

Five days that shook Britain but didn't wake up the left

The bankruptcy of the left during the August uprising of the oppressed in Britain: Its features, its roots and the way forward **By Michael Pröbsting, 1.9.2011**

The uprising in Britain in August 2011 was a historic event. It marked the entering of the class struggle by the lower strata of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed. As we – the Revolutionary Communist Organisation for Liberation (RKOB) – already stated in our publications these so called riots were in reality an explosive uprising. (1) Despite all its limitations and weaknesses it was definitely one of the most important class struggles in Britain since the miner strike 1984/85. It brought thousands and thousands of working class youth, black and migrants on the streets fighting against the police and expressing their anger. It forced the Tory/Liberal-Democrat government to mobilise 16.000 police men and women on the street to put down the uprising and even to consider the use of the army against its own population.

This uprising was a sign of the things to come. A correct assessment of this event, drawing the right conclusion and employing the necessary revolutionary tactics are of decisive importance because in the coming years we will see a number of similar spontaneous uprisings of the lower or middle strata of the proletariat. And we will see such events not only in Britain again but also in a number of other imperialist countries.

Why is this case? Because world capitalism has entered a new historic period of its decline in which its inner contradictions are increasing enormously. Mankind is faced with the alternative "socialism or barbarism". As a result of the qualitative increase of the class contradictions the class struggle is sharpening rapidly compared to the years before the revolutionary period begun. This is why we see in the last two years more and more (pre-)revolutionary (and counter-revolutionary) developments like the Arab revolution, the general strikes and mass occupation movements in Spain and Greece and now the August uprising in Britain. This is why the RKOB characterise the present historic period as a revolutionary one.

Only if one puts the August uprising in Britain in this context one can understand its importance and meaning. Only if one understands this context it is possible to prepare for future uprisings and to help overcome the crisis of leadership. Because only if a revolutionary party with roots in the working class and particularly its lower and oppressed strata, the most active and militant elements in class struggle, can be built in time, only then will it be possible to overcome the weaknesses of the August uprising – its lack of organisation, direction and its lack of connection with the other layers of the working class. And only then it will be possible to connect such uprisings with a general strike movement of the whole proletariat leading up to an armed insurrection to overthrow the ruling class.

The RKOB has already explained in two articles and our comrades from the delegation which we sent to London in these days argued on the streets that the central tasks for revolutionaries in the days of uprising were:

- * to join the movement and therefore to participate actively in the uprisings
- * to participate in the struggle to drive the police out of the areas
- * to argue for steps to organise of self-defence units
- * to agitate for mass assemblies and the formation of councils of actions
- * to argue against looting and burning of property of common people and for actions by self-defence units from the activists to prevent this happening
- * to agitate for the spreading of the uprising
- * to call the workers movement (the trade unions, the left-wing parties etc.) to join the uprising and to mobilise now against the cuts (instead of waiting for Autumn) and to connect the uprising with a general strike movement

(1) Nina Gunić and Michael Pröbsting: These are not "riots" – this is an uprising of the poor in the cities of Britain! The strategic task: From the uprising to the revolution!, 10.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/uprising-of-the-poor-in-britain/>; Michael Pröbsting: The August uprising of the poor and nationally and racially oppressed in Britain: What would a revolutionary organisation have done?, 18.8.2011, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/august-uprising-what-should-have-been-done/>; Bericht der RKOB-Delegation über ihren Aufenthalt in London 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/international/berichte-uprising-in-gb/>. An English translation of this report on the visit of the RKOB delegation in London will be published soon on our website www.rkob.net

I. An Uprising which the left missed

One of the most striking features of the August Uprising is that the self-proclaimed socialist, revolutionary organisations were not involved in it. It was a five-day uprising of the poor sectors of the masses in which the petty bourgeois left simply missed out. Of course this or that individual member was on the streets, but neither the Socialist Workers Party (International Socialist Tendency, SWP/IST), the Socialist Party (Committee for a Workers International, SP/CWI), Socialist Appeal (International Marxist Tendency, SA/IMT), the Alliance for Workers Liberty (AWL) nor Workers Power (League for the Fifth International, WP/LFI) have called for joining the uprising nor did they have an organised intervention trying to give the uprising an organisation, direction and guidance.

This in itself is a devastating fact for a left who claims to fight for the working class, for the poor, the youth, the black and the migrant minorities. The uprising was a historic test for a number of international centrist organisations because Britain is the home of the mother sections – usually the numerically strongest groups and certainly the location of its historic cadre base – of a number of international so-called Trotskyist tendencies (like the SWP/IST, the SP/CWI, SA/IMT and WP/LFI). Add to this that the heart of the uprising was in London where all these groups have their centre and a substantial number of cadres and members.

So in opposite to other sharp class struggles in the past which happened in countries with none or only a small presence and where these tendencies could therefore confine themselves to produce this or that resolution – or to intervene with one or two cadres - , this time they had to demonstrate their politics in words and deeds in an uprising which took place at their front door.

Our criticism is not that the British left were not strong enough to lead the uprising. This was impossible given their failures in the past years and decades to build roots amongst the poorer strata of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed. But given the fact that there are today let us say one, two or three thousand socialists in London it would have been definitely possible to influence the uprising, to help the youth take steps to organise against the police and they could have definitely had a political impact on the consciousness of these layers. They could have helped to form the political consciousness of thousands and thousands of young fighters for the coming years. Years in which we will certainly see more struggles, strikes and insurrections.

The British left could have done this ... but they did not. This failure is not accidentally. It is the result of historic weaknesses in theory, programme and practice.

II. Understanding of the August Uprising

Of course the bourgeoisie was frightened by the August Uprising and unleashed a huge propaganda wave of hatred against the rebellious youth and oppressed. This is not surprising, indeed in a class society it cannot be otherwise as that the ideological apparatus – to which the media (including the internet) belongs – serves the ruling class. Those who own the media apparatus call the shots.

However if the bourgeois journalists write not for the masses, but for the ruling class, they don't need to create an ideological fog but have a more realistic understanding of what is going on. A good example for this is a recent article in one of mouth pieces of monopoly capital, the US Forbes Magazine, called: "*The U.K. Riots and the Coming Global Class War*". This article, shortly published after the Uprising, openly describes this event as part of the class struggle and as a phenomena which will globally spread:

"The riots that hit London and other English cities last week have the potential to spread beyond the British Isles. Class rage isn't unique to England; in fact, it represents part of a growing global class chasm that threatens to undermine capitalism itself." (2)

The author fears that this will lead to a strengthening of right-wing and left-wing extremism: "*This expanding class war creates more intense political conflicts.*" The article concludes pessimistically from the bourgeoisies' point of view: "*But modern society (...) must deliver results to the vast majority of citizens. If capitalism cannot do that expect more outbreaks of violence and greater levels of political alienation — not only in Britain but across most of the world's leading countries, including the U.S.*"

And indeed the whole reaction of the British government to the uprising demonstrates that they understand it as a serious danger, as a spontaneous form of revolutionary class struggle of the lower strata of the proletariat. This is the reason why the Cameron government mobilised 16.000 police officers on the streets and threatened to use of the army against the uprising. This is why the government is now imposing a 30-day ban of any demonstrations and marches. (3) In short: the counterrevolutionary measures of the British government show that the ruling class understood the revolutionary potential of the August Uprising.

But not only does monopoly capital understand the class struggle character of the Uprising. Also a number of people and organisations with roots amongst the oppressed characterise it as a justified rebellion, not simply as riots. As we already quoted in our recent articles the 68-year-old former black civil rights activist Darcus Howe expressed very well what is involved in the so-called "*riots*" in Britain's cities. In an interview with the BBC (which this capitalist state television put off soon from their website), he explained:

"I don't call it rioting, I call it an insurrection of the masses of the people! It is happening in Syria, it is happening in Clapham, it is happening in Liverpool, it is happening in Puerto Spain, it is happening in Chile then, it is the nature of an historical moment!"

Another well-known anti-racist writer, the Tamil-born director of the Institute of Race Relations and long-time editor of the Journal Race & Class, Ambalavaner Sivanandan, wrote a statement at the end of the Uprising which stated defiantly: "*This is not the end of rebellion—it is the beginning*" (4) And John Pilger, also a radical journalist, characterised clearly the so-called riots as an "*insurrection*". (5)

Several organisations with direct or indirect links with the oppressed layers of the black and migrant people also made clear that they do not consider the Uprisings as simply riots or "*mindless acts of violence*". The Black-nationalist African People's Socialist Party and the Uhuru Solidarity Movement called for "*Solidarity with the rebellions in Britain!*" and stated: "*We support the right of the African community to fight back against the injustice and oppression imposed on their communities by the British white power government. The Uhuru Solidarity Movement is in unconditional solidarity with the African population of Britain who are courageously resisting the oppression and colonial domination of their communities. (...) It is this relationship between colonizer and colonized that is at the root of what is happening right now on the streets of London.*" (6)

While we criticise the characterization that the Uprising is "*a conflict between colonizer and colonized*" as false it is certainly correct to refer to the relationship of imperialist oppression behind this event.

And despite its ultra-Stalinist policy the CPGB-ML – with its chairman Harpal Brar, who was the long-time leader of the Indian Workers' Association in Britain – managed to understand better than many so-called Trotskyists what was the meaning of the August Uprising. Instead of describing the uprising as about criminal looting, they did put it in the context of the "*working class fight back*". (7)

Of course all these people and organisations mentioned above have no political perspective for the Uprising to win. They offer – if anything – a black-nationalist or Stalinist, abstract-propagandist outlook. Therefore they present only ways which weaken the working class and harm it.

But as we will see, in opposition to the majority of the left-reformist and centrist forces they at least recognised that these so-called riots were an authentic uprising of the youth and the oppressed.

(2) Joel Kotkin: The U.K. Riots and the Coming Global Class War, Forbes, 8/15/2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/joelkotkin/2011/08/15/u-k-riots-global-class-war/>

(3) David Hughes: Marches banned after day of banned protest, 20 August 2010, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/marches-banned-after-day-of-banned-protest-2057870.html>

(4) Ambalavaner Sivanandan: 'This is not the end of rebellion—it is the beginning', 16 Aug 2011, <http://www.irr.org.uk/2011/august/ha000011.html>

(5) John Pilger: Damn it or fear it, the forbidden truth is an insurrection in Britain, August 19, 2011, <http://www.johnpilger.com/articles/damn-it-or-fear-it-the-forbidden-truth-is-an-insurrection-in-britain>

(6) Uhuru Solidarity Movement: Solidarity with the rebellions in Britain! 10.08.2011, <http://uhurusolidarity.blogspot.com/>, <http://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2011/08/483268.html>

(7) CPGB-ML: Rage against capitalism. The working class fights back, 9. August 2011, <http://www.cpgbml.org/index.php?secName=statements&subName=display&statementId=42>

III. Žižek: The August Uprising as a “zero-degree protest”

Or how a zero-philosopher is frightened by the reality of class struggle

But before we deal with these organisations we want to refer our readers to the assessment of Slavoj Žižek, one of the favourite intellectuals of the British left and a philosopher of the radical wing of the petty bourgeoisie. His attitude to the August Uprising is characteristic of the approach of the middle class left. He wrote in an article in the online-edition of the London Review of Books:

“Although the riots in the UK were triggered by the suspicious shooting of Mark Duggan, everyone agrees that they express a deeper unease – but of what kind? As with the car burnings in the Paris banlieues in 2005, the UK rioters had no message to deliver. (There is a clear contrast with the massive student demonstrations in November 2010, which also turned to violence. The students were making clear that they rejected the proposed reforms to higher education.) This is why it is difficult to conceive of the UK rioters in Marxist terms, as an instance of the emergence of the revolutionary subject; they fit much better the Hegelian notion of the ‘rabble’, those outside organised social space, who can express their discontent only through ‘irrational’ outbursts of destructive violence – what Hegel called ‘abstract negativity’. (...) If the commonplace that we live in a post-ideological era is true in any sense, it can be seen in this recent outburst of violence. This was zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing. In their desperate attempt to find meaning in the riots, the sociologists and editorial-writers obfuscated the enigma the riots presented. The protesters, though underprivileged and de facto socially excluded, weren’t living on the edge of starvation. People in much worse material straits, let alone conditions of physical and ideological oppression, have been able to organise themselves into political forces with clear agendas. The fact that the rioters have no programme is therefore itself a fact to be interpreted: it tells us a great deal about our ideological-political predicament and about the kind of society we inhabit, a society which celebrates choice but in which the only available alternative to enforced democratic consensus is a blind acting out. Opposition to the system can no longer articulate itself in the form of a realistic alternative, or even as a utopian project, but can only take the shape of a meaningless outburst. What is the point of our celebrated freedom of choice when the only choice is between playing by the rules and (self-)destructive violence?” (8)

Žižek’s statement is a perfect example of the reactionary nature of the left-wing intelligentsia which in the hour of sharp class struggle denounces the rebels from the proletariat and the oppressed. Furthermore it summarises the arrogance of the petty-bourgeois intellectuals towards the proletariat and expresses the gross distance – no, let us better say the abyss – between such intellectuals and the mass of the proletariat.

First Žižek claims that the working class fighters “*had no message to deliver*”. The Uprising was according to him a “*meaningless outburst*”, a “*‘irrational’ outbursts of destructive violence*”, a “*zero-degree protest, a violent action demanding nothing*”. This can only be said by an intellectual who didn’t participate in the uprising, who refuses to read or to understand the many reports of eye-witnesses and who considers the fighters to be “*ferals*” or “*stupid animals*”. The whole chronology of the August Uprising starting with the police murder of Mark Duggan and the violent suppression of the protest rally on 5th August, the numerous statement of activists reported in the media, our own experience of the RKOB delegation in conversations with the people in Tottenham and Enfield – all this makes it completely obvious that the hatred against the police, against the racist discrimination, against the poverty and the system behind it were the causes and the motivation for the rebellion. The problem is not the “*zero-degree protest*” but the zero-degree understanding of the revolt by a middle class intellectual.

It is only logical that Žižek slanders the rebellious working class youth as “*rabble*” – abusing poor old Hegel. It is not a far way to conclude from the “*rabble*” to the “*feral*” of Cameron and his right wing propagandists.

Žižek tries to present his slander as philosophical wisdom with his reference to Hegel's 'abstract negativity'. But we Marxists know that movement is impossible without negativity – indeed Lenin spoke about "*negativity, which is the inherent pulsation of self-movement and vitality*" (9) Negativity is a step towards Negation, part of the movement of the contradictions. Politically speaking the spontaneous August Uprising of the poor and oppressed was a step on their contradictory road in acting as a revolutionary subject – despite the denial of the zero-philosopher.

Finally Žižek arrogantly compares the rabble rioters to the university student demonstrating in November 2010. The unruly spontaneous protest of university students is great (these are the people whom Žižek teaches every day) while the unruly spontaneous protest of the dangerous "*rabble*" (with whom people like Žižek hardly ever have contact) is dangerous and "*mindless*". It is true that the working class youth in the poor districts are not well organised in parties and unions. This is not their fault, but the fault of the labour movement. It is therefore not surprising that they did not formally present petitions and declarations. It is also quite possible that they are not as educated as the university students who could explain more eloquently their demands to the media. So what, Mister Philosopher?! You better learn the language and the desire of the working class – go to the areas where they live and support their struggle and efforts to organising. If not, Mr. Žižek, stay at your university but please spare us with your wisdom about the working class, black and migrant youth whom you slander as "*rabble*"!

It is a shame that many leftists praise Žižek as a Marxist philosopher. This tells us a lot about the understanding of Marxism of these leftists. In fact reading Žižek's assessment of the Uprising is important because it expresses – on a "*philosophical*" level – the approach of the left-wing middle class and labour aristocracy to the violent forms of class struggle of the lower strata of the proletariat. To a certain degree he acts today as the philosopher of petty bourgeois left-wing aristocratism.

Some time ago comrade Simon Hardy from the League for the Fifth International published a good critique of Slavoj Žižek and correctly characterised him as an "*idealist Trojan horse*", writing "*but he is in fact a Trojan horse, smuggling in idealist and anti revolutionary concepts into the left.*" (10) But today as the LFI and its British section Workers Power have ceased to be a revolutionary organisation they promote Žižek's reactionary article about the Uprising on their own website. (11) Without a single word of critique in their preface readers of the WP website are invited to join Žižek denouncing of the "*zero-degree protest*" of the "*rabble*". It reflects the sentiments about the August Uprising and the political degeneration of the LFI/WP leadership that such a reactionary statement can find praise and promotion on its website!

It is the arrogant reaction of the pseudo-Marxists to the spontaneous uprisings of the masses. The Russian Marxist fighter, Vladimir Lenin, wrote a polemic in his preface to the Russian translation of Karl Marx's letters to Kugelmann in 1907 against the Menshevik Intellectual Plekhanov, who was an old leader of the revolutionary movement in Russia. Plekhanov condemned the defeated Revolution of 1905 in Russia, moaning that the "*masses should not have taken up arms*". Plekhanov compared himself even with Marx, who was warning the masses in Paris in September 1870 that the insurrection under the concrete circumstances would be an act of desperate folly. Whilst Marx warned the masses in advance he didn't hesitate a single moment to support their struggle half a year later culminating the Uprising of the Paris Communes in March 1871. He rather expressed full enthusiasm, developed tactics to guide the masses, to show them the next steps forward combined with the perspectives in their concrete struggle.

Lenin wrote about this in his polemic against Plekhanov:

"The historical initiative of the masses was what Marx prized above everything else. Ah, if only our Russian Social-Democrats would learn from Marx how to appreciate the historical initiative of the Russian workers and peasants in October and December 1905!

Compare the homage paid to the historical initiative of the masses by a profound thinker, who foresaw failure six months ahead—and the lifeless, soulless, pedantic: "They should not have taken up arms"! Are these not as far apart as heaven and earth?

And like a participant in the mass struggle, to which he reacted with all his characteristic ardour and passion, Marx, then living in exile in London, set to work to criticise the immediate steps of the "recklessly brave" Parisians who were "ready to storm heaven".

Ah, how our present "realist" wiseacres among the Marxists, who in 1906-07 are deriding revolutionary romanticism in Russia, would have sneered at Marx at the time! How people would have scoffed at a materialist, an economist, an enemy of utopias, who pays homage to an "attempt" to storm heaven! What tears, condescending smiles or commiseration these "men in mufflers" would have bestowed upon him for his rebel tendencies, utopianism, etc., etc., and for his appreciation of a heaven-storming movement!" (12)

Žižek today as well as all "Marxists" who share his sentiments on the August Uprisings, including the LFI/WP leadership, sneered at the masses on the streets and the ones who are really participating in their fight. If this behaviour would be characteristic for Marxists, than Marx would not have been one.

In contrary to the behaviour of LFI/WP leadership a delegation of the RKOB from Austria went to Britain to agitate day and night in the working class districts of London and to participate in the struggle of the proletarian youth. Of course there have been a lot of weaknesses of these struggles and one can even say that the perspective of the developments, i.e. the massive repression afterwards, could have been foreseen. But Marxism includes a very simple principle: If the proletarian masses are on the streets fighting against the bourgeois state apparatus revolutionaries have to participate, have to develop the correct tactics for this struggle. Wiseacres can sneer at the masses (the revolutionary masses will sneer back at them too) but if they dare to call themselves Marxists they have to be unmasked.

(8) Slavoj Žižek: Shoplifters of the World Unite, London Review of Books, 19 August 2011, <http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite>

(9) In German: W.I. Lenin, Konspekt zur ‚Wissenschaft der Logik‘. Die Lehre vom Wesen; in: LW 38, S. 133; in English: http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1914/cons-logic/ch02.htm#LCW38_129

(10) Simon Hardy: Slavoj Žižek, an idealist Trojan horse, LFI, 28/10/2010, <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/slavoj-zizek-idealist-trojan-horse>

(11) <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite/>

(12) W. I. Lenin: Vorwort zur russischen Übersetzung der Briefe von K. Marx an L. Kugelmann (1907); in: LW 12, S. 101; in English: Preface to the Russian Translation of Karl Marx's Letters to Dr. Kugelmann, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1907/feb/05.htm>

IV. Lootings and the illusion of “pure” Insurrections

It is no surprise that the bourgeoisie, the reformist bureaucracy and their mouth pieces utilise the looting as a pretext to denounce the August Uprising as criminal and apolitical. It is a shame that the majority of the centrist left adapts to this “*public opinion*” and emphasizes the criminal, looting character of the uprising.

But in fact history has seen many protests which involved mass violence and looting. For example in Vienna in 1911 mass protests occurred against the inflation of food prices. When the police dispersed the demonstrators with brutal force and killed several of them riots broke out.

The social democratic leader Otto Bauer wrote at that time about the forms of this uprising:

“In whole districts of Vienna there was no house, no window, no lantern which was still intact. In the working class district Ottakring school building and tram wagons were set on fire. Barricades were build, the soldiers shoot at the people and behind the enraged masses the lumpen proletariat looted the shops.” (13)

Marxists take the class struggle as it is. They do not raise arrogantly their noses if the masses do not organise the way they would like them to. If an anti-colonial uprising included the “*senseless*” slaughtering of white settlers and their families and the destruction of property this certainly could never have stopped revolutionaries to support this uprising (while of course rejecting all harmful actions). When the national uprising of the Tibetans erupted in March 2008 it also involved a number of attacks against the Chinese and the destruction of their shops. Again only a Stalinist or a reactionary lump could have refused support for this progressive national liberation struggle (again this has to be combined with sharp propaganda and agitation against nationalism). Also today many spontaneous mass protests are accompanied with such features as looting and burning. One just has to look to the hunger revolts of the last years. The author of this article himself saw such results of a spontaneous insurrection when he was in Argentina after the revolutionary days in December 2001.

A number of socialists are prepared to accept this argument ... if it is about events far away. But at home where the pressure of the bourgeois public and the petty-bourgeois milieu of the reformist bureaucracy is strong, they “*forget*” this, i.e. they capitulate to the pressure of the class enemy.

It is characteristic of the reformist and centrist left that many of them approach an uprising by judging it if it meets the standards of a “*pure*”, peaceful and orderly protest. To avoid any misunderstanding: We Marxists say that looting of small shops, burning of shops which can even lead to the destruction of working class homes are wrong. But what various left reformists and centrists do is that they claim that such looting of small shops, burning of houses – the “*mindless destruction of the working class community*” – were the main feature the essence of the uprising. This is nothing else than capitulation to the British bourgeois public opinion produced by the ruling class, their Tory government and their servants at the top of the Labour movement.

Without claiming to have a full picture it is worth mentioning that when our comrades from the RKOB delegation visited Tottenham it was visible that small shops were not the targets of destruction but supermarkets and betting shops were.

Yes, if the revolutionary party is a mass party and has an organised workers militia we would have stopped the looting of small shops and similar destructive acts. But this is not the case today and the revolutionary party will be built via struggles which are either spontaneous or under the leadership of the reformist bureaucracy. Revolutionaries take developments in class struggle with the masses on the streets as they are; they join the masses with a given consciousness and fight inside the militant masses for the correct, the consequent revolutionary line.

As Marxists we denounce all those who claim that the looting is the essential, the main characteristic of the August Uprising. Yes, there were many weaknesses in the uprising. But this is natural for a spontaneous movement. And even organised mass movements can and do have many weaknesses. Let us not forget the huge weaknesses of the peaceful protests or the orderly general strikes. Does anyone seriously believe that they are sufficient to bring down a government?!

"But the August Uprising with its destructions weakened the popular support and divided the working class!" – the centrists say to cover their betrayal. But Marxists reply that it often happens if the oppressed rise up that the backward layers of the working class are opposed to it. Many workers in Germany initially opposed the student uprising in the 1960s. Many white workers in the USA opposed the black insurrection in Detroit, Chicago, Baltimore etc in the same decade. And does anyone believe if the public transport workers, the hospital workers or the kindergarten workers go on strike that the majority of the working class always supports them?!

No, all these reference to the wrong actions of the oppressed which divide the working class are a reflection of the failure to withstand the pressure of the bourgeois public opinion and the labour bureaucracy by the reformist and centrist left.

The leader of the Bolshevik party, Vladimir Illich Lenin, once wrote about the contradictory nature of mass uprisings: *„To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc.-to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution. So one army lines up in one place and says, "We are for socialism", and another, somewhere else and says, "We are for imperialism", and that will be a social revolution! Only those who hold such a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a "putsch".*

Whoever expects a "pure" social revolution will never live to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is.

The Russian Revolution of 1905 was a bourgeois-democratic revolution. It consisted of a series of battles in which all the discontented classes, groups and elements of the population participated. Among these there were masses imbued with the crudest prejudices, with the vaguest and most fantastic aims of struggle; there were small groups which accepted Japanese money, there were speculators and adventurers, etc. But objectively, the mass movement was breaking the shackles of tsarism and paving the way for democracy; for this reason the class-conscious workers led it.

The socialist revolution in Europe cannot be anything other than an outburst of mass struggle on the part of all and sundry oppressed and discontented elements. Inevitably, sections of the petty bourgeoisie and of the backward workers will participate in it—without such participation, mass struggle is impossible, without it no revolution is possible—and just as inevitably will they bring into the movement their prejudices, their reactionary fantasies, their weaknesses and errors. But objectively they will attack capital, and the class-conscious vanguard of the revolution, the advanced proletariat, expressing this objective truth of a variegated and discordant, motley and outwardly fragmented, mass struggle, will be able to unite and direct it, capture power, seize the banks, expropriate the trusts which all hate (though for difficult reasons!), and introduce other dictatorial measures which in their totality will amount to the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the victory of socialism, which, however, will by no means immediately "purge" itself of petty-bourgeois slag." (14)

These observations are particularly true today in the period of capitalist decay, mass upheavals and at the same time a lack of revolutionary leadership.

(13) Otto Bauer: Die Teuerungsrevolte in Wien (September 1911); in: Die neue Zeit (Wochenschrift der deutschen Sozialdemokratie), Jahrgang 29, Band 2, S. 913, online: http://library.fes.de/cgi-bin/neuzeit.pl?id=07.08072&dok=1910-11b&f=191011b_0913&l=191011b_0917&c=191011b_0913 (our own translation)

(14) W. I. Lenin: Die Ergebnisse der Diskussion über die Selbstbestimmung (1916), in: LW 22, S. 363f.; in English: The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm> (Emphasis in the Original)

V. Failure of the Left to understand the nature of the so-called “riots”

Most on the reformist and centrist left failed to understand the riots as a justified uprising, as a rebellion of the oppressed, in short as a form of class struggle. Of course nearly every progressive person (even some parts of the bourgeois media did this) points to the deeper reason for the riots - the misery and unemployment caused by capitalism and now escalated by the Tory policy of cuts in social service. And how can one overlook the fact that the uprising was triggered by the police killing of Mark Duggan and the violent reaction of the racist police forces against the community’s peaceful protest?! Of course how could one ignore the misery caused by mass unemployment and impoverishment?! This connection is no mystery even for the liberals. But most of the left don’t draw the conclusion out of this – to understand that the riots are an (often semi- or unconscious) expression of anger and hatred against the forces and symbols of the capitalist system (police, shops). This is why we called it from the beginning an uprising of the poor and the oppressed.

In addition to this it has *the nature of a spontaneous uprising of the masses*. This means of course that facing the weaknesses of the leadership of the labour movement, this kind of protest was unavoidable badly organized. Everyone who is arrogantly wrinkling his nose because of the lack of organized structures has not understood the depth of the leadership crisis, is not seeing the tragedy lying in the betrayal from the reformist leaderships of the trade unions and its organizations. How can anybody who calls himself a Marxist blame the masses in acting spontaneously and to a certain degree also chaotic? The centrist left has its structures and organization, but everyone who is more than just a Marxist by name stands nearer to the unorganized and “*chaotic*” proletarian youth on the streets during the uprisings than to every organization in the centrist and reformist spectrum. There is a time for discussions and a time for actions. When parts of our class are on the street, fighting against the police and the capitalist system then we have to be there too, proving that we are in solidarity with the masses not only as an idea but in real actions.

Stalinist CPB / YCL

Instead various left-reformist and centrist organisations have openly condemned and denounced the uprising. The Stalinists from the Communist Party of Britain – whose leadership just came back from visiting and congratulating their “*comrades*” in the Chinese Communist Party (for what? For successfully building China’s emerging imperialism?!) (15) – condemned the uprising and demonstrated that it is a reformist obstacle for the class struggle. In a statement “*No to violence, but capitalism is the root cause of alienation*” its youth organisation managed not only to “*condemn the reckless violence and widespread criminality of recent nights*” but also made the bourgeois media responsible for it because ... it gave too much coverage to the unorganised, spontaneous square occupation movement in Spain and the Arab world!

“*The Young Communist League supports the call of the youth of London for justice and for a future. We condemn the reckless violence and widespread criminality of recent nights but understand it as a direct product of the capitalist system, and the resulting dangerous lack of security and stability for the youth of today, accompanied by disenfranchisement and exacerbated by unprecedented levels of alienation. Additionally, the chaotic manner in which the youth are expressing their anger is just one dangerous consequence of the promotion by the bourgeois media of “indignant peoples” protest, protest without organisation, called through social media and without structure, democracy, leadership or clear politics.*” (16)

So the bourgeois media are responsible for the riots ... because they report about the mass protests and revolutions in the Arab world and Southern Europe! The Stalinist bureaucrats are disappointed that the media reports about mass uprisings instead of the glorious achievements of the Communist Party in Britain. The official state media in the Stalinist states before 1989 certainly would not have allowed such failures! The only kernel of truth in this utterly reactionary statement of the CPB/YCL is their unintended recognition of similarities and connections between the uprisings in the Arab world, Southern Europe and Britain. But as the CPB disregards the popular uprising in Libya as a CIA-sponsored conspiracy against the "anti-imperialist" Gaddafi-regime it is understandably not amused by the violent character against the order of His Majesty in their own backyard. Well, this reactionary statement of the CPB/YCL hardly needs any further comment.

(15) See e.g. CPB: Britain's communists in China 2011, http://www.comunist-party.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1399:britains-communists-in-china-2011&catid=129:solidarity&Itemid=161

(16) Young Communist League: No to violence, but capitalism is the root cause of alienation; 9 August 2011, http://www.ycl.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=194:young-communist-leagues-on-riots-in-london&catid=29:london&Itemid=61

Socialist Party / Committee for a Workers International

The so-called Trotskyist Socialist Party/CWI also stated in various statements its condemnation of the uprising: *"The Socialist Party does not support rioting as a method of protest, but we place the blame for what has taken place firmly on the Con-Dem government and say that it must be removed."* (17)

The SP in Liverpool expressed the same sentiment in even stronger terms: *"Liverpool & District Socialist Party is appalled at the current rioting which has resulted in the destruction of working peoples' homes, workplaces, and the community facilities and shops they rely on."* (18)

And the SP's deputy general secretary, Hannah Sell, not only condemned the riots as "only damaging for the working-class communities" but even went so far to openly denounce the SWP for linking the riots with the idea of a revolution!

"However, rioting is not the means to defeat the government, but, on the contrary, only damages the communities in which working-class people live, and gives the capitalist class an excuse to increase the repressive apparatus of the state."

The Socialist Party does not agree with those on the left who condone the riots, such as the Socialist Workers Party, whose posters in the areas affected by riots declare them to be a step from 'riot to revolution'." (19)

The latest SP's youth campaign added in its leaflet another argument for opposing the riots: *"But we will not defeat the government by rioting. On the contrary, the destruction of homes and services hugely exacerbates the problems our community faces."* (20)

Of course it is obvious that riots will not defeat the government. But this is true for most forms of the class struggle today! Will a peaceful demonstration – which the CWI-leadership prefers to the riots – defeat the government?! Will a peaceful one-day general strike – another slogan favoured by the CWI-leadership – bring down the government?! Will the occupation of a square bring down the government?! Dream on, comrade pacifists!

Yes, the riots could not bring down the government but this was because of their lack of organisation, their lack of spreading and their failure to involve wider sectors of the working class. For all these one must not blame the youth, the blacks and migrants but the leaderships of the Trade Unions, the Labour Left and of the various anti-cuts movements who terribly failed in the past to rally and organise the masses for a full onslaught against the government and by this to attract and organise the poorer sector of the proletariat. In addition to it all of these forces are not even in contact with these sectors of our class. They have no idea about these layers – not even when one can find the poorest sector being active in uprisings, not to mention times of lower class struggle.

Building the fight back will not only enter the road of peaceful demonstrations and orderly strikes including general strikes. It will also enter the road of violent uprisings of which the August uprising was only a first step, a beginning as Ambalavaner Sivanandan correctly stated.

What in fact is behind the SP/CWI's reactionary condemnation of the August Uprising is their adaption to the reformist Labour bureaucracy. This adaption expresses itself in anti-Marxist understanding of the nature of the bourgeois state. The bourgeois state – according to the CWI – does not need to be smashed by an armed uprising of the proletariat but can be peacefully transformed, even by getting a majority in parliamentary elections. This is a reformist position which the CWI held since their foundation in the 1970s.

Peter Taaffe, the central leader of the SP/CWI, defended this idea explicitly. In an interview a few years ago he answered to the question if there will be a revolution to overthrow capitalism:

"Well yes, a change in society, established through winning a majority in elections, backed up by a mass movement to prevent the capitalists from overthrowing a socialist government and fighting, not to take over every small shop, every betting shop or every street corner shop -- in any case, they are disappearing because of the rise of the supermarkets -- and so on, or every small factory, but to nationalise a handful of monopolies, transnationals now, that control 80 to 85% of the economy." (21)

And in an educational pamphlet which the CWI publishes on its website another central leader, Lynn Walsh, repeats this idea:

"Our programme presented the case for "the socialist transformation of society" - a popularised form of 'socialist revolution'. We use this formulation to avoid the crude association between 'revolution' and 'violence' always falsely made by apologists of capitalism. A successful socialist transformation can be carried through only on the basis of the support of the overwhelming majority of the working class, with the support of other layers, through the most radical forms of democracy. On that basis, provided a socialist government takes decisive measures on the basis of mobilising the working class, it would be possible to carry through a peaceful change of society. Any threat of violence would come, not from a popular socialist government, but from forces seeking to restore their monopoly of wealth, power and privilege by mobilising a reaction against the democratic majority." (22)

As we can see the CWI doesn't understand the character of the bourgeois state with its huge machinery – built from top down without any democratic control from below and which serves and can only serve the capitalist class. It exists and can only exist in order to implement the class interests of the bourgeoisie and enforce them against the resistance of the working class and oppressed. The CWI doesn't understand that such machinery is incompatible to serve the working class in its road to socialism. This is why Marxists say that the bourgeois state cannot be reformed but must be smashed by a violent revolution. This is why Lenin repeated again and again:

„The supersession of the bourgeois state by the proletarian state is impossible without a violent revolution.“ (23)

And against the centrist Kautsky, who like the CWI, today praised the peaceful transformation of capitalism Lenin stated:

„The proletarian revolution is impossible without the forcible destruction of the bourgeois state machine...“ (24)

As a result of their revisionist theory of the capitalist state the CWI clams that there is no class contradiction involved between the police (despite the fact it is the armed fist of the ruling class) on one hand and the working class and oppressed on the other hand. Therefore the CWI see the police men and women as *“workers in uniform”*.

This is obviously wrong and in contradiction to the classic lessons of the Marxist classics – and in contradiction to the experiences the labor movement made for more than 150 years. The only purpose of the police is to control and oppress the working class – like low-level managers in the enterprise. Neither of them directly or indirectly creates or distributes value in any form. They are paid parasites and thugs of capitalism. They are part of the middle layers and not of the working class. It doesn't matter if the police man or woman initially comes from the working class. Not the past but the present and the foreseeable future are decisive. This is why Trotsky thought any such idea of police men or women are *“workers in uniform”* is ridiculous:

„The fact that the police was originally recruited in large numbers from among Social Democratic workers is absolutely meaningless. Consciousness is determined by environment even in this instance. The worker who becomes a policeman in the service of the capitalist state, is a bourgeois cop, not a worker. Of late years these policemen have had to do much more fighting with revolutionary workers than with Nazi students. Such training does not fail to leave its effects. And above all: every policeman knows that though governments may change, the police remain.“ (25)

As a result the SP/CWI doesn't want to smash the police but rather reform it and *“put them under control of the people”*. This wrong theoretical concept of the CWI leads to a reformist practice. Not only did they condemn the violence of the oppressed – they also didn't call for organized self-defense of the workers and youth in Tottenham, Brixton etc! How should they have defended themselves against the police?! These centrist don't care. Instead the praise the reformist policy of *“controlling”* the police:

“For control of the police to be placed under the auspices of democratically elected local committees involving representatives from trade unions, councils, tenants associations, and community organisations.“ (26)

This is of course a completely illusionary, wrong perspective. We don't need stupid hopes in reforming the police but rather decisive steps to organise armed self-defence units against the police. If police men and women are really standing on the side of the working class, they will leave the oppression apparatus to join such organs of self-defence. The only way to be a *“worker in uniform”* is possible via the total break with the police background, i.e. quitting this job, swapping the police uniform with the uniforms of the working class militias. As long as one stands in the duty of the apparatus oppressing the working class, he or she is not part of this class. What count is not what police men or women are thinking, but rather what they are doing.

(17) Judy Beishon: Con-Dems to blame for anger of youth - mass, trade union-led workers' response needed, The Socialist newspaper, 16 August 2011, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12555/16-08-2011/con-dems-to-blame-for-anger-of-youth-mass-trade-union-led-workers-response-needed>

(18) Liverpool & District Socialist Party statement on the riots in Liverpool, 10 August 2011, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12516/10-08-2011/liverpool-socialist-party-statement-on-the-riots-in-liverpool>

(19) Hannah Sell (Socialist Party deputy general secretary): As inner cities erupt - A mass workers' movement is needed to defeat the government, 9 August 2011, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12510/09-08-2011/as-inner-cities-erupt-a-mass-workers-movement-is-needed-to-defeat-the-government>

(20) Youth Fight for Jobs: London is Burning: Youth Demand A Future (Leaflet)

- (21) The Socialist Party's history – The Militant Tendency, The Socialist, 29th June 2006, http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/html_article/2006-446-militant
- (22) Lynn Walsh: The State – A Marxist Programme and Transitional Demands; in: Marxism and the State – An Exchange by Michael Wainwright and Lynn Walsh, <http://www.socialistalternative.org/literature/state/>
- (23) V. I. Lenin: The State and Revolution. The Marxist Teaching on the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution (1917), Foreign Languages Press Peking 1970, p. 25
- (24) V. I. Lenin: The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky, Foreign Languages Press, Peking 1972, p. 13
- (25) Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932) in: Schriften über Deutschland, Band 1, S. 186; <http://www.marxists.org/deutsch/archiv/trotsky/1932/wasnun/index.htm>; Leon Trotsky: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat, <http://marxists.architexturez.net/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next01.htm#s1>
- (26) Hannah Sell (Socialist Party deputy general secretary): As inner cities erupt - A mass workers' movement is needed to defeat the government, 9 August 2011, <http://www.socialistparty.org.uk/articles/12510/09-08-2011/as-inner-cities-erupt-a-mass-workers-movement-is-needed-to-defeat-the-government>

Socialist Appeal / International Marxist Tendency

Similarly reactionary was the position of Alan Woods' Socialist Appeal/International Marxist Tendency which operates since 1964 (until 1991 as part of the CWI) as a left opposition inside the social democratic Labour Party. Like the CWI the SA/IMT in its leaflet mixed together and presented as an identical thing the resistance against the police, the looting of Tesco, Aldi etc and the few incidents of burning houses. It went even further in its use of reactionary terminology than the CWI and compared the uprising with "cancer":

"Do Marxists condone rioting, looting and vandalism? No, of course we do not. We do not condone cancer, either. But as everybody knows, it is not enough to condemn cancer. It is necessary to discover its causes and find a cure. We reject rioting and looting utterly." (27)

Again we see the denunciatory lumping together of the fight against the police, destruction of gambling clubs, looting of super-markets and vandalism against homes and cars. This is what the bourgeois media, the government etc. already do massively. What a shame that so-called Marxists help them in arguing similarly!

No, comrades of the IMT leadership, the cancer is not the riots but the Labour bureaucrats and their left fig leaves that disorganise and obstruct the struggle against the cuts. The youth, the poor, the nationally and racially oppressed are not part of the problem (the cancer) but they are part of the solution. They can be a decisive force to revitalize the workers movement, to bring in a revolutionary spirit and to build a revolutionary party.

As with the CWI the IMT condemnation of the Uprising is related with their refusal of the violent class struggle, their reformist conception of the peaceful transformation of the capitalist state and the illusionary hope that the labour bureaucrats could overcome their petty-bourgeois essence and become servants of the working class:

„A peaceful transformation of society would be entirely possible if the trade union and reformist leaders were prepared to use the colossal power in their hands to change society. If the workers leaders did not do this, then there could be rivers of blood, and this would entirely be the responsibility of the reformist leaders." (28)

And like the CWI the IMT too believes that the bourgeois parliament could become a vehicle for socialist transformation. Their leader Alan Woods claims that Portugal – in fact an example of the impossibility to utilise the state apparatus for socialism – in 1974 is a good example for his reformist theory:

"Under these circumstances, there is not the slightest question, not only that the revolution in Portugal could have been carried out peacefully, but that it could have been done through parliament." (29)

No surprise that the IMT also dreams the dream of the police as *"workers in uniform"*.

(27) The leaflet is a summary of the longer article of Alan Woods with the same title, published on 9.8.2011, <http://www.marxist.com/riots-london-britain.htm>

(28) Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, December 2008, www.marxist.com

(29) Alan Woods: Marxism and the State, December 2008, www.marxist.com

Alliance for Workers Liberty

The AWL also joined the chorus of those condemning the uprising:

"No one with any sense will endorse, still less glorify or romanticise, the four-day outbreak of street violence, random destruction and pitiful looting that swept over Britain last week." (30)

Representative for a whole strand in the left they blame the uprising for dividing the working class and community. Rather the opposite is the case: Actions like the uprisings of the poorer strata of the working class can be very useful and inspiring for the rest of our class. They show readiness in taking militant forms of action. They show fearlessness in class struggle, which is rooted in poverty and daily oppression that can't be shaken off. And they show how urgent the building of the revolutionary party is which organizes these fearless militants, and which leads the struggle to success.

So instead of the putting the responsibility for all failures and weaknesses to whom they belong - to the left-wing bureaucrats in the labour and student movement with whom the AWL leaders are regularly collaborating and who failed to build a indefinite general strike movement against the government, and who failed to integrate the poorer strata of the working class into the struggle - the AWL put the blame for the divide on the youth who are fighting!

"They will be further alienated from the young people in Lewisham, Peckham, Nottingham. The rioting will alienate the organised labour movement, even those large sections of it which will instinctively sympathise with the plight of the people in the riot hit areas. These outbreaks in areas with large black population, and involving young black people, cannot fail to stimulate and strengthen racism. They will help those such as the EDL in fomenting a 'them and us' view of British society. The fact that Asian and Muslim shops have been burned out and looted and that many of the rioters were white will not lessen or off-set that." (31)

What a shameful blaming of the fighters against the police albeit not surprisingly coming from an organisation which has political positions like supporting Zionism and defending the existence of the racist Apartheid state Israel!

As a side note one cannot fail to mention that all these right-wing centrist organisations with their open condemnation of the so called riots were more backward and right wing than the openly reformist Labour Representation Committee (LRC) chaired by the left-wing Labour MP John McDonnell! In its statement - distributed as a leaflet in London - the LRC at least did not openly condemn the uprising. (32)

Finally we want to draw our reader's attention to the fact that these very same organisations - like the Stalinists, SP/CWI, SA/IMT etc. - supported the chauvinist strike in the campaign *"British Jobs for British Workers"* in 2009. (33) At that time British workers at the Lindsey Oil Refinery wanted to stop the hiring of migrant workers - a social-chauvinist campaign which Marxist revolutionaries correctly condemned sharply.

This correlation is of course no accident. It shows the close connection between the left-reformist and centrist social-imperialists, labour-aristocratic prejudices and the open condemnation of the class struggle of the lower strata of the proletariat including the black and migrant communities.

(30) Sean Matgamna: The riots: stand up to this class-hate blitz on the poor! 14 August, 2011, <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/08/14/after-riots-stand-class-hate-blitz-poor>

(31) Workers Liberty: Blame the establishment for the riots! (Leaflet), it is identical with the same-titled article by Sean Matgamna, 9 August, 2011, <http://www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/08/09/blame-establishment-riots#comment-29116>

(32) Labour Representation Committee: Statement on events in Tottenham and their context, 8th August 2011, <http://l-r-c.org.uk/press/statement-on-events-in-tottenham-and-their-context/>

(33) For our position on these reactionary strikes we refer to the resolution of the statement of the at that time still revolutionary organisation Workers Power: No to the nationalist strikes, 1st February 2009, <http://www.workerspower.com/index.php?id=47,1821,0,0,1,0> and an article which the author of these lines wrote in German: Einleitung der Liga der Sozialistischen Revolution zur Stellungnahme Britannien: Nein zu den nationalistischen Streiks!, 5.2.2009, <http://arbeiterinnenstandpunkt.net/phpwcms/index.php?id=25,579,0,0,1,0>

Socialist Workers Party / International Socialist Tendency

To the credit of the SWP they did not join the chorus of the left's condemnation of the so-called riots. Their main failure was that they didn't develop a concrete tactic, a programme for action in the uprising. But we will deal with this later.

What has to be said here is that the SWP failed to grasp the full meaning and importance of the uprising. They failed to see that it was part of a pre-revolutionary development in the British society. Therefore they had no perspective to spread the struggle but dealt with them like an isolated riot in a district somewhere in Britain.

In addition to this they had no aim to organize the black and migrant youth independent from the petit-bourgeois leadership of the communities. This leadership was one of the reasons why it was possible for the ruling class to bring the uprisings to an end. There was a big campaign going on in the communities organized by the leaders to get control over the actions of the migrant and black youth to "bring them home", i.e. to stop the uprisings.

This is not surprising if one remembers the SWP's opportunistic adaption to the Muslim business men and community leaders when they built together with the RESPECT party for several years in the 2000s. In the end this project failed: the party had no success at the elections and the SWP left RESPECT. But while they have broken with a failed project they have not broken with the popular-frontist method behind it.

Workers Power / League for the Fifth International

Workers Power – an organisation which comes from a revolutionary tradition but which has unfortunately degenerated in the recent past into a centrist direction – had a similar assessment of the situation. They refused the reactionary condemnation of the organisations mentioned above. But they treated the riots as understandable, even justified, but hopeless and perspective-less local uprising. During the uprising the SWP at least touched the question of the connection of riots and the perspective of the revolution. While this was inconsistent and not enough at least they expressed this important idea.

But the erstwhile revolutionary Workers Power group failed even in this. Worse they made concessions to the petty-bourgeois public opinion in relativization of the motivation of the masses in this uprising. In their statement they wrote: *"Some are motivated by hatred of the police and rage at this society – others by the promise of raiding local shops for goods – some by both."* (34)

This was the assessment of the two articles which WP published in the two weeks after the beginning of the uprising. Only one and a half weeks after the end of the uprising the WP leadership adopted a resolution which – probably after being reminded how WP assessed similar riots in the past – turned to evaluate the uprising much more positively. The comrades now – like the RKOB – speak about the *"so-called riots"* and even adopted our name we gave to this event: *"the August Uprising"*. The article also was now more explicit about the character of the uprising. Instead of the *"mixed motivations"* the WPB leadership accepted now what we said from the beginning:

"In all cases, there were a mix of people, classes and motivations for those who came onto the streets. Like revolutions, so-called 'riots' bring people from all the lower classes onto the streets, but this does not mean it is impossible to discern the dominant groups and the main class interests driving the action. It was in the main an uprising of working class youth against police brutality, racism and harassment, and the underlying conditions facing the working class today" (35)

However as we will see this didn't lead them to any correction of their non-revolutionary policy. In fact only a few words in the official assessment changed which couldn't have any practical consequences since the Uprising *"fortunately"* (for WP) was already over. This is why WP can publish an optimistic sounding resolution on the August Uprising and at the same time promote a reactionary condemnation of the Uprising by Žižek. There is no contradiction in this because in essence there is a tendency of Žižekism in the Workers Powers analysis. While they would not use the same words as the philosopher they share his scepticism towards the youth of the lower strata of the working class and their ability to play a central role in the struggle for liberation. That's why they never orientated towards these layers and why in the past decades hardly recruited anyone from amongst the black, migrant and poorer strata of the working class.

(34) Workers Power: With the working class youth of London – against the police, Statement from 8 August, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/with-the-working-class-youth-of-london-%E2%80%93-against-the-police/>

(35) Workers Power: The political situation in Britain after the August uprising; Resolution on the political situation after the riots, 19.8.2011, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/political-situation-after-the-august-uprising/>

VI. SWP: Solidarity but no revolutionary tactics

Those reformist and centrist forces which condemned the August Uprising naturally didn't provide any tactics to win the struggle. But even those centrists who refused to condemn the uprising failed in this.

As we already said the SWP positively differentiated itself from other centrists by relating the riots to the perspective of revolution. However such associations in slogans are hardly sufficient as a compass in such days. In fact if one looks at the SWP statement which was also distributed in these days as a leaflet it didn't contain any tactics for the Uprising.

In their statement the paragraphs which relate to the perspectives said only this:

"We need more protests like the huge demonstration on 26 March and the strike by 750,000 workers on 30 June. Such struggles can unite desperate young people and workers who face job cuts, attacks on pensions, huge wage

reductions and worse conditions. We call for the TUC, trade unions, and campaign groups to hurl themselves into the fight against the cuts, poverty and racism. We call for building events such as the demonstration against the English Defence League in east London on 3 September, the protest at the Tory conference in Manchester on 2 October, and the coordinated strike by more than a million workers planned for November. A real solution to the despair that creates riots will need a different sort of society, where the needs of the vast majority, rather than a tiny elite, come first.” (36)

So while the SWP leadership flirts with the link of riots and revolution when it come to the concrete proposals they refer to the routine menu of the British left – they already pre-planned demonstrations in one, two or three month time. Not a single proposal on how to fight now, how to organise, which demands to raise etc.! “*From Riots to Revolution*” sounds good but the SWP leadership did not even call for organised self-defence against the police! No, comrades of the SWP, despite the best intentions this is useless as a perspective for an uprising of the masses and it doesn’t help the activists which are now suffering from the massive wave of repression.

The historic – meanwhile deceased – SWP/IST leader Tony Cliff used to joke about the Marxist method of developing programmes and making propaganda for them. He used to say: “*You don't need the blueprint for a gun you need the gun itself*” Well, the August Uprising is an excellent example that if you don’t have a blueprint you will never be able to build a gun, not even to understand how to build a gun correctly. The SWP refused to develop a method of how to intervene in such struggles, to develop a programme from which one can derive slogans and tactics. As a result it was completely overwhelmed by the Uprising and lacked any perspective. It could not play the role of a vanguard but rather could only applaud what the masses already did and invite them to their next routine demonstrations and meetings.

Behind this failure is – on a theoretical level – the refusal of the Marxist theory of class consciousness. Marx explained at the beginning of Volume I of “*Capital*” that the dual nature of commodities as exchange value and use value creates a so-called “*commodity fetishism*”. (37) Indeed this fetishism is reproduced in all areas of the complex social formation of capitalism. It is doubled and tripled by the huge ideological apparatus of the ruling class (media, School, university etc.). This ideological fog makes it impossible for the workers (and of course even less for other layers) to spontaneously understand the inner mechanism of capitalism and to develop a programme how to smash it. For this – in addition to the collective practice of the proletariat – a scientific analysis is necessary. That’s why Marx noted at the end of Vol. III of “*Capital*”: “*But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided.*” (38)

The organisational vehicle for this – the fusion of theory and practice – is the collective of the revolutionary party which consists of the most class consciousness workers and those non-workers who dedicate themselves to the proletarian liberation struggle. The revolutionary party develops the socialist Weltanschauung and the programme for the liberation struggle based on the experience of the past class struggles and transmits this understanding to the mass of the working class. In that sense it brings the socialist class consciousness into the proletariat.

It is not by accident that all the major groups of centrism (SWP/IST, SP/CWI, SA/IMT, the Mandeliste Fourth International) explicitly reject Lenin’s theory of the relationship of consciousness and spontaneity and the role of the party in it which he developed it in his major work “*What is to be done?*”. Lenin explained that the working class cannot achieve a socialist consciousness spontaneously since it does not arise automatically from the economic sphere of the relationship between workers and capitalists in the enterprise. It is the task of the revolutionary working class organisation to develop a revolutionary outlook from studying all spheres and the relationship between all classes and layers in the capitalist society and to transmit this outlook to the working class. The revolutionaries must do everything possible “*to elevate the spontaneity to the level of consciousness*” (39)

Lenin therefore summarised the task of Marxists as follows:

„Class political consciousness can be brought to the workers only from without, that is, only from outside the economic struggle, from outside the sphere of relations between workers and employers. The sphere from which alone it is possible to obtain this knowledge is the sphere of relationships of all classes and strata to the state and the government, the sphere of the interrelations between all classes. For that reason, the reply to the question as to what must be done to bring political knowledge to the workers cannot be merely the answer with which, in the majority of cases, the practical workers, especially those inclined towards Economism, mostly content themselves, namely: "To go among the workers." To bring political knowledge to the workers the Social Democrats must go among all classes of the population; they must dispatch units of their army in all directions." (40)

Contrary to the claims of the centrists he defended this fundamental understanding until the end of his life:

„On the other hand, the idea, common among the old parties and the old leaders of the Second International, that the majority of the exploited toilers can achieve complete clarity of socialist consciousness and firm socialist convictions and character under capitalist slavery, under the yoke of the bourgeoisie (which assumes an indefinite variety of forms that become more subtle and at the same time more brutal and ruthless the higher the cultural level in a given capitalist country) is also idealisation of capitalism and of bourgeois democracy, as well as deception of the workers. In fact, it is only after the vanguard of the proletariat, supported by the whole or the majority of this, the only revolutionary class, overthrows the exploiters, suppresses them, emancipates the exploited from their state of slavery and-immediately improves their conditions of life at the expense of the expropriated capitalists—it is only after this, and only in the actual process of an acute class struggle, that the masses of the toilers and exploited can be educated, trained and organised around the proletariat under whose influence and guidance, they can get rid of the selfishness, disunity, vices and weaknesses engendered by private property; only then will they be converted into a free union of free workers." (41)

This is important to understand since in it are all these mistakes of spontaneism, tailism and opportunism where socialists fail to support the working class by advancing their insight, by explaining what are the conditions of the struggle and what is the way forward to win. But a revolutionary organisation only has legitimacy if it strives to educate, organise and lead the vanguard of the proletariat.

Fighting for the revolutionary program and helping the working class to overcome illusions is not an exercise which can be undertaken from outside the struggle. Quite the contrary it necessitates that revolutionaries fight inside the masses, that they participate in the struggle and do not just comment from outside. This again shows how criminal the failure of the so-called revolutionaries was to abstain from joining the Uprising.

The mistakes of the other forces who expressed their solidarity, like the pan-African black nationalists or the Stalinists, are similar. The only answer they had for the struggle was to create a self-reliant black community or build socialism and "join the party" - but no program for the struggle, no tactics how to organise. Again even the most sincere in solidarity with the Uprising failed to advance a set of revolutionary tactics.

The August Uprising and its failure are indeed a tragic and powerful verification of the correctness of Lenin's and Trotsky's understanding of the central role of the revolutionary party. Because a revolutionary party was lacking the masses rose up spontaneously but in an unorganised way and without a clear programme, i.e. clear perspectives for its struggle. That's why they could be defeated after a few days. The bureaucratic leadership of the organised workers movement nearly completely denounced the uprising and as a result the workers movement didn't raise a finger in support of it.

This demonstrates the multiple challenges for the future class struggle: Bolshevik-Communists must both support workers and oppressed to overcome the limits of their spontaneous consciousness and to raise it to a socialist class consciousness. They must do this not only by arguing verbally and in writings but by participating actively in actions of class struggle like the uprisings, and by trying to get strong enough to lead at least a part of the vanguard in these actions. They also have to wage a bitter struggle inside the organised workers movement against the treacherous bureaucracy and to rally them behind a revolutionary leadership. Only a strong revolutionary party can achieve this and this is therefore the central task of the coming period.

(36) Socialist Workers Party: Statement on the riots, <http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=25645>

(37) As a side note we want to remark that it is astonishing to hear these middle-class leftists and intellectuals who sneer about youth who looted shops to take a computer or a TV-screen. Often this complaint about the “mindlessness” and “consumerism” of the youth comes from people who already have their laptops and TV-screens. Why on earth does the “rabble” desire to have the same?! May be they just take a little back what this system robbed them in their whole life!?

(38) Karl Marx: Das Kapital, Band III, MEW 25, S. 825; in English on www.marxists.org

(39) W. I. Lenin: Eine Auseinandersetzung mit Verteidigern des Ökonomismus (1901), in: Lenin Werke (LW) Band 5, S.322; English: A Talk With Defenders of Economism

(40) W. I. Lenin: Was tun? (1902), LW 5, S. 436; in English: What is to be done?, www.marxists.org

(41) W. I. Lenin: Thesen über die Hauptaufgaben des Zweiten Kongresses der Kommunistischen Internationale (1920); in: LW 31, S. 175; in English: Theses on Fundamental Tasks of The Second Congress Of The Communist International (1920), <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1920/jul/04.htm>

VII. Cynical Sunshine-Socialism: Workers Power/LFI/REVOLUTION refuses to join the barricades

Workers Power/LFI and its youth organisation REVOLUTION failed in its biggest test of the class struggle since the miner strike in 1984/85 to act as a revolutionary organisation. It failed both politically and practically. It saw the Uprising as an understandable, justified protest but without any perspective. It did not approach it as a class struggle which revolutionaries join and support but as an event on which it commented but which it refused to join. What is justified in situations in which a handful of anarchists loot without any sort of mass influence and/or support from the working class is a crime during situations like the August uprisings.

In relation to this, they did not treat the tens of thousands of youth as part of the revolutionary subject to change the society.

The main political failures of WP leadership were that:

* *It did not call to join and support the Uprising (and therefore also did not participate itself).*

* *It did not apply a united front tactic in calling the organisations of the workers movement to join, support and spread the Uprising.*

* *It didn't raise a single proposal to the tens of thousands of youth on how to fight and to spread the struggle except one sentence "we support self-defence".*

It is a scandal that the WP leadership failed in their already modest production of propaganda during the Uprising to call for joining the struggle. They preferred to express sympathy and "understanding" but not to call the workers movement and the youth to come out and join the barricades. But the proletariat is not measuring forces by their "sympathy", or their (indeed arrogant) "understanding" in words, but by their concrete actions. Therefore while after the end of the Uprising they called the workers movement to defend the poor against the repression, they failed to call the same workers movement during the Uprising to support and join it. Why? Because their failure to understand the Uprising as an important class struggle is related to their opportunistic adaption to the reformist and centrist left. And for this left it is much easier (i.e. much less risky) to defend victims against victimisation than to support rebels during their rebellion when the whole bourgeois public opinion (including the Labour bureaucracy) denounces them in a hysteric campaign.

WP/REVO's failure to see the tens of thousands of youth as a revolutionary subject led them to make hardly any proposals for them to fight. Nothing about how to organise in the struggle like calls for mass assemblies in the districts, the formation of councils of action, etc.. Nothing about how to spread the Uprising to other areas of the country. No proposals on how to put pressure on the labour movement to give up its silence or condemnation.

WP claims to be a fighting propaganda group. But in fact they hardly delivered any propaganda during the uprising to the fighters and they have not joined the struggle. A fighting propaganda group is also characterized by its preparedness to participate in struggles. "Revolutionaries" who are not participating in revolutions although they happened at their doorstep can call themselves revolutionaries, but they aren't (any more). A fighting propaganda group who is not willing to join the struggle of the proletarian masses can call itself a fighting propaganda group but with such an attitude it becomes a laughing stock. They didn't go to the areas of struggle. They didn't produce any agitation – they only had their 2-page statement. These statements show that they have no idea what the situation in the proletarian districts is like. They didn't go to other areas of London to raise support for the Uprising.

As the practical result of this political failure WP/REVO refused to join these tens of thousands of youth at the barricades. Instead they consciously decided to stay away from the Uprising and to remain at home or in their youth camp. In fact they didn't have any organised intervention in the August Uprising despite its duration of several days and despite the most possible favourable conditions. Very favourable because first the Uprising happened in London, the city where the whole LFI has its strongest local branch. And secondly because at exactly the same time they had from 5-7th August an international REVO conference and from 8-12th August their international REVO summer camp close to London which – according to a public REVO report – was attended by more than 80 people. (42) They easily could have sent a delegation of several dozens of comrades to the Uprising to intervene, to participate, to discuss with people and to learn in concrete struggles together with the proletarian youth. But the leadership strongly intervened against any suggestion from young comrades to join the Uprising.

Instead of intervening in the class struggle the LFI and REVOLUTION enjoyed their summer camp close to London – at the same time when tens of thousands of youth were fighting on the streets! In a public REVO statement titled "Summer, sun, socialism - that was our international summer camp this year" the comrades report about "interesting workshops" and the "opportunity of sports and leisure facilities of the camping grounds". "Every day we watched the events of the 'riots' in London and discussed about it at the Camp plenary. So we adopted for example a resolution and an international united front call against police violence and about the conditions for the British youth. Since as a youth organization we also like to fete, we had in the evening parties at a big camp fire or in the community tent. On Thursday "Broken Dialect," an anti-capitalist hip-hop crew, was our guest and thereafter DJs made music for us. The camp offered a lot of room for members, supporters and contacts to hold political discussions, but also to build new friendships." (43)

This official REVO report makes clear what the practical attitude of this organisation is to a mass uprising of the lower strata of the working class which happened in front of their nose. Published two weeks after the Uprising, it is nothing other than a verification and justification of the collapse of LFI/REVO's revolutionary basic attitude. These sun-shine socialists don't feel ashamed in any way when they report about their interesting workshops and how they enjoyed their parties in the evening while at the same time the police killed and crushed working class youth which was fighting back on the barricades. And they are bold enough to write "With the working class youth - against the police!" at the same time. What a cynicism, what a petty-bourgeois collapse of any basic revolutionary backbone! Every activist participating in the uprisings would be correct to answer to such statements:

Marx once wrote: "*Every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programmes.*" (44) Here we have to say that the LFI/REVO's complete failure to join a real movement tells us more than a dozen of their programmes. It is easy to support an uprising of the migrants in the French banlieues in autumn 2005 and to develop tactics for them while being far away from France. It is easy to write an action programme for the revolution in Tunisia, Egypt or Libya. But when an uprising of the lower strata of the proletariat happens in their own country, in their own cities (!), they are not capable to implement, not even to develop, the correct tactics or any sort of a revolutionary action programme for the fighters and even refused to join them on the barricades. When there was the uprising of the masses on the Tahrir square in Cairo, the LFI sent two comrades to Egypt to write eye-witness reports. When there was an uprising at home they did not even send comrades to the barricades to – at least – write eye-witness reports, not mentioning the possibility to have an intervention. The absolute majority of the so-called Marxists in LFI/REVO did prefer to have programmatic discussions (and fun) while an uprising happened in the front of their door.

What the WP/LFI/REVO leadership doesn't understand is that Marxism cannot be learnt and internalised without the participation in the class struggle. Of course a small propaganda group cannot participate in each and every struggle. But we don't talk about a minor event. We talk about one of the most important class struggles in Britain since 1984/85 in cities where the WP/LFI/REVO had at that time – because of the REVO camp near to London – altogether about 100 people available. This is more than it ever had at any major working class struggle in its whole history!

In a letter to the Spanish youth Trotsky advised his supporters – at a time when the Bolshevik-Leninists also were propaganda groups – that Marxism can only be learnt if theoretical education is combined with "*participating in the life and struggle of the class*". It is a devastating fact that the WP/LFI/REVO leadership refused to join the working class youth when it was fighting on the barricades:

„The strength of Marxism is in the unity of scientific theory with revolutionary struggle. On these two rails, the education of the communist youth should progress. The study of Marxism outside the revolutionary struggle can create bookworms but not revolutionaries. Participation in the revolutionary struggle without the study of Marxism is unavoidably full of danger, uncertainty, half-blindness. To study Marxism as a Marxist is possible only by participating in the life and struggle of the class; revolutionary theory is verified by practice, and practice is clarified by theory. Only the truths of Marxism that are conquered in struggle enter the mind and the blood.“ (45)

WP claimed in their statement from 8th August: "*Our stance is clear: we are 100% for the people on the streets and against the police*" (46) After the Uprising they wrote big-mouthed: "*The August 2011 riots will be remembered as a working class youth uprising against repression, racism and the recession. Workers Power stands solidly with the youth and against the police.*" (47)

But August 2011 has shown what standing "100% for the people on the streets and against the police" means for WP/REVO. Yes, *"the August 2011 riots will be remembered as a working class youth uprising against repression, racism and the recession"*. But it will be also go down in the history of the LFI and REVO as their centrist bankruptcy when at the same time as tens of thousands working class youth did fight on the streets nearly literally in front of their doors for several days ... these sunshine-socialists preferred to discuss about it every day, adopted a resolution and went to party each night. What else than contempt for such holiday-socialists can a militant black youth, an unemployed white worker, a migrant woman in a precarious job living in Tottenham feel?!

It all ended up in a bizarre, indeed embarrassing situation: Leading LFI comrades gave talks on the inspiring uprisings in North Africa while at the same time a few kilometres away there was a quite inspiring uprising. They had training for self-defence at demonstrations against the police while at the same time they could have practised self-defence with people who were actually fighting the police! Afterwards a leading REVO and LFI comrade reported that at the camp they *"discussed progress every day and REVO's international leadership adopted a declaration of solidarity with the youths. Yesterday (on 13th August when there was a demo against police repression several days after the end of the Uprising, MP) comrades departed to the city to conduct interviews with young people, to share the flyers and to intervene at a large meeting in one of the universities (...). It feels good to be part of a movement that swims against the tide in this situation, and striving to do what you can to channel the anger and frustration in a struggle to get to the real and underlying problems (...)"*(48) Well, it might feel good to stay in a camp and refuse to join an Uprising. But being a revolutionary in a situation of a mass uprising demands a bit more than *"feeling good"*!

Unfortunately this is not a description of a Monty Python movie but a real soap opera from an erstwhile revolutionary organisation. What comes to one's mind is the betrayal of the centrist Lambertist group in May 1968. On 10th May 1968 the Lambertist after a meeting marched with hundreds of activists to the Quartier Latin where thousands of students built barricades against the police. After reviewing the situation the Lambertist leaders came to the conclusion that this was only a petty-bourgeois action. They decided to leave the place and walked away. This was at that time correctly denounced as betrayal by nearly all activists of the radical left. And when the LFI was still a revolutionary organisation we characterised this behaviour correctly as *"political cowardice"* and as a *"very unrevolutionary reflex"*. (49) But what shall we say about the behaviour of Workers Power today when there is an Uprising not in Paris (or in Cairo or Tripoli) but in London during an assembly of nearly a hundred of their activists?! In fact the WP leadership acted worse than the Lambertists. They did not even walk to the barricades but remained in their camp or at home. They preferred the fun before the fight. In other words, WP/LFI/REVO's motto was: *enjoying the party in the tent, instead of joining the barricades to build the party!*

When various centrists denounced the uprising of sectors of the oppressed which were defeated by the ruling class (like the Irish Uprising in Dublin in 1916) Lenin replied to them that it is the duty of Marxists to support every rebellion of the oppressed to weaken the bourgeoisie and to go forward in our liberation struggle:

„We would be very poor revolutionaries if, in the proletariat's great war of Liberation for socialism, we did not know how to utilise every popular movement against every single disaster imperialism brings in order to intensify and extend the crisis. If we were, on the one hand, to repeat in a thousand keys the declaration that we are "opposed" to all national oppression and, on the other, to describe the heroic revolt of the most mobile and enlightened section of certain classes in an oppressed nation against its oppressors as a "putsch", we should be sinking to the same level of stupidity as the Kautskyites.

It is the misfortune of the Irish that they rose prematurely, before the European revolt of the proletariat had had time to mature. Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats. On the other hand, the very fact that revolts do break out at different times, in different places, and are of different kinds, guarantees wide scope and depth to the general movement; but it is only in premature, individual, sporadic and therefore unsuccessful, revolutionary movements that the masses gain experience, acquire knowledge, gather strength, and get to know their real leaders, the socialist proletarians, and in this way prepare for the general onslaught, just as certain strikes, demonstrations, local and national, mutinies in the army, outbreaks among the peasantry, etc., prepared the way for the general onslaught in 1905.” (50)

In the same spirit Trotsky drew the line between Bolshevism and centrism. While the former calls and supports the oppressed in their struggle, the centrists consider this as “adventurist” and prefer to limit themselves to defend the oppressed:

„Nevertheless, Ledebour’s position even on this question does not leave the precincts of centrism. Ledebour demands that a battle be waged against colonial oppression; he is ready to vote in parliament against colonial credits; he is ready to take upon himself a fearless defense of the victims of a crushed colonial insurrection. But Ledebour will not participate in preparing a colonial insurrection. Such work he considers putschism, adventurism, Bolshevism. And therein is the whole gist of the matter.

What characterizes Bolshevism on the national question is that in its attitude toward oppressed nations, even the most backward, it considers them not only the object but also the subject of politics. Bolshevism does not confine itself to recognizing their “right” to self-determination and to parliamentary protests against the trampling upon of this right. Bolshevism penetrates into the midst of the oppressed nations; it raises them up against their oppressors; it ties up their struggle with the struggle of the proletariat in capitalist countries; it instructs the oppressed Chinese, Hindus, or Arabs in the art of insurrection and it assumes full responsibility for this work in the face of civilized executioners. Here only does Bolshevism begin, that is, revolutionary Marxism in action. Everything that does not step over this boundary remains centrism.” (51)

The decision of the WP leadership to stay away from the mass uprising is simply a betrayal to the revolutionary goals and the struggle of the working class. This was not a wrong decision of a few persons in a confusing situation. This Menshevik cowardice was pushed by the LFI leaders, confirmed by the decisions of REVOLUTION at their summer camp, confirmed by the WP resolution from 19th August and by official REVO reports published since then. All this demonstrates that the degeneration of WP/LFI/REVO in the recent past has now crossed the Rubicon. They have betrayed the revolutionary method – the fight for the revolutionary program in the class struggle; they have therefore become a left-centrist organisation.

(42) REVO Germany: Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645>

(43) Here is the complete report which we translated from the German original into English.

Sommer, Sonne Sozialismus – das war unser diesjähriges internationales Sommercamp

REVO Deutschland, 29. August 2011, <http://www.onesolutionrevolution.de/?p=1645>

Das diesjährige internationale REVOLUTION Sommercamp fand vom 8. bis zum 12. August in der Nähe Londons statt. Insgesamt waren mehr als 80 Genoss_innen aus Großbritannien, Schweden, Österreich, der Slowakei und Deutschland anwesend. Tagsüber gab es ein vielfältiges Workshopprogramm.

Die Workshops reichten über den Aufbau von Schulstreikkomitees, Augenzeugenberichte vom Tahrir Platz in Kairo bis hin zu Diskussionen über die Krise des Kapitalismus oder die Befreiung Palästinas. Außerhalb der Workshops nutzten Viele die Möglichkeit der Sport- und Freizeitangebote des Campinggeländes.

Täglich verfolgten wir die Ereignisse der „Riots“ in London und diskutierten darüber Campplenum. So verabschiedeten wir zum Beispiel eine Resolution und einen internationalen Bündnisaufruf, gegen Polizeigewalt und über die Umstände der britischen Jugend.

Da wir als Jugendorganisation natürlich auch gerne feiern, wurden abends am großen Lagerfeuer oder im Gemeinschaftszelt Party gemacht. Am Donnerstag war „Broken Dialect“, eine antikapitalistische Hip-Hop Crew, zu Gast und danach Dj's, die für uns auflegten.

Das Camp bot viel Raum für Mitglieder, Sympathisanten und Kontakte, um politische Diskussionen zu führen, aber auch, um neue Freundschaften zu schließen. Wir gehen daher nicht nur gestärkt aus dem diesjährigen Sommercamp in London, sondern freuen uns vor allem auf das nächste internationale Sommercamp in zwei Jahren, dass wahrscheinlich in Österreich stattfinden wird.

Summer, sun socialism - that was our international summer camp this year'

This year's international REVOLUTION summer camp was held from 8th to 12th August near London. In total, more than 80 comrades from Great Britain, Sweden, Austria, Slovakia and Germany were present. During the day there was a varied workshop program.

The workshops ranged from the structure of school strike committees, eyewitness reports from Tahrir Square in Cairo to discussions about the crisis of capitalism or the liberation of Palestine. Outside of the workshops many used the opportunity of sports and leisure facilities of the camping grounds.

Every day we watched the events of the "riots" in London and discussed about it at the Camp plenary. So we adopted for example a resolution and an international united front call against police violence and about the conditions for the British youth.

Since as a youth organization we also like to fete, we had in the evening parties at a big camp fire or in the community tent. On Thursday "Broken Dialect," an anti-capitalist hip-hop crew, was our guest and thereafter DJs made music for us.

The camp offered a lot of room for members, supporters and contacts to hold political discussions, but also to build new friendships. We therefore emerge not only strengthened from this year's summer camp in London, but especially look forward to the next international summer camp in two years that will probably take place in Austria."

(44) Karl Marx: Kritik des Gothaer Programms. Brief an Wilhelm Bracke (1875); in: MEW Bd. 19, S. 13; in English: http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1875/letters/75_05_05.htm

(45) Leo Trotzki: An die spanische Jugend (1932); in: Revolution und Bürgerkrieg in Spanien, Band 1, S. 164f.

(46) Workers Power: With the working class youth of London – against the police, Statement from 8 August, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/with-the-working-class-youth-of-london-%E2%80%93-against-the-police/>

(47) Workers Power: The political situation in Britain after the August uprising; Resolution on the political situation after the riots, 19.8.2011, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/political-situation-after-the-august-uprising/>

(48) Gunnar Westin (REVO Sweden): The British media campaign worthy of the worst dictatorship, 14.8.2011, <http://revolutionsweden.wordpress.com/2011/08/14/de-brittiska-mediernas-kampanj-vardig-den-varsta-diktatur/#more-3743> (our own translation)

(49) Emile Gallet: "Everything was possible"—May '68 (1993); in: Trotskyist International Nr. 11, p. 28; <http://www.fifthinternational.org/content/%E2%80%9Ceverything-was-possible%E2%80%9D%E2%80%94may-%E2%80%9968>

(50) W. I. Lenin: Die Ergebnisse der Diskussion über die Selbstbestimmung, Werke, Bd. 22, S. 366; in English: The Discussion On Self-Determination Summed Up, <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1916/jul/x01.htm>

(51) Leo Trotzki: Was nun? Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Proletariats (1932); in: Schriften über Deutschland, S. 246f.; in English: What Next? Vital Questions for the German Proletariat; <http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/germany/1932-ger/next02.htm#s9>

VIII. The failure of the British left & the crisis of leadership

The total failure of the reformist and centrist left in Britain to intervene in the August Uprising is a dramatic example of the crisis of proletarian leadership. Trotsky wrote in his Transitional Program in 1938: "*The world political situation as a whole is chiefly characterized by a historical crisis of the leadership of the proletariat.*" Unfortunately this is even truer today.

Left reformism and centrism in Britain (as in many other countries) adapts or even capitulates to the pressure of the bourgeois public, the labour bureaucracy and the labour aristocracy. They are not capable to swim consistently against this stream. This is why hardly anyone of them openly called to join the Uprising and to spread it. Even those who didn't condemn the Uprising failed to advance a program of struggle to spread and organise the insurrection.

This opportunism goes hand in hand with the open or hidden refusal by most of the British left of the Leninist theory of party building, of openly fighting against the labour bureaucracy and bringing a socialist class consciousness into the working class.

In addition the Uprising – in which the black and migrants played a central role – showed that the British left has hardly any connections with these oppressed strata. One could see this at the meeting of Coalition of Resistance on 11.8. or the demonstration in Tottenham on 13.8. which the RKOB delegation attended. (52) In both these events black and migrant people were an extremely small minority despite the fact that they were a major force in the August Uprising and constitute the majority in the Tottenham area where the demonstration on 13.8. took place. In Tottenham the Turkish/Kurdish left-Stalinist organisations MLKP and TKP/ML were the only ones which had political graffiti on the walls.

This is a particularly tragic failure given the fact that the migrants and black play an increasing role in the British society. Today in London only 57% of the population are British White and more than 30% are non-White. (53) It is clear that amongst the mass of the working class and in particular amongst the lower strata the non-white people have an even higher share.

A scientific Marxist understanding of the migrants from semi-colonial countries as national oppressed and super-exploited is now of particularly huge importance. As we have explained somewhere else this was one of the most controversial issues in the LFI before we got expelled in April 2011. (54) In our opinion it is important to analyse today the situation of the black and migrant layers of the working class in Britain based on a Marxist method. In our thesis on Migration and revolutionary integration we have developed our understanding of this question. (55)

As we explained repeatedly a revolutionary organisation must not orientate itself primarily to the middle class and the labour aristocracy but towards the middle and lower strata of the proletariat and the oppressed.

Again it is not accidentally that nearly all the groups of the British left (SWP/IST, SP/CWI, SA/IMT, AWL etc.) either openly reject Lenin's theory of the labour aristocracy or consider it as no longer relevant. Or they formally keep it but remove the content and reduce the labour aristocracy to just one of many different social layers of the proletariat without recognising the corruption of them by imperialist super-profits (like WP/LFI).

In the period of decay of capitalism the pressures on the labour aristocracy itself increases. This feature was also very visible in the 1920s and 1930s when the capitalist crisis resulted in the decline of the petty bourgeoisie. So the living conditions of an important part of the labour aristocracy come closer to the mass of the proletariat. This can lead on one hand that sectors of the labour aristocracy join the struggle of the lower and middle strata of the proletariat and one could see (if one looks at the statistics of the mass arrests) that it were not only the poor who joined the Uprising. On the other hand this downward pressure can also lead to the situation that sectors of the labour aristocracy rather join the camp of the counter-revolution. The rise of the English Defence League shows that fascism can become an attractive force again.

The other side of the Menshevik coin is the widespread aristocratic attitude of the left towards the lower strata of the working class and the black and migrants. This is why their ignorance of the Uprising is not accidently. Unfortunately the British left has a strong political and social middle class DNA – meaning that many are coming from this strata and don't have the will to win, or even to have regular contact with the lower and middle layer of working class. Workers Power is a good example for this. Despite our repeated proposals in the years before we got expelled they refused to put an emphasis in their orientation to these oppressed layers. As a result they became over many years more and more distant from the lower strata and when these layers rose up they simply ignored them. It is highly symbolic that on the same day when WP published its statement about the aftermath of the uprising it also published its political perspective document. Despite its considerable length (nearly 6.000 words) the document does not contain anything about the lower strata of the working class, about the black and the migrants. Not a single word! These important layers are not even mentioned once. (56) It is a shameful consistent ignorance of the oppressed layers both in analysis and in their practice. A Bolshevik organisation can never be built on the fundament of such aristocratism! Bolshevism means to be the voice and the arm of the vanguard of the working class, means to be the Pallas with the mass of the working class and the oppressed.

The August Uprising demonstrated the desperate need for a truly Bolshevik organisation in Britain. No one should forget the lessons of these days. These five days shook Britain but failed to wake up the left. Revolutionaries are not only tested by this or that theoretical question or this or that slogan in a resolution (as important as these are). They are tested first and foremost by the class struggle. Which side are you on? Do you enter the struggle and bring socialist consciousness into those layers who fight against the class enemy – or do you prefer to stand on the sidelines, comment or worse lament on the backwardness of the youth, black and migrants, call for understanding of their motives and for solidarity with the victims. This was the test in early August and the Left in its huge majority failed.

The time has now come to draw a conclusion. We need to build a new Bolshevik organisation on an unambiguous revolutionary program, with a healthy orientation to the lower and middle strata of the working class and the oppressed and an understanding of the need of the combination of theory and practise. The RKOB wants to discuss and collaborate with all those who agree with the spirit of our analysis and positions on the August Uprisings which we have published in the last few weeks. Contact us! Join us!

- (52) Bericht der RKOB-Delegation über ihren Aufenthalt in London 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/international/berichte-uprising-in-gb/>. An English translation of this report on the visit of the RKOB delegation in London will be published soon on our website www.rkob.net
- (53) See Office for National Statistics: Neighbourhood Statistics: Area: City of London (June 2009), <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/LeadTableView.do;jsessionid=ZHrqTdyXDznJBKrqFx24Nm5NpQ072tLV CW8F8LTzDY2Yqmy3MHBI!-2005379762!1314728119422?a=3&b=276743&c=London&d=13&e=13&g=325264&i=1001x1003x1004&m=0&r=1&s=1314728122828&enc=1&dsFamilyId=1812&nsjs=true&nsck=true&nssvg=false&nswid=1280>
- (54) Gründungserklärung der RKOB (Declaration of the Foundation of the RKOB), Special Issue of our paper Revolutionary Liberation, April 2011, <http://www.rkob.net/app/download/5094702112/Gr%C3%BCndungserkl%C3%A4rung+der+RKOB.pdf?t=1304341064>
- (55) The Theses constitute a book in German and can be ordered at our contact address aktiv@rkob.net. We have published an English language summary: Marxism, Migration and revolutionary Integration, <http://www.rkob.net/new-english-language-site-1/revolutionary-integration/>
- (56) 2011 British political perspectives. Political perspectives passed by the 2011 Workers Power conference in June, <http://www.workerspower.co.uk/2011/08/1768/>