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Maurizio Lazzarato 10.04.2023

# Class struggle in France: How to get out of the counter-revolution?

Another possibility that the Manifesto of Marx and Engels considered is the order of the day, exacerbated by the ongoing ecological disaster: "the destruction" not only "of the two classes in struggle", but also of all humanity.



The struggles of the French proletariat are admirable. They excite because they recognize features of the revolutions of the nineteenth century, which confront the counterrevolution with a continuity and intensity not seen in any other Western country. However, we must remain vigilant.

Let's get straight to the point: after the huge demonstrations against the "reform" of pensions, the president of France, Emmanuel Macron, decides to make it "pass by force" (passer en force), depriving Parliament of its power and imposing the sovereign decision to approve the law that raises the retirement age from 62 to 64 years. In the demonstrations, the immediate response was "we also went through the force". Between

opposing wills, the sovereign will of the state-capital machine and the class will, force decides. The capital-labor commitment has been broken since the seventies, but the financial crisis and war further radicalized the conditions of confrontation.

Let us then try to analyze the two poles of this power relationship based on force in the political conditions opened between 2008 and 2022.



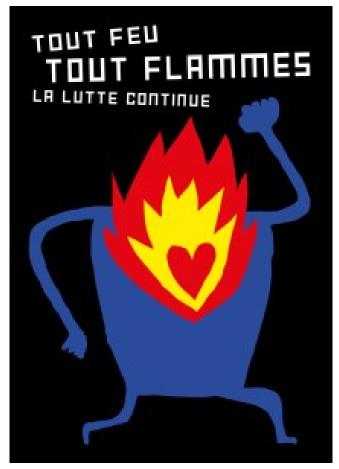
#### **PENSIONS**

THE HEART OF THE STRUGGLE AGAINST THE STATE & CAPITAL Anais Enjalbert

The French March

The movement seems to have grasped the political phase shift brought about, first, by the 2008 financial crisis and then by the war. It has used many of the forms of struggle that the French proletariat developed in recent years, keeping it united, articulating and legitimizing, in fact, its differences. To the union struggles, with their peaceful marches that were progressively changing and integrating non-wage components (on March 23 the presence of young people, university students and high school students was massive), were added the "savage" demonstrations that for days took place at dusk in the streets of the capital and other large cities (where they were even more intense).

This strategy of action, developed by groups that constantly move from one part of the city to another, facing the gray hair, is a clear inheritance of the forms of struggle of the "yellow vests" who began to "terrorize" the bourgeoisie, when instead of parading quietly between Republique and Nation, they brought the "fire" to the rich neighborhoods of western Paris. On the night of the 23rd, 923 fire outbreaks ("departs de feu") were counted in Paris alone. The gray hairs declared that the "wild" nights involved a higher level of "raids" than those carried out against the yellow vests.



ALL FIRE
ALL FLAMES
THE FIGHT CONTINUES

#### Théo Garnier-Greuez

No union, not even the most pro-presidential (CFDT) condemned the "wild" demonstrations. The media, all, without exception, owned by oligarchs, who were anxiously awaiting, after the first "violent acts", a turnaround of public opinion, were disappointed: two-thirds of the French continued to support the revolt. The "sovereign" had refused to receive the unions, evidencing his willingness to direct confrontation, without mediation. Everyone had deduced that there was only one possible strategy to

adopt: the articulation of different forms of struggle, without being ashamed of the distinction between "violence" and "pacifism".

The media that waited anxiously after the first "violent acts", a turnaround of public opinion, were disappointed: two-thirds of the French continued to support the revolt.

The massification and differentiation of the components present in the protests are also found in the strike pickets, which are as important, if not more so, than the demonstrations. Macron's decision was probably motivated, above all, by the blockade, not entirely successful, of the general strike of March 7 (on the 8th the situation had become almost normal!). But what Macron did not foresee was the acceleration produced in the movement by the decision to apply Article 49.3. of the French Constitution, which forced the approval of the pension reform project, without going through the vote of the deputies.

The only movement that was not integrated into the struggle is that of the revolt of the *banlieues*. The conjunction between "petits blancs" (the poorest parties of the white proletariat) and "les barabares" (the French children of immigrants, the "indigenous people of the republic") did not occur this time either. This is not insignificant, as we shall see later, because here the possible world revolution, the North/South conjunction, is at stake. There was a de facto and universally accepted articulation between the mass struggles and the struggles of a minority part that has dedicated itself to prolonging the conflict at night by using the *poubelles* (garbage) – accumulated on the sides of the streets due to the sweepers' strike – to block the police and provoke *zbeuls*. (the disorder). For now, let's call it 'avant-garde' because I don't know what else to call it, hoping that the usual cretins will not cry Leninism. It is not a question of bringing consciousness to the proletariat, which would lack it, nor of political leadership functions, but of articulating the struggle before the iron arm imposed by the established power. The masses/active minorities relationship is present in all revolutionary movements. It is a question of rethinking it in the new conditions, not of eliminating it.



Eat my pussy, not my pension. Paris, 31 January 2023

Before the great mobilizations of these days, there were differences and divisions that crossed the French proletariat, weakening its shock force. Here we can only summarize them: the trade unions and the institutional parties of the left (with the exception of France Insoumise) never understood the movement of the yellow vests, nor the nature, nor the demands of these workers who do not fit into the classical standards of the wage-earner. They have shown indifference, if not hostility, to their struggles. Instead, they have expressed open enmity towards the "barbarians" of the banlieues (with the exception of France Insoumise), who were joined by a part of the feminist movement, when they were all victims of racist campaigns launched by the power and the media against the "Islamic veil". For their part, neither the former nor the latter have been able to develop autonomous and independent forms of organisation capable of contributing their point of view, which neither the trade unions nor the parties, closed on a constantly declining basis, even want to consider. Within the "barbarians" a decolonial theory has developed, many of whose positions can be shared, but which has never managed to take root in the neighborhoods and equip itself with a mass organization. The feminist movement, on the other hand, is well organized and developed lucid and profound analyses, expressing radical positions, but does not bring political ruptures of magnitude. There is no political battle within the ongoing struggles, although women are undoubtedly the most affected by the "reforms". Thus, the French proletariat was fragmented by racism, sexism and new forms of precarious work.



Retirement at age 67?

JaJa JaJa JaJa

Why not to 69?

Since they are going to throw you a powder

choose your position

The current movement made "bouger les lignes", as the French say, that is, it shifted the dividing lines, partially recomposing the differences. Environmental actions also found strength and resources within the struggles. Sainte-Soline's clashes against the construction of large reservoirs to collect water for the agri-food industry, in which the police used weapons of war, aroused outrage and mobilization in the following days, with the resumption of "savage" demonstrations, although on a smaller scale.

A leap in recomposition? Perhaps it is too early to tell. In any case, the various movements that have crossed France in recent years were inserted into the union mobilization, giving it another image and substance: that of the challenge to power and capital. In two months they burned Macron and put his presidency at an impasse.

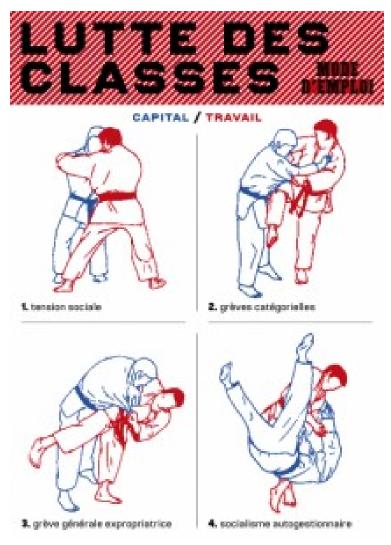
When the political system of Western countries becomes oligarchic and when consensus can no longer be secured by wages, incomes and consumption, which are continually blocked or cut, the police become the fundamental axis of "governance". Macron has managed the social struggles of his presidency centrally through the police.

"The brutality of the interventions is today at the heart of the French 'public order' strategy. France not only has a great revolutionary tradition, but also has a tradition of

exercising counterrevolutionary violence, unprecedented in the colonies and proportional to the danger that power runs in the metropolis (where it does not hesitate to make the colonial army intervene, as in 1848, to suppress the revolution).

When the political system becomes oligarchic and when consensus can no longer be secured through wages, incomes and consumption, the police become the fundamental axis of "governance".

What is at stake now in the movement is not reducible to work and its rejection, but is the future of capitalism itself and its state, as always happens when wars break out between imperialisms.



Class Struggle-Instructions for Use

1. Social

tensions 2. Strikes by category

3.Expropriating

#### general strike 4. Self-managed

#### socialism Sébastien Marchal

The lesson we can draw from two months of struggle is the urgency of rethinking and reconfiguring the question of force, of its organization, of its use. Tactics and strategy are once again political needs that movements have cared little about, focusing almost exclusively on the specificity of their power relations (sexist, racist, environmentalist, wage). And yet, they raised the level of confrontation by moving objectively together, in the absence of subjective coordination, deconstructing the constituted power. Either the problem of rupture with capitalism, with all that it implies, is replenished, or we will continue to act only on the defensive. What arises when the war between imperialisms is imposed is always, historically, the possibility of their "collapse" (from which a new division of power in the world market and a new cycle of accumulation can also emerge). The United States, China and Russia are fully aware of what is at stake. Whether the class struggle can reach this level of confrontation is still unknown.



National
Assembly 49.3
Western autocracy

The French Constitution always provides for the possibility for the "sovereign" to decide within the so-called democratic institutions, hence the invention of article 49.3, which allows legislation without going through parliament. It is the inscription in the Constitution of the continuity of the processes of political centralization that began long before the birth of capitalism. The centralization of military force (the legitimate monopoly of its exercise), also prior to capitalism, constitutes the other indispensable condition for the emergence of the state-capital machine, which in turn will immediately proceed to centralize economic strength, forming monopolies and oligopolies that have only increased in size and economic and political weight throughout the history of capitalism.

Much political thought has ignored really existing capitalism, eliminating its processes of "sovereign" centralization; the way was thus paved for the concepts of "governance", "governmentality" (Foucault) or "government" (Agamben, very agitated during the pandemic, but disappeared with the war – very little biopolitics – between imperialisms). Foucault's assertions in this regard are significant of the theoretical climate of counterrevolution: "The economy is a discipline without totality, economics is a discipline that begins to manifest not only the uselessness, but the impossibility of a sovereign point of view." The monopolies are the "sovereigns" of the economy that will only increase their will to totalize, combining with the "sovereign" power of the political system and the "sovereign" power of the army and









police.

Work less Work all
Produce
what is necessary
Redistribute everything

#### Claudio Pulgar Pinaud

Capitalism is not identical with liberalism or neoliberalism. Both are radically different and it makes no sense to describe the development of the state-capital machine as the passage from sovereign societies to disciplinary societies and the society of control. The three centralizations complement and command each other always and *in any case* as forms of governmentality (liberal or neoliberal), using them and then abandoning them, when the class confrontation is radicalized.

The enormous imbalances and polarizations between states and between classes that provoke centralizations lead directly to war, which once again expresses the truth of capitalism (the confrontation between imperialisms), whose political repercussions are immediate, especially in small European states. While the French president asserts his

sovereignty against his "population", he has lost, as a good vassal, a piece of that at the hands of the United States, which has replaced – thanks to the war against the Russian "oligarch" – the Franco-German axis with that of the United States-Great Britain-Eastern countries; at the center of which, the Americans have installed the most reactionary, macho, clerical, homophobic, anti-worker and warmongering of European countries: Poland. At this point, not only the federal hypothesis is a utopia, but also the Europe of nations. The future will be one of nationalism and new fascisms. If anyone ever wanted to resurrect the European project, after a new slavish consent to the logic of dollar imperialism, they would first have to wage a liberation struggle from Yankee colonialism. On the international chessboard, even less than before the war, but like all marginal lords, Macron pours all his lightness and impotence on his "subjects", to whom he gives police treatment.



THERE IS NOTHING GOOD

IN THE MACRON

Not even the tail

(Allusion to the expression: *In the pig everything is good*)

According to the *Financial Times* of March 25, 2023, "France has the regime that, among developed countries, comes closest to an autocratic dictatorship." It is amusing to read the international press of capital that is alarmed (*Wall Street Journal*) because "Macron's forced march to transform the French economy into a business-friendly environment is at the expense of social cohesion." Their real concern is not the living conditions of millions of proletarians, but the "populist" danger that would threaten the Atlantic Alliance, the global NATO and, therefore, the United States that governs it: the "parliamentary

rebellion" and "the chaos unfolding throughout the country pose disturbing questions for the future of the nation to all those who expect France to remain firmly in the liberal camp, pro-European Union and pro-NATO." The *Financial Times* fears that France will "follow the Americans, British and Italians and opt for the populist vote." It is not clear whether they are hypocritical or irresponsible. They would like to have both at the same time: financial rent/monopoly rent and social cohesion, democracy and dictatorship of capital, tax-exempt companies, lavishly financed by a completely twisted *welfare* in their favor and social peace. *Der Spiegel* speaks of "democratic deficit", of "democracy itself in danger", when it is economic policies that daily defend the causes of the Western autocracy that has nothing, but nothing, to envy to the Eastern.



We don't want any more crumbs

we want

the bakery

Celia Tremori

The cycle of global struggle after 2011

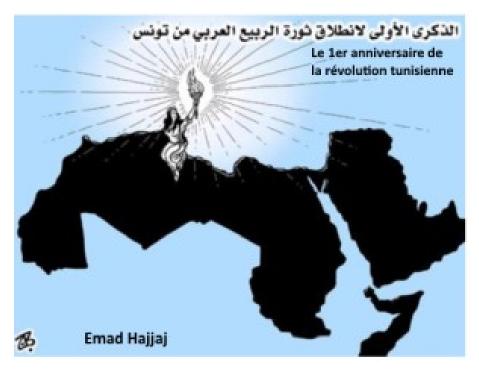
What is just beginning to be glimpsed in the struggles in France, the challenge to power and capital, is what struggles in the global South have achieved since 2011.

Back in the twentieth century, the great South played a decisive strategic role, even more so than the struggles in the West. The international dimension of the balance of power is a decisive knot for regaining the initiative. The crisis of 2008 not only opened the possibility of war (which arrived on time), but also the possibility of revolutionary ruptures (the reality of the struggles moves, it is obliged to move in this direction if it does not want to be swept away by the joint action of war and the new fascisms).

The last globalization not only deepened the differences between North and South, but also created Northerners in the South and implanted Southerners in the North. From this should not be inferred, in any way, a homogeneity of political behavior and processes of subjectivation between the two hemispheres. Centre-periphery polarization is immanent to capitalism and must be reproduced imperatively and continuously. Without the predation of the "South", without the imposition of "lumpen" development and "unequal exchange" (Samir Amin), the rate of profit is destined to fall inexorably, despite all the innovations, technologies and inventions that the North can produce under the control of the greatest techno-scientific entrepreneur: the Pentagon. This is the underlying reason for the current war. The great South wants to get out of this relationship of subordination – it has even partially emerged from it – and it is this political will that threatens US financial and monetary hegemony and its productive and political supremacy.

There are at least two major political differences that remain between the West and the rest of the world. The non-integration of the "barbarians" of the French suburbs into the present struggles, despite the fact that they constitute one of the poorest and most exploited layers of the French proletariat is already a symptom, within the Western countries, of the difficulties in overcoming the "colonial division" from which the Whites have long benefited.

Within the cycle of struggles that began in 2011, there was a differentiation similar to that produced in the <th century. Then we had socialist or national liberation revolutions (with socialist overtones) throughout the great South and mass struggles, some very hard, but unable to lead to successful revolutionary processes in the West. Today we have great strikes in Europe (in France, Britain, Spain and even in Germany) and, instead, real uprisings, insurrections and opening of revolutionary processes in the great South.



Let's consider just a few examples – Egypt/Tunisia opening the cycle in 2011, Chile and Iran more recently – to highlight differences and possible convergences.

It is difficult to compare the uprising of the Arab Spring with "Occupy Wall Street", although there has been a circulation of forms of struggle: overthrow of constituted power, millions of people mobilized, political systems shaken to their foundations, repression with hundreds of deaths, possibility of opening a real revolutionary process, which was immediately aborted because, as a poster in Cairo said during the uprising, "Half revolution, no revolution". Occupy Wall Street never brought into play power relations of this magnitude, nor did it generate, even for brief periods, "vacuums", destructuring, delegitimizations of the power apparatuses such as those that periodically determine the uprisings in the South. And it is still the South that opens and promotes new cycles of struggle (see also South American feminism) that are reproduced with less intensity and force in the North.



Mural by Diego Escobedo that evokes the 300 eyes of protesters torn off by police during the 2019-2022 revolt in Chile

That of Chile, where "neoliberalism" was born after the action of the state-capital machine physically destroyed the revolutionary processes underway and called on Hayek and Friedman to build, on the basis of massacre, the market, competition and human capital (Never confuse neoliberalism with imperialism or capitalism, we must always distinguish them, carefully!), is another type of insurrection, from which other lessons can be drawn, although, as in North Africa, they are political defeats.

In Chile, unlike Egypt, a multiplicity of movements (the importance of the feminist and indigenous movement is significant) were expressed in the revolt. But at a certain moment in the class struggle, one is confronted with a power that is no longer just patriarchal or heterosexual power, it is no longer just racist power, it is no longer just the power of the master, but it is the general power of the state-capital machine that encompasses them, reorganizes them and, At the same time, it overwhelms them. The enemy is not only the national power, the sovereignty of a State like Chile's. In these situations we are directly confronted with imperialist policies because any rupture – as in Egypt (more than in Tunisia) or in Chile or Iran – runs the risk of calling into question the relations of power in the world market, the global organization of power: both the Chilean and Egyptian insurrections were closely followed by the United States. that did not hesitate to intervene with its "strategic interference". In France a similar situation exists: the development of the struggles is found, starting from a "trade union" struggle, with the totality of the state-capital machine.

In these moments of struggle, a point of no return is reached for both contenders, because it is not possible to consolidate stable forms of counterpower, of "liberated" spaces or territories, but for short periods. The Zapatista solution is neither generalizable nor reproducible (as, moreover, the Zapatistas themselves always affirmed). It is not understood how a lasting "dual power" can be implanted in the present conditions of capitalism. At the same time, the seizure of power does not seem, since '68, a priority. The current situation is set up like a jigsaw puzzle!

Despite the political differences between North and South, transversal problems arise: which political subject to construct that is capable, at the same time, of organizing the multiplicity of forms of struggle and points of view and of posing the question of the dualism of power and the organization of force.

The revolts, the insurrections (but also, although in a different way, the struggles in France), produce a series of enigmas or impossibilities: impossibility of totalizing and synthesizing the struggles and impossibility of remaining in dispersion and in difference; impossibility of not rebelling by deconstructing power and impossibility of taking power; impossibility of organizing the passage from multiplicity to the dualism of power imposed by the enemy and impossibility of remaining only in multiplicity and difference; impossibility of centralization and impossibility of facing the enemy without centralization. Fighting against these impossibilities is the condition for creating the *possible* revolution. Only under these conditions, by solving these riddles, overcoming these impossibilities, *does the impossible of revolution become possible*.

Fighting against impossibilities is the condition for creating the *possible* revolution.

The second major difference between North and South concerns the ongoing war and imperialism. *Imperialism* names the leap in the quality of capital that operates from the integration of three processes of centralization (economic, political and military) that the First World War consecrates and that reached their climax during "neoliberalism". Far from free competition and free enterprise, oblivious to any struggle against the concentration of power that distorts competition, dissatisfied with the depredation operated on a world scale and with the imposition of a reorganization in its favor of *Welfare*, imperialist centralization allows to impose – as it is doing – the inflation of its profits ("*pricing power*": the power to set the price in defiance of self-styled neoliberalism).

The French movement has not expressed itself on the war between imperialisms. The fight against pension reform falls within this framework, although the question has never been

raised, although the fact that Europe is at war and the West is recalibrating from Welfare to *Warfare* (from *welfare* to war) significantly changes the political situation. Perhaps it is better this way, even if it is an obvious political limitation. Had they done so, different, even opposing, political positions would probably have emerged.

In the global South, on the other hand, the verdict on the war is clear and unanimous: it is a war between imperialisms whose origin is US imperialism, to which the suicidal European political classes adhere. The South is divided between states that declare themselves neutral and others that side with Russia, but all reject sanctions and arms supplies. [1]

In the South, the category of imperialism has never been questioned as in the West. The blunder committed by Toni Negri and Michael Hardt in Empire – a supranational formation that has never been formed – accounts for a notorious difference in analysis and political sensitivity, to the point that they came to affirm, in the last volume of their trilogy, that after having rehearsed the war, the impossible *Empire* would have opted for finance. That is, exactly the opposite of what happened: US finances, after having produced and continue to produce repeated crises – which put capitalism all the time on the verge of collapse – are saved, exclusively, by the intervention of the *sovereignty* of the States and, in the first place, by that of the United States, which ends up being forced into war.

Contemporary imperialism, whose concept could be summarized – greatly simplified – in the monopoly/currency/war triangle, also sheds light on the limits of the theories that have ignored it and forces us to adopt the point of view of the South, which has never abandoned it because it still has it on its back. As we also have, but we prefer to pretend not!



#### Precarious

women Women at war

How to get out of the counter-revolution?

The struggles of the French proletariat are admirable. They excite because they recognize features of the revolutions of the nineteenth century (and even of the great revolution), which face the counterrevolution with a continuity and intensity not seen in any other Western country. However, we must remain vigilant. If the French proletarians rise up with impressive regularity against the "reforms", so far they only manage to delay their application or modify them marginally, producing and sedimenting, on the other hand, unprecedented processes of subjectivation that accumulate as in the current struggles (from the struggles against the law of the labor of the yellow vests to the *Zones to Defend*. , the SADs). All the struggles have been, at least so far, defensive, whose reactive sense can certainly be overcome, but there is still a considerable *starting handicap*.

To explain what we call "defeat" – despite the great resistance expressed – perhaps we must go back to how wage, social and political gains were imposed. If in the nineteenth

century the first victories were the result of the struggles of the European working classes, in the twentieth century the South played an increasingly important strategic role. It was revolutions – as a latent threat in the North and as victorious in the South – that clogged the machine of the capital-state, forcing it to make concessions. What was frightening was the autonomy and independence of the proletarian point of view expressed there. The union of *peasant revolutions* in the South with workers' struggles in the North led to an objective front of struggles across the "color line" that forced wage increases, welfare policies in the North, and the rupture of the colonial division that had reigned for four centuries in the great South. This is the most important fruit of the Soviet revolution (Lenin never went to London, nor to Detroit, but he was seen in Beijing, Hanoi, Algiers, etc.), which was prolonged by the "oppressed peoples".

Just as socialism is impossible in a single country, it is also impossible to impose conditions on the capital-state machine from a single nation.



WORK
CONSUMES
AND CLOSES THE JET
Sixtine Dano

The Western working classes had been defeated with the advent of the First World War, when the overwhelming majority of the workers' movement agreed to send them to the slaughterhouse for the glory of their respective national bourgeoisies. By the time the workers' and class movement had redeemed itself through anti-fascism, the initiative was already in the hands of the "peasant" revolutions, whose force pushed the centres of capitalism eastward. By then, the Western working classes had integrated into development and even when they rebelled they were never able to really threaten the capital-state machine. In the same period, the revolutions of the great South were transformed into production machines or nation states.

Just as socialism is impossible in a single country, it is also impossible to impose conditions on the capital-state machine from a single nation.

With the disappearance of the threat of the revolution in the North and its real presence in the South, the balance of forces was radically reversed: we began to lose and continue to lose, piece by piece, everything conquered (the passage from 60 to 67 years – that is, seven years of life captured at a stroke by capital – is perhaps the clearest sign of defeat). Until the counter-revolution that began in the seventies, even when it had been defeated politically, progress was being made in the social and economic field. Today it is lost on both fronts. Now, after the crisis of 2008, significant struggles erupt everywhere (the French March is one of them), but unless the web of insurrections and struggles on a global scale is receded, subjectively, this time I doubt that the cage of counter-revolution can be broken.

Men of good will intend to civilize the class war that is at the origin of wars between states. We wish them good luck. In a single century (1914 – 2022), different imperialisms brought humanity to the edge of the abyss four times: the First and Second World Wars, with Nazism as the climax; the Cold War, in which the possibility of humanity's nuclear end was first updated. The current war – of which Ukraine will be but one episode – could revive this last eventuality.

With regard to this tragic and recurrent repetition of wars between imperialisms (we do not even count the others), it is a question of reconstructing international relations of forces and of elaborating a concept of war (of strategy) appropriate to this new situation. The *Communist Manifesto* gave a definition that is still very current, even if it has been eliminated or forgotten by pacification: "uninterrupted war, sometimes disguised, sometimes open." Disguised or open, it always and in any case requires a knowledge of the relations of force; a strategy and an art of rupture adapted to these relationships.

Historically, war – although it seems that even today – can lead to a "revolutionary transformation" or a new accumulation of capital on a world scale. Another possibility that the *Manifesto* of Marx and Engels considered is the order of the day, exacerbated by the ongoing ecological disaster: "the destruction" not only "of the two classes in struggle", but also of all humanity.

April 7, 2023

Note

[1] Laura Richardson, head of the US Southern Command (which also includes all Latin American countries except Mexico) proposed a "deal" with Colombia, a historical ally of imperialism before the change of government. If the country agreed to make its fifty old Soviet-made Mi-8 and Mi-17 helicopters available to the Ukrainian army, Washington would replace them with new equipment. President Gustavo Petro's response was blunt and differs from the shameful and counterproductive submission of European elites: "We will keep these weapons, even if we have to turn them into scrap metal (...) We are not in one field or another, we are in the field of peace."



Curra Cotiza Revienta & Shut Up



Source of the posters :  $\blacktriangleright$  https://formesdesluttes.org/, where you will find hundreds of images

Maurizio Lazzarato

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