Workers’ International Network

THE FUTURE INTERNATIONAL

and

PREPARING FOR REVOLUTION
This publication has its origin in an online socialist discussion list

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/socialistdiscussion.

It does not claim to represent the views of all participants on the list, which is a broad forum for the exchange of ideas between unaffiliated socialists and individual members of existing socialist groups, but is offered as a basis for discussion by the organisers of the list, known collectively as the

Workers’ International Network.

The cover photo shows a scene from the Occupy Oakland general strike, November 2011, taken by John Reimann (seen here speaking at the rally).
THE FUTURE INTERNATIONAL

Socialists and the movement against capitalism

*The future International* was written in March 2012 by Roger Silverman

The section *Women in the crisis* was contributed by Felicity Dowling
This discussion document is an attempt to suggest how socialists should best approach the current worldwide movement against capitalism. It was written as an introduction to an earlier document called *Preparing for revolution*.

*Preparing for revolution* was first circulated in May 2009, but the ideas within it had been germinating over several years. It was a collective enterprise produced by socialists based in different countries who had been exchanging ideas on our online discussion list

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/socialistdiscussion

and at occasional get-togethers over the years. At one such international meeting, held towards the end of 2008, it was agreed to prepare a document putting forward the consensus that had been arrived at by those comrades who had been corresponding and meeting over the years. All list members had been invited to these meetings, and in the course of the discussions those who had attended had arrived at a certain political approach. This document is an attempt to present this common outlook.

No claim is made here that it reflects the views of the socialist discussion list as a whole; it expresses the ideas of those comrades who have evolved a certain set of ideas over a long period of mutual discussion, and who for purposes of identification have adopted the name *Workers’ International Network*.

At a meeting in Dublin in 2009, it was agreed that the draft document presented there would be extended and revised and then sent out to the whole list as a political statement. It represents the views and approach of one group among several that are already represented on this list. In that sense it is a distinct political tendency.

In the past, the word “tendency” was sometimes used as a deliberate euphemism for a disciplined organisation, with internal finances, fulltimers, a headquarters, a constitution, a conference, a central committee, an executive committee, a general secretary, etc. It often meant an organisation claiming to be a vanguard of cadres of the future revolutionary leadership.

We say we have plenty of those already. Our document spells out – uniquely among all other such documents – that establishing such a vanguard is not the immediate task of the day. We have no such pretensions. We are simply making a modest contribution towards the development of ideas which we hope will help to clarify the next steps forward. We are a tendency in the sense of its original definition: a group of like-minded people with a common outlook who wish to identify themselves as such and argue for their point of view. WIN is not a revolutionary party, even in embryo. It is a network. And this document is not intended as a blueprint, it is offered as a basis for discussion.

We hope to reach active committed workers engaged creatively in real struggles. Any hint of the old instant-answer I-told-you-so attitudes which were the negative side of the old left groups’ tradition will alienate them, and rightly so. There is understandably a scepticism on the part of even the most experienced and committed activists at any hint of the old exclusivist messianic postures. This is a healthy attitude on their part.

Theory is distilled experience, and Marxism is the concentrated experience of revolution. We are keen to place at the disposal of the new generation of fighters for a new world whatever theoretical lessons we think might be learned from history.

![Tahrir Square: centre of the Egyptian revolution](image-url)

And yet hundreds of thousands have found themselves packed together for weeks on end of protest – on Tahrir Square in Cairo, on Syntagma
Square in Athens, on Puerta del Sol in Madrid, in Occupy Wall Street and Oakland, in tent cities in Israel.... Literally millions have been marching, mobilising, striking and above all talking non-stop about the prospects and lessons of what is happening. We can be sure that the heated debates they have had will have at least as much to teach us as whatever abstract lessons we may have gleaned from our study of the textbooks. We need to learn from their experience and their ideas, and to find ways to engage in mutual discussion of the way forward for workers throughout the world.

We have a case to argue – the need for an international working-class party – but in a language and tone which will not alienate potential allies or tarnish us with misleading associations. Our case is that the movement will come and go in waves, that the current wave of occupations can’t last forever, and that it should not be allowed to ebb without leaving a permanent presence behind it.

Certainly, historical precedents are crucial as a key to understanding events as they unfold. However, we should guard against the temptation to artificially graft preconceived templates on to living processes. The most important quality – something almost uncannily possessed by Lenin and other great revolutionaries – is an ability to listen.

The Russian revolution is especially rich in lessons for understanding the processes in subsequent revolutions, but it too had its own particular characteristics which gave it its own special character and tempo. One of these was the existence – although by no means without its own disputes, hesitations, adventures and splits – of a revolutionary party which was able to win mass confidence and authority and equipped with a clear programme for a new society. But who is to say that there are not being created right now, in the debates that must be raging in workplaces, street corners and shanty towns across southern Europe, north Africa or Latin America, the first nuclei of such forces there too?

We are circulating our document, and launching a new journal, to invite workers and campaigners for a new society to read it, discuss it, challenge it, defend it, modify it; consider whether or not they wish to subscribe to it; decide whether to identify themselves with it. It is one contribution among many to a worldwide discussion.

There is no more important task than to pass on the torch to a new generation – to link the collective experience of the working class in its old heartlands, as embodied in the memory of its veterans, to the new generation now rising to its feet, largely in areas of the world which have newly and rapidly industrialised over the past thirty years. To reach the youth, the veteran old-timers must be prepared to cut themselves loose from old ingrained habits; to resist old habits of thought and ways of working which are out of step with the times. We don’t claim to know all the answers; we hope we are asking the right questions. Our document is not the last word; perhaps at best a foreword.

A REPLY TO CRITICS

We make no claim of infallibility. No doubt there were big gaps in our 2009 document. Nevertheless, it has proved quite accurate and even prophetic in identifying the main features of events and the coming movement to change society. It seriously addressed the new situation and the new tasks facing socialists: the changed physiognomy of the working class, the effects of globalisation, the different nature of the tasks ahead compared with those of the twentieth century, etc.

When our document first appeared in 2009, some people expressed doubts about the title: what revolution? Today – with mass uprisings, occupations, general strikes in every continent and almost every country – it hardly seems so overblown after all. The criticism of the title itself reflected a misunderstanding. Our purpose was to draw attention to the depth of the crisis and the inevitable social clashes that lay ahead. And sure enough, they have not taken long to arrive.

We were reproached for “glossing over the current ideologically low base”. On the contrary, the gap between the acute objective needs of the situation and the political understanding of the working class – something which is now being rapidly narrowed in daily struggle – is a central strand
in the document. However, it doesn’t put the blame for this on mere subjective mistakes, but examines the objective reasons for it, including the process of deindustrialisation in the old strongholds of the proletariat; the effects of the boom; the collapse of Stalinism; the weakening of the trade unions; and other factors.

In any case, revolutionary situations arise objectively, and irrespective of “the ideological base”. They are the consequence of real material conflict, not of ideology. Political understanding may be a factor in deciding the outcome of a revolution, but not the fact of their occurrence: hence, in fact, precisely, the need to prepare for them... and the very title of our document.

Most surprisingly, we were accused of “catastrophism”. We were reminded of the habit of the left groups “to begin every international meeting by announcing that things were at a turning point”, and admonished that “the document sounds a bit like that”.

To that, we could only reply: when the boy in the fable cried “Wolf!” it sounded just the same when it was true as when it was not. The fact that others wrongly interpreted every significant event as the decisive turning point in world history does not mean that there are no historic turning points. The punch line of the fable is that eventually a wolf did come. Only months previously, the entire world financial system had trembled on the brink of collapse. We doubt if many people today would share the view of our critics that the current economic crisis, let alone the looming environmental crisis, are not catastrophic, in every sense of the word.

Any reader who wishes to follow this debate is welcome to consult the list archives on

http://groups.yahoo.com/group/socialistdiscussion/messages

CATASTROPHE?

One group of people who have no hesitation in describing the current situation as catastrophic is the capitalist class. Catastrophes are predicted every day, nowadays not just in the financial columns but on the front pages too.

According to the OECD, unemployment in the advanced capitalist economies will rise in 2012 to nearly 50 million – a rise of almost 50% since 2007. Youth unemployment throughout Europe varies between 20% plus to almost 50% in Greece and Spain. World sovereign debts now total around $8 trillion. The US debt alone accounts for around $3 trillion of that.

Workers demonstrate against capitalism in Oakland

Many of the Euro countries’ government bonds have already been downgraded to hardly more than junk status. The funds of the EU’s emergency fund the EFSF, and of its planned replacement the ESM, will not run to any more than the already agreed bailouts. There is a real risk of a collapse of the Euro.

Let us take some quotations from the more sober and respectable commentators:

The bank Morgan Stanley comments: “The Great Recession that followed the Lehmann bankruptcy would probably pale in comparison to a scenario involving a euro break-up and widespread bank and government failures.”
Will Hutton, an advisor to the British government, declares: “The future of Europe is in the balance. The potential disintegration of the euro will be a first-order economic and political disaster. Economically, it will plunge Europe into competitive devaluations, debt defaults, bank bailouts, frozen credit flows, trade protection and prolonged stagnation. Politically, whatever resolve there is to hold our disparate continent together, where the old enmities and suspicions are never far from the surface, will evaporate.... What will emerge will be a Europe closer to the 1930s. Fearful, stagnant and prey to vicious racist and nationalist ideologies.”

Deutsche Welle, Germany’s international broadcaster, warns that predictions of social unrest are “closer today than at any other time since this current financial crisis – the worst since 1929 – began... Nations all around the world are concerned about rising social discontent. There is a feeling among experts that the deep anger brewing in these countries is fermenting worldwide against the same institutions, the same people, and the failure of global capitalism.”

Dennis C. Blair, US director of national intelligence, states that the continued economic crisis is “increasing the risk of regime-threatening instability” from which “the United States would not be immune”.

Gerald Celente, financial and political trends forecaster and publisher of the journal Trends, writes: “What’s happening in Greece will spread worldwide as economies decline.... We will see social unrest growing in all nations which are facing sovereign debt crisis, the most obvious being Spain, Ireland, Portugal, Italy, Iceland, the Ukraine, Hungary, followed by the United Kingdom and the United States.”

Marie-Hélène Caillol, president of the European Laboratory of Political Anticipation think-tank, adds: “This crisis is directly connected to the end of the world order as we know it since 1945.... The whole global fabric centred on the US for 60 years is slowly collapsing, generating turmoil of all sorts.” Asked where social unrest will end, she replies: “War. It’s as simple and as horrifying as that.”

The historian Simon Schama predicts: “You can’t smell the sulphur in the air right now and not think we might be on the threshold of an age of rage....” He noted that there is often a “time-lag between the onset of economic disaster and the accumulation of social fury,” but that after an initial period of “fearful disorientation” there comes the danger of the “organised mobilisation of outrage”.

We are seeing just the beginning of an “organised outrage” directed against the super-rich 1%, scooping up astronomical earnings while millions of the 99% are thrown into homelessness and hunger.

The capitalist economy always develops in zigzags. There has been some slight temporary recovery, albeit painfully faint and with little slowdown in the rise of unemployment. Any real growth, however, would only aggravate the class struggle still further, due to the new leverage this would give a newly emboldened working class.

Both Calliol and Celente reject claims that “agitators” are behind the new wave of social unrest. “There are no organisations behind this response....This is a 21st-century rendition of ‘workers of the world unite.’”

So, if we are guilty of “catastrophism”, then we are in good company. Preparing for revolution? The ruling class certainly are.

THE REVOLUTION BEGINS!

On 15th October 2011, demonstrations were held in more than 950 cities in 82 countries. They were inspired by the “Arab spring”, the Spanish

Hundreds of thousands occupied city squares all over Spain
"indignados", the Greek general strikes and the worldwide Occupy movement. In Spain, a million people demonstrated: 500,000 in Madrid, 350,000 in Barcelona, and 150,000 in Zaragoza. In Rome 300,000 marched under the banner "People of Europe: Rise Up!". In Germany, a total of 30,000 people were on the streets. In the USA there were demonstrations in hundreds of cities, including 10,000 people in New York.

Around the same time there were simultaneous mass occupations in over a hundred countries; mass street protests in Russia; local strikes and uprisings in China; general strikes or the near-equivalent by millions of workers in Greece, Spain, Italy, Belgium, Portugal, France, Hungary, Romania, Britain, and beyond Europe in every continent, from Israel to Nigeria to Chile. It would almost be quicker to list countries where there have not been mass protest movements unprecedented for decades.

More than a hundred years ago, French society was rocked to its foundations by a single case of racist victimisation. (What an innocent age that was, compared to ours!). Lenin often used this example (known as the Dreyfus affair) to show how a single everyday scandal could sometimes shine a sudden spotlight on the corruption of the ruling class and revolutionise society:

“In a situation which – from both the international and the national viewpoints – was a hundred times less revolutionary than it is today, such an ‘unexpected’ and ‘petty’ case as one of the many thousands of fraudulent machinations of the reactionary military caste was enough to bring the people to the brink of civil war.”

Today throughout most of the Western world, capitalism and all its trappings are held in universal contempt. The bankers drunkenly gambled away their customers’ savings and were promptly rewarded by their political puppets with trillion-pound bailouts and personal million-pound bonuses; the millions were doomed to a future of poverty, unemployment, homelessness, and hunger.

In Britain, there is public disgust at the multi-million pound personal salaries and bonuses awarded themselves by bankers and business executives; at the greed of MPs with their snouts in the expenses trough; at the criminal antics of the tabloid press vultures; at the trail of police bribery and collusion. These have combined to create a whole stack of super-Dreyfus-scale scandals. Institutions that were previously hallmarks of respectability – the banks, parliament, the press and the police (the monarchy had already long beforehand been discredited) – are now despised. In Ireland and other countries where it was previously the object of awe and reverence, we can add to this list the disgrace of the Catholic church, particularly over the history of child abuse by the clergy.

Everywhere capitalism and its totems are hated. The evidence has even found its way into the opinion polls. In Greece, 33% of the population want “revolution”. In France, no more than 6% “strongly support the free market”, and in Japan, only 2%! In the USA – where in 2002, 80% of Americans “supported the free-market system” – today 40% “no longer feel positive about capitalism”. 37% of all Americans think “socialism is superior to capitalism”; two thirds think there is “a strong conflict between rich and poor”; and among young people, ethnic minorities and the poor, there is already a majority who are “against capitalism”. According to other polls, 77% of Americans think “too much power is held by the rich and the corporations”, and 49% of Americans aged 18-29 “view socialism in a favorable light”.

Since the beginning of the financial crisis less than five years ago, governments in most of the countries of Europe have fallen. Some of these have been incumbent governments voted out of office in due elections, but many more have been swept...
from power mid-term by intractable crises or popular upheavals: in Slovakia, Slovenia, Latvia, the Czech Republic, Ireland, Iceland, Hungary, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy... Only last month, the Romanian government was overthrown after weeks of mass street protests, in a virtual replica of the events in Egypt last year. And yet revolutions have become so commonplace nowadays that they are hardly reported any more.

Never before has there been such a widespread and generalised hatred of capitalism throughout society. At a time when not a single significant political party in the world questions the capitalist system, millions of people worldwide have been taking to the streets to protest against it. From the "Arab spring", to the Greek general strikes, to the Spanish tent cities, to the wave of similar occupations that have swept at least ninety countries, to the Oakland general strike...

Yet where is the party that dares to challenge capitalism? Once again "a spectre is haunting Europe". As in 1848, it is time that all the hatred for the existing order and all the implicit momentum for change found its political voice. All the lingering illusions of capitalism's shaky last fling in the '80s and '90s are gone with the wind. Just as the collapse of the rotting police dictatorships in Russia and Eastern Europe in 1989 spelled the downfall of Stalinism as a system, so now capitalism is facing its own 1989 moment. Briefly, apologists for capitalism had been able to delude themselves that their system was triumphant. The end of history has come, they crowed. Today their system too is imploding. And the more capitalism has become patently irrational, the more the movement to overthrow it has become real.

Before 1989, in every discussion on world perspectives, Marxists reviewing the growing crises of the dying Stalinist system on the one hand, and of capitalism on the other, used to speak of the race between the political revolution in the East and the social revolution in the West. It predicted the inevitable doom of both systems. However, the timing – the question of who would win the race between these two revolutionary processes – became for a time crucial in determining events. The twenty-year time-lapse between them created a historical anomaly. The fact that Stalinism collapsed at a time when capitalism seemed apparently still viable gave history a strange and unforeseen twist, which was politically disorientating to the working class. This effect was amplified by the new technological advances which for the first time created a truly globalised system of world production, stripping bare many of the old industrial heartlands, destroying many former strongholds of the old proletariat and cultivating a new working class on virgin territory who were not yet blooded in class struggle. In the longer term, however, this same process has enormously welded the class together worldwide, and for the first time in history made the proletariat a majority of the world population – a living dynamic presence in every continent.

Just imagine if the current capitalist crisis had coincided with the downfall of the Stalinist regimes; or that Stalinism had staggered on until now. The workers could almost have joined hands in a simultaneous worldwide uprising. Now the knot of history is becoming once again re-tied.

Throughout most of the last century, in Europe and beyond, there was a general awareness that capitalism was doomed and that humankind was on the brink of a new era. That idea became largely eclipsed in the last three decades. Socialists seemed to be swimming against the stream. But it is coming back today with renewed force – still only a mood maybe, a mute feeling, but growing and every day beginning just a little louder to find its voice.

Long before the economic crisis had demolished capitalism’s last fling of self-justification, a general revulsion against it had already taken root among the youth. This was made most manifest at the turn of the millennium in a series of international protest demonstrations. The current protest against capitalism was foreshadowed in wave after wave of sudden, spontaneous, almost miraculous ad-hoc international youth demonstrations. A new generation with a new technology suddenly confronted the rulers of the world face to face. Wherever the political agents of the corporations gathered – in Seattle, Prague, Gothenburg, Genoa – they found themselves trapped by mass sieges. Youth protest came like a sudden storm as if from
nowhere, expressing a general revolt against the existing order.

These events were cut across for a few years by the shock of 9/11 and imperialism’s “war on terror” – although in 2003 the biggest anti-war movement ever seen in history took place, culminating in a simultaneous worldwide demonstration of 30 million people, linking the world in a living chain of protest and worldwide solidarity, from San Francisco to London to Tokyo, Oslo to Melbourne.

These uprisings of urban youth have become an international phenomenon which has begun to define the epoch. From the Chinese youth revolt at Tienanmen Square to those more recently in Iran, Burma and Tibet, and now Greece, Spain and Chile, these universal mass democratic youth protests have leaped across the continents.

Now the economic downturn, and soaring world food and fuel prices, have ignited riots and uprisings throughout the world. Young people are improvising networks of protest with their new technology of instant mass communication. A new era has opened with the revolution in Egypt: the beginning of a new wave of revolutions like those of 1848, 1917-21, 1968 and 1989.

WE ARE THE 99%!

Britain has already experienced a wave of student protests, a trade-union march of half a million workers, and two massive public sector strikes (one numbering up to two million). Even the youth riots represented in a crude form the uprising of the most oppressed and hopeless strata, people who can see no future, no hope and no way out. Unlike the youth of Egypt, Spain, Greece or Israel who occupied their town squares or set up tent cities in their hundreds of thousands, these bitter and demoralised youth had no slogans, no demands, no aspirations, no self-respect: it was a blind and futile eruption of despair.

In the USA – formerly the citadel of capitalism – after decades of falling wages and capitalist triumphalism, the workers, the poor and the youth are beginning to fight back, with workers’ revolts in Wisconsin, Ohio, Maine, Michigan and the Longview docks on the west coast; the upsurge of youth in the Occupy movement, and the campaign against foreclosures.

Despite covert attempts to foment communal discord, in most of the countries of the “Arab spring” there is a working-class population still largely united and defiant; a divided ruling clique; a disaffected middle class; a crumbling state machine, with soldiers openly fraternising with the protest movement – all the classic objective features of a revolutionary situation. We cannot expect a rapid outcome to these events, but a protracted period of flux, with limited victories and temporary defeats, pauses, upsurges, setbacks, periods of demoralisation followed by renewed flare-ups, and meanwhile a constant exchange of ideas, debate and political education.

The “99% versus the 1%” slogan is a brilliant idea that has sprung up spontaneously and spread throughout the world. It has caught the public imagination precisely because it corresponds so well to reality. It reflects both the diminishing spe-
cific weight of the industrial proletariat in many of the former predominantly manufacturing countries, but also the dispossession of the former middle class, the proletarianisation of the clerical workforce, and the extreme concentration of wealth in the hands of the tiny dominant billionaire clique.

The aspiration for a worldwide movement of the 99% expresses perfectly the tasks which a new International could really fulfil. It wouldn't be by any means the final product of the revolutionary movement, but a significant early step.

The response to this slogan reflects exactly the current mood of the movement in society everywhere – both its strength and its weakness. There is a generalised hatred of capitalism, a revulsion at its misery, greed, injustice. At the same time, there is at this stage not even a hint of an alternative programme, no clear vision of an alternative society, no organisation and not much confidence in changing things. That explains both the instant appeal of the "occupy" movement, leaping from city to city, jumping across national borders and continents, but also its shapelessness and naivety: the idea that no demands are needed, and that "the movement is the message".

POWER IN THE STREETS

In situations where the old regime can no longer function, a real alternative order can spring into existence and develop a growing authority from the self-organisation of the oppressed classes, side-by-side with a fast weakening remnant of the old established state machine. In our document, we suggested one such possible scenario. In the event of a collapse of the currency (something which came perilously close in the last financial crisis), we wrote:

"Quickly and naturally, for a time, some kind of rough-and-ready barter system would start to operate; an improvised quasi-monetary system based on tokens would develop; there would be an occupation of workplaces, a network of cooperatives, a refusal to vacate homes. And it is hard to tell where initially the forces could be found to repress such spontaneous mass action."

Such developments would have been not just possible, but surely inevitable – not just in the throes of economic crises but also of the increasingly common environmental disasters. In terms of politics, the economy, the environment, war and peace, the world outlook is full of latent explosive force. Such crises are endemic in the volatile situation now opening up the world over. Whether in emergencies caused by environmental catastrophes, or through an entire spectrum of political and economic shocks, revolutionary opportunities can suddenly arise. The ingenuity of the working class is put to the test.

After the earthquake in Haiti, for a couple of days there was no power at all: no government, and also not yet any alternative authority. The vacuum had to be filled immediately. Out of the compulsion of sheer survival, the people had to improvise their own network of self-administration. In New Orleans after the hurricane, too, local people were beginning to set about practical measures of self-administration. In both cases they were soon to be suppressed by the brutal intervention of the US state (disguised as “humanitarian aid”), which had come not to provide relief and charity, but to turn their guns on a starving homeless population (otherwise known as “looters”) who were determined against all the odds to find a means of staying alive.

GREECE

Above all in Europe, the people are paying the price for the parasitic greed of the ruling class. The Greek workers are in the front line today, many of them facing literal starvation – giving away their
children because they are unable to feed them. They are returning to the hunger and despair of the occupation, the civil war and the dictatorship. But they are not alone. Along with the workers and youth of Ireland, Italy, Spain and Portugal, they are victims of what is only the first wave of attacks on the rights of workers throughout Europe.

It was the uprising of the Greek working class that directly challenged a crucial policy of the European ruling class. When the beleaguered elected prime minister raised the question of a referendum, he was summarily deposed, and direct rule imposed by a member of the European Central Bank – a tactic soon afterwards repeated in Italy, and then in effect extended to the entire Euro-zone under a new treaty imposing draconic austerity laws.

Greece has the most unstable history in Europe, having been plunged into revolutionary upheavals again and again: in the 1940s, the 1960s, the 1970s and most of all today. The general strikes and the Syntagma Square street protests will take their place in history beside the heroic traditions of the Greek resistance to Nazi occupation, the long years of civil war and the youth uprising at the Polytechnic in 1973 which brought down the colonels' dictatorship.

For now, the Greek ruling class hesitates to resort to its traditional solution: a military coup. That option is not being openly canvassed, as it certainly was, for instance, in the period before the Greek coup of 1967 or the Chilean coup in 1973. Already there are tens of thousands of people out on the streets ready to lay down their lives if necessary. The workers have shown exemplary solidarity and ingenuity. For instance, when on top of slashing wages and pensions, the state imposed a crippling new flat-rate household tax, threatening to cut off defaulters' power supplies, the electricity workers promptly occupied the offices administering the tax to stop the bills going out.

However, in 1966, too, workers were marching through Athens against the open threat of a military coup, shouting the very explicit slogan: "Give us arms!" It was not until this movement had died down in 1967 that the military then seized its opportunity. To stage a coup now would mean a Syrian-style bloodbath. Syntagma Square would go down in history along with Tienanmen Square, scene of the 1989 massacre in Beijing in which thousands of young demonstrators were mown down by tanks. A bloodbath on this scale in Europe would electrify the entire continent and utterly transform the mood everywhere.

But the masses are not going to stay on the streets forever. Unless the opportunity is taken now to assert their latent power and move their resistance to a new level, then eventually the balance of forces will change. When eventually demoralisation begins to set in and the street protests disipate, then the time might well be ripe for counter-revolution.

But that too would not be the end of the story. The colonels' dictatorship (1967-74) was utterly unstable. It was rocked by youth protests – notably the heroic 1973 uprising at the Athens Polytechnic – and there was even a "coup within a coup" as the bickering colonels tried desperately to stave off their impending overthrow. Soon afterwards, the regime collapsed in disgrace, with ministers literally packing their bags and fleeing the country, muttering (this is an actual quotation): "We are a ridiculous government... a laughing stock". The adventurism of the colonels, even in that relatively stable period, had led directly to the end of the monarchy and the birth of what was at the time (how soon it was to betray its heritage) a new mass left socialist party: PASOK.

Today, the ruling class will hesitate and think very hard before resorting once again to military rule. The international strategists of capitalism will be fearful of the political consequences throughout Europe.
THE THREAT AHEAD

Already a bankers’ coup has been imposed on Italy and Greece, where elected governments were displaced – in spite of their eagerness to implement slavishly all the cuts demanded by the bankers – because they were considered too incompetent to deliver: in one case, too corrupt, and in the other, too helpless against the mass storm of strikes, street protests and civil disobedience. Meanwhile, while a form of parliamentary democracy still lingers on as a democratic facade, the new Euro treaty amounts to imposition of direct rule by the European Central Bank, in effect virtually dispensing with the inconvenient intermediary of political parties.

But for how long will the banks be able to impose their cuts in living standards with no more than the trappings of a popular political base, and in some cases not even that? To impose military rule in the short term would be unthinkable, a red rag to a bull. But once mass resistance begins to exhaust itself in a constant cycle of futile street protests and general strikes, wouldn’t a move after a couple of years towards more overt repression be likely?

It is significant that the Metropolitan Police in London have announced that they are urgently extending training to officers in the use of plastic bullets, water cannon and even live ammunition. They are also demanding the routine provision of tasers – instruments of instant torture – in every police car.

The coming war on human rights and living standards will beyond doubt provoke mass resistance such as hasn’t been seen for decades. In this situation, the ruling class will have no alternative but to use all means necessary to impose these cuts and crush popular resistance.

In the epoch that is now coming to an end, the capitalists were reluctant to give more than qualified encouragement to the chauvinistic anti-EU cranks or the outright racists. This was at a time when the EU still offered them some economic benefits; when there was still full employment and they were eager to exploit the cheap labour provided by successive waves of immigration.

In the period ahead, however, given the general contempt throughout society at revelations of parliamentary corruption, the growing mass resentment at foreign immigration, and the risk of a break-up of the EU, things will look very different. Conditions could quickly develop in which the capitalists might make a strategic turn towards authoritarian rule, involving among other ugly features, a demagogic campaign to whip up racist prejudice, including incitement of violent attacks on ethnic minorities, and even an official programme of mass deportation, which could be falsely presented as a "cure" for unemployment.

Such a regime could not be imposed quickly or easily. There will be bitter resistance. This could pose the danger of terrorist moods developing among the youth and the ethnic minorities – through a genuine though misguided outburst of desperation, assisted by secretly staged provocations by the state. This would play further into the hands of reaction, providing a pretext for still more intensified repression – a process which is already well under way, with a massive increase in police surveillance, violent police repression at street demonstrations, extension of detention in police custody, etc.

We could well be approaching a social confrontation on a worldwide scale the likes of which has never been seen before. Capitalism can only weather this storm at the cost of economic crisis more devastating than the 1930s, repression as bloody as anything seen even in that decade, and a rush to war more terrible than 1939-45. But first
it will have to defeat a worldwide movement of the 99% who are only just beginning to rise to their feet.

In the old world – Europe, North America and Japan – this is the scenario we all need to prepare for. But in the age of globalisation, it is the "new" working class – five-sixths of them based outside the traditional industrial countries – who have yet to put their stamp on history and show the world a new way forward. They have yet to speak.

THE NEW PROLETARIAT

There is one gaping hole in this article. Even more than in Cairo or Athens or Oakland, the future of the world rests on events further afield.

The relocation of industry through globalisation has transformed the world's working class. Of the world's three billion wage workers, for every one worker in the West, there are now five based in China, India, Russia, Eastern Europe, Latin America, South-East Asia, etc. The proletariat is now for the first time a majority of the world population.

There has been a haemorrhage of manufacturing jobs from their traditional location. In the USA, the percentage of workers engaged in manufacture has dropped from 38% in 1940 to less than 9% today. One third of US manufacturing jobs have been lost since 2001. And the number of manufacturing jobs in Britain has fallen below three million for the first time since 1841!

Meanwhile, there are well over 100 million industrial workers in China – more than twice as many as in all the G7 countries put together (the USA, Germany, Japan, France, Britain, Italy and Canada). China has this year crossed the line to become a predominantly urban society. Since the beginning of the current recession in the West in 2008, during which production has been stagnant or declining, China’s economy has grown by 42%!

Meanwhile, in China and other formerly agricultural countries, a gigantic modern proletariat is now attaining consciousness of its class identity and a culture of solidarity in a huge wave of strikes. In the context of a fast booming economy, these strikes have often led to real material concessions, which have further strengthened the workers’ morale and organisation. In the light of the consequent modest rise in workers' living standards, it would hardly be surprising if China were the one major country where there were still material grounds for reformist illusions. After all, revolutions are rare in societies where the productivity of labour is still growing. And so it has proved. Paradoxically, China really is one of the very few countries left today (Germany is another) where opinion polls show a majority of the population supporting capitalism.

And yet there are countless strikes and local revolts against the ruling clique's corruption and mismanagement, which are bound to end in political explosions. We refer in our document to the 90,000 officially designated 'public order disturbances' that erupted in China in 2005. This figure has now doubled to 180,000 a year.
While for the moment the growth of the Chinese economy may have reinforced workers’ illusions in the capitalist “market system”, this can change very fast. The crisis in the world economy cannot but stunt the development of the Chinese economy, despite the current growth of its home market, provoking confrontations between the regime and the working class. In these circumstances, the Chinese proletariat could well come to play a role similar to the German proletariat in the late nineteenth century in preparing the ground for a new international.

To quote the document: “In a sense, it is in the factories of China, and their nascent underground trade unions, that the future salvation of mankind is being forged right now...."

The class struggle in the countries of the new proletariat is very much alive. It constantly simmers and every now and then erupts; but the news is suppressed, so that each working class fights in isolation, knowing as little about its counterparts' contemporary victories and defeats as it does about the rich heritage of past class struggles, from the campaign for the 8-hour day to the Russian revolution, the American sit-in strikes, the Spanish civil war, France 1968, etc. Chinese workers, many of whom may know little or nothing of the workers’ uprising in Shanghai in 1925-7, are busy building new trade unions there today. The recent book Live Working Or Die Fighting, by Paul Mason gives inspiring descriptions of recent strikes, occupations and uprisings in Argentina, Bolivia, China, India, Nigeria, South Africa, Peru, etc., and draws graphic parallels with earlier chapters of workers’ revolt from the labour history of Europe and the USA in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Socialist traditions in what were considered in the past the “metropolitan” countries have diminished for both theoretical and “demographic” reasons. The rich heroic heritage of labour history becomes largely forgotten, as old industrial communities disappear and generations steeped in their traditions die out. As the old archives close, however, inspiring new struggles are breaking out daily on new terrain.

This new working class is beginning the long haul all over again: in scattered isolation, it is asserting its identity and its needs, learning afresh the hard lessons learned again and again by previous generations.

WOMEN IN THE CRISIS

In Greece there have been cases of women who cannot afford to pay the increased charges for care in the delivery of their baby being blackmailed with the non-release of their new-born babies. There are also reports of pregnant women turned away from hospitals because they cannot pay. What used to be free and public maternity care has been seriously undermined by the attacks of global capitalism on the Greek people. This is just one example of the impact that the crisis of capitalism is having on the lives of women and children. The crisis facing women is worldwide, but it is presenting differently in different areas. This short piece cannot hope but to indicate some trends.

The financial crisis from 2008 has allowed the IMF/World Bank and the EU to impose on European working people attacks on living conditions that had previously only been perpetrated on “third world” countries. The crisis in Europe is a further episode in the storm that has raged across Asia, Africa and the global south, where the impact of the crisis on women has been deadly, as commodity speculation raised the price of food beyond family budgets. “Re-structuring” imposed by the IMF has wreaked havoc upon social structures.

In the poorest countries of Africa, up to ten times as much is spent on servicing the debt (paying interest to foreign bankers) as on the entire social service budget. There are 100 million children who cannot attend primary school. 500,000 women every year are dying in pregnancy or childbirth. In “developing” countries, a girl or a woman dies every minute while giving birth. With the destruction of traditional services (for instance, in midwifery) and cuts in “modern services”, babies are dying at birth in terrible numbers. Old women – especially those without families – are amongst the greatest victims of poverty and crime. Women make up half of the world’s population and yet
represent 70% of the world’s poor. Gender-based violence kills more people than traffic accidents and malaria combined.

The great gains of post-war Europe were the welfare state and the recognition (though limited) of workers’ rights; all of this is now in the melting pot. The workers’ organisations had grown complacent and are now in danger of leaving the class undefended, despite the huge willingness of working people to take action. Women’s organisations have had to regroup or form anew to answer these terrible attacks.

In Europe the welfare state has been fundamental to the gains in the economic and social well-being of women, and to the development of women’s rights and social attitudes, including the control of their fertility and the right to choose in matters of pregnancy. The availability of good quality medical care to most workers’ families in Europe has been of fundamental significance in all these gains.

As each element of the welfare state is stripped away, the pressure and workload on women becomes more obvious. The end of care for the disabled; the closure of nurseries; cuts in pensions; cuts in health care; youth unemployment; ‘austerity’ itself... these all put intolerable pressure on families; and when pressure is put on families, it is the women who bear the weight – this at a time when female participation in the workforce has been steadily increasing.

Chinese women workers on strike

The gains of the welfare state reflect generations of struggle in working class women’s organisations. Whilst the state can end welfare provision, it cannot (yet) turn back the attitudes of women born and raised in the era of the welfare state. While these attitudes survive, women will fight to revive and re-strengthen the welfare state. Women have often been the first to be laid off, the most affected by wage cuts, the most affected by pension cuts. Now the very fabric of our societies in Europe – the hospitals, schools, roads, power and utilities – are being privatised and expropriated.

The rights of women in post-communist Europe have been significantly attacked. Attacks on health care in Poland, and on women’s housing rights there, are but a sample of women’s struggles.

The increase in the size of the global working class, especially in the newly industrialised countries, has produced a workforce with a majority female workforce. It’s often young women who are beginning to fight back. Just as in the infancy of the western working class, women’s struggles lead the way amongst the new proletariat. Women in China are especially involved in much of the labour unrest there. Women textile workers in Pakistan and Bangladesh and even home workers are organising. In the Indian general strike, women were full participants. In Latin America the women are continuing the struggle. In the USA, women workers including teachers and nurses have fought hard for their rights.

The traditional role of women for millennia has been to protect the community. In order to break community resistance, women had to be broken first. Capitalism needs however the reproduction of the next generation of labour. The nuclear family needs somehow to be protected. What capitalism doesn’t need is care of the elderly, disabled and infirm. Often even the care of the very young is not respected. Capitalism does not need communities. The state is rolling back from every aspect of society. Women who resist are a threat to capitalism and patriarchy; hence the witch hunt and the incidence of domestic and gender violence.

The dominant ideas of society are the ideas of capitalism, and this hegemony of ideas is deliberately protected by capitalism. The ideas of patriarchy are presented in different ways in different cultures: the oppression of women by religious
extremists, sex selective abortion, sexual assault as a weapon of war, neglect of baby girls, the ultra-sexualisation of western capitalism and pseudo-science about female brain deficits. Harsh living conditions can be reflected in harsh religions which invoke again the ideas of the witch hunt. (The hegemony of ideas in this case is where attitudes to women, the old, the infirm and the mentally ill are managed by capitalism and patriarchy through the media, academia and religion to suit capitalism’s purpose.)

The traditional (and modern) witch hunt focuses on “useless” women: the old, the socially isolated, lesbian women (in some counties lesbians are killed or imprisoned) women who hold to women-friendly ideas and practices; nothing angers this system more than clever women. Attacks on women are and have been simultaneous with capitalist attacks on the communities’ commons, robbing the community of its communal wealth whether it be land, seed genomes or hospitals.

In countries that have been especially exploited by global capital, a girl or a woman dies every minute in giving birth. Lower health budgeting across the world is likely to increase the care-giving functions falling on women, while disinvestment from community infrastructure, such as water supply systems, is likely to increase women’s household work.

Women and children are disproportionately affected by “natural” disasters The people most affected by both Hurricane Katrina and the South-East Asia tsunami were women – poor and African-American in Katrina, or Dalit or tribal people in the tsunami. These people were abandoned by official recovery policies, while companies profited from the outcomes of disaster.

The crisis in world food again demonstrates the attack on women. Women produce in informal farming probably the majority of human food. Yet this is another area where capitalism attacks to increase profit by dispossession. Capitalism wants to bring production into its ownership by stealing the ancient knowledge of farming from these communities. The World Trade Organisation leads in this. Again the ideas of global capitalism tell us that informal farming cannot feed the future, but Monsanto scientists can! The development of the “green” revolution and agro-technologies has undermined the potential for self-sufficiency and increased dependence on corporate agribusiness, even including removing the millennia-old ability to collect and store seeds for future sowing. Keeping knowledge of seeds suitable for different situations has traditionally been a female role.

The willingness to fight shown by women across the world in 2011 and 2012 has been an inspiration. The organisations of women, and the development of socialist ideas amongst women, are essential to end capitalism and build an alternative future. The anti-patriarchal struggle has to be anti-capitalist, and the anti-capitalist struggle has to be anti-patriarchal. The struggle continues.

**A WORLD PARTY**

Workers everywhere are beginning to rise to their feet again. They have unprecedented latent power. But the gap between their objective power and their subjective consciousness has never been wider. At no time in their history have they been so silent politically. Their struggles are diffuse and unco-ordinated. There is no world party, no International, no mass movement for socialism, no organised programme to change society.

What is necessary is to help to link them and organise them into a coherent force. Now more than ever we need a single party of the working class. Civilised life, war and peace, and environmental survival all depend upon it. Never have national programmes been less relevant.

In the absence of such a party, the alternative is a nightmare. Mass protest will inevitably be diverted along national and racist lines. Dark forces stalk the world: nationalism, racism, bigotry, fundamentalism, nihilistic terror . . . That is the face of reaction today. The choice is: socialism or barbarism. Marx’ aphorism once seemed little more than a rhetorical flourish, but it is quite literally and imminently the issue facing humanity in the period ahead, and this will become clearer to ever wider strata of the world.
Even the crumbled ruins of the old internationals that remained at least to mock the living generations have been obliterated. The old mass movements of organised labour in their previous strongholds have been eroded by the collapse of Stalinism; by capitalist triumphalism and political disorientation; by organic changes in the composition of the working class, which have demolished entire communities and partly eroded their militant traditions; by major trade-union defeats, the strangulation of the ex-colonial countries, and the long credit boom.

But a new, stronger, more cohesive international class is being built, bestriding every continent, and rapidly learning anew the strategy and tactics of the class struggle.

Socialists have always understood that without international unity – in theory and practice, programme and organisation – the working class can never build a new society. The creation of a worldwide party of the working class is not at all an abstract or unreal idea. Every day, in every continent, we see new evidence that such a party is straining right now at every nerve to materialise.

Mass communications and the 'information revolution' have made the present generation incomparably better informed than their grandparents. Facebook is fast approaching a billion members. The world has drawn together and a new global consciousness has arisen. Youth boycott third-world sweatshop products. Super-oppressed strata of the population – women, ethnic minorities and native indigenous peoples – have risen to their feet. The size and specific weight of the proletariat have grown everywhere. Workers remain workers, producing today on a still more collective scale than ever before. They have no alternative but to fight back collectively, and to learn afresh the lessons of solidarity.

When tens of millions of workers and young people protest, on the same issues, with the same slogans, often on the same day, sometimes in internationally synchronised action, that means that the world party of the future is almost a reality now.

In 1890, tens of thousands of workers in several countries staged the first internationally co-ordinated strike (for the 8-hour day). This was hailed by Engels himself as the final consummation of his and Marx' life work: the establishment of a single world party of the working class. What would Engels have said about the events of 15th February 2003, when literally tens of millions staged simultaneous co-ordinated demonstrations against the impending war? Or of 15th October 2011?

What existed in 1890 – and what still remains more than 120 years later to be re-established – is a formal structure. That is of course no small detail; nevertheless, deeds count more than words. All the resolutions by the Second International pledging it to resist the coming world war proved to be worthless shreds of paper when they were put to the test.

The international movement against capitalism needs to be embodied in a permanent thriving organised movement, with a constitution and a formal structure. This is not just an organisational lapse; what remains to be recreated is the political recognition of the need for such a structure. It is the task of socialists to give conscious expression to this process; to bring to light the need for class solidarity, for a worldwide solution and for international day-to-day co-ordination; and finally to formulate this programme in terms of direct practical proposals.

That alone can turn what would otherwise be just a blind historical tendency into an idea which, as Lenin put it, could "grip the minds of the millions", and thus become "a material force". The "International-in-itself" which is beginning to take shape today in front of our eyes would become transformed into something conscious, urgent, irresistible: an "International-for-itself". The practical struggle of the millions for a better life is beginning to turn the age-old dream of generations of socialist pioneers into a real movement.

What form will such an organisation take in its inception? It will necessarily be a broad, all-encompassing forum in which all forces participate which regard themselves as opposed to the dictatorship of the corporations. It will bring the "anti-
capitalist" youth and many of the existing single-issue protest lobbies into alliance with mainstream organisations of the working class and new fighting units of struggle. It will provide a point of contact and solidarity between some of the more exotic or primitive "anarchist" youth groups and the deeply rooted but long-buried traditions of Marxism. It will be built, not on words and manifestos, but on practical campaigns. It will not be an ideological monolith but a vibrant arena of democratic debate in which organised platforms contend.

When such a party does arise – as eventually it must – it can take no other form. No single tendency will dominate a resurgent party of the left. It will be a coalition of platforms, very like the original Labour Party, in the days when it was still the political arm of the trade unions, which brought together trade unions, co-operatives, Fabians, the ILP, and various socialist societies. Let all the self-appointed messiahs remember that Marxist sect (the SDF) which flung down an ultimatum at its founding meeting in 1901, and then proudly marched out into oblivion. Lenin urged the fledgling Communists to affiliate to the Labour Party, reminding them that whether or not the Labour Party recognised the class struggle, the class struggle would certainly recognise the Labour Party.

The best safeguard against such a party degenerating is not adherence to this or that political catechism, but a constitution that will guarantee that all officials and MPs be paid a worker's wage. First rule out corruption and careerism: then the politics will follow.

Such a movement could not in and of itself complete the task. It could not overthrow capitalism. But it would be a hothouse of debate, a workshop in which rival theories and strategies could be tested out, selected and sharpened. It would be the duty of those who consider that they have the answers to convince their peers shoulder-to-shoulder in the day-to-day struggle.

That is the natural way in which workers spontaneously organise when left to their own devices. Workers are practical people with vital objectives. What they need are fighting organisations which can struggle and – above all – win. This in turn presupposes a healthy freedom of debate within their ranks, to determine the best common policy.

Unity and democracy depend upon each other. Each is impossible without the other. We all remember the blunders and crimes of those bureaucratic parties in which policies were imposed by decree from above. We likewise understand all too well the bogus liberalism which allows everyone to disregard majority decisions – especially the leadership. The united action needed for victory can only be achieved when all have an equal stake in deciding policy. The long-abused system of democratic centralism originally meant nothing more than that: the elementary morality of the picket line, projected on to the political plane.

These parties will seem refreshing, appealing, very different from the institutionalised parties of the past. These had imposed upon the workers' natural democratic tendencies alien traditions, through a bloated officialdom insulated against rank-and-file constraints. They had expressed the outlook of distinct social groupings, with interests of their own, whose status was derived respectively from their careers and incomes as MPs, councillors, trade union officials, etc., or from the patronage of the Stalinist elite who fed parasitically off Soviet society. Today the world is changed. Stalinism no longer survives as a challenge or an alternative to capitalism. It has gone forever, except for a few anomalous relics. And what was once called reformism has largely abandoned its earlier role as a brake on the labour movement and become instead a direct alternative agency of the capitalists: moreover, one which is now already largely discarded. In the measure that it is losing its authority over the working class, it is becoming redundant, equally useless to both sides in the class struggle.

The working class is at last beginning the long process of recovery. Where workers have begun to organise afresh, for now at least they no longer carry so crippling a burden as before of a bureaucratic incubus on their shoulders. Their traditions may be dimmed, their consciousness blurred, but they have no choice but to take action.

However, in the absence of a conscious socialist alternative, then some other ideological force will inevitably pour in to fill the vacuum. In Eastern
Europe it was the proponents of the market economy. In Iran it was Islamic fundamentalism. It could be nationalism, communalism or racism. All the more need for Socialists to argue, explain and campaign for our own programme.

ARGUING THE CASE FOR SOCIALISM

The most striking feature of a situation in which established political parties are generally despised is the huge unfilled political vacuum. At a time when capitalism itself is so universally hated, why are there no mass socialist or anti-capitalist parties in existence? Because socialists still need to win the argument all over again that there is a real rational socialist alternative that can bring about a harmonious and viable civilised society.

For much of the twentieth century in Europe, Socialism was a living mass force because it represented the only real way out in the eyes of millions of people. There was a general consciousness throughout society – even among the capitalists themselves – that their system was doomed, their day was past, and that socialism represents the future of humanity. It was understood intuitively that poverty, inequality, and want are not rooted in any scarcity of natural resources. Only the interests of private property stood in the way of harmony and plenty. This was expressed again and again: in the so-called “domino theory” of the US administration at the time of the Vietnam war; in de Gaulle’s famous comment during the revolutionary general strike of 1968, “the game’s up”; in the pronouncement by The Times in 1974 that “capitalism is dead in Portugal”; in the lament of Willi Brandt in 1980 that there would be “communism or fascism within 20 years”; etc. Their system was irrational; it didn’t work.

Today that is no longer so obvious. Due to the very survival of capitalism beyond its natural lifespan, there is a widespread understanding that in the process it has despoiled the planet, that natural resources are finite and civilisation itself is under threat. While it is appreciated perhaps better than ever before that no solution is conceivable under capitalism, a solution is no longer understood to be quite so obviously feasible under any alternative system either.

2011 alone saw some of the biggest recorded natural disasters, in the form of earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, floods, volcanic eruptions, forest fires, and in Japan the resulting nuclear crisis, some of them undoubtedly linked to climate change. Quite apart from environmental disaster, faith in the boundless potential of technology has gone; in its place has come a conviction that society is fast reaching the limit of the world’s finite resources, especially in terms of energy. In the absence of a socialist answer, it is understandable that this helps create feelings of helplessness; of fatalistic resignation to the inevitability of Armageddon.

And yet awareness of the truth about society has never been greater. There are few illusions left about the dictatorship of corporate power. What is lacking is confidence in the power to overthrow it. Why has there been no rush to fill the vacuum left by the rotting of the workers’ parties in Europe? Precisely because of the absence of the old illusions in reformism – in the national programmes of the old social-democratic or “eurocommunist” parties, in a world where national programmes are already manifestly obsolete – and yet equally, there is a lack of any confidence in revolution. No other world seems possible. There is an awareness of the sheer enormity of the task of breaking the stranglehold of the corporations, and a lack of any conception of what could replace it.

It is therefore the prime task of socialists today to re-establish once again theoretically the rationality of socialism. It has to be demonstrated all over again before it can become once again a living force.

OUR TASKS

For all our defence of the traditions of Lenin and Trotsky, the crucial feature of our approach is our recognition of the fact that the tasks facing revolutionaries today are not quite the same as the ones they had to grapple with in their day.
The left groups all have their origins in a period when there were in most developed industrial societies, and many colonial countries too, mass socialist or communist parties numbering millions. Generations of workers lived, fought and died defending their political heritage. All that was holding them back from victory were the material interests of the bureaucratic cliques at their head. The mission of the left opposition groups was to expose the crimes and betrayals of the leadership of those parties and prove themselves a worthier alternative vanguard. To varying degrees they succeeded in educating their cadres and sharpening their skills as theoreticians, writers, speakers and organisers, achieving in some cases admirable results.

The task facing socialists now is different. Historical, economic and demographic factors have changed the political landscape. Today it is a question of building the movement itself, rather than providing an alternative programme and leadership for it. Today it is manifestly not so much a question of replacing the general staff as of mobilising once again the first foot soldiers.

The loyalty of these activists to those organisations to which they have given their lives is an understandable and praiseworthy quality. However, it carries with it the risk of cliquism and conservatism; of a sectarianism which consists of an unwillingness to put the needs of the wider movement above the petty advantages of their own organisation. Even those who in their day had come closest to building a real international left opposition within the workers' parties risk shrinking from the tactical audacity that had inspired Trotsky, who was constantly improvising ingenious and flexible ways of reaching worker activists, and retreating instead into the habits of a cult.

In such a situation, they risk losing a sense of proportion. To take one recent example, in one ex-colonial country where in the past the combined vote for parties calling themselves Marxist had at one time reached 20%, their most prominent surviving splinter group today – an organisation of courageous and selfless revolutionaries – recently bragged that it came third in presidential elections with 0.35% of the vote, and that it outpolled its left rivals in parliamentary elections by 0.16% to 0.09% of the votes.

They would indignantly deny it, but in practice many of the old left groups still sincerely believe that the future depends on their winning leadership of the workers' movement, and this leads them in practice to give priority to the need to build their own organisations before the objective needs of the class. They might agree formally that the tasks have changed; however, their style, structure and persona have not changed accordingly. They often present themselves still as a vanguard, as having all the answers; their internal regime is still insulated from the movement.

Even when we produced our document, some scepticism was aroused. We were asked for proof that any tendency that we helped to create would not repeat the unhealthy practices of the old left groups. Our reply to those who demand such safeguards is: there are no guarantees. There is no constitution in the world that will immunise us against the risk of future abuses. The only protection is eternal vigilance: mass participation, democratic pressure, and the promotion of a culture that will guard against such violations. It was not faulty constitutions or a shortage of pious promises that allowed bureaucratic tyranny to flourish under the Stalinist regime in Russia (which boasted “the most democratic constitution in the world”), but the absence of mass participation and control by the working class – something which was overwhelmingly determined by objective factors.

On a miniscule scale, the kind of petty abuses that have scarred the left groups would never have been tolerated if they had had an active mass working-class membership. Within the left groups there are many admirable and dedicated workers. At the same time to varying extents they have drawn distorted conclusions from the special circumstances of the Bolshevik party in the Tsarist underground and of the Russian revolution during the civil war and its aftermath, which have helped foster a culture of lifelong mandates, an implicit tendency towards leadership cults, resulting splits, the discouragement of dissent, even the outright suppression of factions, and other blemishes.
Marx commented on the sectarian groups of his day that "the sect seeks its raison d'etre not in what it has in common with the class movement, but in the particular shibboleth which distinguishes it from the other." He continued: "The development of socialist sectarianism and that of the working class movement always stand in reverse ratio to each other. Sects are justified historically so long as the working classes are not yet ripe for an independent historical movement. As soon as they attain this maturity, all sects become essentially reactionary."

As the class struggle reawakens from its relative state of hibernation, it is to be hoped that the healthiest elements from within the existing left groups will abandon their obsolete pet shibboleths and join together with the fresh ranks of the new mass movement.

The ideological case for socialism has to be argued all over again, in an entirely new context, to inspire a politically virgin proletariat. The task is not to create a vanguard, as in 1938, but to propagandise the basic ideas, as in 1848 or the years of the first International. This does not mean going through all the traumas and defeats and false starts and betrayals all over again, because history has made the task incomparably simpler.

Many honourable veterans from the past are finding it hard to adjust to the new features of the struggle. 'Human thought is conservative', said Trotsky, 'and the thought of revolutionists is at times especially so'. We more than anyone must beware of rigidity. It is useless to react with the reflexes of a bygone era. To accept new challenges entails new risks, but the worst mistake of all today is conservative orthodoxy.

The First International brought into a single organisation the anarchist Bakunin and the socialist Marx

The Proudhonists of France, Spain and Belgium were opposed on principle to strikes. The Lassalleans of Germany (who resisted persistent approaches to join the International) were secretly collaborating with the dictator Bismarck. The intrigues of the anarchist Bakunin were eventually to come near to wrecking the organisation. And the British trade unionists were frankly terrified by all manifestations of what they called 'continental socialism'. None of them could conceivably have
been admitted, let alone invited, into the 3rd or nascent 4th Internationals.

Nevertheless, at its core stood the working class – and above all, at that time, the British working class, which showed solidarity with the victims of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and of Napoleon III’s coup in France, and with the Polish uprising against the Russian Tsar. Abraham Lincoln himself praised the nobility of the Lancashire cotton workers, who starved rather than break the blockade on the southern slave-owning cotton states during the American Civil War.

The workers’ parties organised in the only way they could, along the lines of the fraternal self-organisation of workers anywhere when not distorted by bureaucratic interference: in accord with the principles of workers’ democracy, free debate and united action.

Sure, the International was not free of human weaknesses. Along with heroism and solidarity and humour and comradeship, there were manifestations aplenty of vanity, pomposity, opportunism, sectarianism, cowardice, adventurism and petty corruption. However, there was no bureaucracy hell-bent on systematic betrayal of the working class. That was to come later.

Marx and Engels were anything but sectarian. As in 1848, they reaffirmed that ‘the Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties’. What then marked them out? Simply that they were ‘on the one hand, practically, the most advanced and resolute section’, and that ‘on the other hand, theoretically, they (had) . . . the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march’. So their tasks were entirely different from those of Lenin in 1921 or Trotsky in 1938, whose avowed goal was, necessarily, to set up new parties to challenge the existing failed parties of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals respectively.

Does this imply that there was a principled difference between Marx and Engels on the one hand and Lenin and Trotsky on the other? Not at all. The breadth of the IWMA corresponded to the tasks of the hour. It was not at all a mark of liberalism, but a preliminary stage in a campaigning offensive by the Marxists. The IWMA was to become a worldwide ideological workshop, in which all the rival ideas could be tested out in practice against the experiences of the workers in victory and in defeat. What was needed – then as now – was a forum in which to debate the issues.

A new international will not in its incipient stages mean a monolithic world party with a sharply defined ideological line. Today is not 1920, when delegates to the Communist International congress were warned of ‘the danger of being watered down by elements characterised by vacillation and half-measures, forces which have not yet finally discarded the ideology of the Second International’. No less than 21 conditions were laid down at that time for affiliation, and, to make doubly sure, Lenin even added a list of named individuals who would never under any circumstances be admitted to the new International.

“The Communist International unconditionally and categorically demands the carrying out of this break in the shortest possible time. The Communist International cannot tolerate a situation where notorious opportunists, as represented by Turati, Modigliani, Kautsky, Hilferding, Hillquit, Longuet, MacDonald, etc., have the right to pass as members of the Communist International. This could only lead to the Communist International becoming something very similar to the wreck of the Second International.”

Neither is today 1938, when Trotsky had to denounce in a single breath the Stalinists and social democrats along with bourgeois liberals and fascists, and declare that ‘the Fourth International . . . uncompromisingly gives battle to all political groupings tied to the apron strings of the bourgeoisie’.

These were not at all expressions of sectarianism. They were a measured response to the reality of such historic betrayals as collusion in the mutual slaughter of the first world war, and the signing of the Hitler-Stalin pact. They belong to the era when mighty social armies had been established at enormous sacrifice by the working class, which had then fallen prey to traitors. The task then was to replace these vile traitors with leaders worthy of the rank-and-file. Today the generals no longer betray and collaborate; if only things were so sim-
ple. They have openly switched sides, and their armies have largely disbanded.

Of course, in many countries the working class still retains its own mass organisations in the form of strong and growing trade unions with millions of potential new combatants.

Some people have suggested that the foundation of the Communist International was an ultra-left mistake. We disagree. The previous Socialist International had died on the outbreak of the first world war, when its leaders had abandoned their internationalist holiday speechifying and started cheering their members on in slaughtering one another by the millions on the battlefields of Europe. Under the impact of the Russian revolution, there was a huge rush by the newly-revived workers’ parties to flock towards the new revolutionary international.

Nor was the proclamation of a Fourth International – as an anticipation – premature in the circumstances of the time. In the dark days when Fascism had most of Europe and Asia in its grip, and the coming world war cast a long shadow, Trotsky gave a graphic description of the terrible betrayals and counter-revolutions of his time: “The multi-millioned masses again and again enter the road of revolution. But each time they are blocked by their own conservative bureaucratic machines... The historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of leadership of the proletariat”. The urgent task of the hour was to offer an alternative leadership worthy of the courage and determination of the ranks of the mass socialist and communist parties. It was a brilliant summary of the essential truth then; but today it can all too easily sound like empty rhetoric.

Trotsky’s perspective of an impending collapse of the existing socialist and communist parties following the Second World War, equivalent to the collapse of the old Socialist International following the First World War, was perfectly rational. If subsequent events had not unexpectedly cut across this perspective, then the sectarian vices of the pre-war Trotskyist groups, of which Trotsky was of course all too aware, would have been naturally overwhelmed by the upsurge of the labour movement. Trotsky was not wrong, at a moment of catastrophe for the world working class – defeated throughout Europe and on the eve of the most bloodthirsty conflict in world history – to raise high the banner of the Fourth International as a rallying point for the coming new generation of revolutionary workers.

It would have been a far greater mistake for Trotsky to have abstained from holding the founding conference of the future International (which was so designated for very clear and explicit reasons, rather than the "congress" of an existing mass world party), merely out of dissatisfaction with the level of the existing cadres.

There is a very exact precedent – one which Trotsky no doubt had in mind. The Zimmerwald Left which met in 1915 comprised just eight socialists opposed to the word war. It was even weaker than the Founding Conference of the Fourth International, which was attended by thirty delegates. And yet it was around the tradition established by the Zimmerwald Left that the Communist International was founded four years later, comprising mass parties in all the major countries of Europe.

If history had taken a similar course following the Second World War, as Trotsky had predicted, and if both reformism and Stalinism had not emerged temporarily strengthened by intervening events, then the role of the founding conference of the Fourth International in rallying millions of newly revolutionised workers would have been indisputable. It was unforeseen objective events which determined that fulfilment of the objectives of the founding conference instead were to be postponed for two generations. Its document (The
Transitional Programme) is nevertheless still rich in lessons for revolutionaries. Its principles need urgently to be applied in today’s changed but equally momentous circumstances.

This example demonstrates the difference between the First International, on the one hand, and on the other, both the Third (Communist) International created by Lenin in 1919, and the Fourth International conceived by Trotsky in 1938. The Communist International was founded on explicit revolutionary principles – and rightly so, in the circumstances of the great betrayal in 1914 that had plunged into catastrophe the by then existing powerful mass workers’ organisations. The First was an amalgamation of disparate pioneering campaigning radical groups, with all their confusions and misconceptions – incipient workers’ parties groping towards a common outlook. Marx and Engels used the crucial few years of the International’s meteoric growth as a political workshop in which to forge a coherent world programme and ideology. In this they succeeded: when the Second International was founded in 1889, bringing together truly mass organisations in several countries, it was on the basis of their ideas.

A WORLD TO GAIN

There has been as fundamental a change in the world situation since the 1980s as there was in 1945 or in 1914. It takes theoretical courage to acknowledge the extent of this change.

The task ahead of revolutionaries today is far closer to those facing Marx and Engels in their day. The future International will not arise from mass splits in long-established traditional parties, in revolt against their ruling bureaucracies.

A new international will look initially much more like the First than the Third. It will necessarily encompass a broad range of opinion. It will be an international projection of the confusions and conflicts within each country’s nascent parties. We will find ourselves working alongside all kinds of disparate and quite probably naïve forces. The simple but strict proviso for uniting our forces will be our common sincerity in fighting capitalism, and our common recognition of the key role of the working class. In the furnace of struggle, all the rival ideologies will be tested, and the best will win out. The new international will be alive with debate.

To avoid sectarianism does not mean blunting our theoretical sharpness. We share the resolve of genuine activists today to drop the habits of sectarian abuse practised so destructively in the past. That does not mean accepting the kind of bogus tolerance in vogue today, which in the name of unity glosses over difficult but vital issues. Those who seek to avoid honest debate end up in practice just as undemocratic as those who repress it outright. We need free and open discussion. Like Marx, we must be 'bold in matter, but mild in manner'.

As Engels explained, the aim of the IWMA was 'to weld together into one huge army the whole militant working class of Europe and America. Therefore it could not set out from the principles laid down in the (Communist) Manifesto.'

Yet it is a stunning tribute to Marx and Engels that within seven short years they had already won the argument. It took the defeat of the Paris Commune, but their brilliant analysis of its lessons was written in the name of the General Council. And, although the IWMA itself was dashed against the rocks of reaction, once the tide had turned and the newly emergent mass parties and trade unions had established the Socialist International in 1889, it was under the banner of the ideas of the Communist Manifesto.

It was the worldwide struggle for the eight-hour day which built a mass socialist international

On the day of the first worldwide general strike on May Day 1890, Engels celebrated what he considered the triumphant consummation of their historic life work.
“True, the International itself lived only nine years. But that the eternal union of the proletarians of all countries created by it is still alive and lives stronger than ever, there is no better witness than this day. Because today, as I write these lines, the European and American proletariat is reviewing its fighting forces, mobilised for the first time, mobilised as one army, under one flag, for one immediate aim... And today's spectacle will open the eyes of the capitalists and landlords of all countries to the fact that today the working men of all countries are united indeed. If only Marx were still by my side to see this with his own eyes!”

The Internationals of the past reflected the working class of their times. The First International was actually called an association of working men. Even the Third International was almost entirely concentrated in Europe. The International that can emerge from the coming struggles will encompass tens of millions of men, women and youth from all the continents. A new international will be built by uniting together all the movements of real struggle today, irrespective of ideology, on the basis of clear and free debate. That way, we too can hope to see our ideas become a material force. The thousands of campaigns for social justice fought by women, the disabled, the elderly, LGBT communities (and those who chose neither gender), and other socially excluded groups are an intrinsic and essential part of our struggle for a different world.

The relentless march of the super-corporations towards absolute global rule is putting a brutal end to the historic anomalies of the past. Capitalism has developed to its utmost extremes. All the trends outlined in the Communist Manifesto have extended to grotesque lengths, and in the process many of the fiendish complications that bedevilled the movement in the past have been cleared away. In their brave new world, there is less and less room for privileged labour aristocracies or bribed labour bureaucracies, for secondary concessions to colonial populism or toleration of 'rogue states', least of all for rival systems that stand outside the orbit of the 'free market'.

The gigantic political obstacles of the past no longer pose the same dangers as before. The long movement towards a new world will not be a simple repetition of the past. Capitalism has enormously simplified the issues and the tasks. The confusions, traps and pitfalls which created fatal dangers to the working class in the past – reformism, nationalism, populism, bonapartism, Stalinism, etc. – will no longer pose the same threat that they did then. The foundations for reformism, and the pernicious influence of Stalinism – which depended not merely on political illusions but on the hostile material interests of alien social castes; on conscious and systematic betrayal – have now been largely eroded.

This does not mean an end to the workers' quite legitimate wish to seek reforms (something that we all, incidentally, share), but a weakening of reformism by its classic Marxist definition: the existence of a labour bureaucracy – an "alien social caste" – able for a period to justify its existence by the winning of occasional reforms, but with an entrenched stake in defeating revolution by conscious and systematic betrayal. Nor does it mean that there will be no false illusions – and worse – within the workers' movement; or that there will be no risk to the workers' movement of personal treachery, weakness, adventurism, cowardice, irresponsibility, or corruption. It doesn't need a bureaucracy to make disastrous blunders.

Of course workers will hope at first to cure the worst excesses of capitalism by reforms. But there are fewer illusions in capitalism today than at any time before. The general attitude of workers today to capitalism is not, as was the case a generation ago: "let us gradually reform capitalism until we have achieved socialism", but a sense of awe and inadequacy at the enormity of the challenge ahead.

The fight for a workers' international is the fight to unite the struggles of the workers of all continents, social, gender and ethnic groups; to link with the environmentalist and anti-capitalist protest movements, and to build worldwide solidarity, just as on that first May Day. We have not only 'a world to gain', but a world to save from annihilation.
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INTRODUCTION

The world today stands on the brink of catastrophe: a “perfect storm” that threatens to tear society apart and call into question the survival of human civilisation itself.

This pamphlet represents the ideas of a network of workers from several countries. We all participate in a broad online discussion list which links committed socialists worldwide, and provides a forum for the vital exchange of experiences and ideas. At its best, it has been a source of advice, support, and even occasional inspiration. Many of the list’s participants – not all from the same past traditions – have evolved over a period a certain common political outlook, and we feel that the time has come to set down more explicitly some of these common principles.

This task is especially timely, given that we find ourselves at a turning point in world history. During the previous period, it was right to give priority to reflecting on past lessons, drawing a balance sheet, and re-examining basic principles, to adjust to the changed balance of forces and prepare for the new period ahead. With the sudden implosion of the world financial system, however, and the imminent prospect of class struggles not witnessed perhaps for more than 70 years, it is now time to take a more proactive stance. The first step towards building the kind of coherent political movement that can hope to change society is to work out answers to the complex new questions of the day, and work accordingly to spread our ideas.

Nothing less than a worldwide party of the working class is needed. We have no pretensions to constitute even the embryo of such a party, let alone a substitute for it. We are just a like-minded group of committed co-thinkers with a certain point of view. We simply offer these ideas as a contribution to the discussion that will help arm the pioneers of such a future party. In the common interests of workers everywhere seeking a way forward to a better and more rational society, we welcome discussion and interaction with anyone with similar objectives.

History since primitive times has meant a struggle between classes. The working class, or proletariat, are those who earn a living not by their ownership of property but by their capacity to work, whether by hand or brain. Workers live solely by selling their labour-power by the week or the month, and at times of capitalist crisis their very livelihood is put at risk.

Capitalism has long since reached the limits of its potential to develop society. The only force capable of further extending human progress is the working class. The key to liberating the oppressed and to saving the planet from war and environmental destruction is the establishment of a new social system based on human solidarity. The indispensable first step in this direction is the establishment of a government of workers’ democracy, which will bring the key strategic sectors of the economy into state ownership under workers’ management and control. Only publicly owned services, run democratically by the working class, can meet the essential needs of a civilised society and open up a flourishing of human talent.

Wherever workers are exploited, they develop collective means of struggle to defend their rights. We base our outlook on the traditions established by previous generations of workers and the lessons learned from their past struggles. Our discussion list is a point of contact for anyone who sincerely wants to fight against capitalism and find common principles in the struggle.

The working class has the potential to take power across the globe. Industry has expanded worldwide, and huge layers of the population have been recruited into the workforce of the multinationals. The forces of production have become globally socialised: each sector of production depends upon cooperation with others. Monopolies long ago replaced capitalist competition, the classic justification for private ownership of the means of production; yet the ruling class still cling to their property. They can no longer rationally defend their privileges because they no longer serve a useful role.
The past twenty years have been a period of paradox, uncertainty and flux. The collapse of Stalinism, the information-technology revolution and globalisation all combined to tempt capitalist ideologues into a premature celebration of the victory of the “market economy”. Their complacency was reinforced by the relative lack of any coherent challenge from the working class, either ideologically or, in most countries, in terms of industrial militancy. This arose on the one hand from an apparent decline in proletarian consciousness and combativity in the formerly industrialised economies, and on the other from the weakness and immaturity of the new industrial proletariat taking root on virgin territory.

These years marked an unexpected pause in the growing crisis of capitalism. Up to 1989, Marxists had confidently counted on an intensified polarisation in the class struggle, a deepening crisis in the ex-colonial world, a mass movement for workers’ democracy in the Stalinist states, and imminent revolutionary upheavals everywhere. These general perspectives were abruptly cut across by the sudden restoration of capitalism in the former Stalinist states and the new lease of life gained by capitalism through the effects of the information technology boom. The mass appeal of socialism suddenly weakened.

With the onset today of the delayed financial crisis, the loop of history is being tied once again. Where reality had seemed for a time to defy all reason, the socialist critique of capitalism has once again been vindicated.

A new stage in history is now opening up, in which the warnings of Marx and Engels that society stands at the crossroads of “socialism or barbarism”, or Trotsky’s characterisation of the period as “the death agony of capitalism”, take on an added immediacy. Not twenty years ago, the “spectre of communism” had seemed finally exorcised, with the collapse of those states which had claimed to be based on socialist planning, and the abandonment of even their earlier token acknowledge of socialist goals by mass parties founded decades ago to champion the workers’ cause. One fashionable philosopher had even proclaimed “the end of history”: the final victory of liberal capitalism.

Now Newsweek proclaims: “We are all socialists now”, as, on the contrary, the ideology of unbridled deregulated speculation becomes universally derided, along with the unprecedented orgy of greed which accompanied it – a display of self-indulgence which might have shamed the Borgias in Renaissance Italy.

After 60 years of relative calm in its main citadels of North America and Western Europe, world capitalism now faces its worst economic crisis since the 1930s. Within months, its spokesmen have passed from acknowledging a “credit crunch”, to a recession, to a depression, to a crisis comparable to the 1930s, to “the worst crisis for a century, lasting 10-15 years”. The unemployment forecast for Britain has risen to four million, and for Germany to 4.6 million. The prospect lies ahead of a pauperisation of the historically more “affluent” populations and a plunge back into starvation globally – to say nothing of the new series of wars that the crisis could precipitate, from the Middle East to the Indian sub-continent to the Pacific, and quite possibly Europe too.

This crisis came as a shock to mainstream commentators; however, it was by no means unpredictable. Not only had Marxists been predicting such a crisis for so many decades that it had become almost a cliché, but a rare minority of others too had seen it coming. For instance, the economist Harry Shutt had written ten years previously of an approaching “deepening economic crisis whose only possible denouement... will be a financial holocaust on such a scale as to bring comprehensive ruin.... Such a disaster could undo all the considerable gains so painfully made by Western civilisation in the five centuries since the Renaissance and usher in a new Dark Age such as that foreseen by Winston Churchill as the likely consequence of a Nazi victory in 1940.”

If the working class does not succeed in overthrowing capitalism, then this chilling prediction will seem in retrospect to have been too mild.
THE END OF THE POSTWAR RESPITE

In the postwar economic upswing of the 1950s and 1960s, there was a huge expansion of world trade and an increase in the exploitation of the ex-colonial world. The labour shortage in the industrialised countries led to a strengthening of trade union power which enabled the workers to win unprecedented gains in living standards. This was only possible due to exceptional and temporary conditions. The postwar respite in the developed countries has been bumpy and protracted, but after six decades it has finally come to a halt.

Between 1945 and 1975, the colonial revolution had transformed the world. In epic struggles, millions of formerly mute subject peoples invaded the stage of world history. After the overthrow of their imperial rulers, the unremitting cycle of intensifying poverty, famine and political instability weakened the grip of landlordism and capitalism. In China, Cuba, and parts of Asia and Africa, victorious guerrilla leaders or insurgent junior military officers struck blows against capitalism and established states modelled on Stalinist Russia. This process culminated in the mid-1970s in the defeat of the USA at the hands of a peasant army in Vietnam. At the same time, Portuguese imperialism collapsed in Africa, and regimes in several ex-colonial countries, including Cambodia, Ethiopia, Angola and Mozambique took drastic steps against landlordism and capitalism.

The postwar world order was already crumbling by the 1970s, both economically and politically. In 1968, mass protests against the Vietnam war, uprisings in the black ghettos of the USA, a revolutionary situation in France, pre-revolutionary turmoil in Italy, street protests in Mexico, and many other events heralded the end of post-war political stability. The long war of the USA on Vietnam – a manifestation of the worldwide uprising of the colonial peoples since 1945 – killed 58,000 US soldiers, created a mutinous army and unprecedented defiance at home, and ended in the national humiliation of the USA’s first ever military defeat. It also undermined the dollar, which had emerged supreme from the world war. 25 years of financial stability were terminated by the scrapping of the Bretton Woods agreement tying the dollar at a fixed exchange rate to the price of gold – an event which foreshadowed the collapse of the Keynesian strategy for moderating capitalism’s tendency towards periodic crises, as inflation in the developed world threatened to sky-rocket out of control. Then, in the mid-1970s, the collapse of the dictatorships in Portugal, Spain and Greece confirmed Europe’s growing political instability, and a four-fold rise in oil prices in the mid-1970s precipitated a world recession.

The balance of forces between the classes had altered so drastically that the capitalists had lost morale. In France, out of the blue, in a country where only three million workers were even organised, suddenly ten million workers were occupying their workplaces and decking them with red flags, while the President fled the country, muttering “the game’s up!” In Portugal a few years later, when bank workers occupied their banks and forced through their nationalisation, The Times calmly announced: “capitalism is dead in Portugal”. At around the same time, the West German Chancellor resigned his post, gloomily predicting communism or fascism throughout Europe within twenty years.

After its defeat in Vietnam, the USA avoided any major overseas military intervention for almost two decades. It resorted to CIA subterfuge to destabilise regimes which threatened its interests such as Allende’s in Chile and the Sandinistas’ in Nicaragua. It was not until the downfall of Stalinism that US imperialism once again reasserted its crushing military superiority in direct military attacks on Serbia, Afghanistan and Iraq. Nevertheless, overall American economic influence in the ex-colonial world is waning. The inability of America to achieve its military objectives in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite its overwhelming superiority of fire-power, is a striking reflection of this changed relationship of forces – as is, even more spectacularly, its new powerlessness to enforce its will decisively in its very own “back yard”, Latin America.

The collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in 1989-90 gave a new and unexpected lease of life to capitalism. State economic planning had successfully laid the foundations for
industrial development in these countries; but once the economy had become more sophisticated the bureaucracy was turning from a relative brake on further development, to an absolute obstacle.

When workers revolted in Hungary in 1956, Czechoslovakia in 1968, and Poland in 1970, they were defending their common stake in a system of state ownership against bureaucratic wastage, corruption and mismanagement. Stalinism faced the real threat of overthrow by a workers’ political revolution to wrest control of their state from its sticky fingers. However, by the 1980s a combination of bureaucratic sclerosis and stagnation at home, a new economic impetus in the West due to the technological revolution, and higher living standards in neighbouring countries, had created illusions in capitalism amongst the people of Eastern Europe. Large swathes of these nationalised economies were dismantled and privatised in a wholesale looting by the bureaucracy, which thereby converted itself into a capitalist class. New markets opened up, former eastern bloc countries joined the European Community, and cheap labour boosted profits as migrant workers from Eastern Europe arrived in the west. Capitalism seemed vindicated, and for one brief moment of euphoria looked forward to a new dawn.

THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

The collapse of Lehman Brothers marked the beginning of a new period of capitalist crisis

Though the upswing since the Second World War was punctuated by sharp but brief recessions in 1974-5, 1980-1 and 1990-1, the developed countries had enjoyed decades of relative stability. Even in the last twenty years, a serious slump had been avoided, first by massive arms expenditure, then by the real economic development of the info-technological revolution, and finally by a massive expansion of personal, state and corporate credit, lubricated still further by a range of ingenious speculative financial instruments. Capitalism could defy the law of gravity for just so long, however; now it is paying the price.

It is true that part of the economic expansion that preceded this crisis was due to expanded production, which in turn was made possible by such factors as the opening up of new markets in the former Stalinist countries as well as the development of new technologies such as high-tech. However, a central driving force of this boom was the massive development of credit. This reflects the increased dominance of finance capital over industrial capital. In the United States, for instance, manufacturing fell from 29% of GDP in 1950 to 12% in 2005. In this period, “financial services” grew from 10.9% to 20.4%, and the financial sector’s share of total corporate profits grew from under 10% to 50%.

From around the year 2000, the influx of money from the booming Asian economies, and especially the trillions of dollars cascading into US banks from China, provided the impetus to the ballooning of financial speculation. Capital has to find a niche in profitable investment, and following successive bubbles in share prices, currency speculation, privatisation scams, dot-com companies, and the property market, came the sub-prime racket. Against the background of a seemingly unstoppable 60-year boom in US house prices, toxic and irredeemable loans were desperately promoted, then repackaged together with sounder loans and sold on in a pass-the-parcel party game as so-called “collateralised debt obligations”, all dutifully guaranteed by tame notaries as AAA credit ratings. The profits raked in from these successive CDO sales were further invested in increasingly obscure derivative gambles, in an orgy of profiteering which amounted to a vast global pyramid scam. When inflation began to take off again – due among other factors to a massive hike in oil prices (another consequence of China’s industrial boom) – the whole game began to unravel. Interest rates rose, a wave of defaults on mortgages followed, and US house prices started to free-fall at an annual rate of 20-30%. The value of financial assets rotted, there was a sudden freeze on inter-bank
lending, and the “credit crunch” followed. The party was over.

A fundamental factor in this process was the increased use of “derivatives”. This form of speculation got a tremendous boost with the collapse of the Bretton Woods accord. In the context of a far less stable world currency climate, massive speculation developed around betting on changes in currencies’ values. From there, derivative speculation went to betting on fluctuations in interest rates (when this became a chief tool of the US central bank), in commodity prices, and even on debt itself. The tendency towards lower profit rates in manufacturing further drove increased investment in financial speculation, as did the increased indebtedness of all sectors of society.

The crisis is first and foremost a crisis of US capitalism, which is no longer an industrial powerhouse but maintains its economic dominance merely as the world’s prime consumer, temporarily sheltered from collapse only by the anachronistic survival of the dollar as the world’s reserve currency. The imminent collapse in the value of the dollar will leave the USA’s power dependent solely on its military superiority. Yet no nation can maintain supremacy by military might alone. The USA is falling under a growing threat from its rivals, notably China. A graphic token of its humiliation was the surprise terror raid of 9/11/01, a daring gesture of futile defiance made on behalf of a dissident clique of Arab oil sheikhs, using suicide tactics – a variant of the classic weapon wielded by a weaker adversary. The wars on Afghanistan, Iraq and many more to come, represent oil and resource wars in which the fading super-power is exploiting its colossal military advantage while it can, to prop up an economic power it can no longer sustain by industrial might.

The current economic crisis was foreshadowed by previous shocks in major sectors of the world economy. The counter-revolution in the former Soviet Union had brought draconian cuts in living standards – more drastic even than those in Chile under Pinochet. Life expectancy dropped sharply, the population fell by several millions, half the population suffered a drop in living standards to below the poverty line and a quarter faced “desperate poverty”. Ever since 1990, Japan has suffered a prolonged recession comparable to that of the 1930s, due like the current world crisis to a previous orgy of financial speculation based on booming property prices. Then in 1998 the currencies of the booming economies of South-East Asia were hit by massive speculative attacks, and $600 billion were wiped off share prices. The warning signs were clear.

Countries in every continent have been bankrupted by this crisis, including Iceland, Latvia, Ireland, Hungary, Ukraine, Turkey, South Korea and others. The economic situation in Eastern Europe has been compared to the 1998 Asian crisis. Recent IMF loans are equivalent to around a staggering half of GDP in Latvia, Hungary and other countries in the region. In some cases, IMF demands for budget cuts have been resisted. In these countries, capitalism has weak social and political roots, and there must surely be a growing nostalgia for the old regimes, with their record of relatively full employment, cheap rents and low subsidised food prices.

Capitalist governments are taking desperate, drastic and contradictory steps in their search for a way out of the crisis. They have reacted with panic to the financial crisis, lurching from “sound” monetary probity to Keynesian deficit financing, and even resorting to “quantitative easing” (a euphemism for the outright manufacture of counterfeit money, a debasement of the currency with all its concomitant risks of future hyper-inflation). So far, a total of some £16 trillion – the equivalent of around £2,300 for each man, woman and child on the planet – has been spent on the recent bailouts and partial nationalisation of the banks, insurance companies and the car industry.

Today, there is some call for reregulating finance capital, and inevitably some new token regulations will be imposed. However, under lax and corrupt supervision, finance capital will have no difficulty in devising one scheme after another to escape, avoid or undermine such regulations.

The delusion that such measures might work is an indication of their despair. Capitalist economies are already over-burdened with “delinquent” debt. While monetarism – balancing the books on government spending – will only lead to massive
unemployment and further collapse of demand, deficit financing cannot overcome the fundamental contradictions of the system, and runs the added risk of stoking future inflation. Meanwhile there is an inexorable tendency towards protectionism, competitive devaluations and even the possible threat of a break-up of the Euro.

THE COMING REVOLUTION

The current economic crisis brings back on to the agenda the prospect of revolution and counter-revolution. The period which is opening up will be protracted; there will be ebbs and flows, setbacks and outright defeats. The workers will not come into struggle immediately seeking revolution. There will be despair, confusion, and illusions in reformism, religious demagogy, populism, nationalism and – most dangerous of all – racism and xenophobia. However, there will also be a resurgence of socialist ideas, which will become increasingly, in Lenin’s words, a “material force” that will “grip the minds of the millions”.

Even the British Tory commentator Max Hastings has concluded: “It will be strange if voices of the left do not find audiences such as they have not known for 30 years... There is speculation about a rise of rightwing extremism. But it will be even more surprising if a new left does not sooner or later present a challenge for power in Britain and other democracies.”

It is two or three generations since the last such crisis. That brought the classes into direct confrontation. The failure to overthrow the rule of capital and introduce a rationally planned socialist system brought a return in the mid-twentieth century to scenes hardly witnessed since the Middle Ages: starvation, homelessness, mass hysteria, civil war, genocide, the destruction of cities, the killing of tens of millions, concentration camps, gas chambers, nuclear bombs, barbarism.

The only way to avoid a recurrence of such a nightmare, resulting quite possibly this time in the terminal destruction of human society itself, is to reorganize society on the basis of a rational administration of resources and a harnessing of humankind’s productive potential.

The battles of the 1930s came after almost two decades of revolutionary upsurges, and already in the wake of some defeats, notably in Italy. Nevertheless the working class was organised, mobilised and even in some cases armed. It had a strong tradition, a recent memory of revolution, a class loyalty to proletarian organizations, and a socialist consciousness.

There was also a fatal negative aspect to this: a misplaced loyalty to leaders who had a conscious interest in betraying their cause – not only the caste of reformist and trade-union paid officials who lived off their role mediating between the classes, but above all the political mouthpieces of the newly crystallised caste of Stalinist bureaucrats in Russia. This bureaucratic ruling caste had come to power on the basis of the isolation of the revolution to a country still mired in barbaric backwardness. It drew its sustenance from the privileges of the new Soviet state, and was rapidly institutionalising what began as catastrophic political blunders – both of opportunism and ultra-left adventurism – into calculated treachery. It was ultimately their conscious betrayal that doomed the workers to defeat.

The eclipse of Stalinism offers a clean slate to socialists to win fresh layers. Not only has the maievolent insidious force that derailed the movement in the 1930s gone forever; the baleful association of a state-owned planned economy with monstrous corruption and repression is no longer a significant factor complicating the argument for socialism.

The new crisis today finds the working class in its former strongholds politically disarmed. Its earlier traditional socialist outlook and basic class consciousness have ebbed, due to a number of factors. The most immediate of these was the collapse of the former Stalinist states, which for all their more repugnant aspects, nevertheless had still held out some fading hope of an alternative future. Other causes were the decline of formerly formidable trade unions in the by now rapidly deindustrialising countries; the erosion of industrial communities in their traditional strongholds; the prolonged upswing and development of the new technology; the new-found triumphalism of the
capitalists; and the abandonment by former “left” as well as right-wing reformists of even the pre-
tence of socialist aspirations.

The need for trade unions, the power of the strike, the culture of class solidarity, and the obso-
cence of capitalism were most strikingly obvious within the old great concentrations of industrial manufacturing workers. What remains today of 150 years of socialist tradition in the West is little more than a fading memory among diminishing circles within the older generation. In the old homeland of the proletariat, many workers today are far less conscious than previously of their role, their tasks or even their class identity. However, whether or not they are aware of it yet, they re-
main proletarians, living on the daily sale of their labour-power – probably a greater proportion than ever before – who produce on a still more collective scale than any workers in the past. In the struggle to defend themselves against the capitalists’ attacks on their rights and livelihoods, they will have no alternative but to fight back collect-
ively, and to learn afresh on the picket line the lessons of solidarity. It will take the experience of the coming struggles to restore a proletarian con-
sciousness among these layers.

However, old traditions die hard. In Britain, there have been strikes of firemen, railway workers, civil servants, teachers, etc. The public sector workers have retained the innate class consciousness, soli-
darity and loyalty that were formed over decades of struggle in the vast concentrations of produc-
tive industrial labour of the past.

Many new factors have strengthened the workers’ cohesion. There has been a huge growth in the size and specific weight of the proletariat every-
where, most spectacularly in many of the former colonial countries, and a remorseless shrinkage in the petit-bourgeoisie, in the wake of monopolisa-
tion and the concentration of production in the hands of the super-corporations. The working class is far better educated than previously. Mass communications and the “information revolution” have made the present generation of working people incomparably better informed than their parents and grandparents. The world has drawn together and an international consciousness has arisen that would have been inconceivable before.

All these factors have objectively strengthened the proletariat worldwide. Taken together, they have created a cultural climate which drastically tilts the relative balance of forces in society. Even in a pe-
riod of relative quiescence in terms of days lost in strikes compared to the late 1970s, it is this new cultural awareness – a mood to which capitalists themselves have had to pay homage in pledges of fair trade, ethical banking, etc. – that has become an unquantifiable factor standing in the way of the capitalists’ resolve to drive down living standards.

What is more, since the battles of the 1930s there has been a social transformation: a mass democ-
ratic uprising of all the formerly super-oppressed strata of society – above all the women, who have risen to their feet and forever shaken off their his-
torically subservient role, and mobilised to form sometimes the most militant contingents at the forefront of working-class struggles. Ethnic minori-
ties and native indigenous peoples too have stood up to demand their rights, largely inspired by the magnificent black revolt of the 1950s and 1960s in the US, which transformed consciousness world-
wide. The working class in the former industrial-
ised countries has become internationalised by decades of immigration, with workers from the Caribbean and the Indian sub-continent working alongside indigenous workers in Britain, Mexicans in the USA, North Africans in France, Turks in Ger-
many, East Europeans throughout Western Europe, etc. The counter-revolution today will have little chance of bolstering its resources by recruiting “colonial” reserves as its foot-soldiers, as Franco used the Moors in the Spanish civil war.

In these conditions, the sheer persuasive power of reality itself has elevated mass awareness of cor-
porate rule. The incredible range of mass commu-
nication today, through the internet, instant 24-
hour news channels, mobile phone technology, etc., has enormously accelerated this process. There is a clarity and awareness throughout soci-
ety today beyond comparison with the past; to a large extent, too, an evaporation of illusions in the viability of gradual reforms, middle ways or na-
tional solutions. Ordinary people have far better access to information and vastly superior means of communication than previously – a fact that even totalitarian governments find hard to control.
Already around the turn of the millennium, this new awareness was manifested in an unprecedented international movement of anti-capitalist protest, with thousands of young activists crossing national frontiers and encircling the secret conclave of world capitalist leaders in Seattle, Prague, Genoa... This spontaneous eruption of inchoate protest was enough to alarm the ruling class, and in Genoa exemplary and ferocious brutality was meted out to demonstrators.

The World Bank predicts that the credit crunch will cause a surge of up to 2.8 million more babies to die between now and 2015, and notes that falls in GDP lead to much greater increases in female than male infant mortality. Other sources, including OXFAM, record the shocking facts that almost 70% of the world’s poor are women; that two-thirds of the world’s illiterate adults are women; that violence against women is the biggest cause of death and disability among women aged 15-44; that women earn just over half what men earn, and that, even in the UK, women are still paid nearly 20% less than men for the same or equivalent work.

The most dangerous event in human life is that of giving birth. Maternal death should be extremely rare, but the neglect of health services and the inaccessibility of such services to many women make such deaths a commonplace in many countries. The legacy of the neo-cons in many countries is the destruction of modern health services. In these circumstances the old network of traditional midwives has been eliminated and modern medicine closed to the women, with nothing to replace it.

Women face double discrimination, as workers and as domestic labour and childbearers. Most women are still expected to raise children and care for sick and elderly relatives when they become cash-earners.

Waves of repression have developed in some Islamic countries, culminating in the sadistic and misogynistic policies of the Taliban, masquerading as orthodox religious injunctions. All religious restrictions on dress or lifestyle represent an attack on democratic rights. Repression of women has always been an instrument of class oppression. The deliberate use of rape as a tool of war in Africa and the Balkans in recent decades is one horrific example. Historically waves of repression have met waves of resistance, some successful, others defeated. The resistance of the women of Pakistan is wonderful to behold and deserving of every woman’s full support. Venezuela has also seen women ready for struggle.

WOMEN’S STRUGGLES

Women account for between 60-80% of the export manufacturing workforce in developing countries. More than half of the people living on a dollar a day or less are women. Women face limited recognition as workers, so even the minimum labour laws are not applied to them. The textile and other industries employing women across the globe rely on low pay, super-exploitation and a deliberate policy of driving their workforce to burn out within a few years.
History shows that women have been at the forefront of the struggle for a better life for themselves and, crucially, their families, and their struggles should never be consigned to a footnote in the struggle. Women have played roles in all the great revolutions from the 17th to the 20th centuries, although their role is hidden from most written history.

The Massachusetts textile workers’ struggle of the nineteenth century was one of the earliest and most critical struggles of US workers. Later in the 19th century, the work of Mother Jones in unionising the miners of the USA included her imprisonment at the age of 90. In Britain the great explosion of the unskilled was presaged by actions by the match workers and other female factory workers. Marxists were deeply involved in the organisation of working women at a time when conventional trade unionism could see no use for these desperately exploited workers. The working class women’s campaign for the vote linked into the need to unionise workers and unionised workers in turn played a major role in the suffrage campaign. Women at Fords in the 1960s fought a long and bitter struggle for equal pay at work and won. Later, in the 1970s, the British Asian women at Grunwick were the first of a wave of union militancy.

Women play a significant role in community organisations that generally persist even after the end of industrial/trade union organisations. Such women will often challenge capitalism because they see no future for themselves, their families, or their communities in the current system.

The new awareness of women’s rights both in the workplace and in society generally has changed the balance of forces decisively.

**GLOBALISATION**

Globalisation represents the fullest possible realisation -- to the nth degree, a degree beyond contemplation even by its authors -- of the processes brilliantly expounded in The Communist Manifesto in 1848. It is chemically distilled capitalism; a vindication of Marxism. And yet it creates unforeseen consequences. A massive new virgin proletariat is awakening in distant continents that are far removed from the centres of capitalist power. Meanwhile, capital is concentrated as never before, with a ruling class never before so fiendishly armed, technologically and militarily, resting socially upon a population largely consisting of clerical and retail workers servicing its comforts.

The economic upswing of the last two decades was partially due to the out-sourcing of production to the former colonial world. The productive industrial hard core of the proletariat has largely disappeared in the traditional metropolitan countries, and is now concentrated more and more in Latin America, Asia and China. This helped to undermine the wages of workers in the industrialised countries of the west. Nevertheless it also had the effect of drawing millions of workers into capitalist production processes and the world economy for the first time. Millions of people have been sucked from villages and small-scale production into the labour force of the multinationals. A huge proletariat has been developed in countries such as China, India and Brazil.

There has been a haemorrhage of manufacturing jobs from their traditional locations. In 2007 the number of manufacturing jobs in Britain fell below the corresponding figure for 1848! In the USA, the manufacturing sector lost more than three million jobs between 1998 and 2003. In 1950, a third of the US labour force worked in manufacturing; now the figure is 12.5% at most, and by some estimates 10%. In the UK, trade unionism survives for the moment mostly within a rapidly shrinking public sector. The days when giant industrial factories were run by shop stewards’ committees are long gone.

In 2005 the expansion of steel production in China was greater than the total steel production of the
USA. Since China opened its gates to foreign direct investment, an ever growing flood of capital has been sucked in by the lure of a rare combination of limitless reserves of virtual slave labour, and the benefits inherited from decades of state planning, which – though wasteful and corrupt – has provided a relatively streamlined infrastructure, and literacy rates closer, at 80%, to those of the West.

The heavy battalions of the industrial working class are no longer to be found for the most part in their traditional strongholds, but on virgin soil. There has been a massive proletarianisation of the formerly underdeveloped world and an entry into the world labour market of the workers of the former Stalinist states. There are now 1.47 billion wage workers in India, China and Eastern Europe, plus another billion in the very least developed countries, to be added to the 460 million workers in the traditional “developed” world. In other words: of the world’s three billion wage workers, for every one worker in the West, there are now five based in China, India, Russia, Latin America, South-East Asia, etc.

The combination of industrialisation in the South (the former colonial countries) with privatisation in the East (the former Stalinist states) has doubled the size of the global working class, to the extent that today, for the first time ever, it represents a majority of the world population.

Moreover, those factors which have formerly divided the working class are fast receding. There is an inexorable tendency towards a levelling of the income differentials in living standards. The same process which created an independent and often militant working class in South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and Thailand is now rekindling the heroic labour traditions of China, India, Eastern Europe and Latin America. At the same time, in the West, an insidious process of casualisation, exploitation of migrant workers, and resort to agency labour have drastically cut wages, rights and conditions for workers. Automation has cut the labour force so thin that for many companies, distribution and logistical costs are now higher than manufacturing costs, while the falling value of the dollar, and during the recession, the falling price of oil, change the relative costs of outsourcing and relocation.

The relocation of the industrial proletariat to new territories has fundamentally changed the international outlook.

The old tripartite division of the world no longer exists. The old "metropolitan" countries are no longer necessarily the theatre of world history. For the first time in history, there is now a truly global working class. The industrial proletariat is taking root throughout entire new continents. In Latin America we see an entire sub-continent in revolt, and in East Asia and China the beginning of what will surely become a tidal wave of trade unionism which could transform the outlook worldwide. It is there that we will find the birthplace of the future International.

Trotsky explained the political effects of the rapid transformation in the consciousness of people suddenly whisked forward several centuries from medieval agricultural conditions to modern industrial production: “In Russia the proletariat did not arise gradually through the ages, carrying with itself the burden of the past as in England, but in leaps involving sharp changes of environment, ties, relations, and a sharp break with the past. It is just this fact – combined with the concentrated oppressions of Tsarism – that made the Russian workers hospitable to the boldest conclusions of revolutionary thought – just as the backward industries were hospitable to the last word in capitalist organisation.”

Just as in Russia it was peasants transplanted from the technology of the medieval wooden plough to the futuristic factories of the multinationals who carried through the revolution, so too now it is the Chinese and other workers who will be sharply radicalised. Already in 2005 – before the sudden drop in the growth rate – there were 90,000 officially designated “public order disturbances” in China. This figure is likely to be multiplied many times over as workers are laid off and wages cut.

In a sense, it is in the factories of China, and their nascent underground trade unions, that the future salvation of humankind is being forged right now. They will need common mobilisation with their fellow workers internationally, to create new bonds of solidarity stretching between assembly
line workers in China, software engineers in India, service workers in Europe, financial workers in New York, etc. Workers in the old industrial countries will have a crucial part to play. It will be the task of those who embody the old labour traditions in the West to promote class solidarity with the new proletariat and share with it a century of rich experience across a vast geographical and cultural chasm.

The new factories in China have created a new proletariat

**EUROPE**

A foreshadowing of full-blown globalisation took place in Europe, starting at the end of the 1950s. European capitalisms, having twice engaged in internecine warfare, and having twice nearly lost power to the working class as a result, chose continentalisation as a new way of overcoming the straitjacket of their national boundaries restricting the need for expansion. The European Economic Community steadily removed tariffs and other barriers to the exchange of goods and services amongst six major European powers following 1958, and within fifteen years this free trade zone had expanded to include Britain, Scandinavia, Greece and the Iberian Peninsula. This organisation, coming to fruition during a major organic upswing of the world economy, facilitated the rapid improvement of the infrastructures of its members even before the collapse of the Stalinist bloc at the beginning of the 1990s. Continental legislation was unified in many areas, border controls were completely abolished in the central area and the establishment of a single currency eased travel and exchange. The GDPs and also the standard of living of the masses in the EU countries rose sharply during the two decades of the 1980s and 1990s.

Seizing a unique historical opportunity with the collapse of the Soviet Union and its dependencies, capitalists in the EU states swooped on the prone and bleeding bodies of the economies of Poland, Hungary, East Germany, etc., and were able enormously to increase their turnover and profits by exporting finished goods. This economic counter-revolution followed the democratic political counter-revolutions, often within a few months. Not only did eastern Europe provide new markets for goods, it also provided new opportunities for western capitalism to export manufacturing plant itself, by taking over or completely replacing bankrupt industries with branches of their own firms, thereby throwing thousands out of work in the western EU member states. In addition, the unemployed and low-paid workers in eastern countries supplied a ready army of cheap labour to undercut wage levels in the west. If the boom had been able to continue, the discrepancies in wage and price levels could have been equalised in the normal course of trade, but the collapse of the boom cut across this process.

At first, the new eastern European members were sucked into the orbit of capitalism just as the cheap and easy credit boom was in full swing and a rapid, albeit unstable, expansion began, temporarily consolidating the political support of the masses for the new capitalist system. But the weakest of the eastern European countries joined the EU in 2007, at the beginning of the end of this boom, and of all the EU member states it has been the economies of the ex-Stalinist countries which have suffered most from the collapse of the credit market. The end of the credit boom also exposed the structural weaknesses in southern European states, with their low productivity and general inefficiency. The EU’s rules on state indebtedness have had to be suspended for the duration of the credit crunch, and the simultaneous character of the economic recession across the whole EU has even raised the question of whether the Euro currency can be maintained across all its members. But far from any proposals to leave the EU or the Euro zone, new states such as Poland and Croatia and even Turkey are clamouring to join, hoping for continental support during the severe crisis. Jingo-
ism and a certain xenophobia, and, more importantly, the demands of the financial wing of the capitalists, will probably politically prevent the UK from applying to join the Euro zone, as that would mean the end of the privileged role of the City of London in world financial markets; but such a step would be logical for the manufacturing wing of the capitalist class. There is no reason to suppose that the EU must necessarily fall apart into its component parts during this severe recession, although the weakest members may be suspended if their drag on recovery is seen as excessive. However, this would be a risky step for the EU capitalists to take, knowing that any national collapse – with its accompanying risks of hyperinflation, emigration and other symptoms – could ignite or accelerate revolt inside the EU itself.

For the movement of the working class, the continentalisation of Europe has had both positive and negative aspects. The chain of crises affecting the car industry and its dependent component subsidiaries has shown hundreds of thousands of industrial workers how closely the work processes are internationally knit together. A Europe-wide day of action for the first time surrounding the demise of General Motors in Europe presages serious continental-wide union militancy for the future. The internationalisation of capital has been creating not only commodities and services, but also its own gravediggers.

**IS THERE A WAY OUT?**

The current crisis is much deeper and probably much longer than many capitalist economists had predicted at its outset. These are dangerous times for capitalism. Nevertheless, it is interesting to consider capitalist economists’ conjectures on the possible technological innovations that could feed the next upswing, because, if the working class does not take power, then over blood and bones – and barring a massive environmental breakdown – capitalism will find a means of reviving itself.

Within monopoly capitalism, prices are manipulated by regulation of production. The OPEC oil-producing states meet regularly to set oil prices at levels that will maximise their profits, often at painful human cost. With a socialist plan of production, the full utilisation of the productive capacity of modern technology and the full use of all the skills and inventiveness of the working class can vastly increase levels of output for all socially useful sectors of the economy. This could be accompanied by a progressive reduction in working hours as productivity rises. The impasse faced by capitalism underlines again the need for a socialist plan of production.

For capitalism there is a paradox. Increasing the productivity of labour is the point of capitalist innovation. Yet, by definition, most such changes entail an increase in the organic composition of capital: the ratio of investment in constant capital (technology and other fixed assets) compared to variable capital (living labour). As the proportion of capital invested in labour declines in the system as a whole, profit rates tend to fall. During an economic upswing, it is possible to counteract this trend temporarily, especially for those companies which gain a bigger share of the market. But in a recession it usually hits back with a vengeance.

Capitalism has now reached the point where, at least in some areas of the economy, productivity is so advanced that its products are effectively available free of charge. This is the case with much of the music industry, and it is becoming so with computer software. Recorded music that was a big source of profits from the 1950s to the 1990s is available online at no cost. Within the computer industry, some products are now given away, partly a reflection of fierce competition but also an indication of the huge fall in cost per item as a result of burgeoning technological progress.

Even if the capitalists were successful in finding alternative sources of energy, this too would only contribute to the system’s downfall. Capitalist economists are talking about a “green revolution”. They are considering the possible market in fitting solar panels on buildings across whole continents, installing wind turbines, developing “environmentally friendly” forms of transport. Their commitment is of course to maintaining stability and finding new ways of making profits, not saving the planet. Mass production of such new technology would, of course, create a big crisis for the oil and motor industry, but it could create a boom in some new areas of capitalist investment.
Yet the long term implications of such innovation would be a massive decline in company profits, because most energy, once the initial investment had been made, would become effectively free from any further input of labour, apart from minimal maintenance. So, after it had burned itself out, even a new capitalist boom would make the world even more “rotten ripe” for socialism.

AFRICA

In their desperate search for solutions to the economic crisis, some Western economists have pointed to Africa as an untapped market.

They have overlooked the fact that the recent economic expansion of China was facilitated by half a century of state ownership and planning. For all the instability, wastage and corruption associated with the Stalinist bureaucracy, it was this crucial factor which provided the infrastructure and level of education needed for capitalism to take root. Without a comparable scale of state investment into the necessary infrastructure, in terms of power supply, transport and communications, not even India will be able to sustain its recent impressive growth rates or live up to the projections of capitalist economists as a potential expanding market.

This applies still more to Africa. It is a continent largely of household-based agrarian economies with limited long-distance trade, colonially imposed (and neo-liberal IMF-reinforced) cash-crop production for export and mineral extraction, with limited industrialization (and even a recent deindustrialisation), tiny domestic markets, largely mono-commodity exports, a collapsing infrastructure, and a poorly trained workforce. Brain-drain and labour migration exert further strains on resources. There is abject poverty, which has increased from 11% of the population in 1960 to some 50% at present: 340 million people live on less than $1-25 a day.

Is it possible that “pump priming” aid could somehow raise African living standards on a scale sufficient to create mass markets commensurate with the needs of twenty-first century capitalist production?

The history of the economic relations between the imperialist powers of the west and Africa provides little grounds for optimism. From the time of the Atlantic slave trade, and through its twentieth-century colonization by European powers, the resources of Africa have been looted for the benefit of the rich in Europe. The decolonisation of Africa was a huge and liberating event for its people, but it has not stemmed this pattern of plunder. Today the wealth of the world’s richest fifteen people exceeds the total production (GDP) of sub-Saharan Africa! The gross national product of sub-Saharan Africa (excluding South Africa), a total of 450 million people, is about equal to that of Belgium.

Western imperialism boasts of the $580 billion of ‘aid’ that Africa has received between 1960 and 2006; but despite that most of the economies of Africa during much of that period have stagnated or regressed, because of continued looting. Onerous debt service payments to the West may have exceeded by three times the amount of ‘aid’ that was given. In addition (until the recent very temporary commodities boom, which has now already collapsed) the terms of trade (the cost of manufactured goods versus the cost of primary commodities which are Africa’s principal exports) have been weighted against Africa, draining huge surpluses from the continent to the imperialist powers. In 2006, even the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development stated that “In the case of Africa various studies have shown that since the early 1980s aid has barely compensated for losses resulting from the decline in the terms of trade, let alone meeting the resource needs for rapid and sustained growth.” At the same time, protectionist agricultural subsidies in the imperialist countries

South African workers on the march
cost Africa, it is estimated, some $500 billion a year in lost exports. The EU subsidy for a cow is $913 – nearly twice the average income per head in sub-Saharan African ($490).

Undoubtedly, with a socialist plan of production allowing full employment, education and the development of a high-skills economy, there is enormous potential for raising productivity, so that Africans could not only enjoy decent living standards but also contribute to world growth. The current statistics are a devastating indictment of the waste of human resources created by the free market. Unemployment was already shockingly high for many African countries even during the boom years. Now it is horrific: Angola (70%), Liberia (80%), Lesotho (50%), Senegal (40%), Somalia (47%), Zimbabwe (70%). Women are the main victims. Many (some 22) countries are scarred by past or present massacres, civil wars and rebellions. The refugee problem is chronic in the continent.

In the past, aid programmes were mostly directed to bolstering the private sector. The G20 meeting in April 2009, floundering about trying to find sound-bite “solutions”, promised $50 billion additional assistance to the poorest countries in the world (mainly in Africa). Even if this materializes at all, it is likely to be phased over a period of 2-3 years and may well consist of loans, not grants. The bulk of it is to be administered by the IMF, notorious for imposing onerous neo-liberal conditions. From an economic point of view, such remedies may well turn out to be little more that a utopian dream.

What of the political consequences? In Africa, state systems are fragile, a patchwork of weak dictatorships and weak nominal democracies. Some (e.g. Somalia) have broken down completely. State corruption is endemic and embezzlement rife. All this is the product of the capitalist system. An aid programme on a large enough scale to make a significant economic difference in the present juncture would involve huge risks for the capitalist class.

Economic development would enlarge and embolden the African proletariat. Even as a result of the puny and inadequate economic development of the post-war period, a significant proportion of the population now work in industry. Out of a population of some 940 million, Africa now has 130 million non-agricultural workers, or 13.87% of the population. The social composition of the continent is thus more heavily weighted towards the working class than was Russia on the eve of the revolution in 1917. In Nigeria, the figure is 18%, Egypt 20%, and South Africa 32%. In these countries there are mighty concentrations of industrial workers who would feel their strength returning as soon as economic expansion got going. Aid that leads to economic development could therefore just as easily destabilise as consolidate the fragile regimes of the capitalist class on this continent.

Against a background of chronic food shortages and incipient mass starvation, imposed by soaring food and energy prices, there is already resistance to global imperialism. In 2007 there were food riots in Algeria, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Egypt, and Tunisia. There were big strikes in Egypt, Guinea, Zambia and South Africa – an indication of the role that the African working class will play in the coming global revolution.

**LATIN AMERICA**

The most striking feature of Latin America today is the spectacular rebirth of the traditional radicalism of the Latin American workers and peasants. From Guatemala to Argentina, a series of “left” regimes have come to power on populist programs. Among other things, in some cases these regimes also represent the increased militancy of the indigenous peoples. Without a mass mobilisation from below, these regimes cannot go on to overthrow capitalism, but the continental-wide movement of the downtrodden of a continent that not long ago was an unbroken chain of brutal dictatorships indicates a massive upsurge of renewed militancy and defiance.

Foremost among such regimes today is that of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela. Having risen to power without a clear class base, Chávez appears to be seeking to gain a more solid base within the Venezuelan working class, through the building of the United Socialist Party of Venezuela. It is not clear if he will succeed in doing this, or if this party will get
bogged down in bureaucratism. In any case, Chávez is seeking to build Venezuela as a regional power, based in part on its oil wealth.

At the same time, the crisis of US capitalism is affecting Latin America in other ways too. The social crisis in the US continues to fuel the demand for drugs, including heroin and cocaine. This extremely profitable US market is driving the continued growth of the drug gangs in Latin America, especially in Mexico. There, some entire states are reported to be under the drug gangs’ control, and these gangs have people in the highest places at the national level of government. In fact, some US analysts are warning that Mexico could become the next “failed state”.

It is these gangs – rogue capitalists, in reality – coupled with the massive poverty in Latin America, which are giving the countries of Latin America the highest murder rates in the world. Neither the Latin American capitalist class nor world imperialism will have any more success in eradicating this crisis than it has in the past. What will be required is a renewed movement of the powerful Latin American working class – a class that has been enormously strengthened in recent decades.

FRANCE

Of all the old imperialist countries, it is perhaps France which seems to be closest to a revolutionary crisis. But one should beware of the theory that France is a “special case”, bandied about by so many European journalists and French politicians. They would have you believe that France is the last European country where strikes are still frequent, and even boast in a nationalist manner about France’s combative, republican spirit. The current crisis has put an end to any idea of a French ‘special case’ of class struggle. After all, it’s not France but Greece where mass demonstrations turned into riots, and it wasn’t France but Iceland where a government was recently overthrown after mass protests on the streets.

Before all of this, France had seen several strike waves, in 1995, 2003 and 2006, which staved off government attacks on earlier social gains, and slightly and temporarily softened the blow of the crisis for the working class. However, since the onset of mass unemployment, it is new global politi-
cal and economic conditions which are determining the class struggle in France.

The particular character of France, especially in comparison with Britain or the USA, is the way the class struggle takes on a political aspect, and the importance of constitutional questions concerning the state itself. Some pages from Marx’s *The Class Struggle in France* (1849) on bonapartism pack their punches with renewed impact today with the regime of the Fifth Republic – the product of a coup in 1958 – and in particular with Sarkozy. The fact that the power of capital is concentrated in the person of what is effectively a monarch (a characteristic which it shares with the USA, but which differs from it in its much weaker parliamentary and judicial powers and its centralisation of the state apparatus) is at the same time a trap for the working class following every presidential election, and a factor which serves to concentrate the class struggle against the summit of power between elections – especially at the present time.

Conditions are such that if the parties emerging from the movement of the workers, or even any single one of them, were to demand a united struggle to bring down Sarkozy, force immediate elections, and form a democratic government representing the workers, this would open such opportunities for the working class that their struggles would swiftly be brought to a successful conclusion. But the fact is that none of the parties has put forward such a policy: not the traditional parties the Socialist Party, Communist Party or the Left Party (Parti de Gauche) which emerged from it, nor the three historic Trotskyist tendencies – the New Anticapitalist Party (NPA – successor to the former LCR), the Independent Workers’ Party (POI), nor Workers’ Struggle (Lutte Ouvriere). It is this very question of power that is taboo to all of them, even though the strikers, demonstrators, the youth and many activists pose it every day. At the same time, the TU leaders organise great days of struggle at widely spaced intervals, resisting pressure to come together against the government, and collaborate with Sarkozy’s and the bosses’ plans for lay-offs and attacks on welfare and social services.

But there is still a chance right now for revolutionaries to build an organisation both with rank-and-file workers and with the youth, acting together with activists from the left parties. Such an organisation could gradually unite them in this common goal, which is nothing other than a concrete perspective of socialist revolution in the form of preparation for a victorious confrontation with Sarkozy.

In this context two particular points should be emphasised:

French Imperialism is on the retreat and in difficulty, surviving by performing a balancing act between Germany on the one hand and the EU and the UK on the other. But its real presence, especially in Africa, remains extremely risky and potentially murderous, as shown in 1994 by the genocide in Ruanda which it provoked. Every defeat for French Imperialism in these countries, as well as in the Antilles or the popular struggle of the Guadeloupian people – each of them linked to the class struggle in France – brings us back to the question of independence for these last of the French colonies, something which will always benefit the working class. No anti-American demagogy on the part of the government should hold back revolutionaries in France from campaigning for such objectives.

Another point: another aspect of the idea of France as a 'special case' has for a long time been the presence of a mass fascist party with considerable electoral support: the 'Front National'. Its present decline can be explained on the one hand by the absolute hostility to the FN on the part of the majority of the youth and of large sections (but not all) of the working class, and, on the other, by the absorption of the majority of its electorate and
political apparatus in Sarkozy’s efforts to renew the Fifth Republic through enhanced authoritari-
anism. But the ruling class and the French state cannot manage without provocations and aggres-
sive actions of a pre-fascist nature, which could lead to real fascist movements. The propaganda of
the old FN was anti-Arab, but there are now attempts to bring fascists together around other is-
Semitism, hoping thereby to attract disorientated sections of the youth of Arab or African descent (the Dieudonné-Soral-Gouasmi list for the EU elections). These people have already understood the new era which the crisis has brought. Revolutionaries in France are faced with the task of pointing out this danger and explaining that whichever way it is dressed up, there is only one way to nip it in the bud: preparation for a vic-
torious confrontation with Sarkozy: the prospect of revolution.

PAKISTAN

Pakistan is today perhaps the most volatile society in the world. Since it is also to a great extent the pivotal fulcrum upon which US imperialism is rest-
ing in its so-called “war against terror” (more properly, its war against the oil-producing na-
tions), the fate of the whole world largely depends upon how events play out there.

Forced to accept the humiliating role of a US client state throughout the Cold War, fighting surrogate diplomatic and military wars, first against Soviet-
patronised India and later against Soviet-occupied Afghanistan, Pakistan staggered under the weight of a constantly swelling crazed clerical-fascist mili-
tary intelligence state-within-a-state: the ISI. Among the horrors spawned by the ISI, its coffers swelling with dollars, was al-Qaeda, the most noto-
rious of its creatures. Every al-Qaeda atrocity bears the hallmarks of the ISI, the monster which the CIA nuzzled to its breast. Pakistan meanwhile continues its tawdry cycle of blundering panto-
mime military dictatorships, interspersed with brief chaotic interregnums of corrupt quasi-
parliamentary regimes.

However, today we see in Pakistan not only the weakest link in the worldwide chain, but a rapidly developing revolutionary situation too. The over-
throw of the Musharraf dictatorship was the out-

come of a revolution in the making: the masses’ heroic expression of anger, solidarity and growing determination.

A new trade-union based working-class party has emerged immeasurably strengthened out of this movement – the Labour Party of Pakistan, which has won the loyalty of thousands of super-
exploited workers and peasants. The LPP defiantly challenged in turn the deposed dictatorship, the US military, the corrupt government, and the fund-
damentalist fascists. By its courage, its transparent honesty, and its tactical flair, it has captured the imagination of workers and peasants, at least in some areas, as well as that of a layer of profes-
sionals. Whether it will succeed in harnessing the energies of the masses now that they are once again on the move; whether it can ultimately lead them to a decisive victory, or at least in the at-
tempt leave behind it a lasting heritage, will be decided not just by tactics – by agitational bril-
liance – but also by theoretical and strategic vi-
sion. The movement in Pakistan has snatched away from socialist commentators around the world the luxury of comfortable platitudes and abstract discussion, and forced them to focus on the constant crucial decisions of a living struggle. Finding the right means of balancing bold leader-
ship of every democratic struggle, on the one hand, with clear warnings, sharply defined per-
spectives and a transitional programme, on the other, is precisely the science of revolution.

It is true that in Pakistan, counter-revolution in the form of mystical obscurantism already has a mass base, an ideological appeal and an army strong
enough in wide swathes of territory to hold the state itself at bay. Conversely, unlike in Russia, the proletariat is relatively weak and scattered. The tireless militant workers of the LPP are facing a harder task; all the more glory to them for their success in building their authority in the struggle. This authority extends also internationally, through their contacts in the Indian sub-continent, South-East Asia, the Pacific region, Australia and Europe. Within their own modest limits, socialists internationally share a duty to observe, discuss and support their work, both practically and in terms of theoretical discussion and an exchange of ideas. We have a lot to learn from their experience. Before too long, we will all be facing similar difficult questions.

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS**

We are told we are about to run out of silver, indium, platinum, antimony, zinc and many more essential elements. As the ‘New Scientist’ puts it: "Virgin stocks of several metals appear inadequate to sustain the modern 'developed world' quality of life for all of Earth's people under contemporary technology." This has already led to wars in the Congo and to a new ‘scramble for Africa’ involving China and other imperialist powers.

We are also told that the world population of six billion is set to rise exponentially to nine billion by 2050, while food production is already in crisis owing to drought, floods, bio-fuel production etc.

Oil reserves are of course limited, and reaching the point where extraction becomes increasingly uneconomic. In any case, the atmospheric pollution and global warming, due mainly to gross overuse of fossil fuels, has reached the stage where even professional government and corporate liars admit that a world catastrophe involving the destruction of whole countries and populations is now inevitable unless overall emissions are brought down by at least 80% from 1990 levels.

It is an anomaly that it is the very productivity on which the chances for socialism and for human survival depend which is too much for the capitalist market to cope with. Climate change and environmental destruction are problems of capitalism (and, in its day, also of Stalinism). What is needed is not simply more renewable energy, or this or that technological fix, but a changed attitude to technology and the relationship of man and nature.

For capitalism the whole of nature has been parcelled up into fixed quantities: so many resources — commodities — to be plundered, exploited and sold. Capitalists derive their profits e.g. from their ownership of and rights to oxidise hydrocarbons. The inevitable unwanted side-product, CO2, is somebody else’s problem. But, amid oil wars and global ruin they tell us that we must buy more but consume less; that there are too many of us to feed, and especially too many that are old and non-productive; that wars are due to “human nature”; etc.

Tsunamis, hurricanes, floods, earthquakes and other environmental disasters are a growing threat.
Marxism has always looked at nature as a network of dynamic processes of which human life was a part. It arose in answer to Malthus’ gloomy calculations that food production could never catch up with population growth, and was based on the idea that human energies once released would always find new ways to “harness the forces of nature.”

This is something that we have barely started. If we have not misunderstood the basic fundamental principles of physics, 95% of the matter/energy in the universe must be ‘dark’ – unknown to us. We are, as Engels said, in a period of prehistory: i.e. technologically as well as socially. But the forces of nature are virtually inexhaustible. A ten-square-metre patch of normal sunlight has in it all the energy needed to meet all a person’s conceivable energy requirements. In all, photosynthetic organisms convert around 100,000,000,000 tonnes of carbon into biomass per year. Plants are typically 3 –6% efficient: humans have created solar panels achieving 41% efficiency. 1 kilogram of matter has enough energy to power a 1-kilowatt electric heater for 3 million years. We have begun to tap the force of nuclear fission (even though we have not yet learned how to dispose of the radioactive waste). In the not-too-distant future, nuclear fusion will almost certainly be one of our fundamental energy sources. If we do not reach this stage, it will not be on account of lack of resources or intrinsically insurmountable technical obstacles.

In response to the New Scientist feature referred to above, letters came back stating that “Elements cannot be created or destroyed... There is exactly as much platinum today as there was at any time in the past, same for any other element. The issue with an element is strictly cost of recovery, be it mining or recycling.” The New Scientist article itself was precise about the solution: "We need to minimise waste, find substitutes where possible, and recycle the rest... Platinum makes up as much as 1.5 parts per million of roadside dust. They are now seeking out the largest of these urban platinum deposits, and ... developing a bacterial process that will efficiently extract the platinum from the dust.”

The UN Food & Agriculture Organisation’s prediction of population growth are often misquoted. They state specifically: "Perceptions of a continuing population explosion are false. In fact it is more than 30 years since the world passed its peak population growth rate.” They predict that world human population will grow and by 2050 or so stabilise at around nine billion.

There is enough good land in the world to give each person half a hectare – enough to feed five people (minimum estimates). But private and grossly unequal ownership of the land makes such calculations meaningless. Even in an ‘advanced democracy’ like Britain, up to a half of the land remains unregistered in the hands of private families: a mere 0.7% of the population owns two thirds of the land. (Only about 7.5 per cent of land of England & Wales is under residential occupation, with a population of 47.8 million living on a mere 3.4 million acres. The other 26.9 million acres are owned by as few as 135,000 people See Kevin Cahill: ‘Who owns Britain?’). There’s also a more recent book ‘Who owns the world?’)

‘Overpopulation’ is a relative term. There are geographical limits to the population a given land area can support within a certain technology. But there are no intrinsic limits to possible technologies. A society in which each new member is seen as an additional burden is a sure sign of its degeneration and imminent collapse. From the palaeolithic age onwards, the development of society is precisely defined by the new technologies it devises to overcome previous limits. Nature itself is unstoppable. The inexorable earthly physical and chemical forces that gave rise to carbon-based life in all its forms persist, and are at no risk of diminishing for another five billion years or so. Societies where people can tap into these forces thrive.

The food crisis is predominantly a problem of marketing. (As recently as 2005, the WHO were warning of the dangers of overproduction!) It is the result of measures taken to reduce past ‘grain mountains’, reduce subsidies and open agribusiness to ‘free market forces’, to domination by supermarkets and by traders and speculators, to monoculture and consequent overgrazing, deforestation, desertification, over-ploughing, over-reliance on petroleum-based fertilisers and pesticides – causing soil erosion and depletion. All of this is a boon to speculators. The biggest single
cause of the panic was the flurry of futures specula-
tion caused by the deliberate reduction of food
warehousing.

The only values capitalism recognises are mone-
tary values. This can distort the ‘real’ value. Meas-
ured by energy input and output, pre-capitalist
farming methods yield 10kcal for each 1kcal spent: 
present day over-mechanised agribusiness gives
just1kcal for each 10kal. In other words, in energy
terms – in rational terms – it is 100 times less eco-

Some NGOs and the United Nations still talk in
terms such as these: “Turning resource access
into wealth requires good commercial models. The
poor need assistance in commercializing their eco-
system assets. This means better marketing.” Yet
more and more people are coming to the same
conclusions as Marx’s (Capital Vol III) even today:
“The capitalist system works against a rational ag-

Tudge is not the only one to point out that “the econo-

OIL

Nothing illustrates the primitive nature of capital-
ism better than oil. Coal powered the industrial
revolution, and oil powered its ‘highest stage’: im-
perialism. (See http://www.rense.com/general80/
wilmce.htm). In its short reign, oil has been re-
ponsible for untold human misery: the key to
world economic and military domination. En-
meshed with banking, the military, espionage
and industry, it has been at the root of two world wars
and innumerable ‘minor’ wars and imperialist es-
capades, inflation and economic collapse, right up
to the present.

There is no shortage of alternatives to fossil fuels. Every new issue of every science journal reports
new breakthroughs in carbon reduction or cap-
ture, alternative forms of electricity generation
e.g.: cars which run on compressed air, ultra-rapid
charging batteries, sewage to fertiliser and ethanol
fuel etc. But every day makes it clearer that the
problem does not lie in the technology, but in the
ability of the social system to manage it. A whole
massive worldwide infrastructure and a range of
powerful global industries has crystallised around


oil. Until recently, electric vehicles were dumped and crushed as potential threats to the survival of the system. Now climate change and peak oil are beginning to suggest that such alternatives may be the only way they can survive and continue profiteering. The benefits to society of efficient modern public transport systems have never been given serious consideration by the capitalist class and much information about their potential is ignored or suppressed. But the question remains whether a system based on private profit is capable of handling an energy delivery programme where the interests of the whole of society and of future generations have to be the decisive factors.

There are any number of studies (e.g. books by George Monbiot, Chris Goodall and David King) which present global solutions to climate change based solely on combinations of proven or immediately developable technologies and on actual practical business experience of countless small-scale (and some very large-scale) operations across the world. Apart from minor disagreements about the effectiveness of this or that particular solution, they are in broad agreement. For example, they confirm spectacular claims that with the use of existing modern CSP solar panels a mere 0.3% of the North African desert could supply all the energy needs of Africa, the Middle East and Europe. A cross-continental grid could store and carry this together with wind- and wave-generated electricity from Britain and Scandinavia across high voltage DC undersea cables. They agree on the viability and surprising effectiveness of thorough home-insulation and emission-neutral housing, on combined heat and power plants, electric vehicle development, carbon capture and storage, reforestation and anti-deforestation, cellulose ethanol fuels and much else.

None of their findings questions capitalism's ability to deliver. On the contrary, they represent a new layer of big eco-business. Sophisticated and detailed global cost-analyses have been commissioned. The business journal, McKinsey Quarterly, for example, in 2007 published "a cost-curve for greenhouse gas reduction" which lists many alternatives such as the above and provides assessments for which of these would provide net savings and which losses. If all were used to their fullest potential they calculated the cost, by 2030, as just 0.6% of world GDP ($54.62 trillion at 2007 estimates) and if less efficiently, no more than 1.4% - perhaps 1.8% for 'rich countries'. (For comparison, this represents the approximate worth of the world's top 100 billionaires, or the cost to the USA of the Afghan and Iraq wars). But the returns on investment are not immediate or guaranteed, and the benefits tend to be spread among people too poor to create any effective demand or extended to presently economically unviable future generations only. The authors were also canny enough to recognise that a time-span of 21 years to take us to 2030 is perhaps too long for capitalism even to contemplate in its present weakly state. So they suggest looking at such investment as a form of life insurance, comforting them with the thought that, after all, the global insurance industry's turnover amounted to more: 3.3% of world GDP.

But even this seems to be more than the system can take. The Stern report described climate change as "the greatest market failure the world has ever seen." Some suggested a tax on carbon emissions. But those particular countries which were imposing such a tax could reach no agreement on the rate to be charged. Attempts to impose a universal rate failed as an impossible step towards an unthinkable world government. Hence the well-known cap and trade schemes whereby high polluters can buy excess pollution-rights from those under the set limit. In 2006 this collapsed, since the market demand for carbon emissions had been over-estimated and the price plummeted! (However, 'good' news was announced the following year when CO₂ emissions rose, allowing the market to climb back up from $10 billion to $30 billion). Rising emissions have created a flourishing global business in carbon offset trading. (Despite global agreements and targets, annual carbon emissions between 2000 and 2007 grew at four times the annual rate they had through the 1990s). Deals are advertised on the internet: Carbon Offsets at only £7.50 Per Tonne, etc.

Governments are now eager to show they are ready to engage in talking. At their latest meeting in Poznan, they even got so far as to agree on methods for how to measure deforestation programmes (that have not taken place) and also on "the principles of financing a fund to help poor and vulnerable countries to cope with the impacts
of global warming (rising seas, floods, droughts, storms and wildfires)." More words. "We just left a lot on the table for us to do in 2009," said a major participant. Considering that they continue failing to provide the mere $10-30 billion a year which could give 17% of the world's population the clean water they need to save their lives, it is hardly surprising that it is proving hard to convince the ruling class that planet-saving is good business.

In any case, the world has changed in the few months since all those books came out. Saving the banks has already cost more than the estimated cost of saving the world. Governments have been forced to declare targets, but business has already (surreptitiously) declared its intention to sabotage them. In their most recent survey, nPower (UK) found that “the majority of businesses (83%) said the target to reduce CO2 emissions by 80% by 2050 was unrealistic... Only 31% think new business will occur as a result of reducing emissions, compared to 47% in 2008... 97% said they are currently more concerned with reducing costs than emissions.”

Ours would not be the first society that had exhausted its resources, ruined its environment and moved on or perished. Ice-age hunters very likely out-hunted the prey on which they depended. But capitalism has already encompassed the globe. Under capitalism there is nowhere for humans to move on to.

"We must act quickly" the experts all agree "Can we afford to do what it takes?" they ask. "Can we afford not to?" they answer, using the 'we' word as though they not only accepted the need to 'reinvent democracy' but imagined that it had already been done! If they were prepared to follow the consequences of their own thoughts to their conclusion, they would ask themselves just who they mean by “we?” and who it is that has to act now.

**WHO CAN SAVE THE PLANET?**

In their various ways they have drafted rational plans for the drastic measures that have to be taken for the survival of civilisation. In doing so they are, more than they know, testing the system to its limits. The global market place has its own laws. Profit-maximisation is the life-force of capitalism. None of the measures governments have taken to rescue the system for the capitalists can be expected to take away their life-support. Already in 2004, 0.13% of the world’s population had gained control of 25% of the world’s financial assets. It is not reasonable to expect that any knowledge and science placed at the disposal of a class which only exists by force of the profits it can extract from others is ever going to be used in the interests of the remaining 99.87%, who for them cannot possibly be anything more than customers, rivals or workers.

A system founded on individual profit-maximisation was, in its time, the only conceivable effective motivating force to set up extraction and production industries, and create the worldwide infrastructures to accommodate them. This system not only transformed the world; it gave rise to a technology and science of transformation, which is not only part of education, but has become assimilated into our general human culture. There are more scientists alive today than there have been in the whole of human history. But the system of private profiteering cannot complete the process. It cannot even secure human survival. To ask it now to clear up the mess it has left us all in – to start all over again and to implement humane and rational plans in the interests of the whole world – is asking it to do something it was never designed to do.

It has been proved that most of the particular technologies and the means of delivering them that have been suggested, can and do bring in good returns for investors. But, for there to be the slightest hope of avoiding a catastrophic global rise in temperature, each technology has to be able to work in combination with the others, as part of a coordinated energy plan on a scale never before seen, which crosses national boundaries and is applied consistently over a considerable period of time, and has to be launched right now. Some steps have been taken, but the profits are too uncertain or distant in time, or the outlay too gigantic; or else the level of international cooperation appears to be beyond the reach of nation states and world institutions which are themselves crystallisations of the worldwide onslaught of capi-
talism. At a time when companies cannot look beyond the next bail-out, any such grand plan looks unlikely. To succeed, the plan would have to be able to call upon the combined knowledge, initiative, skill, imagination and enthusiasm of the countless millions of people who have no material interest in profiteering and world despoliation: the working class. But the capitalists, as a class, are no longer on the side of the future. They are now a threat to our future.

The great achievements of bourgeois science have been perverted into pseudo-science and outright superstition: fatalistic propaganda which makes ‘Chicken-Lickens’ of us all (the nursery-tale farmyard animals who ran to the king to tell him the sky had fallen down). Discoveries in anthropology, evolutionary biology and genetics are being interpreted mechanistically for media use as yet another weapon against us, to ‘prove’ that wars are unavoidable because humans are naturally disposed to violence (because humans are sometimes aggressive); or that class divisions are in-built (because monkeys sometimes show dominance/submission behaviour patterns): that criminals are born, not made (because above average numbers of XYY-chromosome men are found in prisons); and that it is our folly in over-consum ing and over-reproducing which has brought the world to the brink of disaster, rather than the wastefulness, destructiveness and venality of the capitalists. In its youth, bourgeois science took delight in the discovery of nature’s operating mechanisms. This was to be a tool of human liberation. How crabbed, shabby and mean the great age of reason has become now, in its senility!

If “all that is real is rational; and all that is rational is real” then this society is due for dissolution. “All that is real in the sphere of human history” as Engels explained Hegel’s phrase, “becomes irrational in the process of time, is therefore irrational by its very destination, is tainted beforehand with irrationality; and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality.”

Irrational capitalism is now fighting all that is progressive in modern dialectical and materialist science. It is urgent that what they have seen as rational is understood and taken up by the only class which can turn their vision into something real: the working class. The formerly somewhat remote warning “socialism or barbarism” is now closer to hand than ever.

CLASS STRUGGLES AHEAD

How fast can the will to change society materialise? Events in the near future will tell. The working class today has suffered no defeats remotely comparable to those of the 1920s and 1930s. It may have become disorientated politically by the desertion of its former self-appointed leaders, and stunned by the rapid dilution of its industrial organisation and power in the age of globalisation, but its capacity to struggle has not yet been put to the test. That will be tested anew on a truly international scale, on every continent and in every sector, in the period ahead. It is impossible to calibrate in advance the new balance of forces. The ground has been prepared for a quick and widespread revulsion at capitalism and a rise in consciousness by leaps and bounds.

The paralysis of the working class in moving to change society today comes not so much from the old illusions in reformist or national programmes, but in the perceived helplessness of the mass of ordinary people to challenge the dictatorship of the corporations and their state apparatus of repression.

The initial response to the crisis is likely to be one of stunned shock. As workplaces close, as workers lose their jobs by the millions and their homes by the tens of thousands, we can expect explosive reactions. It is true that, once mass unemployment sets in, by definition there will be a drastic weakening in the cohesion, solidarity and initiative of the working class. However, in the process of the descent into the abyss, there will inevitably be inspiring struggles. The period of the Great Depression also witnessed the great waves of sit-in strikes in the USA and France.

In some countries there have already been huge mobilisations. Governments have been overthrown in Iceland and Latvia. There have been running battles between youth and police in the
streets of Athens. And, in accordance with its especially rich revolutionary traditions, the French working class has shown its power. Millions came out on to the streets throughout France in two successive one-day general strikes, and again on May Day 2009. Bosses have been held captive by workers in factory after factory, and there have even been “free picnics” organised in the supermarkets. This is clearly only the beginning of a massive worldwide movement of protest.

If there were sizeable revolutionary socialist parties in any country today, they would be leading mass demonstrations for nationalisation of the banks and finance companies and the industrial corporations, an end to repossessions, occupation of the workplaces, etc. It is impossible to say how powerful such a movement would prove. Remember that after the outbreak of the events of 1968, within a matter of days de Gaulle had concluded that revolution was inevitable.

It is a remarkable fact, and unprecedented, that there is a general understanding throughout society today of the causes and nature of the current crisis. So far there has been no attempt to blame asylum seekers, illegal immigrants, benefit scroungers, single mothers, Polish plumbers, or even Islamic terrorists for the crisis. To quote Max Hastings again: the crisis “cannot be blamed on political troublemakers, workers, asylum seekers, terrorists or climate change”. Bankers are held in universal contempt – and this time without even any attempt to stereotype them ethnically. If only there were a political party ready to channel that mass class hatred and follow through with policies to put an end to capitalism, the revolution could already be within reach.

At the time of the onset of the banking crisis, there was much talk of how close it came to “collapse” or “meltdown”. Mere metaphors! What would such a collapse actually mean? It has been reported that in December Britain came within 48 hours of running out of currency. In such a scenario, what would happen? Quickly and naturally, for a time, some kind of rough-and-ready barter system would start to operate; an improvised quasi-monetary system based on tokens would develop; there would be an occupation of workplaces, a network of co-operatives, a refusal to vacate homes... And it is hard to tell where initially the forces could be found to repress such spontaneous mass action.

A political party would be needed to generalise this process into a political programme, to put forward a plan for democratically elected committees to liaise and co-ordinate, for a system of elected defence patrols to maintain the new system against sabotage by old bosses or new criminals or bureaucrats, to rotate administrative duties, etc., and above all to imbue the people with confidence in the historic meaning of the change, give their actions an international horizon, and make explicit and conscious what would already be taking place on the ground in an instinctive and pragmatic form.

The battle has still to be joined, and we will be surprised what latent resources the working class can still summon forth when the time comes. The working class today amounts to half the global population, the big majority in the newly industrialised world, and the heavy battalions have not yet spoken. When they do, they will transform the outlook.

THE NEW FACE OF COUNTER-REVOLUTION

In default of such a party, an eventual return to the old scenario is inevitable: popular demoralisation, a degeneration into racism and nationalism ending in defeat, rePRESSION and war; perhaps only eventually, after Armageddon – if humanity even survives such a defeat – to a resurgence of revolution and ultimate victory.

The historic effect of the series of betrayals and defeats suffered by the working class over the inter-war period, in country after country – the victory of Fascism in Italy, the defeat of the German revolution, the defeat of the British General Strike, the rise of Nazism, the civil war in Spain, the Stalinist counter-revolution in Russia, etc. – created the nightmare world of Auschwitz, Hiroshima, the Gulags, and the worst horrors in human history. In the coming period, the alternatives posed by Marx
of socialism or barbarism will once again be placed squarely on the agenda.

Counter-revolution in the 1920s and 1930s took the form of horrific monolithic police super-states, resting on the mass base of the dispossessed on the margins of production, driven into a frenzy by the collapse of economic life and mobilised into armies of fascist terror against the trade unions. The counter-revolution today shows another face: the disintegration of civilised life into murderous communal bigotry, along national, racial, sectarian and religious fault lines.

What are the prospects for counter-revolution today? Fascism is the conscious riposte of capitalism to revolution – the mobilization of armed gangsters and the scum of society against the workers’ picket lines and protest marches, whipping up the basest appeals to racism and chauvinism to rally cross-class support.

Even during periods of stability, through the mass media the ruling class consciously keeps backward prejudices simmering. Beneath the surface of British society, for instance, there is a bubbling inferno of barely suppressed racism. The warning signs are clear. Already, to a stratum of disillusioned ex-Labour voters, the BNP have successfully crossed the barrier from the lunatic fascist fringe to an increasingly acceptable expression of protest. The election of a few BNP MEPs at the next Euro-election can no longer be ruled out, or even conceivably of a victory or two at parliamentary elections – something that would immeasurably embolden the fascists and represent the greatest threat for generations to the working class. Expectations are immeasurably higher. Drastic cuts in living standards will provoke protest and instability. The youth above all will not tolerate militarisation or the outright repression of democratic rights. Any resort to the old racist terrorist attacks on ethnic minorities would risk explosive consequences today, after the black revolt in the USA and the colonial revolution, due to their enhanced confidence as well as a sea change in the consciousness of most whites, especially the youth. Thus the scope for counter-revolution is limited. For the moment, the capitalists are forced to move by stealth, surreptitiously eroding democratic rights in semi-disguised ways: using anti-terrorist legislation to tighten up on surveillance over all manner of protest movements completely unrelated to terrorism. In the event of a big upsurge, their first recourse will be to these methods to repress the organised working class.

However, the class basis for fascism today has been drastically eroded since the 1920s and 1930s. In Germany in 1933 the proletariat was dwarfed by a vast petit bourgeoisie both urban and rural, the peasantry alone constituting 40% of the population, in addition to a large class of urban shopkeepers and small producers and a huge pool of declassed unemployed.

In the present epoch, the capitalists are even more reluctant than they were then to resort to outright fascist methods. In the 1920s and 1930s, it took the creation of mass fascist armies composed of the dregs of society to block the flood-tide of revolution. Now, only if faced with an immediate threat to its very survival will the ruling class risk entrusting its future to deranged maniacs like the Nazis. Racism is always a useful tool to the ruling class in diverting popular resentment – the time-honoured tactic of divide-and-rule. But Nazi excesses went beyond defending the property of the rich. These political protection racketeers brought disaster on the heads of their masters, for an entire epoch losing capitalism half the continent.

Nor will the working class submit to fascist gangsterism without all-out resistance. There has been an enormous advance in the general cultural level in the postwar period, won by decades of working-class struggle, bringing improved living standards, better conditions of work, and higher levels of education. Expectations are immeasurably higher. Drastic cuts in living standards will provoke protest and instability. The youth above all will not tolerate militarisation or the outright repression of democratic rights. Any resort to the old racist terrorist attacks on ethnic minorities would risk explosive consequences today, after the black revolt in the USA and the colonial revolution, due to their enhanced confidence as well as a sea change in the consciousness of most whites, especially the youth. Thus the scope for counter-revolution is limited. For the moment, the capitalists are forced to move by stealth, surreptitiously eroding democratic rights in semi-disguised ways: using anti-terrorist legislation to tighten up on surveillance over all manner of protest movements completely unrelated to terrorism. In the event of a big upsurge, their first recourse will be to these methods to repress the organised working class.

Counter-revolution raises its ugly snout in many disguises. The complex ethnic composition of the population in most major countries nowadays, particularly in the main cities, would be likely to create conditions for resistance to racist or communal attacks, and counter-attacks on the part of the victimised minorities. Given the demographic shifts and globalized scope of modern capitalism,
rather than the establishment of monolithic police dictatorships based on ethnically pure nation states, counter-revolution could take the no less bloodthirsty but more unstable form of communal massacres, secessionist uprisings and regional wars. Rather than being crushed underfoot by the jackboot of fascism, the labour movement could instead find itself torn to pieces by the vendettas of rival gangster warlords, as in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, Rwanda, Sudan, Chechnya, Afghanistan, the Congo, Georgia, Gaza, etc. This alternative face of barbarism is the model of reaction today: a global patchwork of communal fratricide.

Racism in Britain too could polarize society, erupting in assaults and murders; provocative marches through Asian, Muslim and black areas; the development of defence groups which might well take on semi-militaristic overtones; rival terrorist gangs; police repression; segregation; no-go areas; internment camps, calls for repatriation; and a possible communal division into warring ghettos along the lines of Northern Ireland during the troubles.

**ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM**

The temporary eclipse of socialism as the clear worldwide alternative to the rule of the global corporations has given scope to the emergence of various spurious ideologies, including militant religious obscurantism, especially in the form of Islamic fundamentalism. This phenomenon threatens to create a dangerous obstacle to the unity of the working class against its common enemy.

In protest against what can quite plausibly be presented as an international crusade against Islam – waged in Afghanistan, Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir and Europe – many Muslim youth are seduced by the propaganda of the Islamists, which cleverly combines a sharp critique of US imperialism and its allies with insidious medieval bigotry and anti-Semitism. It has gained a radical aura from the revolution in Iran, where the mullahs’ regime was brought to power on the back of a proletarian revolt, and from the spectacular raid against US imperialism on September 11th 2001 ascribed to the terror gang of the Saudi oil billionaire Osama bin Laden – the most militant face of the dissident oil sheikhs in their conflict with US imperialism over control of the oilfields.

Nevertheless, Islamic fundamentalism was promoted by imperialism as a bulwark against revolution. In Afghanistan, the Taliban was virtually conjured up by Pakistan’s ISI to launch a paramilitary mass movement of lumpen and rural youth. Armed and financed by imperialism as a frontline force against the Soviet occupation, its underlying mission from the start was to defend the existing property relationships from revolution. It was a counter-revolutionary army that used terror and bigotry to reverse the democratic gains of the Afghan revolution, defeat the Soviet-led Afghan state army, and reinstate the rule of the local landlords and mullahs on behalf of imperialism.

That is exactly the same role as Franco played in Spain, using fascist terror and the fundamentalist bigotry of the Catholic priests, to reverse the democratic gains of the Republic, defeat the Soviet-led republican army, and reinstate the rule of the local landlords and bishops on behalf of imperialism.

Trade unionists in neighbouring Pakistan come under constant attack from the Taliban’s local counterparts, which quite demonstrably play the same role in society as, say, the Blackshirts did in Italy: to terrorise the proletariat, break strikes, smash picket lines, assassinate trade union militants, suppress every trend and intimidate every person in society that is remotely democratic or progressive.
or that represents in any way the embryo of the future society.

Similarly, in India, in the industrial metropolis Mumbai, the local Marathi-based paramilitary Hindu communal party Shiv Sena was created, mobilised, financed and armed by the industrialists, with the specific objective of breaking the grip of the Communist Party and the CP (Marxist) on the trade unions. They smashed the labour movement, organised anti-Muslim riots that amounted to full-scale "ethnic cleansing", and even came to power, both on the city council and (in coalition with the all-India communalist BJP) in the Maharashtra state legislature. Their leader Bal Thakray explicitly modelled himself on Hitler, the Nazi party, and the Final Solution.

The Taliban appear very different from the Nazis — but so did Mussolini's Blackshirts, or the Franco regime. Reaction always and by its very nature takes on the cultural coloration of its environment. It has been argued that the role of the Taliban is "medieval-inquisitionist" — but, again, Franco’s regime was also a parody of the medieval inquisition. What other form could fascism adopt in the culture of Afghanistan or Pakistan? If you isolate its mock-medieval formal trappings from its actual modern global context, it belongs with all the other paraphernalia of a bygone age in a historical junk room. It only makes any sense within the context of the worldwide struggle of imperialism against revolution. Similarly, if you were to take the whole circus of Mussolini and transplant it to ancient Rome, then that could be said to be Caesarianism; but Caesarism in the context of modern decadent capitalism is fascism.

Fundamentalism in the Islamic world plays the same role: the smashing of the labour movement and of everything that represents the embryo of the future society. It wraps itself in fantasies about a golden age of Islam, in just the same way that Mussolini wrapped himself in the glories of the ancient Roman Empire, or Hitler in mystical folklore about a legendary Nordic Aryan race of supermen. Behind all the hypnotic mythology, the real programme of all three was to smash the labour movement and any threat of revolution.

This peculiar phenomenon reflects the recent distorted period that history has gone through. For the first time in a century or more, the organised aspiration of the proletariat for a new society hardly registered as even a political consideration for the capitalists — and yet the contradictions of capitalism have never been more acute. The grotesque nature of the crisis in society is manifested in the demonic form of bin Laden.

Many genuine youth are misled by the dangerous tricks of the fundamentalists. Socialists should obviously oppose the victimisation of those who might be fooled by their propaganda, but also explain to them that the fundamentalists are the greatest threat to the rights of all workers everywhere, and that their goal is to enslave the working class.

THE DECLINE OF REFORMISM

During the era when capitalism still had a role to play in developing the productive forces, there was still scope for workers’ leaders to win some political and economic reforms without challenging the system, and a caste emerged on the upper crust of the labour movement of reformist mediators in the class struggle, who had a material interest in the survival of class society. Historically speaking, this era came to an end early in the twentieth century, when civilisation was plunged into the horrors of world war, slump and fascism. Reformist leaders swung openly to the defence of the ruling class once mass revolutionary movements threatened its overthrow, only themselves to be crushed in turn under the jackboots of the counter-revolution. Mass communist parties arose, but these too were soon to be perverted into instruments of the new privileged state bureaucracy that had taken control in Russia, another bureaucratic caste that likewise had a stake in the survival of capitalism internationally.

During the prolonged upswing that followed the Second World War, capitalism enjoyed a belated spurt of growth, with the development of chemicals, electronics and later information technology. There was a sellers’ market in labour, and a massive growth of trade unionism which brought sections of workers in these countries real material
gains, though at the cost of long hours and intensified exploitation. This gave reformism an unexpected though temporary new lease of life.

In Britain, an overwhelming mood for radical change combined with the devastation wreaked by the war brought the first majority Labour government to power on a programme of nationalisation of coal, steel, the railways and other basic industries, and the creation of the National Health Service. The reforms introduced by this government renewed the loyalty of the working class to Labour for a new generation.

The beginning of economic instability from the 1970s onwards was already beginning to lay bare the limits of reformism, and a mass left wing began to develop in the socialist and social-democratic parties (or in some cases, new left parties) in Britain, Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy, France and other countries.

By the late 1970s, the leading ideologues of world capitalism had switched from conciliation and appeasement of the trade unions to harsh monetarist policies, in effect calling the bluff of the reformist and trade union leaders. The capitalists were summoning up the resolve to claw back all the gains made by the working class by cuts in subsidies and the social wage, and direct attacks on the trade unions. This led to bitter confrontations in the 1980s, notably the air traffic controllers’ strike in the USA and the miners’ strike in Britain.

The year-long miners’ strike was a heroic chapter in working-class history, bringing out on strike some 200,000 workers and directly involving entire communities in women’s support groups, mass pickets of power stations, nationwide solidarity by fellow trade unionists, and pitched battles with police strikebreakers. The defeat of the strike was the direct responsibility of the reformist leaders of the British trade unions, who, in shrinking from the consequences of an all-out fight with the capitalist state, doomed the strike.

With the defeats of the 1980s, the leaders of the reformist parties swung sharply to the right, launching mass expulsions of left activists, and openly embracing the monetarist policies of Reagan and Thatcher. These events have left the working class politically disenfranchised for the last couple of decades. In most countries, this is so for the first time since the early history of the modern working class.

While there have been unrelenting attacks on workers’ rights throughout this period, there have been no major shocks such as might have precipitated political landslides. There have been massive protest strikes in some countries, as well as huge anti-capitalist and anti-war demonstrations. And yet, apart from in the countries of Eastern Europe, where the former ruling Stalinist parties retain some working-class support due to the memory of full employment and state welfare, there have been few serious moves to fill the vacuum left by the traditional mass labour, socialist and communist parties of the previous hundred years. The main exception is the special case of Germany, where the remnant of the former Stalinist party in the East merged with dissident left reformists in the West to form a left alternative to the SPD. In Britain, which had a history of alternating cycles of industrial militancy and political radicalism, the number of days lost in strikes flatlines year after year at a historic low, while there is general apathy about politics and mass abstention in elections.

The obstacle in the path of either a new workers’ party or a Labour Party with socialist aspirations is the crisis of reformism. In the new epoch of globalised corporate dictatorship, national programmes have less meaning today than ever. In a more immediate and practical sense than ever, every demand for defence of existing standards, for even minimal reforms or elementary democratic rights, leads directly to the need for international solidarity and a new society.

THE LABOUR PARTY

Marxists have always welcomed every step taken by workers towards the creation of their own independent class organisations, whether on the trade-union or the political front, and condemned the antics of sectarians who have insisted upon programmatic ultimatums rather than a campaign of patient explanation. As workers move into struggle they do not jump immediately to revolutionary
conclusions. Their first step is to recognise that they have their own, distinct interests that are in direct conflict with the capitalist class. A mass workers’ party represents the organised expression of this elementary class consciousness. The creation of mass social-democratic, socialist and labour parties in Europe and elsewhere around the turn of the twentieth century were historic achievements of the working class; all the more so in that most of them were founded on explicitly socialist principles, and even those that were not – notably the Labour Party – came to adopt socialist ideas later, under the impact of the Russian revolution.

The question of the nature of these traditional parties today – especially the British Labour Party – has been a source of controversy among socialists. It is therefore appropriate to examine this question here at some length.

In 1921, Lenin advised Britain’s fledgling Communist Party to affiliate to the Labour Party. Even prior to 1918, when the Labour Party was not yet even formally a socialist party, Lenin had advocated its admission into the Second International on the grounds that it was the political voice of the trade unions. Again, in the 1930s, at a time of rapid political changes, Trotsky had suggested that revolutionaries who found themselves excluded from the Communist Parties should escape political isolation by joining the leftist moving factions evolving out of the Social-Democratic parties – for instance the ILP, which had broken away from the Labour Party. Later Trotsky recommended entry into the Labour Party.

In the 1950s, during the long postwar upswing, what subsequently became the Militant tendency adapted this to a far more protracted long-term tactic, slowly building a formidable Marxist force within the Labour Party, especially by winning control of its youth section. By extension, the CWI’s policy in most countries was to follow a similar course.

Militant’s decades of work in the Labour Party were exemplary. Militant turned Trotskyism for the first time in living memory into a force to be reckoned with, introducing thousands of working-class youth to Marxist ideas and leading mass movements into confrontation with capitalism. Militant was explicitly feared by the Labour leaders and by the capitalist state itself; it even brought down a prime minister. Militant pushed entrism to the very limits and achieved spectacular results. The split in Militant came when it was necessary to decide where to go next.

Entrism had been originally proposed by Trotsky as one example among many of a daring and flexible short-term tactic, not much more than a brilliant but fleeting improvisation. This was in a period of rapid changes, of revolution and counter-revolution. Militant was right in the more stable circumstances of its time to extend entrism to a whole historical period – a period of slow historical development; but even then, it remained a tactic and not a strategic principle.

The question now is to what extent this tactic is applicable to the Labour Party today; and even whether it can still be considered a workers’ party, rather than a capitalist party relying on the traditional though passive support of large sections of the working class. (This question also applies to socialist or social-democratic parties in other countries; for present purposes we will focus on the British Labour Party.)

The fact that the leadership of the Labour Party has betrayed the working class is certainly nothing new. Labour’s first Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald in 1931 broke his electoral mandate, split the party and formed a National Government – in effect, presided over a Tory government – in order to carry through cuts in the dole to the unemployed. After an initial wave of radical reforms, the 1945 Attlee government moved quickly to counter-reforms, a trend continued by the Wilson and Callaghan governments in the 1960s and 1970s. Hugh Gaitskell had tried in the late 1950s to renounce Clause Four of the party constitution which set out Labour’s socialist aims.

It is also true that ultra-left sectarians have always impressionistically dismissed the Labour Party as a capitalist party, and that Militant in its day was right to insist that as the political arm of the trade unions, Labour was the workers’ traditional party, to which they would turn first in their search for a political solution. On the other hand, it is not
enough to repeat old formulae worked out decades previously, without looking afresh at living processes. We need to examine whether or not the changes that have taken place since then are so fundamental as to represent a qualitative transformation. Let us remind ourselves what changes there have been in the Labour Party’s nature, programme, constitution and declared aims since the days of Attlee and Wilson.

First of these is the removal from the constitution of the party’s commitment to socialism: Clause 4. On its own, such a change need not be decisive in defining a party’s class base. The Bad Godesburg conference in 1959, which carried through a similar change, did not in itself alter the working-class nature of the German SPD. And yet the removal of Clause Four represented a historic shift. For decades such a retreat had been resisted tooth and nail. At the very same time as Bad Godesburg, the Labour Party rank and file had forced Gaitskell to abandon his attempt to take the same route. Gaitskell, a blatant forerunner of Blair, nevertheless had to fight the 1959 election on a programme of wholesale nationalisation. Right up to the 1980s, the party conference was committed to “a fundamental shift in the balance of power and wealth” in society. It was that relentless underlying impulse towards social change that Militant always based itself on.

Unlike the ultra-left groups, Marxists never measured the class nature of the party by the scale of treachery by the leadership. That was predictable. Their assertion of the proletarian nature of the party was based on the aspirations of the membership. Gaitskell was defeated by a mass revolt when he tried to remove Clause Four, and was forced to abandon his attempt. The fact that in 1994 Clause Four was dropped with hardly a murmur of protest when he tried to remove Clause Four, and was forced to abandon his attempt. The fact that in 1994 Clause Four was dropped with hardly a murmur of protest was a significant fact to be taken into serious consideration. Since then, the “curious behaviour of the dog in the night”, as Sherlock Holmes might have put it – the absence of any major rank-and-file protest against the Blair/Brown government’s policies – itself suggests a significant change in the character of the party.

Accompanying this political retreat, there has been a drastic reduction in the specific weight of the trade unions in the party structure. The impact of trade union block votes at Party conference, trade union representation on the national executive, and above all the very powers of party conference and the national executive, have been reduced virtually to zero. The party leadership in the past owed its authority to the mandate it enjoyed from the trade unions. Today the Labour leadership are apparently accountable to no one. In the recent leadership election, there was not even an alternative candidate. A residual trade union link remains, but the principal function of the trade unions in the Labour Party today is their continued donation of cash.

There is also a reversal of the previous relationship of the Labour leadership towards big business. In the 1959 general election, under Gaitskell (a leader considered in those days an arch-right winger), the Labour Party still campaigned in its manifesto for the nationalisation of the top 512 monopoly companies and the “commanding heights” of the economy. In the 1960s, the Wilson government was still pledged to renationalise the privatised steel and road haulage industries. In contrast, New Labour governments have carried much further than even Thatcher dared to go the counter-reforms of the Thatcher regime: privatisation of air traffic control and of whole swathes of the NHS, a disguised return to de facto selection and even semi-privatisation in state education, the introduction of tuition fees for higher education, an astronomical rise in the prison population, etc.

In the past, Labour governments were tolerated only at times when capitalism was suffering a severe crisis of authority, and only then under protest and with gritted teeth, for brief periods, and under relentless pressure. Having been swept to power on the crest of a mass wave, which gave them the scope to make genuine reforms, the Attlee government fell after one and a bit terms, and it was thirteen years before Labour regained office. The first Wilson government objected in so many words that it had been dictated to by the “gnomes of Zurich”; it was blackmailed into reversing its policies by a “strike of capital”; and already there was serious talk of a coup plot to overthrow this government, led by Cecil King and Lord Mountbatten. The second Wilson government found itself back in power when Britain was paralysed by the miners' strike and the three-day
week, and Heath had called an election on the is-

sue of "who runs Britain: the government or the trade unions?" That government was rocked by economic crisis, runaway inflation, waves of strikes, and terrorist bombings. During its period of office, contingency plans were openly discussed for a Chilean-style military coup, and military manoeuvres were even staged at Heathrow airport as an overt warning.

Big business has a very different attitude towards Blair and Brown. For a decade they explicitly patronised New Labour as their preferred instrument of government. They showered donations on New Labour, having abandoned their traditional party the Tories. Now, New Labour having from their point of view served its purpose and outlived its usefulness, the capitalists seem to have opted tactically for a return to their traditional party of government. However, they cheerfully supported the New Labour government for an unprecedented three successive terms of office.

Certainly, the Labour leaders always pursued treacherous policies. Today, however, they have lost all political constraints. In the past, they always had to be careful to justify themselves in terms of the need for "realism", "gradualism", "priorities", etc. They dared not question the overall goal of a social transformation. When Ramsay MacDonald swung towards direct frontal attacks on the working class, he had no option but to break with Labour and rely on the capitalist parties in a National Government, to pursue policies that New Labour nowadays carries out with relative quiescence from the party rank and file. New Labour politicians show open contempt for even the mildest of the old Fabian aspirations for even the most gradual social change.

The Labour Party used to have a socialist constitution, a decisive trade union block vote, an elected national executive committee, a genuine policymaking conference, an active working-class base, and a parliamentary party largely composed of former workers and trade-union officials. It was created by the trade unions, stood for a socialist transformation of society, and actually carried through nationalisation of the basic industries, the foundation of the national health service, and comprehensive education. These are not necessarily socialist measures; but they were reforms inscribed for generations on the banner of the working class. The Tories bitterly opposed every one of them, and did all they could to reverse them at the earliest opportunity. It took years of struggle by the working class to achieve them, and their implementation by Labour Governments was rightly celebrated as a historic victory. For all its corruption and bureaucratisation, Labour was manifestly a party based on the working class, and its leaders had to hypocritically justify each and every treacherous twist and turn with reference to the interests of labour and the cause of social reform.

There have now been twelve years of government by a "New Labour" clique which expunged the Labour Party's socialist aspirations, undermined the link with the trade unions, destroyed any semblance of party democracy, bad-mouthed its Labour heritage, and carried through ultra-Thatcherite policies that even the Iron Lady herself had shrunk from. Its leaders openly proclaim themselves champions of big business: they are "supremely relaxed about people getting filthy..."
New Labour served a very specific historical purpose: to carry through to a conclusion the Thatcherite counter-revolution, once the Tories had become so discredited that they were no longer capable of finishing the job. Now it is the New Labour leaders who are personally discredited, and the Tories who have donned the public-relations-friendly mask of Blair. This is the true face of Toryism, a reversion to time-honoured tradition: rule by the Old Etonian caste.

It is still open to question whether or not even these significant changes add up to a qualitative change in the Labour Party's class nature. We are in uncharted waters. It is unprecedented for a party to change its class character without a split. It was also unprecedented, however, for a state to change its class character without a civil war... and yet that is what has happened in Russia.

Has the point been reached when quantity becomes quality? Has the accumulated erosion of the party's working-class traditions yet reached the stage where the dominant influence of capitalism outweighs the weakening pressure of the trade unions, and the party becomes less a bureaucratically corrupted workers' party, remembered nostalgically as Old Labour, and more an alternative political instrument of the ruling class to which the trade unions for historical reasons continue to lend grudging allegiance?

A NEW PARTY OF LABOUR?

At some point, this question will be resolved in deeds. Either there will be an influx of workers into the Labour Party branches and a resurgence of trade-union opposition at conference and national executive level, or there will be a mass breakaway of the trade unions and the creation of an alternative party. Most likely of all, perhaps, is a combination of both: attempts by some trade unions to reclaim the Labour Party, alongside movements by sections of worker activists to replace it.

After the defeat of the last Labour government in 1979, there was an influx of workers into the Labour Party and a sharp swing to the left, resulting in a historic vote for Tony Benn as deputy leader, who came within a hair's breadth of victory. Such an outcome remains a possibility. However, that event took place in a very different political climate, following a massive wave of militancy and industrial struggle.

Great events impend. The working class will have no option but to fight for its interests, first on the industrial front, but then necessarily politically. Somehow or other, it must find a means of representing itself. How will the vacuum of Old Labour be filled? One way or another, the Labour Party will split. The trade union base and the middle-class careerists who have made their nests in the Parliamentary Labour Party cannot preserve for much longer their current uneasy cohabitation. How that split comes, what premature and false starts might occur along the way, whether or not it manifests itself as one clean sharp break or a messy series of realignments... these are not such decisive questions as they might appear at close range.

In the stormy period that is opening up, there will be all kinds of political convulsions, including breakaways, revolts and splits. Undoubtedly, alongside a wave of mass agitation and struggle by newly awakened workers, unemployed people and youth, there will also be campaigns and protests by trade unionists within the Labour Party. This cannot end with them reclaiming the party and merely spitting out the careerists, as might once have been the outcome. It will mean a confrontation between the trade unions and a highly professional machine of smooth pro-business politicians, owing no allegiance to and sharing no traditions with the working class; a full-scale split with the New Labour apparatus; and quite possibly unification under a new banner with those who left earlier to organise afresh.

The old illusions in gradual, partial or national programmes have lost much of their credibility. In Britain, for instance, before the trade unions can launch a credible campaign either to recapture the Labour Party or to create an alternative – to mount a political struggle to defend the interests of the working class as a whole – they first have to show themselves ready to fight industrial battles.
on behalf of their own members. If they won't fight for their members' rights directly on the picket lines, how can they summon up the political will to launch a campaign either to reclaim or to replace the Labour Party?

The trade unions are operating without any coherent political alternative. Their confusion can be seen, for instance, in the decision by the British railway union the RMT to stand alternative candidates in the Euro-elections on an openly chauvinistic platform.

Nevertheless, the idea of a mass breakaway by the trade unions to represent the interests of labour, maybe alongside single-issue anti-capitalist campaigning lobbies, is by no means far-fetched in this scenario. A new workers' party would inevitably be a broad conglomeration of federated platforms, lobbies and campaigns, as was the Labour Party when it was formed a hundred years ago.

If some trade union leaders were to proclaim a new workers' party, even if it meant a temporary split with fellow trade unionists remaining in the Labour Party, that need not be more than a passing episode. Such a move would immediately raise the hopes of trade unionists, public sector workers, and youth. It would mark the first break in the long self-imposed political silence of the trade unions. A public break with New Labour by a sizeable section of working-class activists and an appeal to the masses to campaign for a manifesto including an end to privatisation, re-nationalisation of basic services, restoration of welfare cuts, restoration of trade union rights, taxes on the rich, etc., would bring a ray of light into the political gloom, a breath of fresh air into the stale atmosphere. It would transform the mood throughout Britain. Of course, it may well still take years of campaigning and of bitter experience to win the battle for the allegiance of the mass of the working class.

Such a party may or may not replace the Labour Party in broad historical terms. It might prove short-lived, as was the ILP in the 1930s – or, more recently, the Scottish Socialist Party or the Rifondazione Comunista in Italy. Those parties all nevertheless played a positive role in winning youth to their ranks and to socialist ideas who would otherwise have been left demoralised and depoliticised. A possible later revival in a radicalised Labour Party could well be inspired by those very same recruits.

When the ILP disaffiliated from the Labour Party in 1931, it was on the most trivial and pedantic issues, and with disastrous timing, coming as it did just after a prior split by the right wing under Ramsay MacDonald. Nevertheless, it took 100,000 workers with it, and recruited a generation of youth, many of whom went on to fight in the Spanish Civil War. Trotsky quite rightly urged his comrades in Britain to join the ILP and help to "Bolshevise" it. That would surely be the right attitude towards any such new party today.

**A WORLD PARTY**

From the time of the European revolutions of 1848 until the aftermath of the great wave of revolutionary upheavals that followed the First World War, constant and renewed attempts were made to unite the international working class into a single world party representing their common interests. During these seven or eight decades, great historical landmarks were built. However, the history of the last 85 years has been blighted by one factor: the absence of a workers' international party. The working class has grown immeasurably and the social reserves of capitalism have shrunk inexorably. Again and again, whenever it came to big social conflicts, all the objective factors for revolution have existed; only the subjective factor was missing that could have made these objective processes conscious. Countless

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An IWMA membership card, signed among others by Karl Marx
millions have fallen victim, entire populations enslaved, for lack of the existence of the International. The issues of civilised life, war and peace, and environmental survival all depend directly upon the building of a world revolutionary party. The struggle to build an international workers' party goes back almost to the beginnings of capitalism. The history of the International reflects the ebb and flow of the class struggle over the last 150 years. While a handful of revolutionary cadres steadfastly upheld the banner of internationalism throughout the darkest days of reaction, mass labour organisations swelled and gathered momentum in periods of an upsurge in the class struggle, only to be dashed against the rocks of reaction when their offensive was defeated. The creation of the Communist League in 1848, the International Working Men's Association in 1864, the Socialist International in 1889, and the Communist International in 1919, were all organisational expressions of the workers' innate striving towards a new society on a world scale, as manifested most brilliantly in the events with which these organisations have become forever historically associated: the revolutions of 1848, the Paris Commune, and the Russian revolution.

Each of these monuments to the class struggle was later to be destroyed by counter-revolution. The Communist League and the IWMA succumbed directly to objective defeats of the working class as a result of demoralisation and state repression, following the defeats of the 1848 revolutions and the Paris Commune. The Second and Third Internationals were stifled by the parasitic castes which crystallised at the top of these workers' parties: by the labour bureaucracy in the imperialist countries, and the new ruling bureaucratic caste in Stalinist Russia, respectively. They too were destroyed under the shadow of counter-revolution, in the form of the outbreak of the First World War and the Nazi victory in Germany respectively.

The Second International went through a period when its leaders Kautsky and Bebel defended Marxism in words against the open revisionist Bernstein, but in practice pursued day-by-day reformist goals (a phenomenon known as centrism). After its first Four Congresses, the Communist International likewise went through a period of bureaucratic centrism, when it lurched drunkenly from opportunism to lunatic ultra-leftism and back again, thus losing several precious revolutionary opportunities. But in each case these transitional phases of blind centrism were later to crystallise into calculated policies of conscious betrayal. For the Social-Democracy, the Rubicon was crossed in August 1914, when its ringing promises of 1912 for a Europe-wide General Strike against the impending imperialist war were betrayed, and war credits were voted to the German Kaiser and the other respective combatants. For the Stalinised Communist International, after Hitler's accession to power in 1933 (a catastrophe which nevertheless raised not a murmur of debate within its ranks), the Russian bureaucracy too began to pursue a conscious policy of counter-revolution, to consolidate its own grip and to appease imperialism. It was at that point that Trotsky launched his campaign for a new International.

The sectarianism which has afflicted Trotskyism has its roots in the aborted birth of the Fourth International. The 1938 Founding Conference was held in anticipation of the development of a mass International even more powerful than its predecessors. Trotsky had correctly anticipated that the coming world war, like its precursor, would be followed by a renewed worldwide revolutionary wave, and went on to predict that this would likewise sweep aside the parties of the old failed Internationals into oblivion. Within a decade "not one stone would remain upon another" of the relics of the Second and Third Internationals, and the Fourth International would be "the decisive force on the planet". Trotsky fought the sectarians of his day, and would have been horrified at how their heirs distorted his legacy.

However, it was the peculiar conditions following the Second World War which derailed the development of the Fourth International. The economic stabilisation of capitalism on the one hand, and the establishment of Stalinist bureaucratic regimes in Eastern Europe and China on the other, cut across this process. The conditions were laid down for a consolidation over a whole historical period of reformism and Stalinism. These factors put back by decades the development of a new International.
The collapse of the surviving remnants of the 1938 Conference was exacerbated by their failure to understand the post-war world order. The disintegration of the Trotskyist current into rival factions on the fringes of the workers’ movement was the consequence. However, even the clearest Marxist leadership could not have withstood the objective turn of events.

THE CWI

The general analysis of the world situation that was put forward in the late 1940s by the tendency which later went on to establish Militant in Britain and the CWI internationally remained for the most part valid for the following three decades. On this basis its leadership earned political authority, the tendency grew steadily, and over this period it avoided serious splits such as characterised the ultra-left fringe groups.

The Committee for a Workers’ International was founded in 1974, the first small step since 1938 towards a new International. Over decades of patient work, its British section, under the banner of Militant, grew into a serious force. It founded a mass youth movement; won control of a major trade union; got three Marxists elected to Parliament; led an entire city in prolonged resistance to the Government; mobilised millions of people in a civil disobedience campaign; and was instrumental in the overthrow of a hated Prime Minister. In addition, to varying degrees in Spain, Greece, Sweden, Ireland, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, South Africa, Nigeria and elsewhere, sections of the CWI became prominent tendencies within the organised working class.

In its heyday the CWI began to approach some of the functions of a genuine International: comparing the experiences of workers in different countries; working out common programmes and strategies; organising international demonstrations and solidarity campaigns; bringing international pressure to bear for the release of political prisoners, etc. More precisely, perhaps, it became a recognised international tendency, comparable to the left wing of the Socialist International at the outbreak of the First World War, which given the shock of objective events was soon to burst on to the stage of history as the Communist International.

By the mid-1980s, the CWI had become colloquially known by its members as an International. While this was never strictly accurate, it would have been a legitimate claim, given the perspectives of a rapid movement towards revolution. After all, it is only with hindsight that we are now compelled to recognise that the historic meeting called in 1938 under the name of the Founding Conference of the Fourth International, for all its crucial political significance, proved unable to consummate that goal. Given the peculiar objective twist in events that was to undermine its initial perspectives, it was doomed never to live up to that mission. In the same way, it is only due to the fact that history proved its earlier perspectives ultimately inadequate that the CWI never came to realise its objective of becoming a fully-fledged International.

In the 1980s, MILITANT led the city of Liverpool in years of struggle against Thatcher’s cuts, and later built a non-payment campaign against the poll tax which brought her down.

Militant played a crucial role in two prolonged struggles against the Thatcher government: the resistance by Liverpool Council to attacks on local government rights, and the mass civil disobedience campaign against the poll tax. These campaigns showed the potential that existed objectively for resistance to attacks by the state. However, Marxists were still a minority within the movement as a whole, and despite their exemplary conduct of these struggles (which in the case of the poll tax led directly to Thatcher’s downfall), they were unable to carry them further. In particular, the CWI failed to understand or draw the les-
sons from the defeat of the miners’ strike, claiming
that this was the beginning of a new wave of mili-
tant struggles. This mistake contributed to its de-
cline.

It is no accident that the CWI’s rise coincided with
the disintegration of the Keynesian model and the
risks in world capitalism. Likewise, its collapse
came when capitalism was able to re-stabilize it-
self and, in fact, gain major victories – a process
which confused and disorientated the CWI.

While the CWI was never quite an International,
its decline too was occasioned by something far
short of a classic defeat, such as past defeats
which have physically annihilated the vanguard
and largely wiped out the historical memory of the
class.

The recent period has had a paradoxical nature, in
which the working class, though disorientated, has
not been violently defeated as in the 1930s. It has
become politically disarmed, but not by any means
crushed. The memory of the more active layers
of the working class lives on. This is a tribute to the
strength of the working class and the new balance
of forces in society.

Over the course of the 1980s, the CWI’s by now
fossilised perspectives became increasingly at
odds with the reality of events. A mistake per-
sisted in for long enough becomes a dogma. By
the early 1990s this incompatibility erupted in a
split. The minority clung unashamedly to the unre-
constructed formulae of the past. The majority
missed the opportunity to conduct an honest re-
appraisal of its mistakes, and floundered in its ef-
forts to grapple with the new realities. The loyalty
earned over decades was dissipated in attempts to
impose by administrative decree a habitual control
which was no longer based upon genuine political
authority, with the inevitable result that the CWI
split and entered a sharp decline. Events had ex-
posed the weaknesses that had by now developed
in the tendency’s world outlook, and paved the
way for an internal crisis which accelerated into a
tailspin.

BUILDING THE
INTERNATIONAL

It is through elemental movements of the working
class that a new International will be built. By its
very nature, the working class strains instinctively
towards solidarity, a goal which is implicit in its
conditions of existence and the indispensable
guarantee for its capacity to struggle. At its highest
political expression this is manifested in conscious
internationalism.

It is the elementary task of socialists to stress the
common interest of all working people, and to
fight against the insidious devices of demagogues
to divide the workers against each other, along the
lines of craft prejudice, nationalism, racism or
chauvinism.

These principles have not changed since the days
when they were explained 160 years ago in The
Communist Manifesto: "The Communists... have
no interests separate and apart from those of the
proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sec-
tarian principles of their own, by which to shape
and mould the proletarian movement. The Com-

munist... are on the one hand, practically, the
most advanced and resolute section of the work-
ning-class parties of every country.... On the other
hand, theoretically, they have over the great mass
of the proletariat the advantage of clearly under-
standing the line of march, the conditions, and the
ultimate general results of the proletarian move-
ment."

The new International will be built out of the com-
mon struggles of mass organisations wherever the
working class is organised. This is a historical law.
The IWMA consisted of all the nascent working-
class parties in the world. The Socialist International was created by mass workers’ parties standing proudly upon the principles of Marxism, supported by mass trade unions. The Communist International too – contrary to popular misconceptions – was built out of upheavals in the mass workers’ parties. It comprised within its ranks the Bolshevik majority of the Russian Social-Democratic Labour Party; most of the Independent Social-Democrats who had formerly been the activists of the German Social-Democratic Party; the French Socialist Party (which promptly renamed itself the Communist Party); the Norwegian Labour Party; the majority of the Italian Socialist Party; and even trade unions like the Spanish CGT and the South Wales Miners’ Federation.

As with every one of its precursors, the new International will be built on the basis of mass organisations, numbering in today’s conditions millions. In the impending struggles, the working class will once again revive or recreate such organisations. To begin with, it is inevitable that these will be built around partial, incomplete and reformist programmes. It will be necessary to support these demands while patiently explaining their limits. The tactics of the united front and entrism will once again be on the agenda.

A new mass workers’ international will not simply grow ready-made out of any single self-styled vanguard organization; rather it will be a much more complicated process, representing an interaction and fusion of various schools of thought within the workers’ movement. The pretensions of any existing socialist group that it, and it alone, is building the future mass workers’ international completely misses the mark and risks rendering it ultimately ineffectual.

In supporting every struggle, no matter how partial, of any section of the working class, the first duty of socialists is to make concessions to no separate sectarian interest but to broaden the struggle’s immediate objectives towards the general interests of the class as a whole. Socialists must be the most resolute fighters for the interests of the class, distinguished only by their understanding of the overall "line of march" – the perspectives of events.

This means the practice of the transitional method – an approach largely forgotten by those who have pretensions to Trotskyism today. All the left tendencies today tend to repeat the formulae of 100 years ago, agitating in their day-to-day routine for partial reforms, while vaguely propagandising for Socialism as an abstract long-term goal. What is necessary, as Trotsky put it, is “to help the masses in daily struggle to find the bridge between present demands and the socialist programme of the revolution”.

Leon Trotsky, a leader of the 1905 and 1917 Russian revolutions and of the resistance to Stalinism, in the room in exile where he was later murdered by Stalin’s assassin

The working class moves into action by organising collectively. The picket line is, after all, an attempt to enforce the democratically agreed will of the majority. That is a fundamental principle of any workers’ organisation. The real traditions of democratic centralism have long been obscured by such factors as the distortions introduced by Stalinist repression, which became commonly mistaken for the norms of a Leninist revolutionary party; the authoritarianism of some pseudo-Trotskyist groups; and insufficient safeguards against the unfortunate tendency within any growing organisation towards elitism, sycophancy and intrigue.

A workers’ international draws its power from real unity, something that can only be guaranteed by a healthy democratic internal regime, based not merely upon the formal constitutional trappings of democratic centralism but upon a genuinely healthy climate which encourages open debate. The emergence of temporary groupings and factions over a succession of issues will be inevitable.
Those who seek to avoid honest debate end up in practice just as undemocratic as those who repress it outright. The principle was best summed up by Trotsky: march separately, strike together. Free and open discussion is as necessary to political life as oxygen is to the human body. It is the indispensable corollary for effective united action.

It is impossible to find a way forward without a compass, and in politics this means an understanding of the processes at work in society. Marxists are not clairvoyants, and there is nothing magical about their method, but to understand complex processes a dialectical approach is needed which takes into account the limitations of formal logic, and the value of such concepts as the unity of opposites, the transition from quantity to quality, development through contradiction, and the science of perspectives. And the first condition for a clear perspective is the maximum input of information from all sources and the crucial corrective of free and open discussion, in which ideas can be constantly asserted, challenged, corrected and abandoned. Without such vital safeguards, even the most eminent authority can prove fatally fallible – as is shown most graphically by the experience of the CWI.

There are times when it is easy to predict the course of events: during prolonged periods of relative stability when the main underlying trends have been proven over and over. There are also periods of flux when society is passing through uncharted waters, and undue dogmatism in such circumstances can prove dangerous. The last two decades have been contradictory and paradoxical, and in such conditions it was necessary to develop an approach towards perspectives that was more conditional and provisional than in the past. Today the outlines of future events are beginning to come into sharper focus.

Without the necessary corrective of constant review and debate, no political leadership can avoid for long the risk of catastrophic mistakes. A revolutionary tendency that continually proclaims that huge events are impending will burn out its members. Yet equally a revolutionary tendency that is not prepared to recognise a sudden change, an acceleration in mass consciousness, will be left behind by events.

Together with the widespread revulsion at capitalism that has sprung up recently has come a sudden thirst for ideas. Through personal contacts, our discussion list, and local discussion meetings, it is becoming easier every day to convince contacts and especially young people of the relevance of socialist ideas. We can begin to organise as a coherent tendency, not with grandiose pretensions or sectarian prejudices, but in the hope of joining forces with individual militants and groupings which genuinely strive towards the same objectives.

We do not ask members of existing organisations to turn their backs on them; on the contrary, we urge them to raise within their ranks those issues which are crucial to the future of the working class. The main cadres for the future International, however, will by definition be fresh young forces, untainted by previous disappointments or delusions, and free from old allegiances and habits. That is why we do not see it as our principal task to engineer regroupments of retired veterans or new permutations of past failures. Many of the old warriors are battle-weary, tired and blasé. Our overriding task in the great events that lie ahead is to help a new generation learn from the history of the workers’ movement, winning in common struggle, and by patient explanation, the best young militants to these ideas.

The tasks facing socialists today are not those of 1938 – to lay claim to rightful leadership of a working class that was already organisationally and politically mobilised – but to rebuild a worldwide movement of the working class in the new conditions of the age. New organisations of struggle and new political alignments are needed, both in countries with long-established traditions and above all on new geographical terrain. The main obstacle standing in the way of revolution is no longer the treachery of a corrupt bureaucracy, but the lack of political confidence of the working class itself.

In contrast to those pseudo-revolutionaries who habitually wreck any initiatives that are outside their control, or toy dangerously with communal or nationalist politics, there remain some surviving fragments from the best Marxist traditions of the
past which still embody elements of our common heritage, and still play a worthwhile role in terms of theoretical education or general propaganda. The main obstacle to working with these groups is the difficulty they have in coming to terms with the new tasks of the day, as distinct from their familiar routines inherited from the era that began in 1938. This misconception has led them to a predisposition towards messianic pretensions and a tendency, with the best of intentions, to put their own sectarian interests before those of the class as a whole.

In their day, Marx and Engels had to pit their scientific socialist ideas against the pet remedies of a range of cheap charlatans and snake-oil salesmen. They had to challenge the quackery of Duhring, the opportunism of Lassalle, the adventurism of Blanqui, the confused posturing of Bakunin, etc. The workers’ movement was many times put in peril by the cowardice, vanity or treachery of such characters, by honest mistakes or even by personal crimes... but by nothing more sinister than that.

In the twentieth century, things were very different. In country after country, the working class was drowned in blood, due to conscious betrayal by two entire social castes – the reformist bureaucracy of the Second International and the Stalinist bureaucracy of the Third International – both exploiting the trust of the class, both having a material interest in their failure to carry through the revolution, and both armed to the teeth with limitless resources of money, full-timers, patronage, coercion and a fiendish police apparatus of repression.

The historical basis for Stalinism has gone, and the material basis for reformism is severely weakened. The kind of conscious betrayals that led to the terrible defeats of the twentieth century can no longer pose the same threat in the epoch that is now opening up. The task facing socialists today is far closer to that of Marx and Engels in the mid-nineteenth century than that of Trotsky in the mid-twentieth century.

Marx and Engels succeeded brilliantly, and almost single-handedly. When the Socialist International was founded in 1889, it brought together mass parties and mass trade unions, and stood on the foundation of clear scientific socialist ideas. Its first act was to organise an international one-day general strike, an event which struck terror into the ruling class.

Engels wrote with pride: “Today, the European and American proletariat is reviewing its fighting forces, mobilized for the first time, mobilized as one army, under one flag, for one immediate aim... And today’s spectacle will open the eyes of the capitalists and landlords of all countries to the fact that today the proletarians of all countries are united indeed. If only Marx were still by my side to see this with his own eyes!”

Engels could not have foreseen the betrayals and defeats that were still to come. But today the conditions really have arrived for the realisation of the goal for which generations of socialists have been striving.

The Internationals of the past represented the composition at each successive stage and the changing character of the working class of their times. In today’s conditions, it seems strange to recall that the First International was actually called an association of working men. Even the Third International was largely concentrated in Europe and, to a limited extent, Asia. The International that will emerge from the coming struggles
will encompass a new and strengthened working class comprising hundreds of millions of men and women from all the continents. It will constitute the most formidable mass movement in history. No force on Earth can stand in its way, short of the sheer destruction of human society. It will be a privilege to play a part in its creation.