

In this issue

The first issue of *Revolutionary Marxism*, the English-language annual publication of the Turkish journal *Devrimci Marksizm*, appeared at the end of 2016. It was distributed and sold around the world from Beirut to Buenos Aires, from San Petersburg to Skopje, from Milan to Montevideo. It may not have sold in the thousands, but on its modest scale, it perfectly fulfilled the mission it was meant for: to contribute to internationalism in militant Marxist theory, leading naturally to proletarian internationalism in the political and organisational spheres, in the Middle East and North Africa, in the Balkans and the Caucasus, in the Mediterranean and Eurasian regions, and in the world at large. In line with this goal, we have now taken a new step and included translations of the editorial piece you are now reading into several other languages, which we are publishing at the end of the edition. This way we can at least transmit the gist of our message to people around the world who cannot read English, but are interested in the voice of internationalist and revolutionary Marxism.

This second issue, *Revolutionary Marxism 2018*, aims to continue working towards the same goal, with a primary focus on the Middle East, with a companion article leaning on the question of the reactionary movements in the imperialist countries, with a special dossier on the October revolution on its centenary celebrating that great festival of the people, with an article looking into the demise one of the countries (Bulgaria) where a workers' state existed until the fall of the Berlin Wall, and with an article that turns our attention to that great masterpiece on the present and the future of humanity, *Das Kapital*, on the 150th anniversary of the publication of its first volume.

The first issue, in its introduction and in several of its topical articles, characterised the world situation by placing the now decade-long economic crisis after the financial crash of 2008 in the centre as a backdrop to several parallel processes: the

rise of proto-fascism around the world; the concomitant rise of the Islamic takfiri-sectarian movement, with its most salient example in Daesh or ISIL; the increasing threat of regional wars turning into a world war; and the rise of the people's revolt both in insurrectionary (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Bahrain, Wall Street, Greece, Spain, Turkey, Brasil, the Balkans etc.) and parliamentary (Podemos, Syriza, Sanders, Corbyn, and most prominently the Frente de Izquierda (FIT) in Argentina) forms since 2011.

As the issue came out immediately after the election of Donald Trump to the highest office in the most powerful imperialist country in the world, this singular event formed the point of entry into a discussion of the new international reactionary phenomenon variously called "populism", "extreme right", "nationalism" etc. Our early diagnosis that Donald Trump was a "loose cannon fascist", a fascist without an established party and paramilitary troops, or, in still other words, a proto-fascist, was amply confirmed by the facts of the past year. The word "fascist" has been in wide circulation, in particular in the wake of the Charlottesville events, to depict Trump's attitude after he light-heartedly and repeatedly condoned the action of white supremacists and self-declared neo-Nazis. Steve Bannon, the top ideologue of the so-called "alt-right" is no longer in office, but is still palpably the alter ego of the US president, carrying out statesman-like visits to countries like China to sound out the situation before the president himself visits the country. Beyond the borders of the US, on the international scene, the liberal establishment has been too quick to characterise the results of the elections in Europe as a series of defeats for what they erroneously have dubbed "populism": in France, Marine Le Pen, the most clear representative of the rising proto-fascist plague, received in the second tour of the elections the vote of every third French citizen and in Germany the Alternative für Deutschland has now become the third biggest party of the country despite the U-turn of Angela Merkel in her immigration policy. If that is defeat, one wonders what victory would have been for an international movement that was considered, only up to recent times, the lunatic fringe!

The reverse of the same medallion for the liberals was the victory of Emmanuel Macron. In a clear instance of wishful thinking, they interpreted this as the comeback of globalism after the astounding defeats of Brexit and Trump. Emmanuel I, as his critics on the left have sarcastically called him in France due to his regal style and his recourse to rule by decree (itself almost a mimicry of the methods employed by Erdoğan in Turkey, who is rightly considered to have become more and more of a despot by the self-same liberal establishment), has seen his magic reduced to ash in a vertiginous collapse of popularity in opinion polls. The success achieved by two strikes within a matter of ten days (12th and 21st September), despite the capitulation of the leadership of some of the labour confederations, is testimony

that the “French spring”, evoked in our first issue in reference to the spring 2016 movement against the earlier counter reform of the Labour Law under the so-called “socialist” government of François Hollande, promises to continue. France remains the key country in Europe as was underlined in our first issue. Macron’s globalist and neo-liberal road is no answer to the Trumps and the Le Pens. It is only the political independence and united struggle of the working class that can definitively push back the rising evil. The horizon is still filled with the Modis and Dutertes and Putins and Erdoğan and Aliyevs and Orbans and Trumps of the world.

No less conspicuous has been the prospect of all out war over the planet since we emphasized the threat of world war in our first issue. Leaving aside for a moment the interminable suffering in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, and Libya and the still glowing cinder of the war in Ukraine, the Asian geostrategic zone is marked by the different facets of the emerging conflict between imperialism and China. Most prominent among these is obviously the US-North Korea brinksmanship that threatens to carry the world to the first nuclear catastrophe since Hiroshima and Nagasaki three quarters of a century ago. Characteristically with his proto-fascist zeal, Trump has threatened “millions of deaths” in North Korea and razing the entire country to the ground. Despite the mendacious presentation of the facts by the “international community” (another name for imperialism) and the capitalist media, the North Korean nuclear preparation is a defensive measure against the US striving for military domination in the Pacific, the presence of a total of more than 80 thousand US troops in Japan and South Korea, and the rising threat of war on the horizon in Asia in general terms. In its confrontation with imperialism, revolutionary Marxists should stand behind a bureaucratically degenerated workers’ state, even in the case of this caricature of workers’ state based on “socialism in one dynasty”.

Closer to home, in our region of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), this reactionary wave has led to a new realignment of forces. Trump’s endorsement of the Egyptian Bonaparte al Sisi during the latter’s visit to Washington was followed by his pompously organised visit to Saudi Arabia. The *kitsch* moment of that visit, when the ridiculous trio of Trump, King Salman and the Egyptian president caressed a shining globe with extras holding guard in the background, was significant above all for the symbolic absence of two actors. On the one hand, Zionist Israel was the absent *eminence grise* of the new alliance that was being set up. Trump’s anti-Iran, pro-Israel policy orientation has been exposed to override all the complications and contradictions of his policy towards the region. Notwithstanding his palpable effort to court Putin, Trump, as attested to once again in his UN speech, is aggressively pushing to form an alliance between all the other reactionary forces of the Middle East in order to isolate and bring to its knees Iran, notwithstanding the almost unbreakable alliance between the latter and Putin’s Russia. That, inci-

dentally, is also why Hamas has recently been pressured to capitulate before Egypt and Israel. The other conspicuous absence was that of Erdoğan, another source of contradictions for the MENA policy of Trump. The official reason was that Trump's visit coincided with the AKP Congress at home, where Erdoğan returned to take control of his party after the April referendum in Turkey, which has laid the ground to a transition towards a more presidential system. However, it pretty soon transpired that the real reason lay elsewhere.

The display of Sunni sectarian power that the Saudis intended to rehearse by inviting a full array of Arab and non-Arab countries to greet Trump proved ephemeral. The Qatar crisis broke on the heels of this triumphalist celebration of unity, driving a wedge between the Saudi-led camp and the Rabiist bloc. To understand what we mean by this, consider the following sequence of events. 2013: the Bonapartist coup of Sisi brings down Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood (Ikhwan) government in Egypt, with the support of Saudi Arabia, and cold-bloodedly kills hundreds of Ikhwan supporters on Rabia-t-ul Adawiya square in Cairo, thus leading to a fallout between Saudi Arabia and Turkey, since Erdoğan has staked his whole strategy of becoming the "Rais" (leader) of the Sunni world on an alliance with the Ikhwan in a series of countries (Tunisia, Syria, Morocco, Palestine, i.e. Hamas, as well as Egypt); 2015: despite his explicit Rabiism (a movement based on a revanchist attitude concerning the Rabia incident), Erdoğan ties up with the new King Salman of Saudi Arabia in the wake of the death of the former king, even joining at year end 2015 the Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism, a Saudi initiative bringing together 34 Sunni nations, and almost going to war in Syria in February 2016 together with the Saudis and Qatar (a duo to be noted carefully!); 15th July 2016: the Saudi camp abandons the Erdoğan government to its fate in the face of the coup attempt; 2017: among the 13 conditions posed by the Saudi-led anti-Qatar coalition as terms of reconciliation appears the withdrawal of Turkish military forces from Qatar, a condition rejected by the Turkish side, which, loyal to its Rabiist strategy, squarely sides with Qatar. We should hasten to add that after the July 2016 failed coup, Turkey has been seeking a countervailing source of power in the Russia-Iran camp to balance the pressure of the US and the EU on its international orientation and domestic policy.

All this goes to show that the sectarian Sunni forces of MENA are unable to form a durable unitary coalition against the Shia camp led by Iran. This does not mean, however, that the threat of sectarian war on the scale of the entire Middle East is now a thing of the past. It only means that the Sunni camp is not as united as it seemed at a certain moment and that Iran has room for manoeuvre and may be able to at least neutralise some of the countries within the reactionary Sunni camp. That the threat continues to exist and will probably get a new lease of life from the

policies of Trump and Israel is shown by the incessant proxy wars in countries such as Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Only a unified and independent bloc of working class and socialist forces all over the MENA region, allying itself with corresponding forces in the Balkans and the northern Mediterranean, can stop this threat of Sunni-Shia sectarian war, a prospect that is certain to lead to the decimation of the population and the destruction of the historic cultural heritage of the region. As the Final Resolution of the 4th Emergency Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Athens on 26-28 May 2017, which we are publishing in this issue as a document says: “Carnage can only be stopped by a broad front of anti-imperialist and anti-Zionist forces that fight also against the reactionary regimes in their own countries. Only a Socialist Federation of the Middle East and North Africa will provide the final solution to all the ills of the region.”

Into this maelstrom Massoud Barzani, the leader of Iraqi Kurdistan, has added the independence referendum, which has conjured all the age-old demons of the regional powers and the machinations of the imperialists. Revolutionary Marxists are for self-determination of the Kurds. The problem is that this referendum is devised not for that self-determination, but for the self-aggrandizement of Barzani and the coffers of his oil rentier supporters. Barzani has fought and clearly intends to fight in the future against the freedom of Kurds in other parts of Kurdistan (i.e. in Turkey, Iran, and Syria). So a victory in this referendum ironically implies a defeat for the cause of national liberation in Kurdistan, on top of giving imperialism another beach head in the Middle East. Revolutionary Marxists are unswervingly against military intervention by any regional power in Iraqi Kurdistan, but stand against Barzani and for the liberation of the entire Kurdish population.

Our first dossier in this issue dwells on the different facets of the struggle in the MENA region, with both a short-term and a long-term perspective. The first article of that dossier is a piece that analyses the Syrian civil war and its international ramifications in its successive stages. Levent Dölek’s article titled “The stages, lessons, and future of the Syrian civil war” opens up with a diagnosis that since the popular revolt against Assad’s dictatorship with demands of freedom and justice could not acquire a proletarian political framework, it soon became open to the manipulations of imperialism and reactionary states of the region. It demonstrates that the interventions of imperialism, Zionism, and regional powers (such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Turkey, and Iran) transformed the popular revolt into a bloody religious-sectarian war between the Sunnis and others (Alawis, the Druze, Christians, etc.). The article makes a detailed analysis of the military activities of all major actors (USA, Russia, ISIL, Free Syrian Army, etc.) during the civil war. A separate section is devoted to the developments in Syrian Kurdistan. Dölek acknowledges the strong progressive basis of the Kurdish movement in Rojava but argues that its

current military cooperation with the US imperialism is both wrong and dangerous. We believe that Dölek's article will remain a valuable source on the Syrian civil war in the coming years.

Kutlu Dane's article titled "The centenary of the Balfour Declaration, the memorandum of the Nakba and Zionist occupation" makes a detailed investigation of the historical background of the colonization of Palestine. It discusses the historical context of the Balfour Declaration of 1917 (which granted a blank check to the foundation of the state of Israel) by shedding light on the shifting positions of all actors involved in the process (including the British and French imperialisms and the Ottoman state). Dane's article demonstrates that both the US imperialism and the Soviet Union (which was following the policy of "peaceful coexistence" with imperialism at that time) supported the foundation of Israel in 1948. It also underscores the fact that all reactionary regimes of the region have supported Israel in practice. As Dane shows, the current AKP government in Turkey (which has continued to cooperate with Israel in many areas and never embraced the Palestinian cause sincerely) is no exception.

Sungur Savran surveys the revolutions in the Middle East from the beginning of the twentieth century up until today and derives generalized conclusions from it. According to Savran, Middle East experienced a large number of revolutions in the twentieth century and the first victorious revolutions of the twenty-first century also took place in the region (Egypt and Tunisia). The article shows that twentieth century Middle East experienced four waves of revolution and the Arab revolution of 2011 can be considered as the fifth wave. As Savran notes, high frequency of revolutionary waves disproves the simplistic (and Orientalist) belief that "Muslim societies are submissive due to their belief in Islam and therefore do not make revolutions." It also provides a strong proof of the Marxist thesis that history progresses not simply by evolutionary advances but actually through revolutionary leaps. Finally, by demonstrating that Middle Eastern history has been determined at revolutionary turning points, Savran's article exposes the shallow and baseless character of the reformists' claim of being "realistic" (the belief that revolution is a distant possibility and left politics should aim small-scale changes). In fact, it is impossible to attain (small or large) changes without revolutions. In other words, the historical experience proves that revolution is a more "realistic" goal than reform.

A companion dossier takes up the reactionary trends and the response necessary to these in other parts of the world. In his article titled "Methods of understanding the 'contemporary': a discussion on populism and fascism", Cenk Saraçoğlu argues that fascism is a much more appropriate and useful concept than "populist right" (a concept that is currently popular among the international left) to understand these reactionary movements. Saraçoğlu identifies "counter-revolutionary subversive"

and “non-contemporaneity” as the two key distinctive characteristics of the fascist movements and regimes of the inter-war period and compares the contemporary reactionary movements by using these concepts. He argues that the reactionary movements of the relatively peripheral countries such as Hungary and Turkey resemble the classical fascism of the inter-war period more than their counterparts in advanced Western countries.

A somewhat different take on the situation in Europe and the world is presented by the Final Declaration of the 4th Euro-Mediterranean Conference, an international event where militants and intellectuals from 18 countries participated in late May 2017 to discuss the way forward on the international level and, in particular, in the European and MENA contexts.

This year is the centenary of the October revolution of 1917. This was an epoch-making event that opened up new vistas not only for the peoples of formerly Tsarist Russia, but for humanity at large and, in particular, for the workers and toilers and the oppressed of the world. We celebrate this world historical event and delve into its different facets in four different articles.

In his paper, “October 1917: A world event”, Savas Michael discusses the relations and the differences between 1917 and 1991, in dialogue with an article by the French philosopher Alain Badiou written shortly after the demise of the Soviet Union. Savas Michael reminds that 1917 was a world event, and was recognized by everyone as the beginning of a global socialist revolution. The social revolution expanded from Russia to Eastern and Central Europe, and produced effects that ranged from Europe to Asia and the USA. As Keynes was very well aware at the time, Bolshevism and the October revolution posed a threat to the global capitalist order. In this sense, the October revolution was certainly not a premature attempt. Rather, it was a world historical “event” that opened an entirely new epoch for humanity. By contrast, 1991 was not an “event,” but a “simulated event”: it did not open a new age for humanity. Savas Michael concludes by emphasizing that the cycle opened by the October revolution has not closed. We are still living in the epoch of October, and we need to make the revolution permanent in the new century.

Tamás Krausz’s paper is a shortened and at the same time partly revised version of a chapter from his celebrated work, *Reconstructing Lenin*. Here, Krausz comments upon one of the most influential works by Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, written in August-September 1917, just before the revolution, and first published the following year. According to Krausz, this small pamphlet, barely over a hundred pages, contains the philosophy of the October Revolution. In this pamphlet Lenin focuses on the question of the state, this “central issue of every revolution” and discusses the overthrow of it as the first phase of the social revolution. Krausz emphasizes the non-utopian character of Lenin’s vision. “From the perspective of

the revolution this thin volume essentially set out, in methodological and political terms, to do away with the ‘opporTunusiatic illusions’ bound up with Parliamentarism, and with Bernsteinian revisionism, as well as the utopist, anarchist approach, all at the same time.”

The article by Özgür Öztürk, “Socialist planning in the 21st century” discusses the potentials of socialism with reference to the possibilities of the present. Öztürk tries to outline the kind of economic planning system that can be built immediately, within at most a few years after a new revolution. According to him, in the 21st century, a planning system that is fundamentally different and far more effective than the previous century can be established. He points to the fact that in the 20th century, one of the major problems of socialist construction has been to prevent the transformation of money into capital. However, a planning and “payment” system that is based on labour time – as foreseen by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* – will limit monetary relations, and hence the threat posed by capital. Moreover, such a system will solve the problem of computation more easily. Öztürk also discusses the possible forms of new industrial relations, and claims that under present conditions, a socialist regime may realistically target full employment, full automation, zero work accidents and the continuous shortening of working hours. According to him, these are potential trends that can never gain full actuality under capitalist relations.

Armağan Tulunay takes up an aspect of the October revolution that has been to a certain extent purposely ignored by some quarters. Since the anti-Leninist, indeed anti-Marxist turn set off on the left from the 1980s on, the relevance of Marxism as a corpus of thought and a programme and of communism as a quest for a different type of society for the question of women’s liberation has come to be rejected on an increasing scale. Identity politics was the panacea. The communist movement was oblivious to women’s oppression and nothing to offer by way of women’s liberation. Tulunay delves into the policies implemented by the Bolsheviks immediately after the revolution to demonstrate incontrovertibly that Bolshevism under Lenin and Trotsky was incomparably more sensitive to women’s oppression than the liberal establishment so much adored by the anti-Marxist post-modernist currents of the day, implemented a concrete programme of measures undreamt of in the most advanced societies of the capitalist world and tried to create not only formal equality between the genders but a real one. That most of these measures were later undone by the bureaucracy that usurped political power, a fact equally demonstrated by Tulunay in her article, can in no way be cited as evidence regarding the alleged indifference of communism to women’s oppression. The bureaucracy, after all, abandoned communism and so none of its activities necessarily implicate this movement.

Our last article on the October revolution attacks an area that has always gone

unnoticed in Western Marxism. It has long been a commonplace to observe that proletarian power was first achieved by the Russians, perhaps the most backward among the big nations of Europe, but it has escaped the Western-biased commentators of the October revolution that, even further, this revolution was also a revolution of Muslim peoples. An important element of the Soviet Union as it was finally established along Lenin's guidelines on 31 December 1922 was the Muslim and mostly Turkic peoples of inner Russia in its eastern borderlands (Tatars, Bashkir, Kalmuk, Dagestani, Chechens etc.), of Transcaucasia (Azeris, Abkhaz etc.), and Central Asia (in what is today Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). In an original article, Sungur Savran explains, in summary form, how communism/Bolshevism conquered the heart of Muslim peoples immediately in the wake of the victory of the revolution and how Muslim communists conquered their own land and people. The later rise under Stalin of so-called Great Russian chauvinism and its impact on the life of Muslim peoples in the Soviet Union are materials for further study.

An article that is related in a somewhat roundabout manner to those on the October revolution focuses on the collapse of the 20th century experience in socialist construction through the prism of Bulgaria. Daniela Penkova's article titled "Bulgaria in the trap of neoliberalism" investigates the process of capitalist restoration in the country after 1989. The author argues that institutions of international capital, especially the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, have imposed a prescription on Bulgaria that was very similar to those imposed on the Third World countries. Although Bulgaria was an industrialized country with respectable living standards by 1989, neoliberal prescriptions of the post-1989 period (such as privatization and deregulation) have impoverished the Bulgarian people. The article empirically demonstrates that although on paper the Bulgarian economy appears to grow, ordinary people struggle to meet their basic needs. Penkova concludes her piece by emphasizing that abandoning the neoliberal "development" policy is absolutely necessary to achieve a well-working industry and social structure.

This year is not only the centenary of the October revolution, but also the 150th anniversary of the publication of Volume I of *Capital*. Our final article is thus devoted to a general overview of the method, content and significance of this masterpiece of human thinking that is a synthesis of social science and revolution.

Capital ultimately is about the progressive exhaustion of the possibilities of the capitalist mode of production to carry humanity into a better future and the necessity of its overturn in order to release the energy of the working population of the planet for progressive purposes. That we are already in that phase of historical development is palpably clear from the deep international economic crisis, the looming threat of nuclear war and even world war, and the destruction of nature, the only so-

urce of reproduction for human and other living species. The defence of humanity, even of life in general, requires the advent of a new mode of production based on collective property in the means of production and democratic central planning, as well as a fraternal fusion of all the nations of the world. In short, it requires internationalist socialism. This can only be brought about by the forces of the proletariat, through revolutionary class struggle, which requires revolutionary parties of the proletariat and a revolutionary International. That is what revolutionary Marxism is about and why our journal has proudly assumed this name.