Euro-election shock by Balazs Nagy

[threecolumns]

> *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 childishly 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 Minster 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 then 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 then 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 Larguiller) 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 Melanchon'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.

Onc 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 they 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 prince 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[/threecolumns]

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 que1917, 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 évènements 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.

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En rétrospectif, il est indéniable que le grand schisme de la IVe Internationale en1952/53 a désigné un évènement 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'elle 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 reconnaitre 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 2è guerre mondiale.

(C'est justement pendant mes investigations sur le développement de la révolution mondiale pendant et à l'issue de la 2è 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 évènement 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 fausse 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 sue 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 fausse : « 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 protègerait 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 pabliste 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.

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C’était pendant la 2è guerre mondiale que cette terrible contradiction entre la vue de Trotsky sur la mission et l’objectif immédiats de la IVe 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 IVe 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 fausse 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 IVe 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 2e 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 IVe 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 Operiao 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 se 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 19e 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 Luxembourg 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 Luxembourg « … 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 expliqué » ! 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 débiles 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 de1940 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

[threecolumns]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'etre 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 Operiao 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 inter-dependence 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 Troskyists 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.[/threecolumns]

Capitalism between hammer and

anvil

[threecolumns]by *Balazs Nagy*
First printed in *Lutte des Classes* No. 12, October 2013.

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 that 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.[/threecolumns]

Cracks recently appeared in the edifice of world capitalism

By *Balazs Nagy*
First published in *Lutte des Classes* No. 11, September 2013.[threecolumns]We really ought to draw our readers' attention to two major current events which – each in its own political and economic way – testify to a considerable deterioration in the painful death-agony of capitalism-imperialism. On the one hand, there is the current stage reached in the breakdown of its arrangements in the Middle East with the in itself unusual and surprising but real political blockage affecting this system in relation to the civil war in Syria; on the other, the fresh upsurge of world crisis in the – for many – unexpected shape of a general fall in the rate of growth in production among more or less all the so-called "emerging" countries: India, Russia, Indonesia, Brazil, South Africa, etc., including China. This fall is expressed and accompanied by a real upheaval in their financial system through a brutal fall in the values of their currencies, excepting China. As luck would have it, all of

these serious problems of imperialism have matured and are concentrated at the Moscow meeting of the 20 countries which are considered to be the most important, the famous G20 on 7 and 8 September 2013.

The attempt to consolidate imperialism's rickety mechanism in the Middle East has turned into its opposite in Iraq and Afghanistan, accelerating its decomposition throughout the region. This historical set-back has laid bare its congenital weaknesses and its contradictions to such an extent that, faced with the rise of the proletarian revolution, even in its incomplete and unfinished form, in North Africa, and the Middle East, it finds itself almost completely impotent and incapacitated. The civil war in Syria has completely paralysed it; its leaders no longer have a clue what to do or how to do it to win back dominance. And that is their only pre-occupation. Their breast-beating about the miserable fate of the Syrian people is merely a hypocritical facade to mask their real concerns. To put it more exactly: the existence of a near-unanimous camp of those who advocate inactivity and abstention shows their disarray in the face of uncertainty. Imperialist war-lust has been reduced to the roaring of a toothless lion. But beware – it is still a ferocious predator!

On the other hand, there few better indications of the notable shortcomings and retreat of the workers' movement than the total absence of its voice and independent initiatives on this whole question.

Under these conditions, the process of decomposition will go on, as we can already see in Libya and Turkey. But this disarray is also an opportunity which the various oppressed peoples (like the Palestinians and Kurds) will seize in order to break free from the imperialist yoke and its local satraps, who will not give up easily, so that there is a risk the whole region will become the seat of a future inter-imperialist war. The charges are already laid and the fuses lit.

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The other event of considerable international import is the sudden economic deterioration in the so-called “emerging” countries, with a significant and rapid drop in their economic growth, which since the beginning of the new century had been spectacular. The basis for this fall was when the US central bank (the Fed) decided to stop the artificial issue of millions of dollars not backed by actual production. It is common knowledge that in the last six months alone, this bank has bought back worthless bonds to the value of $86 billion a month (!) in order to bolster the sickly US economy.

As soon as this policy was announced, US interest rates started an irresistible rise, so much so that capital massively deserted the economies of India and other “emerging” countries. At the same time their currencies depreciated dangerously, thus expressing the fact that the value of their production was actually rather modest. At a stroke, their real growth was shown to be quite a lot lower than it had appeared to be previously. Even China’s growth rate fell because her exports are marking time. At a general level, what we are dealing with is a persistent phenomenon which lays bare the organic inter-dependence of national economies within the contradictions of the system as a whole. Despite what the proponents of so-called “globalisation” say about the economic levels of these countries as a whole tending to converge, with the more backward ones catching up with the more advanced (really?), following the same scheme of development as the advanced countries, this inter-dependence actually makes the differences between their levels greater and more obvious. As it happens, the massive displacement of dollars – the expression of the economic dominance of the US – has placed the “emerging” countries at a disadvantage and caused their fictitious growth to evaporate. In place of growing “equality” or “catching up” harmoniously, what we have is the development of contradictions. In place of the fantasy of the everywhere

uniform and even capitalism that was an article of faith for those who swore by “globalisation” or “mondialisation”, we see an ever greater accentuation of capitalism’s internal contradictions. The problems of China, which still has a non-capitalism system, are at a different level, even if, overall, she cannot absolutely escape the constraining effects of international economic interdependence and its contradictions.

All of this also drives forward and exacerbates international competition, which contains within itself the germ of a new international conflagration, the warning signs of which are already visible. We shall have occasion to return to its various aspects in greater detail in future.[/threecolumns]

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On some lessons of the French municipal elections (March 2014)

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The entire French press is unanimous. Whether left or right in their traditional political colouration – the difference is actually pretty superficial – they compare the so-called socialist party's resounding discomfiture in the municipal elections to Napoleons historic disaster on the Berezina River in Russia in 1812, the prelude to his ultimate defeat. For once the accuracy of their judgement is beyond dispute. So our first response is above all to see what we can learn. Its a perfectly straightforward and normal thing to do, although our conclusions differ noticeably from everyone else's.

First of all it is important to emphasise that elections change absolutely nothing in the fundamentals of the capitalist social system or, therefore, in the overall situation. This view is sharply opposed to the popular belief carefully fostered by the usual politicians and organisations of the left. Even if elections do change that systems form or shape, they move within the framework it imposes and are an integral part of it. Whether municipal, parliamentary or European, they are just part of how the (most democratic!) system in place functions, while remaining profoundly bound to the way it moves and works.

How true this is has been more than adequately demonstrated, and two major and opposed schools of thought on the matter were in evidence during the elections. One body of opinion –

an extremely heterogeneous one (especially if you include the right wingers) – traditionally asserts that elections really can bring about effective changes in the system. It has to be said, regretfully, that even a party such as the Front de Gauche (Left Front) and its component parts – which we see as actually standing on the side of working people, and as such on our side too – remains a prisoner to these blinkered electoral (parliamentary) politics. Its leaders, in effect, leave us to suppose mistakenly, or even themselves assert, that a strong showing (and all the more so outright victory) at the polls would enable them radically to change the capitalist social system.

Abstentions are a kind of vote

In contrast to these shallow parliamentary politics, another large and growing section of the population regularly and deliberately abstain. Although municipal elections supposedly affect people more directly, these latest ones saw record abstention levels of 36.6 per cent, particularly among young people.

Most bourgeois politicians and commentators get onto their moral high horse over this. They have the nerve to impugn such peoples republican credentials, and the audacity to accuse them of helping the right wing. Here or there, the reproach is added that they make it impossible for the Left Front and/or its component parts to make consistent progress, and so change the system.

These abstentions, however, express a definite verdict on the existing capitalist system as a whole, fundamentally rejecting it and repudiating the absurd belief that voting can change the system. In this sense, they are right and we defend them against those republican paragons of (questionable) virtue, even though we think that abstaining is negative and sterile and therefore inadequate.

An accurate map showing the percentage of voters who abstained in the recent French municipal elections would clearly show another France living on the periphery of the cities in the proletarian banlieues. It is working-class France, including the unemployed, suffering under savage austerity. The bourgeois press was so bold as to reveal a tiny corner of its extent and significance. In Paris red belt there were 58.6 per cent abstentions in Ivry, 56.8 in Stains, 56.7 in Vitry-sur-Seine; then 56.7 per cent in Vaux-en-Velin in the outer suburbs of Lyon and 55.5 per cent in the disaster-stricken working-class town of Roubaix in the North. The figure is the same for Trappes in the outer suburbs of Paris, the biggest victims of galloping inequality. Bourgeois journalists and all the petit-bourgeois milieu editorialise about this in the abstract – wringing their hands over the losses suffered by the middle class! The working class and its fate simply disappear from these peoples preoccupations. This arises from a deliberate desire to minimise this dangerous class's importance, even to the point of denying its existence. So you can bet they will never draw up any such map because it would cast rather a pall over their chatter and somewhat upset their peace of mind.

On the importance of elections

Elections cannot change the capitalist system (as we can see in the daily more severe blows it inflicts on us), but political organisations would be making an unpardonable error if they concluded that there is no point in elections. In the first place, they are important because they quite faithfully reflect each partys impact and influence, providing a pretty accurate graphic image (including abstentions) of the level and nature of the populations political consciousness.

This political thermometer marked a general defeat for Hollande and his government and, in passing, wiped out all the myth-making that had gone before about municipal elections being all about strictly local issues: all those who in 2012

had expected this government to protect them against the attacks of capital, this time around voted against his party or abstained. That message is clear. In this sense the bourgeois way the newspaper Le Monde explains what this vote means is deliberately misleading. They write that Holland is now paying the bill for a poor start to his tenure because it was not sustained by a clear and clearly-articulated project. (Editorial on 1 April 2014). But the obviously bourgeois nature of his project was exactly what working people did understand and voted against. Nevertheless, in its usual convoluted way, the newspaper does express the bourgeoisies innermost concerns and its insistence that greater determination should be shown in serving that class. Their complaint expresses these requirements and their preferred response, which is to take matters directly in hand via their own traditional parties. In this they are encouraged by Hollande's own bourgeois proclivities. That explains the significance of the heightened profile of the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), the Union of Democrats and Independents (UDI) and the Democratic Movement (MoDem), parties which express the bourgeoisies desire to press ahead with the destruction of social gains. We can be quite sure that Hollande will do everything he can to satisfy these expectations and will (if possible) become even more hostile to what working people want.

The strength of the fascists (barely) conceals their bourgeoisie character

The considerable advance made by the National Front (FN) is almost entirely due to its demagogic propaganda which appears to defend the interests of workers and working people. But watch out! This tactic of appearing to defend working people is a well-established and well-known trick used by all extreme-right parties. In the 1920s Hitler developed the same stratagem, presenting himself as a defender of working people. He went so far as to call his party socialist, merely adding

the adjective national. As for Mussolini, he came straight out of the Italian Socialist Party. As with all fascists, social demagogy was their most important weapon, and this is what the National Front has picked up on. But how demagogic this political line is, is revealed clearly by the fact that it does not attack the whole bourgeoisie and its social system. It only sets its sights on one of its political lines, the one currently in the foreground: Europe. It advocates a different line, i.e. the withdrawal into nationalism represented by the other, minority, section of the European bourgeoisie. So the FN attacks the bourgeoisies majority (European) policy, but not the bourgeoisie as a class which exploits other classes, nor its capitalist system. Far from it, it vigorously attacks immigrant workers, in other words the majority of the working class, and carries on alarmingly about workers gains, denouncing various benefits. It has derived great advantages not just from this lying demagogy, which continues to conceal its avowedly bourgeois nature, but also the fact that no single party has yet unmasked it as a bourgeois party. Normally, criticisms merely affect its anti-European stance and its racist and nationalist phobias, without touching on the bourgeois basis on which they grow like excrescences.

Why is the Left Front marking time?

Elections are also an opportunity for all those united around shared political aims to rally together so as to further extend their ranks. This is particularly true of all those who wish, on the basis of a programme, to make a step forward towards freeing working people from the yoke of the capitalist system. So the elections offered the Left Front a chance to develop. So how to explain that, despite the terrible crisis of capitalism and the fact that workers rejected this society, the Left Front did not just fall a long way back from its spectacular results in the presidential elections, but was clearly overtaken by all bourgeois parties, including the FN and the UMP?

This absurd situation is a consequence of the Left Fronts political ambiguity. While it makes it clear that it thoroughly opposes the French and European bourgeoisies recent austerity policies, it does not come out clearly against the capitalist system as such. It stays vague and enigmatic on this cardinal point which really does require some straight talking. This obscurity is revealed in the lack of a clearly working-class programme directed against capitalism as the social system at the root of all austerity. This lack of a programme and the fact they are locked into the normal bourgeois election framework have condemned them to limp along far behind the others. In short, their position does not measure up to the situation. How can you expect the Left Front to unmask the National Front as a bourgeois party if they equivocate over their own objectives? The municipal elections show that, under these conditions, the Left Front is condemned to mark time while the National Front has made considerable progress, including among discontented workers.

So the main lesson of the elections is obvious. They show ever more clearly that, instead of looking for scapegoats, the main task facing our Left Front is to make an objective assessment of its activity as a whole, above all its political programme,

Balazs Nagy, April 2014[/threecolumns]

New Valls government: A government of anti-working

class struggle

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, April 2014

The recent local government elections and the formation of a new government are a good opportunity, indeed a direct incentive, to say more about the mean, twisted and nasty way the Hollande team running the country think. Their politico-social reasoning is very simple, not to say simplistic. It is what you might call classical social-democratic thinking of a kind well-known over the last hundred years or more.

Resolute defenders of decadent capitalism

The main thing that really marks these people out, among all those who claim to be on the side of working people, is that they present capitalism as an eternal system whose existence you just have to accept. So according to this disgrace to the name of socialist, everything we do is necessarily limited and determined by the framework of capitalism and its general rules. But as a consolation to working people, according to this conception, the capitalist system can be put right, amended and improved, and our job is to contribute to that. This cheapskate philosophy which has long been selling the mission of liberating the working class for a mess of pottage still had some limited validity when, in return for this sell-out, the bourgeoisie was still able to concede various actual reforms. But imperialism is the period of capitalisms decline – something which social democrats obstinately deny – in which, because it is exhausted, this system is organically unable to concede the slightest reform.

Now the present crisis has brutally revealed that this decline has got to the point where not only have reforms become impossible for this moribund system, but in order to survive it needs to attack and destroy previous reforms. This need is what explains its general offensive against existing reforms

and its intransigent determination to fight that right through to the end.

But social democrats are incorrigible; they have not abandoned their grotesque fantasies, but adapted them precisely to the many-facetted requirements of this offensive on the part of a bourgeoisie with its back to the wall. For all Hollande's solemn oaths – and this sheds some light on the social democrats consummate duplicity – they then told us all the fibs about the need on the one hand to swell the coffers of international capital by paying back the debt, and on the other to help our own impoverished capitalist with yet more billions. Against all the evidence they still maintain the lie that thanks to this aid the grateful bourgeoisie will do everything it can to secure the well-being of working people. Even a few weeks ago Hollande was still handing out dozens of billions in line with this plan, but he and his ilk were the only ones (like all self-respecting social democrats) who still believed the incredible dream that in exchange the bourgeoisie would give unemployed people work. (Through these outrageous deceptions they hoped to justify making savings by drastically cutting expenditure on health, education, all welfare benefits, wages, right to a job and so forth, to the point of threatening their very existence.) Alongside this savage demolition of genuine previous reforms – and to show that they are true reformists carrying out actual reforms – they have flooded the country with a wave of so-called societal reforms – at the margins of and even outside of social and economic life – such as same-sex marriage, electrical cars and so forth. The main function of these pretend reforms has invariably been to distract attention from the activity of destroying previous reforms.

The local government elections brought a stinging defeat to those who, in their arrogant and pretentious duplicity, thought that working people had swallowed this hogwash hook, line and sinker. They were sincerely and profoundly surprised

when they saw the results. But to go from there to imagining that Hollande and co would revise their policies and adapt them to what working people want would be an absurd illusion. Far from it!

A build-up of losses and other miseries threaten workers.

The new government is not just a body committed carrying on Hollande and co.s bourgeois policy of robbing working people. In view of the preceding governments alleged dawdling in getting on with the job and also the bourgeoisies growing appetite, not to say bulimia, it is going to toughen up considerably. After 26 March, the employers body Medef trumpeted: A more ambitious trajectory than the 50 billion cut already announced is now absolutely imperative, (Le Monde, 30-31 March 2014). Then the headline on the same newspapers editorial of 1 April spelled out what the government has to do: Hold course! No wobbling, get on with it! And then Hollande's road map made it clear: The only responsible outcome is to set afoot and then roll out reforms aiming at securing an economic recovery. We all know the terrible reality hiding behind these anodyne words. The self-proclaimed leaders of the bourgeoisie in Brussels have also jumped at the chance to insist on greater rigour from the French government. And the commercial treaty being prepared between Europe and the US has up its sleeve further blows which will make any hopes of an economic recovery by France, already pretty well compromised, even more precarious.

Hollande reacted swiftly, obeying not indeed the wishes of the disappointed voters but the requirements of his real, bourgeois, bosses. He quickly established a new government team tightly organised around his closest social-democratic partners. His new prime minister, Valls, is ready-made to epitomise it, with his even more pronounced right-wing political orientation and aggressive character. It is no accident that he has long wanted to rid his party's name of the adjective socialist. So right from the start this team

presents itself as an advanced detachment of a bourgeois attack formation. The odd reassuring and soothing phrase where required do not alter this truth. We shall have occasion later on to comment in greater detail on this new governments anti-worker offensive, the first elements of which, aiming to dismantle the social security system, we have just seen.

There certainly is a change, not to say a turn. Here is an end to the procrastination and shilly-shallying which, however much they suit Hollande’s innate weakness, have become intolerable to the bourgeoisie and seem contrary to the nature of the new government. The presence of people with a left aura like Hamon and Montebourg has nothing to do with any real left. Much more, it signifies the end of equivocation or misunderstanding surrounding these careerists reputations. Indeed, if there is a real left in this party, apart from the usual fake-left loud-mouths like Lienemann and co., now would be the time to say so in opposition to the deployment of definite measures and attacks against workers gains. Above all, now is the time for all organisations who speak and act in workers interests to rally round the Left Front to prepare together a broad united front of all working people against the redoubled attacks by capital and its new government.

Balazs Nagy, April 2014[/threecolumns]

Down with the bourgeois politics of the Front

National! Against reactionary, nationalist fascism!

[threecolumns]By *Balazs Nagy*, May 2014

The forthcoming European elections will no doubt produce unprecedented advances by the French Front National (FN). It gained considerable strength by its spectacular advances in the recent municipal elections, which have clearly given it a head-start in the European elections. So a critical examination of its programme, in particular in relation to Europe, is not only vital in itself but allows us to clarify what the essential problems for Europe are. It also allows to look at all the other parties European policies.

Now, to decode what the FN's orientation towards Europe is and what it means, we must first of all describe its national policy. We must do this not on the basis of that party's own deceptive slogans or what other people say about it, but on the firm basis of the only objective criterion for political evaluation, i.e. its class character.

What is the Front National's real class character?

Actually, we need to establish clearly what the FN's social basis is and indicate unequivocally which class's interests are expressed in its programme and activities. This is the fundamental question which politicians and commentators either evade or completely muddle up, but it is the most important one.

There are, of course, some vague and hesitant answers which describe the Front National as a petit-bourgeois party, or one that speaks on behalf of layers of de-classed workers. And it is true that in the FN's various shenanigans you will see out-and-out, provocative and panicked members of the petit-bourgeoisie a well as disorientated and desperate working

people who follow this party. A large number of bourgeois propagandists also call this a populist party, alluding to its social demagogy. But the only concrete content of this description is simply the bourgeoisies familiar contempt for anything in the slightest way connected with the people.

All these descriptions are superficial. The adjective populist is so devoid of meaning that brain-dead journalists, in deference to the futile and inconsistent great minds they follow, apply it not just to the FN, but to Melanchon's Left Party (Parti de Gauche) too! What do they care that the class nature and objectives of these two parties are radically opposed, or that by acting in this way they are depriving themselves of an investigative method that actually has some validity.

But it is also superficial to view the FN as a petit-bourgeois party, even if there is an element of truth in it. It is true that the Front National is petit bourgeois in its composition, like similar bodies all over Europe. That was also true in the past of Hitlers and Mussolini's parties, and the rest of them, before they seized power. This widely-held opinion arises from immediate impressions based on superficial features of these parties, which various cohorts of petit-bourgeois do flock to join. It goes no further than the social composition of these parties, and completely neglects to describe their clearly and explicitly bourgeois programme.

The NF's bourgeois nature is clearly underlined by the party's programme and – as we shall see in detail later on – by what it actually does. But so-called classical bourgeois and social-democratic politicians and all their spokesmen make all that disappear as if by magic. This blindness is the intellectual expression of the class and social stratum to which they belong, and they also display it towards all past fascist movements (from Hitler and Mussolini to Franco and Salazar).

This conception, which camouflages the social nature of fascist parties behind their social composition, was taken up and amplified by Stalinists in the 1930s and pressed into

service for their Popular Front policies to rescue bourgeois society. Certainly the tenacious persistence of this superficial point of view right up to the present owes a lot to the still considerable influence of Stalinist ideology, which continues to poison minds at large, long after its progenitors power collapsed. As for the kinship between the FN and past (and present) fascist parties, it can be confirmed to the extent that their specific – and shared – bourgeois character is clearly understood. To check this we need first to make a brief detour into the past.

Past lessons help us to understand the present

What we need, to help us orientate ourselves correctly, is a theoretical elucidation of the historic experience of those years, in particular Trotsky's Marxist explanation, which remains totally valid today. Against all the general, botched and inconsistent characterisations one encounters today, he alone provided a serious analysis of fascism based on the class struggles and movements in capitalist society in its period of decline. Of all the many writing he devoted to this subject, let us pick his study: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat (1932), which I strongly recommend to all activists.

In it, Trotsky notes that in the period of its imperialist decline, capital is able to stay in power only through the entire support of either social democracy or fascism. And if the strength of the proletariat is paralysed by the lack of its own political organisation or the inability of its leadership to march towards the seizure of power, these auxiliary arms of capital will grow stronger. But the inevitable accentuation of the general crisis of capitalism and its growing exhaustion sap and undermine the traditional pedestals upon which social-democratic activity is based: reforms and parliamentary democracy. The exacerbation and prolongation of the general crisis thus abolish the foundations upon which social-democracy rests (reforms) and

alters the framework within which it operates (parliamentary democracy). So social democracy grows noticeably weaker while the fascists, with their unbridled social demagogy, grow stronger.

Only a thin membrane today separates France – or indeed the majority of European countries – from a similar situation. To be able to re-establish capitalisms former equilibrium and check the decline that threatens it, the bourgeoisie urgently needs not just to completely demolish the gains the proletariat made previously, but also to smash (or completely domesticate) its organisations. At the moment, they reckon that they can do that without recourse to the direct terror of fascism. They have already appreciably weakened democracy in an authoritarian and Bonapartist direction both within each country and at a European level. They have also succeeded in destroying a considerable mass of social rights and advantages, and all without any large-scale social shocks. Even if they still have a long way to go, all the signs are that they will be able to continue along the same lines. So you can sum it up like this: The so-called democratic rule of the bourgeoisie, profoundly corrupted by the virus of bonapartist authoritarianism, has already shown much more muscle in imposing tough decisions, while at the same time that class is still afraid of the kind of leap into the unknown involved in going over openly to fascism, the memory of which is still painfully alive. It prefers to stick with the social democrats who anyway seem determined enough to destroy social gains and rights and working class organisations (or at least severely discipline them). Above all, they are reassured by the remarkable weakness and torpor of the workers organisations, the virtual absence of a vigorous response by the proletariat. So everything encourages them to continue as they did in the past.

But despite all that, the crisis has grown more severe and instability has increased. Bourgeois voices are raised demanding a further and more decisive turn, pressing ahead to restore capitalisms health. The European Commission, the

French employers organisation, Medef, and other members of the bourgeoisie show no gratitude to Hollande for services rendered but grow yet more demanding and openly arrogant. Alongside this, the fascists strength and influence spread and they prepare to take power. Under these conditions the bourgeois nature of Front National stands out increasingly and its kinship with fascism becomes obvious.

An aggressive bourgeois party custom-built to save moribund capital at any price.

The class character of the Front Nationals programme leaves no room for doubt. It is flagrantly bourgeois. At the same time the FN takes care not to place too much emphasis on its total open support for capitalism, so as not to compromise the social posture it has usurped. However, its programme and the corresponding propaganda nowhere put in question capitalism as such as a well-defined social and economic system. Its criticisms are aimed not at the system itself but solely at its current policies, against which it advocates the application of different policies of the same capitalist system.
So of course it carefully avoids seeking to overthrow capitalism or agitating for this. Consequently it is deliberately opposed to the social revolution and looks forward to coming in power in accordance with all the rules and customs of bourgeois parliamentary politics, even if it would not hesitate to shoulder them aside should the need arise. But, like all other fascist formations past and present, they wont lay a finger on the sacrosanct private ownership of capital.
Now unlike the traditional bourgeois parties and their social democrat partners and rivals, the FN and its like do not rest content merely to present a different programme. These parties base theirs on a virulent and provocative social and political criticism of economic, social and cultural defects, not as something inherent to the capitalist system, but as the direct

consequences of alleged corruption of national space and its invasion by various ethnicities and nationalities.

This is where the fascist nature of the Front National and its ilk right across Europe emerges clearly and unequivocally. Sociological and political criteria are replaced by nationalist and racist phrase-mongering. Hitler and his supporters found an explanation for the social sufferings of the masses in an imaginary Jewish plot. We know what atrocities this vile anti-Semitism led to. At present the Front National focuses its attacks on Arab-origin French workers and working people and on refugees. But of course they have merely adapted the self-same genocidal propensities to demographic and political changes and are keen to shrug off the highly-injurious association with the still vivid memories of the death camps. But as long as capitalism continues and tries to halt its decline, anti-Semitism and its fascist thugs will also remain active.

Now this nationalism and racism do not emerge – and never did historically – as excessive national sentiment somehow outside of or above classes. As they always did, they form the foundations of a policy and propaganda with a clearly-defined class basis. Its violent anti-Arab attacks are concentrated on and aimed against the most numerous and most vulnerable section of the French working class and working people, which is those of Arab origin and/or identity. But curiously they spare rich emir parasites and, as if by magic, turn into fascinated admiration when it comes to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, these great rentier parasites of world capitalism. (Ingrained anti-Arabism on the part of a few fanatical mystics does not alter this fundamental political fact).

This bourgeois-fascist lineage or genealogy on the part of Front National is entirely confirmed by its real attitude to so-called austerity policies. It castigates them in general and as a whole as mistaken and useless, since in their view all problems would be solved if only all foreigners were expelled, but in reality it does not engage in the slightest struggle against the anti-working class measures involved. One

would look in vain for any plan or real struggle by the FN against the constant pension cuts, the systematic erosion of rights at work, or unemployment. On the other hand, it is well known that it was really the FN who thought of slapping the disgusting and contemptuous label welfare dependents on social welfare recipients, especially the unemployed, and call for payments to be stopped. If they have for now shut up on this typically ignoble fascist demand, it is because the fascist contamination is so strong that other bodies are doing their work for them (Like Sarkozy through his fascist adviser Buisson, and after him the Socialist Party interior minister Valls against Roma, or now the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) MP Wauquiez on welfare dependency)

The programme of national isolation is a fascist policy

The fascist character of the Front Nationals bourgeois programme emerges most brutally in relation to Europe and its future. To strip it down, we need first to cast a brief glance at the bourgeoisies own orientation on Europe.
Painfully, and at the cost of two world wars involving massive destruction, this bourgeoisie, or rather its dominant faction, has arrived at a significant pragmatic conclusion: that the powerful contradiction between the forces of production, which have become European (and even global), and the strict maintenance of national divisions, is one of the causes of capitalist decline and thus a permanent source of war; that even this massive destruction, despite an unheard-of level of devastation, has done nothing to stop this decline but only slowed and prolonged it, all the while growing in extent and intensity. It was this empirical understanding which forced the bourgeoisie to undertake among other things the unification of Europe under the iron rod of its larger monopolies.
Now the whole undertaking of building Europe is completely impossible for the bourgeoisie, whose birth was linked to and completely bound up with the birth of nation states. For the

same reason, the death of these nation states will for sure only come over the corpse of the bourgeoisie. Events in recent years completely confirm this truth. The more the bourgeoisie has engaged on the road to its version of European unity, the more it has stoked up its crisis, the more it has weakened itself and torn itself apart. Its very first hesitant and shaky steps towards its alleged European unification already increased the general destruction at every level and increased many-fold the difficulties all working people have suffered. Above all and despite these unprecedented ravages, difficulties of every kind continued to grow, the class struggle has intensified, doubts persist and become widespread – and the death agony of capitalism worsens.

The Front National certainly picks up in a very lively way on what is badly wrong in the traditional bourgeoisies (and its social democratic allies) attitude to Europe, not to correct it, but to denounce European re-unification as an unsuitable, not to say harmful, approach to resolving the general crisis of the system. Against it they advocate the abolition of the Euro and other attributes of unification and a frank return to national sovereignty as we used to know it.

But such a jump backwards into the past is nowadays impossible; it would create immense upheavals which could quite possibly throw humanity a long way back. How damaging that would be was proved by the atrocities of war as long ago as 1914 and confirmed by the even worse atrocities between 1939 and 1945. Nowadays the European jigsaw of nation states existing separately from each other as independent entities is no more than an historic relic based on differences of language and culture. When we look at the material basis of life, we see economies really intertwined, an organic linking or fusion between the economic products of the various countries which has far outgrown any kind of self-contained national economies existing in parallel and lends them an increasingly integrated character at the European and even international level. Even if this unification is being done in a capitalist way, i.e. by cruelly grinding away involving

material destruction, suffering on the part of millions, and above all glaring imperfections and inadequacies, it is concretely being done and there is no possible way to turn the clock back that does not involve general chaos.

This is because what is at stake here is the historic development of the socialisation of production on a grand scale, something that even the bourgeoisie has continually had to adapt to, albeit in its own capitalist way, in order to mitigate the growing and murderous contradiction between this process and the private character of ownership. The absurd, rickety, incomplete character of their European turn faithfully reflects their fear and inability to see things through to the end, and then on top of that they had to adjust to the international socialisation that has been (wrongly) described as globalisation. Their grotesque attempts to mitigate the threats of serious instability that arise In the capitalist system from this growing international socialisation by establishing official but ramshackle European, American, Asian etc. regional groupings and then the G20 are testimony to how potent this socialisation process is.

These bourgeois reactions to the challenges posed by the socialisation of the world (and European) economy cannot but be timid and incomplete, because not only do they rest on the basis and framework of capitalism, they also aspire to consolidate the system. But instead of mitigating the sources of disequilibrium and instability, they increase them and sharpen the contradictions even more. And so the bourgeoisies European adventure has considerably increased imbalances across the continent, increased economic instability and further deepened the contradictions between the various countries in the continent. The persistent isolation which has greeted French intervention in Africa (Mali and Central African Republic), then the paralysing cacophony of contradictory interests over Ukraine and Putins policies express this natural inability to achieve real European unity.

For a workers programme for Europe!

The conclusion is obvious: All criticisms of the Front National which do not expose it bourgeois character badly miss the essential point. Obviously none of the bodies such as the (Conservative) UMP, the Socialist Party (PS), etc., can do that, so their criticisms of this dangerous rival are reduced to angry shouting of a generally moral order. Their hands are particularly tied in this respect in that they all on occasion draw from the same nauseating bourgeois political arsenal as the Front National without a second thought. Their policies towards Roma and other refugees illustrate this perfectly. At a European level they are compelled to defend their own anti-working class machinery in servile and ingratiating terms against the spectre of the aggressive FN nation-state.

In fact, expecting any political organisation that is not itself resolutely opposed to the bourgeoisie to come up with a class critique of the Front National is really like trying to square the circle; its literally impossible! And the absence of such a fundamental critique on the part of organisations which nevertheless put themselves forward as opposing the capitalist system as a whole reveals how seriously they lack any such ambition.

But a few additional comments are required on the European policy of the Left Party (Parti de Gauche), who do aspire to represent working people and so deserve a closer examination. For all our political sympathy for this organisation, or rather, precisely because of the solidarity we feel towards it, we are obliged to repeat a criticism we already made during the French municipal elections: It quite clearly does not have a working-class programme. It didn’t have one during the previous elections and the lack is possibly even more glaring in relation to Europe.

Of course we do know this party’s criticisms of the bourgeoisies current European monstrosity and its austerity policies. We agree with them. But it is essential to recall that even the harshest, severest and most extensive criticisms workers pour out on this Europe do not add up to a political programme. If they themselves were enough to create such a

programme, you would not need a political party. On the other hand we are undergoing the terrible effects of the Europe imposed by the PS, UMP and their allies. We also know that in this area the Front National wants a return to nation-states. These are the two orientations available to the bourgeoisie. But what, concretely, does the Left Party want? In the absence of a clear and direct answer, one can only speculate.

The party's documents talk about the need to reject Europe as it is so as to open the way to put it right socially, economically and ecologically. It also demands that Europe should be re-founded on social, ecological, democratic and peaceful foundations and also wants a new model of development in Europe. It declares it wants to put an end to the Europe of finance, asserting the need to break with productivism: set up a Europe-wide ecological planning system.

The way these desires are formulated suffers from a dreadful lack of precision, expresses unforgivable naivety and at times betrays crass ignorance. It very clearly shows that instead of an exact and precise political programme, the Left Party presents a fairly confused jumble of vague aspirations and scrambled and indistinct hopes and desires. In any case, the one priority that does stand out clearly in this wish list is to leave the capitalist structure of economy and society fundamentally unchanged, since all this party wants to do is at most alter (or re-found) it in the sense of relegating finance to a subordinate position and reorganising the economy according to ecological doctrine.

In doing so, this list abandons all the tried and tested methods of working peoples struggles such as putting social demands in the foreground and the alliance with trade union struggles. It replaces them with the cheap and tacky ideology of ecology, whose main function is to absolve the capitalist system of its innate responsibility for destroying nature and to re-direct this accusation against people in general.

Now all these specific wishes are entirely compatible with preserving the continued existence of capitalism. They do not at all demand that it should be destroyed, but merely that it

should be corrected and improved. (Clearly this party's leaders do not realise that even some of these innocent wishes are in complete contradiction with capitalism as it really is. And in that case capitalism will either tolerate these garrulous but basically inoffensive charlatans or it will confront them brutally because its crisis is getting more serious. As always happened throughout history, when that occurs, the great majority of these nave quacks will choose capitulation while a tiny minority will decide to fight but, unprepared and overtaken by events, will go down to certain defeat.)

But a workers programme takes an entirely different route: It calls things by their proper name. So it starts resolutely and publicly from how flagrantly and obviously bankrupt capitalism is when it comes to providing the slightest solution to or improvement in the day-to-day difficulties working people in Europe face. The future capitalism holds for them is getting gloomier and less secure, and the system itself cannot accurately predict even the main lines of where it is going. It will not find refuge in any one of its long-past variants: certainly not its old, bankrupt, democratic version and even less whatever it can lash together in terms of the nation-state. Such a programme would clearly enunciate the need to abolish this bankrupt capitalism and replace its pseudo-Europe with the goal of a United Workers (or Socialist) States of Europe, the only road to any real level of continental economic and social integration. We call on all worker-activists and their political organisations, especially the ones in Left Front, to adopt that sort of programme.

It is easy to see that such a programme could not be achieved all in one go, but needs to be prepared and facilitated by a whole series of obvious immediate demands which, as transitional demands, would lead to the inevitable conclusion that such a programme is needed. Besides providing a framework activists to mobilise, it is essential that, to fulfil the requirements of a genuine workers programme in leading us to socialism (actual break with capitalism, real class

independence and living working-class internationalism), such a programme should contain:
1. Joint planning at a European level of the activity of all political formations really fighting for a working peoples programme for Europe, and standing international co-ordination between them.
2. It is important to state the objective of a struggle for a Working Peoples Europe, as the anti-chamber to the Workers United States, in opposition not only to the current bankers Europe but also the fascists goal of nation-states.
Several partial demands can be condensed into this one:
a. It implies the struggle to unify legislation right across Europe which embodies social advantages and gains on the basis of the most favourable (minimum wage, pensions, social security, etc.).
b. It involves sustained activity in relation to and alongside the trade unions with a view to extending co-operation to organise this struggle.
3. The demand to cancel the states immense debts should be prominent in the programme. It is through the reimbursement of these debts and the interest that lenders (banks etc.) regularly siphon off a significant portion of the surplus value produced in the debtor countries. On the other hand, the obligation to repay the debt is used as a pretext to cut and destroy social rights and gains. So debt and repayment constitute the main current source of extra profit and a vital lever for exploiting the working class and working people in Europe. To make it easier to understand and popularise this demand, we should co-operate with all movements calling for a public, independent examination and general audit of these debts.
4. Reducing the struggle against unemployment to the national level is a return to past failed practices or at least represents a serious illusion now that the inter-dependence of the various countries of Europe is so far advanced and the unemployed form about 20 per cent of Europe’s active population. This fact makes an active movement essential which

challenges capitalisms claim to dominate and direct the economy. That is the demand for workers control of businesses threatened with closure and the establishment of a struggle for workers control to ban unemployment.
5. Finally, a real fight for genuine European democracy is vital against all the bourgeoisies despotic bodies and arrangements. A real general clean-out is needed to close them down and re-organise them (the European commissions and directorates and all bodies such as the European Central Bank, the European Parliament, etc.) to ensure that there exists a new set of European arrangements that function in a healthy way at the service of working people. The pre-condition for such a clean-out is preparing, convening and holding a European Constituent Assembly.
A workers programme of this kind puts to shame all the various schemes and horse-trading which preoccupy the leaders of the Left Front about what organisations are called and whose names is on the ballot paper as miserable squabbles of a cheap parliamentary politics unable to hide the absence of a workers programme worthy of the name. However, 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.
Balazs Nagy,
May 2014[/threecolumns]

Long live the South African working class as they get

ready to storm the heavens!

by Balazs Nagy, April 2014

[threecolumns]Here in France, as elsewhere, the media have hardly mentioned the social and political ferment currently convulsing South Africa, which is no surprise actually. This evasive and rather suspect silence contrasts oddly and strikingly with the unprecedented enthusiasm these same media showed during Nelson Mandelas elaborate funeral rites, an enthusiasm whose real purpose was to glorify the mans politics. The sleight of hand that makes important information like this simply disappear also contrasts strangely with the endless, servile, outpouring of easy-reading chatter when the President of France visited the US. (This sycophant never once stopped licking his hosts boots, although they hack into his private communications like they do everybody else on the planet, and US-owned businesses in France dont even pay their taxes).

These glaring contradictions clearly reveal what these media are really like and what they are there for. All working people, especially the politically active among them, should ponder this. It exposes the highfaluting idea that the media are there to provide reliable information as a gross, outrageous fiction. The deception they are currently trying on exposes even more clearly exactly what this vast brainwashing mechanism is for: to stop workers becoming conscious of the situation they are in and what they really need to do by mutilating, obscuring, and in this instance deliberately camouflaging, the great, irresistible strength that lies in workers international unity. This colossal strength, whose development is as uneven as that of capitalism itself, is still deeply divided and fractured along national and regional lines. It is split and stunted even more by the crying lack of political organisation, a genuine, powerful International, on the part of this working class.

So what have the bourgeoisie and its purveyors of mind-altering mush been trying to keep from us in recent months? An initial answer to this question will just focus on the essential facts about this qualitative development in the workers movement in South Africa, since this exceptional groundswell is something we really will have to return to in days to come.

South Africas biggest trade union takes some amazing decisions

To start with, these are admirable and astonishing decisions which break up the class-collaboration that the bourgeoisies power is based on and theoretically and politically re-arm the South African working class. Moreover, their character is such as to shift the international relationship of forces between the working class and the bourgeoisie, halting the long process of defeats and set-backs the international proletariat has suffered.

In December 2013, the powerful South African engineering workers union NUMSA (the biggest union in the country with more than 341 000 members) held a Special National Congress (SNC) attended by more than 1 000 delegates. After passionate debates it took a number of historic decisions (see Workers International Journal no3, March 2014) . To summarise:

The Congress paid appropriate homage to the miners massacred at Marikana, collecting a huge sum in financial support of the victims families, and condemned the compliant attitude, not to say downright complicity, on the part of the countrys political and trade union leaderships. Then in the same spirit it resolved:

To reject the tripartite alliance between the governing party, the Stalinist Communist Party and the trade union confederation (ANC–SACP–Cosatu) as agencies of the bourgeoisie and its policies. As NUMSA General Secretary Irvin Jim stated in his speech of 11 February 2014, the ANC and SACP leadership has consistently attacked the working class, because the current leadership, the very same leadership that calls itself

anti-imperialist, is in a lucrative alliance with international capital. The delegates emphatically declared that The chance of winning back the SACP onto the path of working class struggle for working class power is very remote, something which Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete re-stated in another speech in early February. Consequently the SNC decided to suspend payment of financial contributions to the ANC.

Evoking the disturbing situation the country faces, especially the growing impoverishment of the working class, the SNC launched a call for the nationalisation of the mining and finance sectors as an immediate and urgent requirement to save our nation.

This gathering of workers also resolved that NUMSA will play a central role, as a catalyst, in the building of a united front. That United Front will take up the bread and butter issues of the working class. It will link our struggles on the shop floor with our struggles in our communities.

The Congress then took a vitally important step. As Irvin Jim emphasised in the speech quoted above, there was in the SNC a profound understanding that unless the working class organises itself as a class for itself it will remain unrepresented and forever toil behind the bourgeoisie. For this reason the SNC decided to study, research and investigate various forms of independent working-class parties and to serve as a catalyst to form a party. Deputy General Secretary Karl Cloete was obliged to add in his speech that, as a trade union, NUMSA could not commit itself to setting up such a party, but it should explore the means and methods leading to it. So he recalled the exact words chosen by the SNC, according to which NUMSA should organise a Conference on Socialism as a stage in organising a Movement for Socialism to now be initiated by the trade union. In preparation for this conference, the whole union should look at experiences of building socialism, now and in the past. At the same time: We must conduct an international study on working class parties.

He went on to explain this fundamental decision by saying:

that the building of such an instrument needs patient and consistent work. Parties require political programmes that clearly spell out what they are fighting for. Such programmes need to inspire millions of people as alternatives to the existing order. A socialist political organisation needs to be rooted within the working class and its struggles. History is littered with initiatives to form parties that came to nothing and where such parties collapsed like packs of cards. History is also full of experiments to build socialism that went in other non-socialist routes. And he summarised NUMSAs position thus: While we understand the urgency, we are not rushing as we are not building an electoral machine but an instrument of revolution and transformation with very deep roots within the working class.

We cannot here present in detail the full richness of these resolutions, which trace the innovative revolutionary path taken by this working class in South Africa. We will return to this very shortly. Now, in line with its political line of class combat against the bourgeoisie and for socialism, the SNC took further substantial decisions.

It voted to call on the leadership of the trade union confederation Cosatu to convene a Special Congress and to break the alliance (with the ANC and the SACP) which, according to General Secretary Jim, failed to use the political power it secured in 1994 to take ownership and control of the national wealth of our country and replace the white racist colonial economy.

Going straight from words to deeds, the congress decided to launch a campaign of rolling mass action initiated by the NUMSA structures to demand fundamental change in the direction of the South African economy and society. For a start, NUMSA launched a powerful call for a General Strike and mass and community actions for 26 February. As Irvin Jim emphasised towards the end of his speech: We are starting to build the irresistible force that will take back our nation and build it in the interests of the majority.

A few days after this speech, which clarified and explained the

Congress decisions, nine trade unions affiliated to Cosatu, at NUMSAs prompting, launched a Statement which testifies to the fact that a tumultuous awakening of the working class is underway in South Africa. Note the names of these trade unions: Public and Allied Workers Union, the SA Football Players Union, the Democratic Nurses Union, the SA Municipal Workers Union, the Food and Allied Workers Union, the SA Commercial and Catering Workers Union, Communication Workers Union and the SA State and Allied Workers Union. There can be no doubt that this list will soon grow, although this will involve intense internal struggles in each union. The nine unions which signed this Statement urged the Cosatu leadership urgently to call a Special National Congress of Cosatu, which the factional leadership (an obvious reference to the line-up of leaders behind the right-wing leadership of ANC and the Stalinist party) has prevent from meeting for some time. At the same time they demand the re-instatement of Zwelinzima Vavi, the elected secretary of Cosatu, who was arbitrarily removed because he refused to follow slavishly the opportunist watchwords of the ANC and the SACP.
To complete its resolutions, which profoundly alter class relations within the country, NUMSA decided to organise Marxist-Leninist Schools for trade union delegates to explain, discuss and assimilate the unions socialist orientation and to explain what it means and how to do it. The first of these week-long schools took place in early February 2014.

What the historic rebirth of NUMSA means and what it teaches us

It would be impossible to squeeze into one short article everything that can be learnt from the way this big trade union adopted radical positions, even just in relation to South Africa, not to mention the rest of Africa, starting with her neighbours, or indeed the international working class movement, especially Europe. So we are obliged to confine our remarks to some essential points, with a promise to return

soon to a more complete and systematic evaluation of the invaluable contribution to Marxist theory and socialist practice this section of the great South African working class is making as it starts to move.

First and foremost, this class vigorously states that, faced with the bourgeoisie and its policy of enslaving working people, the only way forward is to commit firmly and openly to smashing capitalism and opening the road to socialism. This clear and unequivocal slogan, backed up by energetic commitment, stands in striking contrast to the reticence, not to say downright confidentiality, in relation to their programme, on the part of the great majority of organisations on the so-called Left in Europe and elsewhere. Even the most advanced political formations such as the Front de Gauche, Syriza and die Linke (France, Greece, Germany) drown their programmes in a fog of mealy-mouthed phrases and random, unexplained and non-committal hints. In the unflattering popular phrase, they try to hide behind a matchbox. One wonders whether they have any plan at all apart from somehow improving capitalism. We urge our comrades in these organisations: be inspired by the example of NUMSA in South Africa. Steer a clear course towards socialism! All the experience in South Africa and in Europe proves that there is no third way between this path and the reign of the bourgeoisie with its attendant attacks and miseries.

Such a clarification would allow us to take the South African road, and so cleanse from top to bottom the theoretical source that illuminates workers struggle for emancipation, by opting for creative Marxism, as the African workers did, the only theoretical guide for such a struggle. Of course such a choice goes hand in hand with a complete rejection of the jumble of all sorts of left-over ideologies and conceptions the bourgeoisie uses to keep working people chained to them. It is urgently necessary to get rid of the mish-mash of the most widely-held—but all bankrupt—fragments of conceptions about class-collaboration, from the insipid hotchpotch of stale Keynesianism to Stalinisms various—catatonic but still

clinging on—popular fronts.

For all trade unions, even the most combative ones, like the CGT in France, the message from South Africa should ring like a persistent wake-up call. It is frontally opposed to the opportunist and degrading conception and practices of partnership with the bourgeoisie and its state which the European trade union leaderships put forward for their unions, following their bourgeois gurus, anti-reform reformists and de-frocked Stalinists. This is where NUMSA has made a radical break. By taking up the resolute defence of the interests of the working class against this class-collaboration, it has necessarily chosen and politically committed the union to fighting for the interests of the independent working class as a whole. By doing so it has entirely confirmed and reinforced the correctness of Trotskys analysis in Trades Unions in the Epoch of Imperialist Decay, the writing of which was interrupted by the ice-pick of Stalins assassin. All working people and the activists among them should study this pamphlet afresh it in the light of the formidable break-through opened up by the South African trade union.

By its very nature, said Trotsky, imperialism in its death agony provokes violent and repeated aggression on the part of the bourgeoisie which mean that must urgently fulfil a political role in relation to the fundamental choices the working class as a whole faces. Now the trade union leaderships have done and still do everything they can to divide up trade union activity and restrict it—at best—to the absolute minimum of defending their members immediate interests. They have erected this separation, which in reality is the same actual break already advocated by the syndicalism of old, into a rigorous, strict dogma in union work, which the majority of organisations, even ones claiming some attachment to Lenin and Trotsky, cheerfully adopt, promote and ruthlessly apply. Now NUMSA flatly repudiates this whole trade union swamp in a way whose ultimate ramifications are still difficult to foresee.

The only European trade union which to my knowledge has

decided and adopted a definite, truly political role on the side of the working class is the biggest UK trade union, Unite. This surely demonstrates that NUMSA is not at all on its own and that the awakening of the world working class really has begun. Clearly opposed to the so-called neo-liberal policies of the Labour Party, Unite has rejected its opportunist leadership and pushed the party to break with this policy and adopt a workers programme. The significance of the tenacious struggle going on in the UK is not confined just to that country; its implications are and increasingly will be valuable for the working class as a whole right across Europe. Similarly, there is no doubt that the meeting between NUMSA and Unite, which was planned before these most recent events, will involve fruitful exchanges of considerable interest not only for the working class of these two countries but for the whole international working class.

As against this renewal, our Journal has already denounced, in particular in a recent article, the class collaboration on the part of many unions, their consequent refusal to take on a political role for the working class and their insistence on confining themselves to an obsolete, ossified, narrow and sterile trade union practice which has led a great mass of workers to turn their backs on them and reject them as blunt and rusty tools. Even a weapon as powerful and deadly (and double-edged!) as the general strike, which the Greek, Portuguese and Spanish working class have boldly and repeatedly wielded in the course of recent years, showing remarkable courage and spirit of self-sacrifice, has ended up each time in a bitter setback. All that these repeated general strikes have actually achieved has been to exhaust the working class and undermine its morale, since their leaders have refused to open their only way out, i.e. the political assertion of the working class taking over the economic and political leadership of the country. As for the half-hearted mobilisations in partial strikes and demonstrations, whose pathetic results merely emphasise the contradiction between what the situation demands and a trade union movement embalmed

in routine, the less said the better.

This sclerosis has eaten its way so deeply into the unions that their leaders now constrict and limit their actions even further, not even fulfilling their basic responsibility to organise workers and defend their interests. Just take unemployment! Deferentially adopting the doctrinal precepts of bourgeois ideology, trade union leaderships only consider those who are directly—and officially—employed in an actual job to be workers. Capitalists are throwing more and more workers out of the production process, but these leaderships are no less eager to get rid of them out of the unions! They dont think that the unemployed deserve to belong to trade unions at all, and any attempt to organise them systematically on a wide scale is sabotaged and abandoned.

Fortunately, pretty well all over Europe workers will not accept being thrown on the scrap heap in this contemptible, humiliating way, like worn-out rubbish. Spontaneously, but at the initiative of local former leaders and cadres, they have gathered in various other structures at the margins of or outside the official unions. In the UK, the Liverpool dockers, after a long and difficult two-year dispute sustained and encouraged by port workers around the world, which was the stuff of legend, were nevertheless deprived of their jobs and the historical Liverpool docks wiped out. But they never said die. Inspired by local leaders and cadres such as Jimmy Nolan, Terry Teague and others, they organised, in this ravaged working-class city, around their Casa with its intense political, social and cultural life to maintain their class as a living, active force. And in the North East of the country, in Tyneside and Durham, former miners whose mines have all been completely closed and the miners left to rot, like one of our former comrades, Dave Temple, have woven back together the broken threads of the union and kept alive the collective activity of the miners. They even revived their disused links with the Spanish Asturian miners when they came under attack.

It is no coincidence that this rock-solid working-class resistance has kept going in the UK, the historical cradle of

the working class and its movement, a country where working peoples consciousness of belonging to a distinct working class is incomparably stronger than anywhere else. But even in Europe, various groups of workers are stubbornly trying a variety of ways to resist degradation. They are essential component parts of a united and powerful working class and of re-constituting its general movement as a whole.

The deterioration caused by the massive destruction of the productive forces, in the first place of workers themselves, has been made even worse by the way in which the aims and methods of their organisations have been obscured and by the general de-naturing and impoverishment of their trade unions. However, the determined orientation and decisive action of South African workers bring the reviving message of a real global awakening of the workers movement.

NUMSAs SNC has opened the floodgates to a development of profound importance in the trade union movement, comparable to the general shift from craft unionism to industrial unionism which started in the first half of the twentieth century. Whereas the trade union bureaucracys practices, ossified into a dogma by reformists and Stalinists, stop at the gates of the workplace, the NUMSA SNC resolved to smash through this barrier. It decided to extend the activity of the union to the struggles waged in the communities (townships, suburbs, settlements, towns and villages) for workers and unemployed peoples basic demands for water, electricity, housing etc.,—struggles which are intense in South Africa. Consequently the union has taken the initiative to take on and directly organise these struggles and the activists involved.

These struggles already have a long history stretching back to the 1990-1994 period, and even then NUMSA wanted to link them up with what it was doing. Its then leader, Moses Mayakiso, worked out a whole political and organisational plan to that effect, to which NUMSA now refers. But the union abandoned these plans when its revolutionary line buckled under the right-wing influence of the overall ANC-SACP-Cosatu alliance. And it was precisely then that these community struggles

really took off as the way in which the impoverished masses defended themselves against the violent destruction of their living conditions by the governments class-collaboration policies.

As a member of a NUMSA delegation to the UK led by Mayekiso, the young Durban engineering worker Bongani Mkhungo easily grasped the correctness of the Marxist orientation of our day contained in Trotskys teaching. And so it was as a member of our Workers International that he returned to Africa, where from the outset he was marginalised by NUMSA. But he completely dedicated himself to organising these community struggles to obtain and improve water and electricity supplies and other essential services and for a decent life. Illness and privation struck down our comrade, whom we sorely miss, before he could witness this re-birth of our movement, but what he did greatly contributed to its preparation and current flowering.

The struggle is particularly lively and violent throughout the region. In neighbouring Namibia, our comrades Erica and Hewat Beukes and their group have spent years organising a whole movement of impoverished and dispossessed working people for access to decent housing and against various abuses at the hands of their bosses and the state.

Over the last two years, these comrades have broadened out this activity to include the defence of miners and teachers robbed of their pensions by the mining trusts and state organs, and of the rights of various ethnic groups of farmers and agricultural workers. To organise and centralise them, they and their supporters and associates have established the Workers Advice Centre, whose activities and influence have become quite extensive. Rapid and brutal reaction from the Namibian bourgeoisie, its old colonial master South Africa, and its own repressive legal organs was not long in coming, especially once our comrades resolved to prepare to set up the Namibian workers party in the very near future. A raft of administrative hassles, legal threats and arbitrary measures, fines and charges and police summonses and harassment, cutting

off of water and electricity supplies, warnings, intimidation and arbitrary accusations paralyse their work and disorganise and even put in question the very existence of the Workers Advice Centre. Certainly they will not be put off doing what they do, and especially not their big project. But active and effective solidarity on the part of working people across the whole world provides precious support which, even in modest forms, helps the Namibian comrades efforts and forges and cements international unity of the working class and all working people.

For a South African turn everywhere!

The immense scope of this initiative by South African workers in NUMSA arises in an international atmosphere where sharpening class contradictions have already provoked a series of revolutionary explosions. Since the Tunisian people unleashed their revolutionary march, spurred on by the working class and rapidly spreading to Egypt and then more or less all Arab countries, the massive mobilisation of working people against the bourgeoisie and the intolerable measures they are taking has accelerated and taken on increasingly sharp and violent forms. The inevitable avalanche of the world revolution has started, even if its various manifestations have a spontaneous character which makes their rhythm somewhat jagged, and even though they dress up in the nationalist or religious garb of past dominant ideologies. A spectre is haunting Europe (or rather the world): the spectre of communism. Even in the last year it has appeared noisily in Egypt, then entered the scene albeit briefly in South Korea and Turkey, while more or less gate-crashed and disguised by nationalist and religious stand-ins, defied the powerful from Palestine to Pakistan by way of Iraq and Afghanistan, and it is ready to burst out in our old Europe, albeit tempered, softened and enfeebled. And all the while, travestied and disfigured as it has been, side-tracked and losing its bearings in Syria, it terrifies the possessors and drives their rulers

all over the world to either desperate self-defence or complete paralysis.

This is the explosive powder-barrel within which the working class masses in Ukraine frontally attack the authorities with exemplary determination—but wrong and confused ideas. Bosnian, Serbian and Croatian workers in Bosnia-Herzegovina in turn have courageously and with great determination launched into an attack on the bourgeoisies feeble rule and its nationalist henchmen. Imperialism and bureaucrats joined together to impose this through the rotten Dayton Agreement, which divides these peoples and ties them down in the straitjacket of the failed and unviable pluri-national framework. Now they are under pressure from all sides to accept the so-called proper application of this Agreement, whereas it is precisely the yoke against which they rose up, as Comrade Pavlovics article explains very clearly (Lutte des classes no 20, February 2014).

At the same time in Ukraine the revolutionary explosion of the working masses has advanced legitimate demands but gets bogged down in the swamp of a false choice between the suffocating embrace of Putins dictatorship or the deceptive siren voices of a capitalist Europe that has itself lost its way.

The lucidity of NUMSAs position and its explicit orientation towards socialism cuts though this whole dense morass to bring vital clarity into the chaotic tangle of wrong roads. It brings the light people need to separate the good seed from the various kinds of bourgeois chaff fed to it, and opens the way to the only solution, which is socialist. It is also entirely valid for all organisations, even those claiming to speak for working people in the more developed countries. It spurs us on to either act like South Africans or take sides with the oppressors or, at best, fall into historical oblivion—and in both latter cases to drag working people into a defeat.

Now, this re-orientation of the whole international workers movement that NUMSA has started—to take up once more and unequivocally the class struggle and the goal of socialism—is

absolutely essential to combat the opportunist perversion of the movement. But other dangers immediately arise along the way to recovery. The most dangerous is probably the adventurous impatience inspired by panicking petit-bourgeois intellectuals—followed unfortunately by young people who are, by nature, necessarily impatient—who try to push this profound correction towards an ultra-left practice that is the licensed midwife of sectarianism.

In South Africa itself, on 14 February 2014, the small, recently-created, workers party WASP (Workers and Socialist Party of South Africa) published a statement. Having greeted the NUMSA decisions, the statement hurries to advise them that the time has come for NUMSA to lead the way to a new trade union confederation. In other words, whereas elsewhere in the same document it supports NUMSAs action in fighting inside Cosatu and forming an opposition group along with nine other unions, it also repeatedly calls for an immediate break with the Cosatu confederation! But that is exactly what the right-wing ANC-SACP leaders want! They would love NUMSA to leave Cosatu and abandon the fight inside it. It would save them a lot of grief. No, the struggle is inside Cosatu and in all the affiliated unions, and fortunately NUMSA shows not the slightest intention of following this suicidal recommendation to put the knife into this struggle by giving up in mid-stream. In particular, this short-sighted haste would limit the horizon to just Cosatu, whereas what is boiling up here is the whole South African working class with all its movements and organisations.

Not only is a bitter struggle developing inside every union, but the ANC and the SACP are undergoing an unprecedented crisis in which oppositions and groupings along a new line are endangering the right-wing monolith Stalinism built up within them. Even the radical turn made by the NUMSA SNC would not have been possible without a decisive political turn on the part of communist and ANC activists who are NUMSA members and delegates. Do the WASP comrades seriously think that NUMSA and its leaders are going to put the brakes on this huge movement

of renewal and strangle it by giving up the fight and looking for a hole to hide in somewhere outside this whole class in ferment?

They want nothing to do with this kind of siren call. Only recently it was very evident how this rash impetuosity allied to sectarian adventurism blocked and isolated the broad scope of the movement that developed after the Marikana massacre. They saw with their own eyes how a lot of activists, advised and guided by the UK-based Committee for a Workers International (CWI) launched themselves against the ANC-SACP right-wingers running the big miners union (NUM) in partnership with the mining trusts and compromised in the Marikana massacre. The CWI also urged them on to set this workers party (WASP) up in a hurry. Knocked off balance by the CWIs inveterate ultra-leftism, itself resting on the young workers genuine—understandable but ill-advised—impatience, activists encouraged the break with the union and with Cosatu and the establishment of an improvised and therefore botched left union. In that way they put themselves outside the battle in the unions and were absent from the actual renewal of NUMSA and the ferment going on throughout Cosatu. Alongside that, by over-hastily declaring the workers party WASP, they bungled its own process of growth to maturity and they are now marginalised in the workers movement as a whole and even stand outside of NUMSAs work for a new party.

These are recent examples which speak volumes to all activists about the CWI-WASPs methods. The great working class mobilisation following Marikana was disrupted and blocked and ended up at the back of the queue. Thoughtless excessive haste meant that the mountain of a huge upsurge by the working class gave birth to a mere mouse.

WASP and its CWI inspirers try to distract NUMSA from the job of winning the other unions for its socialist positions through a struggle inside Cosatu and winning the confederation back. Instead they urge it to break away, as if that struggle was already over, and to stand on the side-lines as spectators. Which is where they themselves are.

Instead, the WASP comrades could have grasped the real job facing Marxist worker-activists by thinking through for themselves, for example, the implications of the NUMSA resolutions, instead of following the CWIs ultimatisic watchwords. That organisation is known in various parts of Europe as a body locked in sectarian isolation which prefers brandishing ultimatums to democratic discussion either in its own ranks or beyond. WASP comrades have nothing to gain by following these watchwords; on the contrary, by doing so they risk doing damage to the South African workers movement. It isnt NUMSA which should break with Cosatu, but WASP which ought to break with the CWI.

All in all, sectarianism constitutes a significant obstacle throughout the whole great international movement, and one which it we must oppose from the outset. The struggle against the bourgeois degradation of the movement and the job of cleansing it of every nuance of its methods and agents is a greater, more urgent and more complex task, and that is what we need to get down to now.

The most obvious and natural thing to start with is to call on all trade union and political organisations anywhere which claim any attachment to the working class to publish the NUMSA resolutions and statement in full and organise a discussion about them as urgent, necessary tasks. That is an elementary duty, for if it is true that recent weather conditions have been somewhat out of kilter, it is no less true that to see the sun of workers struggles rise, from now on we should look not East but—South![/threecolumns]