

A Free Retriever's Digest

An internationalist Articles Selection & Review

Vol. 3 Issue #1

February – March 2019

February 14, 2019

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From the Editor

Thursday, February 14, 2019

Dear reader,

In this issue you find the following contributions on the following topics and questions:

The history section presents the second and last part of the summary article on *the workers' councils in Germany 1918 – 1923* by Ph. Bourrinet, followed by a letter of Anton Pannekoek to the KAZ (Berlin) from July 1920, which sets out the latter's attitude on the questions of the workers' unions and of National-Bolshevism in the newly constituted KAPD.

In pursuit of our following of the situation in the Middle East we present the *balance sheet of the strike and protest movement in Iran* around Haft Tappeh and INSIG (national steel) that has been drawn up by '*Internationalist Voice*'. You find the *introduction* to their brochure, and *large extracts* on the question of *workers' councils* that has emerged in the attempts to massively struggle against the dire conditions imposed on the workers. Hopefully their contribution will obtain due consideration and reactions.

Faced with the broad, and extremely diverse, echoes that the '*yellow vests*' movement in France has obtained with internationalists in the Western hemisphere, we have included a rather extensive selection of articles, followed by the topic section: *The Popular Revolt in France: Possibility or Plague?*, with three contributions on burning questions, with the beginning of a discussion across political divides.

Last but not least, attention is paid to the current escalation of inter-imperialist tensions over the bankrupt *Venezuela*, implying the main powers at world level, through the adoption of a brief article by '*Nuevo Curso*'.

For your reference, you'll find web links included to blog articles on the aforementioned topics. A special on-line section with articles on and documents of the historical German-Dutch communist Left is under construction.

'A Free Retriever's Digest' thanks all contributors that have made this edition possible.

Internationalist regards,

Henry Cinnamon

(Editor)

A Free Retriever's Digest aims at presenting publications that are relevant for discussions within the internationalist milieu in general, and among the groups and circles who claim adherence to the international communist left(s) in particular. It intends to provide comments and a space for discussion.

Readers are invited to send in notifications of publications by e-mail, abstracts and reviews of relevant books, articles or texts, and presentations at discussion meetings. Contributions should be written in English and may not exceed 3,000 words. Included bibliographical references and internet links should be exact.

Articles and contributions express the views of their authors. Publication is at the discretion of the editor. They may be freely adopted if correctly quoted with source reference. A notification thereof is highly appreciated.

Web blog: <https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com>.

e-mail address: afreeretriever@gmail.com.

Selected Articles & News Feeds

December 3, 2019 – February 10, 2019 (week no.'s 49 – 05)

Workers' Struggles and Social Revolts in 2018

Balance sheets and perspectives

1	Title: 1918 - 1968 - 2018	
	Published on: December 11, 2018	Week 50
	Author(s): Dyjbas (ICT)	
	Web link: http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2018-12-11/1918-1968-2018	
	Length (words): 1,489	
	Remarks:	
2	Title: ¿Qué aprendimos de la lucha de clases en 2018?	Spanish
	Published on: December 30, 2018	Week 52
	Author(s): Nuevo Curso	
	Web link: https://nuevocurso.org/que-aprendimos-de-la-lucha-de-clases-en-2018/	
	Length (words): 1,926	
	Remarks:	
3	Title: What workers in yellow jackets can learn from the proletarian struggle in Iran	
	Published on: January 12, 2019	Week 1
	Author(s): Fredo Corvo (Arbeidersstemmen)	
	Web link: https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com/2019/01/12/what-workers-in-yellow-jackets-can-learn-from-the-proletarian-struggle-in-iran/	
	Length (words): 2,527	
	Remarks: Translation from the ‘Arbeidersstemmen’ blog , January 1, 2019	
4	Title: Some Further Thoughts on the Yellow Vests Movement	
	Published on: January 18, 2019	Week 2
	Author(s): C.B. (ICT)	
	Web link: http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-18/some-further-thoughts-on-the-yellow-vests-movement	
	Length (words): 2,497	
	Remarks:	
5	Title: Communiqué on the ‘Yellow Vests’ Movement in France	
	Published on: January 30, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s): IGCL, January 27, 2019	
	Web link: http://igcl.org/Communique-on-the-movement-of	
	Length (words): 3,363	
	Remarks: In this issue on page 27. German translation (Arbeiterstimmen): https://arbeiterstimmen.wordpress.com/2019/02/02/zur-bewegung-der-gelben-westen-in-frankreich/	
6	Title: Les principales leçons du mouvement des Gilets jaunes	French
	Published on: February 1, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s): Robert Paris (‘La Voix des Travailleurs’)	
	Web link: https://www.matierevolution.org/spip.php?article6323	
	Length (words): 2,648	
	Remarks:	

Social Revolt in Europe: The "Yellow Vests" Movement in France (II)

The analyses and appreciations in the internationalist milieu

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------|--|---------|
| 1 | Title: | GILETS JAUNES: the first attempts at mobilising "the people" for a strong state against the proletariat | |
| | Published on: | December 8, 2018 | Week 49 |
| | Author(s): | MC/KpK | |
| | Web link: | http://mouvement-communiste.com/documents/MC/Leaflets/BLT1812ENvF.pdf | |
| | Length (words): | 1,972 | |
| | Remarks: | Bulletin N°. 16, December 8, 2018 (4 p. A4, pdf) | |
| 2 | Title: | The Movement of the Yellow Vests | |
| | Published on: | December 14, 2018 | Week 50 |
| | Author(s): | R. Victor (Cercle de Discussions de Paris) | |
| | Web link: | https://internationalistperspective.org/the-movement-of-the-yellow-vests/ | |
| | Length (words): | 1,666 | |
| | Remarks: | | |
| 3 | Title: | « GILETS JAUNES », ET APRÈS ? | French |
| | Published on: | December 29, 2018 | Week 52 |
| | Author(s): | Lejardinier, December 27, 2018 | |
| | Web link: | http://grand-large.over-blog.com/2018/12/gilets-jaunes-et-apres.html | |
| | Length (words): | 1,274 | |
| | Remarks: | | |
| 4 | Title: | Du mouvement des Gilets Jaunes à la reprise de la lutte prolétarienne de classe | French |
| | Published on: | January 13, 2019 | Week 1 |
| | Author(s): | PCInt (Le Proletaire) | |
| | Web link: | http://pcint.org/01_Positions/01_01_fr/190113_gilets-jaunes.htm | |
| | Length (words): | 3,739 | |
| | Remarks: | German translation available on the 'Arbeiterstimmen' blog:
https://arbeiterstimmen.wordpress.com/2019/01/28/ikp-von-der-bewegung-der-gelben-westen-bis-zur-wiederaufnahme-des-proletarischen-klassenkampfes/ | |
| 5 | Title: | Gilets jaunes? Et après? | French |
| | Published on: | January 16, 2019 | Week 2 |
| | Author(s): | H.S. (Échanges 165, Autumn 2018) | |
| | Web link: | http://www.echangesetmouvement.fr/2019/01/gilets-jaunes-et-apres/ | |
| | Length (words): | 5,519 | |
| | Remarks: | | |
| 6 | Title: | Appel des «Gilets Jaunes» de l'Est Parisien | French |
| | Published on: | January 18, 2019 | Week 2 |
| | Author(s): | 'Gilets jaunes revolutionnaires' | |
| | Web link: | https://paris-luttes.info/appel-de-gilets-jaunes-de-l-est-11521 | |
| | Length (words): | 1,819 | |
| | Remarks: | English translation (Libcom): http://libcom.org/news/call-yellow-vests-paris-east-side-26012019 | |

7	Title:	Correspondence: can the "Yellow Vest" movement open the way to the class struggle?	
	Published on:	January 22, 2019	Week 3
	Author(s):	ICC Online	
	Web link:	http://en.internationalism.org/content/16624/correspondence-can-yellow-vest-movement-open-way-class-struggle	
	Length (words):	3,093	
	Remarks:		
8	Title:	Mouvement des "gilets jaunes": "l'apolitisme" est un danger pour le prolétariat	French
	Published on:	January 25, 2019	Week 3
	Author(s):	RI (ICC)	
	Web link:	http://fr.internationalism.org/content/9836/mouvement-des-gilets-jaunes-lapolitisme-danger-proletariat	
	Length (words):	1,785	
	Remarks:		
9	Title:	Los chalecos amarillos tres meses después	Spanish
	Published on:	January 30, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s):	Nuevo Curso	
	Web link:	https://nuevocurso.org/los-chalecos-amarillos-tres-meses-despues/	
	Length (words):	4,925	
	Remarks:	This fraternal reply on the IGCL's communiqué can be read on page 34.	
10	Title:	The Class Struggle in France	
	Published on:	February 5, 2019	Week 5
	Author(s):	Charles Reeve, Jean-Luc Sahagian	
	Web link:	https://brooklynrail.org/2019/02/field-notes/The-Class-Struggle-in-France	
	Subject:	1. Yellow Fever: Viruses Good and Bad (C.R.); 2. The return of the Yellow Horde (J-L.S.)	
	Genre:	Reviews	
	Length (words):	5,732	
	Remarks:	Translation by Janet Koenig	

International Situation: Central and West Africa

Protests and riots in Congo and in Sudan

1	Title:	Les élections en République Démocratique du Congo n'élimineront pas la domination bourgeoise et impérialiste	French
	Published on:	December 31, 2018	Week 53
	Author(s):	PCInt (Le Proletaire)	
	Web link:	http://pcint.org/01_Positions/01_01_fr/181231_elections-congo.htm	
	Length (words):	3,049	
	Remarks:		
2	Title:	The Crisis of the Sudanese Regime	
	Published on:	January 8, 2019	Week 1
	Author(s):	Jock, January 7, 2019	
	Web link:	http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-08/the-crisis-of-the-sudanese-regime	
	Length (words):	3,138	
	Remarks:		

International Situation: South America

The inter-imperialist stand-off over Venezuela

1	Title: Venezuela: ni gobierno ni oposición	Spanish
	Published on: January 23, 2019	Week 3
	Author(s): Nuevo Curso	
	Web link: https://nuevocurso.org/venezuela-ni-gobierno-ni-oposicion/	
	Length (words): 1,330	
	Remarks: English translation (Workers' Offensive): https://www.workersoffensive.org/single-post/2019/01/29/Venezuela-Neither-Government-nor-Opposition-1	
2	Title: ¿En qué acabará la crisis venezolana?	Spanish
	Published on: February 1, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s): Nuevo Curso	
	Web link: https://nuevocurso.org/en-que-acabara-la-crisis-venezolana/	
	Length (words): 2,197	
	Remarks: English Translation (AFRD): https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com/2019/02/11/how-will-the-venezuelan-crisis-end/	
3	Title: Venezuela: ¡Ni Maduro, ni Guaidó, sino lucha independiente y proletaria contra el capitalismo!	Spanish
	Published on: February 4, 2019	Week 5
	Author(s): PCInt (El Proletario)	
	Web link: http://pcint.org/01_Positions/01_04_es/190204_ni-maduro-ni-guaido.htm	
	Length (words): 2,690	
	Remarks:	
4	Title: The Venezuelan Crisis	
	Published on: February 4, 2019	Week 5
	Author(s): FD (ICT), January 27, 2019	
	Web link: http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-04/the-venezuelan-crisis	
	Length (words): 1,410	
	Remarks:	
5	Title: Bolsonarism and "Frontier Capitalism"	
	Published on: February 5, 2019	Week 5
	Author(s): Daniel Cunha	
	Web link: https://brooklynrail.org/2019/02/field-notes/Bolsonarism-and-Frontier-Capitalism	
	Length (words): 3,909	
	Remarks: Slightly modified version of an article published in October 2018 in Portuguese in Blog <i>da Consequência</i> : https://blogdaconsequencia.com/2018/10/04/bolsonarismo-e-capitalismo-de-fronteira/ . Translated by the author.	
6	Title: Venezuela: ayuda humanitaria... para la guerra	Spanish
	Published on: February 7, 2019	Week 5
	Author(s): Nuevo Curso	
	Web link: https://nuevocurso.org/venezuela-ayuda-humanitaria-para-la-guerra/	
	Length (words): 1,559	
	Remarks: English translation (CWD): http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-02-10/humanitarian-aid-for-war	

Workers' Struggles in Mexico and the USA

Strikes in the car industry in Mexico; Teachers' strikes in the USA (California, Chicago)

1 Title: **Matamoros strike set to expand as ruling class boosts unions** Week 3
 Published on: January 24, 2019
 Author(s): Eric London and Andrea Lobo (WSWS)
 Web link: <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2019/01/24/mata-j24.html>
 Length (words): 1,826
 Remarks:

2 Title: **Mexico: Between Barbarism and Class Struggle** Week 3
 Published on: January 24, 2019
 Author(s): Nuevo Curso
 Web link: <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-24/mexico-between-barbarism-and-class-struggle>
 Length (words): 811
 Remarks: Translated from Spanish: [Dos Méxicos, dos alternativas universales: Tlahuelilpan vs Matamoros](#)

3 Title: **Mexico's Turmoil Continues: The Maquiladora Strikes** Week 4
 Published on: January 31, 2019
 Author(s): Ant
 Web link: <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-31/mexico-s-turmoil-continues-the-maquiladora-strikes>
 Length (words): 2,364
 Remarks:

4 Title: **Unity in Los Angeles teachers' strike** Week 3
 Published on: January 24, 2019
 Author(s): Basho
 Web link: <https://newsandletters.org/unity-los-angeles-teachers-strike/>
 Length (words): 1,072
 Remarks:

5 Title: **Chicago teachers win first strike against charter schools** Week 3
 Published on: January 25, 2019
 Author(s): Bob McGuire and Franklin Dmitryev (N&LC)
 Web link: <https://newsandletters.org/chicago-teachers-win-first-strike-charter-schools/>
 Length (words): 1,057
 Remarks:

6 Title: **LA Teachers Strike Over the Emptying Out of the City's Classroom** Week 3
 Published on: January 26, 2019
 Author(s): AfricanPrint
 Web link: <https://libcom.org/news/la-teachers-strike-over-emptying-out-citys-classroom-26012019>
 Length (words): 1,501
 Remarks:

7 Title: **Picket Line Lessons: The UTLA Teacher Strike** Week 5
 Published on: February 5, 2019
 Author(s): Members of Black Rose/Rosa Negra
 Web link: <http://blackrosefed.org/lessons-utla-teacher-strike/>
 Length (words): 4,075
 Remarks:

The proletarian mass struggles in Germany 1918 – 1923 (II)

Recent articles: historiography, documents and positions

- | | | |
|---|---|------------------------------|
| 1 | <p>Title: Brochure moto proprio déc. 2018 : révolutions des conseils 1917-1919</p> <p>Published on: December 13, 2018</p> <p>Author(s): Ph. Bourrinet</p> <p>Web link: http://pantopolis.over-blog.com/2018/12/brochure-moto-proprio-dec.2018-revolutions-des-conseils-1917-1919.html</p> <p>Subject: LE MOUVEMENT DES CONSEILS EN RUSSIE & FINLANDE, ALLEMAGNE, AUTRICHE & HONGRIE, 1917-1919</p> <p>Genre: Brochure, 52 p. A5</p> <p>Remarks: Orders via: info@left-dis.nl Price per copy: 3 euros.</p> | <p>French</p> <p>Week 50</p> |
| 2 | <p>Title: Zur Novemberrevolution 1918 (IV) - Von den Ruhrkämpfen 1920 und den März-kämpfen in Mitteldeutschland 1921 zur „nationalen und sozialen Befreiung des deutschen Volkes“ (KPD)</p> <p>Published on: December 21, 2018</p> <p>Author(s): Ph. Bourrinet / Fredo Corvo (editor)</p> <p>Web link: https://arbeiterstimmen.wordpress.com/2018/12/21/von-ruhrkaempfe-1920-und-maerzkaempfe-in-mitteldeutschland-1921-zur-nationalen-und-sozialen-befreiung-des-deutschen-volkes-kpd/#more-2186</p> <p>Subject: Coincides with the second part of the summary article on page 11 of this issue.</p> <p>Genre: Translation of “<i>Les conseils ouvriers en Allemagne 1918-23</i>”. (‘<i>Controverses</i>’ Nr.5, May 2018). Supplemented by selected historical texts, excerpts and photographs.</p> <p>Length (words): 10,464</p> <p>Remarks: Documents: Fragment on the Trade Unions and the Workers’ Union, Program of the KAPD (1920); A letter by comrade Pannekoek, <i>Kommunistische Arbeiter Zeitung</i>, July 1920; Lessons of the March actions (H. Gorter); G.I.K. (Holland): Theses on revolutionary enterprise nuclei, 1931.</p> | <p>German</p> <p>Week 51</p> |
| 3 | <p>Title: A Hundred Years Since the Murder of Luxemburg and Liebknecht</p> <p>Published on: January 15, 2019</p> <p>Author(s): EDL (ICT)</p> <p>Web link: http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2019-01-15/a-hundred-years-since-the-murder-of-luxemburg-and-liebknecht</p> <p>Subject: The class struggle in Germany 1918 - 1923 and the question of the proletarian vanguard.</p> <p>Genre: A historical synthesis and appreciation</p> <p>Length (words): 4,536</p> <p>Remarks:</p> | <p>Week 2</p> |
| 4 | <p>Title: Editorial: The Murder of Rosa Luxemburg</p> <p>Published on: January 20, 2019</p> <p>Author(s): Insurgent Notes Editors</p> <p>Web link: http://insurgentnotes.com/2019/01/editorial-one-hundred-years-ago-the-social-democrats-and-fascists-murdered-our-comrade-rosa-luxemburg/</p> <p>Subject: The contributions of Rosa Luxemburg</p> <p>Genre: Editorial to <i>Insurgent Notes</i> #18, October 2018</p> <p>Length (words): 1,245</p> <p>Remarks: Additional documents: 5 selected articles by Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht from <i>Die Rote Fahne</i> (November 1918 - January 1919); The 1916 May 1st Appeal. With reference to the article by John Garvey “<i>What is socialism?</i>”</p> | <p>Week 2</p> |

5	Title:	Lenin, Luxemburg, Liebknecht	
	Published on:	January 27, 2019	Week 3
	Author(s):	<i>L'Étincelle</i> (#10, January/February 1946)	
	Web link:	http://en.internationalism.org/content/16633/lenin-luxemburg-liebknecht	
	Length (words):	3,163	
	Remarks:	Translation of a 1946 article by the 'Gauche Communiste de France' (GCF).	
6	Title:	Die Januarkämpfe in Berlin	German
	Published on:	January 29, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s):	Nelke ('Soziale Befreiung')	
	Web link:	http://sbefreiung.blogspot.de/2019/01/29/die-januarkaempfe-in-berlin/	
	Length (words):	1,490	
	Remarks:	Historiography: Chapter 6 from the Pamphlet " Die revolutionäre Nachkriegskrise in Deutschland (1918-1923) " (2014)	

Documents of the historical communist Left / History of the workers' movement USA/Daniel de León; G.I.C. 1933; Munis on the organization question

1	Title:	The Birth of Socialism in the United States	
	Published on:	December 28, 2018	Week 52
	Author(s):	Workers' Offensive	
	Web link:	https://www.workersoffensive.org/single-post/2018/12/27/The-Birth-of-Socialism-in-the-United-States	
	Subject:	The history of the labor movement in the United States and the legacy of Daniel de León and the SLP (1st part).	
	Genre:	Historiography of the workers' movement / Daniel de León	
	Length (words):	5,656	
	Remarks:	In cooperation with 'Nuevo Curso'	
2	Title:	G.I.K. „Die Umwälzung in Deutschland" (1933)	German
	Published on:	January 18, 2019	Week 2
	Author(s):	Pressdienst der Internationalen Kommunisten Holland, 1933	
	Web link:	https://arbeiterstimmen.wordpress.com/2019/01/18/g-i-k-die-umwaelzung-in-deutschland-1933/	
	Subject:	I. Die Katastrophe der Sozialdemokratie II. Das Ende der kommunistischen Partei	
	Genre:	Reprint	
	Length (words):	3,534	
	Remarks:		
3	Title:	Revolutionary Class, Political Organization, and the Dictatorship of the Proletariat (Part 1)	
	Published on:	January 30, 2019	Week 4
	Author(s):	Grandizo Munis	
	Web link:	https://www.workersoffensive.org/single-post/2019/01/30/Revolutionary-Class-Political-Organization-and-the-Dictatorship-of-the-Proletariat-Part-1	
	Subject:	The question of class consciousness and political organization in the view of the Spanish communist Left	
	Genre:	Organization question; critique of Bordigism, Lenin, and council communism	
	Length (words):	4,870	
	Remarks:	English translation of " <i>Clase revolucionaria, organización política, y dictadura del proletariado</i> ", published in " <i>Alarma</i> ".	

Discussion Topic: The Historical Alternative

"What is Socialism?" & a discussion on the economics of the Transition Period

1 Title: **What is Socialism?** Week 42
 Published on: October 21, 2018
 Author(s): John Garvey
 Web link: <http://insurgentnotes.com/2018/10/what-is-socialism/>
 Genre: Discussion contribution
 Length (words): 5,650
 Remarks: Contribution to a panel discussion organized by the *Platypus Organization* on this question (revised and expanded)

2 Title: **Eine kommunistische Arbeitszeitrechnung - kein Element der »Weltkommune«?** German
Week 45
 Published on: November 8, 2018
 Author(s): Jakob Koekepann (Leipzig)
 Web link: <https://kosmoprolet.org/de/eine-kommunistische-arbeitszeitrechnung-kein-element-der-weltkommune>
 Subject: Labour time calculation and the period of transition
 Genre: Discussion with Kosmoprolet
 Length (words): 4,364
 Remarks: Contribution to the debate on "[Umrisse der Weltkommune](#)" ("Contours on the World Commune"), *Kosmoprolet #5* (March 2018)

3 Title: **THINKING ABOUT COMMUNISM: Fundamental Principles of Communist Production and Distribution: A New Look at an Old Text** Week 50
 Published on: December 11, 2018
 Author(s): Charles Reeve
 Web link: <https://brooklynrail.org/2018/12/field-notes/THINKING-ABOUT-COMMUNISM-Fundamental-Principles-of-Communist-Production-and-Distribution-A-New-Look-at-an-Old-Text>
 Subject:
 Genre:
 Length (words): 6,216
 Remarks: Chapter 10 of "*Le socialisme sauvage*" (Paris: L'Echappée, 2018), translated by Janet Koenig.

4 Title: **Kritik von Hermann Lueer an den Thesen zur Weltkommune** German
Week 2
 Published on: January 20, 2019
 Author(s): Hermann Lueer
 Web link: <https://kosmoprolet.org/de/kritik-von-hermann-lueer-den-thesen-zur-weltkommune>
 Subject: Labour time calculation and the period of transition
 Genre: Discussion with Kosmoprolet
 Length (words): 3,274
 Remarks: The critique is author of a book apropos of the GIC that aims at "[reinserting the Fundamental Principles](#)" (GIC, 1930) into the actual debate" about the alternative to capitalism.

The Workers' Councils in Germany 1918-23 (II.)

A political-historical synthesis

This is the second and last part of the historical summary article by Ph. Bourrinet on the workers' councils in the proletarian struggles of 1918 -1923. The first part has been published in *A Free Retriever's Digest* Vol.2 #6 (December 2018/January 2019) and can be read on the web blog as well. ⁽¹⁾

1) <https://afreeretriever.wordpress.com/2018/11/06/the-workers-councils-in-germany-1918-23-part-1/>

Disappearance of the councils. Formation of workers' unions and organizations of the unemployed

The official disappearance of the councils did not mean that they were definitively buried. The defeat of January 1919 in Berlin (but also that of March) had decapitated the revolutionary movement of its most prominent militants (Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht, Leo Jogiches). But at the same time, economic and political strikes from Upper Silesia to the Ruhr, via Berlin and central Germany, where even the defeat of March 1919 could not stop the movement, multiplied. The workers were reduced to starvation wages, with real wages often falling by 40% compared to 1914. Unemployment had become massive: 40,000 unemployed in Munich, 50,000 in Berlin. At the beginning of 1919, there were more than 3 million unemployed. Hunger riots were common (Frankfurt, Bochum, Dortmund, Breslau). The one in Hamburg in June 1919 was worth a second occupation of the city by the Reichswehr. ⁽¹⁾

From the outset, the SPD had tried to control discontent by favoring the action of the old unions, through an Agreement concluded on 15 November 1918 between employers and the ADGB led by Carl Legien (the "Stinnes-Legien Agreements"). ⁽²⁾ The latter became the "designated workers' representatives". This agreement was supplemented by an ordinance of 23 December 1918 on works councils ("Tarifvertragsverordnung") aimed at supervising all workers

(the "Arbeiterchaft"); these committees, which would be attached to the unions, would ensure good class collaboration:

*"The commissions of workers and employees (...) as well as the representations of the workers and employees (...) have to take charge of the interests of the workers and employees towards the company, the administration or the bureau of the employer. In community with the employer they have to see to the carrying out of the applicable tariff agreements in the enterprise. (...) They are obliged to promote **good understanding** between the workers or employees as well as between these and the employer."* ⁽³⁾

In the Ruhr region, where capital (Stinnes, Krupp, etc.) put the lock-out in practice, miners and steel workers were given hope of the possibility of nationalization – which was called "socialization", and especially of workers' co-management ("Mitbestimmung"). Strikes multiplied from February to April 1919. Once again, they were met with repression led by the Reichswehr and 'formalized' by a social-democratic worker: Carl Severing, who said: "As a representative of the workers, I want to talk to the workers; as a worker, I want to act for the workers." ⁽⁴⁾ The re-

1) Uwe Schulte-Varendorff, *Die Hungerunruhen in Hamburg im Juni 1919 - eine zweite Revolution?*, Hamburg University Press, 2010.

2) The ADGB, once the order was restored, reached 8 million members in 1920; this figure dropped to 3 million in 1932.

3) Source: "Regulation on Tariff Treaties, Workers' and Employees' Commissions and Resolution of labor disputes" of December 23, 1918. [See: RGBl. Nr. 6605 [Verordnung über Tarifverträge, Arbeiter- und Angestelltenausschüsse und Schlichtung von Arbeitsstreitigkeiten](#). II. Abschnitt. Arbeiter- und Angestelltenausschüsse, § 13.]

4) Speech of April 8, 1919, quoted by Heinrich August Winkler, *Von der Revolution zur Stabilisierung. Arbeiter und Arbeiterbewegung in der Weimarer Republik 1918 bis 1924*, Berlin/Bonn, 1984.

sult was almost immediate: miners and steel workers massively left the trade unions to form workers' unions.

The divorce between the mass of workers and the 'Free Unions' ("Freie Gewerkschaften") was total. One had to submit oneself or resign. To get or even keep a job, it was better, as in the councils, to vote for the SPD unions.

From the end of 1918, but especially from the spring of 1919, a slogan became popular, echoed by the KPD, the anarcho-syndicalists and the left-wing Independents: "Get out of the unions!" ("Heraus aus den Gewerkschaften!").⁽⁵⁾ Radical communist militants attacked the offices of these unions in Bremen and Hamburg, Berlin, Essen, etc., seized their funds and distributed them to the unemployed, as well as to militants on the run or in prison.⁽⁶⁾

The first union, that of the miners, was formed in the Ruhr on 30 March 1919. It was composed of revolutionary syndicalists and communists. Destroyed by repression and Freikorps, it was reconstituted in

5) *Kommunistische Räte-Korrespondenz*, No. 11, Berlin, July 1919. In this KPD organ, Paul Frölich writes: "The more we enter into great struggles, the more this call: "Let's get out of the unions!" can become a slogan for the masses."

6) Cf. the testimony of the council communist, former member of the KAPD, Paul Mattick: *Die Revolution war für mich ein großes Abenteuer. Paul Mattick im Gespräch mit Michael Buckmiller*. Unrast Verlag, Münster 2014.

June under the name of *Union of Gelsenkirchen*. Soon anarcho-syndicalist unions (FAUD) and especially Marxist unions became widespread, claiming, like the AAUD, to adhere to the "dictatorship of the proletariat", a dictatorship that would emanate from the "revolutionary enterprise [organizations]" ("revolutionäre Betriebsorganisationen"), a kind of factory groups of the revolutionary party. Before the KPD chose to form "communist cells" in the official trade unions, a large number of workers had joined the Workers' Unions. These constituted a unitary mass organization, both of economic struggle and political struggle until the seizure of power by the workers' councils.

When the AAUD was officially founded in February 1920, and despite the repression, it ended up with more than 120,000 members. It is worth mentioning that these unions, as in the Leuna factories (central Germany), often disposed of weapons caches. It was this union, the most radical, that joined the KAPD in April 1920, a very large minority of the KPD that had been excluded in October 1919 (Heidelberg Congress), and had a 90% majority in Berlin!⁽⁷⁾ This 40,000-member party – which had literally siphoned off the KPD in Berlin – was born out of the Ruhr struggles in March 1920.

7) According to H.-M. Bock it consisted of "more than 50% of the membership". "Syndikalismus und Linkskommunismus von 1918 - 1923", Verlag Anton Hain, Meisenheim am Glan, 1969, p. 228. (F.C.)

The last revolutionary uprisings: the Ruhr 1920. Red Army and Workers' Councils

While an economic struggle resurfaced increasingly radical in its organization, the ruling class did not remain passive. As early as June 1919, General Lüttwitz, who had participated in the repression of the January insurrection, suggested to Noske the establishment of a military dictatorship. Still in collaboration with Noske, he worked to suppress the railway strikes of January 1920 and to ban the KPD and USPD presses. Also the coup d'Etat of March 13, 1920, called the 'Kapp-Lüttwitz putsch', was no surprise, except for Noske who fled and asked General von Seeckt, the Reichswehr leader, to arrest the

putschists. Of course, the whole army and the state apparatus as a whole support the putsch.

But the reaction of the proletariat is immediate. The general strike, which affected 12 million workers, spread across Germany: Ruhr, Saxony, Hamburg and Bremen, Bavaria, Thuringia, Pomerania and East Prussia. In this province, SPD Governor August Winnig took up the cause of the putschists.

Where the SPD does not take a local position in favor of the putsch, the strike is supported, and sometimes even encouraged, especially by trade union

leaders such as Carl Legien, who calls for the defense of the 'Republic' and the formation of a "workers' government". The KPD, except for its left, which it excluded in October 1919 at its Heidelberg Congress, and its leader Paul Levi (who was imprisoned), declares itself "neutral", stating that it will not "lift a finger" to act. ⁽¹⁾ If it acts, as in Chemnitz (with Heinrich Brandler), it is to rally to the idea of a "loyal opposition" in the event of the formation of a SPD-USPD "workers' government".

The reaction of the German proletariat can be compared to that of the Spanish proletariat during the *Pronunciamiento* of July 1936. ⁽²⁾ In three places, the proletariat more or less spontaneously takes power to engage in the struggle on a social terrain, forming workers' councils (especially in the Ruhr) or action committees (when it is a party-union alliance). In Central Germany, in a rather confused way, after armed fights in Gotha, Gera, Halle, in Vogtland (with Max Hoelz), or peacefully, as in Chemnitz (under Brandler's leadership), the proletariat 'takes power'. We should specify: 'more or less'. The same is true in Kiel and the Schwerin region, but not in Hamburg and Bremen. In Hamburg the 'Left', represented by Laufenberg and Wolffheim, reacted like the KPD: "The general strike is a general absurdity". This position is defended by Otto Rühle in Dresden, but also by the leadership of the anarcho-syndicalist FAU, which declares itself, through pacifism, against armed struggle. The FAU base will not follow its direction.

It is in fact in the Ruhr, and not always in a homogeneous way, that the movement goes the furthest towards a total takeover of power, after the entry into the general strike of 300,000 miners. As soon as the Freikorps appeared, as well as the local guards composed of SPD members (in the case of Dortmund they shot at the workers), recruitment offices appeared which gave rise to a real red army, 50,000 to

80,000 men strong. The conditions for fighting are: at least six months on the front during the war and membership of a 'workers party' or trade union or a workers' union (AAU and FAU). In some places, the dictatorship of the proletariat is proclaimed and supplies, like weapons, remain under the authority of the councils. The Freikorps were driven out of the Ruhr and the SPD government militias were disarmed.

But if, on March 17, Kapp had to flee to Sweden, the SPD did not remain inactive and reinstalled itself in power, without Gustav Noske, but with Gustav Bauer – and later with Hermann Müller – as chancellor. He instructs the head of the Reichswehr Von Seeckt to set up special courts against worker insurgents. Freikorps of students are formed. One of them will massacre workers taken prisoner in Bad Thal (Thuringia) on March 24, justifying its action as follows: "we need corpses for our anatomy courses". ⁽³⁾

But the 80,000 Ruhr workers had to be disarmed. This was the meaning of the Bielefeld negotiations, led once again by Severing, while General Watter's troops were stationed in Münster. The Bielefeld agreements, signed on March 24 by the Independents and two members of the KPD, resulted in the disarmament of a part of the Red Army, while the Western Front rejected the agreement. Arguing for this refusal, the SPD government led General Watter's troops to march on April 4. It was a new butchery: mass shootings, including Red Cross nurses, all thrown into mass graves.

This defeat, both military and political, was decisive, much more so than that of January 1919. ⁽⁴⁾ But it was under these conditions that the KAPD, a split from the KPD, was created at the same time, whose militants, supported by AAU members, had played a major role in the Ruhr combats. This party called for the continuation, until victory, of the "world revolution".

1) Udo Winkel, 'Paul Levi and his significance for the German workers' movement', *Cahiers Léon Trotski* No. 62, May 1998, pp. 32-34.

2) In fact: The military coup against the government of the left-wing Popular Front in Spain, the beginning of the 'civil war'. (Editor's note)

3) *Illustrierte Geschichte der deutschen Revolution* [1929], op. cit., p. 487. After a trial in July 1920, the murderers were released. Edifying comment from the bourgeois press (*Deutsche Zeitung*): "Our good boys have been released. There are still judges in Germany....".

4) Chris Harman, op. cit. pp. 127-159.

March 1921 – October 1923: Putschism.

From exaltation of the world revolution to that of national sentiment

At the time when the revolt of the Kronstadt mariners and workers broke out, the Komintern developed a typically putschist theory called “*forcing the revolutionary course*”, the instrument of which was Bela Kun, the defeated leader of the Republic of the Hungarian councils, who arrived clandestinely in Germany. However, at that very moment, certain that the German proletariat would not move, Minister of the Interior Carl Severing decided to go on the offensive, and occupy central Germany, where the workers had kept their weapons.

The unified KPD (VKPD) is suddenly moving from a policy of “*open letters*” to trade unions, to form a “*workers’ government*” to a united insurgent front. Faced with the passivity of the German proletariat, Hugo Eberlein – KPD delegate to the First Congress of the Komintern – even proposes false attacks against the VKPD to arouse “*the indignation of the masses*”. However, it was necessary to find ‘allies’. The Komintern asked the KAPD, as a sympathizing party, to join the KPD in this adventure. The KAPD makes fiery proclamations to the German proletariat, despite the reluctance of its base: “*With guns and knives, with fists and teeth, take it on. It is all or nothing*”. (5) Its leadership affirms “*the masses of the CP act according to our watchwords. They have forced their leaders to do so.*” (6)

Neither the action of the two parties, nor the ‘autonomous’ action of free electrons of the KAPD – such as the ‘troops’ of Max Hoelz and Karl Plättner – can stop the disaster. The proletariat of Berlin, of Central Germany remains passive. The Leuna factories, whose authority was the workers’ Union, with 2,000 members (10 percent of the workers), were bombed by the ‘Greens’ of the Schupo (“Schutzpolizei”), who disposed of armored vehicles.

The KAPD perfectly summarized its position in its Declaration, which it could not read at the end of the sessions of the Third Congress of the Comintern

(July 1921), which was also that of Rosa Luxemburg in January 1919:

“The Communist Party cannot trigger economic struggles; neither can it refuse the fight, otherwise it would sabotage the preparation for victory. In the long run, it can only obtain the direction of these struggles if it opposes all the illusions of the masses with full clarity about the purpose of the methods of struggle.” (7)

In the pamphlet written at the same time by Herman Gorter against the VKPD, the KAPD condemned both Paul Levi’s wait-and-see policy and the Communist Party’s putschism, “*an obligatory counterpart to its parliamentary and union opportunism*”. (8)

The defeat was cruel: after its forced exit from the Komintern in September 1921, the KAPD suffered a hemorrhage of militants, then in March 1922 the scission. The KPD went through a similar process, with the departure of Paul Levi, the party leader, and saw its membership collapse, despite Moscow’s unwavering support.

7) Report of the KAPD at the III. Congress of the Comintern, *Protokolle des III. Kongresses der Komintern*, op. cit., p. 335. For comparison: Rosa Luxemburg, [What are the Leaders Doing?](#) (*Die Rote Fahne*, Berlin, 7. Januar 1919): “*The mass must learn to fight, to act in the struggle itself. And today one can sense that the workers of Berlin to a large extent have learned to act; they thirst for resolute deeds, clear situations, sweeping measures. They are not the same as they were on November 9th; they know what they want and what they should do. However, are their leaders, the executive organs of their will, well informed? Have the revolutionary chairmen and delegates of the large-scale enterprises, have the energy and resolve of the radical elements of the USPD grown in the meanwhile? Has their capacity for action kept pace with the growing energy of the masses? (...) And meanwhile, what have these leaders done? What have they decided? Which measures have they taken to safeguard the victory of the revolution in this tense situation in which the fate of the revolution will be decided, at least for the next epoch? We have seen and heard nothing! Perhaps the delegates of the workers are conferring profoundly and productively. Now, however, the time has come to act.*”

8) Herman Gorter, [Der Weg des Dr. Levi, der Weg der VKPD](#), KAPD, Berlin, 1921, pp. 11-12. (Gorter has only written part of this pamphlet. See: Gorter, [Erklärung](#), in *Proletarier, Monatschrift für Kommunismus*, Jahrgang 1, 1920-1921, Heft 8, August, p. 19. (F.C.)

5) [Heraus zum Kampf auf die ganze Front!](#) KAZ (Berlin), No. 181 or 182 [F.C.].

6) Ph. Bourrinet, *The Dutch and German Communist Left (1900-68)*, Brill, Leiden, 2016, pp. 234-240.

The German CP then reverted to a policy of 'united front at the basis' with the social-democratic trade unions of calling for the formation of a 'workers' government' including all 'proletarian parties'.

The occupation of the Ruhr by the French Army in January 1923, the acceleration of the economic disaster, and hyperinflation created a situation of chaos, which could have seemed "pre-revolutionary", with the development of a movement of enterprise councils similar to that of the revolutionary 'Obleute' of 1918. The success of this movement as well as the creation of party "workers' militias" (proletarian centuries), to fight against the police and the Freikorps in the Ruhr, restored confidence in the PC's base. But, as Pierre Broué notes, 1923 was marked above all by the "progression of extreme right-wing nationalists" – who addressed the "millions of declassed petty bourgeois", and workers sensitive to nationalist and anti-Semitic propaganda – and developed their armed militias (the S.A. of the Nazi Party), thanks to subsidies from the major industrialists of the Ruhr, and with the complicity of the Reichswehr. (9)

However, the KPD engaged in populist demagoguery with these ruined petty-bourgeois layers and flatter their exaggerated nationalist feelings, and even their antisemitism. (10) Karl Radek, the former "Left-wing radical" of Bremen, was able to give a speech – before the executive of the Komintern – in memory of the Nazi Leo Schlageter, who had been shot by the French occupation army in June 1923:

"Only when the German cause becomes the cause of the German people, only when the German cause becomes the fight for the rights of the German people, will the German people win active friends. (...) If the cause of the people is made the cause of the nation, then the cause of the Nation will become the cause of the people. United into a fighting nation of workers, it will gain the assistance of other peoples

9) Broué, op. cit. pp. 686-688.

10) Ruth Fischer, leader of the left-wing tendency of the KPD, proclaims in a public meeting held in a schoolyard in Berlin on July 25, 1923: "He who calls for the struggle against Jewish capital is already, gentlemen, a class fighter, even if he does not know it. You are against Jewish capital and want to shoot down the stockbrokers. Very well. Trample on Jewish capitalists, hang them from the lantern, trample on them!" (*Die K.P.D. im eigenen Spiegel*, Berlin : Kommunistische Arbeiter-Partei, Wirtschaftsbezirk Berlin-Brandenburg. Publisher: Buchhandlung für Arbeiter-Literatur, Berlin, O 17, Emil Schubert (Verlag), 1926. p. 75)

who are also fighting for their existence. Whomever is not prepared to fight in this way, is capable of deeds of desperation but not of a serious struggle.

This is what the Communist Party of Germany and the Communist International have to say at Schlageter's grave-side." (11)

This appeal to nationalist sentiment could perfectly coexist with an "antifascist" mobilization, such as the "antifascist day" on July 29, which was a significant failure. The KPD then tried a Popular Front policy 'avant la lettre'. On October 10, the Saxon Social Democratic government integrated several communist ministers, including Fritz Heckert (future Stalinist leader, still buried in a Kremlin wall), and especially [Heinrich] Brandler, who became head of the State Chancellery. The same thing happened on October 13 in the Thuringia government, where three 'communist ministers' entered, including Karl Korsch in charge of justice.

These apparent "successes" opened the road to defeat. The 'workers' governments' were dissolved by the Reichswehr without resistance. And it is without resistance that the whole movement capitulates. The Hamburg insurrection of October 23, limited to a single district, was a fiasco: "only some of the communists fought, and they fought alone, the large masses remaining, if not indifferent, at least passive." (12)

It was another October, that of 1929, which consummated the defeat of the German workers. After a turn designated 'class-against-class' (or 'third period'), when social democracy was described as 'social-fascist', the KPD returned to its policy of exalting the German "proletarian nation". In August 1930 its central committee, wishing to compete with Nazism on its own territory, launched an address "For a national and social liberation of the German people". (13) In November 1932, the KPD established a

11) Karl Radek, "[Leo Schlageter: the Wanderer into the Void](#)" (June 1923). For a somewhat different version see: [Die K.P.D. im eigenen Spiegel](#). p. 71 ("The K.P.D. in its own mirror").

12) Broué, op. cit., p. 773.

13) "[Programmerklärung zur nationalen und sozialen Befreiung des deutschen Volkes](#)", *Die Rote Fahne n° 197, Berlin, Sunday August 24, 1930* ("Programmatic declaration on the national and social liberation of the German people"). This call was officially written by Ernst Thälmann and the Central Committee, in fact by Heinz Neu-

united front at the base with Nazi workers during the Berlin transport strike.

The counterrevolution had been in power since November 9, 1918, it led the workers' councils to committing suicide, then imposed the law of the Weimar Constituent Assembly by iron and fire. It was a real bloodshed of the German proletariat operated under the direct responsibility of social democracy. In 1923, at the end of the German revolution, the number of workers' victims was already comparable to that of the Paris Commune.

The defeat thus paved the way for Hitler in January 1933. The dream of a global emancipation of the

mann. As a refugee in the USSR, he was shot on Stalin's orders in November 1937.

workers – in which Germany would play a key role – turned into the bloody nightmare of a “national and social liberation of the German people”. It was to open the royal road to world war.

Philippe BOURRINET, September 12, 2017.

Source: *Les conseils ouvriers en Allemagne 1918-23, Controverses No. 5* (May 2018), p. 30 ff.

Translation, proofreading and annotation revisions by Jac. J. and F.C., December 2018. Final editing: February 3, 2019

This translation and its annotations have been supplemented following retrievals from German sources. Insertions between square brackets are from the translators.



Illustration 1: Members of the Red Ruhr Army. Dortmund, 1920. ([Wikimedia Commons](#).)

Documents of the historical Communist Left

A Letter from Comrade Pannekoek ('*Der Kommunist*', KAPD, July 1920)

In this letter from the summer of 1920, Pannekoek criticizes the view of the *Workers' Union*, how it was represented, among other things, in the program of the KAPD. This critique partly resurfaces in the positions of the G.I.C., eleven years later. With a sharpness unusual for him, Pannekoek continues by condemning the *national Bolshevik and anti-Semitic positions* of Laufenberg and Wolffheim.

Bussum, 5 July 1920

From my K. Horner-articles in the Hamburg paper, in which I commented on the Communist Party's controversial issues last winter and spring, you know that I stand by your side in your opposition to the KPD. I also find this confirmed in the program ⁽¹⁾ you sent me. There is only one point – and I want to add this immediately – on which I do not think the position set out in it can be sustained in the long term. It concerns the most controversial question of German development: the enterprise organization – probably the most difficult question because the old trade unions seem to be such solid mass organizations. You consider the enterprise organization as the organization of those enlightened workers – who are still a minority in an enterprise – who consciously recognize the reactionary role of the trade unions and turn away from them and replace them with a new form of organization based on the enterprise. With this we have two organizations of the forward striving, guiding, enlightened workers: 1. the Communist Party, 2. this revolutionary enterprise organization, and these two stand as a small group in the midst of the large, still inactive mass that clings to the old trade unions. That is how I understand the position you are taking. Now it seems to me – also in the light of the Russian experience – that this double organization is unnecessary in the long run; the members of the enterprise organization will be the same communists who generally distinguish themselves as a vanguard – there will be few workers who step out of the trade unions but do not become communists (perhaps some syndicalist groups, but there won't be much that can be done with that, unless they are transferred to the communist point of view). In the long run, one will have: 1. as the basis of proletarian democracy, the assembly of *all* the workers in an enterprise who, through their representatives, enterprise councils, take the political and social leadership into their

hands – the Soviets in Russia (and this organization per enterprise of the whole working class is mostly called the enterprise organization); 2. as the driving force of the conscious minority who, due to its clear insight and revolutionary will, will take the lead in revolutionary times: the communists. A second minority group, which consists almost exclusively of communists, will not be needed, it seems to me.

I present to you this different view because it may happen that the theorist living a long way off, precisely because he does not live in the midst of the compelling circumstances and can compare the developmental tendencies of different countries, is less under the influence of temporary circumstances and keeps a closer eye on the general and the lasting. But I do not ignore the fact that the special circumstances prevailing in Germany in particular may compellingly force your point of view upon you – and for this reason my remarks are not intended to dissuade you from your point of view as a “false” one, but at the most to prevent you from considering it too absolutely firm and too much as a general correct dogma, so that you may consider that a different point of view may prove necessary in the event of a change and development of circumstances. With the present power of the trade unions, for those who consider them a harmful counterrevolutionary power, hardly any other standpoint is possible – the method of the KPD and Radek not to step out of the trade unions in order to “stay with the masses” practically leads to not fighting against this power. But in revolutionary times it can and may change that the masses – even though the union leaders are already preparing to take control of the apparatus of the council system – no longer listen to the unions and [leave] them on a massive scale, but build up their workshop representations independently of and against the union leaders and officials (similar to what the workshop committees did in England during the war); ⁽²⁾ and then it would be harmful if, on the basis of this conception

1) See for the KAPD program of 1920:
<https://www.marxists.org/subject/left-wing/kapd/1920/programme.htm>.

2) Probably Pannekoek refers to the *shop-steward* movement in Britain during the First World War. (Editor's note)

of the program, the revolutionary factory organizations kept themselves separate from such a development of a revolutionary mass force. But at least you who are in the middle of the movement and the masses will decide best what is right here.

I would also like to add that the way in which you conduct agitation in your newspaper seems to me to be **correct both in principle and formally**. Formally by the method of the factual enlightenment in contrast to the method of the *"Rote Fahne"*, calculated on **momentary success and short term conquest, which resembles in every respect the old organs of the SPD before the war** and lets feel the same **contradiction between outer appearance and inner being**, and **in contrast to the Hamburg paper**, which increasingly seeks **the power of agitation in the denunciation of personal misconduct** by its opponents – if a wrong policy often turns its supporters into crooks, then, conversely, a certain policy cannot be fought by being an invention of crooks: the politics of the KPD also has so many natural reasons, which lie in the tradition of the old SPD doctrine and in the difficult development, that completely honest, reasonable people can defend and actually do so. And in principle, **the aberrations of the Hamburgers from a clear Marxist and revolutionary standpoint are so outrageous** – first in the whole nationalist standpoint, then in the accusation that Levi had corrupted the whole revolution by a single act, recently in the **anti-Semitic article**: because Levi is a Jew, that's why he plays the card of Jewish finance capital; **all equally foolish** – that they are **hemming and harming the communist education of the masses** (in my view) **to the greatest possible extent**, and in contrast to this, **the Berlin standpoint contrasts all the more sharply in its value for the revolutionary Enlightenment. To me your criticism of national Bolshevism seems not only very correct, but also far too gentle; you underestimate the harm it does**, since it undermines the basic ideas of communism in principle, and in my opinion **you will not be able to remain together with Laufenberg and Wolffheim**. If the KAPD is to become a leading, guiding force, giving the revolutionary masses in Germany a firm clarity, then **a clear position is absolutely necessary, especially on the national question; and this must be determined by the party at the next Congress**. I understand the difficulty with the great influence that L. and W. exert in

Hamburg, and with the excellent agitation they did *earlier*, a year ago, in the Hamburg paper. But the discussion about it should be taken up again and again if possible; **in these questions no uncertainty should remain**, since it means the sharp demarcation against any reactionary bourgeois ideology. ⁽³⁾

A few months ago I sent a large article ⁽⁴⁾ to Moscow on the general questions of revolutionary development trends and the tactics of communism; because of the difficulty of the connection it will only have arrived there recently, and it will therefore hardly be printed there before the international congress, i.e. it will no longer be able to exert any influence beforehand. Perhaps it will still have an effect afterwards, but if it were no longer to be printed there, it would be worth considering whether it should be published in Germany. Our tendency will also find good defenders in Moscow anyway; but I fear that opportunism will nevertheless be proclaimed as the international tactic of communism – a consequence of the slow development in the West, the external success of Russia which draws on all the wavering elements in the West, and the difficult internal situation of that country. In this case, we must prepare ourselves for opposition as a radical minority until the progress of the revolution in Central Europe gives a new impetus to development.

With friendly greetings

Anton Pannekoek.

Source: "Der Kommunist, Flugzeitung der KAPD (Sachsen)" No. 30 (July 1920). Facsimile Scan: <https://www.aaap.be/Pdf/Der-Kommunist-1920/Der-Kommunist-Sachsen-1920-030.pdf>.

Pannekoek's letter was adopted from the Berlin KAPD's "*Kommunistische Arbeiter Zeitung*" (KAZ). The specific issue of the latter has not been preserved.

Transcription: F.C., December 2018. Translation and final editing: H.C., February 9, 2019. Emphasis according to the source.

- 3) At the second KAPD congress, in August 1920, Wolffheim and Laufenberg were effectively excluded. See for documentary: <http://www.left-dis.nl/d/kapd0820.pdf>
- 4) Probably: [World Revolution and Communist Tactics](#) (1920). See also, in German, *Kommunismus* ('Periodical of the Communist International', Vol.1, #28/29, August 1, 1920): <https://www.aaap.be/Pdf/Anton-Pannekoek/Pannekoek-de-1920-Die-Entwicklung-Der-Weltrevolution.pdf>.

Iran: “Lessons from strikes, labour struggles and internationalist tasks”

A balance sheet by ‘*Internationalist Voice*’ (January 2019)

In pursuit of the discussion topic started in *A Free Retriever's Digest* Vol.2#6, we present the balance sheet of the recent waves of strikes and protests in Iran drawn up by ‘*Internationalist Voice*’. It currently constitutes one of the rare contributions on this subject by a group claiming adherence to the communist Left. Tightly kept under the lid by the mass media, questions pertaining to workers’ struggles in this region are hardly taken up by the internationalist milieu at large. We encourage our readers to send in their questions and comments.

Introduction

The working class in Iran is facing some of the most difficult economic and social conditions. Millions of workers are unemployed, with many thousands of them joining this huge army. The wage level is lower than the poverty line. Wage slaves, who are the creators of all human wealth, are themselves deprived of [the most] basic needs. With its sinister face, the peripheral capital in crisis has created an earthly hell for wage slaves. American and Western government sanctions, in which Western gangsters punish Iranian gangsters for kneeling down before the Islamic bourgeoisie, have had adverse consequences for peripheral capitalism. The bankruptcy and closure of production units, along with the fall in the value of the national currency [the rial], was only meant to impose austerity policies on wage slaves, thereby further reducing the purchasing power of [the] workers.

We witnessed labor protests before the street protests of January 2018. At the time of these street protests, the working class, as a social class, continued to protest and strike without engaging [in them] as a social class. But, from this year, the working class has started a new chapter in its struggles: it is safe to say that, the labor struggles have grown qualitatively and, for the first time, reached an equivalent level with those of 1978-1981. Workers’ protests and strikes occur every day, although they are deliberately not accurately reflected in the news. On average, there are 17 protests or labor strikes in Iran every day. ⁽¹⁾ Although the labor protests [and strikes] have so far *not* involved two key industries, the [oil] industry and the automotive industry, a part of the industrial proletariat is involved in them.

Under the slogan “*Death to the worker, peace to the oppressor*”, rather than joining the class strug-

gle, [some?] workers chose to commit suicide in despair. But not only did the slogan of the workers change into “*Peace to the workers, death to the oppressor*” in the short term; anti-capitalist slogans were disseminated in the labor protests and strikes as well. This review will consider the flogging of workers at labor protests up to the most powerful class demonstrations. The important point is that the examination and explanation of workers’ protests and strikes are not only based on news updates but also on points of view, theories and [reflection].

The reality is [marked by] an ongoing, sometimes secret, sometimes overt, war between gangsters. The United States, along with Saudi Arabia and other capitalist institutions, ⁽²⁾ has begun a psychological and economic war to bring Iran’s economy on its knees; indeed, it has been somewhat successful in this matter. Difficulties of peripheral capital, political insecurity, US-Saudi threats, and so on, have caused the value of the rial to fall by at least 150% in the past few months. ⁽³⁾ As a consequence, the purchasing power of the working class has fallen by 90%. ⁽⁴⁾

The war of Islamic and Western gangs over their imperialist interests [has nothing to do with] the interests of the working class. At one time, the danger of the collapse of society and the fate of Syria seemed to have existed for Iran. As we wrote before, ⁽⁵⁾ [if the workers are to lead the social struggles as a social class], not only will the destruction of society be

2) Like the IMF and the World Bank.

3) Most probably 150% refers to the currency *inflation rate* of the rial compared to the US dollar. In that case, its *loss of value* would be 60%.

4) <https://khabarfarsi.com/u/60434235>

5) See the text: “*Street protests over capitalist barbarism and internationalist positions*”, published on Internationalist Voice’s web site.

1) <http://www.bbc.com/persian/43947490>

ended and not only will the danger of war and the possibility of foreign interference decrease, but the movement itself, because of its anti-capitalist nature, will expand the class struggle in the region as well. We emphasize that the evolution of class struggle not only prevents the collapse of society and reduces the possibility of a crisis caused by gangsters like America, but also increases the chances of expanding anti-capitalist struggles to the capitalist metropolis. In the evolution of the class struggle, [as the class struggle intensifies, the impact of both the right and the left of capital will diminish, and with the working class ceasing to act on behalf of either against its own interests,] reactionary interests will be undermined.

The protests and strikes by teachers and workers at the Heavy Equipment Production Company (HEPCO), at the [Iran] National Steel Industrial Group (INSIG) and at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company have special properties. A responsible review and compilation of the lessons from these struggles are essential in fighting future battles. The effects of these struggles, especially those of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane workers, will be highly useful in spite of all their weak points.

Different tendencies of the left of capital have provided different explanations for [these] labor protests. With the metamorphosis of the Marxist concept, the most radical phrase among them announced the slogan "Go forward into revolution!" and stated that the solution for the working class at the present time was represented by the workers' councils formed at the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company. The defunct councilist communism of peripheral capital created the heroes of the councilist seizure of factories, which in turn was regrettably defeated by reformism. Against the backdrop of these tendencies, internationalists must examine

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and summarize these workers' struggles and strikes, and outline their [political] horizons and duties.

Internationalist Voice, December 28, 2018

Lessons from strikes, labour struggles and internationalist tasks



A scene from the strike by Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company workers

Internationalist Voice

Source: *Internationalist Voice, Lessons from strikes, labour struggles and internationalist tasks*
<http://internationalist.ueuo.com/en/english.htm>

Translation: H.C., February 6, 2019.

Language corrections have been applied after consultation with the authors.

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Extracts on the Haft Tappeh workers' council

The following extracts from the balance sheet “**Lessons from strikes, labour struggles and internationalist tasks**” give interesting information on the backgrounds of the *Shora* (or: councils) that have existed during the workers' struggles at **Haft Tappeh** in Iran's Khuzestan province during last year. The text itself expands more broadly on several proletarian struggles in 2018, concluding each with an evaluation of positive and negative features as lessons for the future. The struggles are analyzed from the theoretical background of the group ‘*Internationalist Voice*’, that declares itself close to the ICT and the ICC.

Strike by Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company workers (p. 15 – 19)

The *Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company* ⁽¹⁾ started its activity as a scientific agricultural pole in 1961 and is now one of the largest industrial factories in the province of Khuzestan. In 2015, it was privatized. About 6,000 people work in the company. Over the past 15 years, this industrial complex has witnessed labor protests and strikes. In 2005 and 2006, workers protested about their livelihood with the slogan “*We are Haft Tappeh workers and we are hungry*”. However, in 2007 protests and strikes were held in the form of sit-ins at the factory or on government premises, or protests in the city of Shush, among other actions. In 2017, following protests and strikes, 15 workers were arrested by the police at midnight and about 40 people were summoned to appear before the judiciary.

In the summer of 2018, workers from the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company *elected an independent workers' council, which included 22 delegates*. The council's assembly of representatives began its work in August, including the organization of strikes, as well as calling for the return of expelled workers, the disclosure of confidential documents and the supervision of accounts. According to Ismail Bakhshi, in relation to the independent workers' council:

“When we say that the independent workers' council was formed in the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company, some think that this council is the same as the final council, which has reached the highest level. No! We are just beginning and it takes time for even the Haft Tappeh workers themselves to understand what the work of the council is... I do not claim that the councils of

workers from the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company are exactly in line with the theory and definition of the council, which has been discussed in detail. But, according to the psychology of the intellectual and cultural atmosphere and the realities of the Haft Tappeh workers' atmosphere, soviet thinking has shown itself and become dominant”. [12] ⁽²⁾

The new round of labor protests and strikes by workers from the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company was launched on 5 November 2018 in protest against overdue salaries, on livelihood issues and job security (privatization). For the first time since the bloodbath by the Islamic bourgeoisie in the 1980s, the strike leader (Ismail Bakhshi), speaking with a loud voice on behalf of thousands, not only of workers but also of the working class, describing the working class' dilemma, not just because of the bad economic conditions of the employers, but also because of the performance of the capitalist class. His emphasis on class is a thorn in the eye of the bourgeoisie. In his speech, he said:

“What the authorities declare about the bad economic conditions of employers does not relate to workers, and the conditions of today are due to the function of the capitalist class. Thus, there is no reason to put pressure on the working class”. [13] ⁽³⁾

In his speech, Bakhshi put forward two alternatives to the striking workers, insisting that they must decide on their own destiny:

“There are two solutions that you must decide on in the end: one is that the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company is completely manned by the workers. We will set up a committee and run the company on a consulta-

1) Henceforth in this text it is referred to as ‘Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company’ or simply ‘Haft Tappeh’, except in quotations.

2) The web source in Farsi appears to have been removed (visitors receive an “html 404” error).

3) Speech by Ismail Bakhshi, on 26 November 2018, in front of the building of the governorate of Shush.

*tive basis. Do not be worried. We have all the skills. Until today, who has run the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company? Have confidence, believe in yourself. We can manage the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company. It is my wish that, one day, we can manage the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company. The other solution is to assume that we will not be allowed to take over or that there are no requirements, although we will keep our council formations. In this case, if the government intends to take over the company, it will no longer be the same as in the past. Rather, **the government should work under the supervision of the workers' council and under the supervision of the general workers.** What is the difference between the representatives of the state and these representatives [of the employer]? They can destroy the company on a number of occasions, but we return the next day. Our alternative is the council and collective opinion". [14] ⁽⁴⁾*

We will examine the issues of workers' councils and workers' self-management from the Marxist horizon in the following pages. These workers' protests become more radical, day by day, and Ismail Bakhshi became a symbol of the struggle of the working class. On 18 November 2018, workers' protests spread out into the city. The riot police and special units had the protesting workers in their sights. The strike leader put forward the slogan "**Bread, jobs, freedom, council management**". Hearing this slogan from the speaker of the striking workers caused a seizure in the limbs of the bourgeoisie. The strike leader told workers that they should repeat a slogan to remind the riot police that "*their salary is paid out of our wages*": "**No threat, no prison, no longer useful!**"

For the first time since the bourgeois bloodbath in the 1980s, thanks to the striking workers, as well as the thousands of protesters in the middle of the city, the council was called. This was akin to swearing in church for the bourgeoisie. Bakhshi understood the consequences of his work well and knew that he would pay a heavy price for it. Therefore, he ended his speech thus:

"The only testament I have is that death is truth. If Ismail Bakhshi died for any reason, no one has the right to bury his body. Instead, bring his coffin to the strike to hear his dead screams."

On the same day, 18 November 2018, the criminals of the Islamic bourgeoisie began their dirty operations. The security forces arrested 18 protest workers, detaining workers' representatives, along with *Sepideh Ghaliyan*, who disseminated news of the labor protests. The bourgeoisie, based on experience, realized that a violent crackdown would worsen the situation throughout the day, leading to the radicalization of the labor struggle. Therefore, with the exception of some radical leaders, the security forces released the remaining detainees gradually and on bail conditions. Workers' protests continued this time with the slogan, "**I am also Bakhshi!**", but the bourgeoisie, by arresting the most radical representative of the workers (Ismail Bakhshi), "decapitated" the strike. The bourgeoisie resorted to the dirty politics of division by simultaneously hunting down the radical representative of the workers and flirting with those representatives willing to compromise.

At the arrest of bold and class-conscious strike leaders, treacherous representatives seized the opportunity to engage with government officials and the employer without the knowledge of all workers, in turn providing the context for defeat.

The bourgeoisie, along with every government, judicial, security and employer's agent, developed a skillful plan to break the strike. The bourgeoisie initially took advantage of the workers' communication and propaganda channels (Telegram) with the help of government and employer agents and poisoned the atmosphere by promoting messages from government officials and employers on these channels. The bourgeoisie then completed its premeditated plan to break the strike, along with the head of the Department of Labor, the governor, a new CEO, agents of the employer and some strike-breaking workers, aided by the betrayal of several delegates willing to compromise. They arrested bold strike leaders; a part of the overdue salary was paid; the director was swapped with another criminal. [In short, the weapon of sawing divisions among the workers was used].

After 28 days of great struggle, after 28 days of class battles, after 28 days of hope, after 28 days when wage slaves rocked society, on 2 December 2018, the strike by the Haft Tappeh workers was virtually de-

4) Speech by Ismail Bakhshi, on 8 November 2018.

feated. On that day, at least 1,000 workers voted to continue the strike but, unfortunately, the strike organization was disrupted, on the one hand, by the arrest of bold striker leaders and, on the other hand, due to the compromise and betrayal on the part of some workers' representatives.

Like a wounded snake, the bourgeoisie is now looking for revenge. It has a long list of criminal acts that it wishes to carry out. The crackdown on striker leaders will be examined in the following pages, ⁽⁵⁾ but protesting workers who were summoned before the Ministry of Intelligence during the strike and those who have been "freed" on bail [and whose families are threatened with prison] ⁽⁶⁾ have recognized the limits of their freedom.

Abbas Hosseini Pooya, the Ahvâz public prosecutor, ⁽⁷⁾ who was present during the installation of the new director of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company, inevitably spoke about the systematic and monthly monitoring of the factory. In other words, the prosecutor would monitor all the work and movements of the workers. He announced that the prosecutor's office would monitor the factory's activities for one year. [15] ⁽⁸⁾

The new manager, who kept his sword close to his chest, said during his presentation that he would not tolerate strikes and would respond to any dismissal: "If anybody no longer wishes to continue working, they are no longer welcome in the company". [16] ⁽⁹⁾

But the most dangerous action by the bourgeoisie involves the revival of the "Disciplinary Committee" and the "Islamic Labor Council". The issue of the revival of the Islamic Labor Council is even more dangerous than that of the imprisoned workers. The bourgeoisie, with the help of security, judicial, labor office and employer organs, wants to exploit the atmosphere of failure following the strikes and, with the possible cooperation of some of the

supine representatives, organize the circus of Islamic Labor Council *elections* in order to declare these compromisers as representatives of the workers. Independent workers' collectives are not only thorns in the eye of the bourgeoisie, they are also an inspiration for other workers. The bourgeoisie does not tolerate this. As Ismail Bakhshi said before he arrested:

"With coordination and with specific purpose, including coping with me (this does not mean that I am important, but refers to the fact that enemies from outside of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company, for example, intend to destroy me because I brought up the slogan about councils), all security and government agencies, employers and labor offices were mobilized to launch Islamic Labor Council elections in the company". [17] ⁽¹⁰⁾

The bitter reality of the strike being defeated must be accepted and lessons taken from it. Despite the strike's failure, the Haft Tappeh workers are no longer the same. The experience of this strike and the lessons from it will be highly valuable in the evolution of the class struggle. It is an irrefutable fact that the recent strike and protests by these workers, after the defeat of the class struggle of 1978-1980, represented the most valuable teaching moments for workers.

Workers' Councils (p. 36 - 39)

Having explained the anarchist, the left-bourgeois and even 'councilist communist' positions on workers' self management, and having confronted these positions with the 'Marxist concept of workers' councils', Internationalist Voice continues:

Outside the ventricle of society, the possibility of managing a factory by a workers' council ⁽¹¹⁾ under the capitalist system, even in the metropolis of capitalism, is just an illusion. It is not possible to create a separate island within the framework of capitalist relations that is not governed by the rules of capitalism. Capitalism is a dominant global production system which has penetrated even the worst periods on the planet.

5) Notably in the section "Suppression of labor leaders" (p. 23 - 25).

6) The text reads: "with family threats from the Islamic bourgeois prison" (editor's note).

7) The text adds: "... and revolutionary prosecutor" (editor's note).

8) <https://khabarfarsi.com/u/62929002> (Farsi).

9) <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/iran-workers-strike-haft-tappeh-factory-ongoing/29631975.html>

10) See footnote 2 [12].

11) The text reads: "the possibility of managing the council of a factory under the capitalist system" (editor's note).

Against this backdrop, we return to the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company. In July 2018, company workers, through an election, chose to form an independent labor organization, which, despite all its strengths and weaknesses, has been a great achievement, not only for these workers, but for the entire working class as well. Applying the concept of a "workers' council" to this independent labor organization is different from applying the Marxist concept of a workers' council, as we explained. Ismail Bakhshi, the strike leader who himself presented this plan, says:

"We selected, this year, in proportion to the size of each section of the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company, the plan that I was delivering and, along with the other workers, it was implemented. Approximately 22 delegates were appointed from nearly 14 sections of the Haft Tappeh Company and, from among them, we chose a board of directors... This plan looks like an oversight organization, and it monitors the performance and durability of these managers. We can then decide on the company's management. Haft Tappeh is a small symbol of Iran. When the state has no power to monitor, through independent monitoring from below, we can make it powerful. There is no need for a single negotiation between workers and employers; the worker has come to the conclusion that the council must have a strong representative to oversee and intervene in Haft Tappeh. Power also resides with all the workers who voted for these delegates. With this backing, delegates are protected against arrest and expulsion". [30] (12)

Bakhshi explains in more detail that the council formed in Haft Tappeh is not the same as those councils at the highest level councils. *But councilist thought has been observed among workers, and this thinking is dominant.* Bakhshi's explanation is very clear and does not need to be interpreted. (...) (13)

This section ends by developing a critique of a 'radical' current of "anti-capitalist workers", who "apparently do not believe in the 'reformism' of the left". (14)

12) <https://meidaan.com/archive/57397> (Farsi)

13) Follows a repetition of the first quotation from Bakhshi's speech in these extracts: *"When we say that the independent workers' council was formed in the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Agro-industry Company (...)" [12]*

14) With reference to:

Workers in chains!

(p. 40 – 41; concluding section)

The working class in Iran is facing some of the most difficult economic and social conditions: on the one hand, the crisis of peripheral capital and, on the other hand, the sanctions imposed by Western countries. In turn, insolvent capital has plunged the periphery into a deep crisis. The bankruptcy and closure of production units and the fall in the national currency value, for our class, for wage slaves, have provided the context to apply more austerity.

If, at some point, the bourgeoisie allowed itself to flog protesting workers in public, and if, at some point, workers were desperate enough to commit suicide in protest against capitalist barbarism, the growth of the class struggle would have refined the atmosphere of this struggle. Today, instead of the flogging workers in public, the slogan **"Bread, jobs, freedom, council management"** heard from workers shakes the city centers. The bourgeoisie is aware of the potential of our class. In such a situation, Ali Mohammad Naeni, chief adviser to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, says that, in 2019, [they] will have two basic trigger points: parliamentary elections and labor protests. [35] (15)

The bourgeoisie managed to defeat the strikes in the Haft Tappeh Sugarcane Company and the INSIG. (16) But the achievements of these struggles and strikes are much greater than those of other victories. It is not in vain that the bourgeoisie is preparing itself for labor protests next year, and that bourgeoisie knows itself that the defeat of workers' protests is only temporary. *The most important character of recent protests and strikes was the reliance on workers' class power.* Striking workers did not confront the bourgeois institutions and organizations to seek fulfillment of their demands, but to reduce the accumulation of surplus value and capital gains. Indeed, despite all their limitations

<http://www.alayhesarmaye.com/index.php/articles/341-shorasazi-7tape>, which is unfortunately in Farsi only.

15) <https://www.radiofarda.com/a/warning-about-the-next-years-crises-in-iran/29684152.html>

16) INSIG = Iran National Steel Industrial Group, whose main plant is located at the Khuzestan capital of Ahvâz, at a distance of about 100 km of Haft Tappeh/Shûsh. The pamphlet includes a section on the strike that broke out there four days later than at Haft Tappeh. (editor's note)

and their temporary defeat, these strikes strengthened the working class' confidence and strengthened the hope for victory in future battles. The working class of Iran, as the bulk of the working class, is the most concentrated and most experienced working class in the Middle East, which has recorded its most brilliant battles in its historical memory, especially from the period 1978-1980.

Until wage slavery and the capitalist system are defeated, an earthly hell is waiting for our class, waiting for the wage slaves. The intensification of the class struggle is the only horizon ahead of our class. This is the ghost of the class struggle which the bourgeoisie fears more than anything else, because class struggle in its evolutionary process will lead to the revolutionary destruction of the capitalist sys-

tem. We have to throw this dirty capitalist system into the dustbin of history by communist revolution, ending its disgraceful life and establishing a communist society, in which there is no production of goods, no profit and no exploitation of man by man. We have nothing to lose, except our chains, [to gain the world]!

Source: Edition of January 14, 2019, 43 p. A4. Free download of pdf via [Internationalist Voice](#).

Editor's Note: Extracts by F.C. The quotations in the text are translated into English by the authors ('*Internationalist Voice*'). Section titles and end-note numbering have been retained for reference. English language corrections, text insertions between square brackets and typographical emphasis are from the editor.

Previous articles on strikes and protests in the Near and Middle East :

'Nuevo Curso' on the proletarian movement in Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran (1)	February 1, 2018
Mobilizations of workers in the Middle East	(AFRD Vol.2#1)
'Nuevo Curso' on the proletarian movement in Iraqi Kurdistan and Iran (2)	February 1, 2018
Why is the movement in Iran in reflux?	(AFRD Vol.2#1)
The movement in Iran is a practical refutation of Leninism	February 1, 2018
A critique of the positions defended by some groups of the communist Left	(AFRD Vol.2#1)
Iraq: The Sequels of the War against Daesh	October 26, 2018
'Échanges et Mouvement' on this summer's mass revolt in Iraq	(AFRD Vol.2#5)
Soviets in Iran: Is a Revolution Underway?	November 30, 2018
'Nuevo Curso' on the dynamic of resumed workers' struggles (Haft Tapeh, Foolad Steel)	(AFRD Vol.2#6)
Which solidarity with the arrested workers of Haft Tapeh?	November 30, 2018
A contribution for discussion ('Arbeidersstemmen')	(AFRD Vol.2#6)
Theses on the 2018 proletarian struggles in the Near and Middle East and their prospects	January 3, 2019
Summary of a Libcom blog article by Fredo Corvo	

An Invitation to Discussion

The Popular Revolt in France: Possibility or Plague?

Rarely in recent history a *popular revolt* in Europe has let flow more ink than that of the “Yellow Vests” in France which, at least initially, has caused a plain embarrassment to the French bourgeoisie both at home and abroad. But not only the ‘powers that be’ have been caught on the wrong foot and exposed. In a range of public statements, the political milieu laying claim to proletarian internationalism has displayed divergent appreciations of its significance and purport of a remarkable kind. Varying from denouncing an attempt at bringing about more state authoritarianism, ⁽¹⁾ via insisting on the impotence of inter-class movements to achieve anything for the proletariat as a whole, ⁽²⁾ to seeing possibilities for advancing its struggle, ⁽³⁾ the spectrum seems to be as diverse as the movement’s composition itself. Moreover, not few have been surprised by the movement’s relative success and endurance.

- 1) For instance: ‘*Mouvement Communiste/KpK*’, in their Bulletin of December 8, spoke of “*the first attempts at mobilising ‘the people’ for a strong state against the proletariat*”.
- 2) For example, in its leaflet of November 29, the ICC has forced itself to demonstrate “*why the ‘yellow vests’ movement can not make the government recede*”.
- 3) Others, like ‘*Internationalist Perspective*’ seem to be charmed by the promises of a grass roots democracy in ‘Occupy’ or ‘Indignado’ style.

On the following pages we have gathered three contributions that promise to shine light on this inter-class movement and its significance for future proletarian struggles, in view of their recent defeats, notably in France:

1. The 2nd *communiqué by the IGCL* offers a useful summary of events, before developing a more precise analysis of the ‘yellow vests’ dynamic, and touching upon the question of obsolete schemas with the communist Left;
2. A *press review* attempts to examine a selection of statements from the communist Left milieu in France, about their vision on the inter-class character of the movement and the perspective for proletarian class autonomy;
3. Last but not least, by replying to the IGCL’s communiqué in a positive critical sense, ‘Nuevo Curso’ opens a discussion that may be of interest for the whole of the internationalist milieu.

- **The ‘Yellow Vests’ movement in France**
A Balance Sheet by the IGCL (Communiqué of January 27, 2019) (page 27 ff.)
- **With Special Interest**
The ‘Yellow Vests’ in the Mirror of the internationalist Milieu (page 31 ff.)
- **The ‘Yellow Vests’ three months later**
‘Nuevo Curso’ in reply to the IGCL’s Communiqué (page 34)

Readers are invited to send in appreciations of the presented texts; the questions implied and/or own contributions on the subject per e-mail. Correspondence may be eligible for publication, providing the authors’ consent.

Interesting reading,

The editor.

The 'Yellow Vests' movement in France

A Balance Sheet by the IGCL (Communiqué of January 27, 2019)

The eleventh Saturday of the 'yellow vests' movement in France, 26 January 2019, has seen the mobilization continue throughout France. According to the police, there were 69,000 demonstrators across the country. It is nevertheless obvious that this figure is largely underestimated: 2,500 demonstrators in Paris were announced, whereas there were in fact between 8,000 and 10,000 when the two main parades met at 4 pm at the *Place de la Bastille*. The clashes that subsequently broke out there allowed the police to disperse the crowd that would gather in the square. But the exact number doesn't really matter. The fact is that this movement of 'yellow vests' expresses a rage and a willingness to oppose the growing misery imposed and promised by capitalism and to confront the state, that the bourgeoisie does not succeed to extinguish. Just like the strikes in Iran in 2018 or the mass strike of tens of thousands of workers in northern Mexico as we speak, to mention but a few, ⁽¹⁾ the radicality, combativeness, [and] obstinacy of the 'yellow vests' movement signals the degree attained by the class antagonisms, and the fact that we have entered in a new period of massive confrontations between the classes at the global level. This generalized climate of potential social revolt, already partly in action, is essentially the result of the effects of the 2008 crisis, which are still being felt, exacerbating capitalism's current contradictions of all kinds, political, ecological, imperialist, migratory, social, etc. Today, these contradictions have accumulated and are exploding one after another. In this international climate of general social revolt in the making, the "slowdown of world growth" – to use the words of bourgeois economists – and the risks of a financial and stock market crash can only accentuate this atmosphere of *end of the world*, the end of the capitalist world to be exact, and bring the current generations of proletarians to the necessity, to consciousness and willingness to oppose capitalism's misery as well as the generalized war that it is preparing and, finally, to destroy it. The entire capitalist class, at least its most enlight-

1) From the United States to China, via Africa and all continents, strikes and conflicts tend to increase in these recent months...

ened fractions, is so concerned with this situation that "the eminences gathered at the Davos summit believe that it is time to 're-moralize' globalization (according to Klaus Schwab, founder of the World Economic Forum) and to seek the paths to a 'more inclusive' world economy" (*'Liberation'*, 23 January 2019), and that States are already preparing for it both politically and in terms of violent and massive repression.

But before going back to the situation in France at the end of January, it is necessary to give a brief summary of the events since our communiqué of 2 December for readers who do not live in France, ⁽²⁾ and who have not been able to follow the situation closely. The violent clashes of 2 December around the *Arc de Triomphe* in Paris, but in the provinces, including very small towns, as well, and the rage they expressed, surprised the fraction of Macron's forty-years-olds in power, for whom, trained in business schools and in management, the class struggle had disappeared; it even partly made them panic. It took the urgent support by other political fractions, Sarkozy's in particular, and by big bosses, to impose on Macron the fact that he had to make "concessions". ⁽³⁾ At that time, the media complained that the 'yellow vests' had no leaders "to negotiate with", as well as that the unions were discredited and powerless. It was only on the eve of the demonstration on 8 December that a first real contact was made with the main spokespersons for the 'yellow vests', who were received by the Prime Minister and who, upon their leave, declared that they were waiting for Macron's declaration they had been promised in the

2) See AFRD's blog: '*On the movement of the "Yellow Vests" in France - IGCL: Communiqué on the Social Revolt in France (2 December 2018)*'

3) Even if the government and Macron did not understand what was happening until December 10, the state apparatus as a whole, starting with its police, via the trade unions up till the other bourgeois political forces (including Sarkozy's former party, but also the Socialist Party) has at no time lost control of the situation. Contrary to what the media have suggested, we were far from an insurrectional, even revolutionary, situation, even at the height of the December 2nd clashes. Macron and the government have faltered, but not the state apparatus as a whole, far from it.

course of the following week. Thereby they let him take the initiative and the State's counter-offensive could take place. The demonstrations on December 8th were as massive and violent as those on the previous Saturday. On Monday, December 10th, Macron announced a 100 euro increase in the minimum wage [the SMIC] – in fact a bonus, as we found out in the subsequent days – and some other measures. As such, they are only marginal concessions, even if they oblige the government to present a budget deficit beyond the 3% required by the European Union. (4) Politically, however, they represent the first real significant setback for the State in the face of any massive mobilization since... 1968. But above all, on the occasion of January 1st, Macron announced the organization of a major national debate, planned until March 15 (!), to respond to the 'yellow vests' demand for a direct democracy and, more particularly, for a "referendum on citizen's initiative" (RIC).

Ever since, it is this typically petty-bourgeois demand that the entire state apparatus has taken up and imposed as a central issue of the situation, overshadowing, if not forgetting, the demands on wages and living conditions. At the same time, the management of the weekly demonstrations was limited to their violent repression which, in addition to the thousands of serious victims caused by flash-balls and sting-ball grenades (both are banned in most European countries), aimed at reducing the massive popularity of the movement in "public opinion". On this occasion, official speeches by politicians, the media and editors competed for the most brutal call for repression and haughtiness regarding this "stupid, hateful, factitious, even fascist people": Sarkozy's former Minister of... Education, a professional philosopher and a delicate and distinguished great bourgeois from the rich Paris neighborhoods, even called the police to use "their weapons once and for all! (...) Enough, these henchmen of the extreme-right and the extreme-left, or from the suburbs, who come to

4) Macron had committed himself to respect it... especially to establish his international – imperialist - credit with the German bourgeoisie. From this point of view, the 'yellow vests' movement has weakened Macron's credit and authority with its European allies, as he was supposed to give French imperialism a more central place, in particular to animate the strengthening of the German-French imperialist axis.

beat up police officers. (...) We have the fourth largest army in the world, it is capable of putting an end to this crap!" (Luc Ferry, *Radio Classique*, January 8, 2019). The class hatred of the May 1871 *Versillais* against the Parisian *communards* is about to reappear. Albeit these provocative speeches calling for widespread repression, and even murder, probably have had the effect of helping to revive the mobilization of the 'yellow vests', the fact remains that since then, the *political initiative has remained in the hands of the bourgeoisie*. The entire State apparatus has hence mobilized to focus political life on the organization of this "grand debate": the president, ministers, deputies, prefects, mayors of towns and villages, the media, all political parties; up to the point of dividing the 'yellow vests' themselves on whether or not to participate. In absence of any other perspective of struggle, even those who advocated not to participate, rightly thinking that it was only a "trickery", have locked themselves up in this dead-end, by arguing for the continuation of demonstrations in order to put pressure on the... "grand debate"! The circle has been squared. It suffices to tighten it little by little without breaking the rope by a clumsiness. (5)

That is where we are today. The terrain is marked out by the bourgeoisie, which holds the timing of the events... up to the call of the main trades union, the CGT, for one day of action and strike on February 5, at which the most radical 'yellow vests', with the help of the Trotskyists, the NPA in particular, (6) are calling to join for an unlimited [general] strike. In case the fire resumes, the backfire is already in place. The trick is done and all terrains are now occupied by the entire bourgeois state apparatus. Only rage and anger can keep Saturday's mobilizations going more or less for a long time.

5) Yesterday, January 26, one of the very popular and "pacifist" spokespersons, Jérôme Rodrigues, received a "flash-ball" in the eye, as he was filming the scene – live on Facebook – calling on the 'yellow vests' to *leave* the Place de la Bastille. Albeit there was no confrontation or any kind of danger to the police at that moment. He risks losing eyesight permanently and has been put in an artificial coma according to this morning's press releases. Such a blunder may very well cause a sudden upsurge of the mobilization, or even change its terms and timing, which the government has succeeded to set up so far.

6) NPA = *Nouveau Parti Anti-capitaliste* (New Anti-capitalist Party), part of the "4. International".

The 'yellow vests' movement is now in a political impasse with no real prospect, while the Macron government and, behind it, the entire state apparatus have regained control of the events. What was the strength and dynamism of the 'yellow vests' movement at first, we can say until Macron's statement on December 10, became its weakness and limitations once the government resumed its political initiative. Its "inter-class" character, identifying itself with the French people and not with the proletarian class, has fueled and maintained illusions about a people's democracy, which is in fact bourgeois democracy, and has caused the class demands that tended to emerge to be drowned in and suppressed by a *referendum on citizens' initiative* and, finally, by the organization of the "grand debate" on behalf of the government and the State on the terrain of bourgeois democracy itself. As far as we know, even the local 'yellow vests' committees most closely linked to the working class, like those of Commercy and Saint Nazaire, are dragged onto the terrain of this impasse, the "self-organization" and ideological mystification of democracy in the name of the people:

"Since Commercy, we are now calling for a major national meeting of the local People's Committees. On the strength of the success of our first appeal, we propose to you that we organize it democratically, in January, here in Commercy, with delegates from all over France, to gather and share the list of demands. We also propose to you to discuss all together the follow up of our movement. Finally, we propose to you to decide on a collective organization of the 'yellow vests', authentically democratic, based on the people and respecting the stages of delegation. Together, let us create the assembly of the assemblies, the Commune of the communes. This is the direction of history, this is our proposal. The establishment of self-organization structures such as General Assemblies today is a central issue for the Yellow Vests movement. Long live the power to the people, by the people, and for the people!" (Second Appeal of Commercy's 'yellow vests', December 30, 2018. (7))

In the midst of the general confusion and the social heterogeneity that have prevailed and continue to prevail among the 'yellow vests', only the mainte-

7) See the quick report of the meeting for a national coordination of the 'yellow vests' at the appeal of Commercy by '*Matière et Révolution*': <https://www.matierevolution.fr/spip.php?article5237>

nance of the wage demands, an increase in the minimum wage and salaries, the "indexation" of the pensions, to name only the main ones, can establish their fight and reject the terrain of bourgeois democracy in which the "great debate" wants to lock them up and suffocate them. The increase in wages and "purchasing power" has been the only political demand by which the whole proletarian class can identify itself as a class, that can still allow a real immediate resistance to the counter-offensive of the government and the bourgeoisie.

Despite several local conflicts or strikes, sometimes directly or indirectly linked to the 'yellow vests', the working class as such, at its workplaces and as a class, did not directly enter into struggle. With the exception of a few, too few, examples such as the strike at *Arc International* in the city of Arques in the North, or those at the *Geodis warehouse* in Bonneuil in the Paris region, the occupation of '*Pole emploi*' offices in Vitry, Rennes and Lorient, (8) and the 'yellow vests' actions at *hospitals* (information taken from the *Collectif Agitation et Gilets Jaunes IDF*). (9) This would have provided a different perspective to the social revolt, breaking the framework and timing of the "grand debate" by imposing class demands as a central issue. That was and is the only way [forward], even if it becomes more improbable by the day.

We were not alone in putting forward the slogan for the formation of struggle or workers' committees to fight for this perspective, that could have displaced the political framework and terms of the confrontation imposed by the government and the bourgeoisie since December 10. It has to be acknowledged that, as far as we can say, this has not been realized. And that thereby no real political class alternative could be presented and, even less, constitute a material factor of the situation.

8) 'Employment offices'.

9) The distribution of this leaflet at the *Place de la République* on 26 January, where the 'yellow vests' were to meet after the demonstration, was banned by some yellow vests: "*no politics within the yellow vests!*" This led to a difficult discussion in which few of us criticized this simplistic "*apolitical attitude*" and argued that it was necessary to take hold of the political **class** dimension in this struggle as in any struggle...

Nevertheless, the movement of the 'yellow vests', whether it still lasts for weeks or not, marks a **before and an after** in the very dynamics of the class conflict in France and constitutes a reference for the international proletariat. In particular, much to the dismay of the trade unions and their tactics of *Days of action*, it showed that an "uncontrolled" and unorganized movement – uncontrolled and unorganized from the point of view of the state and bourgeois ideology – could push the bourgeoisie back.⁽¹⁰⁾ It has also shown that the refusal to undergo the menace and the violence of state repression, the will not to cede to the repression and to continue massive demonstrations in spite of the risks, could force the bourgeoisie to give in to the demands, under certain conditions and at certain times. Finally, this particular episode of the class struggle has brought layers and generations of proletarians into the struggle who hitherto had remained foreign to it, and whose

10) We underestimated the potential of this movement ourselves and dismissed too quickly any possibility of a "gain" for the proletarians in our communiqué of 2 December: *"On this terrain, the workers who find themselves isolated and drowned as proletarians in a mass of "people" with heterogeneous and often contradictory interests, will win nothing."* (Ibidem) This clear-cut statement, without doubt because we were trapped in a schema, has been contradicted by reality – at least in part. The fact that we were not the only ones who were wrong on this particular point does not detract from the need to understand the error and its dimension. In particular, we do not think that it calls into question [our] general analysis of this movement and its limits because of its "inter-class" character.

expression and taking consciousness in future struggles we cannot prejudge. It is too early to deduce that a new generation of revolutionary militants can, directly or indirectly, emerge mechanically from it.

Yet it is also this task that revolutionaries must take up through propaganda and intervention. The weakness and the virtual absence of the communists as a material political force in the demonstrations and at roundabouts (including ourselves), as difficult as it was to intervene actively, given the political reticence of the 'yellow vests' and their displayed "inter-class" character, is an element of weakness, not of this movement in particular (which only highlights it), but of the current international and historical force relationship between the classes. We do not develop this point further in this communiqué, whose immediate purpose is limited to providing an immediate statement of position on the situation for those directly interested and for the whole of the international revolutionary camp.

The International Group of the Communist Left, January 27th, 2019.

Source: *IGCL (Revolution or War)*, [Communiqué sur le mouvement des gilets jaunes en France - 27 janvier 2019](#)

Translator's note: The IGCL's translation has been verified and corrected at the hand of its French source on February 1, 2019. Emphasis and [insertions] by the editor.

'AFRD' Blog articles on the 'Yellow Vests' Movement in France :

[On the movement of the "Yellow Vests" in France](#)

December 9, 2018

IGCL: Communiqué on the Social Revolt in France (2 December 2018)

[Time to surpass the 'Yellow Vests' Moment](#)

December 29, 2018

A statement by 'Nuevo Curso' (December 23), introduced by the IGCL

[What workers in yellow jackets can learn from the proletarian struggle in Iran](#)

January 1, 2019

('Arbeidersstemmen', January 1, 2019)

With Special Interest

The 'Yellow Vests' in the Mirror of the internationalist Milieu

We continue our *review section* on press publications from the internationalist milieu. The following contribution examines a selection of statements on the movement of the 'yellow jackets' in France. Readers are invited to react, and/or send in proposals for a review on a burning question.

Analyses of an inter-class Movement and its Perspectives

The abundance of texts on the movement of the 'yellow vests' makes it necessary to limit ourselves to a choice of texts that reflect the heterogeneous milieu of the communist left *in France*, from councilism to Bordigism. Against the enormous number of aspects, this review concentrates on the analyses that these texts give on the *inter-class* character of the movement and the perspectives shown for *proletarian class autonomy*. This can only be demonstrated in the light of the evident failure of workers to defend themselves within a trade-unionist framework against the attacks of capital on their living conditions since the 1980s.

Henri Simon in "*Gilets jaunes? Et après?*" (*Échanges* 165, Autumn 2018) asks himself if the relations of solidarity will be able to resist when the movement is ended; will they be able to defend working class interests? (introduction to the hard-copy version) ⁽¹⁾ After an extensive analyses (5100 words) the conclusion is – as usual in councilism – that you can always hope so, without too much confidence, because the realities of class division will restore under capitalism. This is not showing a perspective, and Simon doesn't want to. One should also note that Simon's idea of restoration of the realities of class division is purely subjective. However, his analyses is interesting because Simon considers the 'yellow vests' as a manifestation of a situation grown in the past decades, and that no government, no traditional party, and neither the trade unions could provide an answer to. Can this situation develop into a general questioning of capitalism itself? Simon only sees certain *social categories* present in the protests, that he cannot define in class terms. He contrasts this with the movements of "petty craftsmen and shopkeepers" in the 1950s and 1960s that showed a unified and coherent class character. The 'yellow vests' respond to a very heterogeneous

situation, from which follows the use of a vocabulary of *the people, the citizens*, which hides existing differences in their respective problems, but addresses the political power that in fact has insufficient means for their solution. The SMIC – minimum wage – is only a lower minimum, the real salaries depend on many factors that would lie beyond the powers of government. The battle field of the 'yellow vests' is "outside" the class relations and the relations of power within the enterprises. This explains their reliance on the (failed) efforts to bloc the logistics by working day occupations (most mere manifestations) of roundabouts and weekly manifestations on Saturday before buildings of the state power and against luxury shops. This implies that workers participated only part-time and as individuals. From this Simon concludes that the means of action chosen by the 'yellow vests' are not a sign of their strength, but of the weakness of a minority movement, with at most 300,000 manifesting in the whole of France on October 20th. By contrast, 700,000 demonstrators protested against the Brexit in London only, and needed no violence at all 'to be heard'.

In a short text written early December: "*The Movement of the Yellow Vests*" ⁽²⁾ *Raoul Victor* seems to take the opposite position:

"Most of the participants do not support the kind of violence of the "casseurs" ("breakers") amongst the yellow vests, and sometimes try to limit it, but they know it is almost inevitable and say that at least they understand it. They also know that the actions of slowing traffic by filtering barricades, blocking fuel depots, letting cars for free on toll roads, are also violent actions that attack the established order. The interventions of the "forces of order" to prevent those remind them of that quickly. It is a movement of struggle and inevitably it contains forms of violence."

1) Recently published online as well: H.S., January 16, 2019: <http://www.echangesetmouvement.fr/2019/01/gilets-jaunes-et-apres/>

2) R. Victor (Cercle de Discussions de Paris), December 14, 2019: <https://internationalistperspective.org/the-movement-of-the-yellow-vests/>

Why? Victor sees the 'yellow vests' as a kind of prolongation of movements of "non-exploiting layers", like '*Occupy*' and the '*Indignados*' in 2011, and the '*Nuit debout*' square occupations in 2016, to whom he falsely attributes a function of educating the proletarians:

"And, if we look further, if one day a general uprising (of the 99% of which Occupy was talking) would come about, it will not only result from the struggle of "proletarians", those who are directly exploited by capital, but also of a whole set of non-exploiting layers. It will not always be easy to hold meetings and make decisions together. But learning to do so is the first characteristic of a true revolutionary self-transformation."

It is significant that Victor puts the concept of *proletariat* into doubt by placing it between quotation marks. This may be the reason that he misses the vital difference between what the proletariat can learn by meeting and deciding when joining an inter-class movement dominated by petty bourgeoisie ideology, as the 'yellow vests' have been, and the inverse situation of a proletarian movement joined by 'non-exploiting layers', as was possible for example in the street manifestations of the workers of Haft Tappeh in Iran. The historical truth is that in the absence of autonomous class struggle there are no other 'schools of communism' for the proletarian masses than the general assemblies of struggling workers and chosen committees – called Workers' Council at Haft Tappeh ⁽³⁾ – and that these cannot be substituted by gatherings of 'the people'.

It is also the sad state of the class struggle in the previous "centers of capitalism" that motivates some of those others who do recognize the objective existence of the proletariat, to doubt its capacity to develop class consciousness in its struggle on a class terrain, and fall back on Lenin's antagonism between 'economic' and 'political' struggles, as is shown in a text recently published on the web site of the *Internationalist Communist Tendency*:

"[A small part of the demands] stem from the needs of the proletariat which has been crushed and rejected by a bourgeoisie trying to manage a capitalist recession now more

3) *Internationalist Voice*, January 27, 2019: [Iran: Lessons from Strikes, Labour Struggles and internationalist Tasks](#) (Extracts). A presentation of this balance sheet and the extracts can also be read on page 19.

than ten years old. These spontaneous claims of the proletarian wing of the movement represents the economic horizon of the proletariat, as it expresses itself in all its immediacy and spontaneity, and it cannot be otherwise. However, what for the proletariat is the spontaneous expression of its need to live, of an ineffable reaction to the attacks of capital – the indispensable starting point for an anti-capitalist perspective to find roots in the class – (...)"

The solution for this supposed incapacity of the class, is of course *The Party*:

"Another body is needed, This is an instrument that unifies the class ferment, enabling it to make a qualitative, that is a political, leap, to give it a strategy, and anti-capitalistic tactics, to direct the energies emanating from the class conflict towards an assault on the bourgeois system; there is no other way forward. In short, the active presence of the communist, international and internationalist party is necessary."

Our emphasis, C.B., "*Some Further Thoughts on the Yellow Vests Movement*". ⁽⁴⁾

This idea was refuted by *Rosa Luxemburg* in her analyses of 'mass struggles':

"As a matter-of-fact the separation of the political, and the economic struggle and the independence of each, is nothing but an artificial product of the parliamentary period, even if historically determined. (...) in a revolutionary mass action the political and economic struggle are one (...)" (Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*) ⁽⁵⁾

As at the time they learned from the mass struggle in Russia 1905, revolutionaries should now learn from proletarian struggles 'at the periphery of capitalism'; from *Iran*, the Middle and Near East, which has been attempted in "*What workers in yellow jackets can learn from the proletarian struggle in Iran*". ⁽⁶⁾ Unfortunately nearly all analyses of the 'yellow vests' limit themselves to the "French" context. In doing so, most miss the importance of *a unification of employed and unemployed workers on a class base*.

4) C.B. (ICT), January 18, 2019: [Some Further Thoughts on the Yellow Vests Movement](#).

5) R. Luxemburg, 1906, *The Mass Strike: VIII. Need for United Action of Trade Unions and Social Democracy*.

6) Fredo Corvo (*Arbeidersstemmen*), January 12, 2019: [What workers in yellow jackets can learn from the proletarian struggle in Iran](#).

A rare exception to this, has been the “*Communiqué on the ‘Yellow Vests’ Movement in France*” by the IGCL of January 27th (7) that analyzes the movement in France in the context of what it sees as an international climate of general social revolt in the making (mentioning Iran 2018 and the present mass strike of tens of thousands of workers in northern Mexico). Macron’s concessions on December 10th are presented as the turning point of what the IGCL still calls an “interclassist movement”, be it now between quotation marks. This is probably because it feels to have underestimated the potential of the movement when it wrote in a previous communiqué that the workers in yellow vests would gain nothing. At the same time it has become clear that the ‘gains’ in financial terms are indeed very limited. The demands on wages and living conditions that could unify the proletariat, run the risk to be forgotten behind the smoke screen of the national debate “until” March 15th and the demand for a referendum on citizens’ initiative (R.I.C.).

As usual the decline of the mobilizations against the fact that the government has taken over the initiative in the confrontations, is accompanied by brute police repression, applauded by bourgeois politicians and mass media, and desperate fights of the most radical ‘yellow vests’. In a footnote the IGCL states it was a mistake that the police shot a very popular and pacifist spokesman of theirs in the eye, because this could stimulate the mobilizations. However, when hitting the most determinate elements of this movement in decline hard is a goal of the state, stimulation of street fights is an important means in doing so.

Apart from the smoke screen of the petty bourgeois claims for more democracy, restoring credibility of

the trade-unions is a policy directed at the workers in yellow jackets, specially those new strata and generations of proletarians with no experience, attracted to the movement by workers’ demands. The main union, the CGT, has called for a day of action and strike on February 5th, pretending that the unions defend the interests of the workers in production. As usual, the leftists, specially the Trotskyists, propagate this illusion by calling an “unlimited strike”. This latter version of the anarcho-syndicalist idea of the “general strike”, that ‘should’ be organized by the union bureaucrats, is defended as well in the “*Appel des «Gilets Jaunes» de l’Est Parisien*”, January 18th 2019. (8) This appeal affirms further:

“To recognize ourselves in the calls of the yellow vests of Alès, Commercy and Saint Nazaire, whose concern to refuse any hierarchical organization, any representation, and to target the capitalists, is for us the sign of the way to go.”

The communiqué by the IGCL on the contrary, is very critical about both the “unlimited strike” and the ‘yellow vests’ of Commercy and Saint Nazaire, citing one of their appeals for a “national meeting of People’s Committees” full of verbiage on ‘the people’, drowning workers’ demands into the media fuzz about a “referendum on citizens’ initiative”.

It is significant for the disarray amongst radical elements that it took even the disappointing Appeal by the «Gilets Jaunes» of East-Paris more than two weeks to emerge, in the decline of the movement. The situation of the left-communist groups is even worse: each is remaining in its bubble, without any public references to each other’s positions, no discussion, hardly advancing a perspective to combative workers.

F.C., February 1, 2019.

7) IGCL, January 30, 2019: [A Balance Sheet of the ‘Yellow Vests’ Movement in France - 2nd Communiqué by the IGCL \(January 27, 2019\)](#). Integrally included in this issue on page 27.

8) [Appel des «Gilets Jaunes» de l’Est Parisien](#), January 18, 2019.

The 'Yellow Vests' three months later

'Nuevo Curso' in reply to the IGCL's Communiqué

The comrades of 'Nuevo Curso' have adopted the foregoing communiqué by the '**International Group of the Communist Left**' (page 27) on their blog with the following introduction: "Three months later, the 'yellow vests' are still standing in France. But they neither demobilize nor advance, breaking the trap of the demands and approaches of the petty bourgeoisie in despair. To understand what is apparently a "motionless movement," we summarize its achievements and weaknesses so far and reproduce a communiqué by the IGCL that we believe provides (...) very important keys to understanding the type of needs and problems that the struggle of workers in most parts of the world will face for a long period to come." What follows is **Nuevo Curso's** analysis of the movement.

Our analysis

1. The yellow vests are born as a popular movement, i.e., interclassist under the leadership of a petty bourgeois program, but the element of class demands grows, without differentiating enough, so as to lead the Macron government to make the first significant concessions in decades.

2. If the "ghost" of a self-organized class struggle, that was only on the horizon, was enough for Germany and France to suddenly become champions of "fiscal flexibility" in order to allow the minimum wage to rise, it was because – beyond the traps – we are in a new global context of class struggle and intensification of imperialist conflicts. In other words: the main European bourgeoisies understood that the movement could radicalize, self-organize at a different level, and overcome the corset of democratic demands; and that while it was standing, France would not be able to lead the European rearmament, to "squeeze" Britain, to push Germany towards a strategic union and to raise a European army.

3. And indeed, for a certain time, the movement showed signs of demobilization. The state did not cease its efforts to integrate it into the republican political game: from the adoption of the procedural forms of the trade unions to the identification with the parties, via electoral participation and Macron's "Grand National Debate". And yet, the movement and the combativity that keeps it going, does not stop... but apparently it does not advance either.

In reality, what we are seeing is consistent with the Marxist understanding of class consciousness: [it] advances by leaps, swirling behind the material advances of one's own struggles. Only the existence of organized groups of workers – the party – which bring perspective and sweeten that process, can prevent struggles from stagnating at one level of development or another.

*"The combativity of the class flows irresistibly, explosive at certain moments, from its own historical background. It crystallizes into facts that only later are reflected on and give it a basis and energy for further advances. It proceeds then, both in facts and in consciousness, by leaps in the development, the continuity of which **has to be assured by its deliberately revolutionary sector.** The decisive victory will be for the majority of the class **a realization rather than a consummated intention.** Not in vain is the revolutionary class forged by history in defiance of the oppression and intellectual dirigism that accompany its daily life. For the same reason, on the revolutionary workers' nuclei falls, much more than 150 years ago, a decisive role." (**Revolutionary Consciousness and Class for Itself, 1976**)*

4. The 'yellow vests' in France, the **mass strikes in Iran** a few months ago and those in these weeks in Mexico show the need for the most conscious workers to become organized militants. Militants who must intervene and be the most active part of their comrades. not only to call for revolution, but with a clear program that leads to the organization of the class through the progress of their demands. Without them, the movement cannot overcome ideological traps – from nationalism to democratic illusions – and is doomed to run into a dead end.

That is why we differ from the **fatalism** that we sense in the final phrases of the statement reproduced below [here: on page 27.]. It is true that the weakness of communists in today's struggles reflects "*the present international and historical relationship of forces between classes*"... but as in every dialectical relationship, its true solution is the affirmation of their opposite: if the communists want to transform the relationship of forces between classes, we must begin by confronting our own weakness on the basis of the elements within our grasp.

Nuevo Curso, January 30, 2019.

How will the Venezuelan crisis end?

(Continued from page 36)

Saudi Arabia deeper and deeper and more desperate, by the way winning an unlikely ally for 'Chavism'. Finally, by putting nuclear bombers both in Venezuela ⁽¹⁾ and next to the very border of the United States, ⁽²⁾ Russia, has not only shown that it does not intend to "let pass" a regime change that does not follow Russian interests. Hence the warnings about the "blood-bath" that an invasion would cause, and the growing warnings of the danger of war. For Russia, abandoning Maduro would not only be economically devastating, but also for its global imperialist interests: many rulers supported by Russia would wonder whether an imperialist boss who wins the hostility of the Americans, and then does not defend you when the Americans come after you, can be relied upon. To sum up: Russia has no reason to step back.

What about China? For years 'Chavist' Venezuela has been its most solid ally in the Americas. ⁽³⁾ The fact that it has offered to "buy all the oil it needs" to compensate for the partial or total loss of the U.S. market by sanctions, is a sign of its commitment. Like Russia, it cannot afford to abandon its allies because it would harm them in their imperialist emergence, but in addition it has much more relevant investments and far superior regional interests than the Russians.

What is going to happen?

1. Until now **Brazil**, the true "puppet master" ⁽⁴⁾ after this new attempt to evict the Chavist faction from power, has remained in the shadows. While the U.S. took the global lead, recovering the airs of what the USA once was in the region, Bolsonaro became the star in Davos and returned to Brazil for a last post-heart attack surgery. He is the big winner of this crisis so far. Shortly after entering the government he has shown the capacity of organizing – through Chile - the majority of the countries of the Americas in a very aggressive consensus. A consensus that has "walked along its own path"; that, by its global media exposure, is rally-

ing to the Venezuelan opposition; and getting in the car to the U.S.A. - yes, leaving all protagonism to Bolsonaro. We are much closer to the continental model that Brazil claims than we were a month ago. As Bolsonaro said, "Venezuela is doing well..." With the U.S. recognizing Brazil as its main ally against China and Russia in the region... without firing a single shot. Although Bolsonaro's nature, as seen in the campaign, is that of a warmonger, the military and above all **Itamaraty** ⁽⁵⁾ want him to remain in a more peaceful light. Brazil has already won and from now on Brazilian bets will be conservative.

2. When one thinks of an invasion, the first candidate is **Colombia**, not only for Bolton but for all analysts. With Duque in government, with the impact of the latest attack by the ELN, a group linked to Venezuela, and Guaidó warming up even more, everything would seem to be pointing in that direction. Colombia is in these days a hotbed of rumors, denials and suspicious visits. But the truth is that Duque is, for the moment, avoiding to go any further. He has difficulty supporting a U.S. intervention - even qua procedure - and it is even more difficult [for him] to wage a solitary war against a Venezuelan army that has been well-equipped by Russia.

3. Then: what choice is left? An incursion reusing perhaps one or two battalions of the exiled soldiers and commanders in a desperate attempt to provoke a general uprising and the defection of sectors of the army. A very dangerous strategy that only Guaidó seems willing to play. And yet, every day this becomes more probable. Colombia and even Brazil could give the incursion limited air support, intelligence and equipment. In that case, the situation would take a new leap. We would be at the beginning of an inter-imperialist war with the participation of regional and global powers, dressed up as a civil war. In other words, we would be on the verge of seeing Venezuela turn into a new Syria.

Nuevo Curso, February 1, 2019

- 1) <https://nuevocurso.org/bombarderos-rusos-en-venezuela/>.
- 2) <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/2183816/us-and-canadian-fighter-jets-scramble-escort-russian>.
- 3) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/china-standing-nicolas-maduro-190130093441196.html>.
- 4) <https://nuevocurso.org/hacia-una-invasion-de-venezuela/>.

Source: ¿En qué acabará la crisis venezolana?
<https://nuevocurso.org/en-que-acabara-la-crisis-venezolana/>

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- 5) **Itamaraty:** Residence of Brazil's *Ministry of Foreign Affairs*.

How will the Venezuelan crisis end?

'Nuevo Curso' on the ramifications of an inter-imperialist stand-off

The Spanish media seem to be infected by the triumphalism of the Venezuelan opposition: "In Venezuela there is no risk of a civil war, 90% of the population wants change", Guaidó said on the cover of *'El País'*.⁽¹⁾ And if we were to take the media's account seriously, Maduro's regime would fall under the pressure of the demonstrations and the much awaited, but for the moment unseen, defection of the middle cadres of the army. Is that all? Or are there many things that escape from the media's framework?

1) https://elpais.com/internacional/2019/01/31/america/1548899151_098760.html

1. The idea that American capital is [simply] pulling the strings is extremely reductionist. The big capital of the United States has lined itself up with Maduro and has every intention of continuing to do so, no matter what. If the U.S. has swaggered on the most important part of this script and has taken so long to cut off oil imports,⁽²⁾ it is because its own oil sector was negotiating underhand with Maduro⁽³⁾ to bypass sanctions through third countries, even before they were decreed. In other words, important sectors of American capital are *not happy* with a conflict, let alone if it lasts too long. Venezuela continued to be business-as-usual for them with Maduro.

2. Therefore, although the intervention of the United States and Great Britain has served to give Guaidó the funds seized from PDVSA⁽⁴⁾ and will surely soon give him access to the reserves in London, the United States is in as much a hurry as it is mired in a problem when it comes to going further. The bet is that the financial asphyxiation and the mobilization in the street would demoralize part of the army and that a de facto military coup would subsequently entrench Guaidó's government. But things are starting to take longer than desired. And here comes the significant detail: even when he wants to "really" threaten, Bolton is incapable of going beyond sending 5,000 soldiers...⁽⁵⁾ which produces hilarity even with Maduro, anxious to hoist the external enemy. With 5,000 soldiers not even the ranches of Caracas would ever be conquered.

2) <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/01/explainer-sanctions-hit-venezuelan-state-owned-oil-company-190129022539244.html>

3) <https://www.lapoliticaonline.com/nota/117441-exclusivo-maduro-se-contacto-con-refinadoras-de-eeuu-para-sortear-el-embargo-de-trump-a-pdvsa/>.

4) PDVSA: *Petróleos de Venezuela*, the state-owned oil and natural gas company.

5) https://www.clarin.com/mundo/5000-soldados-colombia-apunte-cuaderno-asesor-donald-trump-sembrando-intriga_0_hDGO_i4Cz.html.

3. That doesn't mean there is no real danger of war. As we have been pointing out, the temptation to organize a new *Bay of Pigs*,⁽⁶⁾ training troops and non-commissioned officers now exiled in Peru and Colombia is evident and has not gone unnoticed by Maduro either. Such an invasion, with local troops combined with air and naval support from Colombia, and to a lesser extent from Brazil and the US, is among the possibilities contemplated in all crisis cabinets.⁽⁷⁾ The key element? That the strategy does not work or that it works halfway. And in that case, turning Venezuela into a "Caribbean Syria" becomes even more likely.⁽⁸⁾

4. Because Maduro and his regime are, of course, not lonely crusaders against imperialism: they depend every time, and could not survive any other way, more on the imperialisms rivaling the USA. Beyond the folklore of its Equatorial Guinea's satrapy, Cuban intelligence services or Erdoğan's sudden and very interested love of Bolivarianism, there is Russia and China. Both are not only playing for investments of tens of billions of euros and the lion's share of Maduro's privatizations.

Russia primarily fears a global drop in oil prices. Such a phenomenon is already well on its tracks, but Maduro's fall would accelerate it. Contradictions of imperialism: The effect of this whole process on oil prices would directly affect the balance of the *Middle East*, by making the alliance between Russia and

→ Continued on page 35.

6) The *Bay of Pigs invasion*: Failed attempt by the US bourgeoisie of April 1961 to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba by a CIA sponsored military invasion at the *Bahía de Cochinos*. Following the canceling of air support by President Kennedy, it was militarily defeated within 3 days.

7) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jan/30/what-next-for-venezuela-the-four-most-likely-outcomes>.

8) <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/venezuela-military-likely-to-determine-future-president-a-1250007.html>