

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Print version £2

Political and theoretical journal of Workers International (to Rebuild the 4th International)

No 11

March 2015

Workers Revolutionary Party of Namibia:

Report on November 2014 National Assembly elections

The WRP entered the election on 12 November 2014. The election took place on 28 November. Of 16 parties, the WRP was 7th with 2 seats in parliament. More than 13,000 persons voted for the party. The vote was evenly distributed over the length and breadth of the country with an average of 1.5% of the vote.

It is estimated that the party would have won 4-5 times more votes had it entered the elections earlier. However, this is doubtful as it is strongly suspected that the vote was rigged with electronic voting machines without any means to have verified the votes. We suspect that the WRP obtained its vote because it had escaped the pre-programming of the Indian electronic voting machines.

It was a whirlwind campaign, but it was based on the national organisation of the group of former South African conscripted soldiers.

Other organised groups which account for the WRP vote were former PLAN fighters and SWAPO Youth League members of 1976 and their supporters, mineworkers and the former TCL mineworkers (whose pension fund was stolen), the Southern Communities Allegiance (which had



Thousands rallied in London's Trafalgar Square in support of the Greek government's bid to overturn the crushing weight of Troika-imposed austerity: See 'Greece: The Crisis is Here to Stay' page 5

taken back their land), the homeless and housing groups, (pauperised) teachers etc. Members of the Truth and Justice Committee of the 1976 PLAN

fighters in the north encouraged people to vote for the WRP.

An outcome was that we now have a central committee of 23 persons and

(Ctd. p. 2)

Also in this issue

South Africa:

Numsa National Treasurer Mphumzi Maqungo speaks to the Australian Workers Union.....page 4

Marxism:

Historical Materialism: A timely reminder.....page 9
An extract from a forthcoming book by BALAZS NAGY examines and defends a fundamental aspect of Marxist thought

WORKERS INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

Political and theoretical journal of Workers International to Rebuild the 4th International
Workers International,
PO Box 68375,
London E7 7DT, UK
workersinternational.info
Email:
info@workersinternational.info

it will probably grow to over 30 in the next few weeks. Further outcomes were that the former TCL workers have requested membership of the WRP and the Truth and Justice leadership of the north have requested to meet with us to discuss their joinder of the WRP, and various branches are being organised around the country.

A problem to be sorted out practically and theoretically is that only the core of the leadership can be called Marxist (members of the Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International) at this stage.

The sudden turn of the working class to the WRP we see as a result not only of history, but of the changing configurations in the class. (Since 1978 the nationalists have systematically eradicated the working class leadership in the unions and replaced it with nationalists [tribalists]). The latter years have seen increasing tension and outright hostility between the working class and its petit bourgeois nationalist leadership, particularly the trade union leadership. The class was forced more and more to conduct its struggles outside the unions against the capitalists including the union leaderships. The most outstanding example is the struggle against pension fund theft in which union leaders colluded with big business to steal pension funds, each running into hundreds of millions of rands.

The history of the WRP provided the firm foundation on which the class could build their support for a political current in which it could have full confidence. The WRP was brought into being in 1984 by socialist elements in the liberation struggle. These elements such as Werner Mamugwe (in the 50's and 60's) and later Hewat Beukes, Erica Beukes, Jacobus Josob and others (in the 70's and 80's) not only were the main overt and clandestine organisers of the liberation struggle inside the country, they were part of the spearhead of the struggles against the bourgeois nationalist (tribalist) leadership of SWAPO and others.

During these early years of struggle the socialists were painfully aware that this bourgeois nationalists leaderships were groomed by the Stalinists and the imperialists for political takeover of the states to become independent. Given anti-communist legislation, severe and ruthless repression of any left currents and the relative freedom of nationalists to conduct their politics and imperialist support it was a given that the nation-

alists would prevail at independence day.

In 1976 the challenge of socialist youths against the nationalist leadership of SWAPO in exile ended in defeat, crushed by the bourgeois regimes of Kaunda (Zambia) and Nyerere (Tanzania).

Then in 1984 at the time the WRP was clandestinely established a massive terror campaign since 1978 had been launched inside the SWAPO and the ANC which allowed the party to launch an effective campaign against the nationalists and their international backers. The ones worst hit were the SWAPO as 'liberators', the international churches and the Anti-apartheid movement.

Nevertheless, the SWAPO was foisted onto the Namibian nation in 1990 albeit with a seriously dented reputation and a clear disrespect from the Namibian people.

In 1988 the WRP (still clandestine) successfully called out mass protests on 4 May 1988 against South African occupation of Namibia.

On 1 April 1989 SWAPO sent in PLAN fighters into the north of the country misinforming them that the UNTAG - the UN task force for the elections in Namibia - was in control in the north and that the South African army had already withdrawn to South Africa. The South African Army had not withdrawn and Martti Ahtisaari of the UN ordered the South African Army to massacre the PLAN fighters. Many of them were shot dead while they were eating because the South African Army drove in white UN painted armoured cars.

The SWAPO leadership had clearly acted under pressure of the exposure of their mass crimes by a group in Namibia under the leadership of the WRP.

On the evening of Saturday, 1 April, 1989, the WRP met with hundreds of SWAPO members mourning at a customary meeting place in Katutura, the black township in Windhoek, while the SWAPO leaders were partying with their white partners in Klein Windhoek, the opulent white town adjacent to Windhoek, celebrating the coming of independence. It was a sad, intimate and outraged gathering. We spent time together until the early hours of the morning.

The WRP thereafter staged a flier protest across Windhoek titled, "The UN, the foot soldiers of imperialism".

On 1 May 1989 the WRP was openly declared as a Trotskyist Party with the

hammer and sickle with the superimposed 4 as its emblem.

At the opening of the Namibian Parliament on 21 March 1990, (on the advice of Cliff Slaughter) the WRP staged a march to Parliament to declare the SWAPO leadership traitors and imperialist agents. This demonstration was beamed around the world by television. This was meant among other things to imprint the indelible fact on the SWAPO leadership and its imperialist handlers that their terror was at an end and their pretences were done.

Since 1990 the WRP embarked on the mundane tasks of nursing bodies of workers back to fighting condition and back to the unions who were led into defeat by the provocateur and opportunist tribalist union leaders; individual and group legal defence of workers in labour tribunals; fighting endemic and all-pervading legal corruption; and tasks bordering on welfare, seeking out any pocket of worker resistance and dissatisfaction. Cd Jacobus Josob, a shopsteward of the so-called SWAPO unions at the Namibia Breweries, directed union negotiations to a living wage tied to inflation, permanent benefits such as scholarships for workers' children, housing benefits, etc.

The unionised workers immediately started experiencing the fatal effects of a tribal petit bourgeois nationalist leadership. They were sold out to the corporations. These union leaders - part of the SWAPO leadership - knew the tactic of speaking left while hastening along rightward. Privatisation of public assets including health immediately became the first issue. A section of the union leadership used their anti-privatisation rhetoric to garner public support to climb the ladder to parliament as SWAPO members.

The WRP kept pace and drove for a deeper understanding of privatisation as an attack against workers, the derogation of their rights and benefits, while it had no economic justification as it had been proven to be an unequivocal failure in East and West around the world. It became a favourite invitee at symposiums and panels to discuss privatisations to the ire of union leaders.

However privatisation soon reached workers' pension funds which were liquidated and stolen by the corporations and the SWAPO leadership with the assistance of the union leaderships. In 1994 the process started with the theft of R 200 million from the TCL mineworkers' pension fund.

Thereafter Rio Tinto Zinc, fishing companies and the State Pension fund

took the cue that pension funds were easy pickings from a working class left weak and disorganised by a treacherous leadership.

The amounts stolen and intended to be stolen ran into billions of rands.

In 1996 the WRP worked with workers' leaders at four mines of the TCL where workers were on strike and had formed committees in every department of the mine's management to raise their demands. It advised them to open the mines books amongst others. TCL closed its mines only for the miners to find out afterwards that their pension fund was stolen.

In 2008 the Workers Advice Centre associated with the WRP was approached by the TCL Workers Committee to assist in the recovery of the stolen pension fund. After many protest marches and legal action the campaign is still continuing.

In 1999 the WRP assisted to organise the homeless in Windhoek who were in running battles with the Windhoek municipality which kept on forcefully evicting them from land. This struggle led the WRP into a permanent struggle with the municipality's continuation of apartheid town planning and management policies.

In 2002 the WRP launched a project in which it built 43 housing units for homeless families. It proved that a house could be built at 35% the market price and the houses were of sterling quality, much higher than the council structures. It further developed a housing policy in which group housing contained a social centre including a satellite clinic amongst others which would relieve the pressure on the secondary health centres, the hospitals, and enable them to concentrate on their secondary functions. (One woman of the homeless who has fought tirelessly all the way will be part of our Central Committee).

The municipality did not allow us to complete the houses and the project. With partially built homes into which the families had moved it went on the offensive and stopped the project. (But, we have a written report which will become part of our parliamentary programme.)

In 2002 the executive patron of the homeless, Erica Beukes, was drawn into court when the municipality cut water to the 43 households causing a severe health hazard. She tried to have the water reconnected. This was coupled with protests. Corrupt judges directed the judgments against her in person and barred her for life to bring cases against the municipality. This set



TCL workers gather in Windhoek with families and supporters to campaign against the theft of their pension funds

off a decade-long fight against the courts and the corrupt judges.

The WRP leaders and their associates began studying bourgeois jurisprudence and law from 1999.

In cases of house owners, workers, finance, fundamental rights the WRP through its Workers Advice Centre (WAC) put severe pressure on the judiciary in their exposure of legal corruption, incompetence and academic poverty.

WAC involved itself in pending cases against Labour Hire and in opposing the appointment of corrupt judges. In 2013 the WAC caused one Jeremy Gauntlett - a senior counsel - to be removed from the shortlist of candidates who were to be selected as judges to the South African Constitutional Court, due to his involvement in judicial improprieties and corruption in Namibia.

In 2013 the WRP stopped the forceful eviction of landless in the South when an armed contingent of the Namibian Police was sent down from Windhoek.

WRP leaders and youth spoke at numerous forums - even ones funded by the right-wing Conrad Adenauer Stiftung - and made contact with groups around the country. The issues varied across the political field.

The WRP actively supported striking teachers and fuel workers.

It was accepted in the mainstream of the struggle against Germany for reparations. It assisted national groups - most notably the Rehoboth Baster and Nama peoples - to organise politically to fight for self-determination. This issue is of central importance in the unification of the Namibian working class. The WRP now stands at the heart of it with votes from each and every national group in this country.

During four of the five previous elections the WRP participated, suspecting strongly that it had won at least one seat. However, the SWAPO rigged

each election. The WRP had twice before participated in an alliance.

With an absolutely meaningless opposition, the intensifying critical condition of the working class and the poor peasantry and a cynically destructive boss-boy regime it explains on hindsight the vote for the WRP.

The WRP had also received at least three hours of TV time on a case against the Indian electronic voting machines. The case was beamed live from the courtroom over two days with the running head displaying Workers Revolutionary Party - WRP.

The party's fight against the electoral commission for its use of the EVMs was also well publicised during October 2014.

The only setback was that many people had not known that it had entered the elections.

The workers and their organisations now seek to join the party directly.

We explain this as the weakness of these fledgling organisations and the virtual alienation of the workers from the unions. These workers seem to view the solution of their perceived powerlessness as joining the WRP directly.

To us it seems that we have to accept this, make certain that a Marxist leadership remains and use this situation to empower and build strong working class organisation. This is a theoretical and practical problem for the Workers International under whose discipline this will have to proceed.

Similar problems surfaced in South Africa with the alienation of workers from the COSATU by a tribalist bourgeois leadership. The mine workers were put in a precarious position. NUMSA was the exception.

**Hewat Beukes.
13 January 2015**

Address to the Australian Workers Union

March 3, 2015, Posted in Press Releases, 4 March 2015

I greet you in the name of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, NUMSA. I am here to give you an update since our General Secretary, Irvin Jim, addressed your 2013 conference.

I am happy to report that, despite the shrinking of South Africa's manufacturing sector, NUMSA has continued to grow. In 2013 we reported to you a membership of 300,000. Today it stands at 360,000. We are the biggest union in the history of the African continent.

Despite massive de-industrialisation in our country, during which hundreds of thousands of manufacturing jobs have been destroyed, NUMSA's membership has grown by nearly 65% over the last six years. NUMSA is truly a dominant force.

The key development since Comrade Jim's address to you in 2013 was our Special National Congress at the end of 2013.

We called this Congress because we realised that the situation in South Africa had fundamentally changed and that we needed to respond. The response of the Special National Congress was very clear:

- It called for a break with the Alliance with the governing ANC and SACP, an alliance we have been part of for more than 20 years
- It resolved to build a working-class united front to fight for the fundamental restructuring of the South African economy and society
- It resolved to embark on a process to build a socialist movement and form a working class political party
- It agreed to broaden the scope of the union and to organise along value chains - a break with the strict model of one industry one union that is the history of our federation, Cosatu.

I want to explain each of these resolutions briefly to you.

Why did we call for a break with the governing alliance?

There were three main reasons:

Firstly, the government of the ANC and the South African Communist Party is presiding over a neoliberal strategy which is damaging the South African economy and hurting the working class

and the poor. We sit with an unemployment rate of 35% and the number of unemployed people is rising. In 2012 the ANC, with the support of the Communist Party, formally adopted the National Development Plan. This is a final commitment to a strategy that refuses to restructure our colonial economy. Our minerals will continue to be exported in their raw state while our manufacturing industry declines. The result will be profit for capital and increased poverty, unemployment and inequality for the working class and the poor. The plan also calls for the deregulation of the labour market:

- Making it easier to hire and fire workers
- Extending probationary periods
- Introducing wage flexibility for new labour market entrants

The second reason for calling for a break with the Alliance is that it is attacking democratic freedoms. You will have heard of Marikana, a community next to a Lonmin mine. You will have heard how 34 mineworkers were massacred by South African police on behalf of private mining capital. You will also have heard more recently of the chaos in the South African parliament as a result of the President refusing to answer legitimate questions about huge expenditure of public money on his private residence, the equivalent of nearly 30 million Australian Dollars spent on making his homestead into a luxurious estate. We see the clear signs that we are headed for a security state.

And the third reason for our resolution was that there has been a complete breakdown of democracy within the ANC. The will of the leadership is imposed regardless of the views of the membership.

In short, those were the reasons for the call to leave the Alliance.

Next, let me look at our resolution which called for the building of a United Front.

In South Africa today community protests, which often become violent and are attacked by the police, take place almost every day. 214 community protests were recorded in 2014. The

represent the grievances of South Africa's working class and impoverished people - a lack of decent housing, a lack of sanitation, a lack of piped water, a lack of electricity. They are complaining that they are being left to rot in apartheid townships while the white ruling class and its black allies get wealthier. These protests need to come together into a protest movement across the country. The United Front is a vehicle for that. We understand that any division of workers' interests between their lives at work and their lives at home is a completely artificial one.

Those who live in shacks are workers. Those who use buckets instead of toilets are workers. Those who queue around communal taps are workers.

We are pleased to be able to report that we convened an initial People's Assembly of the United Front at the end of 2014. The United Front is already active all over the country, supporting and initiating community protests. The United Front will formally have its national launch in June.

What about the resolution on building a working class political party?

There is no political party in South Africa today which represents the interests of the working class and the poor.

The South African Communist Party has claimed to represent those interests and continues to make that claim. But in reality it has buried itself inside the ANC. Its General Secretary is a Minister in the government. Its Deputy General Secretary is a Deputy Minister in the government. It supports the National Development Plan. As a party representing the working class it is dead.

We have been researching working class organisation around the world with a symposium and a series of study tours. We will have our own national conference on socialism in the build up to our April Central Committee where we will decide on the form of working class party to build.

Finally, I must explain the resolution to broaden the scope of the union.

Our Congress decided to endorse the principle of organising along value chains, instead of simply being locked into sectors and industries.

We believe that the real power of workers will increase if we organise in the whole of the metal value chain, from mining to transport of raw materials, to production of metals, to manufacturing and transport of the finished product.

As a result of this resolution, we have struggled successfully with the Department of Labour to register our new scope which now includes mining, transport, security, construction, cleaning, industrial chemicals, renewable energy, information and communication technology, aviation and related services, and health and canteen services. We are already recruiting significant numbers in mining and transport. As a result of these decisions we have

been expelled from our federation, Cosatu.

The national leadership of Cosatu has failed to implement the militant resolutions of its own 11th Congress. Instead, it has spent the last two years trying to get rid of those forces who want to implement them. The result is that the federation has become disarmed and demobilised.

At this moment, 8 of Cosatu's 19 affiliates are supporting NUMSA and have refused to participate in any Cosatu national Structures. This Group of 8 has now decided to mount a campaign of rolling mass action in support of the resolutions of Cosatu's 11th Congress. It has challenged the leadership of Cosatu to support this campaign.

So where do we stand today? NUMSA is facing challenges as we grow in numbers and expand our work: A new union in the metal industry has

been formed by disgruntled former members and officials. It is being well funded. This is taking place in a year in which all of NUMSA's shop stewards stand down and new elections are held.

Institutions of the State are less co-operative than they were before, doing their best to obstruct us at every turn.

Our leaders are routinely vilified in the media by ANC and SACP and Cosatu leaders. But we are growing from strength to strength. We are fighting to be reinstated in Cosatu.

But if we don't succeed, we will build a new federation. Whatever happens, as we move forward into this new terrain of struggle, we will remain the militant, revolutionary union that we have always been. As we say in South Africa- Amandla ... Power. Power to the organised working class.

Greece:

The crisis is here to stay

THE first round of negotiation between the SYRIZA-led coalition government in Greece and the Troika (European commission, European central Bank, IMF) has ended. At stake here were arrangements to prevent Greece's national finances collapsing in short order.

As German Finance Minister, Wolfgang Schaeuble has represented the Troika in these negotiations.

Actually Schaeuble spoke for the decisive part of the European bourgeoisie when he bragged that he had imposed a set of conditions for temporary support to the Greek banking system which the SYRIZA-led government would find very hard to sell to their electorate.

The Greek government's response was more or less to point out that they have not been knocked out yet.

Prime-Minister Alexis Tsipras and Finance Minister Yiannis Varoufakis claim that there is a good deal of support in European political circles for their argument that the extreme poverty and social breakdown imposed on their country as the price for "rescuing" it from extreme indebtedness are unnecessary and self-defeating. So far there has been little beyond a few

sympathetic words to substantiate that view. Developments have caused a sharp discussion within the "Radical Left" SYRIZA coalition. Left MP Stathis Kouvelakis said of the accord signed by the Greek government on 20 February:

"The agreement insists on the full and timely repayment of Greece's debts. Most importantly, it foresees the existing programme being followed through in full, which means the country agreeing to remain under the supervision of the Troika ...

"Indeed, the Greek government has committed to not taking any unilateral measure that might endanger the budgetary objectives laid down by the creditors.

"This accord thus neutralises the SYRIZA government's activity and its capacity to implement its programme. We ought to be clear - it keeps the Memorandum framework in place".

(The Memorandums embodied the surrender of the previous Greek government to the demands of the Troika. They imposed profound cuts in state spending, a programme of systematic privatisation, destruction of trade union rights and cuts in wages and benefits which brought the nation to the very brink of collapse. Of course

very little of the money provided to "bail out" the Greek economy goes anywhere near the country. It simply shifts from one bank account to another in Frankfurt, Paris or London.)

Further on in the interview published on the Verso Books website, Kouvelakis added:

"The idea that we could break with austerity policies and yet avoid confrontation with the European Union has been refuted in practice. The majority tendency in SYRIZA avoided giving a clear answer to what would happen if Greece's creditors refused to negotiate.

"Those who upheld this position also thought that our European partners would be obliged to accept SYRIZA's legitimacy and thus accept the Greek government's demands. And we can clearly see that this is not the case. The dominant tendency in the SYRIZA leadership has the illusion that it is possible to change things even within the existing European Union framework.

"These institutions have shown their true face, which is the imposition of extremely harsh neoliberal policies and other policies leading to the eco-

conomic and social marginalisation of entire countries.”¹

SYRIZA is itself a coalition of a medley of left-wing political groups. It won its breakthrough 36% of the vote in February for several reasons.

The forces which set up SYRIZA had previously spent a number of years concentrating on assisting and getting to know social movements such as environmentalist groups, squatters and protests over corporate land-grabs and similar problems. When the crisis hit Greece and masses of people started to occupy the main squares of Athens in protest, many of those involved already knew and respected the SYRIZA activists and discussed with them readily.

As the crisis and the Memorandums started to really erode the Greek economy and cause profound social decay, SYRIZA built on their reputation by helping to set up and encouraging solidarity networks which established free health clinics, cost-price farmers' markets, and food and toy banks. They established the Solidarity for All organisation, contributed to it from MPs salaries, and took up the campaign for support around Europe.

The activists whom the “radical left” coalition won to its ranks in the course of these activities were an important source of strength in the election campaign.

On the other hand, SYRIZA wound back on class-struggle rhetoric and concentrated on denouncing the impact of austerity. More vocally anti-capitalist groupings such as the anti-capitalist Antarsya found themselves completely isolated in the election and won no seats.

On the question of membership of the European Union and European Monetary Union, SYRIZA did not start, as the KKE Greek Communist Party does, with the immediate demand to withdraw from both. KKE slightly improved their performance in the February General Election, but came nowhere near government power.

SYRIZA's core message is that the austerity and the cuts are unnecessary and unwise. They do not talk about these things as necessary products of capitalism in its dotage, but as one policy option among others. They describe the political representatives of the European bourgeoisie in mealy-mouthed terms as “the neo-liberal European elite and its political repre-

sentatives”². They say this elite's aim is “the entrapment of SYRIZA into a framework which does not constitute a real alternative against neoliberal hegemony. They tried and will continue trying to entrap the Greek government and SYRIZA in a clearly defensive stance, in which they would be forced to merely try to confine the damage, without the ability to undertake our own alternative initiatives.”³

SYRIZA fought the election on the basis of the Thessaloniki Programme. Their demands included: A European Debt Conference, a European New Deal of public investment financed by the European Investment Bank, an immediate increase of at least 4 bn euros in public investment, gradually reversing all the Memorandum injustices, incentivising small businesses, investing in knowledge and research, rebuilding the welfare state and working for the broadest possible alliance across Europe to achieve this.

Immediately, SYRIZA in government was pledged to install a national reconstruction plan focussing on: Confronting the humanitarian crisis, restarting the economy and promoting tax justice, regaining employment, and transforming the political system to deepen democracy. A key element in the financial planning was the aim of collecting 20bn euros of unpaid taxes over seven years.

The construction of the SYRIZA alliance is linked to the development of the political consciousness of broad layers in Greek society. In the 1970s, as Fascist dictatorships came crashing down in Spain and Portugal in the face of big colonial uprisings and popular movements at home, Greece, too, emerged from years of military dictatorship.

However, despite many hopes on the left, what arose in these countries were not workers' states, but officially-speaking bourgeois parliamentary democracies (although it was never entirely clear how secure the social foundations of such formations were). The rise of a Euro-Communist trend within the workers' movement, traditionally dominated by pro-Soviet Communist Parties, provided a necessary basis for this development but at the same time bitterly split those parties. Certainly in the case of Greece, the

² Yiannis Bournous: *Thoughts on the New Situation and our New Duties*

³ Yiannis Bournous: *Thoughts on the New Situation and our New Duties*

political form which at the time came to prominence was the allegedly social-democratic PASOK party, which actually embodied many aspects of traditional clientelism.

The split in the Communist movement and then the collapse of the Soviet Union had a devastating impact on working people's political thinking. At the same time Greece suffered the same effects of globalisation and de-industrialisation as many other countries in Europe, leading to further social and political fragmentation. Membership of the European Union and later the European Monetary System seemed to many to be a lifeline for the Greek economy.

All this disarmed and demobilised working people and left them in great political difficulties as the economic crisis burst out in 2007-8 and its effects unfolded.

Many Marxists, like Stathis Kouvelakis, became involved in SYRIZA in order to participate in the re-organisation and rebuilding of the left, which they see as a process linked to the re-constitution of the workers' movement as a class.

There is a contradiction, which is becoming more flagrant by the minute, between the time needed for this development in Greek society to mature and the plain fact that the crisis will not go away and that its consequences will keep working on the political situation.

The essential illusion, and one which it will be hardest to break down, is not so much “that it is possible to change things even within the existing European Union framework” but that there is a way out of the crisis at all that does not involve destroying capitalism.

The initial stages in mass mobilisation do not and cannot embody this revolutionary Marxist insight. They have to be based on a defensive reflex which demands a return to the better days of the past, however that is dressed up. They have to take the form of a “reformist” demand (for want of a better word) to rescue and revive what are generally known as Keynesian policies such as can be read in the first part of the Thessaloniki Programme.

How pressing this contradiction is, is emphasised by the continued support for the fascist Golden Dawn. Following the murder of the left rap artist, Pavlos Fyssas, by a GD associate, leading members of this party were exposed as political gangsters and dragged in front of the courts. Senior police officials who sympathised with them were sacked and there was a stream of exposés in the media. Golden

¹ <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1878-stathis-kouvelakis-going-on-this-way-can-only-mean-defeat>

Dawn still came third in the February elections.

How are Marxists to work in this situation? Some solve this problem with appeals to more radical forms of action. There are calls for an indefinite general strike in Greece or for a strike of bank staff to prevent capital flight. These calls, which might be useful mobilising tools in the right circumstances, completely miss the point at this time.

Some correctly explain how capitalism's internal contradictions drive inexorably to a crisis. Workers International thoroughly agrees with this theory, and "theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses."¹ However, there is clearly a contradiction between our Marxist understanding and the prevailing understanding among masses of working people which cannot be resolved by even the best work of explanation.

The current political situation is clearly a huge test-bed for working out that contradiction, and Marxists have to consider what their practice is, how to organise and act, in relation to this.

¹ Marx: *Introduction to a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*

Obviously we must support and encourage the movement against austerity, the austerity which capitalism needs and requires.

Government debts are being used as a weapon to impoverish working people across Europe, and we should continue to campaign for a popular audit of the workings of finance capital. This should lead to clear mass campaign to drop the debt.

We should support calls for financial transparency and for measures to force big capitalist enterprises and super-rich individuals to pay taxes in order to fund the welfare state.

We need to support and encourage every movement against cuts and austerity.

We need to support and strengthen opposition to privatisations.

We should support those on the left of SYRIZA who press the government to carry out the Thessaloniki Programme and who mobilise mass support for this. It is only through a consistent and determined campaign for the programme on which SYRIZA was elected that the masses can learn to what extent it is a correct and adequate way forward and where its shortcomings lie.

We agree that the government must be prepared when necessary to impose controls on the Greek banking system and face the consequences up to and including withdrawal from the European Monetary Union (the euro) and the EU.

We need to work systematically to internationalise all movements to defend working people against attempts to make them pay for the crisis and to use the crisis to make further capitalist inroads into the gains previous generations have made (measures described in shorthand as "neo-liberalism", but actually expressing the true character of imperialism).

Of course that does not mean ignoring and neglecting movements in each country and locality, but we have to point out that bourgeoisie's attack is international in its scope.

We must continue to propose a Movement for a Europe of Working People. In particular we should try to centre the campaign to defend the Greek people on this demand.

At the same time there are opportunities to clarify what Marxism teaches on a number of issues, and we must continue to take up that challenge.

Bob Archer
March 2015

Letter: To Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International

'I ask you to re-admit me as a member of WIRFI'

Dear comrades,

I ask you to readmit me as a member of Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.

You will remember that back in autumn 2013 the International Secretariat of the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI) asked me to choose between the CWI on the one hand, of which I had been a member since 2006, and Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International (WIRFI) on the other hand, which I had helped to found in 1990.

I explained to you in my letter of 12 November 2013 why I then chose the CWI and so had to resign from your organisation.

To cut a long story short, I did so because I was then certain that both organisations, by their declared intent and by their practice, endeavoured to rebuild the Marxist international, but that it was my duty to build the organisation best suited for the goal of build-

ing a section of that international in the country where I lived, Germany. In that process, in which I have been engaged since my first encounter with the CWI back in 2004, I hoped that I would also be able to continue contributing to the indispensable overcoming of the weaknesses of the CWI, many of them congenital weaknesses inherited from its British precursor, Militant, and its incomplete break with Pabloite and Mandeliste revisionism.

Unfortunately, almost immediately after I had announced my decision to stay in the CWI, its leadership, both international and German, rejected it. In effect, they raised the additional demand that I renounce my criticism of the CWI, accept all of its "tradition" and "break with" WIRFI, that is, treat WIRFI as an enemy organisation. They stipulated these as the new conditions of my staying in the CWI. Those absurd conditions had never been satisfied by me during all the previous years of my

membership. The fact alone that they were suddenly raised shows that neither the International Secretariat nor the leadership of its German section, Sozialistische Alternative (SAV), had ever considered giving me a "real" choice to stay in the CWI.

A virulent internal campaign to expel me from the SAV followed. In itself, this campaign and especially the methods of it shed a light on the true nature of the CWI of which I was not aware before it started. Every militant who envisages to join that grouping should be aware of those methods and I am ready to disclose all the dossier of that campaign to interested working class militants. During four months, the said campaign claimed a large share of the resources of that organisation of then about 350 members and ended by my expulsion on 5 April 2014. That extraordinary, baffling effort can be explained only as part of an attempt to persuade or intimidate the member-

ship so that it accepts that all political clarification inside the SAV stops. Indeed, around the same time as that campaign started, a secret resolution became known. Passed by parts of the International Secretariat and of the German leadership at a meeting in London, in October 2013, that resolution committed them to ending a very important effort of clarification of the nature of the Transitional Programme and its method.

The discussion had been taking place inside the German section but remains important for the whole of the CWI and indeed for the whole of the international working class movement, including Workers International to Rebuild the Fourth International.

In effect, the CWI decided not to be the place to have that clarification. The record of the WIRFI shows that it is that place and I hope that it will soon actually formulate a new transitional programme, of course based on the old one of 1938.

All developments in the international class struggle, especially the latest one, pitting the whole working class of Greece against European imperialism, shows how bitterly it is needed. I would like to contribute to the elaboration of that programme.

The proceedings and the results of a federal conference of the SAV at the end of January 2015 confirmed the negative turn of that organisation and also a large dip in the number of its members. The new SAV is no longer the same living organisation of which I became a member nine years ago. Moreover, there are signs of the same negative tendency of the CWI as an international grouping. A world congress of the CWI that was to take place in December

2014 was cancelled and replaced with a routine meeting of its International Executive Committee, despite all the momentous changes in the class struggle since the last, 10th congress of 2010. In some of these changes, especially in South Africa, the CWI has been a noted participant. No balance sheet of that has appeared.

But the struggle does not wait for anybody to become conscious of their international tasks. The Special Congress of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) initiated, in December 2013, a decisive break with the bourgeoisie and its parties and a turn to build a new party of the working class. This turn opened a new epoch in the relations between the classes in that country but, even more importantly, it opened a whole new perspective for the already long efforts of the working class in several countries to rebuild its parties. Some of those efforts have become mired because of their difficulties to break with the bourgeoisie and form a programme of an actual transition to the socialist revolution which is the only answer to the crisis of the whole system of imperialism. They now have the South African example before their eyes showing that a decisive break with the bourgeoisie is possible. This represents a whole new opportunity to rebuild the Fourth International.

To use this unique opportunity requires an international organisation not just to propagate the imitation of this immense turn everywhere and defend NUMSA against the Stalinist attacks of which it is now victim, but to work in a systematic way towards rebuilding the International. I am sure Workers International can develop as

that organisation. It embraced enthusiastically the NUMSA turn, makes every effort to be part of it and to extend that movement internationally. Despite its very limited forces, WIRFI has been at the origin of new initiatives in the same general direction in former Yugoslavia and in Namibia.

I do not abandon the hope that at some future stage, CWI comrades will also take their place in rebuilding the international. Those who are still members of that grouping must work for it to happen, and it is a lot of work that awaits them – work that becomes more difficult, not easier, as time passes and the results of the negative developments are allowed to solidify. It has already become unlikely that the CWI can play a positive role in the reconstruction of the International without undergoing a major crisis.

For me, it is now high time to organise for the rebuilding of the Fourth International with those who actually set out to do it, however small their numbers, and that is you comrades. I do not promise a complete agreement with everything you do but I know that this has never been the basis of recruitment to WIRFI. I know that you and I still agree with our programme as we stated it back in 1990 and with the aim to rebuild the International on that programme. If you accept me back, I promise to do my best to put it into practice as a member of WIRFI.

**Comradely,
Mirek,
Berlin, 16 February 2015**

(This application was accepted by WIRFI)

Marxist Considerations on the Crisis:

Part 1 by Balazs Nagy

Published for Workers International by Socialist Studies. Isbn 978 0 9564319 3 6

The Hungarian Marxist BALAZS NAGY originally planned this work as 'an article explaining the great economic crisis which erupted in 2007 from a Marxist point of view'. However, he 'quite quickly realised that a deeper understanding of this development would only be possible if I located it within a broader historical and political context than I had anticipated ... it would only be possible to grasp the nature and meaning of this current upheaval in and through the development of the economic-political system as a whole'



£10 per copy (Inc. Delivery in UK) from Workers' International, PO Box 68375, London E7 7DT. Cheques payable to "Correspondance"

Extract from a forthcoming book by Balazs Nagy:

Historical materialism: a timely reminder

This section of a chapter to be published in Volume II of *Marxist Considerations on the Crisis* is a succinct re-statement of Marx and Engels' most fundamental concepts.

They need restating because the widespread misunderstanding, indeed misrepresentation, of these views deprives the younger generation of socialist activists of a theoretical tool-kit which is essential for orientating their practice.

On 18 February this year, for example, readers of *The Guardian* newspaper in the UK were treated to an edited version of a speech the Greek Finance Minister, Yiannis Varoufakis, made a few years ago, under the headline "How I became an Erratic Marxist".

The extract below was certainly not written with Varoufakis in mind, but it does take up, among other things, the fatalistic and mechanical interpretation of historical materialism which he clearly held in his younger days and which has led to him to a critique of Marxism and a turn to thinkers such as Malthus and Keynes when his expectations were disappointed.

The context for the material below is a discussion of the revolutionary movements during and just after World War II and the problems which prevented the parties and militants of the Fourth International from playing the part that they ought to have played in those events.

This text is translated from the French original.

It is not particularly surprising that Trotsky was able to foresee the outbreak of World War II so clearly several years beforehand, and even less the result of some miracle. What enabled him to predict the main lines of future development was historical materialism, the scientific theory and method of Marxism.

Based on a profound understanding of historical development and what it means, and in particular of imperialism as the "highest stage" of capitalism and the relationship of social classes within that development, and armed with Marxist theory, Trotsky was able – years before the event – to predict the war, describe its inner driving forces and announce that its consequences would be revolutionary.

So I need to say something about this fundamental element of Marxism and look in detail at some important questions in a way that will help to clarify those tumultuous years during and immediately after the war.

In the first place it is important to understand that, by working out historical materialism and its various applications, Marxism transformed the presentation of history from an arbitrary narrative of contingent events

into a science. As a result, it provides history in movement, i.e. human activity (politics) with a compass by which to orientate itself and to put itself in harmony with general development. Trotsky was in possession of this scientific strength of historical materialism, which is why he was able – like the outstanding classical Marxists who preceded him – to trace in advance the main contours of future development. The many and aggressive attempts to relegate history to the role of a servant subordinated to the capricious ideologies of the capitalist system at bay make it all the more necessary today to insist on this scientific character of historical materialism. These attempts include the assertion (which is no more than the resurrection of an old irrational belief) that history is ruled by blind chance, and not so long ago the extremely arbitrary announcement of the end of history, a declaration, which seems to have escaped unscathed the general rebuttal and ridicule it so richly deserved.

It is well known that Marx summed up the essence of historical materialism in the famous passage in the *Preface to the Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (published in Karl Marx

& Frederick Engels, *Collected Works* Volume 29, London 1987):

"In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production appropriate to a given stage in the development of their material forces of production ... It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their social existence that determines their consciousness ... from forms of the development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution ... (but) ... In studying such transformations it is always necessary to distinguish between the material transformation of the economic conditions of production, which can be determined with the precision of natural science, and the legal, political, religious, artistic or philosophic – in short, ideological forms in which men become conscious of this conflict and fight it out."

This compact formulation explains why and how Trotsky was able to predict the war and the revolution "with the precision of natural science". But it needs to be supplemented with some of the further stipulations with which Marx and Engels enriched this

scientific conception. Their works are more or less well-known, but it is necessary to recall to mind some passages in greater detail, particularly in view of the violent opposition and shameful neglect they have suffered.

So, in talking about these “definite relations”, which “turn into their fetters”, Engels later made it very clear: “The contradiction between socialised production and capitalistic appropriation manifested itself as the antagonism of proletariat and bourgeoisie”. (*Socialism Utopian and Scientific*, Moscow, 1974, pp. 62 and 63.) But even before then, he had refined and generalised this truth in his famous polemic against “professorial socialism” from which he later drew the pamphlet *Socialism Utopian and Scientific* and in which he wrote:

“... then it was seen that *all* past history ... was the history of class struggles; that these warring classes of society are always the products of the modes of production and of exchange — in a word, of the *economic* conditions of their time; that the economic structure of society always furnishes the real basis, starting from which we can alone work out the ultimate explanation of the whole superstructure of juridical and political institutions as well as of the religious, philosophical, and other ideas of a given historical period.” (*Anti-Dühring*, Moscow, 1959, p.41. Engel’s emphases.)

One could go on quoting various writings by Marx and Engels in order to learn more about this scientific method of investigating the past as well as guide to orientating political activity. One should also make a point of studying *Ludwig Feuerbach and the end of German Classical Philosophy*, which Engels wrote a few years after Marx had died in order to enrich considerably our knowledge of historical materialism. But what matters now is to go into more detail about some of his teachings which are often neglected or left in the shade, although they are essential.

First and foremost it is necessary to clarify that, despite their scientific conception, which presents history (past and present) as materially determined, Marxists are neither soothsayers nor clairvoyants. We have to make an absolute distinction between them and any sort of oracle or fortune-teller, and this means settling accounts, once and for all, with some of the petty-bourgeois perceptions or behaviours which nowadays pass for Marxist.

The most illustrious representative of this tendency is Isaac Deutscher who,

in the three-volume biography he devoted to Trotsky (*The Prophet Armed*, *The Prophet Unarmed* and *The Prophet in Exile*), even presented him as a mystical prophet. Now, surprising though it may seem in people with Marxist convictions, quite a few former Trotskyists followed that very “prophet”, not with the devoted and loyal but also decent and reasonable confidence owed to a respected leader, but like a credulous flock following a preacher. To give a better picture of the difference, if not incompatibility between on the one hand the Marxist understanding of the direction of future development and on the other the prophecies of an oracle, we must here anticipate something that happened immediately after the war.

At the outcome of the second world slaughter, when the Fourth International members saw a reality which at first sight differed from the revolution Trotsky had foreseen, quite a few of them, including certain leading cadres, accused him of having offered a “false prophecy” when he predicted a revolution. Disappointed at not seeing one, they deserted the Fourth International. By doing so they revealed that their membership of it had had more to do with blind, mystical herd-mentality than with Marxist consciousness, since instead of taking into consideration certain concrete events which, in the course of the war, modified the objective givens in the situation, they blindly clung to Trotsky’s words when he, of course, could not have included these events in his calculations. Concretely, for example, they expected a classical triumphant world revolution, whereas the revolutionary class had become more and more dominated by essentially counter-revolutionary Stalinism. This tragic mistake expressed their lack of understanding of historical materialism, which they relegated to the level of vulgar mechanical determinism. Onto it they then grafted the idealised image of a heroic revolution in an exalted, romantic petty-bourgeois spirit that has very little to do with reality, especially as this revolutionary reality had, during the war, been as seriously downtrodden and battered on the one hand as it was misinterpreted and not understood on the other.

We shall see concretely later on how, during the war, certain human activities transformed or modified the general context both in relation to both World War I and Trotsky’s expectations based on the objective march of history.

For the moment, however, I should like to draw the reader’s attention to issue no. 23 (September 1985) of the journal *Cahiers Léon Trotsky* (*Leon Trotsky Notebooks* - hereafter referred to as *CLT*). It contains an article by Pierre Broué entitled “Trotsky et les trotskistes face à la deuxième guerre mondiale” (“How Trotsky and the Trotskyists confronted the Second World War”, available in English online at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/revhist/backiss/vol3/no4/brouww2.html>.)

In this article, Broué analysed how Trotsky specified what the particular features of this war were just as it was breaking out. Certain features of this new war here stand out as making a clear difference with its predecessor. Trotsky’s brutal assassination by a Stalinist agent prevented him from developing this more fully.

But what does emerge very forcefully from what he writes is the recognisable imprint of Trotsky’s analysis, particularly the approach to real facts and movements and the meticulous study of concrete reality. Trotsky carried out the verification of Marxist theory in the light of this reality to restore it, revived and more concrete, on the one hand and/or in part modified on the other. We shall have plenty of occasions subsequently to observe how the sterile repetition of abstract truths (because they are detached from changing reality) is opposed to this creative Marxism.

Here we must point even more concretely to one of the essential characteristics of historical materialism which opposes it definitively to absolute or fatalistic determinism in historical development. That is its main distinguishing mark and one which assumed decisive importance during the war, i.e. the crucial role played in history by men, concretely social classes and therefore their collective representatives (parties, etc.) and individuals.

Contrary to the superficial and biased assertions of innumerable bourgeois critics, Marxism in general and historical materialism in particular have nothing to do with vulgar materialism. Even though historical events and the course of history are determined in general by the material conditions of existence, this determination is not some sort of blind force, but operates through and in human activity. Against the mechanical determinism proper to the Church’s views on predestination and/or resigned fatalism, Marxists have always insisted that men

make their own history. Marx put this truth into words in his magisterial essay on Napoleon III's seizure of power in *The 18 Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*:

"Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past." (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm>).

The decisive importance thus assigned to human activity, or more precisely to that of classes and their struggle, involves giving living concrete flesh and blood reality to the determined but otherwise dry and blind character of the movement of history, a reality which can often quite considerably influence the objective factors of development. As such, and as the motor of history, it is one of the pillars of historical materialism and this was already expressed when this new conception was first sketched out on a big scale by Marx and Engels in 1846 in the pages of *The German Ideology*. This fleshed out and added detail to the first, essential but lapidary formulation of this central idea of historical materialism couched in the bare, concise phrases of the *Theses on Feuerbach* which Marx hurled onto the page in 1845. These precocious texts already expressed the fundamental principles and main laws of historical materialism and clarified its teachings precisely on the primordial role of human activity in history which preoccupies us here.

Talking about the *Theses on Feuerbach*, it is important to emphasise in general that these brilliant comments by Marx are far from being simple aphorisms or bon mots whose only internal link is just that they share the same subject, i.e. Feuerbach's philosophy and that of the materialists in general. Such a superficial view would be a gross error, and one which, sadly, numerous Marxists, including some very prominent ones, have not managed to avoid. For all their efforts and good intentions, they fell back into the usual rut of the old comfortable and reassuring determinism, whereas for all their brevity and density, these *Theses* represent a coherent whole, the succinct formulation of a new materialism breaking radically not just with idealism but the whole of preceding materialism.

Of course a proper overall look at these *Theses* would far exceed the scope of this study, which has to focus

on their main theme, i.e. the place and role of human activity in history, which is the same as the theme of *The German Ideology*.

It is appropriate to repeat that Marx summed up his criticism of the whole of previous materialism in the *Theses*:

"The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively ... Feuerbach wants sensuous objects, really distinct from the thought objects, but he does not conceive human activity itself as *objective activity*." (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/theses.htm>. Marx's emphasis). Then, immediately afterwards, the second Thesis follows logically from this assertion: "The question whether objective truth can be attributed to human thinking is not a question of theory but is a *practical* question. Man must prove the truth — i.e. the reality and power, the this-sidedness of his thinking in practice." (Marx's emphasis).

What is clear is that the fundamental achievement of historical materialism, right from the outset, consisted in re-establishing the unity of the world that had been broken by both idealism and metaphysical, mechanical materialism. Historically the first conception to deny and reject this unity had been idealism, by establishing a hierarchical duality of the world within which the primacy of the spirit and of consciousness dominated over subordinate being and matter. Against this view that was imposed by the ruling classes, materialism asserted the pre-eminence of being and matter. But as Marx stipulated in the *Theses*, the various schools of materialism maintained the same dualism in the world, and merely reversed the respective positions of the two opposed poles in this same rigid duality.

Re-establishing the conceptual unity of the world in this way in and through Marxism was an unprecedented and unparalleled philosophical – and practical! – revolution which brought to a close the pre-history of philosophy and opened a new horizon to human thought and action.

Hence it is very understandable that the dominating classes unleashed a veritable crusade against historical materialism within which its old traditional weapon of idealism was compromised and disintegrated all the more

quickly and completely for running so completely counter to the objective development of the world.

But meanwhile Engels had already had to insist on this unity in his polemic against Dühring: "*The unity of the world does not consist in its being, although its being is a pre-condition of its unity ... The real unity of the world consists in its materiality ...*" (p.65.)

But what preoccupies us here first and foremost is that from its very beginning historical materialism regarded human activity, praxis, not as the manifestation of some spirit hovering above material reality, as successive idealist systems have viewed it, nor as the product of an abstract human essence, a captive dependence of spirit emanating from it, as various currents of materialism have taught. Against these abstract, metaphysical and compartmentalised views, the new conception established the material nature of this human praxis in its whole social dimension, declaring that: "... *human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations.*" (Thesis VI)

Then in Thesis VII, Marx explained: "*All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.*" (Underlined by Marx.) Acting as a material force in this way, this human activity therefore has the power to orientate and define the ultimate course of history, even when it is in opposition and conflict with its trajectory as determined by the so-called objective factors. And it was on this path that Marx arrived at his best known Thesis XII ...: "*The philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point is to change it.*" (Underlined by Marx).

So it now emerges that historical materialism has put human activity back at the centre of the world, that praxis long since essentially embodied in the movements of social classes and the struggles between them which, as material forces, act as the real motor of history.

It was in *The German Ideology* that Marx and Engels together then traced the historical path this human activity followed in its two basic dimensions: in relation to nature and in the social relation between men themselves. In resolving and overcoming the contradictions of the old materialism, including that of its most highly-evolved representative, Feuerbach, they formu-

lated the basic principles of historical materialism. They expressed their criticism of the whole of previous materialism in the observation that: *"He does not see how the sensuous world around him is, not a thing given direct from all eternity, remaining ever the same, but the product of industry and of the state of society; and, indeed, in the sense that it is an historical product, the result of the activity of a whole succession of generations..."* (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01b.htm>. My emphases - B.N.) And a little further on they clarified and sharpened this criticism of the old materialism with the reproach directed in particular at Feuerbach, that: "... he never manages to conceive the sensuous world as the total living sensuous activity of the individuals composing it; ... he is compelled to take refuge in the "higher perception" and in the ideal 'compensation in the species,' and thus to relapse into idealism at the very point where the communist materialist sees the necessity, and at the same time the condition, of a transformation both of industry and of the social structure." (Emphasis in the original).

This recognition of the material world as the objectification and solidification, to put it briefly, the summation of past - and present- human activity marked Marx's efforts to shake off the weight of the whole of previous philosophy. In the Introduction to his article "Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" written for Arnold Ruge's *Deutsch-Französische Jahrbücher*, we find Marx's famous but unjustly neglected formulation: "The weapon of criticism cannot, of course, replace criticism of the weapon, material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory also becomes a material force as soon as it has gripped the masses." (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>. My emphasis - B.N.)

The unity of the world, where human action becoming a material force (including their ideas), fulfils a decisive role in history; as such it is and remains a crucial characteristic of historical materialism, of all Marxist theory. It is not some residue of the past inherited from Hegel in the thinking of a young Marx still searching for his path, as certain pseudo-Marxists have imagined. Well after this first formulation of the significance of the role of

theory in history, and even after writing *The German Ideology* with Engels, Marx repeated this truth in his letter to P. Annenkov of 28 December 1846: "What is society, irrespective of its form? The product of man's interaction upon man ... man is not free to choose his productive forces ... for every productive force is an acquired force, the product of previous activity. Thus the productive forces are the result of man's practical energy, but that energy is in turn circumscribed by the conditions in which man is placed by the productive forces already acquired, by the form of society which exists before him, which he does not create, which is the product of the preceding generation. The simple fact that every succeeding generation finds productive forces acquired by the preceding generation and which serve it as the raw material of further production, engenders a relatedness in the history of man, engenders a history of mankind ..." (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Engels_Correspondence.pdf p.379. Emphases in the original.)

Several decades later, Engels was obliged to reaffirm this truth on several occasions against a current of historical determinism which, as a relatively strong tendency in German Social-Democracy, threatened to contaminate the rest of the movement. In his letter dated 5 August 1890 he warned K. Schmidt that: "... while the material mode of existence is the *primum agens* [primary agent, prime cause] this does not preclude the ideological spheres from reacting upon it in their turn, though with a secondary effect..." (http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/Marx_Engels_Correspondence.pdf p.541)

A little later the same year, on 21-22 September, he expressed his thoughts even more clearly in his letter to J. Bloch:

"According to the materialist conception of history, the ultimately determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. Other than this neither Marx nor I have ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. The economic situation is the basis, but the various elements of the superstructure — political forms of the class struggle and its

results, to wit: constitutions established by the victorious class after a successful battle, etc., juridical forms, and even the reflexes of all these actual struggles in the brains of the participants, political, juristic, philosophical theories, religious views and their further development into systems of dogmas — also exercise their influence upon the course of the historical struggles and in many cases preponderate in determining their form." (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1890/letters/90_09_21.htm.)

A little later in the same letter, Engels admitted that:

"Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasise the main principle *vis-à-vis* our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to give their due to the other elements involved in the interaction."

There have been many examples in history which attest to the extreme power of lying ideologies and false ideas in influencing the course of history quite decisively. Just take the world wars of the last century during which they had a decisive influence on the course of history. Between 1914 and 1918 reactionary nationalism prevailed against proletarian internationalism, even seizing hold of the majority of the Second International. And then during World War II the idea of bourgeois democracy embodied in the Stalinist parties' Popular Front policy floored the revolution.

This is what explains the primordial importance of the theoretical struggle and the confrontation of ideas. This theoretical struggle does not just complete the social and political struggle, it fulfils an essential function for the course and the outcome of the general battle. Later Lenin, fighting against blind spontaneity, re-established the decisive role of revolutionary consciousness and thus the great importance of the theoretical struggle alongside the economic and political struggle in his work *What is to be Done?* which was devoted to this subject. For the present, this examination of historical materialism makes it possible to understand not just Trotsky's ability to foresee war and revolution, but also the imperfect, incomplete and unfinished nature of that revolution.