

The Workers and Socialist Party has been created to take the struggles of workers, communities and youth in South Africa forward into a battle for the socialist transformation of not just SA, but the world – capitalism can only be defeated on a global scale. For serious socialists, the task is to build a world party of revolution. WASP's link to the Committee for a Workers' International, through the Democratic Socialist Movement, WASP's founder, which is the SA affiliate of the CWI, is therefore very important. The CWI was founded on April 21, 1974, by 46 delegates from twelve countries. Today it spans 48 countries on every continent. Robert Bechert of the CWI's international secretariat explains the need for an international in the 21st century:

Socialism and internationalism

Committee for a Workers' International forty years



Left: Democratic Socialist Movement members with the CWI banner at a mass meeting of striking mineworkers, Merafong October 2012.

Right: Nigerian CWI members sell the DSM paper at a march in Lagos during the 2013 general strike.



Since the beginning of the 20th century every decade has witnessed revolutions as the working and poor masses attempt to end the oppression and exploitation they suffer under capitalism. There have also been mass struggles, revolutions, counter-revolutions and mighty, world changing, developments.

The past forty years have been no exception. A mere four days after the CWI's formation, half a century of military and dictatorial rule in Portugal were ended with the 25 April revolution. A few months later the Greek military junta collapsed. But history does not develop in a straight line. In both countries the ruling classes were able to survive, mainly because the mass movements that threatened them did not have a strategy of how to replace capitalism and a leadership prepared to lead that battle.

Stalinism's collapse

The past twenty-five years have been complicated by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the other Stalinist states. Ruled by a privileged totalitarian elite, these states could not be regarded as socialist. However, the fact that they rested on a planned, nationalised non-capitalist economy meant that their very existence proved that capitalism was not the only possible system.

The post-1989 collapse of these states into capitalism was utilised by the ruling classes in their counter-offensive after the radicalisation of the 1960s to 1980s to ideologically claim that there was no alternative to capitalism. This helped accelerate the rightward, pro-capitalist move in much of the labour movement.

Capitalist crisis

But since the 2008 onset of the latest crisis in global capitalism we have entered a new world period. Growing numbers see the questions of the economy, war and peace, and the environment as international and also as tied to capitalism, or at least to the domination of the giant corporations. More people are aware of the possibilities inherent in scientific and technological advances if they are utilised in the interests of the population and the environment rather than cor-

porate profit. The experience of austerity and the struggle against it is forging an understanding of the need to change society fundamentally. Thus events like the 2011 overthrow of Egyptian dictator Mubarak had a worldwide impact.

These developments provide an important potential base for an international socialist organisation, linking together movements around the globe. This century has already seen international movements and struggles, such as the opposition to the US and British-led invasion of Iraq, the Occupy protests, the anti-austerity protests in Europe, the impact of the 2011 Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions and the international dock workers' struggle.

If the workers' movement cannot provide a concrete answer to today's issues, there is the danger that reactionary nationalist 'answers' can gain support, laying the basis for chauvinist or ethnic conflicts within and between states. One of the objectives that the CWI set itself 40 years ago is to help arm the workers' movement with a programme and strategy to both win our immediate battles and remove capitalism's poisonous grip over the world, starting by explaining the central role of the working class.

A revolutionary time

It was not accidental that the foundation of the CWI took place in a turbulent and radical period. The long post-World War Two economic upswing was ending. Already before the 1973 oil crisis that came to symbolise the changing economic situation, Europe and then Latin America had been gripped by revolutionary movements and crises, especially France 1968. In Vietnam US imperialism was facing its first ever military defeat. The Stalinist regimes had been shaken by the 1968 'Prague Spring' in then Czechoslovakia and the 1970/71 wave of workers' strikes in Poland, movements which were not pro-capitalist but in essence looking towards establishing workers' democracy.

The onset of a generalised capitalist crisis deepened a political radicalisation in the workers' movement in many countries. The bitter experience of the bloody 1973 overthrow of the

Allende government in Chile provoked a wide discussion on how socialism could be achieved and also how to prevent counter-revolution blocking the labour movement's path. In 1974 the Spanish dictatorship of Franco, faced with a developing revolution, was crumbling. But the Spanish ruling class obtained the help of the workers' leaders to contain the revolutionary movement and establish democracy within capitalism.

Against this background the Marxists who founded the CWI had begun to reach a much wider audience in Britain and soon in other countries, initially mainly in Europe but also in Sri Lanka, where the history of a Trotskyist movement with mass support meant that the ideas of the CWI found an early echo.

However despite the worldwide revolutionary upheavals of the late 1960s and 1970s the idea of a real workers' international, while attractive to many activists, had become less central to the mass of the workers' movement. Mainly this flowed from the failure of the previous Internationals to remain and develop as organisations that strove to change the world. But today, with the world's obvious and growing inter-dependence, the issue of international action and struggle is once more sharply posed.

Alongside the need for global solutions the experience of the workers' movement again and again shows that protests alone can win individual demands but not fundamentally change the situation, something which can only be achieved by overthrowing capitalism. But to securely achieve that, a movement needs a concrete programme of action that provides national and international answers and a clear-sighted leadership, both of which require a party to formulate and help put into action.

How secure victories?

Today the capitalists have little optimism. They lack confidence, as revealed in their woes over whether they can stop funnelling money into many economies via Quantitative Easing and, if they do, what will be the effects?

These conditions are prepar-

ing new periods of struggle and revolution. Generally in this period of crisis most struggles have been defensive, against the ruling classes' onslaught, but in countries which have seen economic growth, like Brazil and China, there have been offensive battles to win improvements.

In Greece the workers have conducted an incredible 36 general strikes since 2010, but have not succeeded in stopping the ruling class's austerity onslaught. This does not rule out a new radicalisation. Simultaneously sections of the movement are drawing lessons from their experiences, a process which the comrades in Xekinima, the CWI in Greece, are both part of and influencing.

The revolutions and mass struggles of recent years have again posed the age old question of how to consolidate gains and the old order really removed? Egypt is the latest example of where, in February 2011, the working masses potentially had power in their hands but did not fully understand that or see what needed to be done, leaving an opening for counter-revolution.

Mighty revolutions can almost completely sweep away the old order but, as in Portugal after 1975, it can come back if the working class does not secure power. Each revolution and struggle has its own characteristics, but the general lesson of how the working class in Russia were able to come to, and stay in, power in 1917 is still essential.

Today's situation is similar in some ways to the late 19th century when the mass workers' movement developed. Now it is a question of re-building or building afresh workers' organisations. A complication is that, in many countries, workers have the bitter experience of the decay or collapse of the old workers' organisations, with especially the former social democratic, socialist and communist parties now mostly transformed into pro-capitalist organisations.

Rebuilding and rearming the workers' movement

The CWI is, in many countries, playing a key role in this rebuilding and, where appropriate, arguing that a start must be made to create new political parties

of the working class as a step towards building a mass socialist workers' movement. This is not just propaganda. In South Africa, Britain and Nigeria CWI sections have been instrumental in taking steps to form new parties. In countries like Australia, Ireland, Sri Lanka, the USA and Sweden, CWI comrades currently fight elections under their own banner.

Where left parties exist, like PSOL in Brazil and Die LINKE in Germany, CWI comrades are active in them while also arguing what steps need to be taken to further build them as socialist organisations. This is essential as without a clear socialist programme new workers' parties can follow the path of the old ones, like the PT has in Brazil, or simply eventually collapse as the PRC in Italy. Arguing for such a programme is part of our CWI tradition. But from our beginning we have not been just debating policies, we have always been active – participating in and initiating struggles, big and small.

But in many ways these first four decades are really only a pre-history. We are already in a tumultuous period, everything is either being questioned or soon will be. The experiences of this period of capitalism, the growing environmental crisis, with no future on offer to the vast mass of young people, will produce revolutionary storms. The CWI will play a full part in these events, including the building of a movement that can finally end this brutal, chaotic and unfair capitalist system and make life a pleasure for all.



The CWI website is updated daily with news and Marxist analysis of the latest struggles and issues facing the world's workers and poor – an invaluable resource, not to be missed!