

The Communist Party

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WHAT DISTINGUISHES OUR PARTY: the line running from Marx to Lenin to the foundation of the Third International and the birth of the Communist Party of Italy at Leghorn (Livorno) 1921, and from there to the struggle of the Italian Communist Left against the degeneration in Moscow and to the rejection of popular fronts and coalition of resistance groups; the tough work of restoring the revolutionary doctrine and the party organ, in contact with the working class, outside the realm of personal politics and electoralist manoeuvrings.

May First 2018 Against Capitalism's Wars For Working Class Organization and Struggle For Revolution and Communism

Capitalism, despite having developed a huge technical capacity and an enormous quantity of resources and machines which facilitate its frenzied production of goods, still impoverishes the vast majority of humanity and drives the world's proletariat into an increasingly insecure existence.

The perpetuation and aggravation of the global capitalist crisis has demolished the illusion of progress for the proletariat and all the reformist false promises of a peaceful and gradual transition to a less inhuman society.

Capitalism takes advantage of this crisis to attack the living conditions of workers, who then find themselves crushed in their social role of proletarians without reserves, without any certainty in the future. In every country, whether of old or recent capitalism, their governments, with the complicity of trade unions servile to their master's regime, require the submission of workers to the national interest, that is, to the bourgeoisie.

As unemployment increases, austerity policies affect the proletariat, lowering wages and imposing on them various kinds of precarious and underpaid work.

The bourgeoisie hopes the working class, lacking direction and disorganized, without its true party and its militant unions, will not react and will abandon itself to the increasingly fierce competition within the class itself.

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The 2nd World War, after its massive destruction and sacrifice of tens of millions of working class people on the altar of the bourgeois homeland, and a continuous series of atrocious "regional" conflicts in Korea, Algeria, Vietnam, and the Middle East... allowed world capitalism a cycle of almost crisis free accumulation until 1975, when capitalism entered a new crisis of

overproduction which since then has worsened, manifesting in periodic 7 – 10 year cycles.

"Globalization", the fragmentation of capitalism into new big nations, in particular in Asia and above all in China, has helped to postpone the general crisis for at least 30 years, but at the same time it has increased its potential, when it does happen, to overwhelm all the great countries of the world, in all of which the capitalist mode of production predominates and the bourgeois class holds sway.

Today world capitalism produces more goods than it can sell. This general crisis of overproduction is the main cause of new wars. War's only purpose is to destroy, to destroy goods and to destroy the workforce, rendering possible, after decades of further massacres, a new hellish cycle of capitalist accumulation and of vicious subjugation of the working class. War is therefore the bourgeoisie's only solution to its deadly economic and social crisis; that of the capitalist mode of production.

This is because wars, in fact, are also used to divert the proletariat from its historic goal - the revolutionary overcoming of the capitalist society – by dispelling the danger of social revolt with the intoxication of nationalist danger.

Today the clash between the powers which followed the collapse of state capitalism in Russia and the growth of Chinese capitalism is becoming ever more devastating. The zones where the different concentrations of capital are entering into conflict are multiplying, leading us to believe that the outbreak of a third world imperialist conflict is not that far off.

The war in Syria, powered by both imperialist fronts, is entering its eighth year and shows no sign of ending. Using the hypocritical pretext of fighting terrorism, all of the States with economic and military interests in the region, desperate to get their hands on its wealth and aware of its strategic importance, are throwing themselves into it like vultures; no matter that this clash has resulted in hundreds of thousands of victims, millions of refugees and enormous destruction. On the one side the United States, France, Britain, Israel and Saudi Arabia, on the other Russia, Iran and then Turkey. And China has also taken the opportunity to flex its muscles.

All States declare themselves in words to be defenders of peace, "human rights" and civil progress, but the world's military spending is increasing year

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on year and has hit the astronomical sum of 1,800 billion dollars: an immense amount of labor employed to build instruments of destruction and death. All states are preparing for war, from which all of them count on emerging victorious: victorious over the working class and victorious over the communist revolution.

The progress of the crisis of global capitalism has already shattered the myth of free trade, and new trade barriers are being raised.

Any State which wants to divide the working class and push it towards militarism spreads the poison of nationalism, patriotism, racism and of religious war. But the proletariat will reject this infamy: the proletarians have no country and have nothing to defend in bourgeois society, nor anything they can expect from the bosses' state. The factory, construction site or land on which they work is not theirs, and their enemy is the entire administrative, bureaucratic, judicial and military state structure, which is at the exclusive beck and call of the bourgeoisie.

The capitalist mode of production, now hopelessly archaic and doomed, has no further reason to exist, it lives on through inertia and the temporary passivity of the world's working class, which alone can and should fight this abhorrent "civilization", which will only be ended by means of its own class's political revolution.

Capitalism has fulfilled its historic role, socializing the productive forces, that is, by developing the economic base of communism. There remains today only a difficult but necessary task to be absolved: overthrowing the bourgeoisie and its state by means of force, expropriating it and moving to a communist takeover of production and distribution, by abolishing the capitalist relations of production, wage labor and production goods.

To do this it is necessary that the proletariat deploys in an organized fashion on the scene of social conflict. Its economic battle organizations are trade unions, the real class unions used to defend by force of numbers and with the weapon of the strike their living and working conditions. But this movement must be directed, on the higher political level, by the conscious historical party of the communist revolution: The International Communist Party!

Solidarity with West Virginia School Workers

On February 22 a extraordinary event occurred in West Virginia, an illegal strike of over 22,000 teachers and school employees. All public schools are closed in the state and the strike will be continuing into next week.

Despite threats from the West Virginia state authorities to take unspecified action, the strike is holding strong going into a second week. One striker was quoted saying "What are they going to do, fire us all? Who would they get to replace us?" With wages some of the lowest in the US, the state had already been unable to fill 700 teaching jobs.

Because the State's legislature is responsible for the salaries of school employees, strikers have been swarming the State Capital disrupting the meetings there. Pounding on closed doors and chanting "Move Mitch, Get out of the way". A joke on Mitch Carmichael, the President of the Senate, and a song by hiphop artist Ludacris - "Move Bitch".

Self Organized

The organization of the strike started last year when school employees started a facebook group to discuss confronting the legislature for better pay and insurance. One striker said, "This was almost completely a grassroots movement, the unions kind of followed us" by planning an official protest. But the cat was out of the bag and strike votes were taken county by county.

So Much for "Trumpism"

So we have a mass illegal strike in a state in which Trump won West Virginia giving him his largest margin of victory in the country - 68.7% of the vote. West Virginia was also one of two states where Donald Trump won every county. As marxists, thus materialists, the ICP isn't surprised. Elections are con-jobs and the workers, when they find they have power, take their own course despite what their votes in elections were.

A Victory?

The school workers of West Virginia have accepted the state's offer and have returned to work with a 5% raise in wages. Was the strike a success? Like all strikes, yes and no. The wage increases are being funded with attacks on the living standards on all of West Virginia's workers - cuts in school programs and medicare health care programs.

Despite the West Virginia state official's attempts of a quid pro quo, the inspiration of rank and file led strikes have swept the country. Oklahoma teachers are likely striking at the beginning of April, organizing their activities on Facebook. Arizona and Kentucky state workers are also using the organizing techniques of the WV school strikers.

We would consider the spread of worker lead and organized strike movements a great victory.

Our Program

The ICP advocates a program of building A United Front of Class Unions. In the US, this would look like on-going coordinations of unions who fight for the working class, rogue union locals, rank and file workers groups like the one which initiated the West Virginia strike as well as workers centers. Such coordinations would provide a framework for successful economic struggles.

The US National Strategy Presented by President Trump December 18, 2017

In a document read by the troublemaker Trump, US president since January 2017, but drafted by the intellectual US defense secretary, James Mattis, the most threatening countries to the political security and, more importantly, economic interests of the US are China (33 times cited), Russia (25), Iran (17) and North Korea (16).

One can hear it again and again, the voice of the stronger rising up arrogantly over the weaker, serenely demanding the use of diplomacy (the adjective "secret" is not obviously specified), military, and economic means, and so again and again one can expect the waltz of alliances of medium and small powers with one or another of the great imperialisms that are fighting for the world market. The great enemy of the US is clearly identified as China, overwhelmingly in the box office of the enemies of the great American nation. Let's add that if the Chinese bourgeoisie were as frank as the American bourgeoisie, they would certainly put the USA at the top of its list of enemies!!

Regarding the Middle East, it is now becoming clear that the US is far from withdrawing from the region as it was promised by the "pacifist" Obama. Neither he nor the trumpeting Trump have touched on the imposing American military presence in the Gulf, and there are even more US troops in Iraq and Syria under Trump! Iran now becomes, for US diplomacy, the "man to oppose" in the Middle East. But previously, Obama's more "courteous" diplomacy had the same purpose: it was and still is to counter the powerful Chinese dragon, often accompanied by the little Russian bear, sneaking around the world.

Trump and Mattis (former General of the Marines in the wars of Afghanistan and Iraq, with a gift for arrogant frankness) denounce the regional expansion of Iran with its influence on a geographical band which crosses the Middle East, from the Persian Gulf to the Mediterranean: Iraq (the American

intervention in Iraq has cleared Iran of its fierce enemy Saddam Hussein), Syria (by its support for Bashar Assad, and therefore its complicity with Russia), Lebanon (with the Shiite movement Hezbollah, a de facto ally of Iran). Tehran would also be held responsible for the lack of resolution of the Palestinian issue (Iran's support for Hamas). It is therefore for US diplomacy to encourage the ongoing rapprochement between Israel, which is still consolidating in its role as US fortress, and several Sunni Arab states facing "Iranian peril".

We know that the reactions following the daring decision of the ugly duck Donald to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel has met only hushed reactions among the Arab bourgeoisie of the region, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt. The "savior" Ben Salman in Saudi Arabia - who "generously" grants some rights to women, but accelerates imprisonment for not only economic but political crimes - was only waiting for that, Iran being the most dangerous regional power for his country (the two countries clash with each other in Yemen), far ahead of Turkey in this respect.

But Iran has other assets. For example, because of Saudi Arabia's tactical diplomatic "mistake" with Qatar (Saudi economic blockade against Qatar for its support of the Muslim Brotherhood and the tone of the Al Jazeera television channel), Tehran, and also Turkey, are thus close at hand for Doha, with which Iran shares the largest natural gas field in the world. Moreover, Dubai in the Arab Emirates has been Iran's commercial center during the sanctions period and is today the financial capital of Iran!

Now the question of resolving the Palestinian problem is becoming more and more secondary for all the bourgeoisies, except for those represented in Brussels who still insist on claiming a Palestinian state that no one believes in, let alone a good majority of Palestinians, caught in the grip exerted by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and by Hamas in Gaza, on the one hand, and Israel on the other.

The icing on the cake, while not altogether a surprise, the intrusion of Turkish troops a few days ago in Syria, in Afrin (canton held by the Syrian Democratic Forces, close to the PKK since 2012) to prevent its seizure by the Kurdish militia on the Syrian border with Turkey, an action condoned by Putin, shows that the game of chess continues. Mattis declares that he "understands the legitimate security concerns" of Ankara (Le Monde, January 24, 2018), and that the American "ally" will not intervene and leave them to their destiny. Once more the Kurdish clans will realize that their mercenary condition exposes them to being exploited and betrayed by all.

Letter from the USA On Charlottesville: Our stance on Anti-Fascism

Anti-fascists, currently flying under the 'antifa' banner, however radical they may appear, are not communists. In the 20s and the 30s, communists opposed the fascists because they represented one of the parties defending capitalism. Now communists must once again shout from the rooftops: it is not enough to oppose fascism unless you also oppose bourgeois democracy. On the other hand, as we

have shown in countless articles in many languages, historical and recent, anti-fascism has proved to be a very effective weapon against communism, both before and after the 2nd World War.

The political United Front tactic, which was proposed by the Third International in 1921, and rejected by our current as opportunism, involved a rapprochement between communism and social democracy. Subsequently the Communist International would consider fighting fascism to be more important than fighting what had given birth to it - capitalism. For the Comintern it became the duty of the communists to preserve left-bourgeois governments in the face of fascism. Even worse, the communist parties actively destroyed their own organizational integrity: filling the ranks of the communist party with boilerplate leftists and bringing genuine communists together with social democrats of every type. This opportunism of the Stalinist parties resulted in open class collaboration and suffocated the communist struggle... against fascism as well.

In the May 1934 edition of *Bilan*, we instead read: «...if the proletariat is really strong enough to impose a governmental solution on the bourgeoisie, then why should it stop at this objective, rather than posing its own central demands for the destruction of the capitalist state? By contrast, if the proletariat is not yet strong enough to launch the insurrection, then doesn't pushing it towards a democratic government mean in effect spurring it down a path that will make the enemy's victory possible?» (“Anti-Fascism: A Formula for Confusion”).

Far from being “purists” the left communists maintained that the fight against fascism necessarily needs to be a fight versus both fascist and democratic parties, not of communists and democrats parties versus fascism.

The left communists were right in predicting that the bourgeois parties couldn't be expected to stop fascism. Indeed, nearly every party ended up deeming Hitler and Mussolini a non threat and a defence against revolution. They supported them, and paved the way for them to win state-power. It cannot be forgotten that the united front not only destroyed the communists' political independence in the name of “anti-fascism,” but it didn't even stop fascism from taking power.

That is the root of our distrust of antifascism.

Yes, many say, that is all well and good, but this isn't the interbellum era, times are different, and besides, there is no working class movement. But capitalism still reigns now as as then. Sure, there is no large working class movement, and the communist party doesn't have a large following. But there definitely won't be if its independence and principles are sacrificed. If we are to build a communist movement it is the principles that count: not principles that are deemed true for all time, but ones resulting from 1) what the world is 2) what the world is in the process of becoming.

The “leftwing” antifascists say they aren't like that. They don't participate in the ruse of electoralism and they certainly don't take sides in intra-capitalist conflicts (nevermind, though, that if pressed hard enough they prefer the social democrats – and in America, even worse, the Democrats!). They fail to understand they are just a ‘street’ (and thus more ‘militant’) component of bourgeois anti-fascist, interclassist politics, which loudly screams yet offers no solutions: they are not for anything, they are just against fascism. They present no program, they do not organize into a communist political party, they do not work for working class autonomy. Their political activity does not go farther than organizing against fascists. They are still stuck in the trap of “fascism vs democracy,” where fascism is everything they don't like and democracy is meant in a “true” sense that excludes Congress and Parliament, and what it actually means remains a mystery. Both in theory and in practice, these

antifascist positions have nothing to contribute to working class politics. The theory must be rejected and different tactics and strategy must be pursued.

It is a theory that is needed, along with tactics and a strategy to follow.

A paper written in Italy in 1920 called “Lenin and Abstentionism” (*Il Soviet*, 1 February), discusses opposition to parliament on the basis of political principles, that running for parliament is detrimental to the attainment of communist objectives. We read there that Communism is an innate need, that you join the communist party in order to commit yourself to actively channelling the energy of the “masses” onto a clearly communist political path.

Of course, this isn't to say that the alt-right, the kkk, neo-nazi meth gangs, christian identitarians, or whatever racist group, aren't a problem. Of course they are, and of course they must be fought. But unlike the antifascists, communists must fight them from a class-oriented perspective, i.e., from within a political party which encourages independent working class organization. If such a perspective is lacking, fighting in the streets is simply not enough.

Recently in Charlottesville, at a “Unite the Right” rally, clashes with protesters resulted in deaths. The anti-fascists are keen to remind us of these tragedies in order to justify their activity and their politics.

But even on these occasions communists must do their utmost to point out that these defeats demonstrate not only the limitations of antifascism, but the need for methods of action that are purely class-based. There is certainly a need, let us be quite clear, for workers and communists, and of course for ethnic communities as well, to defend themselves from right-wing attacks. It is rather the interclassist and democratic stance, typical of anti-fascism, that we are criticizing here, not the fact you need to defend yourself and consequently also against these nazis. We cannot however let the response to this be “we need more antifa” but rather “we need working class politics”. And not in the vulgar sense of repeating what the bulk of working class people think, but in the sense of the politics that is in the interests of the workers.

Communists do not offer a “solution” regarding what the relationship between the bourgeois State and Fascism should be. They don't call on the democratic bourgeois State to repress anti-democratic fascism. We don't, for instance, have a position on whether the white supremacist Richard Spencer should be evicted or not.

We say that racist and nationalist ideologies will only be overcome in a communist society. What the anti-fascists fail to realize is that even if there are times when it is relevant to confront racists and fascists, and with violence, in the workers' organizations and mutual aid networks (never in the party) nationalists and racists will always be around, etc. The solution is showing that they are wrong, that workers of all races and countries must unite in their common struggle and cast aside racist ideology. Unfortunately, we must live in the real world, where the solution is not beating everyone up all the time.

It is a fact cops did nothing while counter-protestors were shot at and killed in Charlottesville. It is undeniable that the police are racists and have been infiltrated by white nationalists. And it is undeniable that the state will transfer power to the fascists when it needs to. Logically speaking, therefore, every anti-fascist should be an anti-capitalist, and every democrat a communist. But that is not the reality of this situation.

Meanwhile, Cruz, Romney, and Bush have come out to condemn white nationalism, and Clinton specifically referred to the alt-right as 'deplorables'; and it is a fact that the FBI has, and will continue to, infiltrate the Ku Klux Klan. Indeed, several of these racists found themselves fired shortly after their tiki torch stunt. But communism in fact doesn't want to fight fascism as such, it wants to fight capitalism, be it democratic or fascist.

Ideologically, antifa is framed in a street style radical social democratism, and organizationally it is nothing beyond an organizer of brawls. To go beyond that, to be for communism and for broader working class organization and mobilization, not against just racism but for other class issues and ultimately for communism, the antifa initiate must first know our critique of anti-fascism; and then, our continued condemnation of the hardcore antifa activists. The duty of communists is therefore to continue to critique antifascism, giving no ideological grounds to it.

Communists must hold onto the dogma - proven time and time again - that the only way to fight capitalism in all its loathsome reality is through class war.

Venezuela: **The Inter-Bourgeois Political Confrontation Pushes the Proletariat Away from the Struggle for Its True Historical Objectives**

The political confrontation between the government and the parties and movements that support it, on the one hand, and the opposition and the different parties and movements that are grouped together there, on the other, has accentuated to the point of resuming the levels of violence that presented themselves a few years ago with the so-called "guarimbas", barricades and the closing of streets and avenues, as well as the attack and burning of the units of transport and headquarters of different institutions. During the last two years, there have been rehearsals of political dialogues between both bourgeois camps, with the intermediation of ex-presidents and later also of the Vatican.

The opposition has mobilized masses principally nourished by sectors of the petit-bourgeoisie and has put forward the demand of holding presidential elections immediately, as a supposed exit to the economic crisis, which has as its most palpable effects inflation and decline of real wages, the shortage of basic commodities, and unemployment or instability of employment. The opposition's move is to create an environment of political pressure that forces elections to be held earlier before the Chavismo-controlled government has time to recuperate and salvage the preference in voting of the

electors. The opposition also has influence in sectors of the working class and the poor strata of the population, but it is the "middle class" who assumes its slogans in a more radical and firm fashion.

The opposition debates within itself in an internal struggle of leadership that is expressed in the coexistence of a tactic that uses violence with the hope that international bodies will intervene in their favor, on the one hand, and, on the other, street mobilizations that lead to the hastening of elections.

The government and the parties of Chavismo manage to mobilize petit-bourgeois strata and important sectors of the working class, as well as poor sectors, and they have responded to the opposition with legal and constitutional arguments. The crisis situation has weakened the electoral support of Chavismo, which has responded with a series of actions of a demagogic character, like the delivery of food through Local Committees of Supply and Production (CLAP), the "Carnet de la Patria" (a registry of the beneficiaries of the missions), and the continuation of the missions (social programs of Chavismo). The Chavist government has invested important resources in a media strategy aimed at presenting itself as a "government of the people" and bolstering the supposed "gains of its missions or social programs".

Chavismo also presents its own internal contradictions, as an expression of the struggle of its leadership for control over resources and positions within the government.

In this way, the crisis in Venezuela, although having as its basis the capitalist economic crisis, is basically a political crisis derived from the conflict between two great bourgeois fronts or fractions for control over the government.

Chavismo has been developing accords in its management of the government to share decisions at the level of the enterprise but without ceding room to the political parties of the opposition. An example of this is the National Economic Council, which brings together the business community and the government and where different decisions are made in consensus, while in the media the government maintains hypocritical and high-sounding declarations against the business community.

Before the reemergence of violence in isolated pockets in some cities, and especially in the residential areas of the petit-bourgeoisie, the government has responded not only with a mobilization of its followers, but a wave of repression that has left many dead, wounded, and detained.

The most recent political move of the government was the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. With this move, the government presents a mechanism, provided for in the Constitution, that allows it to lay claim to a call for dialogue, while the opposition maintains that the Constituent Assembly is only a form of executing a coup d'état and

immediately declared that it will not participate in the Constituent Assembly because the latter is not necessary for the hastening of presidential elections. The government has already begun to meet with different sectors of society to inform them about this convocation that will lead, in the first instance, to the election of different constituents. Of course, with this Constituent Assembly the government pretends to gain time to recover electoral support, to distract the masses with the expectation that solutions to the crisis will be derived from here, and expand its room for conciliation with those business sectors that have become adversarial.

Waged workers have been trailing behind the anti-worker and demagogic slogans of the two bourgeois fronts in struggle. Whenever a labor union or union leader has tried to push forward the economic struggle against these two bourgeois fronts, the government has repressed them with the accusation of terrorism and before the complicit silence of the opposition.

Waged workers will only move towards an exit to the crisis when they turn their backs to the Chavistas and their government as well as the opposition, when they resume the class struggle for its immediate demands, organized by the base and in class unions, and assuming the revolutionary program under the direction of the International Communist Party.

Germany IG Metall Contract

After several "warning" strikes that began on January 4 at the Porsche plant in Zuffenhausen and culminated with the proclamation of the 24-hour strike involving more than 250,000 workers from more than 250 production plants, on the night between 5 and 6 February, following a long "negotiation", an agreement was signed between IG Metall, the largest union of German metallurgists and the employers' association Sudwestmetall. The new collective agreement, which will last until 31 March 2020, covers 900 thousand metalworkers in the state of Baden-Württemberg and is considered as a pilot agreement for the entire sector and its perspective should be extended to all 3.9 million workers within this category in the whole of Germany.

The Italian bourgeois press has given prominence to this agreement, presenting it as a great victory for the workers in the sector. The headline given to this topic in the Italian daily, "Il Fatto Quotidiano" of 8 February is emblematic: "Metalworkers, in Germany the working class wins. And the others?"

The editor, like his colleagues in other publications, exalts the agreement by reporting the 4.3% wage increase and the right, for older employees, to reduce their working week to 28 hours for a maximum period of 24 months. The article reports data on the unemployment rate according to which it fell from 10.5% in 2003 to 5.1% today, while the absolute number of the unemployed has decreased from 4.4 million to 2.57 in the same period. By contrast the number of people employed rose by 11.4%. It seems appropriate to refer to some parts of the article in full as it highlights some data on the workforce in Germany and allows us to understand who would be the "others" mentioned in the title.

... "Behind the numbers, however, there is a very different and composite reality, as Ver.di union, the other large German trade union, that of services industries, did not fail to emphasize. In fact, compared to an 11.4% increase in employment between 2003 and 2016, the hours worked rose only by 6.36%, is deduced (government agency for research on the labor market). So they are more employees, but they work for fewer hours and with fewer guarantees, very often in mini-jobs paying 450 euros a month, and with highly reduced social charges for the employer. (on this see also the note appearing in number 361 of our newspaper)

In 2000, permanent workers accounted for 63.4% of the German workforce. In 2016, this has fallen to 55%. In the meantime, the percentage of fixed-term contracts and temporary work has increased: today more than a third of German workers are hired with atypical contracts, as highlighted by the analysis "Stability through strong domestic demand" (in German, "Stabilität durch starke Binnennachfrage"), published by the Ver.di union in February 2017. We are facing a deeply divided society, both at the regional level and at the level of industrial sectors.

Those who live in the south of Germany and work in the metalworking sector (and more generally in the industrial sector) have seen their standard of living improve in the last years, while for service workers (logistics, canteens, cleaners, etc.) work has become increasingly precarious and the risk of poverty has increased. The percentage of Germans at risk of poverty has risen on average from 11% to 16% in the last twenty years, but in some sectors the risk is much higher. As for example in the retail trade, where the percentage of workers remunerated on the basis of a collective agreement negotiated with the unions fell from 41% in 2010 to 30% in 2014. The progressive exit of companies from collective agreements for commercial workers is leading to lower and lower wages in a sector that employs over five million people, most of them women "

Those who, for the naive journalist would be the "others" are nothing more than an integral part of the working class for communists. Certainly, a part of the proletariat that has to deal with the most unfavorable economic conditions, with more precarious jobs and more easily blackmailed, but still class brothers whose defense is really promoted by the solidarity of those who would be "better".

Let's therefore turn to who would have won.

From a wages point of view, the February 2015 agreement, signed in the same state of Baden-Württemberg, prior to the one just signed, provided for a 3.4% increase in wages while the current one foresees a percentage equal to 4.3%. According to Eurostat, the consumer price index was 0.1% in 2015, 0.4% in 2016 and 1.7% in 2017; while, according to the IFO Institut of Munich, consumer prices will increase by 1.9% in 2018 and by 2.2% in 2019. If these forecasts prove to be correct, it is quite clear that the current increase is even lower than the previous one, so we are talking about the maximum of a recovery of inflation in spite of all the bourgeois propaganda that passes off this agreement as a victory. The demand from IG Metall, which let us remember is a trade union that is also financially tied to the interests of the German economy, was an increase of 6% over 12 months while the agreement provides for 4.3% from April 1, so for a total 27 months. For the months from January to March 2018, a one-off payment of € 100 (and € 70 for apprentices) will be paid. A fixed amount of € 400, € 200 for apprentices, is to be paid, to which a variable part equal to 27.5% of the monthly salary will be paid before July 2019,

this being at the discretion of companies, which can repeal it in the event of a fall in work volume.

Also, with regard to the weekly working time of 28 hours, also touted as a victory, not all that glitters is gold. The agreement provides for the possibility to shorten working hours for periods from six to twenty-four months for the care of elderly relatives or children. However, if there is no substitute for a worker with key qualifications during the relevant period, the employer may reject the request. Secondly, requests can be refused because of peaks of work exceeding 10%.

This reduction in time, which is not with equal pay, also has as a quid pro quo that the employer can increase working hours from 35 hours to 40 hours for up to 50% of the workforce. A new acceleration to flexibility without business costs, or with even lower business costs, as workers who work 35/40 hours a week will also produce for those who will benefit from the 28 hours.

We can only conclude that this is yet another agreement where the workers lose, and that the only victory that the proletariat can rejoice at is with its complete emancipation from the regime of wage labor!

Where the Proletariat Rebels

The historical crisis of the capitalist mode of production inevitably gives rise to explosions of class struggle: proletarians motivated by insuppressible material factors courageously move to direct action, challenging the forces of repression of the bourgeois states, powerful bastions of social conservatism.

In recent weeks we have had exemplary proof of a rediscovered inclination of proletarians to struggle in some Arab countries and in the Middle East.

In Tunisia and in Sudan

Most recently, it was Tunisia, where masses of young proletarians without prospects for the future, took part in many cities to violent protest, motivated by too low wages, by a high cost of living, by unemployment, by misery: “bread, water, and no Nidaa and Ennahda”, they yelled. The demonstrations targeted those two governmental parties, one secular, the other Islamic, that approved a financial law, in accordance with the IMF, that imposes large increases in prices of up to 300% on many goods as well as on necessities. For the moment we do not know what the development will be of this wave of protest in the southern shore of the Mediterranean. Meanwhile it has had to deal with the hard repression on the part of the democratic Tunisian state, which has not hesitated to send the army to the aid of the police to try to dissolve the demonstrations in the squares, provoking a death, one hundred wounded, and many hundreds arrested. For now, the Tunisian government asserts that it has restored order, but the continuation of protests and their extension cannot be ruled out.

Also in Sudan demonstrations since the second week of January against the high cost of living were repressed with gunfire and there are already at least three dead. The government has removed subsidies for certain necessary goods, driving up prices including that of bread, which tripled in price overnight.

In Iran

In addition to Tunisia and Sudan, in the past weeks the struggle of the working masses found a scenario in Iran that is maybe even more explosive for the bourgeois social order. For roughly one week, between the end of December and the beginning of January, in dozens of cities in the country the crowds confronted the police and the militias of the Islamic Republic. The demonstrations, in which tens of thousands of proletarians took part, for the most part very young, had to contend with ferocious repression. The government declared 22 dead, hundreds of wounded and over 1,000 arrested, while non-official sources claim about 50 dead and 3,700 arrested. The same official press speaks of five “suicides” in prison among the arrested.

To quell the revolt the government has appealed to the Iraqi Shi’a militias and to the Pasdaran deployed in Iraq and in Syria, who recruit their own forces among the Afghani Shi’a, promising them Iranian citizenship.

The explosion of social discontent in Iran revealed unprecedented characteristics compared to other movements that opposed the obscurantist and theocratic regime of the Islamic Republic in the past. For the first time in almost 40 years, i.e. since 1979, when a mass movement, quickly brought under the control of a bourgeois leadership, brought about the overthrow of the regime of the Shah Reza Pahlavi, the struggle in the streets and in the factories (piecemeal news reports also speak of many spontaneous strikes across the country) sees a great number of proletarians as protagonists who can no longer endure the suffering provoked by capitalism and who can no longer be soothed by the patriotic rhetoric and sermons of the priests.

Unlike what happened in 2009, when protests against the suspected vote rigging in presidential elections saw the mobilizing of middle classes, of the intelligentsia and so-called “civil society”, this time yesterday’s players have been mere spectators. Even the bourgeois press stressed without shame the arrogance, and sometimes the disdain, with which the middle class viewed the crowds demanding “bread, work and freedom” and protesting against the sudden rise in the prices of necessities, such as poultry, the main source of protein for the Iranian proletarian masses, which now costs an extra 40%.

In the West the bourgeois press, when it understood the class nature of the revolt, drew a veil on the savage repressions, and overlooked the fact that insurgents in many cases have clearly identified the targets: they attacked the seats of Pasdaran and Basiji Islamic militias, and the banks of Islamic foundations. These, in Persian “bonyad”, control sizeable shares of many sectors of the Iranian economy, according to estimates 20 to 30% of the country’s GDP.

When we consider the political ideology of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we should not be deceived by the constant reference to religion in the theocratic system, as if it were the result of the inertial force of ancient pre-bourgeois traditions. The obscurantism of the State, which manifests itself, among other things, with gender-based oppression (adulterers and homosexuals are still subject to the death penalty!) and the humiliation of women, is a consequence of the perpetuation of bourgeois social domination. This hateful superstructure was the ideological weapon by which the Iranian bourgeoisie kept the proletariat at bay during the long process that has transported the country into full capitalist maturity.

In fact, it was not ideological or religious reasons that drove these proletarian protests, but economic ones. In the

outskirts of the big and small cities, masses of mostazafan, i.e., disinherited, have been pushed into action in just a few decades, driven from the countryside into an impetuous process of urbanization and transformed into a gigantic industrial reserve army. In Iran, 73% of the population lives in cities today!

Iran, in addition to being the fourth largest oil producing country in the world, has developed a robust industrial apparatus and has seen a considerable increase in the number of the working class. Today, 32.5% of the Iranian workforce is employed in industry. This is a considerable proportion compared to that of the industrial powers of Europe: in Germany and Italy, industry workers are respectively 30 and 26.6% of the working population.

In the almost four decades of continuity of the current regime, Iran has become the most important political power in the Middle East, capable of expansionist projection and active military interventionism. The developments in the last months of the war in Iraq and Syria have seen the triumph of the coalition of which Iran is an integral part. Important territorial conquests on the field have opened the "Shia corridor" that allows the deployment of the troops of the Islamic Republic and affiliated militias along an axis that, through Iraq and Syria, reaches the Mediterranean and the borders with Israel in the Golan region. This territorial continuity also allows the shifting in the opposite direction of the Lebanese allied militias of Hezbollah, which played a major role in the war in Syria.

In Yemen too, the Houthi Shiites, allies of the Teheran regime, have in recent months resisted the military engagement of Saudi Arabia, irreducible enemy of Iran, and heavy bombing, also obtaining significant successes, not least the elimination at the beginning of December, of the Yemeni president Ali Abd Allah Saleh, guilty of having defected from the anti-Saudi front.

But these military successes have had a heavy cost for the Iranian state budget and it is inevitable that, as always under any bourgeois regime, it was above all up to the proletariat to pay for it. Wages for many categories of workers have been stagnant for many years while inflation has been galloping due to the withdrawal of political support for holding down the prices of basic necessities and the imposition of new taxes and excise duties.

This explains why slogans were chanted during the demonstrations that, under the appearance of a nationalist orientation, "neither for Gaza nor for Lebanon, but I sacrifice my life for Iran", have expressed impatience towards the country's war effort. In the demonstrations they shouted "we do not want the Islamic Republic" and "marg bar Rouhani" that is "death to Rouhani", who is the president of the Republic. This rejection by the proletariat of military engagement abroad is a sign of how, for a bourgeois power, military successes do not always translate into a strengthening of the so-called "internal front" in the balance of power between the classes.

Once again the bourgeoisie has shown that the flag of the homeland is always a rag to deceive the proletarians, while the latter must become more and more aware that the workers do not have a fatherland.

In Iraqi Kurdistan

Strong disruptions of social peace are all the more likely to occur when a country at war has to face an unfavorable course of military operations, or even when the ambitions of territorial conquest, long fueled by bourgeois propaganda, meet burning frustrations. This is indeed what happened in December in Iraqi Kurdistan which, after the referendum on independence last September, suffered heavy territorial losses in the violent tug of war with the government of Baghdad, which has regained

control of the Kirkuk region, rich in oil fields. In this case too, thousands of workers, outraged by unemployment and cuts in the wages of public administration employees, attacked and burnt state buildings and the headquarters of the two main Kurdish parties.

* * *

These signs of the resumption of the class struggle in Iran, Sudan, Tunisia and Kurdistan should be greeted with enthusiasm. But so long as the international proletariat, for objective historical reasons, is not yet able to offer its support to the courageous struggles of proletarians of these countries, the bourgeoisie will not spare any means of crushing its mortal enemy.

The repression and the momentary defeat of proletarian struggles certainly do not extinguish the fire of the class struggle which, in Iran, in Tunisia, in Kurdistan as everywhere, smolders under the ashes. If, as Marxism states, capitalism cannot exist without economic crises and without wars, it follows that this mode of production is condemned to deal with the interminable series of eruptions of the class struggle determined by the intertwining of the different economic, political and military levels, of rampant social chaos.

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February 2018

Two General Strikes in Italy

On February 23 and 24 were two days of mobilization of rank-and-file trade unionism in Italy.

On the 23rd, school workers, health workers and firefighters went on strike in the public sector, together with logistics workers in the private sector.

The strike by school workers was called by all the rank-and file unions - the Cobas Confederation, CUB, UNICobas, USB and SGB. Left-wing opposition groups in the FLC CGIL union also joined in. A joint national event also took place on Friday 23rd in Rome, where our comrades distributed both of the flyers published below.

As written in the flyer for the strike, this unity of action of rank-and-file and combative trade unionism was very positive, but should have been implemented much earlier, before rather than after the signing of the national contract (February 9).

Even this unity of action was not done in the public health sector. The strike was proclaimed by the Confederation Cobas Public Employment, by the CUB, by USB and by SI Cobas, but not by the USI AIT, by the SGB, nor by the Cobas Health and Research Confederation, which in November 2016 had broken its association with the Cobas Confederation. Nor was a single national demonstration was organized. The USB has organized an event on its own under the Ministry of Health, to which did not participate all the provincial structures of the union in the sector, such as that of Genoa, and it resulted in a harmless presence.

As to firefighters the only rank-and-file union that participated, the USB (apart from the CUB, which organizes only a few so-called casual, i.e. temporary workers), made the right decision not to sign the economic part of the renewal contract a few days earlier. It declared a strike but did not organize any demonstration.

Certainly, the best choice would have been to organize a unitary rank-and-file demonstration for workers of all three public sector categories on strike, to unite weak and fragmented forces in the workplace and in the sector, but the energies and, above all, the will in this sense was lacking.

In the logistics sector workers were mobilized by SI Cobas and the small ADL Cobas. This strike was also proclaimed within the dispute for the renewal of the

national contract, which expired on December 31, 2015. It should be noted in this regard that the national contract 2013-15, signed by CGIL, CISL and UIL, in addition to being harmful (which has been generally the case in recent decades) it is very often not even applied in the warehouses, with the complicity of the same regime unions who signed it. In many cases SI Cobas has therefore found itself having to fight to enforce a contract which it does not agree with and has not signed. Where it has developed a considerable strength - as in the Bartolini, GLS, TNT, and SDA groups - it has managed to sign national agreements which represent an improvement with respect to the national contract. It should also be pointed out that these agreements must then be applied in all warehouses, which is not taken for granted, but always depends on the balance of forces.

At the end of October, the official, national trade unions (CGIL, CISL and UIL) declared two days of national strikes to support the dispute and then proclaimed two more for December.

Unlike what was done in other situations, for example during the strike on November 24 at the Amazon warehouse in Castel S. Giovanni (Piacenza), SI Cobas has boycotted these strikes and proclaimed four days of abstention from work, divided by groups of companies, from 4 to 7 November.

We don't believe that this choice should be condemned, given the degree of corruption and complicity with the bosses by CGIL, CISL and UIL in this category of workers, as well as the fact that it demonstrated that the strength achieved by SI Cobas is comparable if not greater than that of the regime unions. This rank-and-file union is therefore able to organize strikes that are not minority strikes, and actually affect production.

A similar tactic is, on the other hand, wrong in those categories where rank-and-file unionism is still in the minority. In these cases, the trade union orientation of our party is to support the strikes promoted by the official regime trade unions, while advocating the correct classist demands, and not to organize separate strikes, as these would be minorities that do no harm to the bosses.

Significantly, on the night of November 3 CGIL, CISL and UIL signed the contract renewal, revoking the strike days scheduled for December.

The four days of strike organized by SI Cobas seem to have gone well, even better than similar, and in any case successful, national days of struggle proclaimed in past years to support the struggle for the renewal of the contract within the labor category. However, although there is some evidence that the bosses, regime unions and bourgeois political regime are worried, the forces deployed seem insufficient to overturn the system of close collaboration

between companies and trade unions, which once again have been able to have it their way.

Filt CGIL, Fit CISL and UIL Trasporti formally signed the new Contract "on conditions" on the night of November 3 and decided to repeal it after holding workers' assemblies by February 1. In reality very few assemblies have been held and it was the usual empty formalism to give the seal of democracy to a harmful contract.

SI Cobas would therefore have had almost three months, from November 7 to January 31, to try to stop the renewal of the contract by organizing a new strike. Instead it waited until February 23, when the conditions had been set aside almost a month earlier.

This delay is partly explained by the organization, in Rome on the day following the strike (Saturday 24 February) of a national demonstration with a more political rather than purely trade union character, not surprisingly close to the day of the elections, on March 4.

The political character of the demonstration was also apparent in the official communiqué to announce it: "For an anti-capitalist front" - different, and opposed, to the practical address of our party that is "For a united trade union front".

The political position that characterized the demonstration was in the abstentionist direction, although this was formulated in equivocal terms, as evidenced by the final sentence of the communiqué: "Conquests and rights are achieved through struggle; without this the vote can only bring illusions and disappointments". This implies that, when the working class returns to struggle, it will be useful to participate in the elections - another illusion!

As written in one of the two leaflets, both distributed on February 23 and 24, it is legitimate for the leadership of a trade union to express its political affiliation. It is not legitimate - being instead harmful to the union - to use the union, its organizational structures, the energies of militants, its members and financial resources - in support of a party or a front of groups and parties, when the class has not matured to the same positions and attitude; this would imply a serious division, both in the rank and file of the union itself and in the labor movement as a whole.

The event was a success, with excellent participation, a sign of the trust of the workers in this union, and therefore of its good union work, and of the organizational effort deployed. But this does not affect the validity of what we say.

The union's characterization in the party sense does not favor its development and the strengthening of the labor movement. A trade union does not become a "class" union because it is the mouthpiece

and supporter of revolutionary communism, but because it knows how to translate these political positions into the appropriate practical approach to the trade union struggle.

If today the workers registered with SI Cobas show trust in this union, over time this characterization in the party sense will inevitably generate divisions, discomfort, bad moods. It then determines a problem in the relationship with the rest of the class, whose membership can be more easily inhibited by the regime union organizations, which have a good motive to paint the SI Cobas as an organization maneuvered by political groups for their own purposes. In short, it is an action intended, as long as you persevere with it, to shore up the isolation of the union.

The initiative was also taken by the management of the SI Cobas to respond to the decision of the leadership of the USB to give support to the election cartel "Potere al Popolo" (Power to the people), into which the so-called Eurostop Social Platform has merged.

The event was convened by mixing trade union slogans with political ones to make the mobilization more attractive for members, who would be less encouraged to mobilize behind purely political slogans.

The USB behaved similarly: they proclaimed a general strike on November 10 but focused all their efforts on the national political demonstration of the Eurostop alliance on the following day in Rome. They wanted the workers to believe that this political demonstration was the strike demonstration. Instead they were led to march behind political, reactionary slogans such as the exit of Italy from the Euro and from NATO.

These methods outline a dangerous war between party-unions, which damage the working class, and the trade union movement, hindering its emancipation from regime unionism.

The ICP's February 23rd Leaflet

Today, the Rank and File ("Base") unions have called for a national strike in four industries: one industry in the private sector; Logistics (SI Cobas and ADL Cobas unions), and three in the State sector; Education, Health and Firefighters (USB union).

Today's mobilization of workers in Education – and, to an extent, Public Health workers – is heartening. That all the base unions (Confederation Cobas, CUB, USB, SGB, UniCobas, SI Cobas, USI-AIT) have found unity in action by organizing a strike on a single date, surpasses the conflicts between their leaderships last fall which hindered a general strike. In Education this unity encouraged the left opposition in the CGIL (Italy's largest union federation) to join in, further strengthening today's strike.

Another positive element is that the USB, the only rank and file union to have access to the national negotiations for Firefighters, has not signed onto the inter-union National Contract renewal (supported by the large regime unions).

All four strikes were called to deal with contract renewal negotiations in each industry, despite the fact that for three out of four – Logistics, Education and Firefighters – the regime unions (CGIL, CISL, UIL) have already signed contracts which effectively agreed to decreases in the purchasing power of wages, and which will be in place for years.

For the government employees – who have suffered for 8 years a contract block – the CGIL was not ashamed to say it had "regained the right to contract", wanting us to believe that the very State-employer was not already going to make such renewals, of course on its own terms.

In regards to the regime union's contract in the Logistics industry, it should be emphasized that these unions – in line with what has been done since the late seventies, at least – have accepted further limitations on the freedom to strike, by including part of the processes of the industry within the activities subjected to the anti-strike laws 146/1990 and 83/2000. These laws are already affecting the entire public sector, and have the evident intention of stopping the growing strength of the

labor movement in this sector, which has grown thanks to the SICobas union.

If this strike cannot reopen contract negotiations, it will show to the workers in the industries involved that there are unions who won't give up the fight and who reject these crappy contract renewals.

That Base unions in four different industries have called this strike is a small step towards the unity of action of the working class and the formation of an United Front of Class Labor Unions, two necessary conditions for workers gaining the strength to defend themselves.

But there is still much to do. There will be many errors and even more enemies to overcome and defeat.

The Rank and File unions in the Public Sector should have organized to strike before the final stage of national contracts negotiations. This was not possible because of the divisions between the leaderships of the various organizations which are only bypassed when the gravity of the situation makes it inevitable. But these divisions resurface later, causing defeats and preventing construction of a movement that develops over time and has the strength to combat the combined efforts of the employers and regime trade unions.

Only in Education was there a complete unity of action, with the organization of both a joint strike and a united national demonstration. In Healthcare, a joint demonstration wasn't organized and there were some defections from the strike by the Cobas Confederation and USI-AIT.

Obviously, strikes shouldn't be limited to State employees but should also include the increasing numbers of employees of private institutions in these sectors. Such organization should push for equal working conditions between the public and private sectors.

Finally, labor unions endorsing or joining political or electoral united fronts – even when they pretend to be anti-capitalist – is a deterrent on the movement and moves it back. Such alignments should not be seen as a progress towards unity of action of workers and radical unionism, which needs to be based in the necessary construction of a single labor union front of the class. The leaders of a union can join a party and express their preference for a given party vs other parties. But we cannot condone the use of the union, its energy and its structures to support that party. Such political actions open divisions within the union, with

members who do not agree to those politics, and it also raises problems with workers outside of the union, who easily see it as a tool of a particular party and not the general defense of the class. The union then takes a road opposite to that of the united front of class unions: encouraging conflicts between hybrid unions/political parties. Such is the case in many of the Base unions.

The defensive struggle for the class' work and living conditions is anti-capitalist and tends to be revolutionary in itself, especially because it develops unity of action. The authentic revolutionary communist party pursues this goal with a class-oriented trade union policy – which prefigures a single trade union front of the entire class – and denounces the usual political opportunism, made of united fronts between parties and political groupings and their damaging vice of using the workers' movement and its trade union organizations at their service – thus damaging them.

February 24 Leaflet Outside and Against of the Election Farce: Resume the Class Struggle

For class struggle to resume proletarians shouldn't participate in the cretinism of electoralism. Elections are a deceptive farce which is used to mask the ruling class' economic and political oppression. Workers must work on the organization of the independent power of their class, both on the trade union and on the political level.

The proletariat must be able, through its economic organizations, to defend its living and working conditions every day which are under constant attack by the bourgeoisie, landowners and their State.

The revolutionary communist party, which can only be international, has nothing to do with bourgeois democracy and considers that democratic governments are just as reactionary, anti-proletarian and counter-revolutionary as openly fascist governments are.

Anti-fascism, which all the parliamentary parties subscribe to, and

even the extra-parliamentary parties and groupings, is an old tool that the bourgeoisie uses to try to beautify its worn-out democracy and the discredited parliamentary system.

Democracy and fascism are two forms of oppression the bourgeoisie uses against the proletariat. You can't fight fascism without fighting the rule of capital or without abolishing the regime of wage labor, commodity and profit.

You can't fight militarism without fighting for the demolition of capitalism! It's the greatest democracies in the world, in fruitful collaboration with the openly dictatorial States, to sow wars and destruction from Africa to the Middle East to Central Asia. Wars whose only aim is the securing of markets and raw materials. Wars which invest enormous capital in the production of arms. Wars to make profits on the slaughter of all mankind. These democracies force millions of people to leave their countries to escape hunger and despair and turn them into cheap labor. It is democracies which are preparing for a new generalized war in order to get out of the economic crisis. This is what condemns capitalism to a catastrophic end.

The most combative workers, the young people who have no future in this rotting society, the unemployed, the immigrants forced to work illegally, to go underground, to sell themselves for a piece of bread, have a common interest that unites them, to build a united front of class unions able to fight the offensives of the bosses, who are backed by their government, by the collaborationist unions, by the opportunist political parties. A united front to defend and improve working class living and working conditions!

Fighting in this manner prepares for communist revolution, international, dictatorial, directed by the party that has made its own the historical program of revolutionary communism!

Introduction

The Second National Congress of the USB

The following article was first published in the July/August 2017 edition of *Il Partito Comunista*, the party's bi-monthly newspaper in the Italian language. It is important in that it gives a very detailed idea of how the party's line on the trade union question is applied in practice within the rank-and-file unions; with the constant emphasis on bringing to the fore the goal of building a truly class based union, by advocating actions and organizational tendencies that link the disparate struggles fought at the local, company, sectoral, national levels into an ever closer and stronger alliance; one which has the force to defend the working class demands of improved pay and conditions in the short term; but ultimately to impose, guided by the class party, a political solution to these economic demands on a far wider, definitive and ultimately international basis.

This political solution will not be imposed by seeking representation in parliament, but by moving to overthrow the current economic system altogether – a system based on the exploitation of the working class by a minute capitalist minority – and replacing it with a system – communism – in which society as a whole can be organized in a rational way; where the surplus value extracted from the population becomes first a social power deployed by the political power of the victorious working class, then a power deployed by the rationally organized force of the classless society that will follow it.

That is where all working class struggles ultimately lead; it is their logical conclusion, for anything else is an acceptance of the right of the enemy class to steal the lifeblood and energy of the working class and use it against the very class that produced it. And the enemy class will continue to do that for as long as political power remains in its hands; that is what it is impelled to do by its very nature; same as it is impelled to roll back all of the economic gains achieved by previous generations of workers...

At the right time, when the balance of forces is right, the function of the trade unions will change from fighting for piecemeal gains to that of fighting for a general and lasting realization of its aims at the general economic level. And for that battle to succeed, it will require the theoretical guidance and leadership of the class party, which acts as a repository of knowledge of past battles fought by the class, and just as importantly, of how we can draw the lessons of the past to fight the battles yet to come.

Within the union sphere, the composition of the working class army which will eventually fight for the 'maximum programme' on the economic front, will emerge from those union organizations that put up a really determined fight to protect working class interests, ever more necessary against the increasing economic encroachments of capital.

The unions found among the rank-and-file trade union movement in Italy are certainly heading in that direction; it is therefore still possible, and worthwhile, for communist militants to agitate within their ranks in the hope they will gain a hearing, and influence them into taking actions that enhance, rather than undermining, class unity.

The rank-and-file trade union movement that has grown, and continues to grow, in Italy, was shaped and inspired by widespread disgust at the tendency of the 'regime' trade unions to always put the interests of the bosses and nation – in a word, of capital – before those of its members. In Italy a direct line connects these regime unions (which defend a national-patriotic solution to economic problems) to their forebears: the fascist workers' corporations. But the regime unions – or 'tricolour' unions, which we in England and America might dub 'Union Jack' or 'Star and Stripes' unions, are now found pretty much everywhere, even in those countries without specifically fascist antecedents. Fighting 'outside and against' the unions is therefore bound to become a pressing necessity not just in Italy but everywhere.

But to be 'against something' – against the regime unions – isn't necessarily the same as being 'for something'. In Italy, however, we see in a particularly developed form, even if it is also happening to a certain extent elsewhere, the increasing definition of what that 'something else' will necessarily have to be: the class union. And the battle by our militants to fight for this new positive goal, following the

widespread rejection and exodus from the regime unions, is what this article is really about.

Finally, given the bewildering proliferation of 'initials' and acronyms by which the numerous rank-and-file unions in Italy are known, and the number of references in the text to specifically Italian labour legislation and organizational structures, we have added footnotes to aid readers' comprehension. We have also not translated some passages from the original article which we deemed too specifically connected to the Italian scene; those, for instance, which covered internecine struggles whose local or specific nature would have obscured the general emerging picture: of a trade union movement, within which communists can actively agitate and participate, which is moving towards a broader and stronger class union; a matter of utmost relevance to workers everywhere.

A Short History of the Unione Sindacale di Base (USB)

The USB was born in 2010 when the Rappresentanze Sindacale di Base (RdB)i combined with the small Sindacato dei Lavoratori (SdL)ii and some minority groups from within the Confederazione Unitaria di Base (CUB)iii. The RdB, the largest of the USB's components, were formed in the early 1980s, and mainly organized workers in the public sector. The CUB was born in 1992, after the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (Cisl)iv expelled one of its minority left currents. Established originally within the private sector, this organization entered into a federative pact with the RdB, forming the RdB-CUB, so as to establish a base union present in both the private and public sectors.

Other important rank-and-file unions at the time were the Confederazione Comitati di Base (Cobas)v – formed in the mid 80s by workers in schools and which is still based mainly in this sector – and the SLAI Cobas, present in some big metalworking and engineering (metalmecchaniche) factories, like Alfa Romeo in Arese and Pomigliano, and FIAT in Termoli, and Sevel in Atesa.

In an attempt to unify the action of these various organizations, not yet ready to unite on an organizational

plane, the RdB-CUB, the Confederazione Cobas and the SdL organized a national assembly on 17 May 2008, which the following September paved the way to the constitution of a "Patto di Consultazione Permanente Nazionale" [Permanent National Consultation Agreement], and later on, during a second assembly on 7 February 2009, to the so-called "Patto di Base" [Base/Rank-and File Agreement].

Only three months later however, on 22 May 2009, a new national assembly of the RdB-CUB revealed the yawning chasm that existed between its two main components, along the fault line of a never-achieved merger, with the long-time leading group of the CUB not participating in the initiative and the RdB leadership using the assembly to issue the slogan of the "Metropolitan Trade Union" [q.v. "Marcia indietro: Il sindacato metropolitano", il Partito Comunista, maggio-giugno 2009 – <http://www.international-communist-party.org/Partito/Parti335.htm#Sindacato>], an issue we will return to later.

This assembly would pave the way to the formation a year later, on 23 May 2010, of the Unione Sindacale di Basevi.

The constitution of the USB has been justified by its leaders on the grounds it was a decisive step towards the objective of unifying rank-and-file trade unionism, by overcoming the qualitative limitations of the latter and moving towards the building of a genuine, confederated class trade union "of the masses".

However things didn't go quite according to plan. The formation of the USB certainly unified a part of rank-and-file trade unionism but at the cost of a serious rift with the remaining part. Overall, therefore, as regards the objective of unifying rank-and-file trade unionism, it has been a backward step.

Also the USB is not yet the "mass" trade union, organized and powerful, that its leadership would have us believe. In fact, strength-wise, the rest of rank-and-file trade unionism isn't actually lagging that far behind the USB, and this has been demonstrated in practice by several struggles in a number of different firms and a number of different sectors, e.g. telecommunications, on the railways, in Alitalia, IKEA and FIAT. And not forgetting logistics, where the USB presence is small compared to that of the SI Cobas and on a par with the smaller ADL Cobas, another rank-and-file union present in the sector.

All of this means it necessarily has to establish relations with these trade unions in order to take any action in

defence of joint interests. But the position of the USB leadership, which considers that Rank-and-file trade unionism is 'residual' and a dying force, can only make achieving this objective that much more difficult, causing a serious setback as far as the general consolidation of the workers' movement is concerned.

The latest blatant example of this was the non-participation of the USB in the national general transport and logistics strike in June 2016; a strike promoted – something as positive as it is rare – by all the other rank-and-file unions

Joint action, having already proved difficult at the company and sector level, then proved impossible at the confederal level; in fact, the refusal of the national leaders of the USB and CUB to co-ordinate their strikes goes back as far as 2010.

The balance sheet of the unification of rank-and-file trade unionism, since the formation of the USB, is therefore not a positive one and to pretend the problem doesn't exist, by rather arrogantly describing the rest of rank-and-file trade unionism as 'residual', and trying to get us to believe that the USB can defend the workers and oppose the patriotic tricolore unions and the bosses' regime all on its own, does not take into account the real balance of forces and is a serious mistake.

It is therefore necessary to take a step back, to relinquish organizational pride, and to patiently and obstinately rebuild a co-ordinating body to make links with other rank-and-file trade unions; that is the only way we will be able to cope with the increasingly challenging battles ahead, amongst which the struggle, already looking increasingly necessary, to defend the freedom to strike.

After it was formed the USB slowly but surely made its presence felt within the private sector, increasing its membership within the retail sector, logistics, among farm labourers, and among the metalworkers.

This was in part due to a continuous trickle of forces from the Cgil vii to the USB, both union leaders and general members. The most important episodes relating to this were the passing from the Fiomviii to the USB, in June 2016, of the national spokesman of the left minority group within the Cgil, "Il sindacato è un'altra cosa"ix, closely followed by a minority of that current.

This new influx of forces was also due – and in particular among the metalworkers – to the USB having signed up

to the Testo Unico sulla Rappresentanza (TUR)x in May 2015: Sickened and disillusioned by the increasing submissiveness of the Cgil to the bosses' interests, some of its leaders, union reps and militants decided to join the USB, opting for them as opposed to other rank-and-file unions both because it is strongest on the organizational level, and because by belonging to the USB they could continue to take part in one of the two kinds of Trade Union Representative body that exist at the company levelxi and pursue a trade union activity which, even if it did accept the necessity for struggle, also considered trade union recognition indispensable – with the consequent right to sit at the company negotiating tables and enjoy so-called trade union 'fitness for purpose' (agibilità), that is, so-called trade union rights within the company – even if at the expense of the restrictions on the right to strike that abiding by the TUR involves.

Signing up to the TUR is a risky strategy: it might pay off in terms of more members and more RSUs won over but it places the union on an inclined plane, where its growth might come at the expense of its activity, with the risk of it becoming bogged down in consultations, or what is referred to in Italy as 'concertative' activity. Although this is not inevitable, it is a real and palpable danger we must not underestimate, much less ignore.

And it should be noted, by the way, that signing up to the TUR was also the result of a lack of will on the part of the rank-and-file union leaders, and in particular the CUB and USB, to promote a joint action to oppose it. Each of them acting on their own behalf, these organizations went their own way and made their own choices.

Adhesion to the TUR has become the principal polemical weapon used by the CUB leadership against the USB and it is used as an argument against the two organizations engaging in joint actions: opposition to the Inter-confederation Agreement on Representation features in all of the CUB leadership's calls for a general strike; given that signing up to the TUR means abstaining from trade union action against it, this prevents the USB from supporting strikes declared by the CUB.

And that, incidentally, appears to suit the USB leaders. A case in point is the general strike in the transport and logistics sectors on 16 June, when the possibility remained open to the USB to strike on the same day with its own platform, something which however the

leadership was definitely minded not to do, as on so many other occasions in the past. On the other hand the CUB leadership's utilization of the TUR issue looks like it is exploiting the situation, prioritized as it is above the primary necessity of uniting the actions of the workers.

In short, the leaders of the two rank-and-file unions seem to mirror each other, dividing the struggles in the interests of their inter-trade-union war, and all to the detriment of the labour movement.

The USB's growth in the private sector has seen a corresponding weakening, minor in quantitative terms, in the public sector. This is revealed in the figures from the latest RSU elections (45,799 votes in 2013; 44,455 in 2016) and in the membership roll (19,085 in 2012, 17,411 in 2015), which were also no doubt due to the law passed in 2014 which reduced the number of hours militants in public sector unions were allowed to carry out union activity during work time.

In some regions of North Italy – Emilia Romagna, Lombardy, Veneto – the USB was also badly hit by the split in February 2016 that led to the formation of the small Sindacato Generale di Base (SGB), which then went on to draw up an agreement with the CUB. Another episode, this, in the ongoing battle between the leaders of the rank-and-file unions which shows how illusory is the USB leadership's claim to have risen above rank-and-file trade unionism and attained the higher level of class unionism – an objective we all share moreover – but by means of shortcuts that are still entirely compatible with the rationale of rank and file unions battling among themselves.

As for the SLAI Cobas, a number of factors have caused it to shrink drastically, namely: the closure of the big factory in Arese; the expulsion in 2005 of part of the Milanese tram drivers' RSU and the provincial co-ordinations of Varese and Como, with the consequent formation of the AL Cobas which in 2010 joined the CUB; repression by the bosses, which in Pomigliano for example had a major impact; and the split in 2010 which gave rise to the formation of the SI Cobas. Also in decline is the Confederazione Cobas.

Today, therefore, we have two main inter-category rank-and-file unions: The USB and the CUB.

To them we can add the SI Cobas, which despite being mainly established in logistics – although there are a few exceptions – it is proving to be the most

dynamic of the three, and the one which follows the correct, classist trade-union line most closely, as regards for example its insistence on workers' united action. The SI Cobas has gone out on strike with the CUB on several occasions and also with the USB, using as criteria for such decisions whether or not a strike, and therefore the workers' struggle as a whole, would be strengthened by its participation. For the same reasons it has also supported general actions promoted by the Fiom and the Cgil.

The conflict between the leadership of the CUB and the USB has been a factor ever since these unions were formed and it has got worse over time, despite the increasingly brutal attacks the working class has been subjected to. We can see no way that the current leaders will resolve the situation.

Nevertheless in each of these organizations there are workers and union representatives who are opposed to this behaviour. Our party's trade union line consists of struggling, in every rank-and-file trade union, to promote unity of action in all struggles, at the company, category, confederation, territorial and national levels. This unity of action is the necessary basis for attaining unity on the organizational plane, which will only be possible if the workers' movement is reinforced by an influx of more combative workers into these unions; something which will make dumping the mistaken lines currently being followed by the present leaders a real possibility.

USB Congress Report Another 'One Motion Congress'

On 9, 10 and 11 June there was held at Tivoli the national confederal assembly of trade union delegates to the Second Congress of the Unione Sindacale di Base.

The lengthy process leading up to the congress had begun on 26 November 2016 at the National Councils of the Private Sector Employees (Lavoro Privato), of the Public Employees (Pubblico Impiego), and at the National Confederal Council, which governs the union as a whole. The following day the National Co-ordinations, the Council's smaller leading organs elected by the Councils and which in their turn elect the even smaller Executives, made public their respective congressional rules.

On 21 January 2017 the Confederal national Co-ordination approved –

unanimously – the Confederal congressional document. Also in January, the document of the newly arisen USB Federazione del Socialexii, of which more later, was drawn up.

We should clarify here that a "congressional document" outline proposals for the programme a union should follow between one congress and the next and it is the leadership of a union that produces this document. Thus the USB leadership wrote one document for each of the three main branches of the union: private sector, public sector, and the union as a whole; and also other congressional documents for the union's minor branches: Federazione del Sociale, ASIA, Pensionati.

On 10 and 11 February the documents for the respective congresses of the USB Public Sector and Private Sector Employees, supplementing the Confederal one, were approved.

On 28 February a national assembly set in motion preparations for the first congress of USB Pensioners.

Workplace meetings were held in March; by 12 April the provincial congresses, and in early May the regional congresses, of the Public and Private Sector employees had taken place.

In Tivoli on 10 May the first national congress of USB Pensioners was held; on 13 May there was both the national congress of the USB Public Sector employees and the sixth congress of ASIA USB (Tenants and Residents Association); on the 14 May there was the national congress of Private Sector employees.

By the end of May the Confederal regional congresses had taken place, finally leading in June, at the end of this long drawn-out process, to the national Congress.

This second congress, just like the first one in 2013, would revolve around just one document. Yet again the congress rules made no provisions for a plurality of documents to be presented and discussed at all stages of the congressional process, from base to summit.

Only within the National, Confederal and Public and Private sector Co-ordinations, which had met to launch the congress on 21 January and 11 February, could different documents, if presented by at least three members (in 2013 it was five), be discussed, from which however only one document could be selected and put out for discussion at the company, provincial, regional and national levels.

Thus was ruled out both the possibility of debating documents supported by minorities within the national co-ordinations – something formally permitted even within the Cgil – and the possibility of alternative documents being presented by the rank-and-file of the union, if supported by a certain proportion of its members.

The congress debated only one document presented by the union leaders. It

would concede that motions to amend the document and items on the agenda could be proposed. And that is what happened.

The fact that regulations of this type have been unanimously approved by the Public and the Private Sector Employees' National Co-ordinations – we don't know the outcome of the vote in the Confederal Co-ordination – indicates that there is a serious lack of understanding about the ways and means required to manage and develop an authentic class union; although maybe some have just taken the opportunist decision not to oppose them.

To block free expression of the different opinions within the trade union organization, instead of defending free expression and being disciplined enough to achieve a healthy co-existence, can only lead to periodic crises, as has already been the case. The first congress was marked both by the departure from the USB of the greater part of the Varese, Brescia and Legnano Federations, and of a smaller part of the Milan Federation, and by the non-participation of three national Co-ordinations within the ministries of Infrastructure and Transport, Defence, and National Heritage and Culture. In February 2016 there was the split which led to the formation of the SGB (which we will refer to in the second part of this article). xiii

In general terms our line is that we are opposed to splits within the trade unions. For example, our comrades within the USB contributed to the battle against the leadership's decision to sign up to Testo Unico sulla Rappresentanza Sindacale (see note below), but they opposed and criticised the choice made by those who, after having led that internal struggle, decided to abandon the union.

One cannot however entirely lay the blame for those departures and splits on those who left. The leadership are also to blame.

The congressional rules, internal regulation and statutes of trade unions are obliged to specify the executive's disciplinary responsibilities, but they should likewise guarantee full freedom of expression to the different trade union tendencies, as regards practical and concrete approaches rather than private ideologies, and allow these groupings the freedom to organize within the union and promote their views on union policy, by presenting alternative documents at congresses, organizing meetings, writing and distributing their literature, etc.

To put obstacles in the way of freedom of expression out of fear it will divide and weaken the union produces the opposite effect. The (apparent) homogeneity which currently exists within the leading organs of the USB, as well as being the fruit of earlier crises which wasted much precious energy and caused many militants to leave, is a far from definitive result. As new groups of workers join and the organisation

expands, a plurality of internal currents will form as a matter of course, and the best way of disciplining their activity would be to make correct use of the instrument of congresses at the various levels, by engaging in discussion and weighing up the different viewpoints. If this doesn't happen the forces with no means of expressing themselves or of existing within the organization are bound to leave.

With democracy a mere façade and internal dissent repressed you don't encourage the growth of a large class trade union but trade union fragmentation instead; this is the perennial defect of rank-and-file trade unionism from which the leadership of the USB believes, or wants to believe, it has emancipated itself.

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A Guide: To be used to Identify the (unfortunately) Numerous Rank and File Unions in Italy

To date, in Italy there are the following rank and file unions, which we list below in decreasing size order: USB, CUB, SI Cobas, Confederation Cobas, SLAI Cobas. As can be seen from this brief note, the picture is characterized by fragmentation in many organizations more or less at war with each other. This is a very negative factor for the rebirth of the class union and an expression of the political opportunism of the various leaderships.

USB (Unione Sindacale di Base):

Founded in May 2010 from the union between RdB (Rappresentanze Sindacali di Base, Base Trade Union Representatives), SdL (Sindacato dei Lavoratori, Workers' Union) and a minority share of the CUB (see below). It is the largest among the rank and file unions and has about 40 thousand members. The majority of the leadership stems from that of the RdB, which was born in the late seventies and early eighties in some categories of the civil service (Social security workers, Firefighters). From 1992, when the CUB was born, RdB had federated with them, forming the RdB-CUB. But in reality the union has never been substantial. The birth of USB in 2010 on the one hand represented a step forward towards the organizational unity of basic unionism, on the other a step backwards, as it led to an organizational break with the CUB and to the beginning of a war between the latter's leadership and that of the newborn USB. RdB was a trade union established by a large majority on public sector workers. USB in recent years has also started to develop in the private sector, forming organizational units in some engineering factories, thanks to the influx of a group of militants and officials from the left opposition of the largest regime union in Italy, i.e., the CGIL (Italian General Labor Confederation).

In the private sector, USB had also undergone a good growth among workers in commerce, but last February an important part of the union structure in this sector, about half of the national one, with its top manager, abandoned USB, accusing the summits of authoritarianism, and merged into the Cobas Confederation. This is not the first

episode of breaking up within USB, since there were those of February 2016 that led to the birth of SGB and two minor splits during the first congress in 2010, which caused the formation of micro local trade union organizations: ADL in Varese and SIAL Cobas in Milan. The growth and strengthening of this rank and file union, therefore, does not seem easy, obvious and straightforward.

CUB (Base Unitary Confederation):

Founded in 1992 following the expulsion in Lombardy - the most industrialized region of Italy - of a left wing of the second trade union of the country, the CISL (Italian Confederation of Workers' Unions). On the wave of a working-class struggle that took place in 1992-93, the CUB spread nationwide in various sectors of private business. From the very beginning, it has established a federative pact with RdB, with the intention of constituting a single and larger rank and file union, present in both the private and public sectors but, as mentioned above, things have gone differently. Over time, instead of developing, this union suffered a slow decline until, in 2010, due to the maneuver of the management group of RdB that led to the emergence of USB, the CUB suffered a severe blow, losing some pieces in favor of USB, which, judging by the mobilizations of recent years, seems to have further aggravated the decline. Its presence in the engineering factories, once scattered in many places, now appears confined to a few islands (eg Electrolux of Solaro, ILVA of Taranto). In any case we do not have reliable numbers about the membership of this union. In 2016 it signed a federative pact with SGB, a small trade union formed with a February 2016 USB spin-off, which mainly concerned the territorial union structures of Emilia, Lombardy and Venice.

SI Cobas (Intercategory Union of Base Committees):

Founded in 2010 from a SLAI Cobas split, starting from two groups of

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members in logistics warehouses in the Milan area, it had considerable development in this sector. Today it has approximately 10 thousand members. It is developed above all in Lombardy and in Emilia, with minor groups in Turin, Alessandria, Genoa, Rome, Naples. It acts in concert with the ADB Cobas, which operates in the same sector in Venetia and Romagna. It is the only rank and file union to date able to deploy strikes that actually affect the productive activity of the sector in which it is installed at national level. The participation of its members in the demonstrations is very numerous, as in the last two cases, in Rome on 23 February and in Milan on 27 October last year, on the occasion of the general strike promoted by a part of the base syndicalism, succeeding in bringing to the streets a number of workers whom the other basic union organizations put together are hardly able to reach. So, despite having a number of members certainly less than that of USB, the ratio between this and that of the participants in the mobilizations is the best among the basic unions. The limit of this union lies in being confined, with very few exceptions, in the logistics sector and in organizing immigrant workers to a large majority. The second between these two factors, which certainly is also a merit, however, contributes with the first to shore up a sort of ghettoization of the union organization compared to the rest of the working class in Italy. It does not help to overcome this isolation - as we write in the introduction published here to the two leaflets distributed in Rome on 23 and 24 February - the idea of the national leadership to characterize the union in a party sense, based on the assumption that this should play a function of "substitution" in the face of the absence - in its view - of the communist revolutionary party.

Cobas Confederation:

Founded in the mid-80s mainly among school workers and secondly in health care, developing then as a leopard scattered fur in other categories (eg post office, transport, urban hygiene), also in the private sector. Also this union has

experienced a slow decline over time. In November last year the loss of a major part of the health federation was lost. In February, however, it received the influx of that part of the trade union structure of the commerce sector that abandoned the USB.

SLAI Cobas:

Founded in 1992 in some big factories like the Alfa Romeo of Arese (Milan), Pomigliano (Naples) and Termoli, and SEVEL of Atessa. It also had a good organizational structure among the tram drivers of Milan, and was the protagonist in the great national mobilization of December 2002-January 2003, with wildcat strikes (outside the limits of the law). The latter group was expelled from the SLAI Cobas together with the majority of the Varese territorial structure, and formed the Cobas Workers Association, which then joined the CUB in 2010. The shutting down of the Arese factory, the bosses' repression in that of Pomigliano, and finally the 2010 split that led to the formation of the SI Cobas, marked a drastic decline in this union.

Others

There are also other small or very small organizations: in addition to the aforementioned ADL Cobas, SGB, ADL Varese, SIAL Cobas, there are also UNICobas (mainly established among teachers), USI-AIT (anarchist), USI (Rome based split from the USI-AIT), the SOL Cobas (split from SI Cobas).

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