label have come into opposition by such varied and with good reason different paths that you have to expect the most unexpected combinations and groupings".

We know that in fact, when he was at first in exile, Trotsky started his activity by drawing the line rigorously. Over the course of those first years of line-drawing and new groupings, the forces of the Marxist Opposition lost many experienced old cadre (who went over to the right or the left wings of the workers' movement) and the new forces were mainly drawn from inexperienced young people. Together with Zinoviev's "bolshevisation" of the CI, this whole wide-ranging process of selection pushed the international Opposition to the periphery of the working class and its movement and, incidentally, led to a deterioration in its social composition in favour of the petty-bourgeois intellectual. The triumph of Stalinism accentuated this evolution even more.

Trotsky was fully aware of the great weaknesses of the international Opposition; its serious inadequacies in Marxist education and its lack of experience, as well as its organisational shortcomings. The movement as a whole lacked practically any really Communist continuity.

Again at the beginning of 1936, Trotsky wrote that: "even today, the Fourth International already possesses its biggest, most numerous and best-tempered section in the USSR", at a time when it was severely decimated and almost all its members in prison and the camps.

Thus Trotsky's entire struggle concentrated on an incessant activity of transmitting Bolshevism and its teachings in every possible form to the young, and sometimes not-so-young cadre and activists of the nascent Fourth International, because he knew all the flaws and the politically immature character of the majority of these young people. On 25 March 1935 in France, he noted in his diary: "I believe the work that I am doing at this moment ... is the most important in my life, more important than 1917, more important than during the Civil War, etc." And further on he added: "what I am doing now is in the fullest sense of the word 'irreplaceable' ... the collapse of the two internationals had posed a problem which none of the chiefs of these internationals has the slightest ability to deal ... it is a task which no-one apart from myself is able to fulfil..." Then he estimated how long it would take to fulfil this historical task: "I need at least another five years of uninterrupted work to make sure this heritage is transmitted".

We know that he had barely five years before he was assassinated, but subsequent developments showed that he had not been able to pass this Bolshevik heritage on, that the leaders he was teaching had only understood it very imperfectly and had not assimilated it.

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In retrospect, there is no doubt that the big split in the Fourth International in 1952-1953 marked a much more significant event than a frank and open break with the revisionists contained in the orientation and practices of Pablo and co. In reality it marked a historic turning point, a point of demarcation after which the Fourth International definitively entered its phase of rapid fragmentation, decomposition and disintegration into sects, many of which no longer even claim its name.

At the root of this dispersion and decline was the inability of these anti-Pabloite leaders to take their criticism right through to the end, the incomplete nature of the act. It was confined – and that was in itself an important positive fact – to a critique of Pabloite revisionism as it appeared, without deeply examining the conditions which, in the course of the Fourth International's history, had fostered this revisionism and made it possible to such an extent that the sudden emergence of Pabloism took everybody by surprise, including its opponents, whereas the conditions and specific features of that history had long since accompanied, fermented and prepared all kinds of deviations, including Pabloism.

However, it was the incomplete, partial character of the criticism which made it possible for the American SWP – followed by several other organisations – to return to the bosom of international Pabloism, thus blocking any further process of clarification. We know that this volte-face on the part of the SWP and others, signifying their refusal to take this criticism (not to mention any more consistent criticism) onboard, was in the last analysis the basis and profound reason for the complete degeneration and almost complete disappearance of this SWP and others.

On the other hand, the great historical merit of Pabloism's two main opponent organisations, which later became the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) in France and Socialist Labour League (SLL) in the UK, joined together in the International Committee of the Fourth International, resides not only the fact that, in breaking with it, they provided a Marxist analysis of Pabloism, but that they also undertook in part the job of studying and correcting the conditions which favoured its development.

That is how they arrived at the determination that one of the roots of the appearance of Pabloism lay in the fact that the Trotskyist organisations were not adequately rooted in the working class. This shortcoming reflected and expressed an unfavourable, particularly petty-bourgeois, social composition in Trotskyist organisations, particularly in France. It is certain that taking account of this problem, which Trotsky denounced several times, and the steps taken to remedy it, constituted an immense step forward which we should not only recognise but develop further.

But steps to ensure the working-class composition of organisations, and their implantation in the class as well as in the workers' movement, essential as they are for the International and its organisations – and we still have a long way to go in order to achieve it – do not of themselves guarantee anything, since they are a matter of the organisation and how it functions, without defining its content. In such a way that even solving these problems, indispensable as they are for a Marxist organisation, could – and indeed can – serve various ends, some of them in contradiction with the interests of the working class. The Stalinist organisations made up of workers furnish various examples of this.

So it is necessary to go further and confront the fundamental political shortcoming which was, in my view, at the root of all the inadequacies in the activity of the Fourth

International and formed the basis for all deviations which have arisen in the course of its history, including Pabloism but also many others.

This was the inability to understand what the Fourth International is, its mission and its task, and, thus, its nature. Right through the history of the International Opposition and then the FI, this lack of understanding was omnipresent and appeared clearly in the difference, not to say opposition, between Trotsky's views on this matter and all the leaderships and cadres of the International.

This fundamental and important difference has run through the entire history of the Opposition and the FI and surfaced very frequently. To present Trotsky's views, I merely refer to two of the most significant texts. The first (38 pages) is "War and the International" of October 1934 (note in passing how characteristic of Trotsky's approach it is that he spoke about the Fourth International – and not the Opposition – well before the FI was formally proclaimed.)

Having established that "without a proletarian revolution, a new world war is inevitable" – a judgement unique in its far-sightedness at the time – Trotsky specified that "This fact alone makes the attitude towards the coming war the *key question* of proletarian politics." (my emphasis, BN).

Here he clearly and without the slightest equivocation defines the task of the Opposition: "*The transformation of the imperialist war into a civil war* constitutes the general strategic task to which the whole work of a proletarian party during war should be subordinated." (Emphasis in original).

For Trotsky, the central objective was therefore the proletarian revolution and its preparation, and, let us note, quite apart from the limited strength of the ranks of the Opposition (later the FI). That is why he says, in the same text, "He who tomorrow will capitulate in the face of fascism

and war, who will fall silent on the task of arming the workers, is not a revolutionary, but an impotent parasite" – consequently he here broadly developed what was involved in this arming! Then he stated: "If the working class turns out to be unable to prevent a war by means of a revolution – and that is the only way to prevent a war – working people, along with the whole people, should *participate in the army and in the war.*" (Emphasis in original).

And he finishes with these words: "Even if the real revolutionaries should be in a tiny minority at the start of a new war, we should not doubt for an instant that this time the move of the masses to the path of revolution will occur more rapidly and more decisively and relentlessly than during the first imperialist war. A new wave of insurrections can and should win throughout the capitalist world."

We have to say that the war as a whole and the Yugoslav Revolution in particular – despite the Stalinist leadership forced upon it by circumstances – provide a stunning confirmation of this strategy, backed up by the revolutions which broke out in Greece and Italy, for example, channelled and stifled by the Stalinist and others.

Another basic text (of 51 pages) of May 1940 analysed the same task central task even more concretely. Written for the so-called "emergency" international conference in New York, even its title formulates the matter very urgently: "Manifesto on imperialist war and the world proletarian revolution". Here one can read: "Our policy (that of the FI) in war is merely the pursuit in a more concentrated form of our policy in peace." And this programme "is formulated in a series of documents available to all. Two words sum up its substance: *proletarian dictatorship.*" (Emphasis in original). In other words, the aim is proletarian revolution. So it should be abundantly clear that for Trotsky the immediate aim of the International was to prepare this revolution.

Now the leaderships both of the FI and its sections saw this aim as at best a more or less distant perspective, and in no way as the task of the moment. And this significant deviation became brutally evident in the course of World War II.

(It was precisely during my investigations on the development of the world revolution during and just after World War II and the process by which it was channelled and strangled that this tragic reckoning appeared to me more clearly. This study constitutes vol. 2 of my work: *Marxist Considerations on the crisis*).

This historical event faced the Fourth International with a test which exposed and violently accentuated its principal weakness. This is what impeded the development of the International Opposition right from the start. All in all, this general lack of understanding (confusion, wrong and/or limited understanding of tasks, etc.) of the Fourth International and building it severely hampered its development and, in the end, not only threw it back but formed the basis of profound change in its objective and hence its nature. It was this relatively slow change – delayed by the contradiction with the pressure of the working class transmitted by militants resting on it – which formed the precise content of its impotence, which went to the very threshold of extinction.

To bring out this veritable opposition between Trotsky's view of the Fourth International's mission and that of its leaders and cadres, it suffices to see how the latter – a mere few decades later – saw the reason why it was proclaimed and was born. In his pamphlet *The Fourth International*, published by Maspero in 1969, Pierre Frank refuted the arguments of those who opposed its proclamation saying it was "premature" with a statement that was no less strange. According to him "...he (i.e. Trotsky) did not see it as a question of numbers of forces, (etc.), but first and foremost of political perspective and continuity." To further back up this

misunderstanding approximating to mystification, he stated that: "In hindsight ... one can see that if we had gone into war without the Fourth International having been proclaimed, that would have allowed all the alien pressures and centrifugal tendencies ... to act a hundred, a thousand times more intensely." And he baldly hurled at us his false conviction: "By proclaiming the Fourth International Trotsky aimed mainly at ensuring this continuity in a period full of dangers".

In this Frank was expressing a view widely-held by leaders and cadre of the Fourth International who saw in the Fourth International – and still do – a sort of talisman of supernatural power which will protect against all the threats of a dangerous environment.

So how did Frank's anti-Pabloite adversaries in 1952/1953 see the Fourth International's *raison d'être* in opposition to his view of his? The standard-bearer of the anti-Pabloite struggle in France and for a good part internationally, Pierre Lambert, published a pamphlet in 1970 under the promising title *Some Lessons of Our History*. (It is worth pointing out that, although he was the unchallenged leader of his group, the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste [OCI], he did not venture to state in public his paternity of the pamphlet). Nevertheless, on page 29 of this pamphlet we can read the opinion, to which he often laid claim, i.e. that Trotsky thought " ... they had to proclaim the Fourth International with the aim, precisely, of allowing the vanguard ... to stand up to the terrible pressure World War II was about to inflict on them..." He went on: "... it was precisely because defeats and setbacks ... were inevitably going to grow with the new imperialist war ... that the Fourth International had to be proclaimed." Let us follow Lambert as he wanders off into fantasy: "Proclaiming (it) was the only way to allow the working class to secure the heritage of October and resolve positively the contradictions ..." and so on, followed by a long, confused and scarcely understandable list. So he invoked

precisely the same "arguments" as his Pabloite adversary Pierre Frank and thus confirmed that they were profoundly in agreement over this point, specifically that the enemies of Pabloism did not take their criticisms right through to the end because they were and remained standing on the same terrain of negating the mission of the Fourth International which after all, had allowed Pabloism to arise and fostered its progress.

A rigorous and detailed examination of the intimate interdependence and close kinship between pabloism and its adversaries reveal very clearly and obviously their common refusal to take on an open and direct commitment to the Fourth International in order actually to prepare the proletarian revolution. Pabloism has proved itself to be one of the more finished forms of this refusal, while the Lambertists who criticised and denounced it represented and still represent one of its more subtle, concealed variants. It is essential to take this analysis further and enrich it. But for the moment, we should continue our examination, which merely sketches out the main lines of a critique in order to assist the assimilation of the true lessons of our history with a view to reaching conclusions able to re-orientate our activity.

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During World War II this terrible contradiction between Trotsky's view of the immediate mission and objectives and that of the leaders of that same international became an actual antagonism. Moreover, and Trotsky's assassination assisted, this disagreement swelled immeasurably and culminated during the war in the paralysis of the international for which the sporadic positive actions of this or that section of its activists compensated hardly or not at all.

As we have seen Trotsky saw the war as a significant matrix of the proletarian revolution, a fertile ground for its preparation, something that nourished everything that he wrote, whereas the leaders and cadres of the International only saw in the war an inter-imperialist conflict – which of course it was! – in which they had nothing to do beyond speaking for and defending the proletariat just as they did in peace. From the incontestable truth that the war was between two imperialisms and was not their war, the overwhelming majority of leaders drew the false and formal conclusion that Trotskyists had nothing to do with this war. In general – apart from the British and the Americans – they rejected military involvement, identifying it with serving the interests of Anglo-Saxon imperialism. Above all, from the outset they all rejected the armed struggle for power which presented itself then in the specific form of taking up arms alongside the partisans. By doing so, they placed an enormous question mark over Marxism, specifically the teachings of Lenin and Trotsky about the epoch as one of “wars and revolutions”.

Thus the Fourth International turned itself from being an instrument of imminent revolution into a sort of sacred icon heralding a radiant future. The tragic scorn its pontiffs had for its objective softened the sharp edge of this potent instrument of struggle to turn it into an amulet. And like ancient peoples in the distant past, they firmly believed – as many still do – that it would protect them against whatever accidents befell them and against all disease and deformation.

One of the powerful sources of this perception was to be ignorance of Lenin’s teachings on imperialism, a sketchy and superficial knowledge of the death-agony of capitalism, its definitively declining nature. They were thus blocked by a partial and incomplete understanding of this imperialist decadence as the basis of the immediately revolutionary role of the International.

In fact, with the exception of the Bolsheviks, the whole international workers' movement had been fed reformist traditions transmitted and reinforced through a thousand channels. Still in his *Diary in Exile*, Trotsky noted as early as March 1935: "After the World War, Blum" (Leon Blum – BN) "considered, (and still in fact considers) that conditions were not ripe for socialism. What naïve dreamers were Marx and Engels, who from the second half of the nineteenth century expected the social revolution and prepared for it! ... For Blum there exists ... who knows what absolute 'ripeness' of society for socialism, a maturity determined in itself by objective symptoms alone ... I have conducted the struggle against the mechanically fatalist conception since 1905 (cf. "A Balance and Prospects").

One can measure the ravages of this objectivist lack of understanding by the dreadful fact that even after World War II the period of thirty years of fake prosperity of capitalism was attributed by the whole of the Pabloite Fourth International to capitalism's supposed ability to develop the productive forces. The contamination caused by this speculative perversion advanced by the Pabloite economist Ernest Mandel was so great that even at the start of Workers' International we were obliged to conduct a sharp discussion against this conception supported by the Argentinian Comrade Garmendia and the Italian "Gruppo Operario Rivoluzionario" (a group which, as far as I know, has disappeared into the catacombs of the workers' organisations in Italy). Be that as it may, the belief in the ability of imperialism to regulate its contradictions and regenerate is so persistent that today it forms the basis for the general platform of petit-bourgeois currents and renegades from Marxism who call for a return to the Keynesian measures of the so-called "thirty glorious years".

The profound influence of this anti-Marxist view does not just come directly from the old reformism but from the way it has

been adopted and "contributed to" by Stalinism. Stalinism's reactionary nationalism, asserting the possibility of socialism in a single country, assumed that capitalism would go on developing in the rest of the world. This distortion of Marxism also rested upon another aspect of the reformist conception which viewed the world capitalist system not just in its organic entity but as a sort of adding together of countries with different systems. This is an overall view whose source was and is ignorance of the nature, role and functioning of the world market which long since unified the world on the basis of capitalism. The *Communist Manifesto* already said: "The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country." And further on: "In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." It could not be clearer. However, that has not prevented the widespread and frequent expression of reformist views of a fragmented world such as that expressed above. However, I shall not dwell on this question. Suffice it to say that in her analysis of imperialism, even Rosa Luxemburg fell into the error of suggesting that for the realisation of surplus value there had to be a market external to capitalism. We know how lively was Lenin's reaction in his critical notes to this unexpected back-sliding on Luxemburg's part into the platitudes of the Narodniks, for all that she had rejected them. Suffice it to say that, despite this error of a reformist kind, Luxemburg did not follow the revisionist trajectory of this conception, but asserted herself as a true revolutionary.

We have seen how, in criticising Blum's blinkered view that capitalism was somehow not yet ripe (whereas it had already entered its phase of decline into decay), Trotsky made reference to his work *Results and Prospects* published in 1906. On the morning after the 1905 Russian Revolution and on the basis of rich experiences, he reached, in this work, the

conclusion that after the great developments of the 19th century, the dynamics of the class struggle would lead the proletariat, even in the more backward countries, to take power before capitalism had completely matured. Consequently the proletariat would be pushed by its struggle into accomplishing the bourgeois revolution while continuing its struggle for socialist objectives. So Trotsky wrote in opposition to the fatalists of so-called objective development:

“But the whole point lies in the fact that the processes which are historically pre-requisite for socialism do not develop in isolation, but limit each other, and, reaching a certain stage ... undergo a qualitative change, and in their complex combination bring about what we understand by the name of social revolution”. (*Permanent Revolution and Results and Prospects*, Leon Trotsky, New Park Publications Ltd., 1962, p. 219.)

I do not see any point recapitulating the whole theory of permanent revolution here, but must just say that this remarkable conception enabled Trotsky put the class struggle with all its inner driving forces, elements and combinations back in the centre as the main agent and pivot of historical development. By doing so he relegated all those who punctiliously weigh the various signs of levels of capitalist development into the ranks of all the other dogmatists.

Without any fear of exaggeration one can say that these two works which absolutely complement each other: Lenin's *Imperialism* and Trotsky's *Permanent Revolution*, constitute a real renewal and fundamental enrichment of Marxism. It is no accident that all of today's vulgar reformists and renegades – even the ones who try to hide behind Marx – carefully avoid facing up to these two theoretical monuments.

Obviously we should not compare supporters of Trotsky with vulgar reformist like Blum. Even if their understanding of

Lenin's analysis of imperialism (in particular its outmoded, decadent nature, its decay and parasitism) is very summary and superficial, they wanted to overthrow capitalism and sincerely believed in the socialist revolution. It's just that this belief, even certainty, remained at the level of a scientific conviction and political hope, but never became the diligent practice of concretely preparing it. Besides, an old prejudice approaching superstition laid hold of most Trotskyists and held them in a strange passivity in this domain.

They were, rightly, convinced that it is the working class which makes the revolution, and so were hostile, also rightly, to any adventurist idea of "making the revolution" themselves. But from this correct understanding, they drew the general, false and anti-dialectical conclusion that all they needed to do was to wait for the working class to make the revolution. But in 1902 Lenin devoted a whole book to the struggle against such a submission to the spontaneity of the proletarian masses, writing, for example: "... the spontaneous working-class movement is trade unionism ... and trade unionism means the ideological enslavement of the workers by the bourgeoisie." (Lenin, *What is to be Done?*, Pekin, 1975, p. 49.)

For all that, the influence of this spirit of spontaneity on the members of the Opposition was so strong at that time that Trotsky thought it necessary to return to the question. In 1935 he wrote a significant article, "Luxemburg and the Fourth International: Cursory Remarks on an Important Subject" (*Writings of Leon Trotsky [1935-36]*, Pathfinder, New York 1977 p. 29.) It is necessary to quote from this at some length. First of all, one reads that, "... the preparatory selection of the vanguard, in comparison with the mass actions that were to be expected, fell too short with Rosa; whereas Lenin ... took the advanced workers and constantly and tirelessly welded them together into firm nuclei ..." (p.30.)

And it was precisely here – against spontaneity! – that he first put into words: "Without the slightest exaggeration it

may be said: the whole world situation is determined by the *crisis of revolutionary leadership.*" (P. 31, emphasis in the original!)

And then he explained: "great actions require a great leadership. For current affairs, the workers still give their votes to the old organisations. Their votes – but by no means their boundless confidence. On the other hand, after the miserable collapse of the Third International, it is much harder to move them to bestow their confidence upon a new revolutionary organisation. That's just where the crisis of the proletarian leadership lies. To sing a monotonous song about indefinite future mass actions in this situation, in contrast to the purposeful selection of cadres of a new international, means to carry on a thoroughly reactionary work". (p.31.)

He concluded: "The crisis of proletarian leadership cannot, of course, be overcome by means of an abstract formula. It is a question of an extremely prolonged process. Not of a purely 'historical' process, that is, of the objective premises of conscious activity, but of an uninterrupted chain of ideological, political and organisational measures for the purpose of fusing together the best, most conscious elements of the world proletariat beneath a spotless banner, elements whose number and self-confidence must be constantly strengthened, whose connections with wider sections of the proletariat must be developed and deepened."(p.32). I believe we should think about every sentence in this text in order to assimilate the message, which is entirely valid for our activity today.

But despite all these warnings of Trotsky's and all his efforts, he could not put right a general tendency towards spontaneity which strongly marked the activity of the Fourth International. After his assassination, the international leaders completely by-passed his recommendations. To be more exact, they interpreted them in their own way, just as they

understood them in their own schematic, formalist and anti-dialectical way. Thus, during the war – since Trotsky had predicted there would be a revolution – they expected it with the fervour of the Jewish people awaiting the Messiah.

And the revolution did arrive. But the revolutions of 1943-1946 in Europe, lacking an appropriate leadership and therefore unable to attain the pinnacles of mass mobilisation and intensity of struggle that were seen in the revolution of 1917, emerged in barely-sketched outline. Then they started to recede rapidly. And then many deeply-disappointed Trotskyist revolutionaries expressed their bitterness: “There was no revolution!” They were so deeply disillusioned that a whole series of leaders turned their backs and deserted the organisation, leaving the field to younger people, complaining that “Trotsky deceived us” and “Marxism cannot explain anything”! Not one of them realised that the revolution is not inevitable and does not fall out of the sky. It does not even arise necessarily and inevitable from the action of the masses, – if conscious revolutionaries do not, like good midwives, prepare the way for it, facilitate its progress and organise its tools – but turn their backs on it, abandoning the armed struggle against fascism and the rickety states in its pay. There is no rise of the revolution without conscious revolutionaries!

For there is a relationship, a dialectical inter-dependence between, on the one hand, the revolutionary action of the masses, and on the other, the conscious vanguard of the revolution. Without the latter, the spontaneous movement of a mass revolution can bring down a hated regime, but without the corresponding activity of a revolutionary vanguard, its inevitable ebb will only bring another hated regime to power. A whole number of revolutions testify to this truth, most recently the history of the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. The incontestable fact that these revolutions have yet to utter their final word does not change that.

In fact the leading Trotskyists back then did not at all understand Marx's "Theses on Feuerbach", or to be more precise they understood them the wrong way. Nevertheless, these Theses condense the whole Marxist philosophy into a few words as "revolutionary practice", concluding with the famous assertion: "Philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it".

In any case a good number of these Trotskyist leaders of the first period of the Fourth International (1938-1946), convinced that there was no revolution, deserted the struggle. Trotsky's dramatic prediction anticipating such a serious result rings prophetically. In the 1940 Manifesto quoted above, he wrote: "If bourgeois rule emerges unscathed from this war, all revolutionary parties will degenerate". Not only did this extremely grave prognostication become terrible reality, it also described that reality's cause and content.

Capitalism between hammer and anvil

by *Balazs Nagy*

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In our last issue, we briefly noted "cracks" emerging in world capitalism, including, among other things, weaknesses in relation to the international monetary system organised on the basis of and governed by the US dollar. We do know that, to ward off the last great crisis, the big chiefs of US finance decided to supply the economy, which was gasping for breath and quite unable to meet astronomic levels of losses and needs, with even greater massively and artificially swollen credit arrangements. To put it another way, the crisis had

revealed the imperative urgent need to deal quickly and urgently with the yawning gap between real production on the one hand, hampered and dragged back by the growing limitations on effective profits, and on the other the phenomenal pile-up of dollars not backed by anything whose job was to make good the market's organic deficiencies. Let me repeat: the whole edifice of runaway and inflamed world finance operates under the auspices of the US dollar.

We know that immediately on the outbreak of the crisis, capitalist governments carefully put the corpse of capitalist economy on life-support, injecting hundreds of billions of dollars (and euros) to soften the sudden absence of billions of fictitious dollars which had gone up in smoke. The managers of the US dollar in the Federal Reserve System (the US central bank) panicked and decided to institutionalise the allocation of billions of dollars into the economy through regular purchases of American Treasury bills, i.e. to buy these bits of valueless paper with billions of newly-created dollars (85 billion a month!) hot off the press and not backed by anything in the proper way. This blatant forgery they pompously baptised "quantitative easing", and it is no more than an act of common counterfeiting. But this time the forgeries are done by the state and swapped for other state bonds which are also worthless, i.e. they are buying government debt with paper. As the notoriously blunt billionaire Warren Buffet commented recently: "The Fed is the greatest hedge fund in history" (Bloomberg.com/news September 20 2013). Indeed, the whole business casts a glaring light on the fact that the whole mechanism of capitalism-imperialism today rests on a swindle.

Now, as we commented in a previous article, the US central bank, the Fed, has stated that it will now aim to progressively reduce these purchases with a view to ending them. Obviously by doing so the Fed hoped to help, in its own way, to contain the unbridled proliferation of un-backed credit which even they admit is a permanent crisis-trigger.

But as our previous article said, the bare mention that they would eventually do this shook capital around the world.

The first consequence of the Fed's announcement that it wanted to turn off the easy dollar-tap was to provoke a swift and inevitable rise in interest rates in the dollar's US home country, and elsewhere, given that currency's preponderant role. This rise in interest rates meant that credit became more expensive, which cut across the imperative need for cheap money. This fact immediately unmasked all the claims about an economic recovery as mendacious bragging. Next, it started a massive flight of capital from the so-called "emerging" countries in search of more profitable investments. This defection abruptly exposed a bitter truth for the bourgeoisie: that the best part of economic growth in these countries (India, Brazil, etc.) is not based on real production, but is artificially doped by financial juggling with the cheap dollar. So the announcement that the easy dollar was shortly to be withdrawn cut the transfusion needed for their economic growth, and as they were left short of blood, their markedly lower real growth rate emerged in the light of day and their currencies depreciated. A terrible new stage in the crisis started to loom on the horizon in these countries. But while they were waiting to hear what the 22 May announcement about reducing and then stopping the flow of easy dollars actually involved, the Fed took everybody by surprise on 18 September by finally announcing its spectacular U-turn. The same Bernanke who had disconcerted capitalists with his astonishing announcement that he would deprive the economy of cheap dollars, caught the whole world napping with the Fed's final decision contradicting its previous announcement. It turned 180 degrees, stating that "the Fed would continue to buy long term treasury paper and other bonds worth \$85 bn a month, believing that tightening financial conditions could slow down the rate of recovery" (Le Monde, 20 September 2013.)

Despite the coded and extremely careful language, this is a

resounding and honest public confession. It relegates the servile press's enthusiastic reports of a supposed economic recovery in the US and elsewhere to the level of lying fantasy on a level with the Coué method of optimistic auto-suggestion. More generally it is an involuntary admission that capitalism actually is undergoing a prolonged worsening of its death-agony, and in particular that merely keeping it going pushes and drags the economy towards an even more corrupt state of putrefaction and parasitism than was already revealed by Lenin's analysis of imperialism. The major fact is and remains that finance, or more exactly omnipotent credit and the way it is manipulated, tend to supplant production in simply making sure that capitalist economy keeps functioning (accumulation, investment and circulation). But here we must remember what Marx said about credit in volume 3 of Capital: "Banks and credit become the most potent means of bringing capitalist production out of its own limits and one of the most effective bringers of crises and fraudulent speculation". To support this judgement he quoted a contemporary (J.W.Gilbart, The History and Principles of Banking, London 1834, pp 137-8): "It is the object of banking to give facilities to trade, and whatever gives facilities to trade gives facilities to speculation. Trade and speculation are in some cases so nearly allied, that it is impossible to say at what precise point trade ends and speculation begins." To which Engels adds a note: "To what extent the entire business world of a country may be seized by such swindling, and what it finally comes to, is amply illustrated by the history of English business during 1845-47." (Capital vol 3, 1984 p. 406). What would they say about things today!

The dead hand of finance is precisely the concrete form that the increasing rottenness of the system takes today. Massive parasitism in the economy – and in daily life – are its inevitable outgrowths. In the same way, the amazing growth in the social stratum of rentiers, as well as the appearance of a series of rentier states and their expansion and their

significance testify to an unparalleled growth in parasitism.

It is really characteristic that when the Fed announced it was going to reduce the flow of dollars, economic growth immediately tended to slow down, especially in the "emerging" countries, whereas immediately after the bank turned 180 degrees, stock markets around the world marked up considerable gains. Even the European Central Bank (ECB) is now itself proposing to pump some fresh liquidity into the deathly anaemic European banks, having vainly allowed them a thousand billion euros in 2011-1012. But it is still a lot more reticent than its US colleagues.

In fact world capital as a whole is trying to walk a tightrope between two pseudo-solutions, both equally risky: either they will continue to pour billions into keeping their system ticking over, and in doing so all the while preparing a series of upheavals even more devastating than the one we have not yet got out of. Or, anxious about that way out, they will try to control credit parsimoniously, which seems to be the option which the ECB favours. But both potential outcomes of this tightrope-walking lead to the same blind alley of capitalism. With or without injecting billions, production in this system keeps marking time and has not even managed to make good past and current losses.

Two things are certain. The first is that these two false capitalist options will both deepen the systems congenital sickness, bringing redoubled attacks and suffering on working people. The second, which flows from it, is that the overthrow of this cruel system in its death-throes is now on the agenda.