

# Why we must rebuild the Fourth International by Mirek Vodslon 14/09/15

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### **1. The question posed**

The Namibian working class – all the active elements in it – is now creating its own party. This party will represent workers and other exploited people in the parliament and soon also in the local authorities. This is already an important step. It will make workers more confident to fight for their demands.

Several movements of working class resistance against

capitalist exploitation now converge under the banner of the Workers Revolutionary Party in order to fight together and achieve important partial improvements.

For instance, banks in cahoots with SWAPO officials have stolen the pensions of former press-ganged SWATF recruits and of miners who worked for the now bankrupt TCL corporation. The thieves must be forced to give back what they stole and be punished! The Southern Peoples have long been oppressed. Their legitimate demands which will enable a real development for them must be satisfied. These are just two examples, but there are many. In fact every oppressed section of society has legitimate demands and for each one there is only one party with which they can hope to achieve their satisfaction: the WRP.

However, a lasting improvement of the material situation of the working class requires a fundamental change in the whole society. All the groups and individuals who are now becoming part of the WRP have already understood that. And they expect the WRP as their party to arm itself with a programme that will allow them to achieve such a fundamental change.

All over the world we live under a regime, capitalism, where a tiny minority appropriates and accumulates the lion's share of the wealth that the vast majority, the toiling classes, produce. But that is not all. The capitalists only allow the toilers to produce anything at all if the products can generate private profit for capitalists. This puts a straitjacket on production of wealth. That straitjacket is becoming ever tighter, as can be seen from the growing number of unemployed.

All these unemployed workers and young could be producing useful things for their own needs and those of others. But not under capitalism. Modern means of production could assure that the vital needs of everybody in the world are satisfied and his or her individual personality can develop freely and

fully. Instead, we live in a world where a tiny minority swims in abundance and the vast majority lives in ever-worsening poverty.

Capitalism has entered a phase of final decline, its death throes, where capitalists find it ever more difficult to serve their purpose in life, the core principle of capital: making profit in order to increase capital. And since production of useful things for the needs of working people is allowed only under the condition that such production serves to increase capital, those needs are ever less satisfied.

The systematic theft of public money and resources, the theft of pensions and other assets of the working class is not limited to Namibia, it is endemic in all of Africa and common also in other parts of the world. A feature of capitalism since its beginning is that its ruling class is composed of an increasing number of criminals who do not respect their own stated sacred principle of private property. In the death agony of their regime they are pushed ever more to open theft and fraud as their opportunities to make legal (according to their own laws) profit diminish.

So the real, historic task is not just to correct the worst abuses of capitalism, the corruption, the oppression of nations or races, the oppression of women. It is not just to stop the ever-worsening wars and the deterioration of the environment which threatens to destroy the conditions of life itself. It is not even just to redistribute wealth from the rich to the poor.

All these can be achieved only if the working class is able to produce wealth directly both for its collective needs (like, for instance, railroads, hospitals and schools) and for its individual needs (like bread and medicine). Workers themselves must achieve that situation, nobody can do it in their place. They need to seize the private property of the capitalists, take over factories and other facilities, machines, and raw

materials. Workers need to become the collective owner of all these means of production. Then they need to use them to organise production for their own needs as a class and for the needs of all other working people. To accomplish that, the corrupt SWAPO state in this country, like all other capitalist states, must be replaced with a state that belongs to the working class and is fully under its command. Only a radically new state composed of organised workers themselves from bottom to top can be fully a workers' state.

Only such a workers' state can start cleaning up the material and moral mess created by capitalism and building a new society: socialism and communism.

We build the Workers Revolutionary Party under a red flag with an emblem that consists of a hammer, a sickle and the number four. All the elements of that symbol express the foundations of our programme.

Before I get to the main question – why the number four – I need to mention the meanings of the other elements of our flag. Each of them needs to be examined in greater depth than we will be able to do this time. In fact everything we will talk about in this short pamphlet needs deeper consideration. So I hope that there will be many more education initiatives and that every present or future member of the WRP will get a chance to deepen his or her understanding of all of our programme.

## **2. Productive forces and modes of production**

Humans are very special beings. Other life forms just adapt to the conditions that nature offers for their life. Humans produce the conditions of their own life by working in cooperation. They possess productive forces: the tools and the collective knowledge needed to produce all they need, food, shelter, medicine and nowadays also roads, books, bibles, aeroplanes and computers. Workers themselves are of course the

main productive force. People beg the heavenly Father to give us this day our daily bread, but everybody knows that there would be no daily bread without the work and the cooperation of farmers, millers and bakers.

Humanity went through several stages of development of its productive forces. At the beginning, producers lived in small groups that owned their means of production and shared the products. This was the time when the community had just enough tools and knowledge to survive, but only if everybody worked for it all day. Such communities still live in some regions of Namibia. Anybody who wants to talk to such a community must bring enough food to feed everybody while they are talking, because during that time they can't be searching for food, as they would do normally.

But people invent ever better tools and eventually, starting with some areas of the world like the Middle East, they were able to produce more than they needed to survive. This is when the big separation became possible. Some could stop working and have leisure to think and rule. The others worked to maintain both themselves and the rulers. Society became divided into classes, and the first "class society" was born. Each class had a very different position in production than the other. Some classes ruled and organised production, others were the actual producers. Human society was turned around completely. The result of this first social revolution was that the original equality of all people was replaced by inequality. At the same time, the division of work between man and woman developed into a domination of woman by man.

Further developments brought several successive types of class society. For instance, the mode of production of the ancient Roman republic and later the Roman empire divided society fundamentally into slaves and slave owners. This was replaced with the feudal mode of production, where the ruling class were the feudal lords, the owners of land. With the land, they also owned the peasant population settled on that land. Each

type of society corresponded to a specific degree of development of the productive forces, each was based on a distinct mode of production, and each was brought about by a social revolution that had to destroy the previous society.

### **3. Capitalism and democracy**

Finally, the development of industry and the democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th century brought a type of society whose members are all traders, people who buy and sell goods for money. Those who have no money are not fully members of human society. The only way to cooperate in this society is by buying and selling privately produced goods. Where this type of society is fully realised, all its members are equal (as traders) and therefore also have equal rights in the eyes of the law. This equality in the eyes of the law is, as we know, a democratic ideal. Its highest expression is political democracy in which the people, by means of individual votes, choose their government. In most countries this ideal is not fully realised and in countries like Namibia it is mostly an empty pretence.

But for all its formal equality, even where it does exist, this society generates profound and increasing social, that is real, inequality. The reason is that it separates producers from their means of production. The baker, for instance, no longer owns his kneading trough. He or she works in a huge bread-producing factory that belongs to somebody else, the capitalist. While the worker works, he or she has no freedom at all. In exchange for a wage, every worker must surrender his or her freedom for the whole working day and must follow orders given by the capitalist or usually a lieutenant of the capitalist. In summary, the worker becomes a slave under the dictatorship of the capitalist for the duration of every working day.

The capitalist starts with some money. With that money he buys means of production and labour power. Having bought them, he

becomes the owner of both. The product of labour – bread in our example – therefore also belongs to the capitalist, although he did not make it – and this is what he sells. As a result, he gets more money than he had at start. The difference is called the profit. Then he uses most of the money he now has to buy more means of production and more labour power, in order to produce even more products and sell those, again with a profit. So the capitalist accumulates enormous wealth. This seemingly self-increasing wealth is called capital.

Of course it is the workers who produce capital, all of it. The capitalists only owns and therefore commands it. But he cannot do with it as he pleases. In fact, any capitalist who does not do his best to increase his capital, will be overtaken by other capitalists. So in fact it is the capital that commands the capitalist, telling him what to do in order to increase the capital. So, in effect, workers are being bossed around by the accumulated results of their own work!

Being owners of the whole product of the society, capitalists form the upper class. This type of society is therefore called capitalism. Capitalists are often called “bourgeois”. That is a word borrowed from the French. Originally, it meant simply inhabitant of a town. That is where the capitalists developed. Accordingly, the class of capitalists is often called the “bourgeoisie”.

Capitalism with rule of law equal for all and with democratic rights and freedoms is much better for the working class than capitalist rule without them. In a democracy, the working class can organise openly in trade unions and parties. Without it, working class organisations become illegal and have to go underground.

But among all its rights and freedoms, the only one which this regime enforces ruthlessly is the right of capitalists to own the means of production, that is the right to exploit the

working class. This right of the capitalists takes precedence over all other rights and freedoms. This democracy is therefore not just “democracy” for all people. It is limited, bourgeois democracy. Its essence is the dictatorship of the capitalists. So this democracy is only the best form of a bad thing: the dictatorship of the capitalists.

#### **4. The red flag and the hammer**

The hammer symbolises our class, the working class.

But what exactly is the working class? It is not all toilers. It is the class of those who need to buy their means of subsistence – food, shelter, education, health care – for money, in order to live and raise children, but own nothing that they could sell – except one thing: their own capacity to work, their labour power! This class is also called the proletariat and wage-workers are called proletarians. That word is very old and meant originally people whose only wealth consisted of their children.

Labour power (the capacity to work) is a very special commodity. The worker goes to the factory and surrenders eight hours or more of his daily life to the capitalist. The capitalist pays the value of that labour power as a daily wage to the worker. That value is determined by that of all the products needed to sustain workers’ life and reproduce their labour power, not only for the next day or month, but also to enable them to have children, the next generation of workers.

The capitalist consumes the worker’s labour power by employing him or her to do actual work – and there something strange happens: that work produces much more value than that of the worker’s wage. This is why the owner of the bakery can sell the bread produced by the bakers at a higher price than the sum of the prices of the flour needed to make the dough, the electricity needed to bake it, the amortisation of all the machines and buildings and the wages of the bakers. The profit



of the capitalist comes from this difference. This is the basis of capitalist exploitation. We owe this discovery to Karl Marx.

There is much more to learn about this. Marx lived in the 19th century at the time when capitalism developed. He lived mostly in the country that pioneered that development, England. Marx wrote several books about capital. The main one is called simply: Capital. I hope that we can have more discussions that make clear to every member of the WRP how exactly capitalist exploitation comes about in this organisation of society which is called the capitalist mode of production – the society we live in.

Wage workers form the principal lower class in society. That class has existed for over 180 years in Europe and for at least 100 years in every country of the world. The capitalist organisation of society constantly produces both classes, the capitalist and the working class. Formal equality of rights cannot hide this increasing social inequality.

As long as it has existed, the working class had to fight against the capitalist class for such conditions of exploitation as allow it to survive. The capitalist's interest is to increase its profit by paying ever-lower wages, making workers work ever longer hours and always speeding up the pace of work. So capitalists and workers have fundamentally opposed interests. Each class must fight the other. Therefore, never believe a capitalist who pretends that he and his workers "are in the same boat", as capitalists often say. On the contrary, workers must unite against their own employer and against all capitalists.

If workers don't unite, each worker remains just an individual trader who trades their labour power. All those worker-traders compete against each other and, even worse than that, they compete against an army of unemployed workers ready to take up any work in any conditions. Disunited workers undercut one

another on wages and other working conditions.

So workers must unite, form trade unions and fight collectively for their working conditions simply to prevent capitalists from starving them and from working them to premature death.

In the past and in some countries like Germany, where I live, workers' organisations were quite successful in this everyday struggle, so there are well-off workers who may possess a house or a car and have enough money to be able to send children to university to let them become skilled workers. But even a house, a car or university education are still only means of reproduction of labour power, be it at a much higher standard than the means available to the inhabitants of the shanties of Windhoek. Even a well-off German worker is therefore still just a wage-worker. He does not belong to the middle classes as some people pretend. He belongs to the same class as a super-exploited Namibian miner because he has the same fundamental interest in defending his working and living conditions against the capitalist class and in replacing the whole capitalist regime by a society without exploitation of human beings by other human beings. Being wage-workers is the solid foundation of workers' solidarity; regardless of important differences in living standard and even regardless of whether they actually have work at the moment. It does not matter where they live, what skin colour they have, whether they are men or women, which beliefs or faith they hold or which local customs they follow.

Moreover, the capitalist class all over the world has started a huge attack on the living standards, working conditions and rights of the working class with the objective of aligning them with the worst of existing conditions, those of super-exploited workers without rights in many countries of Asia and Africa.

Even in Germany, the past conquests of the working class are

threatened and a growing part of the working class sinks into the uncertain existence of contract labour and unemployment. Most unions traditionally unite only the fully employed in the fight for their wages and conditions. They are losing this battle everywhere because of the downward pressure of competition from the growing crowd of defenceless precarious and unemployed workers.

So unions must change in order to unite all layers of the working class. Some unions are becoming conscious of this necessity and as they try to realise it, they also start to realise that they cannot defend the working and living conditions of the working class with any prospect of a lasting success – and keep capitalism. So they must support the struggle to overcome capitalism itself. Workers must unite to defend themselves and fight off the multiform divisions constantly introduced by capitalists. But all experience shows that it is a losing fight unless the unity has the goal of uprooting the whole system of exploitation of humans by humans. This is a political goal which requires workers to form their own political party.

The workers' party cannot replace unions, which are vital for the everyday struggle. But neither can there be a tight barrier between trade unions and the workers party. The political struggle must be rooted in everyday struggles and many everyday struggles can only be won on the political level. For instance, capitalists more and more often break the resistance of their workforce to a worsening of its conditions by forcing large sections of that workforce out of the enterprise and into a new one, where they do the same work and produce the same things under much worse conditions. Unions have to fight against this so-called "outsourcing". In some cases they manage to fight off an "outsourcing" attack. But "outsourcing" is a right of capitalists, flowing from the fundamental right to private ownership of enterprises which is guaranteed by all capitalist constitutions. So without a

political change, any particular success against “outsourcing” is short-lived.

Since its origins, the most far-sighted elements of the working class have seen beyond the never-ending elementary struggle for survival. They have understood that a definitive liberation of their class was necessary and also possible by overthrowing the capitalist class and its state and making the modern, large-scale means of production the property of all those who work. They have also understood that the only way for workers to become owners of today’s means of production is to own them in common, as the working class. These workers have therefore called themselves “communists” and for a very long time they have organised in international communist associations and parties. Their only difference from the rest of the working class is the clear understanding of this overall aim and that the international unity of the whole working class must take precedence over national or particular interests. In all struggles of their class they have promoted these principles.

The red colour of our flag symbolises the workers’ blood which has been shed in all those struggles over many decades.

## **5. The sickle**

As indicated before, besides the working class, there are other toilers. Some belong to intermediate layers. Some work for a wage but all they do is manage production on behalf of some capitalist. Top level managers have very large “wages” that are in reality parts of the capitalist profit, bribes. Moreover, they own large shares of capital, so they are capitalists. Others administer the top level of the capitalist state on behalf of the capitalist class as a whole in order to maintain the overall conditions for the capitalist regime to persist. All these belong to the capitalist class.

Still other toilers do produce commodities, or work in the

distribution of commodities, but not as wage workers. They work, but are different from wage workers in that they possess their means of production or of other work. They are craftsmen and small retailers in cities who still possess their workshops or shops.

Yet others, most important in a country like Namibia, are peasants in the countryside who possess their plot of land.

All these latter classes are often lumped together and called "petty-bourgeois". That means simply that they may be owners of some means of production or just wish to become owners of some means of production, but those means are so small that they do not constitute capital.

Most of these classes are being squeezed out by large capitalist production. The peasants especially, all over Africa, are being starved, forced off their land and obliged to look for a living in the cities, usually as the lowest layer of the working class.

New urban layers that are intermediary between the capitalist and the working class are still created. Many are self-employed but their social condition differs from that of the working class only in their imagination, where they deem themselves superior to the working class.

The peasantry still exists. Like the working class, the peasantry too must struggle for its living and working conditions.

Some peasants' land doesn't provide enough for them to live, or they may have no land any more. They have to work for a wage for richer farmers or in factories. In fact they are already part of the working class. They have the same demands as we have, such as higher wages and better working conditions. Of course we support these demands.

Poor peasants usually want to get enough land to sustain

themselves and their families. The working class supports the demand for the expropriation of landlords possessing large amounts of land – and sometimes not even exploiting it. Such land must be distributed especially to landless peasants. They themselves should decide if they want to use these lands collectively as a cooperative or individually.

The life of the poorest layers of peasantry mostly lacks even the one relative freedom which capitalism affords to the urban worker, that of choosing his or her master. Instead, a poor peasant often depends on a powerful, irremovable master, a landlord, a capitalist or, mostly, both. That master appears irremovable because he is supported by a corrupt, autocratic state. This is true even in countries like Namibia, which is formally a republic and a democracy, but its state is not a normal capitalist state. It is a corrupt autocracy like the old kingdoms were, except that the role of the autocrat at the top is taken by anonymous, foreign representatives of imperialist powers, like the bureaucrats of the International Monetary Fund. It is they who make sure that peasants and other poor classes at the bottom of society are forever imprisoned in rotten dependency relations. The whole SWAPO state, including its “parliament”, its president and its “Father of the Nation”, are the local executive apparatus of imperialist (international capitalist) powers that loot the country.

Capitalists exploit peasants by forcing them to sell their products too cheap and by selling the necessary machines and tools to the peasants at too high a price. Banks deny them the necessary credit. This can change only if the “commanding heights” of the economy – big industry and all credit institutions – belong to the working class.

But to the peasantry the question often appears as that of gaining a true democracy, of removing their immediate masters and becoming full citizens equal to others. This is not limited to the peasantry. The working class, especially its

lowest layers, are also deprived of their elementary democratic rights by a regime like that of SWAPO in Namibia.

Imperialism foisted a capitalist constitution on Namibia. It made sure that it guarantees the irremovable principle of private ownership of the means of production. This made the constitution undemocratic as it creates a barrier to making land available to those who work on it or need it to live on it and so it maintains peasants and poor people in towns and cities in dependency. By instituting the principle of a "unitarian state" it violates the democratic right of peoples of Namibia, such as, Caprivians, Herreros, Basters and Namas, to self-determination. For example, Caprivians who tried to practice that right have been in prison for 15 years. A real unity can be only voluntary but the peoples concerned were not asked. The whole constitution was concocted by capitalists using a ready-made template elaborated by imperialist powers, acting behind the backs of the people of Namibia. Therefore the immediate demands in any revolution must include that of a Constituent Assembly to install a democracy in a truly independent Namibia.

Since peasants live in small communities disseminated over large distances, it is very difficult for them to organise as a class on their own. Sometimes they do succeed in that. They form a party or an army to push their demands. But very soon they find out that they cannot formulate a programme for the whole of society. So they have to ally themselves with one of the two main urban classes, either with the working class if the working class is able to organise itself and become strong, or with the bourgeoisie.

The latter alliance was the only possibility in the epoch of the great bourgeois revolutions in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries, when the modern working class had not yet been developed by capitalism. During the French revolution of 1789, activists of the bourgeoisie visited peasants in their villages and helped to write up their demands for

independence from aristocratic and ecclesiastic landlords, for equality before the law and for a Constituent Assembly to realise those demands. The bourgeoisie of that epoch had genuinely common interests with the peasantry.

This is nowhere the case today, and has not been for a long time. The bourgeoisie cannot be a genuine ally of the peasantry and where it lures the peasantry into such an alliance, it will betray them. Only the working class can help the peasantry to realise its social and political demands. Only the working class, if it takes power, will be able to offer peasants acceptable conditions for the sale of their products, and credit for the purchase of their tools and machinery. Only the working class can help realise full democracy but the only way to do so is not to stop at formal, limited, bourgeois democracy, which leaves the capitalists in control of society and still running things in their own interests. The working class must carry on to expropriate the capitalists and install a workers' state. So the Constituent Assembly of all classes in society will necessarily and rapidly give way to the rule of councils of workers and poor peasants.

The hammer and sickle in our emblem symbolises the alliance of the working class with the peasantry in struggle against the capitalist class and against the remnants of old oppressive relations that flourished before capitalism.

But alliance does not mean fusion! We build a party of one class, the working class. This does not mean only that we aim for a party composed mainly of workers. It means above all that its programme is the programme of the working class and any person, worker, peasant or intellectual, who wants to become member, has to accept all of that programme. Moreover this programme stipulates which of the two classes must lead the alliance. That leading class is the working class.

## **6. The number four: the International**



This number stands for the international character of our party. It may seem strange at first that the International can be symbolised by a particular number. There is a powerful reason for it but it can be understood only in connection with the history of all the efforts to build the International. So I am forced to make yet another long detour.

The working class has, since its origins, understood that it is fundamentally an international class. Its fight starts on a national level but can be won only if it becomes international.

It is impossible to achieve socialism in one country. Especially in a small (by population), entirely dependent country, like Namibia. Greece in Europe is another obvious example. But it is in the long run impossible even for a large country or a group of countries. The experience of the USSR shows it.

Because socialism and communism are possible only on the world scale, the social revolution of the working class must be a world revolution. This does not mean that the revolution can happen at the same time everywhere. But the working class itself is international; therefore so must be its party.

What we call the International is not a corrupt club that exists only to concoct or cover hideous plots against the working class and oppressed peoples, like the so called Socialist International to which SWAPO and ANC belong. Neither is it a federation of national groups which pursue their own independent, often conflicting policies and meet only to proclaim a token unity from time to time. There are many of these but often they hide their true nature quite well.

The International the working class needs is one international party. Of course it must have national sections able to decide how to tackle quickly national and local issues as they arise.

As the Communist Manifesto puts it: "Though not in substance,

yet in form, the struggle of the proletariat with the bourgeoisie is at first a national struggle. The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with its own bourgeoisie.”

The International must have an international life involving all members directly, a unified internal discussion process on the most important issues of strategy and tactics, both on international and on national issues.

## **7. The Manifesto**

The efforts of the international working class to organise as such, that is as an international party, have a long history full of rich lessons. The first thing to understand about it is that it was determined by the development of capitalism itself. Capitalism, as I said, produces the working class. During the nineteenth century the capitalist mode of production went from strength to strength and it produced a mighty working class, above all in Europe.

This working class was from the start a danger for the capitalists. In 1848 several revolutions shook Europe. They were all democratic revolutions led by the bourgeoisie. Through them, the bourgeoisie wished to exert political power in the name of the people, instead of leaving it in the hands of emperors, kings and lords. But in the most important country of that time, France, the revolution was, at its highest point, already a workers' revolution. In all countries of Europe, the working class existed already and threatened not only the kings and aristocrats but also the bourgeoisie. Therefore the bourgeoisie preferred to stop and betray all these revolutions, and renounce political power, rather than risk that this power be contested from below by the working class.

Just before that revolution, in 1847, German workers who had emigrated from the oppressive regimes of that country formed

an international association, the League of the Communists. Two young German intellectuals, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, were members of the League and were charged with writing its Manifesto. It was published in February 1848, just before the revolution started.

It was not the first programme of the working class. Previous programmes had already established the goal: a society without exploitation, a society where the means of production are common property of the workers. But these programmes were not scientific. They were projects based on the clever ideas of some inventor who thought out in his head a proposal how society might be organised better. Then he usually submitted his project to influential people of the ruling class, appealing to their supposed benevolence. Such projects go by the Greek name "Utopia", meaning an imagined organisation of society that exists in "no place".

Marx's and Engels' Manifesto of the Communist Party was the first programme with a scientific underpinning. It made clear that this new form of society, communism, was the necessary next step for humanity not because it was a better idea than the existing society, but because it was a step required by the material productive forces developed by capitalism itself. It made also clear that capitalism was creating a whole class of people, the working class, who had to lead a new social revolution in order to make communism happen. Capitalism itself started a process which would enable this class, through its own movement and education, to rise to this historic task. So everybody should read the Manifesto, it is still our programme! There is no better, more forceful or more beautiful explanation of our overall aims. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/>

But of course capitalism has developed further. The situation has changed a lot in the 167 years since the publication of the Manifesto. Our programme has had to be adapted and

specified further. Our programme is a living thing that has to evolve.

The League of Communists was only a precursor of the International. The working class itself was not yet fully developed and accordingly the League consisted not of industrial workers as we know them but mostly of skilled craftsmen.

## **8. The first and the second Internationals**

### **8.1. First International**

In 1864, the first real international party of the working class was constituted in London: the International Workingmen's Association. The police of every state kept them under close surveillance and estimated that they had five million members. But the International itself counted eight million. Many of them were already industrial workers in big factories.

This International played a leading role in the most important revolution of the 19th century, the Paris Commune of 1871 which for the first time in history brought the working class to power, although only in one city. The Commune was defeated and the International did not survive that defeat for long. It split, became weak, and in 1876 it dissolved itself.

But the First International left a legacy on which we build today. Marx and Engels were part of it and they were able to persuade the majority of the other member of their programme and of the scientific foundations of it. It was not easy, they had to have many discussions especially with the anarchists who at the outset had had the majority in the International. Anarchists were communists who thought that it was possible to install communism immediately, without having to build it first. This is because their idea of communism was in fact a return to some long forgotten age of small communes that would function in completely autonomous ways, without the need for

any centralisation. This backward-orientated idea ignored the centralised nature of modern industry. Consequently, they saw no problem in replacing the capitalist state immediately by a regime of no government at all. Such a regime is known by the Greek name "anarchy" and that is why this current in the working class are called "anarchists".

But we know that the working class will have to do the opposite of anarchist notions. It will have to redirect existing industry towards production for human needs and develop it further. That means, among other goals, that the working class will have to establish democratically a plan of development and correct it frequently and democratically according to an honest evaluation of its results. Only through this path of development can real, modern Communism be achieved, an organisation of society where everybody is entitled to the satisfaction of his or her needs and everybody contributes to production according to his or her ability. This presupposes that the productive forces of humanity are so developed that lack of basic means of subsistence will be replaced by their abundance. Only then will the need for the state as the guardian over scarce means of subsistence gradually disappear. The final result will be that there will be no rule of humans over other humans. In this final goal, Marxists and anarchists agree.

Marxism prevailed but anarchism persisted, especially in Italy and in Spain. Much later, during the workers revolution in Spain, in 1936-1937, it got an opportunity to make political proposals to the working class in order to defeat fascism and overthrow capitalism. Anarchists saw that their conceptions were not workable, and they had then no better idea than to become part of a government of the capitalists in Barcelona in 1937 and so to help protect the capitalist state against the insurrection of the workers, whom they helped to disarm and demobilise. This final lesson about anarchism can and should be studied in the works of Leon Trotsky and other Marxists who

participated in that revolution.

Through its participation in the Paris Commune of 1871 the International gained a very important insight: the revolution of the working class cannot use the old state of the capitalists and just fill its parliament, its government and other organs with workers. To that extent, the International agreed with the anarchists. But the International under Marx's guidance drew a positive lesson completely opposite to the notions of the anarchists. Namely, the working class must install an entirely new, workers' state in order to start building communism.

Dutifully, Marx and Engels acknowledged this lesson. They did not change the Communist Manifesto which by that time had become a historic document, but all subsequent programmes of the working class had to include that lesson.

This example of Marx and Engels teaches us another important lesson. Their teaching cannot be considered as finished. We must develop it on the basis of experiences of the working class. We must acknowledge inaccuracies and errors, in order to be able to correct them, like Marx and Engels did in their lifetimes.

## **8.2. Second International**

In 1889 the Second International was founded. This was an immense advance because it was based on mass revolutionary workers parties in Germany, in France, the Austrian empire and in many other countries. They were called socialist or social-democratic parties. But they were revolutionary parties, quite unlike most of the parties that use the same names today.

These parties were linked to trade unions. In most cases the parties promoted or founded the unions, like in Germany and France. In Great Britain, it was the unions who came, a bit later, to the conclusion that they needed a political wing and so they founded a Labour Party. The Second International led

great, victorious struggles, for instance for the eight hour working day or for the universal right to vote. It gave its support to the struggle of working class women for equal rights with men and so contributed mightily to the first advances in that field. Among other conquests, it established the First of May as the international day of struggle of the working class.

These material conquests of millions of workers in the developed countries could never have been achieved if the working class had limited itself to purely "economic", day-to-day struggle.

What made them possible was that the Second International allowed them to understand and adopt the programme of scientific socialism and communism.

In other words it was a Marxist International which educated millions of workers as Marxists.

But there were flaws.

Its leading members tended to forget the most important lesson from the experience of the First International – the one about the state! The Marxism of the majority of the leaders of the Second International was not quite the original teaching of Marx and Engels. It was distorted in that its revolutionary consequences seemed far away and abstract.

### **8.3. Imperialism and its impact on the Second International**

During this period of rise of capitalism in Europe and also in the United States of America, the whole world was increasingly subjected to capitalist conditions of exploitation. Capitalist exploitation was introduced into huge countries, like Russia, India and China and to whole continents like Africa, through colonisation.

Most people in the Second International saw the enormous

exploitation of the colonies by their colonial masters and protested against it. But they also expected progress to come out of it. Many thought that colonies and other latecomers to capitalism would soon follow a similar path of glorious capitalist development as Great Britain, France, Germany, the USA and Japan had done.

In fact world capitalism entered a new stage: imperialism. This is the highest stage of capitalist development. In it, a new entity emerged: finance capital. This results from the merger of financial institutions (such as banks and other money lenders and money makers) and industrial capital under the leadership of the money lenders. Finance capital dominates over all smaller capitals, limits them or squeezes them out. Imperialist countries export goods and capital and exploit natural resources, including cheap labour, from the rest of the world. This is called the imperialist relationship. For instance, Great Britain had an imperialist relationship with India and later also with South Africa, among others. Germany was able to establish an imperialist relationship with South-West Africa. Around the beginning of the twentieth century it became apparent that the imperialist relationship in general did not allow the dependent countries to develop. This is still the case, even though most colonies liberated themselves politically. The imperialist relationship persists. Under it, Africa's natural resources are being plundered as savagely as in previous periods. Its masses are descending into horrible poverty, and are subjected to barbaric dictatorships and barbaric wars. Capitalism itself has become an absolute barrier to the development of humanity, which means to the development of its productive forces. Therefore the imperialist stage is the last stage of capitalism.

All humanity is faced with the choice between passing to a new, socialist and communist mode of production, or a long descent into ever more barbaric conditions of life. This alternative was already formulated by Friedrich Engels in 1878



and then again in the middle of the first world war by the Polish comrade Rosa Luxemburg who wrote: "Bourgeois society stands at the crossroads, either transition to Socialism or regression into Barbarism". All subsequent history has confirmed this prediction. Both world wars and fascism represented huge outbreaks of barbarism.

After the destruction of the Soviet Union in 1991, which (especially in its beginning) had represented the hope for a socialist future, we are already experiencing an acceleration of the worldwide descent into ever-deeper barbarism. For over a hundred years the working class has been trying to make the transition to socialism. In the present period of a new rise of the working class we have perhaps the last opportunity to do it. But already some revolutions in the Middle-East, and in northern Africa have been defeated. This has favoured yet another big slide into barbarism not just there, but also, in Central Africa for example. Europe is also sliding rapidly into mass poverty, authoritarian rule and wars. So we do not have much time. The working class must now learn quickly and act, or perish.

In the late 19th century, capitalism was still in its ascending phase. A thin layer of relatively well off workers developed at that time in the leading capitalist countries of Europe and a little later also in the USA. They had won relatively high wages and good working conditions. The capitalists of these countries were able to afford these conditions to some of "their" workers due to the extra profits they were making by exploiting the rest of the world, especially colonies. This thin layer is called the "labour aristocracy". The labour aristocracy had an enormous influence on the parties of the Second International. A bureaucracy expressing the contentedness of the labour aristocracy developed inside these parties and in the unions. This was (and still is) a layer of leaders who did not object to others talking about the social revolution in some far future.

Sometimes they themselves made such Sunday speeches. The socialist revolution was the so called "maximum" programme of social-democracy. Words are cheap. But in everyday life they were content with what they had and wanted to keep capitalism, with some improvements. Such improvements, like the eight-hour working day, were called "reforms" and they were the contents of the so called "minimum" programme. The people who limited the movement to the minimum programme were (and still are) called reformists.

But there was a strong left wing in the Second International around such people as Rosa Luxemburg in Germany and the Russian Vladimir Ulyanov. Ulyanov had to hide from the police of his country and therefore adopted another name: Nikolai Lenin. Later he became known as Vladimir Lenin.

Unfortunately, the left wing was not well organised. That was a big mistake because the reformists held the leadership of most of the parties of the International. Only in one country did the left wing organise strongly. That was Russia. The left there called themselves "Bolsheviks". Bolsheviks organised themselves into a faction and shortly before the world war that faction became in fact a party independent of the reformists who were called "Mensheviks". I omit the explanation of those strange names because the origin of the names is rather accidental. The origin of the Russian factions themselves is not accidental. I'll come back to it.

## **9. The failure of the Second International**

In 1914 the first world war started. The world as prey of imperialist powers had become too small for their expansion. The main imperialist powers of that time: Great Britain, France, Japan, Russia and the United States allied themselves on one side, Germany, Austria and the Ottoman empire (Turkey) on the other side. Each alliance tried to win a greater share of colonies as markets for its goods, sources for its raw materials and targets for profitable investment.

During the war, in 1916, Lenin published a pamphlet to explain to workers what imperialism is and why it is the highest and last stage of capitalism. The title of the pamphlet declares this insight. It is called: "Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism". Members of the WRP should study this pamphlet, too, it is still valid.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/imp-hsc/>

Millions of workers killed each other in this war in the interests of "their" capitalists. The international working class could have prevented this. That would have required defying the marching orders, calling a general strike and taking power in every country. Before the war, congresses of the Second International had decided to call a general strike in the event of a war. But its reformist leadership had not prepared it at all for such an eventuality. When it came to doing it, they did the contrary: each national party took the side of its own capitalists. The Second International collapsed. Its leaders went over to the capitalist enemy.

The left had to do under terrible war conditions what it had failed to do in peacetime: organise. It started to propagate the idea of a new, Third International.

## **10. Russian Revolution and Bolshevism**

Then, after three years of terrible suffering during the war, the Russian working class overthrew the old rotten imperial state of the Tsar in February 1917. Unfortunately, the Russian bourgeoisie was able to take power. In only a few months it completely revealed its reactionary character by refusing to stop the war or to distribute land to the peasant masses. In October, the working class led the masses to get rid of the bourgeoisie and install a completely new, workers' state. It was based on workers' councils in the cities and on councils of poor peasants in the countryside. These councils decided everything in Russia. One of the first thing they did was to stop the war unilaterally, nationalise all the land, hand it

to poor peasants for long-term use, and expropriate the whole capitalist class. Because the Russian word for "council" is "soviet", the new state was called the "soviet state". The Soviets immediately held a congress, and appointed a new government. Lenin became the head of the new state, and another well-known revolutionary, Leon Trotsky, was charged with forming a completely new army, the Red Army. The capitalist governments of 14 countries sent armies to destroy the republic of workers' councils in Russia and reintroduce a dictatorship of the capitalists. They fomented a civil war. But all these enemies were defeated by the new revolutionary army.

We speak of the Russian revolution but in fact it was victorious in a much larger area than Russia. It included most of the countries of the old Empire of the Tsars; for instance, Ukraine, several large countries of central Asia and smaller countries in the Caucasus region. All these countries soon federated to form the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the USSR. When it was founded, this Union was not strong because of coercion exerted by its largest member, Soviet Russia on the other republics, but precisely because it was a free Union. The Bolshevik Party and the Third International under Lenin's leadership made the right of self-determination of all peoples, up to and including their right to separation, into a principle.

For the first time in history, the working class of a whole country, and a very large one at that, was able to get rid of the rule of the capitalists, install its own state and start with the practical realisation of the socialist programme. The imperialist war, the intervention of the 14 states and the civil war left the country exhausted. Almost all industry, railways and other infrastructure were destroyed. As in other countries, it was the working class – who else? – which had to rebuild the country. But in Russia it could do it on a completely different basis. It no longer worked for capitalist

profit. It worked for its own needs. That was the main achievement of the revolution in Russia. This conquest brought social advances, like a free health service, free access to education and many others. Superficially, these social conquests resemble some partial conquests later achieved by the working class of some capitalist countries, like Great Britain. But in reality they were socialist conquests because they set the whole working class of a huge country on the path to build socialism. That path could not be followed to its end without an international revolution. There can be no socialism in one country. But the international working class was encouraged to follow the Russian example. Rightly, the international working class considered the Russian revolution and its socialist conquests as its own and the Russian working class considered its state as just the first success of the world revolution.

In 1991, after 74 years, the October Revolution was finally defeated. The USSR collapsed under the pressure of imperialism, because of its isolation. That was due to an enormous delay in the world revolution, itself due to a series of defeats and betrayals over many years. Capitalists, their politicians, their press, their historians and other ideologists heap slanders on the achievements of the October Revolution. But these achievements will never be forgotten. The working class will always learn from them.

Many books have been written about the October revolution. Leon Trotsky himself wrote one, "The History of the Russian Revolution". Everybody should read that book and we should discuss all the rich lessons of the Russian revolution as part of the building of the WRP and formation of its members.  
<https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1930/hrr/>

Here just a few of the main points about the Russian Revolution.

The victory of the Russian October revolution was only

possible because there was a well organised party of dedicated and well educated workers who understood what Capitalism-Imperialism is, the concrete situation of the masses in Russia and were able to act in unity to propose the socialist revolution to the masses as the way out of their plight. In other words, the Bolshevik party was a genuine Marxist workers party.

Here is where I have to come back to its origin in 1903, because such a party is the necessary condition for the working class to be able to take power even today. So we must look carefully at the only example of such a party in history.

The Russian social-democratic party really formed only at its second congress which had to be held outside Russia in Brussels, then in London, because of police repression. At the congress, suddenly there appeared a difference about the conditions of membership. Mensheviks thought that party members should be those who accepted the party programme and supported it by regular personal assistance under the direction of one of the party's organisations. Bolsheviks, with Lenin, demanded that members "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". So Lenin and his followers in the party required a much more serious engagement of party members than the others, but was that so important? Everybody, including Lenin, was surprised that the two factions could not unite because of such a seemingly small detail. After all, both factions were followers of Marx's school of scientific socialism/communism. But later history proved that the difference was indeed fundamental. In fact, the laxness of the Mensheviks in this question was just the beginning of the influence of petty-bourgeois ideas. Later, this became apparent, as the Mensheviks became a particular kind of reformist. In 1917 the socialist revolution became an immediate task and the Mensheviks refused to accomplish it.

We are against petty-bourgeois laxness. The conditions of

membership in the Workers International and in its Namibian section, the Workers Revolutionary party, are those written down by Lenin: "recognise the Party Programme and support it by material means and by personal participation in one of the party's organisations". We want to build a fighting organisation with a clear shape, not a soft cloud. There is much more to be learnt from the history of the Bolshevik party and members of the WRP should study that history.

Another point: the October Revolution was only the first victory of the international, world revolution. The Bolsheviks understood that, the masses in Russia understood that; and what is more, very soon the majority of the working class of the world understood that! Old parties of the Second International began to break up because workers, their members, wanted to imitate Russia. Outright revolutions broke out in Germany and Hungary. In several other countries, there were revolutionary movements.

During most of the war, the Third International was the proclaimed aim of a small minority of courageous opponents to that war. After the October Revolution, in 1919, the Third International was actually founded. In several important countries, big chunks of the old social democratic parties demanded to be part of the new International. In Germany, France, Italy and Czechoslovakia it was even the majority in those parties!

## **11. Third International**

The Third International had a huge task on its hands. In the epoch of imperialism, the world revolution has become the immediate task. But the leaders of the working class were not up to that task. Even the leadership of those parties who were sincerely in favour of the revolution were not up to it.

Some of them continued to preach socialism in Sunday speeches but in everyday life they remained reformists. They remained

prisoners of the distorted version of Marx's teachings that was current in the Second International. Already in 1917, Lenin published a pamphlet to correct that, above all to refresh and develop the lesson drawn by Marx from the Paris Commune, that the working class cannot take over the bourgeois state but must sweep it away and install a new, workers' state. The title of the pamphlet is "The State and Revolution". It should be read and understood by every member of the WRP.

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/staterev/>

In order to make clear how different it was from its predecessor, the Second International (which called itself socialist), the Third returned to the old name used in Marx's and Engels' time: "communist". It called itself the Communist International. Russians at that time liked abbreviations a lot and called it simply the "Comintern".

Other factions of the Comintern ignored the fact that the socialist revolution must be an act of the whole working class. They were so impatient that they started minority actions all of which ended in disaster. They called themselves "left-wing communists". They wrote up whole theories that communists need not bother to go into bourgeois parliaments or work with workers in trade unions because of their rotten leadership.

In fact, both factions operated with the old notions of a minimum programme and a maximum programme. For both there was no connection, no bridge between the two programmes and so some stuck to the minimum programme and ignored the maximum programme, while others did the opposite.

The true task of the communists is to raise the level of comprehension of the whole of the working class until that class becomes capable of taking power into its hands. That requires a programme that combines both the minimum (reforms) and the maximum (revolution). It must contain intermediate,



transitional demands that lead from reform to revolution and in the process help the masses to acquire experiences with struggle and draw the right lessons from them.

In 1920, Comrade Lenin published a whole book to explain that and to criticise the "left-wing communists". It is called "Left-Wing" Communism: an Infantile Disorder', and is yet another very important book that every member should read. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/lwc/>

So the situation was that the new, imperialist epoch required a completely new approach to struggle. But none of the new communist parties was prepared for it. Despite their best intentions, all were still fraught with conceptions and habits acquired in the calmer previous epoch of rising capitalism. All parties except one: the Russian party of the Bolsheviks. That party, because of the peculiar conditions of Russia, had understood what was required for a revolution to succeed. Indeed, it was the party that had led the October Revolution to victory. But it is important to know that even that party had followed a line of supporting its own bourgeoisie at the beginning of the year 1917. Fortunately it had a very good leader, Lenin. Lenin had formed the party and the party had formed him and many other thoughtful revolutionaries. The party listened to Lenin and so was able to rearm itself to become the leading party of the revolutionary process that was already taking place.

In effect, the whole Third International needed to start a political formation of millions of socialists (who now called themselves communists) to rearm them theoretically and politically. Only in this way could they become really fit for the period of imperialism and of world revolution. They could not simply learn what to do by reading books and taking classes, they had to learn by doing. During the process many mistakes were made which had to be theoretically understood and practically corrected.

The necessity of a transitional programme was one major difference between the Second and the Third International. The other was a concrete understanding of the world revolution as a living process. The majority of the Second International had assumed that socialist revolution would be victorious first in one of the countries where the working class was most numerous and powerful because their capitalism was most mature: Great Britain, France or Germany. But the Russian Revolution proved them all wrong. It was victorious in a backward country which had not attained full capitalist development, whose immense majority of toilers were peasants and whose working class was a tiny minority. A country which had not even arrived at the stage of a bourgeois democracy. In the history of Europe, the class "normally" responsible for leading the democratic revolution to overthrow kings and other tyrants, was the bourgeoisie. Yet in Russia the bourgeoisie proved completely incapable of accomplishing that task. The working class had to take power in order to achieve bourgeois democratic rights and freedoms. Then it would not and could not stop at this. It went directly on to expropriate the capitalists and advance towards socialism.

The imperialist relationship between advanced capitalist countries and dependent, backward countries produces this situation where the capitalist class proves incapable of realising its task of installing democracy. So the working class has to take up both the democratic and socialist tasks in one and the same revolution. Leon Trotsky recognised this necessity well before the October Revolution of 1917. For this process of advancing from democratic to socialist revolution in one movement he used the term "permanent revolution" which had already been used by Marx.

Permanent revolution characterises the whole process of the world revolution in our epoch of imperialist relationships. At the time of the growth and enthusiasm of the Third International, Trotsky's theory was known as such, under this

name, only to a minority. But the International was aware of the fact of permanent revolution, if not of the term. It turned towards the dependent, oppressed countries which had been almost completely neglected by the Second International. Communist parties were set up in backward countries such as China.

Unfortunately, all the promising developments of the Third International were stopped after the Comintern's Fourth Congress in November 1922. Our comrade Balázs Nagy of the Workers International wrote an article which shows the limits of the work of both of the Third International and the Fourth International and how we, Workers International, must take up these unavoidable tasks. The article's title is "Some Problems of the Fourth International – and the tasks involved in rebuilding it". I suggest that we read and discuss it in one or more training sessions dedicated to these problems. <http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

The reason the Third International's work could not be completed is that the Russian revolution remained isolated. The process of German revolution of 1918-1923 ended in a defeat. That happened because the leadership of the German communist party felt uncertain, became indecisive, hesitated and that hesitation of the leadership weakened the whole party of a million members. After that, Capitalism was able to stabilise for several years. It had been shaken by the war and the revolutionary uprisings after the war. But since none of these uprisings had led to the working class taking power in one of the advanced countries, the capitalists prevailed globally.

## **12. Stalinist bureaucracy**

The Russian working class, though victorious, was exhausted by years of war, revolution and civil war. Its international isolation led to the development of an uncontrolled caste of

parasites that came to rule the country in the name of the working class. It first appeared through an alliance between the party apparatus of the Bolshevik party and the well-off peasants and other smaller capitalists that the Bolsheviks had to allow because of the international isolation of the revolution. Then the caste consolidated into a real monster that ruled not only in the name of the working class but more and more over the working class and against the working class.

The foundations of the workers' state installed by the October Revolution still persisted. There was still no capitalist ruling class. Workers still produced for human needs instead of producing for profit, as they must in capitalist countries. But the ruling caste controlled both production and distribution and directed both to satisfy above all its own needs. The whole apparatus of the state no longer consisted of councils (soviets) of workers. Its organs were still called soviets, but they were entirely in the hands of the ruling caste. So it was still a workers' state but a deeply damaged, degenerated workers' state.

This ruling caste is known as the Kremlin bureaucracy after the old imperial palace in Moscow from where its leaders ruled the whole country. More frequently, it is called the Stalinist bureaucracy because its leader was an old Bolshevik named Stalin. He was not a remarkable man except that he was an outstanding schemer and able to rule with an iron fist. But the new caste needed no great leader and educator of the working class like Lenin had been (he died in 1924). It needed an unscrupulous dictator and Stalin exactly fitted the job description.

Soon, after 1933, this caste became great friends with the bourgeoisie of France and Great Britain. Then with that of Hitler's Germany. Then again with that of France, Great Britain and the USA. Stalin and his caste became sworn enemies of the working class of the world. They did not allow the working class of any country to take power. After the 2nd

world war, the working classes of Yugoslavia and of China were able accomplish social revolutions in their countries only against the will of the Kremlin.

But at the same time, though this reactionary bureaucracy wanted to be friends with the capitalists abroad, the capitalist were never friends of the workers state, the USSR. Soon after the war, the British and American capitalist "friends" of the Kremlin put so much pressure on the USSR that the Stalinist bureaucracy felt it had to allow the communist parties to carry out social revolutions in several countries of central and eastern Europe. Because of this, some people started to think that this bureaucracy could not be entirely reactionary. They were completely wrong.

In fact, it was the beginning of a period of systematic worldwide collaboration between the Kremlin and the leading imperialist power, the USA. This collaboration had two names, "peaceful coexistence" and "cold war", but both are wrong. The coexistence was not peaceful, nor was the war always "cold". The aim was to maintain the rule of imperialism globally. Therefore, all movements of the working class, of other oppressed classes and of oppressed peoples against imperialism had to be terminated and their leaders either corrupted or killed. The real, comprehensive history of this horrible collaboration has yet to be written.

It is of great importance also for southern Africa. It was Henry Kissinger, an envoy of the USA-Imperialism, who orchestrated the reining in of all the bourgeois liberation movements, such as those led by the ANC, SWAPO, MPLA and FRELIMO in the 1970s. This entailed the massacre of leaders and militants whose democratic and socialist goals were incompatible with the continued rule of imperialism in this region. But Kissinger was able to do his bloody work only with the collaboration of the Kremlin bureaucracy. It was all part of the functioning "peaceful coexistence" or "cold war".

At the time it formed, in the 1920s, the Stalinist bureaucracy took advantage of the great prestige of the USSR among the workers of the world to take over the leadership of the Third International. From 1929 onward, all leaders of the communist parties were hand-picked by Stalin for their obedience to all his directives, sudden turns and whims. Neither Stalin nor these local lieutenants of his were able or willing to get on with the great historic task of the Third International. Instead, they used it as an instrument of pressure in the service of their diplomacy. In 1943 they dissolved it but by then it had been dead for ten years as a workers' organisation.

With some exceptions, Stalinist parties remained workers' parties. Apparently, these parties remained "communist", continued to propagate Marxism as the scientific theory of the working class and above all, defended the heritage of the October Revolution. So millions of workers remained their enthusiastic members because they thought these parties still represented the interests of the working class. But this appearance of Stalinist parties did not agree with their true nature at all. This "Marxism" of the Stalinist bureaucracy propagated "socialism in one country" (the USSR). That was in complete contradiction to the real scientific insights of Marx and Lenin. It was however very suitable for the purposes of the Stalinist bureaucracy whose very existence was based on the isolation of the USSR. But critique and discussion was not allowed in any of these parties and so the real nature of Stalinism has remained undiscovered for the majority of members of the Stalinist parties to this day.

### **13. Left opposition and Fourth International**

The decisive point of no return in this negative development of the Third International was the year 1933. Hitler came to power in Germany. The Stalinist party in Germany had helped to divide the working class and prevent its resistance to Hitler's fascism. Even after the defeat, the Stalinist

Communist International drew no lessons from it. This International, completely dominated by the Stalinist bureaucracy and its international apparatus, was dead for the purposes of the working class.

So the Third International degenerated, was later even formally dissolved and left behind a reactionary international apparatus with its centre in the Kremlin. But this did not happen without resistance. Almost immediately after the Stalinist bureaucracy began its rise in 1923, a Left Opposition arose against this bureaucracy, first in Russia, then internationally, in most parties of the Communist International. Lenin himself gave the first impulse to resist Stalin's takeover of the Bolshevik party. After his death, it was the other most prominent leader of the October revolution who led the Left Opposition: Leon Trotsky.

The Left Opposition recognised after 1933 that it had to build a new International, the Fourth International. It was proclaimed in 1938 in France on the eve of the second world war. It inherited all the positive experiences and insights of the Third International before its capture and destruction by the Stalinist bureaucracy. These experiences and insights are gathered in the Programme of the Fourth international. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/1938/tp/>

It was written by Leon Trotsky after many discussions with other members of the Fourth International. Trotsky conceived it consciously as the programme of the imminent revolution which he predicted to come after the second world war. Its main idea is that capitalism-imperialism attacks the very existence of the working class – the only class in this society capable of opening a positive outcome to the crisis of the whole humanity. But to do so, this class needs a programme of demands leading to this revolution, a programme of transition.

For instance, ever-growing unemployment throws whole layers of

the working class, especially the youth, out of the production process, with no hope of ever becoming part of it again. This divides the working class and puts pressure on all working conditions, both wages and working hours, of those who still have work. So on the one side, there are those who are not allowed to work at all, on the other side those who work must work ever longer hours and ever more quickly.

The Programme of the Fourth International seeks the unity of both parts of the working class by demanding the distribution of all available work among all capable hands without loss of wages. On the one hand, this demand must be satisfied in order to stop the destruction of the working class. On the other hand it runs dead against the need of capitalists to make a profit. So it is both indispensable and not realisable under capitalism. It is in fact a demand to overthrow capitalism and start building socialism, but it makes this theoretical necessity accessible as a result of the experience of millions of workers in their practical struggles for their very existence. The programme of transition is a whole system of such demands both economic and political, leading up to the socialist revolution. Those demands cannot be just thought up by a clever person at his or her desk. They originate from the deeply felt needs of the masses, and often are formulated by the masses themselves.

This is the programme of the Workers International adopted at its founding conference in Budapest, 1990. Its full title is "Death Agony of Capitalism and the Tasks of the Fourth International. The Mobilisation of the Masses around Transitional Demands to Prepare the Conquest of Power."

Every member of the WRP must read and understand our programme.

So this is how the number four in our emblem represents the International. It does not represent an abstract appeal or desire for an International but the engagement to rebuild the



Fourth International.

Now the question arises: where is this Fourth International, 77 years after its foundation? Why must it be rebuilt?

#### **14. The fate of the Fourth International**

The Fourth International was proclaimed and founded on the eve of the Second World War out of a historic necessity. The Fourth International predicted that this world war would be even more terrible than the first one and that it would be followed by mighty revolutions. The task the International set itself was to build the parties that would lead these workers revolutions to victory over capitalism. These revolutions did take place but it turned out that the International was not ready to lead them.

Sections of the International were part of the resistance against fascism in occupied Europe and promoted the internationalist line in it against the dominant nationalism propagated by all Stalinist parties. But the International ceased to function as a world party. The Stalinists and Fascists assassinated many of its leaders during the war.

The most experienced section of the Fourth International was the soviet section. All of its members knew and used Marx's scientific method and many had learnt how to apply it in practice in the Russian October Revolution of 1917. So it was mainly this section and its leader, Leon Trotsky, that could teach the other sections all the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired by the Russian communists before and during the October revolution of 1917.

Unfortunately, in the the 30s almost all members of this party were incarcerated in Stalin's prisons and concentration camps. They organised clandestinely inside the camps, but around 1940 Stalin ordered their physical liquidation and that of Leon Trotsky himself, who lived in exile, in Mexico. Only a few survived and were not liberated until 1953. By this action and

by lies and slander, physical violence and murder, Stalin's international apparatus deliberately isolated the Fourth International from the workers' movement. This damage inflicted by Stalinism on the Fourth international led to an unhealthy isolation and lack of growth and ultimately led to the emergence of sects acting in the name of the Fourth International but unable to learn the lessons of Leon Trotsky.

So it came about that after the war, the International did not understand its task – which was to lead the revolution. Its leaders had not understood the main lesson of Marxism: that there can be no revolution without the leadership of a revolutionary party. Instead they observed how the revolutionary movements that took place in Italy and in France at the end of the war were led to their defeat by completely counter-revolutionary Stalinist parties. After that, a majority of these leaders declared that the prediction of revolutions was proven wrong and turned their backs completely on the task of building revolutionary parties. They themselves fell under the influence of Stalinism.

However, as a result, there have also been continual efforts by the most conscious elements of the class to resist Stalinism's dead end diversions of the march towards socialism. That resistance organised itself in 1953 to rebuild the Fourth International. But even inside this resistance the influence of Stalinism was strong and all the stronger for not being conscious. As a result, the movement is now in a state of dispersion with a myriad of sects all claiming the "tradition" of the Fourth International for themselves and all pretending to grow at the expense of other such sects and, most importantly, at the expense of the living movement of the working class, whom they all consider as just building material for their own sect, just like the Stalinist parties did. Most of them have undemocratic internal regimes and this is another aspect of the unconscious influence of Stalinism on them. Marx, Engels, Lenin or Trotsky never favoured such

attitudes and behaviour which do not belong in the working class movement. Our organisation, Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, was founded in 1990 as the continuation of the ongoing organised effort to overcome these problems. Some of us have been part of it for decades.

To learn more about the crisis of the Fourth International, comrades should study Balázs Nagy's book "Marxist considerations on the crisis" and his already mentioned article "Some problems..."  
<http://workersinternational.info/2014/08/some-problems-of-the-fourth-international-and-the-tasks-involved-in-rebuilding-it/>

## **15. The defeat of 1989-1991**

In 1991, the Stalinist bureaucracy dissolved the Soviet Union. In each of its constituent republics, the national branches of the Stalinist bureaucracy stole most of the state's assets, in fact anything that could be transformed into capital. The current capitalist classes in Russia, Ukraine, Kazakhstan and the other republics formed on the ruins of the USSR originate from this theft. The state founded by Lenin, Trotsky and by millions of revolutionary workers and peasants in 1917 was lost. So were the workers' states in Central and Eastern Europe, with the same methods (theft) and results. The worst aspect of this bare-faced theft was that the working class was unable to oppose it, because it no longer recognised that these states belonged to the working class. Generations lived under the oppression of the Stalinist bureaucracy in a degenerated workers' state in the USSR. Similar states in Central and Eastern Europe even came into existence with that oppression and with the deformation of the state. The social revolutions that installed them in 1948-49 were themselves deformed by their Stalinist leadership. In the end, the workers' nature of these states became unrecognisable even to their rightful owners – the working class. But when these states disappeared, all the other, more palpable socialist conquests also disappeared! Suddenly, state enterprises went

bankrupt and stopped paying workers. Unemployment and humiliating poverty appeared, access to health care and education became difficult and so on. Workers fought against some of these consequences but they lacked a party that would unify all these struggles in a mass resistance to the cause – the restoration of capitalism.

This defeat was not only that of the working class of the USSR. The working class of the whole world suffered a historic defeat. Everywhere the capitalist classes were encouraged to deepen their so called neo-liberal “reforms” whose meaning is to increase exploitation in order to save their profits. At the same time, they were able to restrict the rights of the working class to resist through its unions and politically through its parties. Social democratic and Stalinist parties were thrown into disarray and most responded by becoming bourgeois parties and striving to resemble other bourgeois parties as closely as possible, officially renouncing their working class origin. So the working class of most countries was deprived of its own political expression: representation on the political arena and leadership in political struggles.

Imperialism felt triumphant. Its leaders proclaimed socialism dead and the leader of these leaders, George Bush senior, the president of the USA, even proclaimed a capitalist “new world order”. But it became apparent very quickly that capitalism-imperialism had reached a degree of decomposition where the only “order” it had to offer was in fact chaos and increasing barbarism.

In South Africa this negative turn was represented by the transformation of the South African Communist Party into an openly bourgeois party, although recent events there show that sincere communists will resist these reactionary developments.

## **16. Turn to new workers' parties**

Some of these sincere communists have now recognised the

nature of the SACP and were initiators of the turn of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) in December 2013 to start exploring ways to build a new socialist party of the working class and to constitute its true programme. NUMSA is the largest union of South Africa and perhaps of the whole continent. It sets an example to be followed by the working class in the whole world. There is now a new uprising of the working class of the world. There were revolutions in North Africa and the Middle-East, led by inexperienced and unorganised youth. They stalled or were defeated. But the working class in several countries now tries to rebuild its unions and re-found its political parties. NUMSA's turn in this direction is not isolated, it is only the most decisive part of a worldwide turn.

In Namibia, the working class must participate in NUMSA's turn but the situation here is different in two ways: there has never been a workers' party in Namibia and the Namibian working class is now seizing the opportunity to build the Workers Revolutionary Party, section of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International, as that much needed and overdue workers' party.

So the working class of Namibia can make an original contribution to the world turn towards new socialist parties of the working class initiated by NUMSA. The main contribution is that these parties must be built as revolutionary parties in the process of rebuilding a world party, the Fourth International. This is a very important contribution not only for Africa, but also for countries at the other end of the imperialist relationship. Especially in Europe, where several of the new parties of the working class that have formed during the last decade are now arriving at a crossroads. Recent events in Ukraine and the Balkans tested their reformist conceptions and proved them wrong. A large international debate has started as working class activists are looking for alternatives.

## **17. The International that must be built**

The defeat of 1991 created a very new situation for the international working class. Its oldest and most experienced section, the European working class, has lost its leading role. It was weakened by deindustrialisation in the old imperialist countries of Great Britain, France and Italy. Its long domination by Stalinist and reformist ideas produced a limited and unsuccessful resistance to the capitalists when they moved industries and diverted investments to countries providing cheap labour on other continents.

Everywhere in the world, the working class became divided into the unemployed, precarious contract workers and the dwindling section still in permanent employment. These sections have been pitted against each other and against workers of foreign origin. Workers became less conscious of their immediate interests as unions (with a few exceptions like Unite in the UK) failed in their task to unite all these parts of the working class. The political consciousness of being one international class with the historical mission to overthrow capitalism and replace it with socialism declined even more.

So, to a large extent, the educational work of the four Internationals (First, Second, Third and Fourth) was undone and has to be recommenced. To some extent, we are back in 1864 when the First International was formed. As then, the working class now needs to form an International with all genuinely working class currents, and Marxists have to do as Marx did: patiently argue for the scientific method and programme.

Some people draw from this the conclusion that we must really build a new edition of the long defunct First International, as if the history of the working class of the last 151 years had not taken place.

Others express the same desire to erase history by wishing to build a Fifth International without even bothering to draw a

serious balance-sheet of the so far unsuccessful efforts to build the Fourth International. A prominent representative of these was the late President of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, who even called an international conference to debate this idea a few years ago.

Still others go as far as proclaiming that the working class has to build an International without a number. By saying that numbers and labels do not matter, they express the most radical negation not just of the necessity to learn from history, but even of the fact that the working class has a living history. We know that there is no other way than to continue that history by learning its lessons so we can overcome our weaknesses. The number 4 in our emblem symbolises the responsibility we take towards our own history as the working class!

Concretely, all those who reject this approach have in common that they propose some "International" that will – permanently or for the time being – ignore the main theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals: the theory of permanent revolution, the need for a programme of transitional demands and the knowledge of the nature of imperialism as the latest stage of capitalism which is the theoretical basis of the first two. By running away from history such people immediately fall into the traps of reformism and Stalinism. They prove the truth of the saying: those who have no past, have no future.

The number 4 in our emblem stands concretely for all these theoretical achievements. These achievements are precisely the main subjects of the great and very positive discussion about the way forward which is now taking place among worker activists in this country, in South Africa, in the USA, in Greece and in many other countries. We would be great fools to drop these achievements by dropping our goal to rebuild the Fourth International.

Even more profoundly, without the political and theoretical achievements of the Third and Fourth Internationals, there would be no material conquests of the working class. All these conquests were, in the last analysis, only won as products or by-products of the struggle for the proletarian revolution. If many of these material conquests have now been destroyed, this has been possible only because the theoretical achievements have been forgotten or falsified by organisations of the working class in a retrograde movement on both fronts, theoretical and practical. But the working class now defends itself. We are part of this resistance. Our task is to inform it with Marx's, Lenin's and Trotsky's school of thought and of workers' politics.

In conclusion: To fully understand all the symbols of the flag, we have to understand our programme. The programme is not just a collection of demands plus an overall aim. That would just reproduce the old division between a maximum and a minimum programme. Our programme is the summary of what the working class is and how it fights. It summarises the aim of our class, the conclusions it has drawn from its dearly bought experiences, its disappointments in the past and its hopes for the future. This is why the programme cannot be declared finished once and for all. The conditions of working class struggle have changed a lot since 1990 and we need a programme taking into account all those changes. It will be based on the old programme of 1938 but at the same time it will be a new programme. The programme that the WRP of Namibia will elaborate in preparation for and during its special congress will be an important contribution to this new international programme of the Fourth International.

## **18. References to literature mentioned in the talk**

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