

Editorial

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With this issue, we launch the second volume of the journal Fifth International. Although in a different format, the journal continues the project which was begun by the Workers Power group in 1976, namely, the development of the revolutionary ideas of Leninism-Trotskyism in contemporary conditions. This includes both the defence of the Marxist programme and its application to the class struggle today and the promotion of the key programmatic goal that has faced the international working class since the political collapse of the Fourth International in 1951: the foundation of a new world party of social revolution on a re-elaborated transitional programme.

The new period of heightened class struggles and instability that opened in 1999 shows no signs of abating. As we go to press in September 2006, the armies of the imperialist USA-British alliance are suffering ever-greater losses at the hands of the national and Islamist resistance movements. Hezbollah's defeat of the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon has emboldened the masses of the Arab world, demonstrating not only the possibility of inflicting blows on the 'invincible' Israeli army, but also the abject cowardice and venality of governments from the Maghreb to Amman and Riyadh. What is more, it has thrown the British government into deep crisis, with warmongering premier Tony Blair facing outright rebellion within his party over his slavish support for Israel's doomed war, and with his equally bourgeois rivals manoeuvring to take advantage of the crisis to unseat him.

In South America, the new period of revolutionary struggles that gave rise to the revolutionary days in Argentina in 2000-2001, to the victory of the Workers Party in Brazil, to explosive revolutionary situations in Venezuela and Bolivia, has deepened still further. Now Mexico is paralysed by a fresh revolutionary crisis, with left populist Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador threatening to establish a 'rival government' to the fraudulently elected regime of Felipe Calderon, and with mass strikes giving rise to the formation of a popular assembly in the south of the country.

In the USA, support for Bush is slumping as the occupation of Iraq sinks deeper into the quagmire. A new mass movement of Latino and immigrant workers stunned the world with its huge marches of hundreds of thousands and its bold strike action on May Day. In France, the uprisings of migrant youth last year brought the imposition of a state of emergency and insurrectionary fighting in 14 towns - including the centre of Paris. Then this year a mass rebellion of school pupils, students and young workers against the government's proposed CPE law spread rapidly to broader sections of workers, threatening a general strike and forcing the government to back down. A historic hole had been blasted through the neoliberal offensive of the French capitalists -pointing the way forward to workers and youth across Europe and beyond.

And yet, just as the deepening of struggles worldwide reveals the essential validity of the Leninist theory of imperialism, that we live in an epoch of wars and revolutions, so too it has validated a key notion of Trotskyism: that in periods of heightening class struggle, the future of humanity is reduced to a crisis of proletarian leadership. And what a crisis it is. Seldom can the scale and breadth of resistance to the

capitalist offensive have taken place alongside so deep and total an absence of revolutionary communist leadership for the working class. That gap between the perspectives and programmes of the leadership of the working class movement and the actual necessities posed by the class struggle has never been so wide. In the USA, the new movement of migrant workers risks being channelled into a fruitless campaign to re-elect the capitalist Democratic Party, unless a new movement for a working class party emerges.

In France, the Communist Party is preparing for yet another opportunist electoral bloc to put the pro-capitalist Segolene Royale in the Elysee Palace, squandering the enormous potential that unfolded in the mass mobilisations this year. In Britain, there is a danger that the workers' organisations - above all the trade unions - will pass by the opportunity to break hundreds of thousands of workers away from the proimperialist Labour Party and launch an independent workers' party, leaving hostility to Blair to be channelled only into liberalism, the conservatives, Islamic initiatives and, waiting on the wings, a resurgent far right.

In Latin America, populist bonapartes like Chavez and Morales express the intense antagonism of the people to US imperialism and the privateering multinationals, but leave private property - including that of the US and British corporations and the latifundist landlords - largely intact. In the Middle East, from Palestine and Lebanon to Iraq and Afghanistan, the failure of secular, nationalist, democratic and socialist forces to come to the head of resistance to occupation leaves the way open for Islamist groups to take the leadership of the struggle against imperialism, preparing the way for them to make peace with property in the future.

Even where radical 'communist' forces play a leading role, they serve to demonstrate the depths of the crisis of leadership. In Nepal, in the revolutionary crisis that came so close to sweeping away the fratricidal monarchy of King Gyanendra in April this year, the inadequacies of Stalinism were graphically revealed. The 'official' Communist Party of Nepal (United Marxist-Leninist) formed a classic 'people's front' coalition with bourgeois parties and formed an administration, leaving the monarchy in place and attempting to terminate the revolution without threatening capitalism or landlordism. Meanwhile the more radical wing of the Stalinist movement, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) failed to translate its rural guerrilla war into planning for an insurrection at the height of the revolutionary days, and limits the goal of its struggle to a democratic republic. The Menshevik 'stages theory', taken up by Stalin in the 1920s, continues to mislead revolutions in the underdeveloped countries to this day.

As we said in 1976, the principal error of the manifold currents that have emerged from the Fourth International and the principal mark of their degeneration from revolutionary into centrist trends, is their belief that the crisis of leadership that grips the working class movement can be overcome spontaneously, automatically, through a disembodied process, without the conscious intervention of revolutionaries. Our task is not to advance inadequate solutions in the hope of inveigling ourselves into the leadership of reformist, populist or centrist formations, but, in Trotsky's words, to 'say what is', to advance the forms of struggle and goals that are necessary for the workers and oppressed classes to win.

Our goal is to convert the resistance to globalisation into a global social revolution. In this we will find ourselves in direct political opposition not only to the bourgeois, reformist, social democratic and bureaucratic trends that dominate the leadership of the struggle worldwide, but also to the miasma of opportunist and sectarian trends that seek to insulate the misleaders from revolutionary criticism.

In this issue of FI, we examine the parameters of the crisis of globalisation and the resistance. We are pleased to publish a major survey of the international political and economic situation that was debated, amended and adopted at the Seventh Congress of the League for the Fifth International in July this year. The document provides, we believe, a worked example of how, far from being obsolete or of incidental

interest, central Marxist theories of modern capitalism ? Marx's theory of crisis, Lenin's theory of imperialism and Trotsky's theories of combined and uneven development, of permanent revolution and the crisis of proletarian leadership ? are powerful explanatory tools that can help orient revolutionaries in the struggles of today.

We believe these perspectives stand in our best traditions of continuity and creativity. We uphold our long expressed view that since the 1970s a crisis of over- accumulation has obliged the imperialist bourgeoisie to launch a sustained offensive against the living standards of the working class in the imperialist metropolises. At the same time, we observe how the new period of globalisation extends this offensive to the whole planet, threatening not only a serious decline in the living standards of the masses but a new cycle of wars and environmental catastrophe. This in turn has had a profound impact on the movements of the exploited and oppressed, necessitating new proletarian political organisations and a permanent coordination of resistance across national boundaries. In addition, this issue carries important assessments of the political situation in two of this year's major flashpoints, France and Lebanon.

In 'France in Crisis - Left Leaders' Electoralist Strategy Blocks the Road to Power', Marc Lassalle of our sympathizing group in France argues that despite the huge opportunities posed by the scale of mass mobilization against the CPE and the emergence of new co-ordinations of struggle from below, the policy of the French Communist party and the far left groups, Ligue communiste révolutionnaire and Lutte Ouvrière, looks set to squander this in favour of an approach entirely centred on electoralism and parliamentary gains. They way forward, he argues, demands a revolutionary programme of transitional demands and a new party for the working class.

We also reproduce three statements issued by the International Secretariat of the League for the Fifth International during the Israel-Lebanon War this summer. We show how the 'war on terror', as an armed initiative of globalising capital, aims at the reconquest and reorganization of the whole Middle East under the domination of the USA, and how Israel's invasion plan backfired, throwing imperialism's project into crisis. We further set out the contemporary importance for communists of the Communist International's policy of the Anti-Imperialist united Front, and how only Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution can ensure that the just democratic and national demands of the Palestinian and Lebanese people can be resolved, under a working class leadership that can avoid the reactionary dead-end of Islamism and open the road to the socialist transformation of the Middle East.

Finally, in a major article, Dave Stockton examines the recent split in the League for the Fifth International. He discusses the emergence of a significant minority in our British Section opposed to key elements of Leninist-Trotskyist policy, in particular the demand for a new workers party in Britain and the fight within the new assemblies, convergences and social forums of anticapitalists and anti-imperialists in Europe and beyond for the formation of a new world party of social revolution. This schism, he argues, was no accident but a reflection of the change of period through which the world has passed over recent years. The refusal of the minority to acknowledge these changes and the methods that communists must adopt if we are to meet the challenges of the period reflected their essentially conservative and passive propagandist outlook. The minority, in conducting an irresponsible split, claimed to be seeking a way 'back' to the past years of our organisation. In fact, by breaking with our principled application of Leninism-Trotskyism to real twenty-first century conditions, they broke not only with our present-day revolutionary project, but with our revolutionary past as well. The split has left us reduced in numbers and financial resources (though the split took a minority of our members, it took the richer part).

That, we freely concede, is why volume two of this journal appears in a simpler and cheaper format. Nevertheless, we have decided to convert necessity into a virtue, and to publish the journal as a smaller

and more frequent publication, able to combine thorough-going theoretical articles with shorter features analysing key aspects of the international class struggle and revolutionary thought today.

With communist greetings to all our readers,

Richard Brenner

Editor

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