



# **Student struggle and Assemblies of neighbourhoods**



**Internationalist Communists - Klasbatalo**

## Table of contents

### **Spring 2012 student movement**

- An international economic crisis, drastic austerity measures worldwide ... and rising tuition
- The struggle against tuition fees is part of the struggle against capitalist attacks on our living conditions
- Student unionism
- The student movement isolates itself and is isolated from the labor movement
- Social strike radical students and minorities
- The question of violence
- The beginning of the end: the elections mark the end of the movement and its defeat through extensive student participation in those elections
- The summit on education and continuation of austerity measures

### **Autonomous Popular Assemblies of the neighbourhoods: our intervention in the APAQs**

- 'Democracy' gives birth to Bill 78
- The *manifestations casseroles* movement: the working class and the middle class in solidarity with the student movement
- Democratic illusions and the civic "*manifestations casseroles*"
- The *casseroles* seem to want to give themselves a political extension: creation of the APAQs
- The APAQs supported the student movement, but were also put in tow
- Autonomy according to the APAQs
- Struggles of tendencies: localism and anarchist individualism disrupt the APAQs
- The end of the wave of struggle, the drift to self-management

### **Annexes**

General strike or electoral circus

The organisation of the proletariat outside periods of open struggle (workers' groups, nuclei, circles, committees)

## Spring 2012 student movement

This text won't go into a precise chronology of the 2012 student strike. Instead, what we'll present is a political analysis of the struggle that unfolded last year. We intend this both as an assessment of the movement, as well as a preparatory tool for coming struggles.

An international economic crisis, drastic austerity measures worldwide ... and rising tuition.

Last spring's student struggle against tuition hikes wasn't a bolt out of the blue. Since the 2008 US financial crisis, the deteriorating economic situation has become increasingly global and international in nature. Without getting specifically into the causes of the economic crisis - other texts provide good explanations<sup>1</sup> - it is important to understand its consequences. Capitalism's crisis is quite evident, simply in the growing loss of profitability of capitalist enterprise and the lack of opportunities, which necessarily entails a reorganization of markets (through bankruptcy, concentration, etc.). For capital, this crisis is the moment of truth – a make or break situation – to ensure growing profitability for business, in short, to fetch higher profits than in the pre-crisis period. The bourgeois solution to the crisis, as a last resort, has always been and will always be imperialist war.

How to ensure higher profits? Clearly,

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<sup>1</sup> See the text of the Fraction of the international communist left:  
[http://fractioncommuniste.org/ficci\\_eng/b42/b42\\_2.html](http://fractioncommuniste.org/ficci_eng/b42/b42_2.html)

Also the file « Economic Crisis » of International Communist Current :  
<http://en.internationalism.org/taxonomy/term/276>

Finally the texts of the Internationalist Communist Tendency, such as:  
<http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2011-08-16/the-international-sovereign-debt-crisis>

capitalist recovery of large parts of the market, following the acquisition of the smaller capitalists derailed by the crisis, puts it on track towards higher profits. But this comes down to the increased exploitation of labour, of which the crisis is a pretext among many others, for boards of directors to pull new profits out of a hat in the aftermath of an economic cataclysm. Increased exploitation is synonymous with austerity. And austerity is synonymous with lower wages, longer working hours, delays and cuts to pensions, rising unemployment, etc. In short, for us proletarians, austerity means sacrifice, humiliation and a decline in living standards. This is what is happening on an international scale for workers: austerity in Greece, unemployment in Spain, pension 'reform' in France to name just a few.

The state also plays a fundamental role in the adoption of austerity. Being "the bourgeoisie's executive committee" (Marx), the capitalist state reacts much like a captain of industry. Its watchwords are fiscal restraint, belt-tightening, and trimming the fat, but also, and more fundamentally, as it directly affects our living conditions, cuts to social programs. Thus, politicians and the business sector, brandish the enormous state debt plaguing our society, against which we, as citizens for the good of the nation (sic), must make sacrifices to resolve the crisis. It is important to raise a fundamental point here. The various national debts in the world are symptomatic of capitalism's advanced state of decay. So, the bourgeois solutions to the crisis, whether from the right (PLQ CAQ), or left (PQ<sup>2</sup>, QS), only temporarily defer a more violent crash to come. Those on the right would cut all spending, causing unemployment and stagnation, but promote established big

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<sup>2</sup> For a lot of petty bourgeois militants, the PQ is neo-liberal up until one has to decide in an election booth between the PLQ and the PQ. The PQ quickly becomes less neo-liberal and respectable ... like magic.

business over the long term. The left would focus on state intervention for the welfare of the nation, aggravating national debt while pretending to lead and pacify the workers with promises that capitalism can still ensure them better days to come... until the next elections, a change of power and new, even more drastic cuts resulting from debt exacerbated by the capitalist left.

In short, the economic crisis is at the core of an upsurge in class struggle on an international level. Let's look at what happened in Quebec last spring.

**The struggle against tuition fees is part of the struggle against capitalist attacks on our living conditions.**

The tuition hikes announced for 2011 by the Charest government, were hardly surprising. Already, in 2005, the same Charest had tried to cut student aid, causing one of the biggest student strikes to date. Charest ultimately backed down, but only to renew the attack two years later, in 2007, announcing an increase of \$50 per year for five years. The trick, a 'small' increase over several years, was to ease that pill down students' throats, which worked rather well, as such an increase was not likely to trigger massive resistance.

With the five-year increase nearing its limit, Charest decided to defer this in announcing another tuition hike beginning in 2012. This time the pill was big – huge, in fact: a 75% hike over five years! Student reaction was swift this time. From late winter to early spring, college and university students went on a massive strike.

It's important to emphasize that the logic behind the tuition hikes is primarily one of austerity. The basic principle of austerity measures employed throughout the world today is to impose cuts everywhere – in private spending (wages) and in public

spending (social programs), in order to revive profits. Quebec is no exception. In its role as the Quebecois bourgeoisie's "executive committee", all the Charest government is asking is for students to tighten their belts, to "make an effort" to give capital some leeway, so that it can pull itself out of the current slump.

But what does this "little effort" of 75% increase represent for a large number of students? First of all, this represents an increase in debt, which on one hand mortgages the lives of many young people for several years, and on the other leads to higher profits in bank capital on the backs of these students. Secondly, the need to take on menial jobs becomes more universal among students to make ends meet. This is already a harsh reality for students from proletarian families. But now it also affects the middle classes and the petty bourgeoisie. In short, students in general are becoming proletarianized. The student / worker is a boon for the bourgeoisie. He often works for minimum wage, or close to it, with flexible hours – a typical mainstay in the service industry, for example.

It goes without saying that the 2012 strike was primarily a strike against the humiliation and sacrifice on the altar of capital. For most striking students living on a tiny income, often having to bear the stress caused by debt, constantly juggling between work and study... and for the capitalist state to say "make an effort, do your fair share", was simply the last straw. That, among other things, proletarianized the students, giving the strike its massive and radical political nature.

**Student unionism**

This movement first began through the "Coalition large de l'Association pour une Solidarité syndicale (CLASSE)". Its student union members went on strike first. Subsequently, the Quebec Federation of

College Students (FECQ) and its university counterpart, the Quebec Federation of University Students (FEUQ) followed suit. Although the movement was more or less prepared in advance by the student union bureaucracy, in particular l'ASSE, the massive character of the movement showed that it was, in fact, the student base "spontaneously" set in motion .

Let's take a closer look at the student unions. The FECQ-FEUQ represents the right-wing of the trade union movement, an elite corporatist establishment that seeks privileges for its members through government negotiation. They have a history of frequent close relations with various governments and patronage of the Parti Québécois. They also have a tradition of restraining and channeling the enthusiasm of the student movement, then liaising with the government to negotiate deals on the backs of students.

The FECQ-FEUQ did not betray its own traditions during the movement of 2012. Its main function during the strike was to pacify the student struggle. We saw the leader of the FECQ, Léo Bureau-Blouin, playing the role of the police by constantly calling for calm and respect for order, while students rightly challenged the capitalist order. It was even sometimes difficult to differentiate between the speech of Bureau-Blouin and Ian Lafreniere, head of communications of Montreal Police Service (SPVM). Of course, the media and business milieu quickly made darlings of them. Students also soon realized that the FECQ-FEUQ had entered the movement belatedly, under pressure from its base, intending to put an end to it as quickly as possible. In this sense, the FECQ and FEUQ represent the most hypocritical aspect of student unionism.

Regarding l'ASSE, the left wing of the student movement, the problem is more complex. Indeed, CLASS is often portrayed by the media as the radical

organization of the student movement. Unlike the FECQ and FEUQ, CLASSE advances a project for society. For several years, it championed the principle of free education at all levels. These positions, in addition to more combative tactics, as compared with FECQ and FEUQ, ensure that more students still have great confidence in CLASSE to represent their interests and to provide a tool for social transformation.

But what is the CLASS program other than the capitalist left adapted to students' realities? Indeed, it represents this rather utopian, not to mention reactionary, political current that aims to transform neo-liberalism to "capitalism with a human face." The demand for free education is quite instructive in this regard. CLASSE assumes that the state, (obviously, for the capitalist left, the state is neutral, and therefore above social classes), should finance public education in order to make it accessible. The mission of national education, therefore, is to educate citizens; and this national civic education is part of a process of emancipation. So, for CLASSE, education financed by the bourgeois state is a step towards e m a n c i p a t i o n . . .

The dilemma is this: emancipation of humanity through transformation at the root of society, or 'emancipation' through social mobility afforded by higher education for certain privileged individuals? Here's the rub, since obviously CLASSE fights for the latter.

In short, throughout this strike, student unions put the brakes on the movement. From the right came hypocritical appeals for calm, with students constantly subjected to state violence at the hands of police. From the left, the mobilization of students under an illusory program of reformist capitalism full of empty promises. Furthermore, student unions did everything to contain students within the

framework of the fight against tuition hikes. For students, or at least the most radical amongst them, the real issues became increasingly clear: austerity, crisis of capital, anti-capitalism, police brutality, a frontal fight against the State – in short, issues surpassing simple student circumstances to become increasingly proletarian and revolutionary. Meanwhile, student leaders debated over and over again and again over university funding, taxation, free education and elections!

**The student movement isolates itself and is isolated from the labor movement.**

Throughout our involvement in the student struggle, we've had as the leitmotif that students alone, facing the government, could not aspire to impart any transformation on society. Thus, it was necessary for them to broaden their struggle to other sectors of society, especially workers, the only truly revolutionary social class.

Clearly, student leaders who make a virtue of union corporatism never thought to call for worker solidarity with students. Not only had they never addressed it, but they did everything to prevent this from occurring in their ranks. They had been ensuring that students keep their noses fixed on their immediate economic interests, as the struggle became increasingly political, going beyond mere student issues.

It must be said that there were good initiatives on the part of the radical student base, initiatives that showed great promise, but unfortunately would be short-lived. Here, we can give the example of students demonstrating in solidarity with Aveos workers, a company in the aerospace sector, which had announced layoffs.

But if students remained isolated from workers, it is not so much their fault. The fault lies more with the major unions and

their utterly reactionary actions during the strike. First of all, union bosses had agreed, at Prime Minister Charest's request, to sit at the student-government negotiating table. Charest's gesture was not without significance. He knew very well that the union bosses were specialists at sabotaging struggles. Moreover, they complained of the triumphalist attitude of Jean Charest in the aftermath of the negotiations. For Michel Arsenault, President of the FTQ, "*when you catch a big fish and someone asks you where you caught it, you answer, in the lake, and keep your trap shut about it. It's the same in the aftermath of a negotiation, the employer remains silent until the end of the vote. It is not complicated; you keep your mouth shut!*"<sup>3</sup> In short, union bosses offered no solidarity with the student movement, on the contrary, they participated in the preparation of negotiations for a bogus agreement, (82% increase over 7 years instead of 75% over 5 years!), later overwhelmingly rejected by the students both in their general meetings and on the street.

But that's not all. With *les manifestations casseroles* movement, the idea of a "social strike" caught on more and more. Many workers voted at their union meetings for the initiation of a social strike. The movement was so impressive and massive that the base of the National Confederation of Trade Unions (CSN), one of the three major unions, adopted a mandate for a social strike. Union tradition: union leaders prevaricated throughout the remainder of the conflict, saying they were questioning their base on the issue of a social strike, even though the mandate had already come from the base! In short, what better way to sabotage a movement than to nip it in the bud?

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<sup>3</sup> André Frappier, Richard Poulin, Bernard Rioux, *Le printemps des carrés rouges*, M éditeur, collection mobilisations, 2012, p. 104

Worse, the bureaucrat-in-Chief of the *Federation des Travailleurs du Québec* (FTQ), Michel Arsenault, ensured with his Canadian counterpart, Ken Georgetti, the boss of the Canadian Labor Congress, the Canadian equivalent of the FTQ, that the rest of Canada would not meddle in Quebec's affairs. Under the smokescreen of jurisdiction and spheres of influence presented as the responsibility of each of the unions within their own national borders, it was the solidarity of Canadian workers and students with Quebec workers and students that they wanted to silence at all costs. The exchange between these two social firefighters is quite instructive in this regard.

Here are some excerpts: Arsenault calls his Canadian counterpart about rumors concerning English Canadian unionized rank and file workers and their willingness to help their peers in Quebec. Arsenault says "*that the union activities and strategies in Québec are to take place exclusively under the responsibility of the FTQ*"<sup>4</sup> In other words, it means don't come and stick your nose in our affairs, and pacify your membership. Georgetti responds: "*I know that all affiliates and federations respect the jurisdiction of the FTQ in their province and hope that these rumours are just rumours and not facts.*"<sup>5</sup> In other words, to hell with solidarity, we will deal with these overly radical insubordinates!

Arsenault continues regarding the struggle against law 78: "*As well, more radical wings are calling for social strike and we do not believe that it is THE strategy to be promoted for the moment. (...) We think that at the moment, the best approach is to facilitate a settlement instead of fueling the fires. It is in fact possible that the Government and student associations meet*

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<sup>4</sup> To see the original letter : <http://zinelibrary.info/files/FTQ-Students-2012-05-28-EN-1.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> To see the original letter : idem

*early in the week for a round of bargaining ; we believe that it is necessary to foster for this operation to be successful.*"<sup>6</sup> Arsenault not only sabotages the solidarity that arose in English Canada, but increasingly jams sticks into the wheels of a movement that tries more and more to escape the trade-union stranglehold.

These strike votes and initiatives of solidarity within the union bureaucracy demonstrate once again the high degree of illusions of the working class towards the unions. Let's hope that this umpteenth "betrayal" of the CSN and FTQ will destroy these illusions! But let's learn from this experience. We should have attempted, wherever possible, to establish strike committees outside and against the unions in the workplace. Thus, the mass strike against the government from the perspective of radical transformation of society could be possible.

### **Social strike radical students and minorities**

In summary, the "social strike" failed mainly because Labour was not put on strike. And if workers didn't go on strike, it is mostly through the consciously calculated inertia of large unions.

But there was also a lot of ambiguity in the very concept of the social strike. Nobody much knew what it was referring to. To us, it seemed pretty clear that the proponents of this tactic had a rather clear idea of the nature of the call for a social strike. This tactic was put forward by trade unionists and the capitalist left. They basically wanted to hold a nice little mini-strike, according to union tradition, of a few days in some key sectors of the economy in solidarity with the students and to "drive out the neo-liberals" from government. The neo-liberal political parties in Quebec are the *Coalition Avenir Québec* (CAQ), the

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<sup>6</sup> idem

Liberal Party (PLQ) and, depending on each other, and the Parti Québécois (PQ). Note that the concept of neo-liberalism is one of variable geometry, especially with regard to the PQ.<sup>7</sup> In short, if the ultimate goal of a social strike is to drive out neo-liberals, it is also logical that the government wants to install the PQ and ensure strong representation in Québec Solidaire (QS). The program of these parties is essentially that of "capitalism with a human face" and this program has nothing to bring to either workers or students. So always beware of those who point towards neo-liberalism and that alone as the defect of present society, as such a position inevitably implies that another type of capitalism is desirable. For us, workers, students, unemployed, this is not the case.

Still, students demonstrated a certain radicalism. Many remained completely independent and wary of bourgeois political parties, even those parties on the left, although this spirit unfortunately disappeared the day the elections were announced. So, students shut the door on parliamentarism throughout most of the strike, right up until parliamentarism swung the door wide open in their faces with the elections. In addition, more young people voted overwhelmingly in the 2012 elections despite the fact that this segment of the population is usually rather abstentionist.

Another positive aspect was the tradition of mass demonstrations in the evenings. These demonstrations took place every day for several months. Invitations were sent through social networks. It was not unusual to see processions of a few thousand

people meandering through the streets of Montreal into the wee hours of the morning. Apart from the massive nature of these events, more importantly from the revolutionary point of view was the political character of these demonstrations. Each demonstration had its theme according to developments in the struggle. If student leaders had just negotiated an agreement, we took to the streets that evening to say overwhelmingly that the agreement was unacceptable. If a student had been seriously injured by police during an action, we went out into the streets that evening to denounce police brutality and state violence, and so on.

### **The question of violence**

Violence was pervasive throughout duration of the strike. Indeed, the student movement was faced with state /police repression unleashed. First of all, the hypocrisy of the bourgeois media should be noted here. During the strike, they fervently denounced 'violent student protests' as they turned a blind eye, or even approved, police violence. It must be said that the violence on the part of the students amounted to legitimate self-defense against very aggressive agents of law enforcement, vs. broken windows or minor damage to street fixtures. However, police / state / judicial violence was significant, with hundreds injured, pepper-sprayed, tear-gassed, beaten, some severely injured (partially blinded, jaws smashed, to give just a few examples), constant social profiling and finally, around 3400 people arrested or criminalized!

State violence against the student movement reminds us that the use of violence is a basic necessity for revolutionary militants. Not that its use is a virtue in itself, but rather because state violence forces us to use violence ourselves. The bourgeoisie and its agency of enforcement, the state, insist that its system of domination and exploitation should last forever. And it uses violence

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<sup>7</sup> We maintain the term variable geometry for the PQ since for a lot of petty bourgeois militants, the PQ is neo-liberal up until one has to decide in an election booth between the PLQ and the PQ. The PQ quickly becomes less neo-liberal and respectable ... like magic.



unscrupulously to achieve this end. To overthrow the bourgeois system, one can not do without the use of violence, not without condemning ourselves to impotence and defeat.<sup>8</sup>

Many students understood this and did not hesitate to defend themselves against the police and sometimes even to counter-attack (for example, the *Salon Plan Nord* riot). The issue of violence also helped clearly identify class division in the opposing political camps. One of these was the side of order: the state in general, the Charest government, the police, the media, opposition parties, trade unions, etc. On the other side we had “disorder” and “anarchy”: striking students and those in solidarity with the working class and the middle class. This clear separation of forces also highlighted the struggle’s political nature, namely, a frontal attack against the bourgeois state.

Then there’s the “*paci-flics*” episode, another important occurrence. Some rather reactionary pacifist students took up the deplorable practice of physically and verbally attacking militants who used certain forms of violence – even handing them over to police. The majority of militant participants in the demonstrations promptly denounced these police-like actions, scathingly branding these student zealots “*paci-flics*”.

### **The beginning of the end: the elections mark the end of the movement and its defeat through extensive student participation in those elections**

The police crackdown never overcame the students nor those supporting them (the *manifestations casseroles*, among others). The movement showed tenacious

perseverance and courage for several months. But police repression was not the only weapon in the government’s arsenal. Judicial repression also battered the strikers, with the Court legally supporting “student scabs”. But it was never enough. The movement remained strong even during a long hot summer, less than ideal conditions for motivating militancy.

The movement, because it was massive and continuous, can not simply be gutted by force and a law-&-order agenda, the bourgeoisie and its state must thus take it over by making sure to remove anything of substance. The student movement could not be brought into line, so long as it remained in the street. So it was forced into the ballot box. In the streets, it could enjoy a certain political and ideological independence with regard to the capitalist left. And so political radicalism, an expansion of questioning beyond the simple matter of tuition and even a rising consciousness, pitting the class struggle against capital, began to take shape. However, with the elections and the call to vote for a new government, the students, along with the rest of the population followed, and many activists fell into a trap that they had up till then avoided beautifully.

The trap was in falling back into the harmless and restrictive debate on tuition, and abandoning the wider political issues, such as capitalist austerity, its international character. The strictly legal parliamentarism ensured that the movement was brought in line and gutted through the September elections. On the one hand the PLQ and CAQ represented the political wing of the bourgeoisie with calls for repression and maintenance of order. Charest tried, unsuccessfully, to campaign on the theme of law & order. On the other hand, the PQ and QS played the role of scavengers – the left wing of the bourgeoisie, in other words – for which it was important to address *some* student

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<sup>8</sup> On the issue of violence, see the text International Communist Current« Terrorism is an instrument of imperialist war». <http://en.internationalism.org/node/1475>

demands, tuition of course, but in any case it was to stop the struggle at all costs so as to avoid its engulfment of social peace. Pauline Marois, head of the PQ, essentially campaigned on the cancellation of tuition hikes. It is worth noting that even CLASSE participated in the electoral circus that put an end to the strike. Indeed, with its slogan of "Neo-Liberals Out !", it implicitly called for strikers to vote QS and even PQ!

The PQ was elected, and announced that they would cancel the increase in tuition for 2012-2013, which was done. The student strike, already winding down since the announcement of the elections, and along with it, the spirit of solidarity that it aroused in other segments of society, especially workers and the middle classes, was stopped cold. Many cried victory. However, we do not share this opinion. Certainly, at the economic level, the cancellation of the tuition hike is a relief for students. But this relief will be short-lived, since other attacks against the living standards of students are on the horizon, with either the PQ or PLQ in power.

One can judge the results of a struggle by the degree of reinforcement of class consciousness, unification of activists, by expansion of struggles to a more global level both territorial and political, and by actions, strikes, by increasingly massive demonstrations directed head-on against the state. The movement of 2012 worked in this direction for several months. However, it ended with a cry of victory, united behind Pauline Marois, symbol of the end of the struggle and scavenger of the capitalist left.

The student strike of 2012 had good prospects for long months, but ended with scraps.

### **The summit on education and continuation of austerity measures.**

After their election, the PQ decided to hold a summit on education in February 2013. There, they called on the business sector, university directors, students, and other "stakeholders". This summit is a farce, of course, more likely to discuss a future increase in fees in one form or other, rather than the real issues affecting students. --All the questions about capitalism that students raised during the strike, having been eliminated from the debate. This summit would serve only to hammer the last nail in the coffin of the strike movement.

Moreover, the PQ wasted no time in taking over from the former Liberal government. Indeed, capitalist austerity need not even choose between political stripes, as the PQ continues in the same reactionary vein as the Liberals. Hardly two months has passed, and the new government has already begun to drop its campaign promises "*caviar left*" for the well-heeled left, (capital tax for example) and we start talking about cuts and rate increases (as in Hydro-Québec). In their demolition of our living conditions, the PQ presently resumed its work of 1996<sup>9</sup> and the work of nearly ten years of Liberal government. Governments are practically interchangeable.

Thus, although government has temporarily and partially met student demands, capitalist austerity measures implemented by the bourgeoisie continues and will continue to overwhelm us,

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<sup>9</sup> At that time, the PQ government of Lucien Bouchard was launched according to the same capitalist logic of austerity as the one we see today, with its program of « zero deficit » The bourgeoisie simply wanted to reduce the debt by cutting social programs and the wages of employees and State workers. This demolition program of our living conditions was approved by the unons in a spirit of national unity to safeguard « the Quebec economy', in short, the Quebec bourgeoisie.

students, workers and unemployed, alike. This austerity is felt by proletarians of all countries, without exception. There will be no quebecois solutions to Quebec austerity, just as there are no Greek solutions to the economic crisis in Greece. We will prevail only by imparting an international and internationalist character to our struggle.

### **Autonomous Popular Assemblies of the neighbourhoods: our intervention in the APAQs**

#### **'Democracy' gives birth to Bill 78**

At the beginning of summer, the Liberal government of Jean Charest found itself in a particularly awkward situation. Indeed, the student movement, after several months of bitter struggle, maintained its inspiration and fighting spirit. The initial government tactic, a combination of bullshit and deaf-ear negotiations, generally proved unable to quell the student movement.

The government then took the initiative with Bill 78 (now Bill 12) a notch up in repression. Clearly, the student movement had already undergone repression, brutalized daily by police, but this proved largely ineffective. Rather, police brutality contributed often to a certain radicalization of the student rank and file. Bill 78 was to give political and legal legitimacy to the police in intensifying its crackdown against students and those who supported their movement.

The content of this law is quite clear in this regard. It was a first step in practically criminalizing demonstrations. For the powers that be, it was an attempt to put an end, once and for all, to the daily mass demonstrations that had so far characterized the movement. As a second step, the law called for ridiculously steep fines for activists who did not comply. The idea was to hit them where it hurts, right in the throat of individuals who were already

financially vulnerable: the proletarian students and the workers who supported them.

It should be noted that this is the good old 'democracy' that set this particularly repressive law into motion. The role of 'democracy' is to pacify the social antagonisms, of class struggle, in the interests of the ruling class, of course, and its system of exploitation, capitalism. When this doesn't work, democracy resorts to a baring of its teeth and truncheons. As it stands, this situation in fact renders obsolete these current trendy movements such as Demokratia Real, Ya! and Occupy whose first line of business is the democratization of capitalist society. Both the student movement and the *manifestations casseroles* movement had to deal with these sorts of petty bourgeois pitfalls hoping to democratise bourgeois democracy.

#### **The *manifestations casseroles* movement: the working class and the middle class in solidarity with the student movement.**

The Charest government thought to maybe turn the page on this in a few weeks with its truncheon law, but the opposite happened. In fact, the unjust and coldly repressive nature of Act 78 resulted in a massive wave of popular sympathy towards the students. Spontaneously, in Montreal neighborhoods, as well as in several other cities in Quebec, people began banging on their pots & pans in daily protest against the government and its repressive law.

For the first time since the beginning of the student strike, the movement successfully expanded to other segments of the population. With the *manifestations casseroles* movement, students were no longer isolated against the State. Broad masses of workers and middle class people then joined the movement alongside them to lend a hand.

From this point, the mass demonstrations mushroomed. In addition to the daily and nightly student protests from the city center, processions arose spontaneously in various Montreal neighborhoods, to the clang and clamour of pots & pans. Processions meandered through Montreal streets, and finished by coming together. A march would begin with 150, often ending up with 5,000 or more!

All this was done, it must be remembered, under constant threat of repression, since spontaneous demonstrations were now theoretically illegal. In the demonstrations we shouted "*La loi spéciale, on s'en caliss!*" ("We don't give a fuck about the emergency law!"). It showed a beginning of understanding in the masses that the struggle should not comply with the law and must go headlong against the State or be doomed to failure and / or takeover. But illusions, especially on the issue of democracy, remained very much alive.

### **Democratic illusions and the civic “*manifestations casseroles*” movement.**

Under the amorphous guise of a supposed citizens' movement, the *manifestations les casseroles* movement was mostly comprised of workers and middle class people, not to mention the many students. However, the petty-bourgeois ideology of the middle class instantly gained the upper hand over the demands and proletarian objectives, which explains the democratic and civic illusions of the *manifestations casseroles* movement. Illusions undoubtedly fostered by the government to keep the *manifs casseroles* harmless. Even the then Finance Minister, Raymond Bachand, supported the *mouvement casseroles*: "*Although the events of the manifestations les casseroles are designed to show outrage at the policies of the state, we can wonder about the outcome.*" *Finance Minister Raymond Bachand, meanwhile, welcomed the protests as a*

*creative and festive way to voice opinion without harming the tourist image of the city. This is what he said to a conference of men and women in business in Montreal.*<sup>10</sup>. In fact, the petty bourgeois illusions about the reform and validation of democracy had gotten its paws on the movement. Instead of seeing liberal democracy as a well-functioning system of domination of the proletarian masses, as many radicalized minorities began to perceive it, the majority of the *manifestations casseroles* demonstrated for ‘democracy’, for its overhaul. It’s come down to some rather hilarious political nonsense: billy-club democracy, imprisonment, months of legal wrangling and one sorely frustrated middle class ‘*bobo*’ takes to the streets to beg for more democracy or ‘real’ democracy!

The *manifestations casseroles* movement was thus crossed by antagonism and serious political divisions. The majority, the reformist oriented petty-bourgeois and good child of the middle class, led the movement with its program for Québec Solidaire. The minority, radicalized activists, often workers and students, began to perceive the importance of political organization to wage a frontal struggle against liberal democracy and its state, the only way to lead the class struggle begun by students to victory .

### **The *casseroles* seem to want to give themselves a political extension: creation of the APAQs.**

And so, the radical militant fringe of the *casseroles* movement took the initiative to create and organize neighborhood meetings in an attempt to provide a more political character to the *casseroles*. Such meetings were created quickly in all of Montreal’s proletarian neighborhoods (notably in Hochelaga, South Central,

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<sup>10</sup> Extract from our tract General strike or electoral circus? See the annex.

Villeray and Rosemont neighborhoods of the southwest, etc.). Their manifesto, provisional but common to all, was opposition to Bill 78 as well as support for the student movement.

These meetings were above all a place for discussion and organization of political activities in connection with the student strike. As we have already noted above, the *manifestations casseroles*, and its logical extension, the APAQs, represented an extension of the movement started by students in other sections of society. The militants congregated in APAQs had to now ask the question: "What do we do now?" Of course, consideration was primarily focused on the student movement and the struggle against political / police repression. But a more advanced reflection, namely about capitalism and its exploitative nature, also attempted to rise.

### **The APAQs supported the student movement, but were also put in tow.**

A major weakness of APAQs, which also came to light early on was that the majority of militants had become partially blinkered by the student strike. Indeed, rather than thinking about how we could extend the strike to the workplace, to factories, to transport, it considered only how to bring about a "citizens" solidarity with the students, namely, a simple solidarity, in terms of attendance at demonstrations and on picket lines. This solidarity was certainly beautiful, but it was not enough in terms of struggle and the balance of power against the state. If the students lost, it is also partly because they remained alone in the struggle – in short because the strike was never extended to other sectors of society.<sup>11</sup>

To illustrate our point: Take for example a

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<sup>11</sup> Obviously, the unions did everything to ensure that it didn't happen.

worker from the STM. Neighbourhood participation, solidarity activities with the students through demonstrations is a good thing, but not enough. The best test of solidarity would be that one would push one's comrades at work to strike in turn. This necessarily involves struggle against the unions, which behave more like a fire-brigade at a barbecue than pyromaniacs in the class struggle!

In the APAQs instead to looking at how we, ourselves, could take action by striking at our own work places, the majority of militants, however, tagged along behind the student movement. Everything was done only in the direction of and for the student movement.

### **Autonomy according to the APAQs**

The APAQs were formed according to a very important principle of revolutionary perspective. – The autonomy of assemblies with respect to parliamentary political parties, and also in relation to the state. Some call this the non-partisan caviar left, others call it apolitical (anarchism). We prefer the term independence of the working class and other non-exploiting layers against the bourgeoisie and its State parties. The first two terms being only petty bourgeois distortions of the latter.

The principle of autonomy at the base of the APAQs looked promising at first. Indeed, that mass unitary political organizations see themselves clearly in opposition and independent of the current order and its political forces, is very encouraging. It was also one of the first steps toward unifying organizations, giving APAQs a potentially revolutionary character. We must remember the example of the workers' councils!

On the other hand, autonomy according to the APAQs, became another thing altogether. Indeed, rather than talking about political autonomy against the state,

individual autonomy became the dominant ideology of the APAQs. This frenzied individualism curbed and politically immobilized the APAQs, rendering them unable to make collective decisions and to act in an organized and unified fashion in the struggle.

The majority viewed these assemblies as an aggregate of like-minded individuals rather than a unified organ to equip workers in times of struggle to take action as a class, thus in a collective manner. As well, here we find the best example of this negative vision from the point of view of militantism based on individualism: *"Everyone is free to invest in projects that interest them and to think as they please: APAQ never takes a stand on behalf of those who comprise it. Thus, one can not speak or represent others in the name of APAQ, since it would be proprietary to speak for others. According to this reasoning, every person who creates links between APAQ and other groups does so as an individual."*<sup>12</sup>

What's the use of organizing if one can not even take a position as an organization? Might as well stay in one's room talking to oneself, "unsullied" by a an assembly! What's more, making connections from organization to organization, in a personal manner, i.e. by affinity creates the problems of behind-the-scene game-playing. Indeed, rather than transparency, discussions and decisions arrived at in meetings, individual initiative, with no accountability, takes over, so we are plunged into peer relationships with little political insight.

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<sup>12</sup> *Des casseroles aux assemblées de quartier*, in Relations, numéro 761, décembre 2012, p. 6-7.

### **Struggles of tendencies: localism and anarchist individualism disrupt the APAQs.**

This individualistic spirit dominating the APAQs was right at home with the majority of militants, who were strongly influenced by anarchism. With the collapse of Stalinism (misleadingly called communism by the ruling class) at the end of the last century, anarchism was awarded the monopoly of more 'radical' social protest. This proved to be the case in the APAQs as well. The old Maoism and Trotskyism fortunately are no longer fashionable. Now, unfortunately, Anarchism has the wind in its sails.

But anarchism, with its inherent individualism, is also as harmful to workers' struggles as Maoism and Trotskyism. Its anti-organization approach impedes and disarms militants in struggle. The proletariat possesses no element of force in capitalist society. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, has everything: money, media, police and the army, etc.. Against the ruling class and its state, our only weapon is our organization. But here we have anarchism's disruption of the collective and organized action on the altar of the inviolable individual. The revolutionary will was therefore obstructed in the APAQs by anarchism.

This is not unlike the struggle of Marx and Engels against anarchism and its representative Bakunin in the First International. They faced the same localist and apolitical spirit among anarchists of the AIT that we criticized amongst the anarchists dominating the APAQs. Marx and Engels satirized anarchists and their approach to non-organization *"instead and in place of our executive committee, we would have a simple office of statistics and correspondence, which would be at a loss to overcome the autonomous sections, autonomous to the point that they would never recognize the governing authority,*

*born of their own consent! (...) No way to gather strength, no means of common action! If, in any section, the minority adapted to the majority, they would be committing a crime against the principles of freedom and endorse a principle leading to authority and dictatorship! (...) And above all, no disciplined sections, no party discipline, no concentration of forces towards an objective, and especially no weapons for combat!* <sup>13</sup>

The last, and probably the most serious of the APAQs' drawbacks, from a revolutionary point of view, was localism. This is expressed through a local and immediate view of social issues and struggle. This attitude is also no stranger to anarchism which always favors federalism over centralism, and localism over internationalism. The localist arguments are quite simple. First we were told that centralization leads straight to authoritarianism. Second, we are told that each neighborhood has its own characteristics and peculiarities, which is why each APAQ is autonomous from one neighborhood to the next. What's striking about these arguments is their somewhat less troubling resemblance with nationalism.

Centralism is not equivalent to authoritarianism. On the contrary, this principle is only intended to ensure effective collective action. We debate, we discuss and come to a decision, according to a process of political unification, whereby our class speaks and acts with one voice against a more powerful enemy. Regarding the specific characteristics of neighborhoods, these particularities are

pure petty bourgeois inventions as when you compare working-class neighborhoods to middle-class ones, where it goes without saying that there are antagonistic interests. But it's not the case here, since the APAQs originate from working-class neighborhoods. So, the rise in tuition fees has the same effect on a student from Verdun as a student from Hochelaga. Unemployment has the same effect in Rosemont as in Villeray.

We can take it still further. The Greek unemployed faces the same situation as the Quebec unemployed. The Chilean student is as brutalized as his comrade from Quebec. Quebec workers are in as precarious a position as those from Europe. The comparisons do not end here, because workers have no fatherland. Everywhere we are proletarian and have the same interest in destroying the very foundations of capitalist society. This unifying principle that goes beyond national borders is called internationalism and is one of the most important guarantees for the future success of the revolution.

### **The end of the wave of struggle, the drift to self-management<sup>14</sup>**

The election of the PQ and the ruling on the cancellation of rising tuition led to two different reactions among APAQ militants. Some declared victory, but most felt that it was no victory at all, and demoralization prevailed. Yet, these two different reactions led to the same effect: demobilization. The fact was that the struggle was over after the elections.

And thus the question asked in the

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<sup>13</sup> Translated from : Frederich Engels, Karl Marx, *Le parti de classe. Tome 3 : questions d'organisation*, textes réunis et présentés par Roger Dangeville, Petite collection Maspéro, 1973, pp. 56-57 ou <http://www.marxists.org/francais/marx/work/s/00/parti/kmpc076.htm>

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<sup>14</sup> It should be noted that we are talking about APAQs in general following our experience in the APAQs in which we participated. In other APAQs, the end of the struggle has taken various forms, often demobilization and dissolution of the APAQ.

assembly. What do we do now that the struggle is over?<sup>15</sup>

Some activists wanted to transform the assembly into a community organization, which meant the negation of the APAQ as an organism of struggle, since community organizations are the antithesis of the struggle. Indeed, they are more like unions elsewhere, a ministry for the pacification of social protest, and fully funded by the state, at that.

Others wanted to give in to self-management. The idea was to create from APAQ small islands of self-government, for free and without authority. While seemingly very radical, such activism is harmful in that it encloses militants in their own artificial community. Instead of struggling to transform society according to our interests, these activists are seeking a way of life according to abstract principles and outside of society, besides.

Finally, many APAQs took the initiative to develop popular education workshops. This is very good because it allows activists to sit together and talk, think and take stock of the last struggle. This is useful for drawing lessons from the last strike and preparing for the next wave of struggle that will surely happen because the economic crisis is far from over!

February 2013

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<sup>15</sup> See the annex for the text of International Communist Current *The organisation of the proletariat outside periods of open struggle (workers' groups, nuclei, circles, committees)*: All the lessons of the revolutionary point of view, a decline in the class struggle are there.



Annex

## **General strike or electoral circus**

The student struggle against tuition increases has taken a new turn following the adoption of *matraque* law 78. Recall that before being used against the student movement, this law was especially aimed at the working class, threatening any demonstration of over 50 people with heavy fines. --Leaving it to the police to decide whether or not the demonstration is legal, if they'll accept the route or not. This law is not only an attack on the students, but on the working class as a whole. This is bourgeois 'democracy' for you, and this sort of law is not unique to Quebec. Faced with capitalism in crisis, several 'democracies' have passed similar laws or are in the process of doing so. In 2001, under the pretext of the 'war on terror', several states passed counter-terrorism laws, which in practice, attack working class struggles. In 2005, for instance, striking New York subway workers faced charges of terrorism. Recently a score of Montreal students were accused under a similar law passed by the federal government in 2001.

The struggle against rising tuition is spreading elsewhere in Canada, as well. Students have held actions in Ottawa and Toronto, with other groups spread across several provinces preparing to join them. A day of action took place June 5<sup>th</sup>, with a demonstration in Toronto, as well as other Ontario cities. BC students, as well, have declared solidarity with those in Quebec, condemning bill 78. Demonstrations in solidarity against this bill have been held in Ottawa, Toronto, Paris, Cannes, New York, London and Chile. This is no longer just a struggle against the rising cost of tuition. Since May 21, workers, unemployed, students and pensioners have been banging on pots and pans every evening at 8 o'clock, and great numbers of people are out in the streets to demonstrate that they're fed up with bill 78, the mass arrests, police brutality, government corruption and austerity measures. We've lost count of the number of cities and towns participating in these nightly casserole demonstrations, and these as well are spreading throughout other Canadian provinces. This struggle is part of an international struggle against capitalism in crisis. It's linked with that of workers in Greece, Spain, Portugal, China, India, France, the UK, the US and other parts of the world.

Although the casserole demonstrations are intended as an expression of outrage against state policies, one might question the outcome. Speaking at a Montreal business conference, Finance Minister Raymond Bachand, himself, welcomed these demonstrations as a creative and festive means of voicing an opinion without hurting the city's tourist industry. As in the rest of the world, the bourgeoisie tries to divert struggle by persuading workers to vote in coming elections, in 6 months, a year, two years... At heart, this is what matters most to the unions and all political parties: Québec Solidaire, Parti Québécois, the Liberals, the CAQ and others, diverting all activity into the electoral circus. Elections are by no means an expression of "popular will". The election of this or that political party is determined by the interests of big capital of which the bourgeois state is a servant. Elections are useless to the working class. It's a terrain in which it has no real place, except when it comes time to marking an X every four years to elect the usual bourgeois, such as Charest, Marois, David, Khadir, Legault, etc. They'd have us believe that the ballot can help to "make change". They perpetuate the illusion of democracy, in which all "citizens" are equal and the state is neutral.

While the Liberals and the CAQ are well known for openly serving the interests of large capitalist enterprise, others are nastier in a sense, more insidious, as is the case with Parti

Quebecois nationalists and Québec Solidaire. While they denounce the implementation of rightwing policies by the Liberals with *matraque* law 78, they insist that the government's policies would "go against common Quebecois values" No such 'common values' exist. What typical nationalist, petty-bourgeois language, propagating illusions of capitalism's "human face", while failing to mention the working class and its struggle. Capitalism is bankrupt and for its survival it's carrying out the same attacks everywhere: raising energy prices, attacking pensions, increasing tuition, creating new taxes, eliminating thousands of jobs in the public sector, cutting unemployment benefits, on top of massive factory closures.

The strength of the working class whose exploitation sustains bourgeois society, is in its collective action, led and organized on the basis of class. Only the working class, in resisting and abolishing this rotten system, will change society. Working class struggles in Greece, Spain, Portugal, China, India, France, UK, USA, in Chile and other parts of the world are forcing bourgeois factions to unite against the working class. Hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of demonstrators around the world are refusing austerity. The lying media is censoring these struggles in an effort to prevent the rise of international solidarity. The struggle of Quebec's students and working class is not isolated.

Workers, the unemployed, students, pensioners, we've got to stop going along with our fake trade union friends and politicians, such as those from QS, who are simply interested in reforming capitalism. We have to quit begging the bourgeois state through petitions and votes. We must take control of the struggle from them. Otherwise, they will divert our struggles to the parliamentary circus or into negotiation of our level of exploitation.

A general strike, is what we need to expand the struggle, as our brothers and sisters, the working class from Greece and Spain, have shown. They set an example for us by uniting more and more broadly in spite of nationalism and union corporatism, by rejecting politicians, and attacking the bourgeois state machine as a whole. For example, the Greek working class besieged parliament when it approved the measures demanded by the European capitalists. It's the capitalists who are responsible for this crisis. It's not for the working class to pay. A single slogan: unite with the working class of Greece and Spain through general strike.

### **Yes for a general strike! No to the electoral circus!**

To end this barbaric system, we need a new society. A society intent on production to meet real human needs as opposed to a society bent on production for profit. A society in which the means of production and distribution would be within reach of all, socialized, without an exploiter to hold the reins and appropriate our socially produced wealth. A world where the environment is no longer seen as a huge profit reserve – for plunder and ruin – by the capitalist class as we see today. A world based on the participation of all, which could be expressed through new organs of co-ordination, of production, and of distribution, through a system of delegates elected and subject to recall at any time, and representing society as a whole. To achieve this, it is imperative to overthrow the bourgeois state along with its parliamentary 'democracy', the capitalist class's usual smoke & mirrors trick for establishing and maintaining their dominance. It's up to the working class, with its class party as a guide, to take power by ridding itself of the the class which exploits it, by destroying its State, and establishing its own institutions. Only the working class as a whole, through its own autonomous bodies, workers councils for example, may establish a new classless stateless society. This task can not be delegated, not even to the most and conscious class Party.

Internationalist Communists Klasbatalo have no organizational links with the International Communist Current and don't share all of their political positions. We reproduce this text because we agree with it. The text mentions committees, circles, groups, etc. We could also put Autonomous popular Assembly of District or city.

Internationalist Communists Klasbatalo (ICK)

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### **The organisation of the proletariat outside periods of open struggle (workers' groups, nuclei, circles, committees)**

(This text was adopted by the 3rd Congress of Internationalism, the ICC's section in Belgium, February 1980.)

What is to be done outside times of open struggle? How should we organise when the strike is finished? How to prepare the struggles to come?

Faced with this question, faced with the problems posed by the existence of committees, circles, nuclei, etc, regrouping small minorities of the working class, we have no recipes to provide. We cannot choose between giving them moral lessons ('organise yourselves like this or that', 'dissolve yourselves', 'join us') and demagogically flattering them. Instead, our concern is this: to understand these minority expressions of the proletariat as a part of the whole class. If we situate them in the general movement of the class struggle; if we see that they are strictly linked to the strengths and weaknesses of different periods in this struggle between the classes, then, in this way, we'll be able to understand to what general necessity they are a response. By neither remaining politically imprecise in relation to them, nor by imprisoning ourselves inside rigid schemas, we'll also be able to grasp what their positive aspects are and be able to point out what dangers lie in wait for them.

### **Characteristics of the workers struggle in decadent capitalism**

Our first concern in understanding this problem must be to recall the general, historical context within which we find ourselves. We must remember the nature of this historic period (the period of social revolutions) and the characteristics of the class struggle in decadence. This analysis is fundamental because it allows us to understand the type of class organisation that can exist in such a period.

Without going into all the details, let's recall simply that the proletariat in the nineteenth century existed as an organised force in a permanent way. The proletariat unified itself as a class through an economic and political struggle for reforms. The progressive character of the capitalist system allowed the proletariat to bring pressure to bear on the bourgeoisie in order to obtain reforms, and for this, large masses of the working class regrouped within unions and parties.

In the period of capitalism's senility, the characteristics and the forms of organisation of the class changed. A quasi-permanent mobilisation of the proletariat around its immediate and political interests was no longer possible, nor viable. Henceforward, the permanent **unitary organs** of the class **were no longer able to exist except in the course of the struggle itself**. From this time on, the function of these unitary organs could no longer be limited to simply 'negotiating' an improvement in the proletariat's living conditions (because an improvement was no longer possible over the long term and because the only realistic answer was that of revolution). Their task was to prepare for the seizure of power.

The unitary organs of the dictatorship of the proletariat are the workers' councils. These organs possess a certain number of characteristics which we must make clear if we are to grasp the entire process which leads to the self-organisation of the proletariat.

Thus, we must clearly show that the councils are a direct expression of working class struggle. They arise in a spontaneous (but not mechanical) way from out of this struggle. This is why

they are intimately tied to the development and maturity of the struggle. They draw from it their substance and their vitality. They don't constitute, then, a simple 'delegation' of power, a parody of Parliament, but are truly the organised expression of the whole working class and its power. Their task isn't to organise a proportional representation of social groupings, or political parties, but allow the will of the proletariat to realise itself practically. It's through them that all the decisions are taken. That is the reason why the workers must constantly keep control of them (the revocability of delegates) by means of the General Assemblies.

Only the workers' councils are capable of realising the living identification between the immediate struggle and the final goal. In this liaison between the struggle for immediate interests and the struggle for political power, the councils establish the objective and subjective basis for the revolution. They constitute, par excellence, the crucible of class consciousness. The constitution of the proletariat in councils is not then a simple question of a form of organisation, but is the product of the development of the struggle and of class consciousness. **The appearance of the councils isn't the fruit of organisational recipes, of prefabricated structures, of intermediate organs.**

The more and more conscious extension and centralisation of struggles, beyond the factories and beyond frontiers, cannot be artificial, voluntarist action. To be convinced of the correction of this idea, it's sufficient to recall the experience of the AAUD and its artificial attempt to unite and centralise the 'factory organisations' in a period when the struggle was in reflux. [1] The Councils can only continue to exist when the permanent, open struggle continues to exist, signifying the participation of an ever-growing number of workers in the struggle. Their appearance is essentially a function of the development of the struggle itself and of the development of class consciousness.

### **The attempts to bridge a gap**

But we are not yet in a period of permanent struggle, in a revolutionary context which would allow the proletariat to organise itself in workers' councils. The constitution of the proletariat in councils is the result of objective conditions (the depth of the crisis, the historic course) and subjective conditions (the maturity of the struggle and the consciousness of the class). It is the result of an entire apprenticeship, a whole maturation, which is as much organisational as it is political.

We must be conscious that this maturation, this political fermentation, doesn't unfold in a well-designated straight line. It expresses itself instead as a fiery, impetuous, confused process within a jostling, jerky movement. It demands the active participation of revolutionary minorities.

Since it is incapable of acting mechanically in accordance with abstract principles, preconceived plans or voluntarist schemes detached from reality, the proletariat must forge its unity and consciousness by means of a painful apprenticeship. Incapable of regrouping all its forces on a preordained day, it consolidates its ranks in the course of the battle itself. **It forms its 'army' within the conflict itself.** But in the course of the struggle it forms in its ranks more combative elements, a more determined vanguard. These elements don't necessarily regroup themselves within the revolutionary organisation (because, in certain periods, it is virtually unknown). The appearance of these combative minorities within the proletariat, whether before or after open struggles, isn't an incomprehensible or new phenomenon. It really expresses the irregular character of the struggle, the unequal and heterogeneous development of class consciousness. Thus, since the end of the 1960's, we've witnessed, at one and the same time, the development of the struggle (in the sense of its greater self-organisation), a reinforcement of revolutionary minorities, and the appearance of committees, nuclei, circles, etc, trying to regroup a working class avant-garde. The development of a coherent political pole of regroupment, and the tendency for the proletariat to try to organise itself outside the unions, both issue from the same maturation of the struggle.

The appearance of these committees, circles, etc, truly responds to a necessity within the struggle. If some combative elements sense the need to remain grouped together after they've been struggling together, they do so with the aim of simultaneously continuing to 'act together' (the eventual preparation of a new strike) and of drawing the lessons of the struggle (through political discussion). The problem which poses itself to these workers is **as much one of regrouping with a view to future action as it is of regrouping with a view to**

**clarifying questions posed by the past struggle and the struggle to come.** This attitude is understandable in the sense that the absence of permanent struggle the ‘bankruptcy’ of the unions, and the very great weakness of revolutionary organisations creates an organisational and political void. When the working class returns to the path of its historic struggle, it has a horror of this void. Therefore, it seeks to reply to the need posed by this organisational and political void.

These committees, these nuclei, these proletarian minorities who still don’t understand clearly their own function, are a response to this need. They are, at one and the same time, an expression of the general weakness of today’s class struggle and an expression of the **maturation of the organisation of the class.** They are a crystallisation of a whole subterranean development at work within the proletariat.

### **The reflux of 1973-77**

That is why we must be careful not to lock away these organs in a hermetic, rigidly classified drawer. We cannot forecast their appearance and development in a totally precise way. Furthermore, we must be careful not to make artificial separations in the different moments in the life of these committees, getting ourselves caught in the false dilemma: ‘action or discussion’.

This said, it must not stop us from making an intervention towards these organs. We must also be capable of appreciating their evolution in terms of the period, **depending on whether we are in a phase of renewal or reflux in the struggle.** Because they are a spontaneous, immediate product of the struggle, and because the appearance of these nuclei is based mainly on conjunctural problems (in distinction to the revolutionary organisation which appears on the basis of the historical necessities of the proletariat), this means that they remain very dependent on the surrounding milieu of the class struggle. They remain more strongly imprisoned by the general weaknesses of the movement and have a tendency to follow the ups and downs of the struggle.

We must make a distinction in the development of these nuclei between the period of reflux in the struggle (1973-77) and today’s period of renewed class struggle internationally. While underlining the fact that the dangers threatening them remain identical in both periods, we must, nonetheless, be capable of grasping what differences the change in period implies for their evolution.

At the end of the first wave of struggle at the end of the 1960’s, we witnessed the appearance of a whole series of confusions within the working class. We could measure the extent of these confusions by examining the attitude of some of the combative elements of the class, who tried to remain regrouped.

We saw develop:

- **the illusion in fighting unionism and the distrust of anything political** (OHK, AAH, Komiteewerking [2]). In many cases, the committees that came out of struggles transformed themselves, categorically, into semi-unions. This was the case for the workers’ commissions in Spain and the ‘factory councils’ in Italy. Even more often they just disappeared.

- a very strong **corporatism** (which itself constitutes the basis for the illusion in ‘fighting unionism’).

- when attempts were made to go beyond the limits of the factory, the result was **confusion and a great political eclecticism.**

- a very great political confusion was present, rendering these organs very vulnerable to the manoeuvres of the leftists, and also allowing them to fall prey to illusions of the type held by the PIC (cf. their ‘bluff’ about workers’ groups)[3]. Also, in the course of this period, the ideology of ‘workers autonomy’ developed, bringing with it an apology for immediatism, factoryism and economism.

All of these weaknesses were essentially a function of the weaknesses of the first wave of struggle at the end of the 60’s. This movement was characterised by a disproportion between the strength and extension of the strikes and the weakness in the content of the demands made. What especially indicated this disproportion was the absence of any clear, political perspective in the movement. The falling-back of the workers, which happened between 1973 and 1977, was a product of this weakness, which the bourgeoisie utilised to demobilise and

ideologically contain the struggles. Each of the weak points of the first wave of strikes was 'recuperated' by the bourgeoisie to its own profit:

*"Thus the idea of a permanent organisation of the class, at one and the same time economic and political, was transformed later into the idea of 'new unions' to end finally in a return to classical trade unionism. The vision of the General Assembly as a form independent of any content ended up — via the mystification concerning direct democracy and popular power — re-establishing trust in classical bourgeois democracy. Ideas about self-management and workers' control of production (confusions which were understandable at the beginning) were theorised into the myth of 'generalised self-management', 'islands of communism' or 'nationalisation under workers' control'. All this caused the workers to put their confidence in plans to restructure the economy, which would supposedly avoid layoffs or caused them to back national solidarity pacts presented as a way of 'getting out of the crisis'".*

(Report on the Class Struggle presented to the IIIrd International Congress of the ICC).

### **The renewal of struggles since 1977**

With the renewal in struggle since 1977, we have seen other tendencies delineate themselves. The proletariat matured through its 'defeat'. It had drawn albeit in a confused way, the lessons of the reflux, and even if the dangers represented by 'fighting unionism', corporatism, etc remain, they exist within a different general evolution in the struggle.

Since 1977, we have seen the hesitant development of:

- a more or less marked will on the part of the avant-garde of combative workers to develop political discussion (remember the General Assembly of Co-ordinamenti in Turin, the debate at Antwerp with the workers of Rotterdam, Antwerp, etc, the conference of dockers in Barcelona. [4]);

- the will to enlarge the field of struggle, **to go beyond the ghetto of factoryism**, to give a more global political framework to the struggle. This will expressed itself through the appearance of the 'co—ordinamenti', and more specifically in the political manifesto produced by one of the co-ordinamenti situated in the North of Italy (Sesto S. Giovanni). This manifesto demanded the unification of the combative avant-garde in the factories, spelt out the necessity for a politically independent struggle by the workers and insisted on the necessity for the struggle to break out of factory limitations;

- the concern to establish **a link between the immediate aspect of the struggle and the final goal**. This concern was particularly expressed in workers groups in Italy (FIAT) and in Spain (FEYCU, FORD). The first of these groups intervened by means of a leaflet to denounce the dangers of layoffs made by the bourgeoisie in the name of 'fighting terrorism', and the second intervened to denounce the illusion of parliamentarism.

- the concern to better prepare and organise the struggles to come (cf. the action of the 'spokesmen' group of dockers in Rotterdam calling for the formation of a General Assembly). We must repeat that the dangers of corporatism, 'fighting unionism' and locking-up of the struggle on a strictly economic terrain continue to exist even within this period. But what we must take into account is the **important influence of the period** on the evolution of the committees and nuclei that appear both before and after open struggles. When the period is one of combativity and resurgence of class struggle, the intervention of such minorities takes on a different sense, as does our attitude toward them. In a period of generalised reflux in the struggle, we have to insist more on the danger of these organs becoming transformed into semi-unions, of falling into the clutches of the leftists, of having illusions in terrorism, etc. In a period of class resurgence we insist more on the dangers represented by voluntarism and activism (see the illusions expressed in this connection in the manifesto of the co-ordinamenti of Sesto S. Giovanni), and by the illusion which some of these combative workers may have about the possibility of forming the embryos of future strike committees, etc. In a period of renewal in the struggle, we will also be more open to combative minorities which appear and regroup with a view to calling for strikes and the formation of strike committees, General Assemblies, etc.

### **The possibilities of these organs**

The concern to situate the committees, nuclei, etc, in the cauldron of the class struggle, to understand them in terms of the period in which they appear, doesn't imply, however, abruptly changing our analysis in the wake of the different stages in the class struggle. Whatever the moment that gives birth to these committees, we know that they **constitute only one stage in a dynamic, general process** they are one moment in the maturation of the organisation and consciousness of the class. They can only have a positive role when they give themselves a broad, supple framework to work within, in order not to freeze the general process. This is why these organs must be vigilant if they are to avoid falling into the following traps:

- imagining that they constitute a structure which can prepare the way for the appearance of strike committees or councils;
- imagining themselves to be invested with a sort of 'potentiality' which can develop future struggles. (It isn't the minorities who artificially create a strike or cause a General Assembly or a committee to appear, even though they do have an active intervention to make in this process).
- giving themselves a platform or statutes or anything else that risks freezing their evolution and thus condemning them to political confusion.
- presenting themselves as intermediate organs, half-way between the class and a political organisation, as if they were an organisation that is at one and the same time unitary and political.

This is why our attitude towards these minority organs remains open, but at the same time tries to influence the evolution of **political reflection** in their midst, and this whatever the period in which we find ourselves. We must try our hardest to ensure that these committees, nuclei, etc. don't freeze up, either in one direction (a structure which imagines itself to prefigure the workers' councils) or another (political fixation). Before all else, what must guide us in our intervention is not the interests and the conjunctural concerns of these organs (since we can't suggest to them any organisational recipes nor any ready-made answers), **but the general interests of the whole class**. Our concern is always to homogenise and develop class consciousness in such a way that the development of the class struggle happens with a greater, more massive participation of all workers, and that the struggle is taken in-hand by the workers themselves and not by a minority, no matter what type it may be. It is for this reason that we insist on the dynamic of the movement and that we put the combative elements on their guard against any attempt at substitutionism or anything that might block the later development of the struggle and of class consciousness.

In orientating the evolution of these organs in one direction (reflection and political discussion), rather than another, we can give a response which will be favourable to the dynamic of the movement. But let it be well-understood that this doesn't signify that we condemn any form of 'intervention' or 'action' undertaken by these organs. It is obvious that the instant a group of combative workers understands that the task isn't to act to constitute themselves as a semi-union, but rather to draw the political lessons of the past struggles, this doesn't imply that their political reflection is going to happen in an ethereal vacuum, in the abstract, without any-practical consequences. The political clarification undertaken by these combative workers will also push them to act together within their own factory (and in the most positive of cases, even outside their own factory). They will feel the necessity to give a material, political expression to their political reflection (leaflets, newspapers, etc). They will feel the need to take up positions in relation to the concrete issues that face the working class. In order to defend and disseminate their positions, they will thus have to make a **concrete intervention**. In certain circumstances they will propose concrete means of action (formation of General Assemblies, strike committees...) to advance the struggle. In the course of the struggle itself, they will sense the necessity for a concerted effort to develop a certain orientation for the struggle; they will support demands that will permit the struggle to extend itself and they will insist on the necessity for its enlargement, generalisation, etc.

Even though we remain attentive to these efforts and don't try to lay down rigid schemas for them to follow, nonetheless it is clear that we must continue to insist on the fact that what counts the most is the active participation of all the workers in the struggle, and that the combative workers should at no time substitute themselves for their comrades in the organisation and co-ordination of the strike. Moreover, it is also clear that the more the organisation of revolutionaries increases its influence within the struggles, the more the



combative elements will turn toward it. Not because the organisation will have a policy of forcibly recruiting these elements, but quite simply because the combative workers themselves will become conscious that a political intervention, which is really active and effective, can only be made in the framework of such an international organisation.

### The intervention of revolutionaries

All that glitters isn't gold. To point out that the working class in its struggle can cause more combative elements to appear doesn't mean affirming that the impact of these minorities is decisive for the later development of class consciousness. We must not make this absolute identification: an expression of the maturation of consciousness = an active factor in its development.

In reality the influence which these nuclei can have in the later unfolding of the struggle is very limited. Their influence entirely depends on the general combativity of the proletariat and of the capacity of these nuclei to pursue without let-up this work of political clarification. In the long-term, this work cannot be followed except within the framework of a revolutionary organisation.

But here again, we've no mechanism to drop in place. It's not in an artificial manner that the revolutionary organisation wins these elements. Contrary to the ideas of organisations like Battaglia Comunista or the PIC, the ICC does not seek to fill-in, in an artificial, voluntarist manner, 'the gap' between the party and the class. Our understanding of the working class as a historic force, and our comprehension of our own role prevents us from wanting to freeze these committees into the form of an intermediate structure. Nor do we seek to create 'factory groups' as transmission belts between the class and the party.

This presents us with the question of determining what our attitude to such circles, committees, etc should be. Even while recognising their limited influence and their weaknesses, we must remain open to them and attentive to their appearance. The most important thing that we propose to them is that they open up widely to discussions. At no time, do we adopt toward them a distrustful or condemnatory attitude under the pretext of reacting against their political 'impurity'. So that's one thing we should avoid; another is to avoid flattering them or even uniquely concentrating our energies on them. We mustn't ignore workers' groups, but equally we mustn't become obsessive about them. We recognise that the struggle matures and class-consciousness develops in a process.

Within this process, tendencies exist within the class that attempt to 'hoist' the struggle onto a political terrain. In the course of this process, we know that the proletariat will give rise to combative minorities within itself, but they won't necessarily organise themselves within political organisations. We must be careful not to identify this process of maturation in the class today with what characterised the development of the struggle last century. This understanding is very important because it permits us to appreciate in what way these committees, circles, etc are a real expression of the maturation of class consciousness, but an expression which is, above all, **temporary and ephemeral** and not a fixed, structured organisational rung in the development of the class struggle. The class struggle in the period of capitalist decadence advances explosively. Sudden eruptions appear which surprise even those elements who were the most combative in the proceeding round of struggle, and these eruptions can immediately go beyond previous experience in terms of the consciousness and maturity developed in the new struggle. The proletariat can only really organise itself on a unitary level within the struggle. To the extent that the struggle itself becomes permanent, it causes the unitary organisations of the class to grow and become stronger.

This understanding is what allows us to grasp why we don't have a specific policy, a special 'tactic' in relation to workers' committees, even though in certain circumstances it can be very positive for us to begin and systematically continue discussions with them, and to participate in their meetings. We know that it is possible and increasingly easy to discuss with these combative elements (particularly when open struggle isn't taking place). We are also aware that certain of these elements may want to join us, but we don't focus all our attention on them. Because what is of primary importance for us, is the general dynamic of the struggle, and we don't set up any rigid classifications or hierarchies within this dynamic. Before everything, we address ourselves to the working class as a whole. Contrary to other political groups who try to surmount the problem of the lack of influence of revolutionary minorities in



the class by artificial methods and by feeding themselves on illusions about these workers' groups, the ICC recognises that it has very little impact in the present period. We don't try to increase our influence among the workers by giving them artificial 'confidence' in us. We aren't workerist, nor are we megalomaniacs. The influence which we will progressively develop within the struggles will come essentially from our **political practice** inside these struggles and not from our acting as toadies, or flatterers, or as 'water-carriers' who restrict themselves to performing technical tasks. Furthermore, we address our political intervention to all the workers, to the proletariat taken as a whole, as a class, because our fundamental task is to call for the maximum extension of the struggles. We don't exist in order to feel satisfied at winning the confidence of two or three horny-handed worker but to homogenise and accelerate the development of the consciousness of the class. It's necessary to be aware that it will only be in the revolutionary process itself that the proletariat will accord us its political 'confidence' to the extent that it realises that the revolutionary party really makes up **a part** of its historic struggle.

[1] AAUD: Allgemeine Arbeiter Union Deutschlands, 'General Workers Union of Germany'. The 'Unions' weren't trade unions, but attempts to create permanent forms of organisation regrouping all the workers outside and against the unions, in Germany in the years following the crushing of the 1919 Berlin insurrection. They expressed nostalgia for the workers councils, but never succeeded in carrying out the function of the councils.

[2] These were all workers groups in Belgium.

[3] The French group PIC (Pour Une Intervention Communiste) was for several months convinced - and tried to convince everyone else - that it was participating in the development of a network of 'workers groups' which would constitute a powerful avant-garde of the revolutionary movement. They based this illusion on the skeletal reality of two or three groups largely made-up of ex-leftist elements. There's not much left of this bluff today.

[4] These are organised meetings regrouping delegates from different workers groups, collectives and committees.

### **Basic positions of the Internationalist Communists – Klasbatalo!**

1 - The October 1917 Russian revolution took the first step toward real communist world revolution in the international revolutionary wave, which put an end to the imperialist war and lasted a few years. The failure of that revolutionary wave, particularly in Germany in 1919-23, condemned the revolution in Russia to isolation and rapid degeneration. The Stalinism that developed during the 20's and thereafter was only an ideological representation of this degeneration and isolation. It established itself as the gravedigger of the Russian revolution, instituting a state capitalist regime, centrally planned according to the doctrine of "socialism in one country" which we reject.

2 - Since the First World War, capitalism has been a social system in decline. It no longer has anything of progressive value to offer. It has twice plunged humanity into a barbaric cycle of crisis, world war, reconstruction, and new crisis. The theory of decadence is a point of view in dynamic movement that makes it possible to foresee the direction that world capitalism seeks to take.

3 - Contrary to bourgeois as well as Stalinist propaganda, countries of the former Eastern Block, as well as China, North Korea, Cuba, etc., have never been communist. What in fact existed and still exists are countries under a particular form of state capitalism.

4 - Working class participation in the electoral circus and in the various parliaments is the best means the bourgeoisie has found to divert the proletariat from its historic task, the emancipation of all humanity. Just as with fascism, "bourgeois democracy" is a terrain in which the proletariat has no real place.

5 - We view the trade unions as organizations bound by a thousand and one ties to the state by laws, subsidies and dialogue. To change the trade union leadership or to attempt to transform the unions is impossible, inasmuch as their links to the state are organic. This includes the rejection of red or anarchist trade unions.

6 - We reject the tactics of the “united front”, “popular front” and “anti-fascist fronts”. All these tactics enmesh the interests of the proletariat with those of bourgeois factions whatever they may be, and ultimately divert the working class from its revolutionary objectives.

7 - All nationalist ideologies, “national independence”, “right of self determination”, whatever their pretext, ethnic, historical, religious, etc., are a nothing but a drug for workers. Their objective is to make them party to one faction or other of the bourgeoisie, pitting one group of workers against the other, leading them to war.

8 - The working class, and only the working class, is capable of making the communist revolution. Out of necessity, the revolutionary struggle leads the working class into a confrontation with the capitalist state. To destroy capitalism, the working class must overthrow every state and establish the dictatorship of the proletariat worldwide – the international power of the workers councils unifying the entire proletariat.

9 - “Self-management” and the “nationalization” of the economy are not the means to overthrow capitalism, since these do nothing to address capitalist relations of production. They are in fact just forms of capitalism. Communism requires the working class to consciously abolish capitalist social relations and to create a stateless society, without class, without money, without national borders or professional standing armies.

10 - A first step towards this goal is the revolutionary political organization of the class-conscious proletariat, uniting us into an international political party. This party’s role will not be to seize power in the name of the working class, but to participate, to take part in the unification and the extension of its struggles controlled by the workers themselves, in spreading and disseminating the communist program in order to raise proletarian consciousness in its own class. Only the working class in its totality, through its own autonomous bodies, e.g. workers councils, can institute socialism. This task cannot be delegated, not even to the most conscious and capable of class parties.

11 - Revolutionary practice leaves no room for sectarian attitudes and isolationism. Our ideas must be heard within our class. We see as our mandate to intervene wherever possible, in keeping with our real forces within the various struggles of our class, to participate in the exchange of ideas, in the clarification of the proletarian program, and in building the revolutionary party.

## **From Nationalism to Internationalism**

This booklet is very important for ICK as the habits and ideas acquired in Maoist groups block one’s understanding of Marxism and its implementation at the level of class struggle and the internal organizations of Left Communism.

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