

Introduction

Formally the ICC defends a series of pertinent political positions like the capitalist nature of all countries that have pretended to be 'socialist' – or still do so; the institutional integration of so-called "left" organizations, including the trade unions; the outdated character of "revolutionary parliamentarism"; self-management as self-exploitation of the waged workers, etc.

- a) However, the theoretic framework that supports them is completely obsolete, because it frontally contradicts the facts; it is anachronistic according to historical materialism and beyond the Marxist critique of political economy. It results in a sum of explanations without objective foundations; in reality idealist ones.
- b) As a consequence, it implies dangerous political aberrations, for instance on the immediate struggles and the so-called impossibility to obtain real and sustainable reforms since 1914; ⁽¹⁾ the impossibility of real national developments in the 20th Century; an idealist conception of human nature and morals; ⁽²⁾ productivist visions of historical materialism; ⁽³⁾ not taking into account objective divisions within the working class, whose origins are not specific of class societies (like for example gender); an idealized vision of the first societies...
- c) Consequently, this theoretical framework has to be replaced by a corpus with really scientific foundations, one that establishes a new coherent whole in which material reality and theory are conjugated and respond to one another.
- d) This implies to amend certain basic positions of the ICC ⁽⁴⁾ in the light of the evolution of Capitalism, like on the national question, or the place occupied by the reformist forces since the First World War and the defeat of the insurrectional movements from 1917 to 1923.
- e) Moreover, two positions of the ICC are only stated without really being defended by it, like the non-substitution of the workers' councils by the party, and the respect of non-violence when deciding on divergences within the working class.
- f) Finally, numerous questions are either absent from its basic corpus or are only marginally treated, albeit they are crucial: gender, human nature, the relationship with nature, new technologies, the changes in the composition of the proletariat, the period of transition, ecology, etc.

1) Cf. C.Mcl., [How to understand 'May 1968' in France?](#) (Abridged version, September 23, 2018, also in 'A Free Retriever's Digest' Vol.2#5, October – November 2018). The full version appeared in French on May 11, 2018 at the 'Controverses' website: [Mai 68 : la signification des luttes de 1966 à 1972](#), and in 'Controverses' no. 5, May 2018.

2) Cf. C. Mcl., [Morale et matérialisme historique – lère partie](#) ('Controverses' no. 2, September 2009); currently only available in French.

3) Cf. *Matérialisme historique et dialectique – La société se complexifie-t-elle au cours du temps?* in [Controverses No. 5, May 2018](#) ("Historical and dialectical materialism – Does Society become more complex over time?"); currently only available in French.

4) Cf. [Basic Positions of the ICC](#).

Our objective here is not to develop all these points, that will be treated in subsequent contributions, but only to treat the first one, in order to demonstrate the incoherence of its basic credo – the decadence of capitalism since 1914 – in its version inherited from the **Gauche Communiste de France** ⁽⁵⁾ since the Second World War, and which, essentially, has not changed one iota. Well, this framework, which at the time already was shaky on many points, is totally outdated today.

5) Cf. [Gauche Communiste de France \(1944-1952\)](#) (French)

I. A Brake on the Productive Forces since 1914 – or their Acceleration?

Historical materialism

No civilization has lasted forever, they all have known a phase of expansion and one of decline, and there is every reason to think that the same goes for capitalism. Like with all past modes of production, its obsolescence is inscribed in its contradictory dynamic. In this way Marx has considered at least at four occasions that capitalism had reached its apogee ⁽¹⁾ but, at the end of his life, Engels concluded that they both have been mistaken, estimating that this system still had a long future before it: *“History has wronged us and all who thought alike. It has made it clear that the level of economic development on the continent at that time was far from mature enough for the elimination of capitalist production; it has proved this through the economic revolution which has gripped the entire continent since 1848.”* [...] *“If even this mighty army of the proletariat has still not reached its goal, if, far from achieving victory with a great blow, it has to advance slowly from position to position in a hard, tough struggle, this proves once and for all how impossible it was in 1848 to conquer social transformation by simple surprise.”* ⁽²⁾

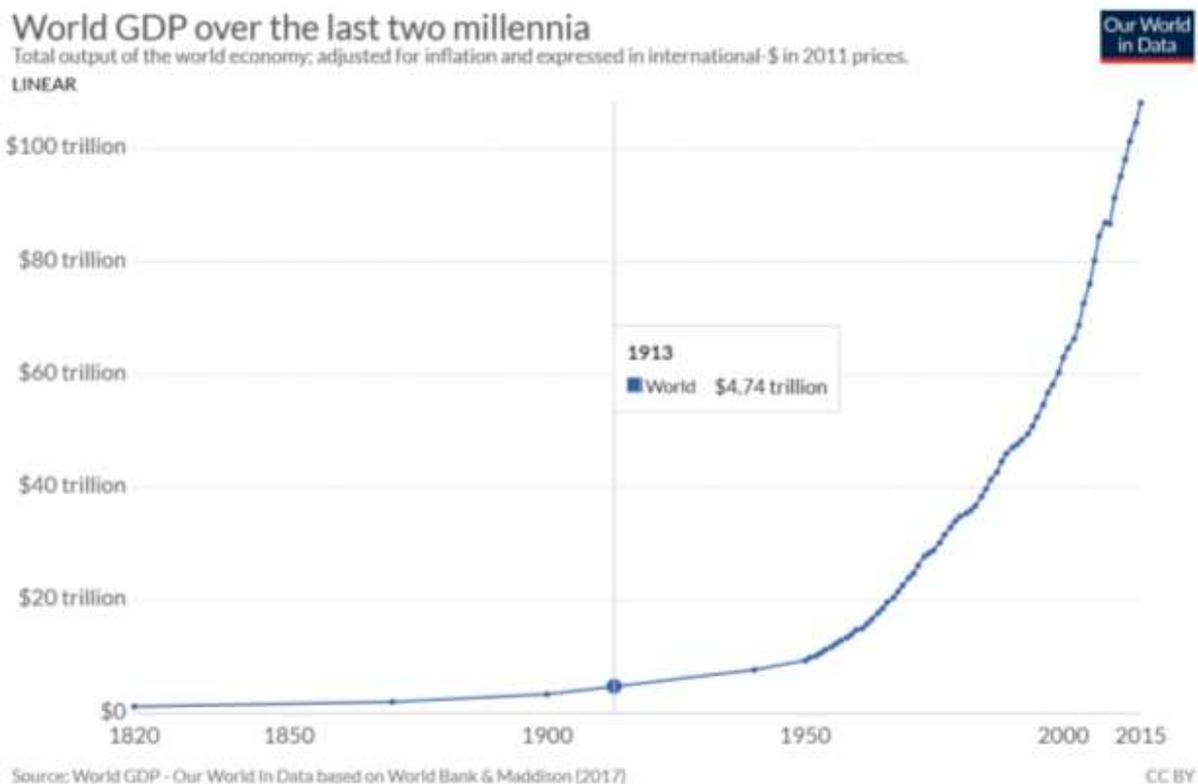
This diagnostic of obsolescence of capitalism has nevertheless been taken up by the III. International and several of its fractions, and it is this theoretical foundation that the ICC has adopted to articulate its political positions: *“Since the First World War, capitalism has been a decadent social system.”* ⁽³⁾ With the human and material destruction of the two world wars and the slowdown of growth from 1914 to 1945, this analytical framework, postulating a brake on the development of the productive forces, could still be defended just after the second world war, and even until the 1970s for certain characteristics, since capitalism has always shown itself incapable of developing the majority of the countries and of the population of the planet. ⁽⁴⁾ This is no longer the case ever since, as the article **‘250 years of modern capitalism’** develops in a deepened way, ⁽⁵⁾ on which we rely for the development of the polemical elements that are analyzed hereafter.

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- 1) More details on the process of obsolescence of the modes of production in history and its application to capitalism by Marx and Engels, can be found in Chapter IV of : *‘Dynamiques, crises et contradictions du capitalisme’* (Ed. Contradictions, 2010): [L’obsolescence du capitalisme](#) (pdf, French language).
 - 2) Engels’ introduction of 1895 to Marx’s *‘Die Klassenkämpfe in Frankreich’* (1848 – 1850). (“The class struggles in France”). The quotations have been translated from [‘ML-Werke’](#). Source: MEW Vol.22 (Karl Dietz Verlag Berlin, 1972).
 - 3) The first sentence of the [Basic Positions of the ICC](#).
 - 4) Until 1967, world population growth was higher in the group of people living below the absolute poverty line. In other words, from the industrial revolution until that date, capitalism had been relatively impoverishing the world’s population, but since then the opposite has been true, as nowadays (2018) only 11% of the population still live below the absolute poverty line (See graph 1.4 below).
 - 5) Cf. M. Roelandts, March 17, 2020: [250 ans de capitalisme - §1 à §3](#). (pdf, 48 p.) The first two chapters are available in English: [250 years of modern Capitalism: A reconstruction of its dynamics](#).

A brake on the *absolute production of wealth* since 1914?

Marx retains three great elements within the productive forces: the sphere of material production (science included), the population (the development of the working class in particular) and nature. As the ICC has always argued its theoretical corpus of '*capitalism's decadence since 1914*' departing from the first of these three elements, and only very subsidiarily from the second, (6) we limit ourselves here to these first two aspects, reserving the right to treat the third in another contribution. Effectively, struggling with the first two aspects, and recently surfing on the ecological thematic, the ICC has started evoking this problematic here and there, in order to attempt to validate its diagnostic of the 'decadence' of capitalism. Before we come back to the latter, we first present our arguments on the first two elements of the productive forces.

For a start, we have to examine the basic credo of the ICC, the existence of a supposed brake on the development of the material productive forces since 1914 compared to their growth in the course of the preceding century. It is attested by absolutely nothing, because global economic growth after 1914 is six times greater, in absolute terms, than before, as the following graph indicates:



Graph 1.1: Global Product 1820 – 2015, in parity with purchasing power and in constant US\$ of 2011. (Source: Our World in Data)

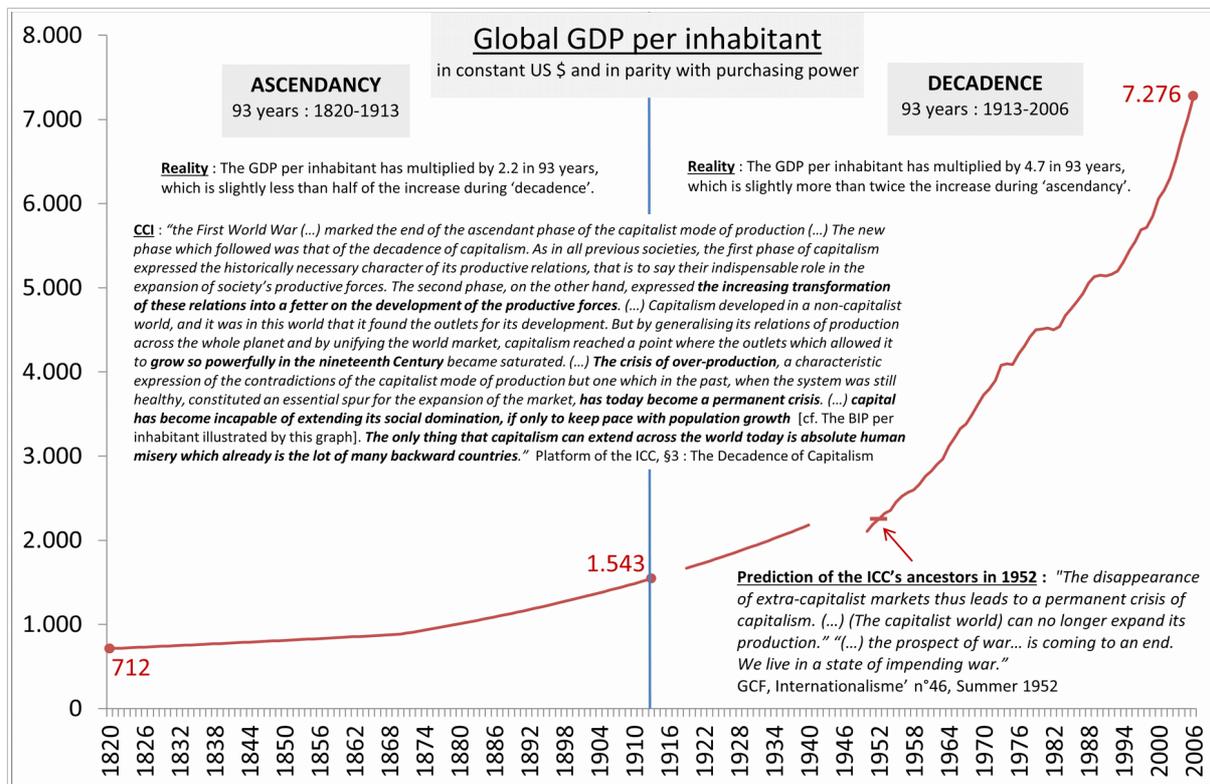
6) This is the case for all its basic texts (its platform and pamphlets) and almost all the articles in its international theoretical journal '*International Review*'.

In effect, in absolute terms, world GDP has been multiplied by **four** in 102 years of so-called 'ascendancy' of capitalism (a mean annual growth rate of 1.4% between 1811 and 1913), whereas it has multiplied by **twenty-three** in 102 years of so-called 'decadence' (or a mean annual growth rate of 3.1% between 1913 and 2015). The annual growth rate of the material productive forces has thus been **more than two times higher** during 'decadence' than during 'ascendancy'! And no subtraction (like unproductive costs or credit for example) can fill up this enormous difference, in spite of the ICC contenting itself with affirming this, without ever demonstrating it at the hand of sustainable data. Moreover, to prove that there would have been a real brake on growth since 1914 supposes a division of the growth rate by more than a half. Well, in more than 50 years of existence, the ICC has never been capable to put forward the least figure showing a simple division by half of the growth rate during 'decadence'!

What to think of the theoretical seriousness of an organization that affirms that the 19th Century knew "*a formidable expansion*", whereas its growth rate is less than half of that in the 20th Century? What to think, when it affirms that capitalism after 1914 is "*in permanent crisis of overproduction*", and that its growth is confronted with "*heavy obstacles*", whereas this growth is twice as high compared to its said "ascendant phase" ?

A brake on the *relative production (per inhabitant)* of wealth since 1914?

What to think, finally, of a platform supporting that “*capital has become incapable of extending its social domination, if only to keep pace with population growth*”, whereas the growth of global GDP per inhabitant – which takes the growth rhythm of the population into account – arrives at exactly the same conclusions, since it has multiplied by 2.2 in 93 years of ‘ascendancy’ (a mean annual growth rate of 0.84%), and by 4.7 in 93 years of ‘decadence’ (a mean annual growth rate of 1.68%). In other words, if the growth of the material productive forces per inhabitant has been twice as important in ‘decadence’ as in ‘ascendancy’, capitalism has been **capable**, and not “*incapable of extending its social domination, if only to keep pace with population growth*” (see the following graph). Every sensible reader will conclude that this platform is not only erroneous, but that it affirms the exact opposite of reality! Very annoying for “Marxists” whose approach is supposed to be founded on the materiality of objective facts.

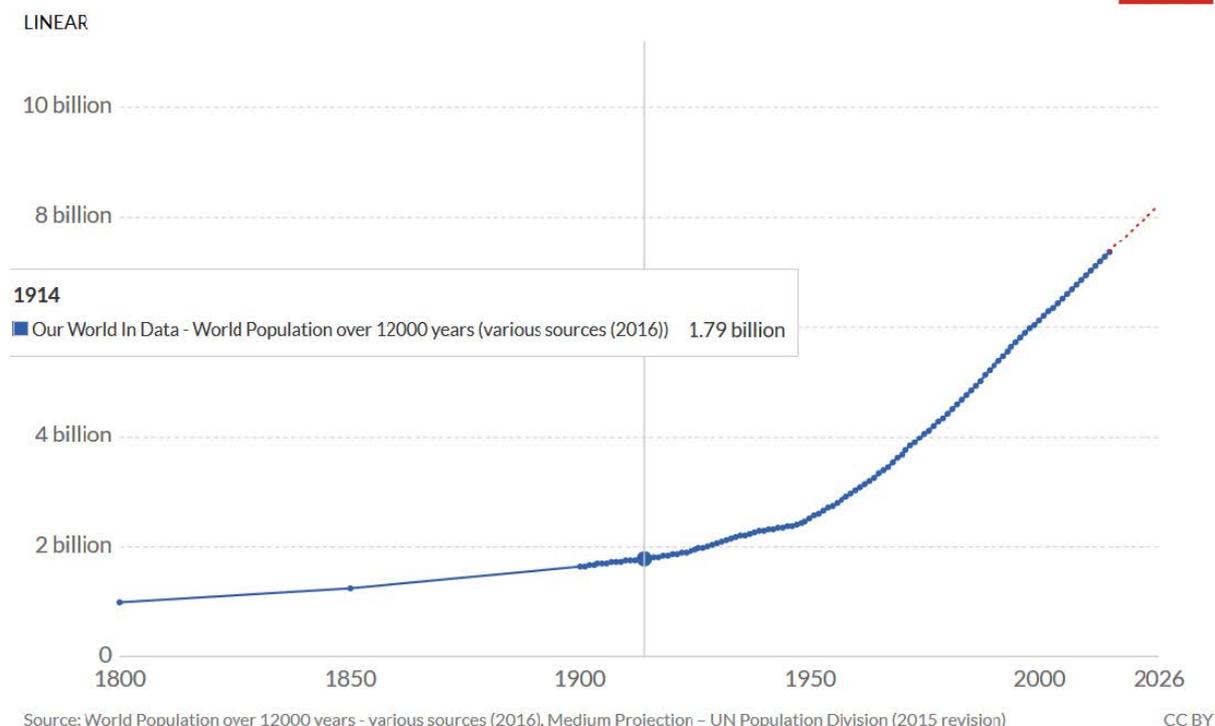


Graph 1.2: Global Product per Inhabitant (1820 – 2006)

A Brake on the *population* since 1914?

Here, the findings are still more implacable, because the world population has increased more rapidly after the First World War than before!

World Population over the last 12,000 years and UN projection until 2100



Graph 1.3: The World Population since 1800 and its projection until 2100

Effectively, it increases from 1.042 billion inhabitants in 1820 to 1.793 billion inhabitants in 1913, a multiplication by 1.7 in 93 years of ‘ascendancy of capitalism’ (or a mean annual growth rate of 0.58%) and, attaining 6.54 billion in 2006, it has multiplied by 3.6 in 93 years of ‘decadence’ (or a mean annual growth rate of 1.4%), which is more than twice as much in ‘decadence’ than in ‘ascendancy’!

Production versus distribution of wealth

But producing more wealth and engendering a more abundant demography after 1914 than before does not forcibly mean to ameliorate the condition of the population on the planet, it remains to be examined who has profited from this wealth, and how it has been distributed, because this increase could very well have been captured by a minority, thereby leaving the immense majority in the most complete destitution. This is, by the way, what the ICC supports in its platform and in its pamphlet on the trade unions:

“The only thing that capitalism can extend across the world today is absolute human misery which already is the lot of many backward countries.” ; “Inflation, a permanent phenomenon since World War I, immediately devours any wage increases.” (...) “As capitalism entered its decadent phase it was no longer able to accord reforms and improve-

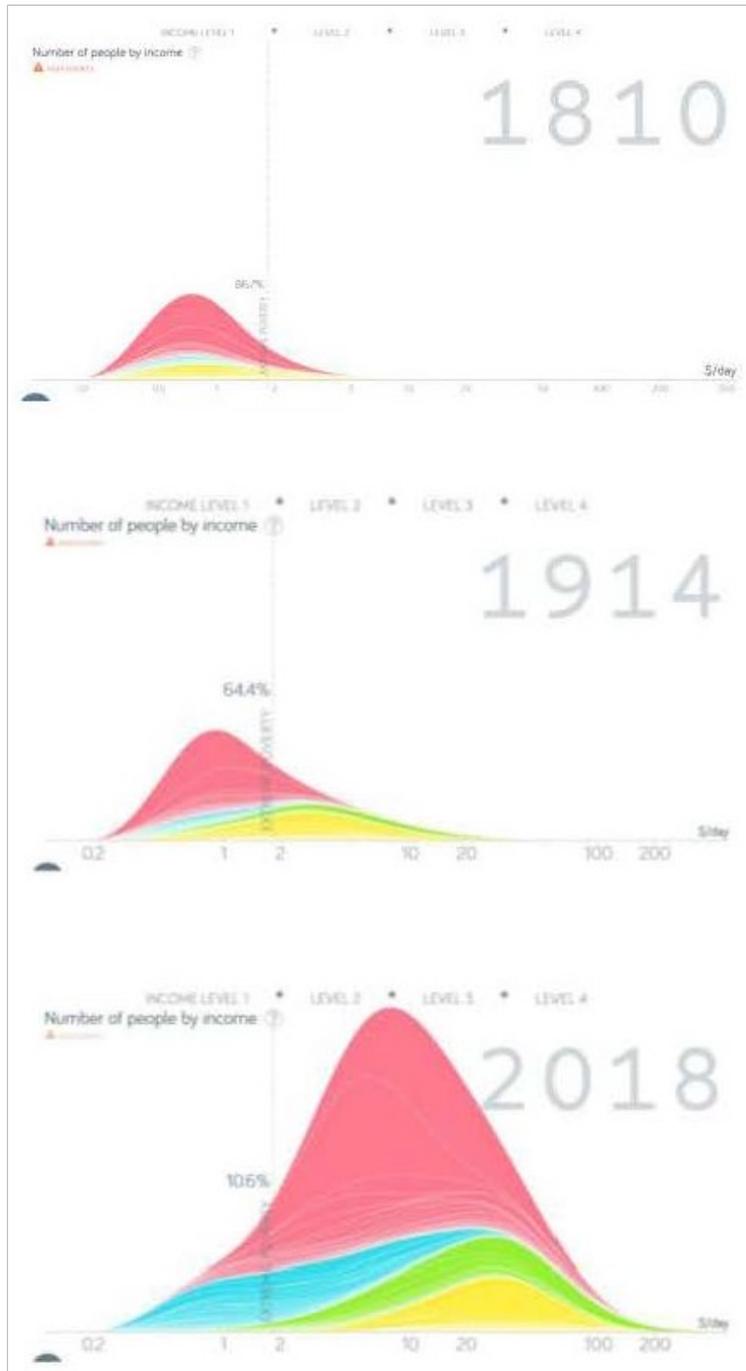
ments in living conditions to the working class.” (...) “While during the ascendant period of capitalism the length of the working week effectively fell due to the pressure of workers struggles [...], under decadent capitalism the number of hours has remained the same when it has not actually risen.” (7) In other words, no amelioration of the real incomes of wage earners, neither of their working conditions, nor of their sanitary conditions, neither a decrease of their working time, but “extension across the world of absolute human misery” similar to that “which already is the lot of many backward countries”.

Such affirmations need, at least, to be objectified. As the ICC has never done so in half a century, let's help it by examining everyone of these assertions, both at world level and in a particular country, not an arbitrary one, but one that has been the subject of a meticulous analysis by Marx in **Capital**, namely England. It is about examining if capitalism really has “extended absolute human misery across the world” and whether the real incomes and working time have stagnated after 1914... all are crucial not only from an analytical or economic point of view, but above all from a political and militant one.

7) Quotations from the '[Platform of the ICC](#)', §3, §6 and §7; and from the pamphlet '[Unions against the working class](#)', Ch.3: 'The unions in decadent capitalism'. Note: Whereas the English text speaks of “many backward countries”, the quoted phrase in French reads “Third World countries”. (Translator's note)

The distribution of incomes before and after 1914

The following graph illustrates the distribution of incomes for the whole of the world population before and after 1914. It shows that, if the median income per inhabitant has increased from \$0.75 in 1810 to \$0.90 in 1914 (in 104 years), it has leaped from \$0.90 in 1914 to \$8,- in 2018 (again in 104 years). The increase during so-called 'decadence' has been 7.4 times higher than that during 'decadence'!



Graph 1.4: The Income Distribution of the World Population (1810, 1914, 2018)

In addition, the part of inhabitants living above the absolute poverty threshold has increased from 13% in 1810 to 36% in 1914, representing 504 million inhabitants. Well, so-called 'decadent' capitalism has clearly done better, since this part has increased from 36% to 89% and it has been able to extract from absolute poverty six billion persons more than in 1914, which is twelve times better than in so-called 'ascendant' capitalism. 'Decadent' capitalism has not only almost eradicated absolute poverty, since in 2018 only 11% of the population have remained under this threshold (which were still 2/3 in 1914), but it has made increase the incomes of the immense majority of the world population like never before, much more rapidly than before 1914!

Amazing as this can appear to militants formed to the ICC doxa: albeit ravaged for long by the most absolute misery, traversed by numerous wars and famines making tens of millions of deaths, handicapped in its development by a galloping demography, capitalism has nevertheless been able to extract the essence of the **Third World** from this disastrous state, and to push a significant part of it onto the roads of a growth that would pale many Western leaders. To the discharge of these militants, it is true that all "theoretical" assertions of their mother house rendered them incapable of perceiving this objective state of the world as it really is: *"The inability of the underdeveloped nations to lift themselves up to the level of the most advanced countries can be explained by the following facts: 1) The markets represented by the extra-capitalist sectors of the industrialised countries have been totally exhausted by the capitalisation of agriculture and the almost complete ruin of the artisans. (...) 3) Extra-capitalist markets are saturated on a world level. Despite the immense needs of the third world, despite its total destitution, the economies which haven't managed to go through a capitalist industrialisation don't constitute a solvable market because they are completely ruined."* (8)

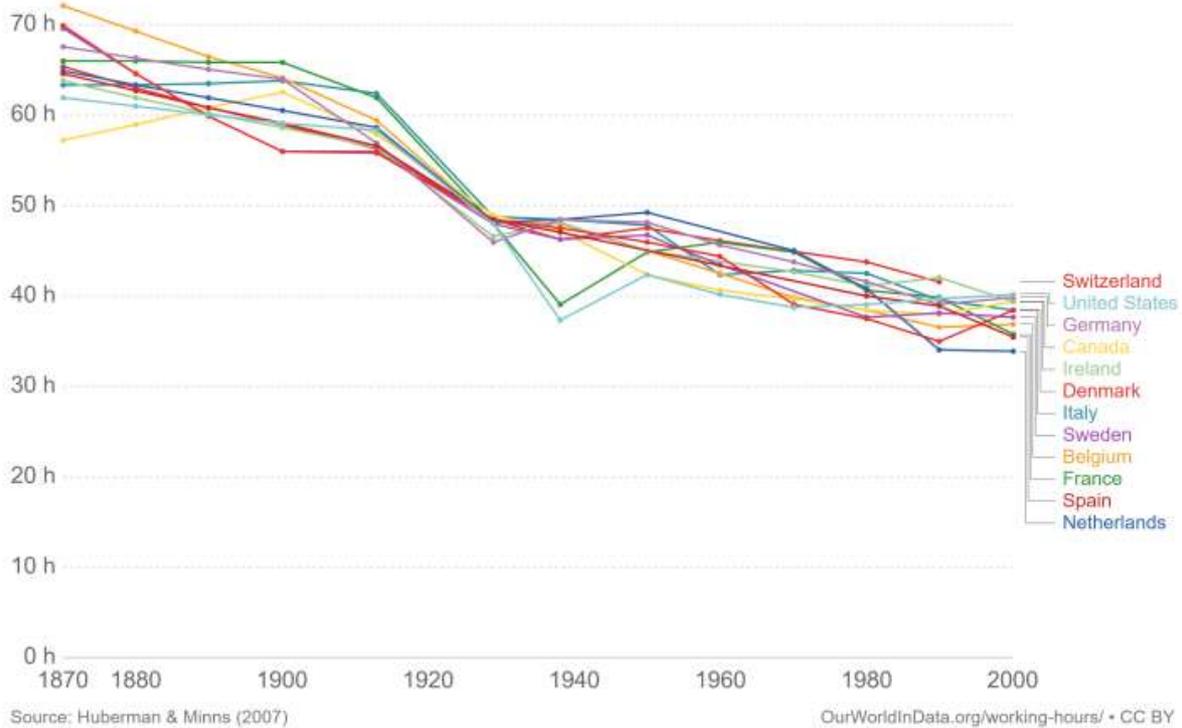
The reality of a very significant development of the former **Third World**, among which India and China, but also of numerous other Asian countries and even some in Africa, comes to sweep all these theoretical assertions and peremptory affirmations about the global extension of absolute misery and the impossibility of increasing the real incomes of the wage earners in 'decadence'. They are not only wrong, but the exact inverse of reality! In fact the ICC swims in an ethereal fiction of petitions of principle that do not rest on any objective basis, because it conceives the world according to its ideas, and not how it really is. Such is the very particular 'scientific method of analysis' of the ICC!

Yes, but, the ICC adds *"While during the ascendant period of capitalism the length of the working week effectively fell due to the pressure of workers struggles ... under decadent capitalism the number of hours has remained the same when it has not actually risen."* (ibid.) Again, not only is nothing further from the truth, but reality is likewise the inverse since working time has decreased much more rapidly in 'decadence' than in 'ascendancy':

8) ['The proletarian struggle under decadence'](#); article in the **International Revue** no. 23 (4th quarter of 1980). Its canvas was written by the ICC's soul (Marc Chirik), the article was completed by FM.

Weekly Work Hours

Work hours of full-time production workers (male and female) in non-agricultural activities.



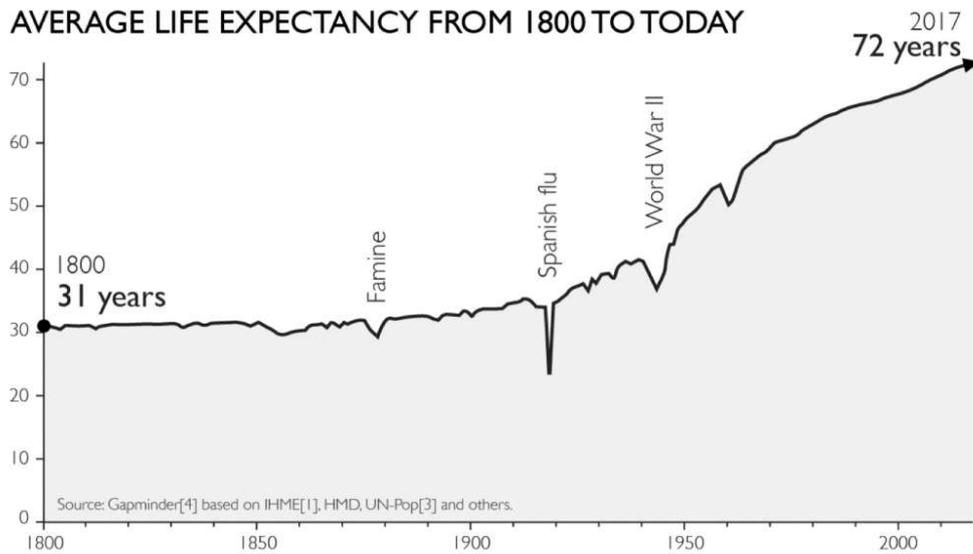
Graph 1.5: Weekly Labor Time 1870 – 2000 in twelve developed countries

Life expectancy and the body length of inhabitants before and after 1914

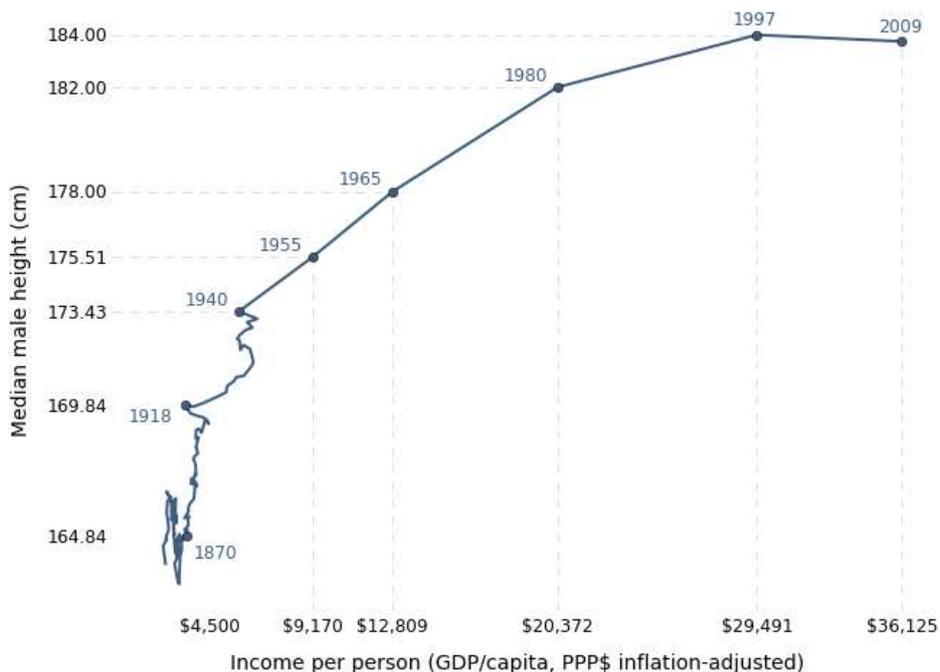
If there is a domain that summarizes everything we have seen until now, it's the evolution of life expectancy at birth and the body length of the inhabitants. In effect, these are the results of a variety of factors that conjugate with one another: when they regress or stagnate, this is mostly in the wake of low incomes, deplorable housing, sanitary and hygienic conditions, as well as of exhausting working conditions, that weaken and wear the organism, and when they increase, it is evidently the inverse result in all these essential dimensions of life. So, knowing that a worker at Liverpool – an emblematic city of the English industrial revolution – had a life expectancy at birth of about 25 years in 1860, and has one between 65 and 70 years at present, one understands that this indicator allows us to approach an ensemble of aspects of the life of the wage earners under capitalism in a more qualitative way. In addition, these indicators evade the endless discussions about what ought to be 'subtracted' from the growth of the GDP (improductive sectors, etc.) and what not. In effect, the number of inhabitants of a certain age or their body length are undeniable realities that diverse quibbles cannot make miraculously disappear. They are, by the way, essential aspects of the productive forces about which the ICC keeps silent, as these arguments frontally contradict its theory of the 'decadence of capitalism since 1914'.

In fact, what does the evolution of these factors, demonstrated in the following graph, show us? That they have regressed or almost stagnated before 1914 and have

doubled or strongly increased afterwards! In other words, capitalism has been able to make live a much more considerable number of inhabitants, taller and in better health in 'decadence' than in 'ascendancy', and this with a much longer life expectancy, as a result of multidimensional improvements of life: higher real incomes, better conditions of life, work, sanitation, medical care and housing, etc. We are thus light-years away from the elucubrations of the ICC about the so-called 'decadence of capitalism, the impossibility of real and sustainable reforms and of consequent national development since 1914...'!



Graph 1.6: Life Expectancy at Birth of the World Population since 1800



Graph 1.7: Income per Inhabitant and Median Body Length: Men in the Netherlands, 1820 – 2009. (Source: Olson R.S., 'Why the Dutch are so tall ?')

The development of the working class since 1914

However, the ICC does not only content itself with reversing the reality of the material and human development of the productive forces, real incomes, working time, the improvement of the overall state of the population and of its life expectancy, despite the population explosion in the 20th Century; it also reverses this apropos of the development of the working class after 1914 : *“World War I marked a definitive turning point in two particularly significant aspects of capitalist expansion: imperialist expansion, and the proportional growth of the working class in society.”* (...) *“This marked decline in the expansion of the ‘principal productive force’ continues up to the present time. (...) In the underdeveloped countries this decline is even more pronounced. (...) Until 1914, the population effectively integrated into the capitalist economy grew faster than the world population. That was during the ascendant phase of capitalism. This tendency has, since then, been definitively reversed.”* ⁽⁹⁾

Here is another one of those “theoretical” affirmations, asserted with the faith of a charcoal-burner that leaves one stunned: *“definitively reversed”*. In reality, a year before the very moment these lines were written by the CCI in 1973, this thesis had already been refuted by a very well-documented work by **S. Rubak**, published with **éditions Spartacus**: *“La classe ouvrière est en permanent expansion”* (*“The working class is in permanent expansion”*) ... but when we see today the hundreds of millions of jobs created in many Asian and other emerging countries, there’s no longer room for doubt! But, here again, the ICC refuses to really recognize it because it claims, without ever providing the slightest proof, that the employment growth in China, for example, would largely correspond to the destruction of industrial employment in the former developed countries: *“Has Chinese capital developed the productive forces? In its own terms, yes, but what is the global and historic context in which this is taking place? It’s certainly true that the expansion of Chinese capital has increased the size of the global industrial proletariat, but this has come about through a vast process of de-industrialisation in west, which has meant the loss of many key sectors of the working class in the original countries of capital, along with a great deal of their traditions of struggle.”* ⁽¹⁰⁾

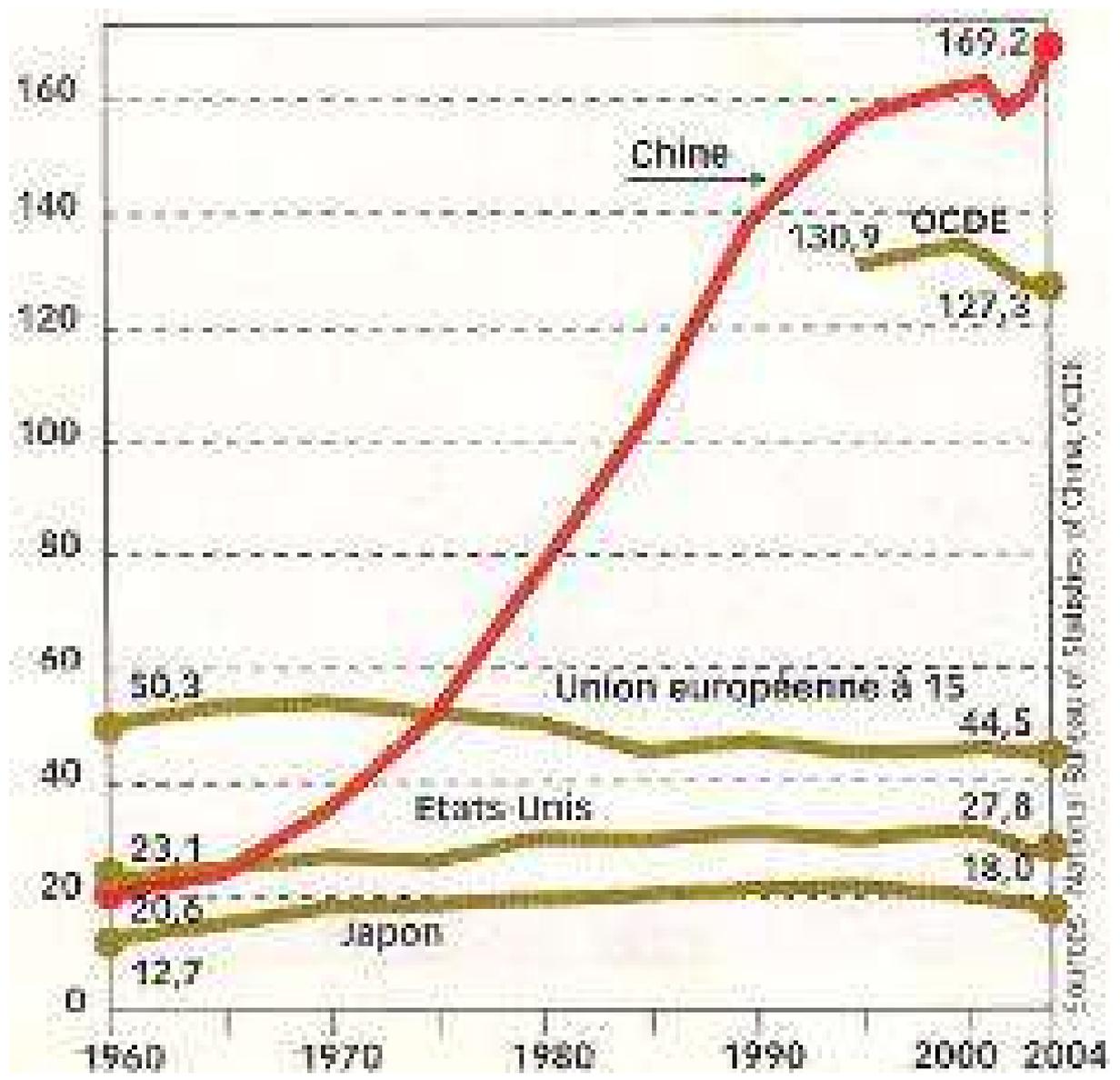
Here we can see that, despite a few concessions of form to make it appear that it takes reality into account, substantially the ICC reaffirms its long-standing doxa on the impossibility of a real development of the productive forces in decadence. Indeed, for this organization, the development of countries would not correspond to anything very real but would be the result of artifices, such as credit or communicating vessel mechanisms: the industrialization of emerging countries would mirror the deindustrialization and the delocalizations in the developed countries.

Nothing could be further from the truth because industrial employment in China has exploded without having decreased in the Triad (Europe, USA, Japan) as the follow-

9) From the ICC’s pamphlet on the decadence of Capitalism, Ch. 5: [“The turning point of the 1914 war”](#).

10) **International Review** no. 149, 2nd quarter of 2012, Gerrard: [‘Decadence of capitalism part XIII: rejection and regressions’](#).

ing graph clearly shows us: 86 million industrial jobs in the Triad in 1960 and 20.1 million at the same date in China; 44 years later (2004), there are slightly more jobs in the Triad (90.3 million) and many more in China (169.2 million)! Global industrial employment has thus increased 2.4 times, from 106 million to 259.5 million between 1960 and 2004, without any decrease in the old industrialized countries... here we can measure the whole 'scientific rigor' and the superficiality of the ICC's argumentation!



Graph 1.8: Employment in Manufacture (1960 – 2004)

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II. A Halt to Real and Sustainable Reforms after 1914 – or their Accentuation?

Real wages and working time before and after 1914

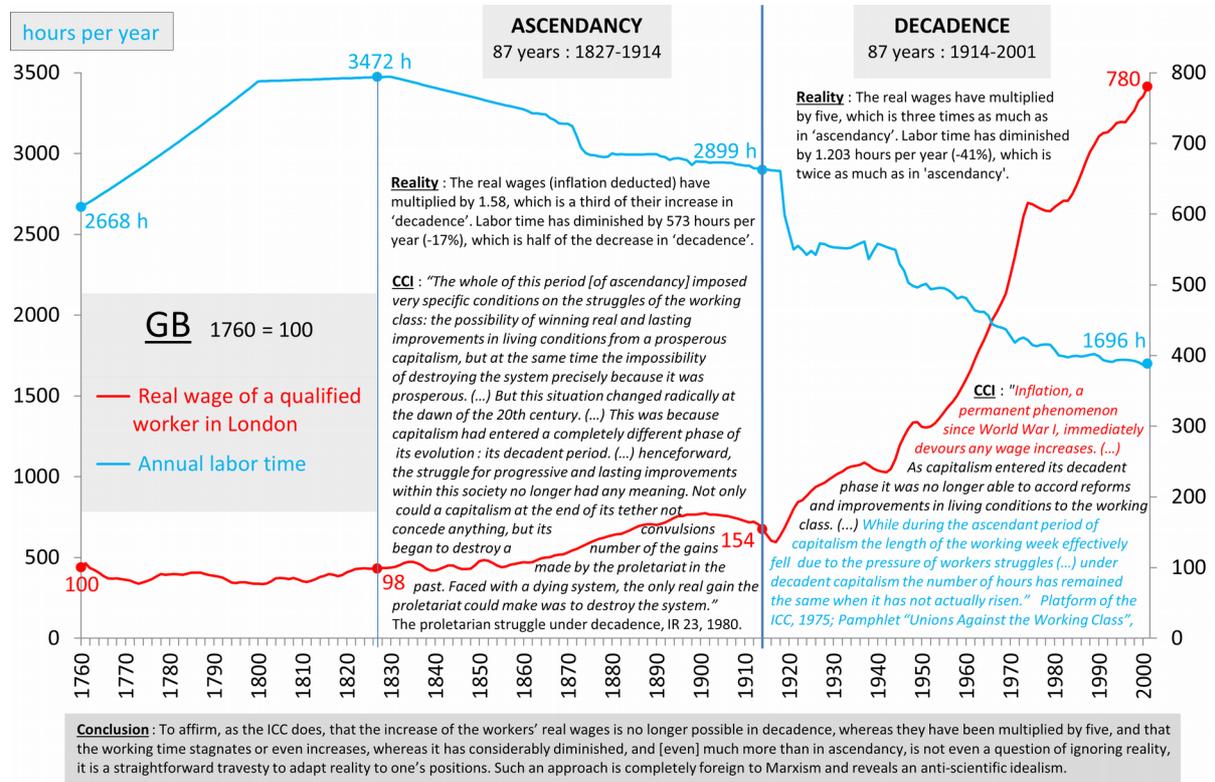
For the ICC, the ‘ascendant’ period of capitalism permitted “*winning real and lasting improvements in living conditions from a prosperous capitalism (...) But this situation changed radically at the dawn of the 20th Century. (...) henceforward, the struggle for progressive and lasting improvements within this society no longer had any meaning. Not only could a capitalism at the end of its tether not concede anything, but its convulsions began to destroy a number of the gains made by the proletariat in the past. Faced with a dying system, the only real gain the proletariat could make was to destroy the system.*” ⁽¹⁾

These are strong assertions that deserve, at the very least, to be seriously objectified, as they are so contrary to everyone’s perceptions. Objectifications that are all the more imperative from the point of view of immediate struggles and militant orientations since the ICC affirms that “*the struggle for progressive and lasting improvements within this society no longer had any meaning*” and that therefor “*the only real gain the proletariat could make was to destroy the system.*” However, as the ICC has never put forward any serious validation of its claims in almost half a century of its existence, it will be necessary here to examine the accuracy of these assertions and the two reasons which are supposed to form their basis, namely, on the one hand, that “*inflation, a permanent phenomenon since World War I, immediately devours any wage increases*” and that “*while during the ascendant period of capitalism the length of the working week effectively fell due to the pressure of workers struggles (...) under decadent capitalism the number of hours has remained the same when it has not actually risen.*” ⁽²⁾

These two reasons are all the more surprising since it is well known, even in the absence of statistics, that real wages have risen considerably and working time has fallen since 1914, much more than in the 19th Century. Let us, however, objectify these assertions and impressions by relying on the statistics of the evolution of annual working time and real wages published in the article “*250 Years of Modern Capitalism*”. ⁽³⁾

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- 1) [‘The proletarian struggle under decadence’](#); MC & FM in *International Revue* no. 23 (4th quarter of 1980)
 - 2) Extracts from the [ICC’s platform](#): §6 – The proletarian struggle under decadent capitalism, and from its [pamphlet on the trades unions](#): §3 – The unions in decadent capitalism. The impossibility of reforms.
 - 3) See: [250 years of modern Capitalism: A reconstruction of its dynamics \(Table of Contents\)](#). The graph 2.1 on real wages and annual working hours in Britain/ the UK has been taken up hereafter.

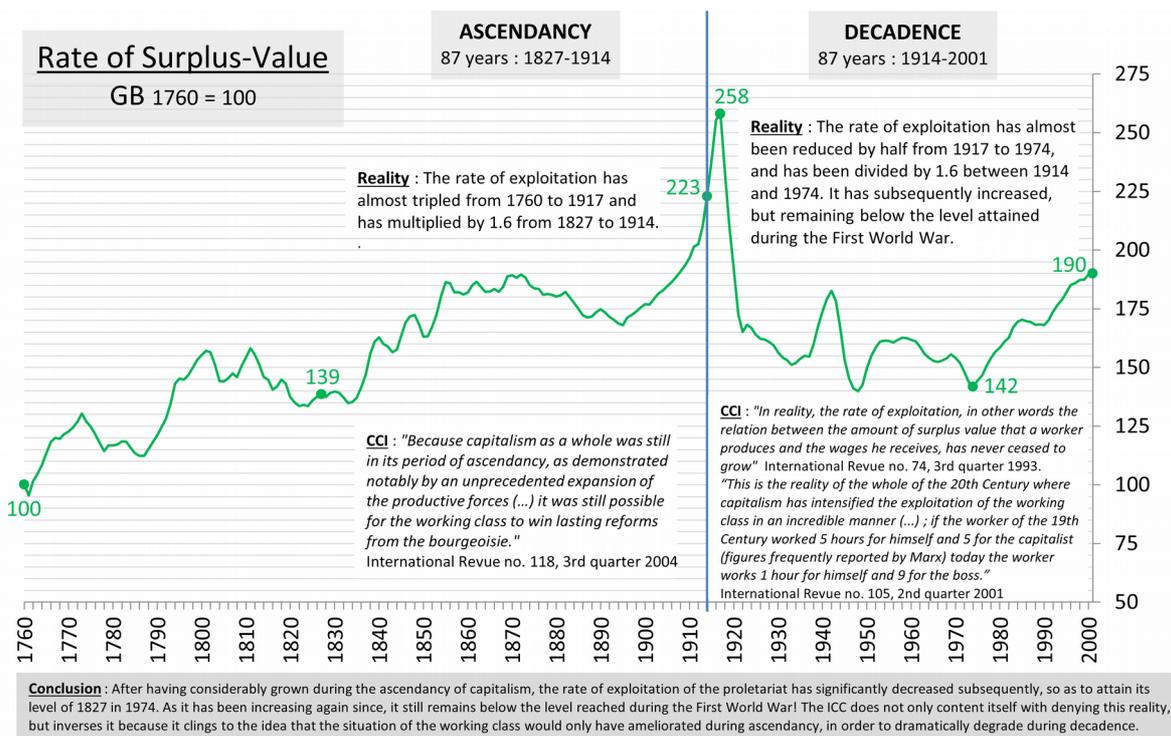
The findings are beyond appeal and prove the exact opposite of all the ICC's assertions. Indeed, real wages (i.e. inflation deducted) in the 'ascendant' phase of capitalism were multiplied by 1.58, i.e. three times less than in the so-called 'decadent' phase where they were multiplied by five. As for working time, it fell by 573 hours (-17%) in the 'ascendant' phase, half as much as in the 'decadent' phase, where it fell by 1,203 hours (-41%):



Graph 2.1.: G.B.: Real Wages and Annual Working Hours (1760 - 2001)

The rate of exploitation of the wage earners before and after 1914

But the ICC not only asserts the exact opposite of reality regarding the two most important aspects of the conditions and struggles of the working class, which are the evolution of working time and real wages; it repeats the same offense with regards to its rate of exploitation. Indeed, it claims, without giving any reference other than its own certainties, that “if the worker of the 19th Century worked 5 hours for himself and 5 for the capitalist (figures frequently reported by Marx) today the worker works 1 hour for himself and 9 for the boss.” Therefore, it concludes: “In reality, the rate of exploitation, in other words the relation between the amount of surplus value that a worker produces and the wages he receives, has never ceased to grow.” (4) However, basing oneself on reliable and duly sourced statistics (cf. ‘250 Years of Modern Capitalism’), the rate of exploitation is multiplied by 1.6 during the ‘ascendant’ phase (the 87 years from 1827 to 1914), then has sharply declined until 1974, in order to subsequently rise again, but remaining below the level reached in World War I. In other words, the rate of exploitation increased sharply in ‘ascendancy’ and decreased in ‘decadence’, which is the exact opposite of what the ICC claims.

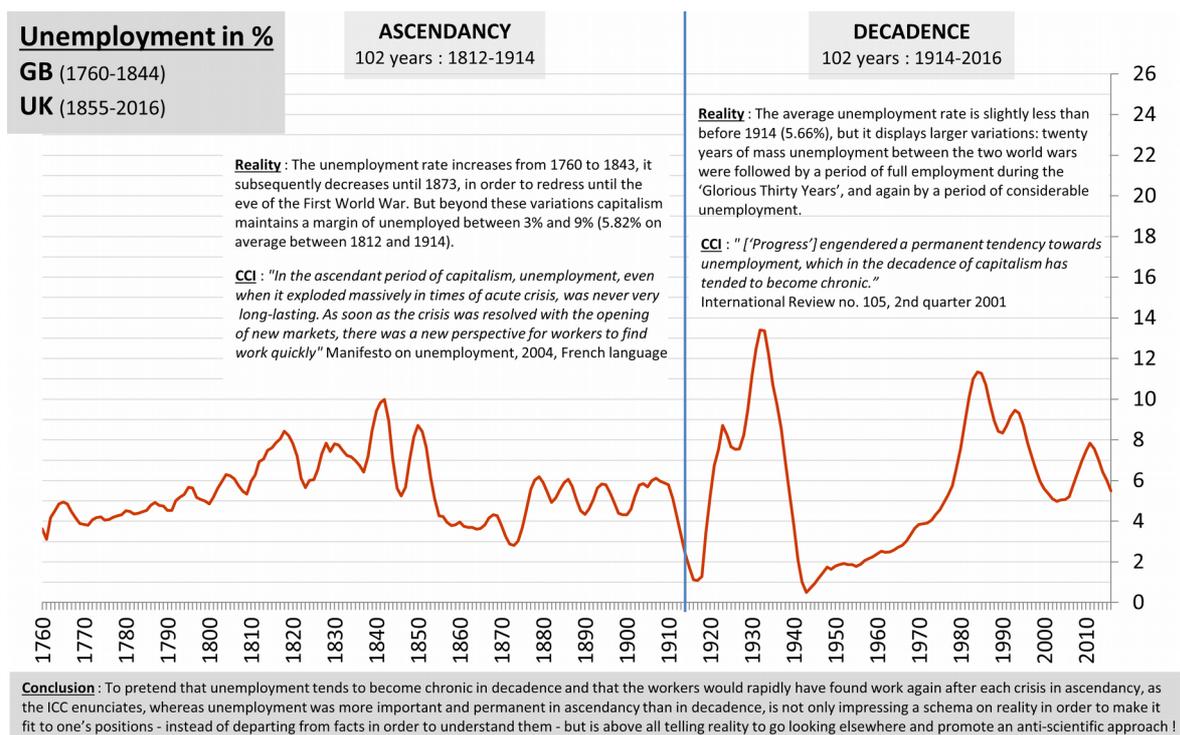


Graph 2.2: The Rate of Surplus-Value (1760 – 2001)

4) Extracts from No.'s 74 and 105 (2nd quarter of 2001) of its *International Review*.

Unemployment before and after 1914

The same applies to unemployment, since the ICC claims that “in the ascendant period of capitalism, unemployment, even when it exploded massively in times of acute crisis, was never very long-lasting. As soon as the crisis was resolved with the opening of new markets, there was a new perspective for workers to find work quickly.”⁽⁵⁾ By contrast, “(Progress) engendered a permanent tendency towards unemployment, which in the decadence of capitalism has tended to become chronic.”⁽⁶⁾ Again, reality does not correspond in any way to this schema, completely invented to correspond with the ICC’s theoretical framework. It is true that unemployment varies more in ‘decadence’ than in ‘ascendancy’, but it is not “chronic” as the ICC asserts: twenty years of mass unemployment between the two wars, followed by a period of full employment during the Glorious Thirties, followed by another period of high unemployment. As for the average unemployment rate during the ‘ascendancy’ of capitalism (5.82% from 1812 to 1914), it is higher than that of ‘decadence’ (5.66% from 1914 to 2006) and it is more permanent (between 3% and 9%), and thereby is at odds with the ICC’s assertions that unemployment during ‘ascendancy’ “was never very long-lasting. As soon as the crisis was resolved with the opening of new markets, there was a new perspective for workers to find work quickly”.



Graph 2.3: The Unemployment Rate (1760 – 2016)

5) The ICC’s Manifesto on Unemployment, 2004 ([French language](#)).

6) [Correspondence on Crisis Theories and Decadence, Part 1: Our reply](#) in *International Review* No.

On the nature and function of the Trade Unions since 1914

That the ruling class was able to definitively integrate the trade unions into its system at the outbreak of World War I and make them its most ardent defenders in the face of the revolutionary desires of the proletariat is easily demonstrated by a number of objective facts (trade unionists even became ministers for their services to the bourgeoisie). The now institutionalized **nature** of the trade unions is beyond doubt as far as we are concerned.

However, in order to effectively and tangibly perform this **function** of Trojan horse within the proletariat (the maintenance of the demands within capitalist legality and their limitation to it), the bourgeoisie owed them a debt of gratitude and gave them some grain to grind by confiding them with a role as negotiators of the work force. This corresponded to an imperative for the ruling class to prevent the possible development of a new revolutionary wave similar to the end of World War I. Indeed, by the scale of its social movements, through its ability to impose an end to the world conflict and even by its ability to take power in many places between 1917 and 1923, the working class succeeded in making fear change camp. Now sufficiently numerous and concentrated, the working class is in fact exercising a potential or actual pressure on capital. It is this capacity and pressure by the mass of wage-earners in the 20th Century that forced the ruling class to keep it within capitalist legality by diverting its protests towards purely claim-oriented objectives or towards dead end streets, etc.

And who would be better situated for ensuring this role than the old organizations in which the labor movement had placed its trust?! They were the ones entrusted with encapsulating the social movements. It is this role as negotiators of the labor force, a role that has henceforth been institutionalized, which has enabled the trade unions to gain the confidence of the wage earners **and** at the same time ensure the maintenance of social conflict within the framework of capitalism.

It is thanks to the material strength arising from this role that the trade unions have been able to establish their influence and lock the working class into the capitalist system. In other words, because real wage increases, reductions in working hours and social improvements have been devolved to the forces of the left, the trade unions were able to anchor their hold on the working class.

This is the material basis for understanding why the latter has continued to trust them, despite their institutionalized character and their role as guardians of the social order within the framework of capitalism.

By contrast, the theses of the ICC are incapable of explaining it without falling into an idealistic schema, that is to say an explanation by the sole force of ideology and mystification. Indeed, as it would no longer be objectively possible to obtain real and lasting reforms after 1914 and the only role of the trade unions would be to sabotage and/or defeat the workers' struggles, how can it be explained that the proletariat still gives them its confidence? Three explanations are then possible:

1. Either the working class is deeply stupid and masochistic to the point of putting its trust for a Century in organs that would bring it nothing materially and constantly

lead it to defeat in its struggles. This is a deplorable observation, but it is implicit in the ICC's 'explanation'.

2. Or, as the ICC asserts, the 'prosperity' of capitalism before 1914 would give the power of the bourgeoisie a material basis and a possibility for trade unions to push for real and lasting reforms for the class, whereas all of this would then disappear because 'decadent' capitalism would be "*in a crisis of permanent overproduction*", that "*the only thing that it may today spread throughout the world, is absolute human misery*" and "*that it ceases to be in a position to grant reforms and improvements in favor of the working class.*" In this context of 'decadence', the power of the trade unions within the working class is therefore now based solely on the ideological and mystifying forces of the latter, **and then one falls into the purest idealism.**
3. Or we are looking for a materialist explanation for this paradox, that the working class still globally trusts the forces of the 'left' in spite of their anti-worker role. Materially, this is only possible thanks to the concessions granted via these "left wing" apparatuses throughout the short 20th Century (a five-fold increase in real wages and a near cutting by half of the working time). It is thanks to these economic, social and political achievements that the working class could have been duped, conscripted and defeated at key moments in its struggles. In other words, the counter-revolutionary nature and role of the forces of the 'left' can be explained by material reasons and not by the sole strength of their ideologies. Certainly, like any institutionalized body, the left-wing parties and the trade unions are developing a mystifying ideological corpus towards the working class, but this alone cannot suffice to explain their influence in its midst, this influence draws its roots in a material reality, namely the reforms granted to the wage earners. Only this material basis can explain the ideological strength of the left and the trade unions, a strength all the greater as these material and political achievements were far more important after 1914 than before, as we just have seen.

Moreover, in addition to its idealistic foundations, the 'explanations' for the counter-revolutionary character of the forces of the **[bourgeois]** left put forward by the ICC lead to enormous nonsense. Indeed, if the condition of the working class had really not known improvements during a century of 'decadence' as it claims, then, in view of all the attacks it has suffered since the end of the Glorious Thirties, the wage earners should have returned to a state of destitution in which they found themselves at the beginning of the 19th Century. However, one does not need to be a statistics enthusiast to know that this is completely false because, despite all attacks it has had to endure, the present working class is still in a material situation incomparably superior to that of the beginning of the 20th Century.

In fact, despite its recurrent statements about the need to trust the capabilities of the working class historically, in reality, the ICC spreads enormous mistrust towards it. Indeed, how can one trust a class that has systematically given credit to its worst torturers for nearly a century without any material basis, that is, by the mere 'virtue' of their ideological evil spells? Anyone in his right mind will logically conclude that

such a social class is incapable of unmasking these mystifications since it has not been able to do so for a century, of which more than half has been spent in economic crisis, incessant attacks and sabotage by the forces of the 'left'.

Ignoring the most elementary material realities of this world, in particular concerning the situation of the working class, here the ICC is indeed in its role as impostor: it pretends to be what it is not, to be the most consistent defenders of the immediate and historical interests of the proletariat! In fact, it is only a tiny group living in the ethereal world of its idealistic petitions: it represents the idealistic pole within the Communist Left.

C.Mcl. August 14, 2019.

Source: [Les impostures du CCI \(Courant Communiste International\)](#)

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