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Marxism, the EU and Brexit

by Michael Pröbsting

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Revolutionary Communism is the monthly English-language journal published by the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT). The RCIT has sections and activists in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Yemen, Tunisia, Israel / Occupied Palestine, Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela, Britain, Germany, and Austria. In addition the RCIT has fraternal relations with *Dördüncü Blok* in Turkey.

The L5I and the European Union: A Right Turn away from Marxism

The recent change in the L5I's position towards the support for EU membership represents a shift away from its own tradition, of the Marxist method, and of the facts.

By Michael Pröbsting, Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT), August 2016

INTRODUCTION

The *League for the Fifth International* (L5I) has undergone a remarkable political change, manifested in its position on the EU referendum in Britain in June 2016. Towards that vote – in a dramatic reversal of its position promulgated for decades – the L5I called for socialists to vote in favor of Britain remaining in the EU. The title of the call it published leaves absolutely no doubt that the L5I now considers a vote for a country's remaining in the imperialist EU beneficial for the struggle for socialism: "*The UK EU Referendum – Vote Yes and fight for a socialist united states of Europe*".¹

In contrast to this shift, the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues to uphold the position which the L5I has taken ever since the mid-1970s: in any referendum on membership of an imperialist nation-state in the European Union, revolutionaries will neither vote for nor against membership in the EU. This is because both options represent only different manifestations of the imperialist state, and thus can only serve the interests of rival factions of monopoly capital.²

Instead, revolutionaries must, as always, raise the banner of the political independence of the working class. Therefore, on the issue of any such a referendum, we adopt a *revolutionary defeatist* attitude – that is, we reject both camps as qualitatively similar reactionary and imperialistic, and consequently abstain from voting in the referendum.

Again, in absolute contrast to the L5I, the RCIT continues to uphold this authentically revolutionary position even today. The RCIT is an international organization with militants in 11 countries, whose founding cadres were either bureaucratically expelled in 2011 by the majority of L5I leadership or resigned their membership in the latter organization.³ These founding cadres participated in the elaboration and defense of the traditional position of the L5I for, some for decades, and now proudly and tenaciously continue this tradition, whereas since 2011 the L5I has shifted from Marxism towards centrism.⁴

It is therefore only logical that the L5I today publicly attacks the RCIT and other forces that defend a position of class independence in the question of national membership in the EU.⁵

In the past, we have had frequent opportunity to discuss the issue of the EU and the tactics of revolutionaries. Often, we have criticized the attitude of centrist opponents. However, in general these documents were primarily

directed to those organizations which advocated national-centered tactics in support of exiting from the EU. Consequently, we have devoted far less space to the arguments of proponents of EU membership, seeing how, outside social democracy, there are few leftist groups that actually support the central project of the European bourgeoisie. Unfortunately, the L5I has now joined this small, exclusive circle.

We have already published a preliminary article on the L5I's rightward turn towards the EU in German.⁶ The following document is the translation to English of another, more elaborated document also originally written in German.⁷ It reveals in detail how the L5I most egregiously broke with its own tradition, with the facts, and with the Marxist method. This shift to the right is based on a conscious abandonment of fundamental tenets of authentically Marxist theory and includes:

- * An opportunistic and economic optimism about the progressive potential of decaying capitalism,
- * An historical pessimism about the revolutionary potential of the working class,
- * And a break with Lenin's theory of imperialism.

As we shall elaborate, this theoretical crisis of the L5I in turn justified, in the eyes of this organization's leaders, their ostensibly sincere but essentially cynical adaptation to pro-EU social imperialism.

This fissure constitutes a perilous portal leading to a complete capitulation to social-imperialism. Such surrender is inevitable if the comrades of L5I do not reverse their policy, something which we in the RCIT appeal to them to do.



I. THE NEW VIEWPOINT OF THE L5I TO THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE ISSUE OF EU MEMBERSHIP

Let's start by presenting L5I's reasoning for their recent political turn. Essentially, the comrades put forward seven arguments which we will elaborate below. First, the membership of a country in the EU benefits the promotion of an internationalist consciousness of the working class.

"To be for Europe – even if capitalist production methods prevail – helps to preserve a more international consciousness. An exit, no matter in which form, does not only destroy every internationalist consciousness, it also creates illusions in the national state. For that reason alone the pro-Brexit outcome of the referendum is not a reason to celebrate, but a defeat which can not be whitewashed." ⁸

Second, the comrades argue, the EU is something progressive insofar as it enables a broader development of the productive forces and culture:

"The breakup or disintegration of the EU into isolated capitalist states would be a step backwards for the international working class. The progressive impulse in the EU was not its political institutions but the underlying processes of economic integration that give rise to them. The expansion and integration of commerce and industry across borders, on a regional and global scale, raises humanity's productivity, culture and, above all, the international awareness and coordination of the working class." ⁹

"We should vote against Brexit because it is a backward step from the development of modern capitalism – the means of production and labour power – to a smaller, fragmented, more isolated capitalism. For four decades capitalism's productive

forces have been developing within a trans-European framework. To sever or restrict these links will worsen the coming crisis. But most of all, it will further fragment the working class." ¹⁰

And elsewhere the L5I writes: *"The system of nation states of liberal capitalism is much more of a restriction, an obstacle, for the further development of the productive forces, it is the source of crisis not its solution. The unification of the EU, and the introduction of the euro are a response to the real developmental tendencies of the productive forces, although under the rule of finance capital and the governments of Germany, France and the other "leading" EU states. (...) In such a case, the working class movement of Europe should fight to oppose the expulsion of the country and instead call for the cancellation of all austerity programmes, the cancellation of the debts and so on. The answer of revolutionaries to the imperialist unification is fundamentally not a return to independent nation states, with their own currencies, but rather the unification of Europe under the working class, the struggle for the United Socialist States of Europe. The exit of any particular country from the euro zone is in no way an unavoidable stage in this perspective. On the contrary, in the struggle for the revolutionary unification of Europe that would be much more of a step backwards."* ¹¹

Third, the L5I argues that a withdrawal from the EU would create a worse situation for migrants than would be the case if Britain would remain within the EU.

"In short, it would be a reactionary step, testified to by the fact that a Brexit vote will be used as a mandate for further massive restrictions on immigration." ¹²

Fourth, the L5I argues, that membership of a country

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in the EU would be helpful for the promotion of the international class struggle.

*"What "Brexit" would do though is to reduce the objective basis (a linked up economy, reduced state borders and a common legal framework) for a united struggle of Europe's workers, just as Fortress Europe's external borders obstruct solidarity with the workers of the world. This should be our starting point."*¹³

Fifth, the L5I rejects for these reasons not only the exit of imperialist EU countries, but also of semi-colonial ones (such as Greece or Ireland).¹⁴

Sixth, the L5I comrades consider as wrong the viewpoint of the RCIT (and thus their very own position during recent decades) which sees the referendum as a conflict between two imperialist camps.

*"The argument, to support the interests of the working class by advocating an "independent position" is not correct. (...) The Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) has managed a theoretical feat by applying the military tactics of revolutionary defeatism, relevant for cases where two imperialist camps are pitted against each other and so both are led to defeat, in this political question. As if you can react to a policy issue where there is only a Yes and No by saying that this is all crap and you simply abstain."*¹⁵

Finally, the L5I-comrades think that their position corresponds with the approach of Trotsky. To substantiate this claim, they cite the following quotations from Trotsky in 1916: *"Would [the slogan of the European working class, Ed.] be the dissolution of the forced European coalition and the return of all peoples under the roof of isolated national states? Or the restoration of tariffs, "national" coinage, "national" social legislation, and so forth? Certainly not.*

*The program of the European revolutionary movement would then be: The destruction of the compulsory anti-democratic form of the coalition, with the preservation and furtherance of its foundations, in the form of complete annihilation of tariff barriers, the unification of legislation, above all of labor laws, etc. (...) The even partial overcoming of these hindrances would mean the establishment of an imperialist Trust of European States, a predatory share-holding association. The proletariat will in this case have to fight not for the return to "autonomous" national states, but for the conversion of the imperialist state trust into a Republican European Federation."*¹⁶

Most of these arguments are not new, but have previously been raised in recent years by the British group *Alliance for Workers' Liberty* (AWL), which also takes a pro-EU stance and which – just like the British supporters of L5I – have for some time been active within the Labour Party. The AWL is an extremely right-centrist sect which openly supports the Zionist apartheid state of Israel and which steadfastly refuses to defend oppressed peoples against imperialist powers. In the past, when we were still active in the LRCI/L5I, we always expressed our disdain for the AWL. But since our expulsion from the L5I, the latter has unfortunately changed in many ways. Today, its British members are not even ashamed to form a common block with the AWL and to stand together with them as candidates for leadership positions within *Left Unity*.¹⁷ For L5I, these pro-Zionist social-imperialists evidently have been transformed from Saul to Paul. But, in reality, the L5I leadership itself has sadly transformed itself from a Paul to Saul.¹⁸

New Book of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Marxism and the United Front Tactic Today The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement and the United Front Tactic Today.

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a new English-language book – MARXISM AND THE UNITED FRONT TACTIC TODAY. The book's subtitle is: *The Struggle for Proletarian Hegemony in the Liberation Movement and the United Front Tactic Today. On the Application of the Marxist United Front Tactic in Semi-Colonial and Imperialist Countries in the Present Period.* It contains eight chapters plus an appendix (172 pages) and includes 9 tables and 5 figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

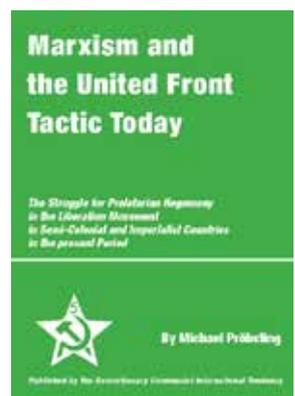
The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

The united front tactic is a crucial instrument for revolutionaries under today's circumstances in which the mass organizations of the working class and the oppressed are dominated by social democratic, Stalinist and petty-bourgeois-populist forces.

The purpose of this document is both to summarize the main ideas of the Marxist united front tactic while at the same time explaining its development and modification which have become necessary due to political changes which have transpired in the

working class liberation movement since the tactic's original formulation.

In this book we initially summarize the main characteristics of the united front tactic and elaborate the approach of the Marxist classics to this issue. We then outline important social developments in the working class and the popular masses as well as in their political formations in recent decades. From there we will discuss how the united front tactic should be applied in light of a number of new developments (the rise of petty-bourgeois populist parties, the decline of the classic reformist parties, the role of national minorities and migrants in imperialist countries, etc.). The eight chapters of the book are accompanied by nine tables and five figures.



II. THE POSITION OF THE RCIT AND OUR TRADITION IN THE LRCI/L5I

Contrary to the L5I, the RCIT continues to defend the program of the political independence of the working class in a conflict between two imperialist camps. Given the referendum in Britain we said, *“Boycott Cameron’s Trap: Neither Brussels, nor Downing Street! For Abstention in Britain’s EU-Referendum! For international Unity and Struggle of the Workers and Oppressed! Fight against both British as well as European Imperialism! Forward to the United Socialist States of Europe”*¹⁹

The RCIT and its British comrades stated that the referendum is a trap, *“...because it presents two equally bad forms of capitalist state organization as a pseudo-alternative. It is no accident that both camps – the pro-EU as well as the Brexit camp – are dominated by reactionary, chauvinist and pro-business forces. The referendum asks people to choose between two forms of racism where in fact both camps – Cameron and the EU as well as Nigel Farage’s Brexit – are deeply racist. (...) The referendum asks people to choose between two forms of imperialist militarism where in fact both the Cameron government and the EU as well as the right-wing anti-EU forces have a long history of waging wars abroad. (...) The referendum asks people to choose between two forms of capitalist exploitation where in fact both the Cameron government and the EU as well as the right-wing anti-EU forces are champions of attacking labour rights.”*²⁰

We note that both camps – both the pro-EU as well as the anti-EU forces – were dominated by reactionary forces of the capitalist class and their respective allies. *“In short, the pro-EU camp is dominated by the big imperialist bourgeoisie, trailing in its wake the social-imperialist labor bureaucracy. (...) In short, the anti-EU camp is dominated by the most reactionary, backward sectors of the (middle and petit) bourgeoisie and the country’s middle layers, while left-reformists and centrists serve as their “left-wing” fig leaf.”*²¹

The viewpoint of the RCIT on the issue of the EU referendum in Britain in June 2016 is based on the fundamental position of Marxists, expounded by Lenin, regarding membership of imperialist nation states in a European confederation. Lenin formulated the Marxist position on the question of unification of Europe in his famous saying that *“a United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary.”*²² Lenin elaborated this position by saying, *“Of course, temporary agreements are possible between capitalists and between states. In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists ... but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty against Japan and America, who have been badly done out of their share by the present partition of colonies, and the increase of whose might during the last fifty years has been immeasurably more rapid than that of backward and monarchist Europe, now turning senile.”*²³

Therefore, even “tactical” support of the imperialist United States of Europe is nothing but support for the reactionary imperialist bourgeoisie.

Likewise, Marxists neither defend the imperialist nation state (as opposed to the oppressed, semi-colonial countries) against other states or a confederation. For Lenin it was clear that the imperialist nation state is not worthy of support in any way.

*“What do we mean when we say that national states have become fetters, etc.? We have in mind the advanced capitalist countries, above all Germany, France, England, whose participation in the present war has been the chief factor in making it an imperialist war. In these countries, which hitherto have been in the van of mankind, particularly in 1789-1871, the process of forming national states has been consummated. In these countries the national movement is a thing of an irrevocable past, and it would be an absurd reactionary utopia to try to revive it. The national movement of the French, English, Germans has long been completed. In these countries history’s next step is a different one: liberated nations have become transformed into oppressor nations, into nations of imperialist rapine, nations that are going through the “eve of the collapse of capitalism””*²⁴

Later Trotsky combined the slogan of unification of Europe with the slogan of workers’ power and, on his initiative, the Communist International adopted the slogan of the *United Socialist States of Europe* in its programmatic arsenal in the summer of 1923 (from where it was deleted by 1928 as a result of the Stalinization of the Comintern).²⁵

Such an approach is the only legitimate one for Marxists in conflicts between two imperialist camps. Marxists can never lend support in to one side in a conflict between an imperialist state and one or more other imperialist states – no matter how “tactical” or “critical.” Similarly, class-conscious workers do not support capitalist corporations competing against one another. Any such support would be nothing other than a betrayal of the principles of proletarian class independence and a transition to being in the camp of reformist class collaboration.

Based on this approach, our movement – formerly under the name the *League for a Revolutionary Communist International* (LRCI), then the *League for the Fifth International* (L5I) and today as the RCIT – called for abstention at referendums on membership in the EU. This viewpoint was developed for the first time in Britain. After the country had joined the *“European Economic Community”* (the forerunner of the EU organization) in 1972, a referendum on an exit from the EU was held in June 1975. In this vote, on the very same question as that put before the public in 2016, a 2/3 majority voted for Britain to remain in the EU.

Later, our movement generalized this tactic, and in one of our first statements as an international organization we incorporated it as part of our programmatic arsenal.

“For that reason Workers Power in Britain called for an abstention in the 1975 referendum and will not add its voice, nor will the Gruppe Arbeitermacht nor the Irish Workers Group, to the campaigns for withdrawal, which are chauvinist in their inspiration and utopian and narrowly nationalist in the solutions they offer for ailing European capitalism. For the same

reason we would have been unable to and unwilling to advocate either a yes or a no vote in the Norwegian referendum on entry or any future one in Spain or Portugal or even in a referendum on withdrawal in Greece. On each occasion the proletariat is asked to decide on the merits of two purely bourgeois programmes which contest the form of the relationship each of the European powers has with the others.”²⁶

Even if we then mistakenly combined the question of EU membership for imperialist and semi-colonial countries, rather than make a distinction in these two cases (for more on this, see below), nevertheless the above quote demonstrates the basic and correct thrust of our movement. We refused to support either of the alternative variants of imperialist state organization or to tail any of the two factions of the imperialist bourgeoisie. Through this attitude we set ourselves apart from both the pro-EU Social Democrats and the Stalinists and various centrists who preferred the imperialist nation-state in favor of the EU.

We later confirmed this attitude again in another resolution of the International Secretariat of LRCI from 1992. There, we rejected the position of the “left” pro-exit supporters as well as those who spoke out for respectively joining or remaining in the EU. In marked contrast to today’s pro-EU position of the L5I leadership, which has become centrist, at that time we forcefully rejected casting a vote either for or against membership in the EU. On the contrary, we unconditionally condemned those in the pseudo-left who took such a social-imperialist position:

“Attracted to a ‘social Europe’ or a ‘Europe of regions or the small nations’, right-wing reformists, nationalists and

even some ‘Marxists’ are arguing for a ‘Yes’ vote. This too is profoundly mistaken and will have equally reactionary and class-collaborationist consequences. The unifying EC has the overall character of an imperialist power, exploiting semi-colonies both within its frontiers and beyond, restoring capitalist exploitation and misery in Eastern Europe, fomenting rivalry, and economic and, ultimately, military confrontation with the US and Japan. We can never give a vote of confidence in imperialism to unify Europe in the interests of all its peoples in the interests of its workers and small farmers. Only the working class can build such a federation under the banner of the Socialist United States of Europe.

A united capitalist Europe will not aid or benefit the masses of the super-exploited semi-colonies. Free movement within the Fortress Europe will be matched by a battery of racist immigration controls, imposed by a new transnational police force with added powers for tracking ‘terrorists’. (...) Post-1992 Europe will be a fortress against political refugees and those fleeing the economic havoc that the EC and the IMF has wrought in the semi-colonies.

We reject both the new capitalist Europe which is currently being constructed and the isolated capitalist nation states which currently exist. To indicate this double rejection, workers should demonstratively and actively abstain from choosing between the existing states and the existing EC of which they are a part and the post-Maastricht new order. Where the population is directly asked to endorse or to reject Maastricht we say neither option is a real choice for workers.”²⁷

When the question of joining the EU arose in other imperialist countries where our movement had sections, we consistently applied this method and therefore refused

Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: Greece - A Modern Semi-Colony

The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism, Its Failed Attempts to Become

a Minor Imperialist Power, and Its Present Situation as an Advanced Semi-Colonial Country with Specific Features

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a new English-language book – *GREECE: A MODERN SEMI-COLONY*. The book’s subtitle is: *The Contradictory Development of Greek Capitalism, Its Failed Attempts to Become a Minor Imperialist Power, and Its Present Situation as an Advanced Semi-Colonial Country with Some Specific Features*. It contains six chapters (144 pages) and includes 12 tables, 35 figures and 4 maps. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

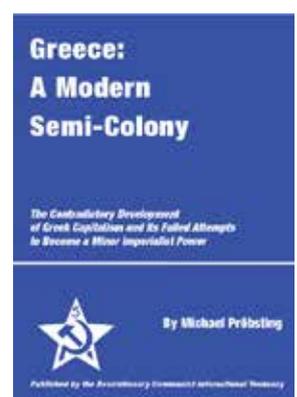
The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which gives an overview of its content.

Greece is at the forefront both of the capitalist crisis in Europe as well as of the class struggle. It is hardly an exaggeration to say that what the Arab Revolution has been for the world in the past few years, Greece has been for Europe.

Subsequently, the question of the class character of Greece is of crucial importance both for the domestic as well as for the international workers movement: Is it an imperialist

state, a semi-colonial country or something else, and what are its specific features?

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Marxists’ theoretical conception of imperialist respectively semi-colonial states. In Chapter II we give a brief historical overview of the development of Greek capitalism. In Chapter III we deal with Greece’s failed attempt to become a minor imperialist power. In Chapter IV we outline the historic crisis of Greek capitalism from 2008 until today. In Chapter V we elaborate the most important programmatic conclusions and in the last Chapter we present a summary in the form of theses. The book contains 12 Tables, 35 Figures and 4 Maps. ■



to either support the country's joining the EU or defend the nation state. Consequently, we called for abstention in such respective referenda.

In a resolution drafted by this author and adopted by the leadership of the Austrian section of the LRCI in April 1993, we put our position as follows:

"The real alternative in a vote for EC membership is as follows: 'Are you for a capitalist Austria within a capitalist EC or are you for a capitalist Austria outside the EC' (which equally exploits the Third World countries and Eastern Europe)? A 'Yes' to joining the EC means openly advocating the policy of the big bourgeoisie and promoting participation in an imperialist alliance. Voting 'No' vote means to prefer the stuffy, provincial capitalism with its tradition of peace of the graveyard and patriotism, and is no less pathetic. For such voting behavior is deeply nationalistic. (...) To lend ideological support for one of the two bourgeois factions is nothing but criminal and has nothing to do with a policy in the interests of the international working class. Workers militants can only abstain when considering this alternative and have to focus the attention of the working people away from the referendum and towards the international class struggle.

The proletariat therefore must not lend support to the campaign of the big bourgeoisie which attempts to weaken and overcome the national borders of its rule: What can come out in the best case, is a united (Western) Europe on a bourgeois-capitalist basis. Such is never ever our Europe - the Europe of the working class! However, the workers must also not take a reactionary position by opposing the tendency to unify the outlived nation state.

The answer of the revolutionary Marxists: class struggle instead sham referendum!

We say: the working class must not let itself be distracted by the bourgeoisie of the real fronts. Not the form of capitalist exploitation (EC or Austria), but the struggle against the attacks of the capitalists themselves is crucial. 'Class struggle instead of sham referendum'. Marxists must tirelessly explain that the only way to defend proletarian interests is an offensive campaign against the recent attacks of the capitalists and for an international fighting community. First positive signs are the European Day of Action of the railway workers in autumn 1992 as well as the international day of action on April 2 for the right to work and social security, even if the OGB [the Austrian trade union federation, Ed.] in Austria doesn't do anything. But that is not enough in order to resist the attacks of the bosses. The Austrian working class must fight again - and for this any nationalist propaganda, as the petty-bourgeois left is promoting, is intolerable.

Our principled defeatism in the face of these alternatives is not altered by the fact that Austria would join most probably the WEU. The military component is only one - and not the dominating - aspect in the context of the whole question of joining the EC.

The workers movement must begin to raise Europe-wide demands to prevent being divided against each other. Such demands must allow a united response of European workers against the essential lines of attack of the bourgeoisie." 28

In 1994, our Swedish section also called upon workers of that country to oppose both the pro-EU as well as the anti-EU camp of the bourgeoisie and to abstain in the upcoming referendum there. Our Swedish comrades argued:

"The immediate task for revolutionary socialists in Sweden will be to intervene in the EU referendum, defending working class independence from both the Yes and No campaign - which are just two different ways of trying to tie the workers to the fate of capitalism." 29

In another programmatic article which we published years later we again highlighted this viewpoint:

"The working class as a whole should not take a position for or against the Maastricht Treaty in referendums since the opposition to it is opposition to one form of capitalist development and in favour of another. Each of these forms of development have anti-working class implications and these must be resisted by the working class. But it would be disastrous for the working class in any European country to line up behind one section of the bourgeoisie or another, to espouse protectionism and so on. This would fatally undermine the independence of the workers, and destroy the chances of effective international solidarity between sections of workers. (...) All this must be rejected. We advocate neither a united imperialist Europe exploiting the world and clashing increasingly with its rival blocks (NAFTA and Japan) nor for "independent" rival European imperialisms, racing against each other to introduce South East Asian conditions in the labour market whilst stoking up nationalism amongst the working class. The workers of Europe must establish their class independence from both their national capitalists and from the institutions of a would-be European imperialist superstate." 30

In marked contrast to the L5I, the RCIT proudly continues to defend this tradition under today's present conditions. It is our firm belief that this method of struggle for the political independence of the working class and the oppressed and against all forms of support for a fraction of the imperialist bourgeoisie is the *only* possible, revolutionary and internationalist alternative for Marxists.

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III. THE ESSENCE OF THE MATTER: A QUESTION OF THE FORM OF IMPERIALIST STATE ORGANIZATION

The fundamental mistake in the entire approach of the L5I leadership is their complete misunderstanding of the central issue in the referenda on EU membership. This organization justifies its political turn to the right by saying that EU membership is beneficial for the development of productive forces *and* the internationalist consciousness of the working class. In the next chapter, we will demonstrate that these arguments have little to do with reality, and actually contradict Marxist method.

But even if the L5I's arguments were true, this still in no way would justify the political somersault performed by its leadership vis. à vis. pro-EU social imperialism; because, in the final analysis, the referenda have nothing to do with the development of the productive forces. Nor are they about the international class struggle.

The fundamental issue is rather about whether an imperialist nation state (such as Britain) should continue to be part of the EU – an imperialist confederation – or whether it should revert to being an “independent” imperialist nation state. Consequently, the question is *only* about of the *form of the imperialist state organization* – either being a (relatively) smaller imperialist nation state or participating in a larger imperialist confederation. It is this question alone which revolutionaries must take a position on and adopt an approach to. The allegations of the L5I leadership regarding the impact of EU membership on the forces of production and the consciousness of the working class in reality only serves to distract us from the true heart of the matter: which imperialist state organization should a given country adopt?

Therefore, the leaders of the respective campaigns for or against membership in the EU are dominated by factions of the imperialist bourgeoisie. In general, the predominant

fraction of the big capital is clearly for joining or remaining in the EU, and is therefore often supported by the elite of the social democratic bureaucracy. This is reflected in the fact that, usually, the openly bourgeois main parties lead such campaigns.

The campaigns against joining or in favor of leaving the EU are usually dominated by political representatives of the weaker, small and medium factions of the capitalist class. These are usually reactionary nationalist forces as UKIP in Britain, Le Pen in France, the Freedom Party in Austria, etc. They are often supported by Stalinists and various centrists.

Of paramount importance is that, in both cases, on the two opposing sides of the question, the leading forces are *always* different factions of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Therefore “tactical” support for one of the two options – YES or NO – inevitably means political support for one of the two forms of imperialist state organization, both of which are equally reactionary.

Therefore, it is neither possible for authentic Marxists to call for an exit from the EU, nor is it legitimate for them to vote to remain inside the EU.

As the quotations we have cited above clearly demonstrate, such an understanding of the EU has for decades been a central component our Marxist analysis as well as the revolutionary tactics we have derived. Today, the L5I leadership has broken with this fundamental Marxist position with a single stroke of the pen, without even attempting to explain, even partially, why their own decades-old tradition suddenly became null and void, and if so why it should have been preached by them all this time until now!

The British Left and the EU-Referendum

The Many Faces of pro-UK or pro-EU Social-Imperialism

An analysis of the left's failure to fight for an independent, internationalist and socialist stance both against

British as well as European imperialism

A pamphlet by Michael Pröbsting
(International Secretary of the RCIT)

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IV. THE JUSTIFICATION OF THE L5I'S TURN TO THE RIGHT – OUR REFUTATION

Let us now turn to those individual arguments with which the L5I leadership justifies its jumping aboard the pro-EU train. As we will show, not only are the allegations of L5I leadership entirely wrong, but they are covertly based on an incorrect opportunistic and economic belief which assumes that there does, in fact, exist potential for reversing the decay of capitalism. It is only in this way that the L5I can justify its adaptation to pro-EU social imperialism.

a) Is It True that the Fate of the EU is Beneficial for the Development of the Productive Forces?

As we have shown above in several quotes taken from the writings of L5I leaders, this group justifies its support for membership in the imperialist EU by claiming that this will “raise humanity’s productivity and culture.” But the L5I leaders make no attempt at all to show how the continued existence of the EU and membership in this body will achieve these ends. This is quite understandable, as no such objective evidence can be provided!

Let’s take a quick look at the facts. First, let’s clarify what exactly is meant by the “productivity of mankind” and how this is measured. For us, as Marxists, based on what Marx wrote, the working class itself is “the most important productive force.”

Let’s first reexamine the facts in order to check the bold – to put it politely – assertion of the L5I leadership. In Table 1, below, we see the long-term development of the share of wages in total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the old imperialist states from 1960 to 2010. In parallel to this, Table 2 displays the trend of official unemployment for the same period of half a century.

The figures show unequivocally that, despite the progressive integration of the EU in the economies of 15 countries since the 1980s, the period has been marked by both a significant decrease in the wage share as a percent of GDP and a dramatic increase in unemployment. By way of comparison, these two tables also give the corresponding figures for the US and Japan. Taken together, these tables show that – regardless of whether we are talking about countries within or outside the EU – the situation of the working class in all imperialist countries has deteriorated in recent decades. The wage share in the EU fell from 71.1% in the 1970s to 63.6% in the first decade of the new millennium. During the same period, unemployment increased from a range of 2–4% in the 1960s and 1970s to a range of 8–9.5% since the 1980s.

The cause of this deterioration of the condition of workers (“the most important productive force”) during the 50 year period examined is, of course, *not* the advanced integration of the EU in itself (as nationally narrow-minded opponents of EU membership claim), as is readily discerned from the corresponding trends in imperialist countries outside the EU, like those for the US and Japan.

Rather, this deterioration is based on the long-term crisis of capitalism. Therefore, in the broader context, it would appear that the increased economic integration of member states within the EU has had no real positive impact on either wages or unemployment.

Tables 3 and 4 compare the respective development of real wages and unemployment in Sweden and Austria before and after both countries joined the EU in 1994. Here too, no positive impact for the working class ostensibly attributable to joining the EU can be discerned. For Sweden, unemployment tripled from a range of 2–2.5% between the 1960s and 1980s to a range of 7–8% starting in the 1990s (Table 3). We see a similar development for Austria where unemployment also increased significantly while real wages mostly stagnated since the country joined the EU (Table 4).

For Austria, we must add that these official figures do not reflect the dramatic impact on the lower layers of the working class. For example, adjusted for inflation, the wage share for manual workers has dropped by 14% since the mid-1990s. For the total working class, the wage share decreased from 75% (1995) to 69% (2015).³⁵

In summary, the position of the working class has deteriorated dramatically during the phase of accelerated EU integration – just like what has happened in other parts of the capitalist world. EU integration has done *nothing* to ameliorate the economic decline of workers in member states.

Now let’s examine some other indicators of the development of productive forces. Table 5 shows how, regardless of the EU’s successful integration and expansion in its member states during a half a century (1960–2010), the dynamics of industrial production did not increase in the member countries, but rather fell drastically – just as happened in the US and Japan. From growth rates of 2.5–5% during the 1960s and 1970s, average industrial production in the 15 EU member states dropped to an average of -0.3% in the first decade of the new millennium.

A similar picture emerges when we examine capital accumulation during the same 50-year period. Again, we see a significant decline for the EU states from + 6% in the 1960s to meager + 0.4% during the first decade of the new millennium (Table 6).

The figures for growth in labor productivity reveal yet again the same trend towards stagnation – + 4.7% in the 1960s, + 2.1% in the 1970s and only 0.7% in the first decade of the new millennium. Contrary to the assertions of the L5I leadership, we do not discern any beneficial development for productivity brought about by EU integration, but rather a substantial decline (Table 7).

The same picture emerges when we consider the specific examples of Sweden and Austria. Here too, we see declining labor productivity, despite a small upswing for Sweden in the 1990s and again in 2013–2014 (Table 8).

Table 9 makes a long-term comparison of changing

Table 1: Adjusted wage share in selected imperialist countries; total economy, 1961-2010 ³¹*As percentage of GDP at current factor cost*

	<i>USA</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
1960-1970	67.2%	73.8%	69.8%
1971-1980	66.8%	77.7%	71.1%
1981-1990	65.2%	74.0%	67.8%
1991-2000	64.9%	70.8%	64.8%
2001-2010	63.3%	65.5%	63.6%

Table 2: Unemployment rate in selected imperialist countries, 1961-2010 ³²

	<i>USA</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
1960-1970	4.8%	1.3%	2.2%
1971-1980	6.4%	1.8%	3.9%
1981-1990	7.1%	2.5%	8.5%
1991-2000	5.6%	3.3%	9.4%
2001-2010	6.1%	4.7%	8.0%

Table 3: Sweden before and after joining the EU ³³

	Growth of real wages per head	Unemployment
1961-73	3.5%	2.1%
1974-85	0.7%	2.6%
1986-90	2.2%	2.0%
1991-95	-0.1%	7.2%
1996-2000	3.2%	8.0%
2001-05	2.2%	6.7%
2006-10	1.5%	7.3%

Table 4: Austria before and after joining the EU ³⁴

	Growth of real wages per head	Unemployment
1961-73	5.1%	1.8%
1974-85	1.8%	2.3%
1986-90	2.3%	3.3%
1991-95	2.1%	3.9%
1996-2000	0.7%	4.4%
2001-05	0.0%	4.9%
2006-10	0.6%	4.9%

Table 5: Growth of industrial production in selected imperialist countries, 1961-2010 (in % per annum) ³⁶

	<i>USA</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
1961-1970	+4.9%	+13.5%	+5.2%
1971-1980	+3.0%	+4.1%	+2.3%
1981-1990	+2.2%	+4.0%	+1.7%
1991-2000	+4.1%	+0.1%	+1.5%
2001-2010	-0.2%	-0.4%	-0.3%

productivity for a number of Western and Eastern European countries. By examining these figures we can compare how productivity developed before and after the entry of these countries into the EU. Britain joined the EU in 1972; Austria, Sweden and Finland in 1994; and Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary became members of the EU in 2004. In all cases – with exception of the previously mentioned partial exception for Sweden – we can discern no increased productivity after joining the EU; on the contrary, the figures show a constant decline.

Further on we will elaborate the causes of this trend. For now we shall summarize by noting that many indicators of social and economic developments prove quite the opposite of what the L5I leadership wants us to believe.

b) Is It True that the Fate of the EU is Beneficial for the Situation of Migrants?

Another argument by the L5I leadership for their support for remaining in the EU is that withdrawal by Britain (or any other country) from the EU would aggravate racism against migrants the country in question.

Basically, we welcome the L5I leadership's attaching such great importance to the defense of migrants in imperialist metropolises. Yet, when they expelled us from their organization in 2011, a central issue in the intra-party struggle was our analysis of the oppression of migrants; our thesis contended that they are, in the vast majority, "*nationally oppressed and economically super-exploited.*"⁴¹ Today, however, we suspect that what lurks behind the argument of L5I leadership expressing such concern for the well-being of migrants is not so much a correction to their approach on the issue of migration but rather a pretext to justify their pro-EU stance.

In any case, the argument of L5I leadership on this question is incorrect from beginning to end and only serves to whitewash EU imperialism. Of course we don't deny that an imperialist Britain outside the EU will accelerate its oppression of migrants. But we strongly refute the assertion of the L5I leadership that this would be causally related to the withdrawal from the EU.

Anyone who seriously deals with the situation of migrants in Europe knows that, in recent years, there has been a massive intensification of racist oppression of migrants not only outside the EU but also within. Is it possible that the L5I leadership still doesn't know about the French police hunt for refugees in the port of Calais; that various countries like Austria and Hungary are building fences on their borders; and that more and more EU countries have passed legislation to suppress Muslim migrants? No, this is not possible. Today it is entirely absurd to claim that migrants are suppressed more outside the EU than inside it.

The exploitation of migrants from semi-colonial countries residing in EU states is a lucrative business for EU imperialism. Between 1995 and 2011, the British state alone collected as tax revenue from migrants who arrived from other EU countries (especially Eastern Europe) no less than 4 billion pounds *more* than it handed out to them as social benefits and other government spending.⁴² This is to say nothing of the extra profits garnered by individual British capitalists by over-exploiting migrants. At the same time, the EU attacks with full force refugees stranded along the

external borders of the European Union, a trend that will doubtlessly accelerate in the future. Furthermore, since 2000 more than 11 billion Euros have been spent by the EU solely for the deportation of migrants.⁴³ Is it possible that Marxists can seriously contend that the situation of migrants in a given European country would be better if that country remains within an imperialist alliance of states like the European Union, than if it left such an alliance?!

The L5I leadership may point to the leading anti-EU party in Britain, UKIP which ran a huge smear campaign against migrants before the Brexit referendum, and now is only encouraged by the gross incitement it waged following its success. We quite agree, and have repeatedly pointed out ourselves, that the pro-Brexit campaign is inherently chauvinistic and directed against migrants. But the same chauvinism also exists *within* the EU. And parties similar to UKIP have been around for years in the EU: parties like the National Front in France, PEGIDA and the AfD in Germany, the FPÖ in Austria, and Geert Wilders in the Netherlands. There is absolutely nothing incompatible between such parties and membership in the EU, as was demonstrated by 6 years of the FPÖ participation in the Austrian government from 2000–06.

Let's check whether – as the L5I leadership asserts – withdrawal from the EU inevitably leads to "*further restrictions on immigration.*" Naturally, we have no crystal ball which allows us to predict what will happen in Britain in the next few years. But we *do* have the experience of recent years and decades. And this experience only points to the intensification of the trends – as we have identified in our *Theses on Migration* – that will inevitably lead to increased migration from the global South to virtually all imperialist countries. These trends are two: the increased demand of capitalists in imperialist metropolises for cheap labor; and the increased misery of the people of the semi-colonial world.⁴⁴

For these reasons, since 1960, the proportion of migrants within national populations has increased dramatically not only in Europe but in North America and Australia as well (see Figure 1).

Taking these two key trends into account, we see that – contrary to the claims of the L5I leadership – the growing migration to the EU in recent decades has very little to do with the existence of the EU itself. This understanding is only reinforced when we examine migration to non-EU European countries like Switzerland and Norway.

For example, the number of migrants in Norway's population grew from 59,000 (1970) to 805,000 (2015). Today migrants make up 15.6% of the population of that country.⁴⁶ This is, in fact, a *higher* proportion than in many EU countries. In the case of Switzerland, this increase is even more pronounced, where migrants and their descendents account for 36% of the country's population, the highest percentages of migrants anywhere in Europe.⁴⁷

Finally, it is also edifying to analyze the evolution of migration to Britain. In 1931, the country had 1.08 million people who were born abroad. At that time this accounted for 2.7% of the total population. By 1971, i.e., a year before Britain's entry into the EU, this number grew to 3.1 million migrants (6.4% of total population). However, after another 30 years, in 2001, 4.6 million migrants lived in Britain which makes 8.8% of total population.⁴⁸

Table 6: Capital accumulation in selected imperialist countries, 1961-2010 (in % per annum) ³⁷

	<i>Gross fixed capital formation at 2010 prices; total economy</i>		
	<i>USA</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
1961-1970	+4.7%	+15.7%	+6.0%
1971-1980	+3.5%	+3.5%	+1.9%
1981-1990	+3.5%	+5.7%	+2.8%
1991-2000	+5.4%	-0.6%	+1.8%
2001-2010	-0.4%	-1.9%	+0.4%

Table 7: Labor Productivity in selected imperialist countries (in % per annum) ³⁸

	<i>Gross domestic product at 2010 market prices per person employed</i>		
	<i>USA</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>EU-15</i>
1961-1970	+2.3%	+8.6%	+4.7%
1971-1980	+1.0%	+3.7%	+2.1%
1981-1990	+1.5%	+3.7%	+1.8%
1991-2000	+2.1%	+1.0%	+1.7%
2001-2010	+1.5%	+0.9%	+0.7%

Table 8: Labor Productivity in Austria and Sweden before and after joining the EU ³⁹

	<i>Average growth of Gross Domestic Product per employee</i>	
	<i>Österreich</i>	<i>Schweden</i>
1961-73	4.9%	3.5%
1974-85	2.1%	1.1%
1986-90	2.1%	1.4%
1991-95	2.1%	2.8%
1996-2000	2.1%	2.7%
2001-05	1.1%	2.4%
2006-10	0.1%	0.9%
2011	1.2%	0.5%
2012	-0.3%	-1.0%
2013	-0.1%	0.3%
2014	-0.5%	0.9%

Table 9: Average labor productivity growth in Austria, Sweden, Finland, Britain, Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary 1950-2013 ⁴⁰

	<i>Annual average growth within each period</i>			
	1950-1972	1972-1995	1995-2004	2004-2013
Austria	5.8%	2.7%	1.5%	1.2%
Sweden	4.0%	1.3%	2.5%	0.9%
Finland	4.5%	3.0%	2.3%	0.6%
Britain	2.8%	2.6%	2.4%	0.4%
Poland	-	-	4.8%	2.5%
Slovakia	-	-	4.4%	2.7%
Czech Republic	-	-	3.1%	1.9%
Hungary	-	-	2.8%	0.9%

So we see, contrary to what the L5I leadership claims, the proportion of migrants in the total population of in Britain grew more rapidly in the time *before* the EU membership than since. So how exactly do the L5I comrades conclude that a withdrawal from the EU would automatically have a negative impact on immigration to that country? Such a conclusion flies into the face of the data for Britain before it joined the EU compared to its migration figures after it became a member state; and this conclusion is further undermined by the experience of Switzerland and Norway which have never even belonged to the EU!

In fact, immigration is not linked in any way to the existence of the EU as such, but is rather a common feature of imperialist capitalism – especially during its period of decline. Similarly, regarding the issue of productivity, the L5I leadership attests to the supposedly progressive character of the EU, so that they can justify their opportunist shift to the right.

c) Is It True that the Fate of the EU is Beneficial for Internationalist Consciousness and the International Struggle of the Working Class?

We now come to the next myth perpetrated by the L5I leadership. As the quotations from their publications which we included above demonstrate, the L5I leadership further justifies its support for membership in the imperialist EU by asserting that such membership would be conducive to *“raise the international awareness and coordination of the working class.”*

Here, too, the L5I leadership does not provide a single shred of evidence to back up its assertion and, once again, they would be hard pressed to do so. While an *“international working class consciousness”* is not something that can easily be quantified, we can definitely say that trade unions, both in countries inside as well as outside of the EU, have in practice demonstrated an international class consciousness. For example, the number of trade unions in non-EU countries supporting the boycott campaign against apartheid Israel (the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions [LO], COSATU in South Africa, CUT in Brazil, the Canadian Postal Workers’ Union) has its parallel in trade unions within the EU.⁴⁹ During the Gaza war of 2008/09, the Norwegian unions of railway workers and the tram drivers even arranged short strikes in solidarity with the Palestinian people!⁵⁰ Therefore, we would maintain that the internationalist consciousness of the working class is not linked to the existence of the imperialist EU itself, but rather exists largely independent of it. Rather, the extent and depth of *“international working class consciousness”* depends in large part on the specific experience of class struggle within a given country, the influence of political forces in that country and, in particular, on the nature of the respective leaderships of the working class.

This is also evident when one examines the development of actual class consciousness of the workers within the EU. Here, the experience is seemingly contradictory. For while we have witnessed various signs of the strengthening of an international consciousness of the proletariat (for example the solidarity with refugees in 2015), in parallel we have also seen the advance of reactionary chauvinism in recent decades. The latter is reflected in the strengthening of racist parties like the FN, the FPÖ, UKIP,

and AfD, particularly among backward sections of the working class. In any case, we definitely do not ascertain a qualitatively advantageous development of international consciousness of the proletariat within the EU compared with that in countries outside the EU.

Involuntarily, even the L5I has to confirm our thesis. Dave Stockton, the leading comrade of the L5I, wrote in a recent article: *“ Nearly all the high points of class struggle in the last century (1917-21, the mid-1930s, the late 1960s and early 1970s) saw an international cross-fertilisation of ideas and methods of struggle.”* This is absolutely correct! However, the author unfortunately forgets to mention that, during the course of the century being examined, either no EU existed or, in the period of 1968–75, the European class struggle took place internationally *beyond* the borders of the EU (e.g., in the non-EU countries Portugal, Spain, Greece). This yet again confirms that the existence of the imperialist EU in itself is not a significant factor in whether an international class struggle takes place or not.

In general, it is nonsensical and a complete distortion of the facts to assert that the EU membership would automatically be beneficial to the militancy and the class consciousness of the working class. If that would be the case, the European proletariat would be the most politically developed and most militant in the world, because nowhere else on earth is there a similar supranational institution like the EU. Well, as we all know, the reality is quite different!

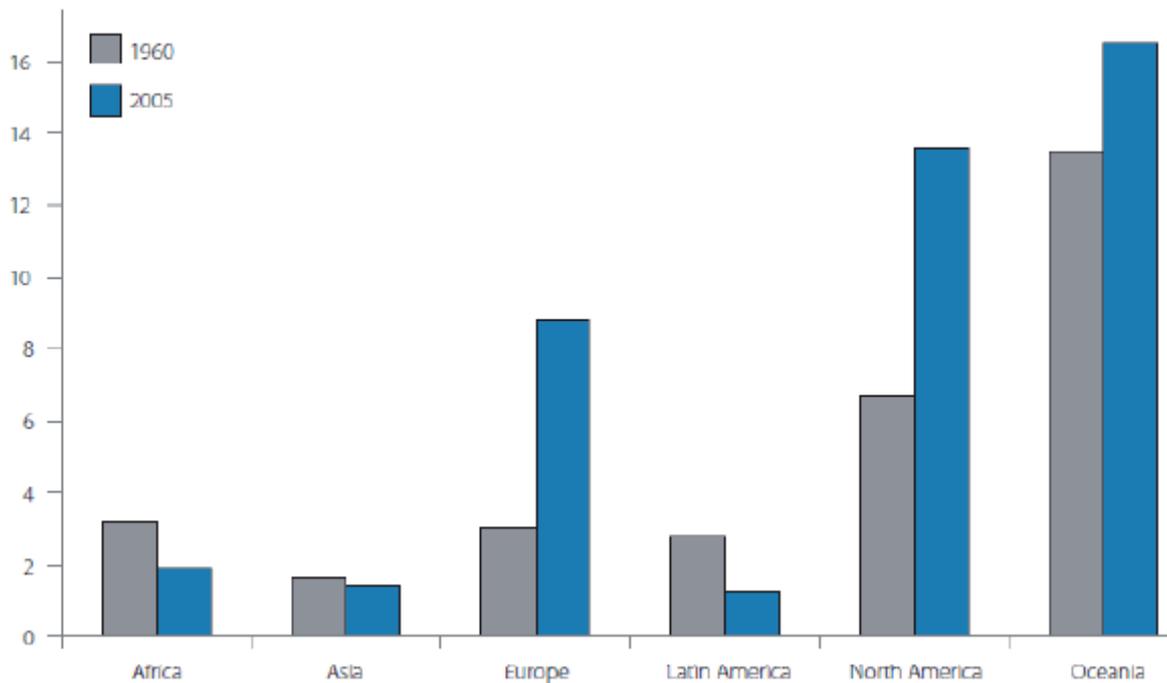
The fact is that the progressive integration of national economies into the EU has, in general, brought about a weakening of worker militancy and unionization. Naturally, this is not a result of the existence of the EU, but because the capitalist crisis has led to the material weakening of the proletariat and, primarily, the systematic betrayal of union leaderships. Thus, in no way can facts be used to prove the assertion of the L5I leadership that the EU membership is advantageous for the working class and its struggle.

Table 10 shows that the extent of union organization in the EU countries – despite the alleged beneficial effects of EU integration on the working class militancy – has in most cases been dramatically decreased just as is the case for non-EU countries. In France, the share of union members from 1978 to 2013 dropped by 2/3 to 7.7%. In Germany it was halved (from 35.5% to 18.1%), as was also the case in Britain (from 48.8% to 25.8%). By contrast, Norway, which does not enjoy the alleged blessings of EU membership, union membership has remained relatively stable, ranging between 52% and 57%. The same is true for Iceland, another European non-EU member.

Similarly, we see that in Austria and Sweden union membership has dropped significantly since these countries joined the EU in 1994. Taken together, these figures hardly support the L5I thesis about a positive correlation between EU membership and class consciousness!

Now let’s examine the development of the class struggle, as manifested by the number of worker strikes in Europe, during recent decades which have been characterized by the increased integration of national economies within the EU. If we look at the number of annual strike days per country, we find absolutely no confirmation for the L5I-assertion on the benefits of EU membership for the class struggle.

Figures 2 and 3 detail the frequency of strikes between

Figure 1: The share of migrants in the population, 1960 and 2005 (in %) ⁴⁵Table 10: Trade union density in selected OECD countries, 1978-2013 (in %) ⁵¹

	1978	1994	2013
Australia	49.7%	-	17.0%
France	20.5%	-	7.7%
Germany	35.5%	-	18.1%
Italy	50.4%	-	37.3%
Japan	32.6%	-	17.8%
Britain	48.8%	-	25.8%
Austria	57.6%	41.4%	27.8%
Sweden	77%	83.7%	67.7%
Norway	54%	57.6%	52.1%
Iceland	66.2%	87.4%	85.5%
USA	34.0%	-	10.8%
OECD	34.0%	-	18.1%

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1990 and 2015 and reveal mainly two interesting facts. First, the number of strike days overall has decreased during the last 25 years – again, despite the assertion of the L5I leadership. Second, we also see that in both tables, non-EU member Norway (NO) ranks among the top countries for strike statistics, and in fact leads a number of EU member countries such as Britain (UK).

The development of the class struggle in the specific case of Britain makes the assertion of the L5I leadership no less puzzling. Regardless of its membership in the EU since 1972, the working class in Britain has met serious setbacks and the class struggle there has declined dramatically since the mid-1980s. Naturally, these setbacks were not *because* of the Britain's EU membership, but they do demonstrate that the beneficial effects of EU membership for the class struggle are nowhere to be found.

d) What Should the Attitude of Revolutionaries Be towards EU-Membership for Semi-Colonial Countries?

The turn of the L5I to the right is also reflected in their attitude to the question of membership of European semi-colonial countries, such as Greece, in the EU. The L5I vehemently rejects the slogan calling for an exit of Greece, claiming that this would only be a nationalist dead end.

It is striking that, in its increasing adaptation to pro-EU social imperialism, the L5I neglects to point out that the EU is *not* a federation of equal countries; rather it is a proto-state dominated by a few imperialist powers (especially Germany in tandem with France) and while including a number of oppressed and exploited semi-colonial countries. By semi-colonies Marxists understand countries which, although they formally constitute independent states, are in reality economically dominated and exploited by imperialist corporations and are politically dependent on the great powers.⁵⁴

From a Marxist point of view, more than half of the EU member states (all the countries of Eastern Europe [formerly part of the Soviet-Stalinist bloc] as well as Greece, Cyprus, Ireland, and Malta) can be characterized as semi-colonies, these are home to more than ¼ of the total EU population. The arrogant supremacy of the EU Troika in Greece and its forcing the sale of the country to foreign banks and corporations is probably the most renowned example of imperialist exploitation and oppression by the EU towards its semi-colonial countries in recent years.⁵⁵

Remarkably, in all its articles on the EU, the L5I hardly mentions the fact that the EU is to a considerable extent composed of semi-colonial countries. This neglect is presumably intended to draw the reader's attention away from the following dilemma: If a quarter of the population in the EU lives in semi-colonial countries, then the comrades would have to admit that, in these cases, they are dealing with oppressed peoples. From this admission would follow that the L5I comrades must seriously deal with the role of these oppressed peoples in an imperialist confederation like the European Union. Furthermore, they would have to deal with the role of the imperialist countries in the EU and their relations with their semi-colonial "partners." By itself, any such a serious examination would make it impossible for them to reach the conclusions they have on tactics concerning the EU.

But instead of making a clear Marxist characterization

of the EU and calling the current national oppression within this confederation by name, the L5I leadership prefers all possible descriptions and euphemisms ("*center - periphery*", etc.). At all costs they must avoid drawing the conclusions for the anti-imperialist tactics dictated by such a clear characterization – namely, to support the struggle for shaking off imperialist domination within the EU, which would unavoidably necessitate the raising of the slogan for an exit from the EU.

But, unlike the national-reformist Plan B supporters, we Marxists combine such an exit-slogan for the semi-colonial EU countries with a socialist perspective of a workers' government.⁵⁶

e) Is It True that Trotsky Advised the Working Class to Favor Remaining in an Imperialist Pan-European Confederation?

We have already mentioned above a quote by Trotsky that is used by the L5I leadership to justify its turn to the right. As a longtime militant of our movement, I cannot personally help but smile when I see my ex-comrades citing this quotation. In 1984, our movement published in one of our journals the entire article by Trotsky from which this quotation is taken. The article appeared in the context of and subsequent to our resolution on the EU in which we justified our revolutionary defeatist position.⁵⁷

In a separate preface to Trotsky's article, we covered, among other things, the slogan of unification of Europe. Unlike the present leadership of the L5I, we saw then that Trotsky's article in fact confirms our traditional position, namely to reject supporting either a call to join or remain within the EU on the one hand or to call for an exit from the union on the other hand. Today, the L5I leadership wants to exploit the cited quote from Trotsky as evidence to justify its opportunistic turn to the right, without even bothering to explain how previously we, all of us, saw exactly the same article as justification of our revolutionary defeatist position!

But let us put aside the intricacies of the history of our movement and turn to the interpretation of Trotsky's article itself. This is not the place to discuss in detail the development of Lenin and Trotsky's attitude to the slogan calling for a United States of Europe, and for this we refer the reader to another document which we published a number of years ago.⁵⁸ Rather, here we limit ourselves to the observation that, at that time, Lenin correctly rejected the slogan of the United States of Europe because it was "*either utopian or reactionary*" – that is, either it is an illusory demand for a peaceful, equal Europe on a capitalist basis, or it is a reactionary slogan understood as an imperialist confederation. At that time Lenin did not envision the possibility of developing this slogan to one called for a United *Socialist* States of Europe. Similarly, Trotsky didn't envision this either, which is why his slogan calling for a *Republican United States of Europe* – regardless of their far-sighted and progressive core idea on the political and economic unification of the continent – was *objectively* wrong for the very reasons given by Lenin, which we just cited. As we noted in the preface to the above-mentioned article by Trotsky which we republished in 1984, at the time he originally wrote it, Trotsky had not yet broken with the tendency to objectivist processism. It was only later that

Figure 2: Strikes in Europa 1990-1999 and 2000-2009 ⁵²

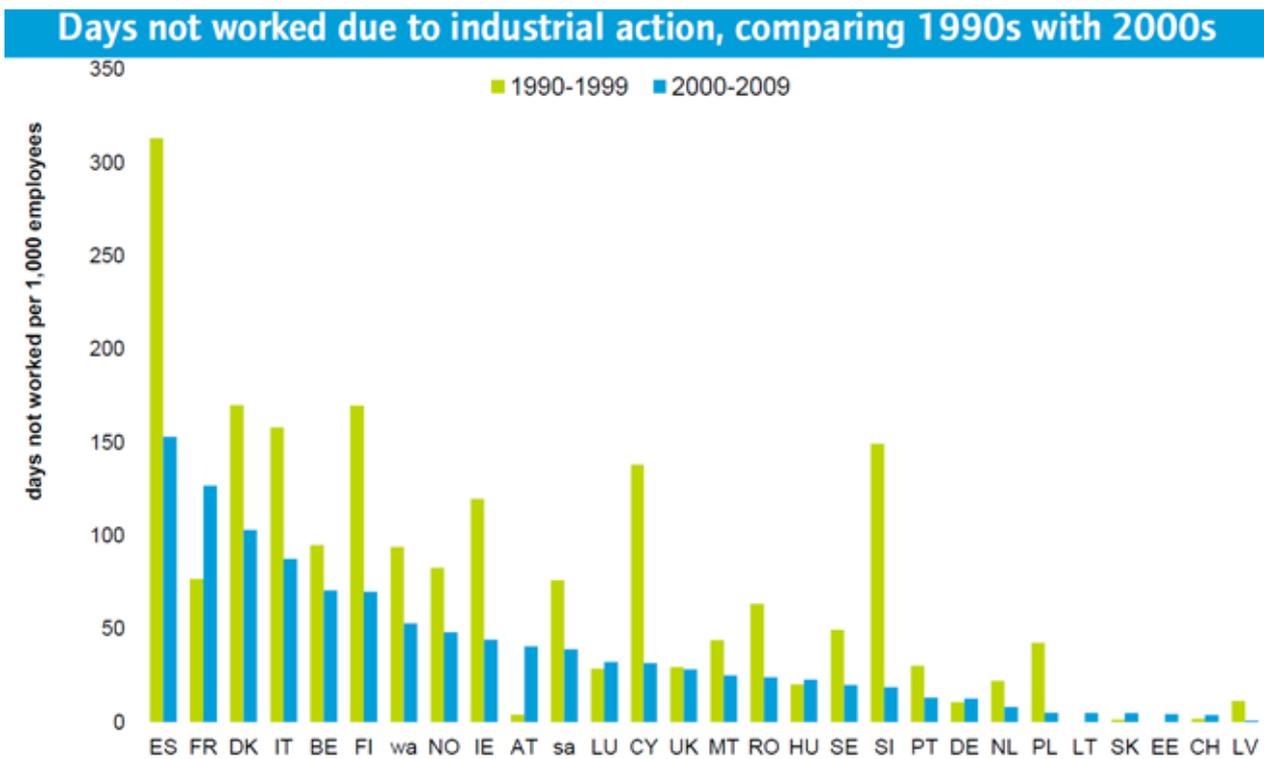


Figure 3: Strikes in Europa 2009-2015 ⁵³



Trotsky combined the slogan of European unification with the proletarian seizure of power, and in 1923 he won over the Comintern for the slogan of the *United Socialist States of Europe*.

Regardless of all this, the current interpretation of Trotsky's quote by the L5I leadership is (and this is probably the most important point in the entire issue) to put it mildly, outrageous. Naturally, Trotsky rejected then, as we do today, praising the imperialist nation state as an alternative to a European imperialist confederation. And, of course, he saw the unification of the continent by the proletariat as an alternative to an imperialist-dominated Europe. Had the L5I leadership been content with such an interpretation, they wouldn't have become so embroiled in theoretical nonsense.

But, unfortunately, they are zealously motivated to find a "Marxist" justification for their pro-EU position, and therefore have boldly dared to reinterpret the Marxist classics. They were better advised to have let this alone, because the result of their machinations is nothing less than a public ridicule of Trotsky.

To quote again from their article, the comrades of L5I polemicize against us as follows: "*The Revolutionary Communist International Tendency (RCIT) has managed a theoretical feat by applying the military tactics of revolutionary defeatism, relevant for cases where two imperialist camps are pitted against each other and so both are led to defeat, in this political question. As if you can react to a policy issue where there is only a Yes and No by saying that this is all crap and*

you simply abstain." So, in fact, they are claiming that it is methodologically incorrect to tie a political issue, such as the relationship of an imperialist confederation with an imperialist nation state, with the military tactics of revolutionary defeatism. Can it be that the L5I comrades have forgotten that Trotsky wrote the article, from which they themselves quote, in 1916, i.e., in the middle of the First World War? The war saturated *all* political issues with the military tactic of revolutionary defeatism, indeed no political issue could be separated from the great conflagration. Could it possibly have escaped the attention of the L5I comrades that Trotsky's article discussed the question of the unification of Europe under imperialist domination – to make it more concrete – that would be the result of the victory of one of the two camps in World War I? The L5I leadership completely and unabashedly distorted Trotsky's position as a means of justifying their own pitiful support for a country's remaining within the imperialist EU. Do the comrades seriously want us to believe that, at that time, in the case of a referendum to remain or exit from such an imperialist confederation – let us use Belgium as an example, which was then occupied by Germany – Trotsky would have called for socialists in Belgium to vote for remaining in an Empire dominated by Germany?! Yet this is precisely the ramifications of their corrupted reasoning; otherwise the use of the Trotsky quote by the L5I leadership would make no sense at all. Poor Trotsky, who is so misrepresented by his self-styled followers as a political clown!

New Book!

Michael Pröbsting: Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice

Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *BUILDING THE REVOLUTIONARY PARTY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE*. The book's subtitle is: *Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. The book is in English-language. It contains four chapters on 148 pages and includes 42 pictures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who serves as the International Secretary of the RCIT.

The following paragraphs are the back cover text of the book which give an overview of its content.

A few months ago, our movement commemorated its 25th anniversary. In the summer of 1989 our predecessor organization, the League for a Revolutionary Communist International (LRCI) was founded as a democratic-centralist international tendency based on an elaborated program. The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) continues the revolutionary tradition of the LRCI. Below we give an overview of our history, an evaluation of its achievements as well as mistakes, and a summary of the lessons for the struggles ahead. This book summarizes our theoretical and practical experience of the past

25 years.

In Chapter I we outline a summary of the Bolshevik- Communists' theoretical conception of the role of the revolutionary party and its relation to the working class. In Chapter II we elaborate on the essential characteristics of revolutionary party respective of the pre-party organization. In Chapter III we deal with the history of our movement – the RCIT and its predecessor organization. Finally, in Chapter IV we outline the main lessons of our 25 years of organized struggle for building a Bolshevik party and their meaning for our future work.

You can find the contents and download the book for free at <http://www.thecommunists.net/theory/rcit-party-building/> ■

**Building the
Revolutionary Party
in Theory
and Practice**

Looking Back and Ahead after
25 Years of organized Struggle for Bolshevism



By Michael Pröbsting

Published by the Revolutionary Communist International Tendency

V. WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE POLITICAL TURN TO THE RIGHT OF THE L5I ON THE EU ISSUE?

The question of tactics on the issue of EU membership is tremendously important, because the theoretical justification of the L5I leadership contains arguments with consequences extending far beyond the EU question.

The arguments of the L5I leadership to vote for Britain to remain within the EU – the alleged advantages for the development of productive forces and for the international consciousness of the working class – are, of course, arguments calling for other non-EU European countries to join the EU (e.g., in Norway, Switzerland, Iceland, Moldova, Belarus, etc.).

And why, if so, should the new method of the L5I leadership be limited only to Europe? Such limitations cannot be justified by even one logical argument. It follows, therefore, that the L5I comrades could see themselves justified in agitating for Mexico to remain part of NAFTA, dominated by US imperialism. Furthermore, as a natural extension of this right-opportunistic logic, the L5I leadership could argue for the extension of NAFTA to other Latin American countries. Certainly, this would result in more favorable conditions for the development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class, à la EU. If the L5I in Europe justifies expanding the EU with such arguments, why not apply the same method to other continents?!

The same opportunistic logic would then also lead the L5I to support the various free trade agreements between the EU and the US (TTIP), between the EU and Canada (CETA), between the US and several Asian and Latin American countries (TPP), or between China and a number of Asian countries (RCEP) – of course extremely “critical” support and naturally in conjunction with their call for “international class struggle.”⁵⁹ According to their logic, such free trade agreements would “objectively” promote closer international integration of national economies and the working class! These are extremely concrete and important questions, as these free trade agreements are currently under negotiation, and MPs from the workers’ movement must take a position on them. If the L5I leadership rejects these free trade agreements, then it would have to explain why in one case it is advocating membership in an international political and economic organization but in another case not.

Likewise, the L5I leadership would have to reject the exit of countries from the *World Trade Organization* (WTO), and would have to advocate joining that imperialist tool of oppression. This question would also be quite concrete, particularly when the growing rivalry between the US and China threatens to tear it apart.

All these examples show that the new position of the L5I on the EU and its justification inevitably drive them in the direction of social-imperialism. Despite their anti-imperialist rhetoric, they would support the concrete central projects of the EU and other imperialist powers –

in the name of the “*development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class.*” Ultimately, the group would degenerate to becoming “critical” (of course) cheerleaders for the imperialist powers and their expansionism. What a sad end for a group that once embodied a proud revolutionary tradition!

It is very likely that the L5I leadership – frightened by the consequences of their right-wing turn based on opportunistic calculations – will indignantly reject calling to vote for the free trade agreements or WTO membership. But, if so, it will not be possible for them to explain why they use double standards regarding the EU and other such economic agreements.

Finally, Marxists know – and even the L5I leadership should not have forgotten this – the principle of the Prussian military theorist von Clausewitz, often cited by Lenin, according to which the “*war is nothing but the continuation of politics by other means.*” If the alleged advantages of larger imperialist countries and business associations for the development of productive forces and of the international consciousness of the working class are actually so important for the L5I leadership, so much so that they are in favor of EU membership – then why not support achieving such greater political and economic state organizations by military means? Of course, the comrades will reject this as an “*outrageous insinuation,*” and we do not for a moment doubt in the least their honorable intentions. But that does not change the objective logic of their position by means of which they unfurl the presumed advantages for the development of productive forces and the international consciousness of the working class and wave them above the political significance of the “tactical” support to imperialist states and confederations. Anyone who extends even a little finger to the program of social imperialism is inevitably caught in the net of its political chasms.



VI. THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE POLITICAL RIGHT-WING TURN OF L5I

Until now we have analyzed in detail and refuted the arguments of L5I leadership, and have pointed out the consequences of its turn to the right. In this last chapter we will address the theoretical foundations of their arguments.

a) Opportunistic Belief in the Potential for Progress of Decaying Capitalism – a Break with Lenin’s Theory of Imperialism

We have seen that the L5I leadership advocates EU membership by arguing that this would be beneficial for the development of productive forces and “to increase the productivity of humanity.”

Elsewhere we have reported that, among the leadership of L5I, there have always been controversial discussions about Lenin’s understanding of the theory of imperialism. As such, when we still belonged to that organization, we were repeatedly forced to struggle against the position of various L5I comrades who expressed skepticism about the tendency of capitalist stagnation as being characteristic of the imperialist epoch; who doubted whether imperialism is really the last stage of capitalism; and who, in the first decade of the new millennium, rejected recognizing a stagnation of the productive forces and who refused – following the opening of the new historic period in 2008 – to affirm an objective decline of the productive forces. Our own orthodox stance was condemned by our inner-party opponents as “catastrophism” and “dogmatism,” and it this enmity obliged us to invest great effort (involving our reluctant agreement to make various deletions in draft documents) to win over majorities for our positions.⁶⁰

Our ultimate expulsion from the L5I in 2011 marked the start of that organization’s descent from Marxism into centrism. This was also manifested in their “De-Leninization” of Lenin’s theory of imperialism, which is the “theoretical” base they devised which hides behind their latest justifications for their rightward turn in the question of the EU.

All of the above is clear from the arguments put forth by the L5I leadership in defense of their advocacy of EU membership in the interest of the development of productivity. The comrades have repeatedly pointed out that an inherent law of capitalism is that the productive forces outgrow the borders of the nation state and that, therefore, any attempt to return to the isolated nation state would be reactionary. Now, of course, it is a truism for Marxists that modern productive forces strive beyond the boundaries of the nation state and towards global exchange, and that any reverting back to the nation state is reactionary.

However, it is *also* a truism for Marxists that capitalism in its final stage – the era of imperialism – is no longer able to support an organic, comprehensive growth of the world’s productive forces, very much in contrast to what was the

case during its epochs of ascent.

Or to formulate it more precisely: on the one hand, capitalism continues to advance technologically, and these advances manifest themselves in various material aspects of the forces of production; but at the same time it utilizes the benefits from this technological progress in order to:

- * increase the exploitation and oppression of the working class and oppressed peoples;
- * exacerbate the inter-imperialist rivalries and make such crises more destructive; and finally
- * accelerate the transformation of the forces of production to destructive forces, thereby worsening the destruction of the environment, increasing the spread of wars, and augmenting those dynamics which could bring about a new world war.

That is why – in contrast to our opponents inside and outside of the LRCI/L5I – we have *always* defended Lenin’s thesis on the tendency towards stagnation which is inherent to imperialism.

This becomes clear when we remember the Marxist understanding of productive forces which includes not only the technique and the quantity of goods produced, but also and, in particular, the development of the working class and humanity. We addressed this issue more fully in an article published in the L5I’s German-language theoretical journal “*Revolutionary Marxism*” of 2007.

There we gave the following definition of the productive forces: “Let’s first recapitulate what Marx and Marxists actually understand by productive forces. Productive forces include both the material means and results of production – that is means of production (machines, etc) and goods – and the people who operate the means of production and, for this purpose enter into certain forms of the social division of labour.”⁶¹

In that document, we also drew attention to the dramatic dangers to the livelihood of humanity which result from capitalism’s increasing transformation of the productive forces into destructive forces. Marx himself insightfully wrote:

“Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology, and the combining together of various processes into a social whole, only by sapping the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the labourer.”⁶²

And we summarized our understanding in the following concluding paragraph:

“In summary, by the tendency of the productive forces to stagnate Marxists mean the following developments:

* Capitalism’s increasing inability to transform technological innovation and economic growth into social progress for humanity. On the contrary, capitalism increasingly undermines the possibilities of human progress.

* The dynamic of decreasing growth both in the production of commodities as well as in the accumulation of capital.

* Increasing instability and the tendency of world capitalism to spawn crises, both economic and political.”⁶³

And later we wrote in another work, and at that time the

Table 11: The development of global Gross Domestic Product, 1960-2010 (in absolute numbers as well as average annual growth) ⁶⁶

<i>Global GDP in absolute numbers</i>	<i>Average annual growth rate (5 years)</i>	<i>Average annual growth rate (10 years)</i>
1960: 7279		
1965: 9420	1960-1965: +5.88%	
1970: 12153	1965-1970: +5.80%	1960-1970: +5.84%
1975: 14598	1970-1975: +4.02%	
1980: 17652	1975-1980: +4.18%	1970-1980: +4.09%
1985: 20275	1980-1985: +2.97%	
1990: 24284	1985-1990: +3.95%	1980-1990: +3.46%
1995: 27247	1990-1995: +2.44%	
2000: 32213	1995-2000: +3.64%	1990-2000: +3.04%
2005: 36926	2000-2005: +2.93%	
2010: 41365	2005-2010: +2.40%	2005-2010: +2.66%

Legend: GDP figures are in billions of constant 2000 US dollars. The growth figures are the respective averages of the five ten years cycle (our calculations).

Figure 4: The development of the world economy 1970-2010, Gross capital formation and annual percentage growth of world GDP ⁶⁷



Legend: Gross capital formation (as a percentage of world GDP, thick gray line, left scale) and annual percentage growth of world GDP (dotted thin black line, right scale).

current L5I leaders agreed with us that:

*"In particular, increasing socialization and internationalization demonstrate the historical obsolescence of capitalism and, due to the fetters of private property, its inherent hindering of rich and sustainable development of the forces of production. In the epoch of imperialism, the forces of production tend to stagnate – a law that was less valid in periods atypical for this epoch, like the long post-war boom. But in those periods which are typical for this epoch this law remains fully valid and manifests itself in those historical periods in which the contradictions of capitalism erupt in all their explosiveness, as in 1914-1948 or in the period which began in 2007 and which is characterized by a decline of the forces of production."*⁶⁴

We have shown both in the previous chapters of this essay, as well as in other documents, how the living conditions of the working class and humanity have deteriorated in recent years – in Europe and worldwide.

But even regarding the class interests of the bourgeoisie, i.e., levels of production, capital accumulation and productivity, we have also demonstrated numerous times in the past that, in recent decades, the development of capitalism is characterized by a definite tendency toward stagnation and decline. For an elaboration of this point, we refer the reader to different works which we have previously published – some during our tenure in the LRCI/L5I, and others, in more recent years, in the context of the RCIT.⁶⁵

Here we shall limit ourselves to three tasks: citing statistics published by the United Nations regarding the development of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1960 and 2010 (Table 11); giving figures for the development of global Gross Fixed Capital Formation and GDP in the period between 1970 and 2010 (Figure 4); and referencing data about the long-term development of labor productivity between 1950 and 2013 (Figure 5).

Both Table 11 and Figures 4 and 5 reveal unequivocally the clear downward trend of world capitalist production and accumulation in the past decades. In Table 11, we can demonstrate, using official figures from the World Bank, that the growth of global production gradually declined over the past five decades, from + 5.88% in the 1960s to + 2.66% in the first decade of the new millennium, and that the growth figures for the current decade will inevitably be even lower.

As we have repeatedly elaborated in other works on the world economy, the driving factor behind this decline of capitalist economic growth is the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, just as Marx pointed out in *Capital*. (See Figure 6)

As we have demonstrated above, the L5I leadership maintains that the augmentation of imperialist confederations like the EU is vital to boosting the development capitalism's forces of production. Indeed, it is true that, in the period of globalization during recent decades, world trade and foreign investment have witnessed a tremendous expansion, just as we have shown in our study on globalization.⁷⁰ But, contrary to the (opportunistic) optimism of the L5I regarding capitalism's potential for progress, this huge expansion of trade and foreign investment during the period of globalization did *not* result in the accelerated growth of capitalist value production – to say nothing of an improvement in the living conditions of workers and the inhabitants of

the oppressed world. On the contrary, all the figures for the world economy in recent decades show that the rise of globalization has been accompanied by a decline in economic growth.

How is this possible? Simply, the explanation is that the internationalization of production has *not* contributed or, if so, only marginally, to the increase of the world's forces of production. Instead, the calculus of imperialism dictates that, for their own economic well-being, the respective monopoly bourgeoisies of the imperialist states both individually and collectively, promote and utilize globalization in order to intensify exploitation of their local working class as well as the semi-colonial world, in doing so increase their competitiveness vis. à vis. one another, and ultimately advance the destruction of productive forces (in bankruptcies, economic crises, wars and other military operations, including the huge stockpiling and sale of non-productive sophisticated weaponry). The inevitable result is increasing impoverishment for the mass of humanity, and the existential imperative of imperialism to more intensively oppress the masses.

It is, therefore, no coincidence that Lenin spoke of the imperialist epoch as the era of "*moribund capitalism*" and pointed to the tendency to stagnation (which of course in no way excludes temporary upswings):

*„The fact that imperialism is parasitic or decaying capitalism is manifested first of all in the tendency to decay, which is characteristic of every monopoly under the system of private ownership of the means of production. The difference between the democratic-republican and the reactionary-monarchist imperialist bourgeoisie is obliterated precisely because they are both rotting alive (which by no means precludes an extraordinarily rapid development of capitalism in individual branches of industry, in individual countries, and in individual periods).“*⁷¹

And it is, therefore, hardly surprising that in the EU – regardless of the massive expansion of the continental trade and cross-border investments – there has been neither an acceleration of growth in production nor in productivity. On the contrary, both have declined!

What the L5I leadership obviously forgets, or perhaps unconsciously desires to block out, is the classic thesis of Lenin and Trotsky, that the productive forces in the epoch of imperialism (i.e., of decaying capitalism) tend to stagnation, while in the pre-imperialist epoch they were still growing. If this were not the case, and the thesis of the L5I leadership could somehow be linked to the economic and political reality of this current epoch, then the huge internationalization of trade that we have witnessed during the last three decades of globalization should have resulted in the acceleration of the productive forces and the fastest economic growth in history. But, as we have shown, precisely the opposite is true! We live in one of the most pronounced stagnation periods of capitalism!

Moreover, it has been in the EU during the last 30 years that the internationalization of trade and production has increased the most dramatically. But it is precisely in this period that growth has declined most precipitously! Around the world, many countries which weren't subject to such a massive degree of internationalization as was the case for the EU states, experienced stronger growth. If so, clearly, the advancement of EU integration has had no particular positive effect on the development of productive

Figure 5: Labor productivity performance in a long term comparative perspective, 1950-2013⁶⁸
GDP per hour worked; annual average growth

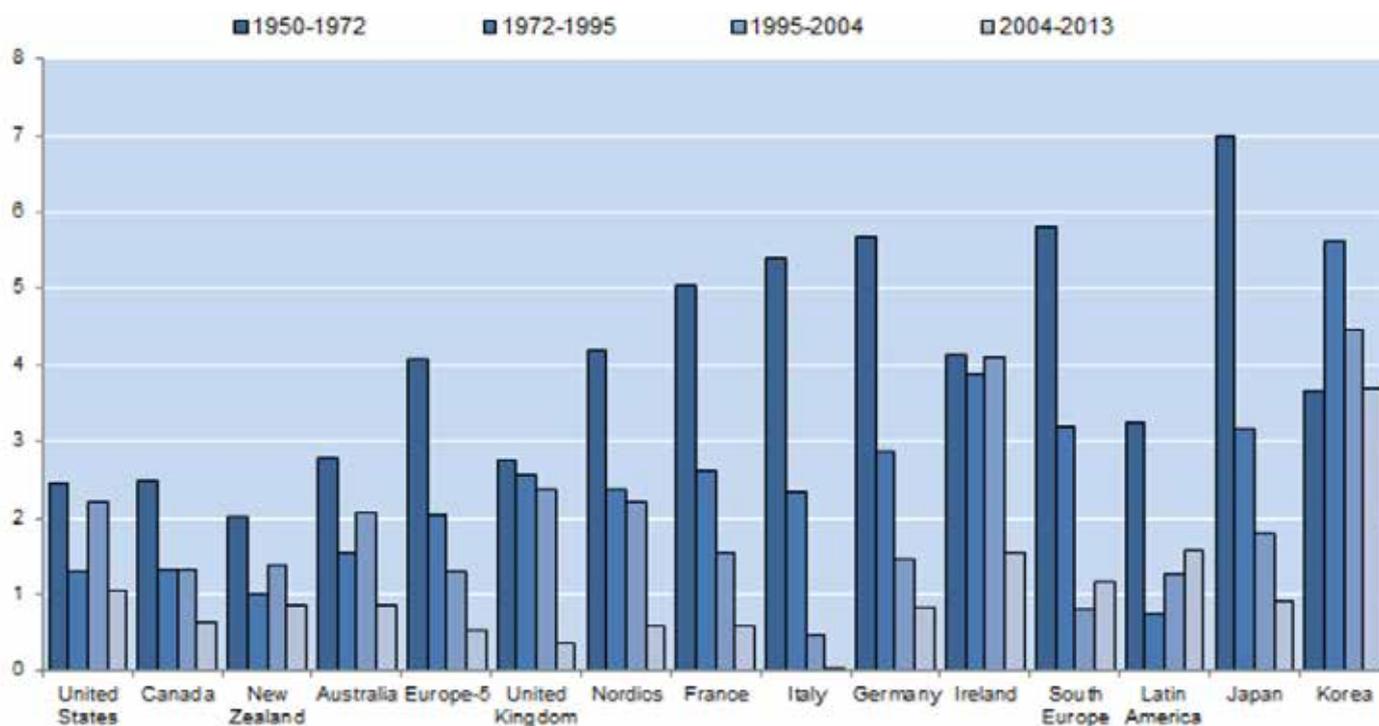
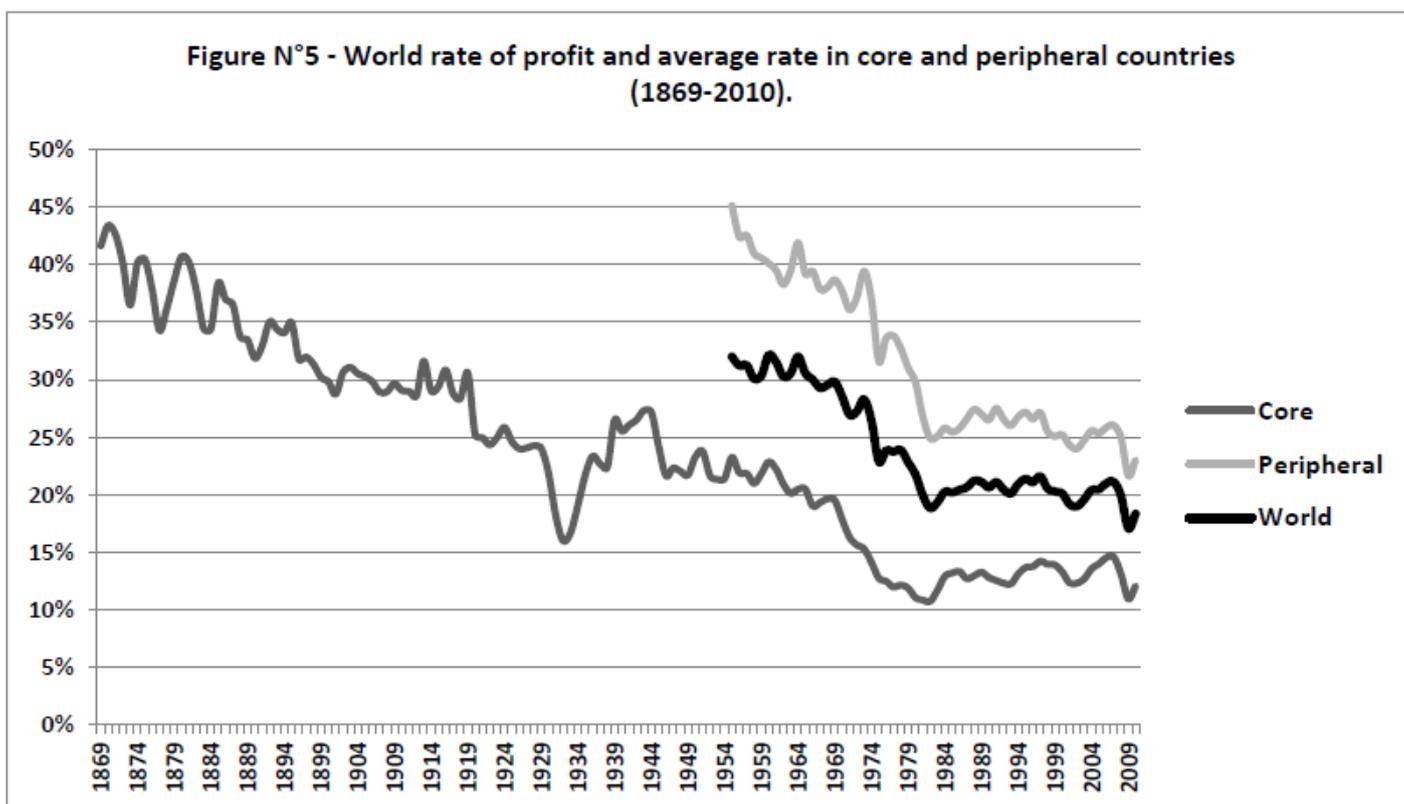


Figure 6: World rate of profit and average rate in imperialist and semic-colonial countries (1869-2010).⁶⁹



forces!

What explanation does the L5I leadership have for this contradiction? How, given the data, can it *theoretically* justify its desire to convince the working class to give “critical” support the central project of the European monopoly bourgeoisie in the name of the “*development of productive forces*”?

So who, then, actually *does* benefit from the integration of the EU and increased globalization? As we implied just above, the answer is: *the imperialist monopolies*. It is they who are responsible for the acceleration of the integration of the EU and the globalization of the world economy, including all its free trade agreements. That is the reason that, in the past, we have produced the following equation to encapsulate the essence of globalization: *Globalization = Internationalization + monopolization*.

Again, we can only surmise that the L5I leadership has obviously either forgotten or is defensively blocking out that, in the age of imperialism – and especially in the recent decades characterized by global crisis-ridden development – *an organic development of the productive forces is no longer possible*. This stagnation can also *not* be ameliorated by the creation of larger markets like that of the EU. No, internationalization of the productive forces in the epoch of imperialism does *not mean expansion and growth of the productive forces*. Rather, first and foremost its significance is the *monopolization* of the forces of production, and the concomitant expansion of the power and dominance of monopolies on the world’s political economy and thus on the individual nation states.

This is why Lenin, in his theory of imperialism, was absolutely correct when he identified the dominance of monopolies as the central characteristic of the present epoch: “*The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism.*”⁷²

Excuse: The Marxist Classics on the Internationalization of the Productive Forces in the Imperialist Epoch

Only unabashed social-democratic charlatans think in terms of winning over the working class so that they can be exploited by the corporations for their drive to expand monopolistically controlled markets. By contrast, Marxists, vehemently reject any such support, without at the same time giving any support whatsoever to that faction of the imperialist bourgeoisie which is strongly-oriented towards the nation state and the domestic market.

As early as 1888 – i.e., before the beginning of the imperialist epoch – Engels noted that the benefits of free trade, critically supported by both he and Marx in the mid-19th century during the epoch of rising capitalism, were increasingly dwindling:

“The question of Free Trade or Protection moves entirely within the bounds of the present system of capitalist production, and has, therefore, no direct interest for us socialists who want to do away with that system. (...) If a country nowadays accepts Free Trade, it will certainly not do so to please the socialists. It will do so because Free trade has become a necessity for the industrial capitalists. But if it should reject Free Trade and stick to Protection, in order to cheat the socialists out of the expected social catastrophe, that will not hurt the prospects of socialism

*in the least. (...) In the meantime, there is no help for it: you must go on developing the capitalist system, you must accelerate the production, accumulation, and centralization of capitalist wealth, and, along with it, the production of a revolutionary class of laborers. Whether you try the Protectionist or the Free Trade will make no difference in the end, and hardly any in the length of the respite left to you until the day when that end will come.”*⁷³

With the beginning of the era of imperialism, things changed fundamentally. In their brochure *Socialism and War* written by the Bolsheviks in 1915, they emphasize that the development of productive forces was no longer the justification for the internationalization of production and trade, but “*the pursuit of monopolies for conquest of territories*”:

*„Imperialism is the highest stage in the development of capitalism, reached only in the twentieth century. Capitalism now finds that the old national states, without whose formation it could not have overthrown feudalism, are too cramped for it. Capitalism has developed concentration to such a degree that entire branches of industry are controlled by syndicates, trusts and associations of capitalist multimillionaires and almost the entire globe has been divided up among the ‘lords of capital’ either in the form of colonies, or by entangling other countries in thousands of threads of financial exploitation. Free trade and competition have been superseded by a striving towards monopolies, the seizure of territory for the investment of capital and as sources of raw materials, and so on. From the liberator of nations, which it was in the struggle against feudalism, capitalism in its imperialist stage has turned into the greatest oppressor of nations. Formerly progressive, capitalism has become reactionary; it has developed the forces of production to such a degree that mankind is faced with the alternative of adopting socialism or of experiencing years and even decades of armed struggle between the ‘Great’ Powers for the artificial preservation of capitalism by means of colonies, monopolies, privileges and national oppression of every kind.”*⁷⁴

Hence, as Lenin wrote in his study of imperialism, the difference between smaller and bigger markets, between Free Trade or Protection, “*only give rise to insignificant variations in the form of monopolies*”.

*„Official science tried by a conspiracy of silence, to kill the works of Marx, who by a theoretical and historical analysis of capitalism had proved that free competition gives rise to the concentration of production, which, in turn, at a certain stage of development leads to monopoly. Today, monopoly has become a fact. Economists are writing mountains of books in which they describe the diverse manifestations of monopoly, and continue to declare in chorus that ‘Marxism is refuted’. But facts are stubborn things, as the English proverb says, and they have to be reckoned with, whether we like it or not. The facts show that differences between capitalist countries, e.g., in the matter of protection or free trade, only give rise to insignificant variations in the form of monopolies or in the moment of their appearance; and that the rise of monopolies, as the result of the concentration of production, is a general and fundamental law of the present stage of development of capitalism.”*⁷⁵

In his preface to Nikolai Bukharin’s book “*Imperialism and World Economy*,” Lenin expressed a similar idea:

„In all this it is extremely important to bear in mind that this change has been brought about in no other way but the immediate development, expansion and continuation of the most profound and basic trends in capitalism and in commodity production

in general. These main trends, which have been in evidence all over the world for centuries, are the growth of exchange and the growth of large-scale production. At a definite stage in the development of exchange, at a definite stage in the growth of large-scale production, namely, at the stage which was attained towards the turn of the century, exchange so internationalised economic relations and capital, and large-scale production assumed such proportions that monopoly began to replace free competition. Monopoly associations of entrepreneurs, trusts, instead of enterprises, 'freely' competing with each other—at home and in relations between the countries—became typical. Finance capital took over as the typical 'lord' of the world; it is particularly mobile and flexible, particularly interknit at home and internationally, and particularly impersonal and divorced from production proper; it lends itself to concentration with particular ease, and has been concentrated to an unusual degree already, so that literally a few hundred multimillionaires and millionaires control the destiny of the world." ⁷⁶

Bukharin's book, in which, again, the above appeared in the preface, drew attention to the characteristic tendency of the great imperialist powers to expand beyond their borders and to incorporate smaller countries – a development which has taken place in the European Union.

„The war, which was bound to break out because it had been prepared by the entire course of events, could not fail to exercise a colossal influence on world economic life. It has caused a complete change in every country and in the relations between countries, in the 'national economies' and in world economy. Together with a truly barbarous squandering of production forces, with the destruction of the material means of production and of the living labour power, together with the devitalisation of economy through monstrous socially harmful expenditures, the war, like a gigantic crisis, has intensified the fundamental tendencies of capitalist development; it has hastened to an extraordinary degree the growth of finance capitalist relations and the centralisation of capital on a world scale. The centralising character of the present war (imperialist centralisation) is beyond doubt. First of all, there is a collapse of independent small states whether of high industrial development (horizontal concentration and centralisation) or of an agrarian type (vertical centralisation); the latter have also absorbed some of the weaker (and similarly backward) formations — which, however, is comparatively unimportant. The independent existence of Belgium, a highly developed country with a colonial policy of its own, is becoming doubtful; the process of a centralising redivision of territory in the Balkans is perfectly obvious; it is to be expected that the tangle of colonial possessions in Africa will be straightened out. On the other hand, we witness a very strong rapprochement (in the form of a lasting agreement between syndicates) of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Whatever the actual outcome of the war, it is already clear (and could have been assumed a priori) that the political map will be changed in the direction of greater state homogeneity—this being exactly the way in which the imperialistic "nationality states" (Nationalitätenstaaten) grow." ⁷⁷

Naturally, Bukharin did not conclude from this that class conscious workers should lend any support to such tendencies. According to him, socialists should instead of "defending or extending the boundaries of the bourgeois state" – i.e., to translate this into modern language – neither support the EU nor the nation state, but exclusively fight for the "slogan of abolishing state boundaries and merging all

the peoples into one Socialist family."

„The war severs the last chain that binds the workers to the masters, their slavish submission to the imperialist state. The last limitation of the proletariat's philosophy is being overcome: its clinging to the narrowness of the national state, its patriotism. The interests of the moment, the temporary advantage accruing to it from the imperialist robberies and from its connections with the imperialist state, become of secondary importance compared with the lasting and general interests of the class as a whole, with the idea of a social revolution of the international proletariat which overthrows the dictatorship of finance capital with an armed hand, destroys its state apparatus and builds up a new power, a power of the workers against the bourgeoisie. In place of the idea of defending or extending the boundaries of the bourgeois state that bind the productive forces of world economy hand and foot, this power advances the slogan of abolishing state boundaries and merging all the peoples into one Socialist family. In this way the proletariat, after painful searching, succeeds in grasping its true interests that lead it through revolution to Socialism." ⁷⁸

In the same spirit, Lenin warned revolutionaries to avoid the typically centrist mistake committed by the German social democrat Karl Kautsky and his supporters, who raised the possibility that progressive developments in the interest of the working class are possible within the capitalist system:

„There is evidence that even today the indisputable fact that capitalism is progressive, when compared with the semi-philistine 'paradise' of free competition, and that imperialism and its final victory over 'peaceful' capitalism in the leading countries of the world are inevitable — that this fact is still capable of producing an equally great and varied number of political and apolitical mistakes and misadventures." ⁷⁹

Marxists concluded at that time that every serious workers' party must not give any "critical" support to imperialist monopolization.

All this, of course not surprisingly for Marxists, is because all these tendencies spring from capitalism's inherent logic driven by the profit motive towards maximizing capital accumulation. The working class cannot fight against this development by reversing this trend and returning to economic models focusing on the nation state boundaries and domestic markets (as promoted by various petty-bourgeois anti-globalization activists). On the contrary, the working class must take action against the international monopolies by means of the international class struggle and advocate an international revolution and the establishment of a world socialist republic based on the internationalization of the forces of production.

However, this struggle requires not only a rejection of narrow-minded national anti-globalization activists, but also a *complete rejection* of all forms of support for the projects of the imperialist monopolies and great powers who aim to expand their power over the entire world market and entirely dominate world politics!

But the support of the L5I leadership for advancing EU integration, their evaluation of this project viewed through rose-colored glasses, and their superficial understanding of the consequences on the productive forces is diametrically opposed to what the struggle requires. Naturally, it involves very "critical" support for the prevailing policies of the monopolies and their imperialist governments. But how could it have possibly escaped the attention of the L5I

comrades that, by spreading propaganda for Britain to remain inside the EU, they stood shoulder to shoulder on the same side of the barricades together with virtually the entire big bourgeoisie of London and across the continent.

In the past, we unreservedly agreed with the LRCI/L5I's then-orthodox Marxist position on this issue. In 1992, both we and they knew that the internationalization of the productive forces under the control of the capitalist monopolies – just as a return to the nation state – is by no means in the interests of the working class. Thus, revolutionaries cannot give either of these options any “critical” support. This was stated very clearly in a resolution on the enlargement of the European Union:

„The international working class has nothing in principle to fear from the centralization and organization of production on a continental scale; such a mode of organization is intrinsically superior to isolated national production, which is one of the elements of restraining the unfettered development of the forces of production. However, a precondition for such continental organisation being progressive is that it should take place under the rule of the international working class. It is not excluded that capitalism can unite Europe, but it will only lead to increasing exploitation, oppression, competition and, ultimately, war.“⁸⁰

Finally, let us deal with one additional argument of the L5I leadership. As noted, above the comrades justify their “critical” support for the EU by stating that the productive forces have become too large to be restrained by the border of the national state. As we have said several times, this is absolutely true. But, in their eagerness to “critically” support the EU, the comrades have overlooked the following important point: The productive forces with their global production chains, their global trade, etc., have become today – far more than in the time of Lenin and Trotsky – not only too big for the boundaries of the nation state, but also for the borders of the European Union! So from this point of view, too, there is no justification for Marxists to support the EU.

b) Economist Reinterpretation of Questions of the Political Class Struggle: the Question of the Nature of the EU

The central failure of the L5I leadership is that it economically distorts a highly political question. They artificially transform a political issue through and through – should the working class live in a nation state (like Britain) which is dominated by the imperialist bourgeoisie or should it live in an imperialist confederation (like the EU) which is also dominated by the imperialist bourgeoisie? This political issue is transformed by the L5I leadership into a mere question of voting for the one of two options which would (ostensibly) be “objectively” better for the development of productive forces, i.e., whether larger or smaller states would (ostensibly) create “objectively” better conditions for the development of an internationalist consciousness of the working class. This “de-politicization” of the EU question is nothing but an expression of objectivist and economic thinking – the transformation of a fundamental political question to one of primarily economic-technical tactics.

In this way, the L5I leadership is guilty of the very same error which both they and we have previously jointly criticized in Trotsky's method before 1917: his *objectivism*

and *processism*.

What exactly is the objectivist error of the L5I? It is that the comrades focus their analysis and the tactics derived from it on the “objective development of productive forces” instead of the eminently political character of the EU question. In doing so, they entirely place the “*objective development of productive forces*” in the forefront, and view *this* issue as the leitmotif for their political tactics, rather than the political struggle against both the imperialist nation state *and* the EU.

This objectivism is expressed in their hope that an internationalist consciousness of the working class could develop out of the existence of and membership in a larger EU (instead of the narrow limits of the nation state). It never occurs to them that the development of such political consciousness among the working class is totally unrelated to the *size* of a state or confederation. It is well known that the working class in imperialist Belgium has more class consciousness than those in the US, Japan or Russia. And the workers and peasants of Bolivia, Venezuela or South Africa – countries with comparatively fewer developed productive forces – have much more political consciousness (and more internationalism, as is demonstrated by the broad solidarity in South Africa for the Palestinian people) than the workers of Europe.

The L5I's objectivism is also manifested in its attributing proletarian class consciousness with the existence of a pan-European imperialist super-state, believing that the class struggle necessarily and inevitably experiences a setback when a country leaves the EU. Thus, the comrades “forget” that the highlights of the European class struggle during the last 100 years took place in periods where no integrated and “internationalized” EU existed at all (1917–23, 1934–37, 1943–47, 1968–76). Associating an internationalist class consciousness with the imperialist United States of Europe is simply a myth invented by the L5I leadership in order to justify its opportunist turn to the right.

In short, contrary to the illusion of the L5I leadership, class consciousness of the proletariat arises *not* from state borders and *not* from the development of productive forces, but is a consequence of the intervention of the revolutionary subject, of the living struggle of political forces of the various classes, of the organizations in the labor movement and their policies. In other words, class consciousness of the proletariat does *not* depend on the borders of the imperialist state, but on the struggle of the classes and their leaderships. If there have been problems and failures for the class struggle of the European proletariat in recent decades, it is *not* because of the borders between states, but because of the dramatic crisis of revolutionary leadership and the dominance of the treacherous reformist bureaucracy!

Moreover, the development of class consciousness is critically dependent on how large and how determined is the subjective factor fighting for the political independence of the working class from each, nationally-based fraction of the imperialist bourgeoisie and their social-imperialist lackeys – whether pro-EU or anti-EU – in the workers' movement.

In other words, the crucial factor is the *existence of a revolutionary party* which leads the working class in the inevitable class battles and which provides a consistent

program of class independence from all national and supranational great powers and from each fraction of the imperialist bourgeoisie.

Without being aware of it, via their position on the EU, the L5I leadership has delegated tasks of the revolutionary party – namely the enhancement of class consciousness – to the objective process. For Marxists, this is an entirely illegitimate posture!

A century has passed since the days when Trotsky did not understand the weaknesses of his pre-1917 position. To repeat the same methodological error today is far more unforgivable than the mistake of Trotsky then. Yet we know that Lenin was particularly mild in his judgment of Trotsky's mistakes. How then shall we judge today the failure of L5I leadership?!

The result of the opportunist tactics of the L5I leadership is a tendency to downplay the reactionary and imperialist character EU. Let's give an example: Their British comrades recently wrote: "*The EU has many genuine defects – its imposition of austerity on Greece, its [the EU, Ed.] undemocratic institutions should not be ignored. Corbyn was right to stand 100 per cent for Remain whilst at the same time criticising the EU.*"⁸¹

The choice of words here is revealing! Let's imagine for a moment that British Marxists would say that the imperialist nation state of Britain has "*genuine defects.*" Imagine that they would advocate "*to criticize*" this state but to remain in it (rather than smash it). It would become immediately clear that these are not Marxists, but social democratic opportunists who trivialize the deeply reactionary character of "*their*" imperialist state apparatus and merely speak of "*defects.*" Unfortunately, the British L5I comrades do not only praise the leader of the Labour Party (they often call him simply by his first name "Jeremy," as if he is "one of us"), but also adopt more and more the social democratic language!

It is, therefore, no coincidence that one hardly finds in L5I articles and statements the idea that Marxists stand for the "smashing" of the European Union through the European proletarian revolution. The European Union is nothing more than an enlarged, supra-national imperialist state apparatus – or, better formulated, a proto-state, a confederation in the process of formation. Underlying this is the, conscious or unconscious, idea that the EU can be reformed in the direction of socialism. But, in reality, not a single one of the EU institutions – not the EU Commission and the EU Council, not the European Central Bank, not the powerless EU Parliament, not the European Court, not the capitalist economic treaties, etc. – will be taken over by the working class. They must be all broken up and replaced by new institutions of the European federation of workers' republics.

c) Economist Reinterpretation of

Questions of the Political Class Struggle:

the Question of the Tactics of Revolutionary Defeatism

The L5I leaderships' lack of understanding of the inextricably political and economic nature of the question of EU membership is inevitably reflected in their political tactics – that is their call to remain within the imperialist EU.

In this context it is useful to remember the polemics of

Lenin against Kautsky where he repeatedly points out that the latter "*divorces imperialist politics from imperialist economics, he divorces monopoly in politics from monopoly in economics.*"⁸²

The L5I leadership, albeit differently than Kautsky, is also guilty of such a separation of monopolism in the economy and monopolism in politics. For them, the expansion of the EU as a capitalist economy and the expansion of the undemocratic EU institutions are two different things which can, therefore, be treated differently in tactics. As a result, the L5I leadership separates the alleged blessings of economic internationalization of the productive forces of European imperialism from the political institutions of European imperialism (the EU's proto-state apparatus).

In reality, such a separation is not possible. The enlargement of the EU economic area served primarily not the development of productive forces (as we have shown above) but the extension of the power of the monopolies. Hand in hand with this process, the power of the monopolies in politics has increased, which is reflected in the various undemocratic EU institutions and the powerful lobby organizations in Brussels.

However, in its own way, even the L5I leadership cannot escape the inseparable unity of economics and politics. In their desire to promote the economic expansion of the productive forces in the EU, the comrades choose political tactics to call for voting in favor of membership in the EU in the respective referenda. And, in turn, they strengthen not so much the productive forces but rather the imperialist EU state apparatus. Once again, we see that the unity of politics and economics exists not only in revolutionary politics, but equally so in social-imperialist opportunism.

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Associated with all this, the L5I leadership is victim of a fundamental misunderstanding. They confuse internationalism with imperialist supra-nationalism – when in fact internationalism is the opposite of the latter. The comrades will object to this criticism, saying that they indeed reject the EU and its imperialism. On this, we have not the slightest doubt. But by characterizing the imperialist EU as something qualitatively better and indeed so much better that they call the workers to vote for membership in the EU; in doing so, they declare the imperialist EU as "the lesser evil," as an evil worthy of "critical" support against the imperialist nation state. And that is, objectively, in practice and via its consequences, nothing but a pro-EU social-imperialist tactic and therefore diametrically opposed to the policy of proletarian independence, which is expressed, among other things, by calling to vote neither for nor against EU membership in referenda in imperialist countries.

* * * * *

The tactics based on the principle of proletarian independence go back to the standpoint of the Marxist classicists. For them it was a fundamental axiom that the working class cannot support any of the two factions of the monopoly bourgeoisie in the epoch of imperialism – neither those who favor free trade and the internationalization of production nor those who advocate protective tariffs and

the promotion of the nation state market.

Rudolf Hilferding, an Austrian Marxist, who in 1910 published a groundbreaking book on the emergence of finance capital (later he became an ideologist of reformism), wrote:

*“While capital can pursue no other policy than that of imperialism, the proletariat cannot oppose to it a policy derived from the period when industrial capital was sovereign; it is no use for the proletariat to oppose the policy of advanced capitalism with an antiquated policy from the era of free trade and of hostility to the state. The response of the proletariat to the economic policy of finance capital - imperialism - cannot be free trade, but only socialism. The objective of proletarian policy cannot possibly be the now reactionary ideal of reinstating free competition by the overthrow of capitalism. The proletariat avoids the bourgeois dilemma - protectionism or free trade - with a solution of its own; neither protectionism nor free trade, but socialism, the organization of production, the conscious control of the economy not by and for the benefit of capitalist magnates but by and for society as a whole, which will then at last subordinate the economy to itself as it has been able to subordinate nature ever since it discovered the laws of motion of the natural world. (...) It is precisely in those countries where the policy of the bourgeoisie has been put into effect most fully, and where the most important social aspects of the democratic political demands of the working class have been realized, that socialism must be given the most prominent place in propaganda, as the only alternative to imperialism, in order to ensure the independence of working class politics and to demonstrate its superiority in the defence of proletarian interests.”*⁸³

In his book on imperialism, Lenin approvingly cited this quotation from Hilferding, and added:

*„Kautsky broke with Marxism by advocating in the epoch of finance capital a 'reactionary ideal', 'peaceful democracy', 'the mere operation of economic factors', for objectively this ideal drags us back from monopoly to non-monopoly capitalism, and is a reformist swindle. Trade with Egypt (or with any other colony or semi-colony) 'would have grown more' without military occupation, without imperialism, and without finance capital. What does this mean? That capitalism would have developed more rapidly if free competition had not been restricted by monopolies in general, or by the 'corrections', yoke (i.e., also the monopoly) of finance capital, or by the monopolist possession of colonies by certain countries? Kautsky's argument can have no other meaning; and this 'meaning' is meaningless. Let us assume that free competition, without any sort of monopoly, would have developed capitalism and trade more rapidly. But the more rapidly trade and capitalism develop, the greater is the concentration of production and capital which gives rise to monopoly. And monopolies have already arisen—precisely out of free competition! Even if monopolies have now begun to retard progress, it is not an argument in favour of free competition, which has become impossible after it has given rise to monopoly. Whichever way one turns Kautsky's argument, one will find nothing in it except reaction and bourgeois reformism.”*⁸⁴

As is known, the L5I leadership insists that Marxists supposedly should promote the economic development of the productive forces (which supposedly has nothing to do with the political development of the EU). But even here Lenin clearly states explicitly that Marxists, while not rejecting such objective developments or even dragging them back, can equally support them. Thus he wrote in 1916 in his article *“The Military Program of the Proletarian*

Revolution”:

*„The bourgeoisie makes it its business to promote trusts, drive women and children into the factories, subject them to corruption and suffering, condemn them to extreme poverty. We do not 'demand' such development, we do not 'support' it. We fight it. But how do we fight? We explain that trusts and the employment of women in industry are progressive. We do not want a return to the handicraft system, pre-monopoly capitalism, domestic drudgery for women. Forward through the trusts, etc., and beyond them to socialism!”*⁸⁵

This was the approach of the Marxist classics and this has always been the attitude of our movement. In the German-language L5I journal *“Revolutionary Marxism”* comrade Martin Suchanek expressed succinctly our former, defeatist attitude in 1994:

*“The 'progress' of the European free trade is nothing more than one side of the coin, the other is the call for the formation of an imperialist bloc. Of course, this does not make the demand for a little imperialist foreclosure of 'independent' Austrian capitalism one iota more progressive. Faced with the choice between two thoroughly reactionary factions of the imperialist capital, the working class does not take any side. Its victory will not depend on the victory of this or that capital fraction, neither these nor those fractions can save capitalism by their victory.”*⁸⁶

How well comrade Suchanek wrote then, when he did not take a leading role in pushing the L5I towards a centrist right-wing turn as a central cadre of this organization!

Today the L5I leadership denies its past, propagates membership in the imperialist EU, and makes fun of our defeatist tactics. As quoted above, the German LFI section ironically spoke about the RCIT's “theoretical feat” in relating the issue of EU membership with the Leninist program of *“revolutionary defeatism.”* No, if the author of the German LFI section would not only have cited Trotsky, but also read the article from which this quotation is taken, he would have understood precisely that the entire background to Trotsky's argument was the First World War. It is, therefore, inherent in the nature of things to link the tactics of proletarian independence to both the imperialist war and the European Union.

In reality, the “little joke” that the German LFI section found so amusing on “the theoretical feat” of the RCIT reveals an astonishing unfamiliarity of that author with the Marxist program. Obviously the comrades are completely unaware that the Leninist program of revolutionary defeatism is valid not only in the event of war, but is more generally applicable to all forms of conflict between imperialist camps (e.g., economic conflicts, sanctions, etc.). It would have been better if the comrades would first have studied the documents of Lenin and Trotsky (or even Kautsky). Then they would have realized that the whole issue of the *“United States of Europe”* – and the question of revolutionary tactics as well – indeed emerged on the backdrop of political tensions leading up to and ultimately the breaking out of war between the great powers of Europe! If they find this “theoretical feat” so amusing and so theoretically problematic, the L5I comrades should first direct their criticism to the Marxist classics, and only then to the RCIT!

* * * * *

It seems that the L5I comrades, in their eagerness to justify their recent political belly-flop in front of the Labour Party, forget the programmatic root of the method of revolutionary defeatism: namely, the struggle for the political independence of the working class from the fractions of the bourgeoisie and the imperialist powers.

For this reason, Marxists apply the very same method of “revolutionary defeatism” not just to cases of conflicts between imperialist countries or to issues of the membership of imperialist states in inter-state alliances, but also in cases of elections in which only open-bourgeois candidates are competing (e.g., in the presidential election in Austria between the Green candidate Van der Bellen and the FPÖ candidate Norbert Hofer). In such situations, revolutionaries cannot support *any* of these candidates and therefore call for abstention.

Trotsky insisted in his theses on *War and the Fourth International* on the close and inseparable relationship between the internal and external policies of both the ruling class and the proletariat. The vanguard of the proletariat advocates a policy of class independence from any imperialist bourgeoisie and from each of their fractions – both of those at home and of those abroad:

*“The foreign policy of each class is the continuation and development of its internal policy.”*⁸⁷

Unlike the L5I, the Marxist classicists knew that *“war is nothing but the continuation of politics by other means.”* This applies both to the policy of the bourgeoisie as well as for the policy of the proletariat. Hence, Lenin wrote:

*“War is a continuation of policy by other means. All wars are inseparable from the political systems that engender them. The policy which a given state, a given class within that state, pursued for a long time before the war is inevitably continued by that same class during the war, the form of action alone being changed.”*⁸⁸

And Trotsky pointed to the fundamentally same principles of the class struggle in times of peace as well as during wars:

*“Imperialist war is the continuation and sharpening of the predatory politics of the bourgeoisie. The struggle of the proletariat against war is the continuation and sharpening of its class struggle. The beginning of war alters the situation and partially the means of struggle between the classes, but not the aim and basic course.”*⁸⁹

In other words, the entire method of revolutionary defeatism has no “special tactics” for war, but rather dictates the continuation of tactics directed to promote the independence of the working class of every imperialist bourgeoisie (and each fraction of this), which are valid for all phases of the class struggle – whether in war or peace.

Unfortunately the L5I leadership has abandoned this basic Marxist tenet of political independence of the working class from each fraction of the imperialist bourgeoisie without offering any explanation. Obviously, it’s following the principle: *“Who cares about my past gossip!”*

But today it is particularly important that revolutionaries wage a determined battle against any form of pro-EU or anti-EU social imperialism and connect it with a concrete program of social and democratic demands. Such a program must culminate in the slogans of the conquest of power, that is, of breaking up the EU institutions (as well as those of the nation state) by European revolution and the establishment of the *United Socialist States of Europe* –

a step towards a *Socialist World Federation*.

Such a perspective was already formulated by Trotsky when he called to resist the pursuit of the bourgeoisie to unite Europe under its dictates:

*“But the Communist parties have their hands tied. The living slogan, with a profound historical content, has been expunged from the program of the Comintern solely in the interests of the struggle against the Opposition. All the more decisively must the Opposition raise this slogan. In the person of the Opposition the vanguard of the European proletariat tells its present rulers: In order to unify Europe it is first of all necessary to wrest power out of your hands. We will do it. We will unite Europe. We will unite it against the hostile capitalist world. We will turn it into a mighty drill-ground of militant socialism. We will make it the cornerstone of the World Socialist Federation.”*⁹⁰

d) Europe-Centeredness with Social-Imperialist Consequences

Finally, we turn to examining the underlying cause for the political turn to the right of the L5I leadership. Of course, it is no coincidence that the British supporters of the L5I announced their support for Britain’s membership in the EU during the same month in which they also decided to join the Labour Party. As we have shown above, the L5I shares the same position – “critical” support for the imperialist EU – with the left reformist party leader Jeremy Corbyn.

But it is not sufficient to explain the L5I leadership’s right turn to short-term, tactical considerations any more than their long-term work inside the British Labour Party.

The L5I’s renunciation of its decades-long defeatist position also reflects other and more profound opportunist and social-imperialist adaptations.

First, it reflects an *historical pessimism*, which, inter alia, has been expressed in their vehement rejection of our characterization of the current historical period as a revolutionary, as well as their rejection of our thesis of the decline of the productive forces, and ultimately a lack of confidence in the possibility of fomenting world proletarian revolution and overthrowing capitalism. This pessimism leads to above-mentioned objectivism and processism which conflate the tasks of developing internationalist class consciousness with the successes of the imperialist EU.

At first glance, it seems entirely paradoxical that the L5I leadership has abandoned its decades-long defeatist position on the question of EU membership and has adopted a pro-EU stance precisely when capitalism is in the midst of its most serious crisis, with all the obvious difficulties of the EU ruling class to advance their project. But this paradox is only apparent. In reality, the revolutionary period, which started in 2008, frightened and demoralized the L5I comrades. Instead of taking the necessary step forward – towards work among the proletariat and the oppressed layers of society, with an emphasis on the semi-colonial world – the leadership of the L5I retreated to their roots as middle-class leftists in imperialist countries, pinning all of their hopes on the privileged labor aristocracy, and increasing focused on centrist regroupings (which of course all invariably failed) or entrism into the Labour Party.⁹¹

The new tactic they adopted in the question of the EU and

their sudden faith in the beneficial effects of the EU on the class consciousness of the European proletariat, are also related to the L5I's traditional Europe-centeredness. They are not only focusing their political work, propaganda and the vast majority of their international leadership on this continent, but they also consider – whether consciously or unconsciously – the Western European proletariat to be the world's most developed and politically advanced.

The comrades cannot or don't want to admit the fact that Western Europe has not seen a revolutionary development since Portugal in 1976, while the working class on other continents has made enormous advances and experienced countless revolutionary situations (e.g., in Venezuela, Bolivia, a number of Arab countries since 2011, Thailand, Nepal, South Africa). The country in Europe which experienced the most developed class struggle in the recent past is Greece.

But the L5I comrades desperately need to justify their orientation toward the upper, aristocratic layers of the Western European proletariat – the world's most privileged working class sector and those who still engage in serious illusions about the ostensible beneficial effects of imperialist EU integration; hence the opportunist tactics of the L5I leadership and the social-imperialist consequences of their turn to the right.

This adaption to the pro-EU illusions of petty-bourgeois intellectuals, the liberal middle classes and the labor aristocracy is not an isolated incident, but has also manifested itself *in various other areas*. We need only cite the attitude of the relevant sector of the L5I cadres who are actively promoting the assimilation of migrants into imperialist national majorities, and who make no pretense of supporting the migrants' right for true equality on their own terms (e.g., the use of their native language); or the shameful refusal of the L5I to participate in the August 2011 Uprising in Britain; or the fact that, in the programs and propaganda of the British supporters of L5I, they no longer publicize the slogan calling for military victory of the resistance in Afghanistan against the imperialist occupiers, while – at the same time – they publicly expressed their condolences to the family of a killed British soldier (2013); the fact that the German REVO group publicly urged to throw bombs *both* at Netanyahu *as well as* Fatah and Hamas, and doing so put the Israeli and the Palestinian camps on the same level, etc.⁹² All these positions or actions are many facets of a comprehensive adaption to the social-imperialist prejudices of the Western European labor aristocracy.

Similarly, the Europe centeredness of the L5I leadership manifests itself in another way: The comrades think that a larger and more integrated EU would be beneficial for the development of productive forces and the class consciousness of the European proletariat. Even if we don't agree with this thesis, let's assume for a moment that the argument is true. In that case, don't the L5I comrades consider what would be consequences of a stronger imperialist EU *on the world proletariat!*

Why do the comrades seem not be able to understand that a stronger, larger imperialist EU represents a *greater* threat to oppressed peoples in the semi-colonial world, since such a EU would be in a stronger position to enforce more exploitative "free trade" agreements with the countries of the South; would be in a stronger position to intervene

militarily in Africa; would be freer to wage wars and occupations outside of Europe (which in turn, of course, would negatively affect the development of productive forces)?! Why can't or won't they understand that a strengthened European great power only fuels global rivalry and militarization (and thus also negatively effects the development of productive forces)?!

No, authentic Marxists must *not* derive their tactics on questions of EU membership not primarily from a national or regional point of view, but *only* from an international point of view – that of the world proletariat.

Lenin already warned those with such social-imperialist deviations.

*"Hobson, the social-liberal, fails to see that this 'counteraction' can be offered only by the revolutionary proletariat and only in the form of a social revolution. But then he is a social-liberal! Nevertheless, as early as 1902 he had an excellent insight into the meaning and significance of a 'United States of Europe' (be it said for the benefit of Trotsky the Kautskyite!) and of all that is now being glossed over by the hypocritical Kautskyites of various countries, namely, that the opportunists (socialchauvinists) are working hand in glove with the imperialist bourgeoisie precisely towards creating an imperialist Europe on the backs of Asia and Africa, and that objectively the opportunists are a section of the petty bourgeoisie and of certain strata of the working class who have been bribed out of imperialist superprofits and converted into watchdogs of capitalism and corrupters of the labour movement."*⁹³

Finally, the Western Europe-centeredness of the L5I leadership is also expressed by the fact that it hides and ignores the existing imperialist oppression within the EU – i.e., the super-exploitation and national oppression of the semi-colonial countries such as Greece, Cyprus, Ireland, and the Eastern European countries.

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In closing, we cannot refrain from pointing out the following paradox. At its Congress in 2013, the L5I added a new paragraph to their statutes in which they state that they are still in the very first stage of party building – a stage which they call *"ideological current."* By this they mean a small group of intellectuals who is especially devoted to the development of theory and propaganda.

*„Distinct stages or phases can be seen historically in the development of this fusion; from very small numbers of revolutionary intellectuals committed to the working class cause who form an ideological current and first begin the task of promoting the revolutionary programme within the working class, ..."*⁹⁴

All the more strange, therefore, that for many years the L5I hardly published a book (and if it did so, this was a new edition of older documents); the English-language international journal appears rarely and at irregular intervals; and for years they have hardly dealt with any new theoretical questions. Now the L5I suddenly decides on an important change of tactics concerning the EU question, entirely abandoning its traditional position. But even a year later they have not managed to present this fundamental change on a theoretical level. Only a few sentences of assertions, without even an inch of serious argument!

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Of course, we cannot fail to recall the arrogance with which the leading L5I cadres viewed the RCIT some years ago, and how proud they were of having not only a larger organization but of also having more students and intellectuals among their ranks. They did not mind that, from the very beginning of its existence until now, they have entirely failed to integrate into their international leadership structures members from semi-colonial countries and comrades from the lower layers of the working class and women and migrants. Instead white, intellectual, West European comrades philosophize on the purported lack of understanding of these members of Marxist theory. Well, the experience of the past five years has shown that an organization like the RCIT, with a proletarian composition focused in large part in semi-colonial countries, is clearly also far more productive theoretically than an organization like the L5I which is so oriented to the student-intellectual milieu in Europe. While the RCIT has published numerous books and pamphlets, a monthly English-language international journal and deals with a variety of theoretical questions, the L5I doesn't even manage to publish one theoretical piece on the central question of the Brexit referendum. Regardless of whether one agrees with our analysis and conclusions or not, the

difference between us in the RCIT and the L5I is obvious, because the latter organization does not even have a single theoretical work from which one could form an opinion! Such a superficial treatment of the EU question is only the latest manifestation of its theoretical poverty which, as we have shown here, is at the heart of their extreme turn to the right.

In light of all of the above, it is vital that comrades of the L5I open a serious debate on their organization's approach to the EU. Because the rightward turn of the leadership represents a dangerous gateway towards a complete capitulation to social-imperialism; and this will inevitably happen, if the comrades of the L5I do not enforce a reversal of their ideologically bankrupt policy. The RCIT appeals to the members of L5I to initiate such a political reversal.

We therefore propose to the comrades of the L5I to contact us and to open a discussion on the Marxist analysis of and revolutionary tactics towards the European Union. We would be happy to publish a response to our criticism in our own publications, because this is a key issue for the class struggle in Europe in the coming period. A clarification and deepening of Marxist understanding are therefore priorities for all revolutionaries.

Books of the RCIT

Michael Pröbsting: The Great Robbery of the South

Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism

The RCIT is proud to announce the publication of a book called *THE GREAT ROBBERY OF THE SOUTH*. The book's subtitle is: *Continuity and Changes in the Super-Exploitation of the Semi-Colonial World by Monopoly Capital. Consequences for the Marxist Theory of Imperialism*. The book is in English-language. It has 15 chapters, 448 pages and includes 139 Tables and Figures. The author of the book is Michael Pröbsting who is the International Secretary of the RCIT.

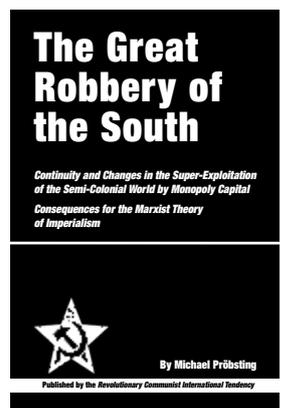
In *The Great Robbery of the South* Michael Pröbsting analyses the super-exploitation and oppression of the semi-colonial world (often referred to as the "Third World") by the imperialist powers and monopolies. He shows that the relationship between the small minority of rich capitalist countries and the huge majority of mankind living in the semi-colonial world forms one of the most important elements of the imperialist world system we are living in. The Great Robbery of the South shows that the past decades have been a complete confirmation of the validity of Lenin's theory of imperialism and its programmatic conclusions. *The Great Robbery of the South* demonstrates the important changes in the relationship between the imperialist and the semi-colonial countries. Using comprehensive material (including 139 Tables and Figures), Michael Pröbsting elaborates that never before

has such a big share of the world capitalist value been produced in the South. Never before have the imperialist monopolies been so dependent on the super-exploitation of the semi-colonial world. Never before has migrant labor from the semi-colonial world played such a significant role for the capitalist value production in the imperialist countries. Never before has the huge majority of the world working class lived in the South – outside of the old imperialist metropolises.

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The Author: Michael Pröbsting is a revolutionary activist since 35 years. He is the author of many articles and pamphlets in German and English language. He published books or contributed to books on Rosa Luxemburg (1999), on the World Economy (2008), on Migration (2010) and the Arab Revolution (2011). In addition to *The Great Robbery of the South* and *Cuba's Revolution Sold Out?* he also published in 2014 the book *Building the Revolutionary Party in Theory and Practice. Looking Back and Ahead after 25 Years of Organized Struggle for Bolshevism*. He is the International Secretary of the *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency*.

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What the RCIT Stands for

The *Revolutionary Communist International Tendency* (RCIT) is a revolutionary combat organisation fighting for the liberation of the working class and all oppressed. It has national sections in a number of countries. The working class is composed of all those (and their families) who are forced to sell their labor power as wage earners to the capitalists. The RCIT stands on the theory and practice of the revolutionary workers' movement associated with the names of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Trotsky.

Capitalism endangers our lives and the future of humanity. Unemployment, war, environmental disasters, hunger, and exploitation are all part of everyday life under capitalism as are the imperialistic oppression of nations, the national oppression of migrants, and the oppression of women, young people, and homosexuals. Therefore, we want to eliminate capitalism.

The liberation of the working class and all oppressed is possible only in a classless society without exploitation and oppression. Such a society can only be established internationally.

Therefore, the RCIT is fighting for a socialist revolution at home and around the world.

This revolution must be carried out and led by the working class, for only this class has the collective power to bring down the ruling class and build a socialist society.

The revolution cannot proceed peacefully because a ruling class never has nor ever will voluntarily surrender its power. By necessity, therefore, the road to liberation includes armed rebellion and civil war against the capitalists.

The RCIT is fighting for the establishment of workers' and peasants' republics, where the oppressed organize themselves in councils democratically elected in rank-and-file meetings in factories, neighbourhoods, and schools. These councils, in turn, elect and control the government and all other state authorities, and always retain the right to recall them.

Authentic socialism and communism have nothing to do with the so-called "socialism" that ruled in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, and which continues to do so in China and Cuba, for example. In these countries, the proletariat was and is dominated and oppressed by a privileged party bureaucracy.

Under capitalism, the RCIT supports all efforts to improve the living conditions of the workers and oppressed, while simultaneously striving to overthrow this system based on economic exploitation of the masses.

Towards these ends, we work from within the trade unions where we advocate class struggle, socialism, and workers' democracy. But trade unions and social democracy are controlled by a bureaucracy perniciously connected with the state and capital via status, high-paying jobs, and other privileges. Thus, the trade union bureaucracy is far from the interests and living conditions of

its members, based as it is on the top, privileged layers of the working class – a labor aristocracy which has no real interest in replacing capitalism. Therefore, the true struggle for the liberation of the working class, the toppling of capitalism and the establishment of socialism, must be based on the broad mass of the proletariat rather than their "representative" from the upper trade union strata.

We also fight for the expropriation of the big land owners as well as for the nationalisation of the land and its distribution to the poor and landless peasants. Towards this goal we struggle for the independent organisation of the rural workers.

We support national liberation movements against oppression. We also support the anti-imperialist struggles of oppressed peoples against the great powers. Within these movements we advocate a revolutionary leadership as an alternative to nationalist or reformist forces.

While the RCIT strives for unity of action with other organizations, we are acutely aware that the policies of social democrats and pseudo-revolutionary groups are dangerous, and ultimately represent an obstacle to the emancipation of the working class, peasants, and the otherwise oppressed.

In wars between imperialist states we take a revolutionary defeatist position: we do not support either side, but rather advocate the transformation of the war into a civil war against the ruling class in each of the warring states. In wars between imperialist powers (or their stooges) and a semi-colonial countries we stand for the defeat of the former and the victory of the oppressed countries.

As communists, we maintain that the struggle against national oppression and all types of social oppression (women, youth, sexual minorities etc.) *must* be led by the working class, because only the latter is capable of fomenting a revolutionary change in society. Therefore, we consistently support working class-based revolutionary movements of the socially oppressed, while opposing the leadership of petty-bourgeois forces (feminism, nationalism, Islamism, etc.), who ultimately dance to the tune of the capitalists, and strive to replace them with revolutionary communist leadership.

Only with a revolutionary party fighting as its leadership can the working class be victorious in its struggle for liberation. The establishment of such a party and the execution of a successful revolution, as it was demonstrated by the Bolsheviks in Russia under Lenin and Trotsky remain the models for revolutionary parties and revolutions in the 21st century.

For new, revolutionary workers' parties in all countries!
For a 5th Workers International to be founded on a revolutionary program! Join the RCIT!

No future without socialism!

No socialism without revolution!

No revolution without a revolutionary party!

