

“Without revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement.” Lenin, *What Is To Be Done*

## APPLYING DIALECTICS TO THE NEW MASS MOVEMENTS

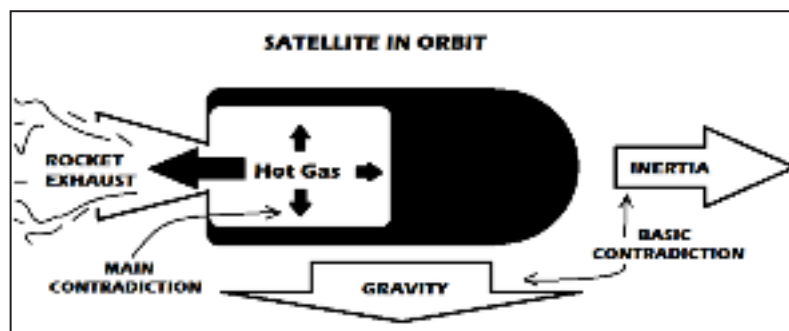
Recent issues of *Red Flag* have featured reports on mass protest movements in many places like South Africa, Brazil, Greece and Egypt, and the demonstrations about Trayvon Martin, just to name a few. The rise of these movements is an exciting new development that provides new opportunities for winning masses to communist ideas, but does this new activism change the course of history?

To answer this question we can use concepts from communist dialectics. Dialectics says that it is the conflicts (or contradictions) in things that make them change, and that some contradictions are more important than others in determining how things change. The conflict that has the biggest effect on a process at some particular time is called its “main contradiction” at that time. For example, when a rocket engine is started, the main contradiction is between the expanding gases from the burning fuel and the metal container that surrounds the hot gas. The expanding gas relieves this contradiction by escaping out the tail of the rocket and driving it forward.

The main contradiction is not the only contradiction in a process, however, and other contradictions have effects, some small and some large. For example, earth satellites often have small rocket engines to move them from one orbit to another. When the rocket isn’t turned on, the main contradiction that determines how the satellite moves is the conflict between gravity that pulls it down and inertia that tends to keep it going in a straight line. When the rocket engine is turned on, the main contradiction shifts to the expanding gas that is prevented from escaping anywhere but out the back of the engine. The contradiction between gravity and inertia is basic in any moving object, that is, always present and always having some effect. This contradiction is only the main contradiction when the rocket engine is not in use.

The main contradiction that has been driving world history for many decades has been the rivalry between the big capitalist powers, each trying to dominate as much of the labor, markets and resources of the world as it can. This network of contradictions has led to two world wars in the last century and many smaller ones recently.

Capitalism always has contradictions between workers and capitalists. Exploitation of workers by capitalists is the heart of capitalism, and always provokes some degree of resistance by workers. This worker-capitalist contradiction is basic, that is, part of what makes capitalism capitalism. Imperialist rivalry is also a basic contradiction of capitalism that has developed to the imperialist stage, a stage that exists now and has for a long time.



Although the basic worker-boss contradiction always exists and always produces some effects, like strikes and protests, it isn’t always the contradiction with the biggest effects, that is, the main contradiction. In fact, this basic contradiction isn’t the main contradiction throughout most of the history of capitalism, but will become the main contradiction when the revolutionary movement is strong enough that overthrow of capitalism will happen soon.

Contradictions among imperialist bosses and between workers and bosses are not independent of one another. The wars that resulted from contradictions between bosses in the 20th century weakened the Russian and Chinese rulers enough so that workers’ revolutions were able to win there. The recent mass movements in many

places have created more intense contradictions between workers and bosses there. They have forced bosses to make some concessions to try to prevent the movement from becoming a challenge to the whole system. In Brazil bosses took back bus fare hikes and president Rousseff announced half price movie tickets for people from 15 to 29, but fares are still very high compared to Brazilian wages.

The fact that these reform gains are very modest does not mean that the movements are not important. The bosses’ economic crisis has caused mass misery and angry masses are responding, demonstrating their potential for collective power and organization, a lesson that millions are learning. Intensifying worker-boss contradictions lead more people to look beyond reform and oppose capitalism. This is a very important opportunity to build the communist movement. In Brazil, for example, some people distributed *Red Flag* and an ICWP leaflet during the demonstrations.

Until mass movements challenge the capitalist system directly and fight for communism, the contradiction with the biggest effects will remain the rivalry of capitalist powers with each other, not with the working class. That basic contradiction will only become the main one when the masses are won over to communist ideas and fight under the leadership of a communist party.

In some places industrial workers have played key roles in the mass movements, including aerospace workers in Brazil, textile workers in Egypt and miners in South Africa. These developments confirm the ICWP’s outlook that the industrial working class is the key to mass mobilization for communism. They also challenge us to use our resources, and especially our paper *Red Flag*, to reach masses of workers and give them the ideas that they need to fight for communism and win. Now is the time to make a big increase in the circulation of *Red Flag*, and help make the basic worker-boss contradiction the main one.