#### WFTU General Secretary, George Mavrikos speech

The creation of classes

Many books, many papers, countless articles have been and are being written on worldwide level on the issue of the “classes”. During the last centuries, the ideological conflict on the issue of class structure of capitalist society is intense and lasting. It is constantly being heightened. So, as fighters of the workers’ movement and as cadres of the class struggles we have to acquire the basic knowledge on these issues; we have to know the class composition of the society we live in, of the society in the broader region and all over the world.

The correct knowledge and scientific analysis of class composition is an element necessary for developing the correct strategy and correct tactics of the Workers Movement. It helps the right definition of the driving forces and the policy of the necessary alliances of the Working Class with the other popular strata. The exact knowledge of the components of the social composition, also, assists in understanding the priorities of the organizational targeting of the Workers Movement, the modern necessities for developing organizational measures and adjustments, the very goals of class struggle.

Anti-scientific theories

A priority among the duties of the militants of the workers’ movement is the exposure and repulse of the anti-scientific theories that ceaselessly (since as early as the 18th century, but mainly during the 20th) propagandize the quantitative and qualitative limitation of the Working Class, confining it only to “manual workers”. This limitation under present-day circumstances is highlighted by the so-called “post-industrial era” theory, where industry is driven to elimination since science and technology (informatics, robotics, biotechnology, nanotechnology) dominate the economy; however, industry with modern means of production is their application field. At the same time, the working class which operates them is educated and sells its labor power to the capitalist owners of these industries, of these means of production.

These theories talk about the “end of the working class” and are used for imposing on workers’ consciences the concept that their interests are the same with those of the owners; that the working class disappears and thus, so does the class struggle; that there is no vanguard force in society and there is no need to change society in order to satisfy the workers’ needs. On the contrary, they say that this would be “achieved” through joint effort, social dialogue, class submission and collaboration involving everyone.

In the ’60s and ’70s there were some anti-scientific theories on classes which were “stretching” the limits of the working class, considering almost the whole population as being what they call “working people”. They mostly used to consider some parts of intermediate strata, youth, intelligentsia as working class. These theories were mainly promoted from time to time by certain reformists, speaking on the so called “leading” role of intelligentsia, youth, students, “indignants”, of “spontaneity” etc.

This distortion of the working class social limits also distorts the relations of social classes and strata within capitalist society and therefore distorts the true class interests by thinking that working class interests are the same with those of intelligentsia, especially of the scientific and technical one to whom intermediary strata and part of bourgeois class belong. This muddies the waters and conceals the class contradictions in society, undermines the class struggle of the working class and its final goal and becomes a tool for perpetuating exploitation.

Capitalism’s development also develops quantitatively and qualitatively the working class.

Under the contemporary conditions of the scientific and technical revolution, the topic of class structure becomes even more complex and pertinent. Along with the other central issue of the “class nature of the state”, they are two top issues for the Workers Trade Union Movement and its cadres.

The creation of classes

Capitalist society (as every class society) consists of social classes and social strata. These classes are neither static, nor eternal, but are always in harmony, in direct relationship with the system of social production existing in each historical period.

Therefore, in the primitive society there were not any classes, because essentially there wasn’t any private ownership. There was a rudimentary division of labor between the two sexes. In fact, they were living and being fed by nature; the productivity of their work couldn’t create any surplus product which could be owned by someone. The development of tools, of means of production, i.e. the discovery of agriculture and livestock production set the conditions for certain groups of people to engage in a particular form of work; there was a labor productivity increase and, this way, surplus product was created; a surplus product belonging to those who were producing, those who had the appropriate tools for agriculture or had domesticated animals for livestock production. These people were also exchanging the surplus product. The private ownership and slavery began. Under these circumstances, the decomposition of the primitive classless society began. The tendency to expand private ownership led to tribe wars where owners used to subjugate other tribes and create slaves; thus, began the expansion of slave society, the first class society to exist. So, commercial activities began to grow and profits began to be gathered by the private owners who also were slave owners.

This way, step by step the division of society in classes, groups and social strata was created.

On the one side, there were the owners of means of production: slave owners, feudal lords, bourgeois and from the other side those who by themselves were the slave-owners’ tools of property (such as slaves in slave society) or they had few tools of their own to work on the land for the feudal lord (such as serfs in feudalism) or they just have their hands and minds (just as the working class in capitalism) and sell them; that is to say that they sell their labor power in order to live.

Of course, there also were intermediate social groups such as craftsmen, merchants, artisans etc., in slave society and in feudalism. In capitalism, there are the intermediate or middle strata, on which we will speak below).

This way, the antagonical position of these two basic classes started to appear in every socioeconomic formation.

The class conflicts started. The first big class confrontation in the history is considered to be the revolt of Spartacus in 1st century BC, where more than one hundred thousand slaves took part. On that matter, Karl Marx in one of his letters to Friedrich Engels in 1896 writes: “Spartacus appears as the most famous figure, revealed by the ancient history … A great general, a real representative of the ancient proletariat.”

Feudal lords, aristocrats, landowners, emperors, popes, cardinals and kings accumulated land and economic resources in their ownership and controlled commerce. Of course, merchants, who were intermediating for merchandise circulation, infiltrated industry and manufacturing; so, they also infiltrated the productive process of products processing and became owners of such production units.

This tendency was growing bigger, giving economic power to manufacturing and industry units’ owners and creating the young emerging bourgeois class.

This way, they became the first capitalists in their era, in the given-at that time- feudal system of social production.

On the other side, serfs, other independent individual producers and manual workers were obligated -in order to survive- to sell their labor power to the capitalists in exchange for a remuneration. They became, thus, the first sectors of the Working Class in their era. For example, in England, where fields were needed for pastures so that sheep be reared and their wool be used in industry, they forced poor farmers to leave and go to industries in search of work or to be unemployed. At the same time, artisans concentrated in manufacturing became workers in big industrial centers.

Another question which contributed to industry’s «fueling» with workers was the eradication of slavery (a characteristic example was the war in the US between the capitalist North and the rural South where black slaves’ transport from Africa was perpetuating slavery in plantations and constraining capitalist development. The victory of the North liberated slaves from slavery and “enslaved” them in the industrial centers). The same applies to the extermination of millions of Native Americans in the American continent who were concentrated close to the big industries, close to the big industrial centers with a great number of workers.

In these areas (in Europe and primarily in England and in the U.S.), where we have concentration of the Working Class, the first efforts for collective class action, for unity of the workers against the exploitation of the capitalists start to appear.

Basic and non – basic classes

In class societies, there are the basic classes, that have a leading role in production and the non – basic, various social strata that can be found between the two basic classes; that’s why they are called middle or intermediate strata.

The class struggle in capitalist society is held principally between the two basic classes and each one of the basic, antagonistic classes, tries to carry to their side, tries to gain allies from within the non-basic classes and the other social strata.

The two basic classes in capitalism are the bourgeois class, the class of capitalists on one side, and the Working Class on the opposite site.

The definition of classes was prepared by great thinkers K. Marx and F. Engels with their classic works and finally was formulated by V.I. Lenin in his work “The great initiative” is underlined that:

“Classes are large groups of people differing from each other 1) by the place they occupy in a determined system of social production, 2) by their relation to the means of production, 3) by their role in the organization of labor, 4) by the mode of remuneration and 5) by the dimensions of the share of social wealth of which they dispose”.

A capitalist is: the industrialist, trader, banker, the owner of great land areas cultivated by workers, the owner of big tourism complexes etc. who has capital and makes use of it in the production process and services (e.g. tourism) is owner of means of production moved by workers whose labor power buys. Those who take part in the production process as bosses, who receive their income from the profits they gain selling the products produced by the workers working for them, who exploit and profit from the workers’ exploitation, from the surplus value produced by the workers, those whose income is large and secures for them a comfortable life and accumulation of wealth.

Worker – proletarian: Those who do not have means of production under their ownership. Those who sell their physical or mental labor power or both of them (mental labor gains an increasing importance) and receive their income whether in the form of salary, wage, hourly or weekly payment, those whose income is small and have a hard time making ends meet, those whose job is mainly to merely execute the instructions and directions of their superiors, those who are oppressed in the capitalist system.

Namely, the basic classes are on one side the class that owns the means of production and on the opposite side the exploited, the oppressed class.

In the course of the centuries the basic classes have been:

* In slave society the slave owners on one side, the slaves on the other side.
* In feudalism, feudal lords on one side, the farmers on the other side.
* In capitalism, on one side the bourgeoisie and the proletariat on the other.

The proletariat includes the industry workers, but also the workers in commerce, the farm workers, bank employees etc.

The working class has different strata as well, there is an internal stratification e.g.:

— the factory proletariat, who works in the big factories, is concentrated and constitutes the heart of the working class.

–the industrial proletariat, that includes factory workers, as well as every worker in big construction groups, in other, smaller industries etc.

— the unemployed, who are the reserve army

Furthermore, among working class there is a distinction according to the sector where some parts of it work, according to the profession (e.g. salaried engineer/mechanical engineer, accountant, turner etc.), amount of remuneration etc.

All these constitute a necessary element of knowledge in action for the class unity of the working class.

The relation between capitalists and workers is not only limited to the relation between the individual capitalist and the workers he exploits. It’s a relation between classes. Capitalists as a whole exploit the unpaid product of the labor of the working class which has a social character.

Intermediate strata

Of course, bourgeois society is not just comprised of bourgeoisie and working class. Between them there are the intermediate strata of city and village community; their main characteristic is that even though they possess the means of production, they are not that developed so as the outcome of every individual labor be incorporated to the product obtained. That is to say that they don’t use somebody else’s wage labor or they use it to a limited extent and mainly in cooperative form. Thus, they have an intermediate position between bourgeoisie and working class. In capitalism dominates the tendency of expropriation of direct producers from the means of production they possess. The tendency of revolutionizing the means of production dominates, i.e. the substitution of means of production with new ones which are new and technologically sophisticated and concentrate production and work force; in other words, they make production more social.

The bottom line is that the tendency of destroying the independent producer dominates. A complementary element of this process is also the tendency of reproduction of intermediate strata into new productive sectors or their preservation in services (income to income exchange) where the capitalist relations and organization has not spread yet (e.g. various categories of employees such as physiotherapists, self-employed to Internet Services etc.). Depending on the number of using of somebody else’s wage labor and the level of their income, some parts of intermediate strata are closer to the working class and some other border on the bourgeoisie. These strata, by their nature, they socially oscillate between bourgeoisie and working class.

Inter-class strata

1 Peasants: there are farmers who own large tracts of land, are rich and exploit the workers who cultivate the land; they usually have a vertically integrated production in agriculture and livestock products processing. These farmers are rich and belong to the bourgeoisie.

Other farmers are intermediate, with smaller land properties even though they have the capacity of mechanized farming and gaining income to make ends meet. But there are also poor farmers who own very little land and have difficulty to surviving and who are the vast majority and are the closest allies of the working class as well as a moving force for social progress. The peasantry, the poor peasants were a basic class during the Feudal times.

Of course, farm-workers also exist.

Friedrich Engels in his work “The Peasant Question in France and Germany” since 1894 divides the peasants in: rural workers, small peasants, middle peasants and big peasants. He also underlines that there are also latifundists and big landowners, who constitute “undisguised capitalist business”.

* The intelligentsia: is also a special inter-class social stratum. Under conditions of scientific and technological revolution, their quantitative and qualitative presence is growing and is heterogeneous class-wise. For example, there are doctors who work in their own practice or in diagnostic centers, other doctors work in private hospitals and their only income is their salary while their owner makes profit by exploiting them.

On the other side, there are doctors who own Hospitals, Health Centers and big practices and have other doctors working for them. They exploit them and make profits. The same thing goes for lawyers, engineers, architects, etc.

* Youth: It is not a social class, it’s an inter-class category, same as students. Youngsters coming from working class or its allied poor popular strata belong to the working class and those coming from bourgeoisie and intermediate strata, in terms of interests, are in alliance with bourgeoisie.

Youth’s position in society is determined by the class which gave birth to them. That’s why we talk about “children and youngsters of the working class or the poor peasantry”. Of course, young people, when they get integrated into production they belong to social classes, depending on the place they occupy in production and either belong to the working class, poor peasantry and self-employed or to the bourgeoisie.

Some other issues regarding the working class.

According to the dominant Marxist view, the criteria as have been given by Lenin’s definition on classes must be taken into consideration uniformly, together, and not individually or by groups.

If we were obligated to prioritize one for its special weight, this would be the criterion “by their relation to the means of production”, but without this criterion being the only one that socially classifies somebody as belonging to the Working Class or not.

Some examples:

The Manager of a transnational corporation who works daily but may not own any shares, nor means of production, but:

* Is rewarded with share of the profits
* Is remunerated with sums of money 5 or 10 times higher than a simple worker
* Has administrative, not executive role in the production process

This person may work many hours daily, may even work more hours than the janitor who works in the same company, but the manager doesn’t belong to the Working Class, but to the bourgeoisie.

For instance, a CEO, the Manager or the Board of a business group belong to the same category.

Managers of business groups departments may also belong to the bourgeoisie or to the intermediate salaried strata, having higher salaries and coordination or intermediate coordination role. For example, a supervisor in a big industry.

The role of the Working Class

The Working Class has some attributes that make it vanguard class for social progress, give it the leading role in the course for democracy and socialism.

The most basic of these attributes are:

* It is connected with the big production of wealth, that is getting greater and greater with the concentration and centralization that is conducted in a constant process.
* It is the main productive force in capitalist society, since they produce all goods, from means of production to articles of consumption sold by capitalists to make profits.
* It is concentrated in big business groups, urban centers, big cities, it is concentrated in big industrial centers and big factories.
* Is constantly improving its educational level, its technical knowledge, its experience and skills.
* It is the class that has the best discipline acquired by its participation in the production process as well as collectivity, collective action; it has militant disposition, militant stability and consistency.
* It is the class that is organized in its own organizations, since it has its trade unions and has a wide historically accumulated experience of struggles and class confrontation.
* As a class, it can express the basic economic and political interests of the whole working people and unite around it the poor peasantry, the self-employed, given the constant tendency of their proletarianisation as capitalism grows.
* It is the class that with the overthrow of the capitalist system will “have nothing to lose but their chains”.

These characteristics underline the vanguard role of the Working Class in the struggle for the organization of society without bosses without exploitation. It has this goal under the condition that it is organized in its own Party which is its vanguard.

In the modern world, these attributes are strengthened and make the Working Class even more important, since its getting a better educational level, knows and makes use of the new technology, knows -through internationalization- the news from every corner of the world and this internationalization facilitates the workers knowledge, the expansion of experience and the expression of solidarity and internationalism. The internationalization of the class struggles, gives the working class bigger strength, intervention on an economic, political and ideological level. Of course, under the condition that class struggles have a certain content and orientation, fighting capitalists until their overthrow.

Moreover, the overthrows that took place during 1989-1991 in the former Soviet Union and other Socialist Countries, give the ability to the International Workers Movement to study the errors, weaknesses, omissions, that led to the overthrows and be taught by the negative experience. We can draw precious experience from the class struggles for a society without exploitation.

All these are the main reasons why the Working Class today is in the center, the heart of productive process and holds the “master switch”. By understanding its role and its historic mission, building its unity and winning over its natural allies, in a broad social alliance, it can change the development of things on all levels.

All the evolution of societies, up to today was result of class struggles. Class struggles have overthrown the slave regime, later on feudalism and tomorrow will overthrow the capitalist regime.