



communist

# review

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# Internationalism begins at home

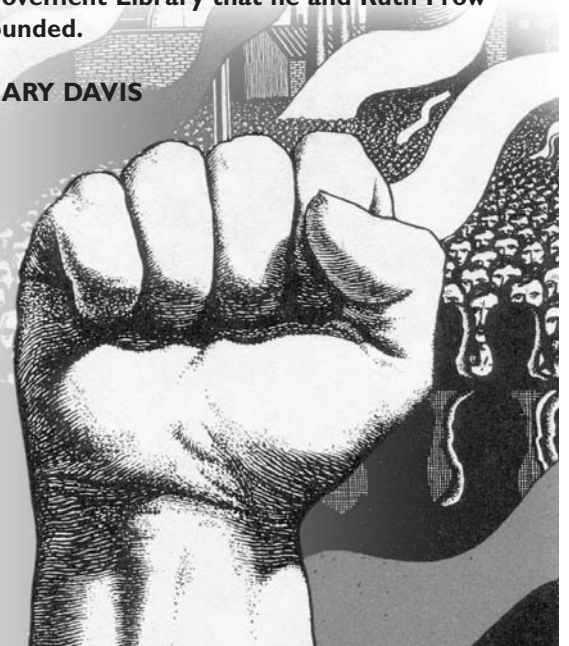
**I**n the month in which we celebrate international workers' day, it is appropriate that this issue of 'Communist Review' should have an international theme. Hence we continue the debate on China and reprint an important interview with Tetsuzu Fuwa, the Chairperson of the Japanese Communist Party. With a membership of 370,000, 14.8% of the popular vote and a readership of 2.8 million of 'Akahata' (the party's daily paper), the JCP is a significant force. The Eurocentric predisposition of the chattering classes to prematurely consign communism to the dustbin of history would do well to cast their otherwise globalised eyes further to the east. Kenny Coyle continues his article on the new wave of anti-communism. The first part (CR no.31) looked at the theoretical basis for the attack on marxism, in this issue the resulting distorted historical reading of the Stalin era is analysed.

Internationalism for marxists does not simply consist of ritual acknowledgment of the struggle of workers in other countries, welcome though this is. It is meaningful only when we discover the real interconnectedness of all anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist struggles worldwide even when they are not played out on such a consciously ideological terrain. This entails, in the first instance, recognising that internationalism begins at home. Expressing solidarity for black workers in other countries is meaningless without supporting the fight of black workers in Britain. Hence anti-racism cannot be separated from internationalism. This is graphically illustrated today when refugees and asylum seekers, many escaping from persecution from neo-colonial puppet regimes propped up by western imperialism, have become yet another target of racist vilification. The new labour government has shamelessly manufactured the problem of 'bogus' asylum seekers and the racist 'solution' to it in the form of the Asylum and Immigration Act thereby creating spurious political legitimacy for renewed forms of racial intolerance and bigotry callously exploited by Hague and other right wing forces. The Straw man verbally espouses the findings of the Lawrence Report, but his and the government's

action creates the climate for the perpetuation of overt and covert racism. Contrast the treatment of asylum seekers with the sympathy and succour given to rich white Zimbabwean landowners.

*Communist Review* is committed to the renewal and application of marxism to the problems of the 21st century. Some of these problems, like racism, are hardly new, but have been neglected by marxists. Ken Biggs shows that Marx and Lenin understood the importance of the issue and laid the foundation for developing the analysis of the relationship between class and race. Mike Squires reminds us that the CPGB was not always 'colour blind' and that its early history displayed a remarkable understanding of the importance of the fight against racism. This was reflected in the fact that black people joined the Party – one of them, a highly talented black boxer, Len Johnson is the subject of a book by Michael Herbert, reviewed here by Liz Elkind. We are also pleased to include Ray Walker's review of a biography of the late Eddie Frow, surely one of the finest working class intellectuals of the 20th century in this country. His legacy as a marxist will live on in the 21st century in the form of the remarkable Working Class Movement Library that he and Ruth Frow founded.

MARY DAVIS



## Part 2: Bodycount politics

### Kenny Coyle

Part one of this article appeared in the last issue of *Communist Review*

In a special supplement to *The Economist* last year, the magazine's editor, Bill Emmett, drew up the balance sheet of the events of 20th century. There were comparisons, of course, between Marxism and fascism as the two great criminal ventures of that era even if, Emmet grudgingly conceded, Marx's *Capital* was more intellectually sophisticated than Hitler's *Mein Kampf*.

Included in the supplement was a small table purportedly showing the greatest culprits of 'death by government'. The figures apparently exclude those killed by war. The Soviet Union topped the list with 62 million deaths, People's China came next with more than 30 million, ahead of Nazism. That these figures are quoted as reliable fact by such an impeccable bourgeois magazine as *The Economist* is symptomatic of the current anti-communism.

In the aftermath of Kosovo, where NATO/KLA propaganda suggested a 'genocide' of hundreds of thousands of ethnic Albanians to be followed immediately after the bombing with greatly revised figures, we would be justified in displaying a healthy scepticism.

Indeed, part of the emphasis of the New Wave is that these crimes are objectively documented. In his *New York Times* review of *The Black Book of Communism*, Tony Judt stressed that:

*"The facts and figures, some of them well known, others newly confirmed in hitherto inaccessible archives, are irrefutable."*<sup>1</sup>

Yet, although also magically adding up to the psychologically important 100 million figure, *The Black Book* breaks down that figure entirely differently: China: 72 million, Soviet Union 20 million, Cambodia 2.3 million, North Korea 2 million, Africa 1.7 million, Afghanistan 1.5 million, Vietnam 1 million, Eastern Europe 1 million, Latin America 150,000.

If the figures are irrefutable how is it possible that they should vary so wildly? How are such figures established and why are they being put forward?

*The Economist's* figures are drawn from *The Statistics of Democide* by Rudy Rummel, a retired US academic associated with the US far right and what we might call the US government's military-academic complex'.<sup>2</sup>

**Problems with methodology** First, it is entirely misleading to remove 'war' as a factor for calculating deaths this century, since 'war is the



continuation of politics by other means' and is in general a government monopoly. However, to do so might raise uncomfortable questions for the right.

Rummel argues that 'liberal democracy' is incompatible with war. He assures his readers that wars only happen when at least one of the protagonists is not a 'liberal democracy'. This might lead us to assume that 'liberal democracies' do not start wars and only act in self-defence. However, the bloody First World War was fought in Europe by the leading 'liberal democracies' of the day, Britain, France, Germany, Belgium and then the USA. Millions of men and women met their ends in an imperialist war where ideology was unimportant.

Add to this the dead in wars of US liberal democracy in Vietnam and Cambodia, the active US government role in arming, training, planning and in some cases directly overseeing, mass murder from El Salvador, Indonesia, Chile, South Korea, to Guatemala and Yugoslavia. This is not to forget the deaths caused by the British, French, and Dutch empires, which combined widespread liberal democratic freedoms at home while denying them to their colonies.<sup>3</sup>

But Rummel is not interested in these comparisons. His 'research' lists no sources in any language other than English. His figures are derived not from first-hand sources but often from second- or even third-hand ones. Among his list of sources on the Soviet Union, for example, he includes propaganda pamphlets produced by extreme right-wing emigré groups and by officials of the US propaganda services such as works by William Henry Chamberlin and Eugene Lyons. These two were members of the American Committee for the Liberation from Bolshevism, a CIA-funded group that set up the propaganda station Radio Liberty. His other sources range from pro-Nazi sources, the CIA to even the Socialist Workers Party's late leader Tony Cliff and Andrew Rothstein!



**Revolution or Bolshevik coup d'état** At the heart of the anti-communist argument is that Marxism, rather than just 'Stalinism', 'Maoism' or even 'Leninism' is in essence violent and undemocratic.

Yet, paradoxically, it was after the bloody crushing of the Paris Commune in 1871 that we find repeated references in the writings of Marx and Engels to the possible peaceful triumph revolution in the more developed capitalist countries. At a gathering of the First International, Marx posed the question of armed force as being one of tactics not principle, and clearly suggested that the peaceful path was preferable.

*"We must explain to the governments: We know that you are the armed might directed against the proletariat; we shall proceed against you in a peaceful way where that is possible for us, and with weapons if it should become necessary."* (London Congress of International 21st September 1871)<sup>4</sup>

What is astonishing is that this was before the achievement of universal adult suffrage in any capitalist country. Speaking in Amsterdam after the Hague congress of the International Marx commented:

*"We appreciate that one must take into consideration the institutions and customs and traditions of the different countries, and we do not deny that there are countries like America and England – and were I better acquainted with your institutions I might perhaps add Holland too – where workers can reach their goals by peaceful means. While that may be true we also have to recognise that in most continental countries the lever of our revolutions has to be force; it is force to which one must some day resort so as to establish the sovereignty of labour."*<sup>5</sup>

He was even more direct in an earlier interview, where he describes any attempts at insurrection in Britain as: "foolishness, when the goal can be reached more quickly and certainly through peaceful agitation". In 1886, Engels wrote that Marx's study of the British situation was such that:

*"at least in Europe, England is the only country where the inevitable social revolution might be effected entirely by peaceful and legal means. He certainly never forgot to add that he hardly expected the English ruling classes to submit without a 'pro-slavery rebellion' to this peaceful and legal revolution."*<sup>6</sup>

Far from being committed to violence as a principle, Marx and Lenin regarded the peaceful development of revolution as the most desirable path. However, the possibility of this path being open depended not on the desires of revolutionaries but on the ability and willingness of the ruling classes to deploy counter-revolutionary violence against the mass of the population. In the concrete conditions of 1917, Lenin's efforts were first to prod the reformist socialist parties to take power through the Soviets, when *they* possessed the majority that the Bolsheviks lacked.

Only after these efforts had failed, and Bolshevik

strength increased substantially, did Lenin set out to achieve a coalition of anti-war, pro-Soviet parties in government. It is also worth noting that the formal banning of other parties only occurred after they openly sided with counter-revolution. The bourgeois Cadet Party, for example, existed for several months after the October Revolution. It was only suppressed after it openly advocated and participated in armed insurrection against the Soviet government.

The Bolsheviks refused, despite mass pressure from below, to take power in the urban centres during the 'July Days' of 1917. Lenin regarded such a seizure of power as possible in the cities but not in Russia overall, since peasant support was lacking. The Bolshevik reticence to be provoked into an adventurist putsch, resulted in a temporary recovery of reaction, which sought to arrest the leading Bolsheviks. Lenin went into hiding. The ultra-right army generals under Kornilov revolted and would have slaughtered working-class activists had the Bolsheviks not already succeeded in winning mass support within the army. It is clear that the choice facing Russia in late 1917 was either a Bolshevik-led Soviet government or a bloody military dictatorship of the far right.

**Intervention and Civil War** A striking feature of the October Revolution was its lack of bloodshed, during the immediate transfer of power. Even Nicholas Werth, in *The Black Book*, notes that the Soviet security police, the Cheka, was initially set up with just 100 personnel and was briefed to prevent undisciplined acts of mass revenge, vandalism and looting.

An important factor in transforming this situation was foreign intervention, consisting of 200,000 troops from the imperialist powers. Full-scale civil war and Allied intervention followed an uprising in May 1918 by the Czechoslovak Brigade in Russia. The Czechs had joined the imperial Russian army during World War I.

Although, with the exception of the Japanese in the Soviet Far East, these forces did not involve themselves in major set-piece clashes with the Red Army, they did bolster those forces fighting for a White dictatorship in the following ways.

First, their existence provided a morale boost to supporters of the overthrown regime. Second, there was now a ready supply of weaponry and training for the counter-revolutionary armies. Third, foreign intervention allowed the temporary creation of separate anti-Bolshevik states. Fourth, the Soviet government was forced to adopt a harsh economic policy, 'War Communism', which would otherwise not have been implemented. Taken together, these forced a heavy militarisation of society, state and party that left a deep imprint on many aspects of early socialist construction.

In Finland, granted independence by the Bolsheviks, a military dictatorship led by the right-wing military dictator Mannerheim slaughtered around 40,000 Red Finnish workers. This gives a



measure of the alternative to Bolshevism.

The Baltic states of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia, were occupied by the Germans and declared 'independence'. In the Ukraine, the Germans set up a puppet regime under "Hetman" Skoropadski.

In the west, General Yudenitch commanded a British-equipped White army in Estonia. He advanced close to Petrograd in October 1919, but Trotsky rallied its defenders and Yudenich's army dissolved.

The chief military threat came from the south. Early in autumn 1919, General Denikin's Don Cossacks and Volunteer Army (equipped with British tanks), reached Orel, 250 miles south of Moscow. Then numerically superior Red forces counterattacked and drove him back, and in March 1920 the British evacuated the remnants of his army from Novorossiysk.

To reconstitute a Greater Poland, the forces of Marshal Joseph Pilsudski invaded the Ukraine and captured Kiev in May 1920.

This is the background to the period of intervention and civil war that lasted through 1918-1920. But a reader of the *Black Book* would find such significant facts missing. The only real reference is to 'Red atrocities' – whose main source is a propaganda pamphlet compiled by their opponent, General Yudenich.

Rummel's work includes 2.5 million famine deaths from the 1921-22 period as if this was a deliberate Bolshevik policy.<sup>7</sup> In any case, many famine deaths are inseparable from disease that ravages malnourished populations. Rummel also takes out some of the Civil War deaths, which he classifies as 'Red Terror', and are therefore included in his overall total, despite the wartime conditions that he was so keen to exclude elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

**Soviet Collectivisation** As a result of the recovery stimulated by the New Economic Policy, during the mid-1920s, richer peasants (the kulaks) sought to use their more favourable trading position to hold the Soviet government to ransom and demand higher prices for grain. They also became more politically emboldened in attacking Soviet and Communist Party representatives in the villages.

These actions represented not only a political threat to the Soviet state but also, and this is a factor entirely absent from the *Black Book*, threatened to starve the urban areas of foodstuffs. In other words, the Soviet government acted to *prevent* famine. The Stalin leadership initially seems to have believed that a return to a policy of forced requisitions from the richer peasants, used during the period of War Communism, would resolve this temporary crisis. In fact, the clashes escalated and the Soviet government responded in kind.

As the stakes were raised by the growing threats to food supply in the towns, Stalin increased the pace of collectivisation. However, opponents of collectivisation also organised armed clashes and the outright destruction of livestock and food stores. Ukrainian nationalists have even boasted

that perhaps 1 million peasants were involved in violent resistance to the Soviet authorities. It was those implacably opposed to collectivisation who engaged in the widespread slaughter of livestock, destruction of food stores and seeds. It has been estimated that 44% of cattle and up to 65% of sheep and goats along with 50% of horses were lost in this period.

This not only slashed direct food stocks and draught animals but also catastrophically affected the production of animal manure for use as fertiliser.

The collectivisation programme, given the unprepared and unplanned manner in which it was launched and implemented, confronted an unfavourable objective situation. Combined with this, however, were serious errors, such as the replacement of large amounts of fodder production for animals, with grain production for human consumption. Tractor production and other agricultural technologies were woefully inadequate.

The resulting food shortages and famine is usually unceremoniously dumped at the feet of the Soviet government but this entirely ignores the complex situation in the Soviet countryside at the time and the fierce internal debates within the Soviet leadership at the time.<sup>9</sup>

Although, Stalin later represented the collectivisation programme as an example of his far-sighted genius, a more accurate appraisal is that the growing food crisis in the country forced his hand. The collectivisation programme appears to have been pragmatic and ad hoc rather than pre-planned.

Indeed at a number of points, the Stalin leadership attempted to slow down the pace of collectivisation. Aside from Stalin's own famous article 'Dizzy with Success', we know that the Soviet leadership expressed a certain concern at the pace and extent of over-enthusiastic local officials. This is the text of a formerly secret document translated by the US Library of Congress and available on its web site:

*Addendum to point 20, Politburo minutes no. 94 of April 20, 1931*

*ON FORCED COLLECTIVIZATION OF LIVESTOCK [Handwritten line:] Resolution of the Central Committee [TsK] of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) [VKP(b)], Mar 26, 1932*

*In many regions of our country we can observe the collectivisation of cattle and smaller livestock by forcible means. This practice is a flagrant violation of repeatedly issued directives by the party's TsK, as well as of the provisions contained in the statute of the agricultural artel.*

*The TsK VKP(b) stresses that only enemies of the kolkhozes would permit forced collectivization of livestock from individual kolkhozniks. The TsK emphasizes that forced requisition of kolkhozniks' cattle and smaller livestock is contrary to the party's political program. The goal of the party is that every member of the kolkhoz have a cow, some smaller*



*livestock and poultry...*

*The TsK of the VKP(b) proposes to all party, Soviet and kolkhoz organizations:*

*1. Cease all attempts of forced collectivisation of cattle and small livestock belonging to the kolkhozniks and expel from the party those guilty of violating TsK directives;*

*2. Organize aid for the members of the kolkhozes who have no cattle nor small livestock to purchase and raise young animals for their own personal needs.*

*Signed: TsKVKP(b)*

Aside from the attributable subjective errors of the Soviet party's central leadership, not only attributable to Stalin, there were more localised excesses that were not officially sanctioned.

Other objective factors, such as weather conditions are often ignored. One expert on Soviet agriculture noted that there was a good harvest in 1930, the first year of collectivisation. This may have led the authorities to be complacent and underestimate difficulties. Nonetheless:

*"The drought in 1931 was particularly severe, and drought conditions continued in 1932. This certainly exacerbated the crisis of grain supply in 1931-32, which resulted in the famine in the following year. Four years later, in 1936, the weather was again extremely bad, and the harvest was low, but by this time the authorities were better able to manoeuvre stocks and grain collections and famine was averted."*<sup>10</sup>

So in 1931-33, a certain proportion of the losses can be attributed to incompetence, inexperience, complacency and so on the side of the Soviet authorities. However, unless we are to believe that Stalin underwent a complete ideological U-turn in 1934, it appears that the Soviet government was not hell-bent on the physical destruction of the peasantry and that on the contrary effective efforts, "to manoeuvre stocks and grain collections", were made to prevent famine.

Hardly the action of a 'famine-genocidal' regime.

As for the wildly differing estimates of famine deaths, we will raise a point we will return to in the final part of this article. There is no agreed method for calculating those who might have died from famine in 1931-33. Most of the argument is based on projected population figures from the 1926 and 1939 censuses (the 1937 census was censored). The figures are then calculated on the gaps between projected birth and death rates over a normal period. The gap is regarded as a population deficit. Estimates of this gap, however, are often cited as evidence of excess deaths. However, the facts are not at all so clear.

For example, if we assume that a 'normal' peasant couple in their mid-20s would have borne three children in the space of three to four years, we have to take into account that in the utterly abnormal dislocation of Soviet collectivisation, many couples will have deferred raising a family or chose to restrict its size. Yet the difference between the expected, 'normal' family population of five (two

parents and three children) and the possible figure of two (a childless couple) is clearly substantial. Even if we assume that famine hit ten out of every 100 of these couples, resulting in the death of one spouse, this would result not only in the actual loss of ten real people, but in the disruption of ten family units, preventing, for the sake of this argument, the conception and birth of 20-30 children.

A population deficit, then, may be many times the actual death rate.

The complexities of this debate are outlined, without a satisfactory conclusion, in the chapter on 'Population' by SG Wheatcroft and RW Davies in *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union 1913-1945* (published by Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp57-80).

We can make several tentative points.

First, collectivisation was a pragmatic response to a developing food crisis not a masterplan for a 'man-made famine'. Further, forced collectivisation had never been envisaged by anyone in the Bolshevik leadership, Stalin included, before the crisis of the mid- to late 1920s. It was not, therefore, the inevitable result of a dogmatic, ideologically driven regime, as alleged.

Two, even forces hostile to the Soviets admit that large-scale destruction of food stores and livestock were, in fact, carried out by the kulaks and their supporters. This was the immediate cause of a large part of the famine – not Soviet policy but anti-Soviet sabotage.

Third, far from imposing a dogmatic solution, Stalin's policy toward the peasantry changed dramatically, swinging from an initial position close to that of Bukharin, toward a policy of intense industrialisation and the transfer of resources from agriculture to industry.<sup>11</sup>

Fourth, while Stalin has been criticised, correctly in my view, for failing to properly distinguish between the richer peasants and the middle peasantry, he did not treat the peasantry as single mass but sought to encourage the mass of poorer peasants to side with the Soviets, as indeed many of them did.<sup>12</sup>

Inevitably, the historical debate on the lessons of Soviet collectivisation must continue, but the comparison with fascist genocide is simply untenable.

**Rehabilitating Nazi propaganda** The Ukrainian famine issue was a cause celebre of the Nazis, since they hoped to annex the Ukraine for 'lebensraum'. During the Cold War, Ukrainian Nazi collaborators reinvented themselves as fighters for national independence against 'Soviet imperialism'. The idea of the Soviet's 'Captive Nations' was not only a useful propaganda weapon for the West, but also served to obscure the active role played by Ukrainian, Baltic and other East European fascists in collaborating with the Nazi occupiers and participating in the Holocaust against local Jews.<sup>13</sup>



Bukharin



Kamenev





Until recently, the key anti-communist texts on collectivisation were those of Robert Conquest.<sup>14</sup> His work *Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* book concentrates on the Ukraine and draws directly from a series of works by pro-Nazi collaborators, such as *The Ninth Circle* by Olexa Woropay, which was published in 1953 by the youth movement of Stepan Bandera's Ukrainian fascist organisation.

Rummel uses Walter Dushnyck's *Fifty Years Ago: The Famine Holocaust in Ukraine*, published by the far-right World Congress of Free Ukrainians in 1983 as a major reference. Dushnyck was an active member of the fascist Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists in the 1930s, a movement which was responsible for the widespread slaughter of non-Ukrainian populations, Jews in particular.

Another major source for Rummel, Conquest and Werth are the works of Dana Dalrymple and James E Mace. An examination in turn of their sources raises still more questions. Dalrymple's 1964 article *The Soviet Famine of 1932-1934* is based in large measure on sources such as Nicolas Prychodko, a former functionary of the 'Ministry of Culture and Education' in Kiev – during the Nazi occupation.

Dalrymple's work cites another source – Otto Schiller – who was responsible for agriculture in Nazi-occupied Ukraine. Dalrymple even quotes one of Schiller's articles published in Berlin in 1943.

A further 'source', cited by Dalrymple, was Dr Ewald Ammende a major figure in Nazi-sponsored anti-Soviet propaganda campaigns and organisations of the 1930s. Ammende wrote a book, published in English under the title *Human Life in Russia*, which is worth noting. This book claimed to publish pictures of the Ukrainian famine of 1933. Yet, in fact, at least a dozen of them were identified as having been taken during the post-Civil War famine of 1921-1922.

This Nazi-era propaganda book was republished in 1984, at the height of Reagan's anti-Soviet drive, with the sponsorship of Professor James E Mace of Harvard University.

The Soviet specialist J Arch Getty pointed out that the re-emergence of this propaganda in the 1980s was an essential feature linked to contemporary anti-Soviet campaigns:

*"We might profitably wonder about the resurgence of the intentional famine story just now. It seems to be part of a campaign by Ukrainian nationalists to promote the idea of a 'terror famine' in the West... The not-so-hidden message behind the campaign coincides with the long-standing political agendas of émigré groups: given that the Soviet could murder so many of their own people, might they not be willing to launch a destructive war in order to spread their evil doctrine?"<sup>15</sup>*

Thus we see how outright Nazi and collaborationist propaganda has become embedded in more mainstream right-wing literature with the added kudos of apparent academic respectability.

The Canadian author Douglas Tottle provided the

most far-reaching demolition of the 'terror-famine' propaganda in *Fraud, Famine and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard*. This superb book documents the widespread falsification of photographic evidence, for example the use of Tsarist-era and even Austrian First World War photographs as pictorial proof of the Ukrainian famine. Tottle also revealed the tainted Nazi sources that are at the heart of many of the 1980s US works on the Ukraine and the activities of emigré Ukrainian collaborators.

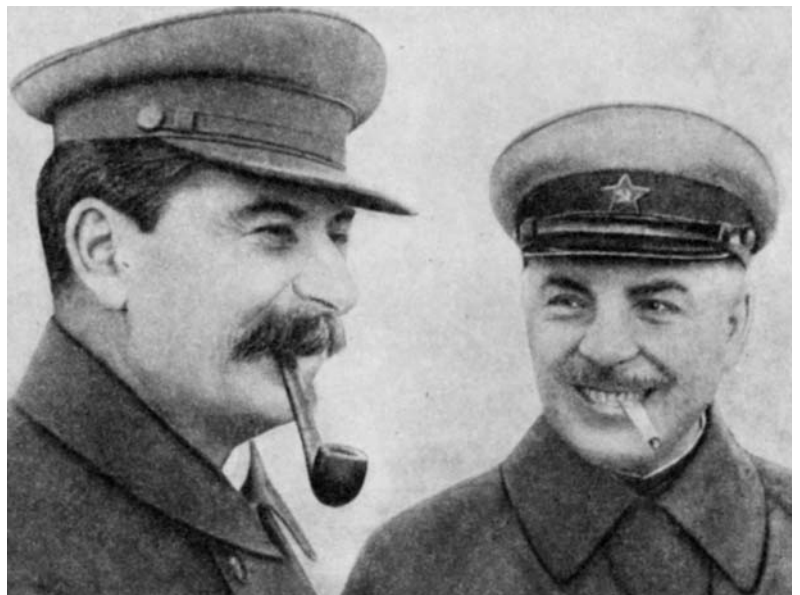
**Deportations** During key points in the Second World War Stalin ordered the mass deportation of certain national minorities, such as the Chechens, Tatars, Volga Germans etc. Such blanket orders effectively criminalised entire nationalities for the collaboration committed by some of their compatriots and the deportations were rescinded during de-Stalinisation in the mid-1950s.

Certainly Stalin acted ruthlessly to ensure unconditional loyalty to the Soviet state and to himself as its leader.<sup>16</sup> However, Stalin's decision cannot be reduced to simple paranoia. Widespread collaboration of ethnic Germans, the Nazis referred to them as Volksdeutsche, had occurred throughout Central Europe, most notably by the Sudeten Germans of western Czechoslovakia. Nazi strategy was to encourage all separatist movements wherever they could be turned against an enemy state. Waffen SS units recruited Bosnian Muslims, Kosovan Albanians, Ukrainians, Latvians, Estonians, Lithuanians and others as part of this strategy.<sup>17</sup>

It is in this context that Chechen separatists attempt to secure Nazi support as Hitler's armies headed for the Caucasus.<sup>18</sup>

It must also be remembered that the rounding up of suspect groups occurred in all the allied countries. In Britain, even anti-fascist émigrés were sometimes interned in camps on the Isle of Man and elsewhere. In the United States, which was never seriously under threat from invasion at any time and whose domestic economy boomed during

Stalin with Koroshilov



the war, Japanese Americans were imprisoned in camps, particularly in California.

The Soviet deportations happened during the fiercest land war ever fought, under conditions of unimaginable hunger and hardship suffered by Soviet citizens of all nationalities.<sup>19</sup> There is no way, however, that these mass deportations can be likened to the deliberate industrial genocide of Jews and Roma by the Nazis, as the Black Book does.

**The Purges** Since the opening up of hitherto closed Soviet archives, we now know with a great deal of certainty the numbers of those subjected to political repression in the Stalin period. We are also able to read the confidential memos and reports relating to this period in the crucial work of J Arch Getty and Naumov, *The Road to Terror: Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939*, published by Yale University Press in 1999.

Several points of caution need to be made. The figures do not always distinguish between political and common criminal prisoners. In other words, many of Stalin's prisoners could also have been prisoners of Clinton, Blair or even Mahatma Gandhi.<sup>20</sup>

However, this can hardly explain, never mind excuse, the mass repression of thousands of innocent people, party and non-party, who fell victim to the arbitrary actions of the security forces. It cannot explain why in 1936, a total of 1,118 people were executed (for a whole range of crimes) yet in the 1937-38 period, 681,692 were shot.<sup>21</sup>

We need further study of what factors caused the Great Purges and their real motivations.<sup>22</sup>

There are several key points.

First, that the scale and nature of the purges and trials of 1936-37 period stand out as quite different from the early Soviet period under Lenin's leadership. It also stands out from the entire post-Stalin period. However, it also stands out quite distinctly even *within* the Stalin period. We therefore need a much more detailed analysis of the exact events and context of that period, characterised by the growth of fascism in Europe and the 'non-interventionist' appeasement of the Western capitalist democracies.

Second, while Stalin is directly implicated in the deaths of many senior leaders and officials, Arch Getty and others have argued that the Great Purge also had a dynamic of its own. Lower-level party members and non-party members used the purges as a means of toppling unpopular leaders and bureaucrats. Foreign intelligence disinformation from the Nazis played a role in convincing the NKVD security service that key Red Army officials were either plotting a coup or were working directly for foreign powers.<sup>23</sup>

However, the Great Purge was not only a crime against socialism in the sense of its general ideals or principles, it was also a clear breach of Soviet constitutional law, which was entirely set aside as arbitrary procedures replaced any semblance of Soviet legality. De-Stalinisation in the mid-50s

restored, however inadequately, the basic framework of a legal process and, despite the extreme restrictions on socialist democracy in the post-1956 period, this remained the case until the 1980s.

Any intelligent reader of *Mein Kampf* in 1923 would have fairly quickly understood its intentions and recognised them when they were later realised in the Third Reich. However, no reader of Lenin's *Last Testament* of 1923, or, for that matter, even Stalin's *Foundations of Leninism* of 1924 can reasonably maintain that the events of the 1930s were inevitably pre-ordained and laid out. De-Stalinisation, however inadequate, was carried out by the Soviet Union's Communists, people and state themselves, on their own initiative. The purging of Nazism was only possible as a result of the combined efforts of foreign states to smash the Nazi regime.

That is enough to reject simplistic equations of Nazism and Stalinism

**The Gulag's Missing Millions** As we mentioned in the first part of this series, during the 1970s the word 'Gulag' became a rallying call of the anti-Soviet right. Several correctives need to be added. First, many of the quoted figures are total prison populations, mixing in various common criminals with those charged with political offences.

It does not take into account the large numbers of those arrested and then freed. Many senior figures landed in jail during the height of Stalin's purges, only to be released later, sometimes as the result of acquittal or for reasons that the victims were never quite sure.

The key area of Rummel's statistics are derived from imagined Gulag populations and their then (entirely arbitrary) estimated death rates. Repeating the ludicrous claims of Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Anatoli/Nathan Sharansky, Rummel suggests that the total number of Gulag prisoners in the 1983-87 period was in the region of at least 4 million, of which he calculates 200,000 died prematurely. But, as the US writer Michael Parenti sarcastically pointed out, where did this huge number of prisoners disappear to on the great day of liberation from the Red Yoke? Why were the CNN camera crews unable to capture this historic event on film? Where are the 3 million-plus freed prisoners of communism now?<sup>24</sup>

Rummel's figures are contradicted by just about every documented or investigated calculation. Rummel's method is to pile misestimate upon misestimate and pull projected death rates like white rabbits out of a magician's hat. First, after quoting ridiculously high estimates of total prison populations, he then works out excess death rates as a percentage of the supposed death rates of the Stalin period.

Rummel's estimate of the gulag population in 1939, at the end of the Great Purge, turns out to be almost three times the actual figure, his estimate for



the death rate due to hardship rather than direct repression in 1944 is 20% or 200 per 1000, although the actual figure, for one of the harshest war-time periods was closer to 92 per 1000. However, Rummel then calculates all subsequent labour camp death rates on the basis of this single incorrect figure from the war-time Stalin period. Thus prisoners in the immediate post-war Stalin period are allocated 50% of this death rate, while prisoners in the Brezhnev period are allocated 5% of the original figure.

Yet, within the Stalin period, death rates differed between the war-time period of shortages and privation and post-war recovery in the early 50s by more than 20-fold. Picking estimates like lottery numbers, Rummel assumes that in 1953, the last year of Stalin's rule, there were 10 million gulag prisoners, 2 million of whom died. This would be an annual death rate of 20%, or 200 per 1000. In fact, not only is Rummel's total number of prisoners astronomically wrong, the US researchers revealed the true death rate was a fraction of Rummel's estimate.

Using these unsupported figures and fictitious estimates, Rummel is able to 'prove' that about 5 million gulag prisoners died in the 1970s and 1980s alone. Even a quoted CIA source, claiming the figure of 4 million total prisoners in the 1980s, suggests that only 10,000 of them were political prisoners, ie 0.25% of the total, the rest were ordinary criminals.

Common sense would tell us that the figure of 60 million excess deaths, on top of those by natural causes and some 27 million during the second world war, would be practically impossible for any society whose population during the 1930s to 1980s was around 160-220 million. Yet these figures are now put forward as fact. It is a measure of the irrationalism of this contemporary anti-communism, that such wildly inaccurate statistics are being seriously entertained and that a magazine of record such as *The Economist* should present them as unquestioned fact.

Arch Getty offers a 'guesstimate' of 2 million 'custodial deaths' during the entire 1930s. In other words, those who died during incarceration, due to hunger or disease as well as those who were executed or forcibly deported. This is a horrendous figure if we accept it as accurate.<sup>25</sup> Yet it is not only the motivation of those who participated in these tragic events but their context that was entirely removed from that of the Nazi regime.

**The absence of the adversary** One of the striking and recurring features of *The Black Book* and its ilk is the absurd presentation of Communists as lone protagonists in world history. Humanity appears divided into two camps, the oppressive Communists and their innocent victims. Fascism, imperialism and colonialism are merely noises off-stage in the great drama of 20th century history. For this reason, *The Black Book* can be regarded not as an objective, unchallengeable

series of documented facts, but as a series of dubious statistics and contested interpretations of history, all presented in an entirely biased, one-sided and ahistorical manner that erases conflict from the Cold War.

A North American academic group, the Stalin Era Research Project, has pointed out, for example, in a recent seminar:

*"Jeffrey Burds (Northeastern University) began the day's proceedings with a discussion of his paper 'The Origins of the Cold War in Soviet Eastern Europe'. In this paper, which focused on 'Soviet responses to the US recruitment of an anti-Soviet Ukrainian nationalist guerrilla force', Burds maintained that American intervention in Eastern Europe began much earlier than has traditionally been acknowledged. Basing his findings on newly declassified Soviet police records, Burds demonstrated that US intelligence services had begun to support indigenous anti-Communist movements in Eastern Europe even before the end of World War II."*<sup>26</sup>

**Conclusion** The Communist Party of Britain has spent much time discussing and evaluating the experience of the former and existing socialist countries and that will continue.<sup>27</sup> The CPB made its opinion clear that the departures from the principles of democratic centralism within the ruling parties and the utterly inadequate levels of socialist democracy in state and society as a whole were critically responsible for the collapse of the Eastern European socialist countries. It was also clear that the crimes that had been committed were also crimes *against socialism*. However, we concluded, the failings of these socialist countries were the result of a variety of departures from Marxism-Leninism, not the inevitable outcome of their application. These subjective errors were added to highly unfavourable objective conditions.

New archival evidence also suggests that we be wary of simplistic historical explanations that suggest a pre-planned coup by Stalin against his rivals in the Bolshevik party, either to establish a state-capitalist regime or the rule of a conservative bureaucratic caste, much of which depends on seeking Stalin's motivation in either personal psychology or bureaucratic group interests, in either case a strategy clearly planned and executed.

As Arch Getty has remarked on the initially inconclusive Show Trials, the expulsions and the readmittance to the party of leading scapegoats such as Bukharin and Zinoviev demonstrate that:

*"It is a mistake to see in this some sort of grand plan for terror. Without a doubt, at every juncture Stalin acted in ways that would increase his personal power; in this he seems to have had a clear goal. But the road to centralised power was not necessarily the road to terror."*<sup>28</sup>

It is perhaps understandable, faced with this renewed ideological anti-communist onslaught, that some comrades react defensively and go to the other extreme of denying any serious or long-



standing violations of socialist legality. They either reduce all negative factors to purely unavoidable objective difficulties, or cling somehow to the Stalin cult, on the grounds that the imperialists single out Stalin as a particular hate figure.<sup>29</sup> This is unnecessary.

At extreme points in the construction of socialism, real crimes were committed against socialism, weakening it structurally and undermining its base of popular support. A Marxist approach to the history of the socialist countries depends on an open appraisal of the objective facts. We have nothing to fear from the truth. That is precisely why we can reject the lies and distortions on the contemporary anti-communists. We must not allow the anti-communists to force our retreat into nostalgia and dogmatism. That would only be their victory.

Nor can we seek solace in simplistic references to 'personality cults', as was done regularly in the world communist movement after Khrushchev's 1956 Secret Speech, reversing the 'Great Teacher Stalin' into the 'Evil Monster Stalin', as if issues of personal psychology, while not unimportant, were decisive.

As the great Italian Communist leader Palmiro Togliatti remarked: "The problem of the origins of the cult of Stalin, and how it became possible cannot be considered as resolved. We do not accept that everything can be explained just on the basis of the grave personal defects of Stalin."

Indeed, we owe it to the many unjustly accused and persecuted socialists of the Stalin-era to clear their names and so rescue the continuity of genuine Leninism. ★

#### Notes:

1 Judt's review begins with a 'quote' attributed to Stalin, "One death is a tragedy a million is a statistic." In fact, this remark is literally fictitious, appearing first in a play by Belarussian writer Ales Adamovich.

2 Rummel's CV shows an active and longstanding link with both the US military and its intelligence arms and the 'conservative libertarian' wing of the US ultra-right. Rummel is a retired US academic at the University of Hawaii. His internet homepage reproduces not only this book but several other similar works and tells us a great deal. By his own description, Rummel is a determined, principled, implacable opponent of 'government', since government restricts the freedoms and rights of individuals. But his web site acknowledges grants from a body called the US Institute of Peace. Up till now we might be forgiven for assuming that Rummel is some 60s anarcho-peacenik leftover, but no. The US Institute of Peace is an 'independent' body. We know this because its advisory council is appointed directly by "the President of the United States and the US Congress".

The anti-government Rummel was paid at least \$105,000 by the US government (via the *independent* US Institute of Peace) for his research. This follows a whole series of grants in the late 60s and early 70s from the US Defense Department. Furthermore, Rummel's CV includes a spell in the mid-60s helping the US Army's Special Operations Research Office. Visitors to Rummel's web site can also find a useful series of links to 'pro-democracy' web sites, these include various agencies of the US government, independent ones of course, such as the National Endowment for Democracy etc, as well as the Reagan Foundation. He has spoken at meetings of the American Security Council, a McCarthyite-era employers' organisation akin to the Economic League and Freedom Association in Britain. He served on the Republican National Committee's Advisory Council on National Security and International Relations, 1977-1980

3 When US secretary of State Madelaine Albright was challenged on economic sanctions against Iraq that have caused an estimated 500,000 childrens' deaths. This, she replied, "was a price worth paying". When challenged by John Pilger in his recent documentary film on Iraq to justify this remark, White House spokesman Jamie Rubin claimed that Albright had been misquoted, he later went on to say that the effect of the sanctions had been "more than we had hoped".

4 Cited in 'The Philosophy of World Revolution', Franz Marek, Lawrence and Wishart, London 1969, p123

5 Ibid

6 Preface to English edition of Capital, 1886

7 Rummel gives a total of 5 million deaths by famine during the Civil War (even though many of these were also linked to disease epidemics) and 'scientifically' halves the blame between Red and White. The Civil War produced acute food shortages in south-western Russia. Wartime devastation was compounded by two successive seasons of drought. In early 1920, the Soviet government sent out a worldwide appeal for food. Although it had not recognised the Soviet government, the United States organised the American Relief Administration (ARA) transport, store, and deliver relief. The ARA was given a free hand to distribute thousands of tons of grain, as well as clothing and medical supplies and was later honoured by the Soviet Union. Both the causes and the Soviet government's response hardly suggest an ideologically inspired "man-made famine".

8 Recent work by US scholars J Arch Getty and Robert Thurston draw directly from Soviet archives. Their main works are J. Arch Getty *The Great Purges Reconsidered: The Soviet Communist Party 1933-1939* (Cambridge, 1985), *Stalinist Terror: New Perspectives* (Cambridge, 1993) Robert Thurston. *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934-1941*, Yale University Press, 1996.

9 Both Bukharin's 'Right Opposition' and Trotsky's 'Left Opposition' had developed their own programmes on the agrarian question which were at variance with Stalin on several key points. Far from being monolithic, the Soviet party had serious internal differences.

10 'Agriculture' by SG Wheatcroft and RW Davies in *The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union 1913-1945*, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p126

11 It is not possible to deal with this complex issue in any depth here. Stalin had criticised Bukharin's call to peasants to 'enrich themselves' and for a transition to 'socialism at a snail's pace'. Likewise, Trotsky's Left Opposition had criticised Stalin for his delays in upping the pace of industrialisation. Soviet Gorbachev-era works allege that Stalin simply stole Trotsky's economic programme. This is a rather simplistic interpretation, in the late 1920s many Trotskyists did rally to Stalin, such as the economist Evgeny Preobrazhensky.

12 Although extremely critical of the Soviet authorities, some writers on collectivisation note that however, ineptly and unsuccessfully: "The authorities attempted to win over the mass of the peasants by engaging in class struggle within the village." ('Agriculture' by SG Wheatcroft and RW Davies in 'The Economic Transformation of the Soviet Union 1913-1945, Cambridge University Press, 1994, p126)

13 See Nick Lowles Searchlight February 2000 and Morning Star May 19 2000. After the war, the British government allowed an 8000-strong division of former Ukrainian SS men to come to the country as part of the West's Cold War against the USSR. The remnants of various fascist collaborationist terror groups remained active in the Baltic states, Ukraine and Poland until the late 1940s.

14 Conquest was formerly employed by the 'Information Research Department' of the Foreign Office. The IRD was the covert department responsible for much British Cold War 'black propaganda'.

15 Cited in Douglas Tottle, *Fraud, Famine and Fascism: The Ukrainian Genocide Myth from Hitler to Harvard*, Progress Books, Toronto, 1987, p3.

16 Stalin's suspicion toward Jews in the late 1940s until his death characterised events such as the infamous 'Doctors' Plot' and the execution of leaders of the Jewish Anti-Fascist Committee. The attacks on 'rootless cosmopolitans' and the fake 'anti-Zionist' campaign in Poland in the late 1960s likewise rested on this question of divided loyalties to the state as well as a sop to backward anti-semitic prejudice remaining in society as a whole. This area needs longer more detailed treatment along the lines of Steve Silver's article on anti-semitism in a previous number of Communist Review.



17 See 'Renegades: Hitler's Englishmen', by Adrian Weale, Warner Books, 1994, pp97-98.

18 In 1940 a nationalist revolt broke out which climaxed in 1942, with the Nazi army just 300 miles away. Chechen nationalist leaders Hassan Israilov and Mairbek Sheripov issued an appeal declaring that the Nazis would be welcomed as guests, providing, of course, they were prepared to support Chechnya's independence. The Nazis also recruited around 20,000 Cossacks, a people who had been at the forefront of the White forces in the Civil War. Numerous accounts suggest that the ferocity of the massacres carried out by enlisted groups shocked even the German commanders. However, one should not forget that thousands of Russians, for reason of ideology or to avoid prison or death, also served in the Nazi ranks, the army of General Vlasov being the most infamous example.

19 A copy of Stalin's order deporting the Crimean Tatars is available on the internet at the US Library of Congress site. This document repeats the reason for their deportation as group collaboration with the Nazi invaders. However, it also outlines the numerous medical and sanitary conditions of the deportations, financial compensation etc. Undoubtedly these were hopelessly utopian in the real context of the Nazi-Soviet war, but evidence enough to refute ridiculous comparisons with Nazism's transportation of Jews to extermination camps.

20 The total of detained persons, this includes normal prisons as well as punitive labour camps, was 3.8 million in 1938. 'Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939'. Yale University Press 1999, p589. This compares with the current US figure of 2 million incarcerated Americans under President William Jefferson Clinton and an annual execution rate of around 100.

21 'Numbers of victims of the terror', appendix to 'Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939', J Arch Getty and Oleg Naumov, Yale University Press 1999, p587-594.

22 Various unsatisfactory explanations of the Stalin-era purges have been put forward by differing Marxist groups. Maoists argued that

Stalin was bureaucratically *eliminating* an embryonic state-capitalist class, the British Socialist Workers Party that he was bureaucratically *creating* an embryonic state-capitalist class, and the standard orthodox Trotskyist case has been that Stalin represented a conservative bureaucratic caste. Space does not permit an adequate exposition of these arguments, never mind a rebuttal.

23 This hardly excuses Stalin and other senior Soviet leaders from their responsibility for the ridiculous charges against veteran Bolshevik leaders. It may be one thing to argue that a certain policy or political platform/faction are promoting policies that are objectively counter-revolutionary but that does not mean that these individuals or groups are consciously counter-revolutionary. The absurd charges at the main Moscow Trials presented false and fabricated evidence against some of the key leaders of the Soviet state. It is impossible to believe that Stalin, with his intimate knowledge of the personalities involved, was simply fooled.

24 Michael Parenti, 'Blackshirts & Reds, Rational Fascism & the Overthrow of Communism', p81, San Francisco 1997

25 'Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939'. Yale University Press 1999, p592

26 From SERP web site.

27 Assessing the Collapse of the Soviet Union, CPB 41st Congress document 1992, also 'Reassessing the Socialist Experience' in Communist Review, no 26 Autumn-Winter 1997.

28 'Stalin and the Self-destruction of the Bolsheviks, 1932-1939'. Yale University Press 1999, p578-579.

29 See for example 'Another View of Stalin' by Ludo Martens of the Belgian Party of Labour. While able to refute some of the most obvious distortions about collectivisation, Martens maintains the legitimacy of the Moscow Show Trials and defends virtually every word and deed of Stalin without criticism. Similar points can be made about Socialist Labour Party leader Harpal Brar's writings. Their common origin in ultra-left Maoism is not accidental.



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# Communists and the fight against racism during the Class against Class period 1928-33

Mike Squires

In the lifetime of the Communist Party of Great Britain, the Class against Class, or New Line period, from 1928 until 1933, is generally regarded by both Marxist and Non Marxist historians as the most barren in the party's entire history. The strategy, which characterised members of the Labour Party as social fascists, and held out the perspective that only the Communist Party was capable of giving leadership to the working class, was in complete contradiction to the party's earlier endeavours since its formation in 1920, of seeking the maximum Labour movement unity. This radical change of policy had come about, in part, because of a change of line by the Communist International which organised and led the work of Communist Parties throughout the world. In addition to this shift of strategy at an international level, there had also been a fundamental rethink by British communists in their attitudes towards the Labour Party, because of changes that had taken place within the British Labour movement during the period preceding the New Line. The most important of these changes were the disillusionment of communists after the experience of the first Labour Government from 1923-24. The Government, in the view of the CPGB, instituted no progressive domestic measures whatsoever, and

even worse, did nothing to alleviate the iniquities of colonial rule. Disatisfaction with social democracy grew still further when the Labour Party and Trade Union Congress were seen by the communists as active betrayers of the 1926 General Strike. Finally, and probably the most important factor in the communists' change of attitude, was that their attempts to win Labour Party affiliation, which had been granted to their predecessor the British Socialist Party, were continually rejected, and then, as if to rub salt in the wound, communists as individuals, were, from 1925 onwards, denied Labour Party membership. Until then Communist Party members could be individual members of the Labour Party, and many were, there were no bans and proscriptions, and communists held the same rights as any other members of the Labour Party. By 1927, after repeated attempts at Labour Party Conferences to repeal the ban, there was a realisation by communists that they were not going to succeed, and the party was forced into a reassessment of its strategy. The outcome was the New Line, or the policy of Class against Class.

During this relatively short period in its history the CPGB, often isolated and ostracised by the Labour movement, led a number of significant struggles. I shall not deal here with the party's resistance to colonialism, significant though it was. The purpose of this article is to relate the important, and often lonely fight waged by the communists against racism. It was a battle that the party conducted both at an ideological level; that is to reduce the influence of racist ideas within the working class; and at the level of active participation to unite both black and white workers in the face of the employers. It was no mean task. Support amongst the population for the Empire was high and as a consequence racist ideas were endemic amongst the working class. In addition, we are talking about a party that rarely exceeded three thousand members throughout the period under review.

For many the Communist Party's finest hour in the struggle against racism was the epic Battle of Cable Street in October 1936. The communists, against the advice of the Jewish establishment and the official leadership of the Labour movement called on the people of London to rally against Oswald Mosley and his British Union of Fascists, and physically prevent them from marching through a predominantly immigrant Jewish area of East

Police arrest an anti fascist demonstrator, Cable Street 1936



London. The response was magnificent. Half a million people, Jews and Gentiles, responded to the party's call and Mosley was rebuffed. Cable Street is written about in all the histories of the inter war period as a triumph for the United Front – and so it was – yet what has been forgotten and effectively erased from history is the communists anti-racist offensive in the years preceding 1936. For the lessons learned during the Class against Class period were to stand the communists, and others concerned with anti-racism, in good stead in the relatively easier period of the Popular Front.

**'Fight Against Imperialist Prejudice'** In the 1920s Britain's black population was tiny compared with today, and mainly clustered around the ports. Despite this small number of black residents the communists had attempted to influence the black community from soon after the party's formation. In 1923 the CPGB Polibureau decided to prepare a leaflet and manifesto aimed at black workers for circulation in those party districts where there was a significant black presence. Party organisers in these districts were instructed to obtain information and statistics about the living and working conditions of immigrant workers. The areas concerned were Cardiff, Liverpool and London.<sup>1</sup> Nothing much came of this initiative but it does show that even from an early date the CPGB was keen to recruit amongst his section of the population.

At the party's Seventh Congress in 1925, before the onset of the New Line, the communists made their position clear about how the anti racist struggle should be conducted. For the communists racism was a product of Empire – it was the ideological underpinning that made colonialism possible. Racial prejudice was a result of imperialism and it was the duty of communists to fight against any 'imperialist prejudices' existing amongst the working class. The resolution passed by the Seventh Congress declared,

*"every party member must actively take up the fight against the Imperialist prejudice still existing amongst large sections of the working class in Great Britain".*<sup>2</sup> This commitment to fight racism made by the CPGB in 1925 continued throughout, and beyond, the New Line years.

In order to recruit amongst the black community, the CPGB in October 1929 sent one of its leading members, Andrew Rothstein, to address a meeting of black workers in Barry in South Wales. Barry was not far from the port of Cardiff where there had resided for some time a number of black people in the Tiger Bay area of the city. The subject of Rothstein's address was, 'The position of Negroes and the attitude of the Communist Party' What is significant was that according to reports in the 'Workers Life' there were thirty black people in attendance at the meeting.<sup>3</sup> Given the party's small size at the commencement of the New Line this was a respectable turn out. In addition, to have attracted such a number of black people to a

communist meeting indicated that the party must have had some following, or at least contact in the local black community. A similar attempt at recruitment amongst black workers in the area was made three years later when, during the midst of Class against Class, Shapurji Saklatvala was sent to South Wales. Saklatvala, who had been a Communist MP, was one of the party's most popular orators. He spoke at two meetings in Cardiff where special efforts had been made to attract black workers. Once again the appeal had met with some success and a number of black recruits were made for the CPGB.<sup>4</sup>

**Exposing Racism** Not only did the CPGB take active steps to recruit amongst the black community, the party also drew to the attention of the predominately white working class, the hardships faced by black workers. The League Against Imperialism, which had been established in 1927 as a broad left movement against colonialism, by the onset of the New Line was completely controlled by the communists. The Liverpool branch of the LAI decided, early in 1931, to undertake some research into the living and working conditions of the city's 'three hundred Negroes'(Negro was the accepted term used by both black and white progressives) The research showed that not only were black workers discriminated against economically by the employers, but in addition their civil liberties were being violated. Black maritime workers who worked in the city's docks in the stokeholds of ships were paid £6.10s a month. Their white counterparts received £9 a month. One shipping company even demanded of its black employees that they each carry an identity card complete with a photograph and a thumb print of the bearer. In order to expose these injustices and win sympathy for black workers from the labour movement the party paper, the *Daily Worker*, carried news of the research findings and headlined the article under the eye catching slogan 'Negro Slavery in Liverpool'.<sup>5</sup>

This was not the first time during the New Line that the CPGB had defended Liverpool's black community. The year before, in 1930, the city's mixed race children had come under attack from sections of the press. There were in Liverpool about three hundred and fifty mixed race marriages, or cohabitations, in most cases these were between black seamen and white women. These relationships had produced about thirteen hundred or so mixed race children. There were demands from a number of newspapers that the right of entry of black people to Britain be curtailed, and that the Liverpool families black fathers should be replaced by white men. The party paper, in defending the families, gave publicity to Frank Macaulay the editor of the Lagos Daily News. Macaulay, who was to visit Britain and speak on the families behalf, was described by the *Daily Worker* as, 'a militant Nigerian Trade unionist'. He wrote an



article for the paper that defended the families and particularly the children and contrasted their treatment with that received by those in similar circumstances in Nigeria.

*“The great difference that exists between the half-castes in Liverpool and those in Nigeria is that those in Liverpool are being taken care of by the coloured seamen, whilst in Nigeria the fathers of these half-castes, who are either white Provincial Commissioners, Resident Magistrates, Assistant Colonial Secretaries or white merchants, never subscribe a single penny for the maintenance of these children”*<sup>6</sup>

Macaulay’s analysis, that looked at issues of race from a class perspective was one that was welcomed by the CPGB at the time.

To unite workers in struggle had been the party’s perspective since its formation, and whether these workers were black or white made no difference. Any attempt to divide workers along racial lines was, according to the communists, playing into the hands of the employers and could only lead to defeat. This was the party’s approach when the seamen’s dispute erupted in 1930. The right wing, and anti communist, National Union of Seamen, had united with the ship owners to bring in the notorious PC5. This was a document that had to be signed by every seafarer, whether a union member or not, every time that they got work on a ship. The cost to the seafarer would be £2 per signing. The communists argued that in future seafarers would have to pay, if they wanted to work, “to belong to a union that was openly a company union”. Opposition to the signing of the document was greatest in the North East, where two thousand seafarers struck work in the port of South Shields. What was particularly pleasing for the communists was that of these two thousand strikers almost a thousand were Arab seamen. The strike had managed to unite black and white in a struggle against a notoriously right wing union. The *Daily Worker*, in its coverage of the stoppage, carried the party’s message to the readership and welcomed, “the magnificent solidarity of white and coloured seamen”<sup>7</sup>.

A few days after the start of the strike fighting broke out between black and white seafarers in South Shields, and this was portrayed in sections of the national press as a race riot. The communists, through their paper, presented their view of the situation, which was, that fighting had occurred but this was between striking black and white seamen and scabs, who were being assisted by the police. The communists accused other newspapers of lying about the dispute and of trying to stir up racial prejudice. The *Daily Worker* ran the story of the so called race riot under the headline, ‘Seamen Fight the Police-Attempt to break South Shields Strike – Arab and White Seamen solid’. It concluded its presentation with the sub heading ‘Racial Riot- Lie’. The paper, in yet another attempt to build black and white unity, gave further publicity to a black seamen’s rally in Liverpool in support of the

strikers.<sup>8</sup> As a result of the communists active participation in the strike and their efforts to unite black and white workers they were instrumental in establishing in Liverpool and London a black self help organisation – the Negro Welfare Association.

The NWA was a creation of the New Line and was something of an achievement for the CPGB. Two black AfroCaribbean communists, Arnold Ward and Chris Jones, were responsible for its establishment. The Association was affiliated to the League Against Imperialism and party members were urged to invite NWA speakers to Labour movement meetings. The NWA was described by the communists as, ‘a militant organisation of Negro workers’. The *Daily Worker* gave publicity to its events and meetings, which were of a social as well as a political character. The Association organised a number of outings for black children. One such event put on by the London branch was given front page coverage and a photograph in the *Daily Worker* under the headline, ‘Negro Kiddies-having a good time’.<sup>9</sup> This sympathetic portrayal of black workers served to break down any cultural or racial prejudices that may have existed amongst readers of the party press. The NWA also acted as a channel through which black and white communists and their supporters could meet and mix. NWA dances were regularly advertised in the ‘*Daily Worker*’ throughout 1932, and these events, which were usually held in the Kings Cross area of London, had the aim of bringing together like minded people irrespective of their race. How successful they were in doing this is not known, but at least the communists were trying to break down barriers. It is doubtful if any other political organisation at this time, even on the left, made such an effort to recruit amongst Britain’s black population.

Despite its small size, the CPGB even took up issues of racial discrimination. Shapurji Saklatvala, during the time that he was the Communist Party’s representative in parliament from 1924 to 1929, led a successful campaign against the banning of Indian students from dance halls in Edinburgh. Some years later, in May 1931, there was another attempt to introduce a colour bar in the Scottish city. This time yet again Indian students studying at the university were the target. The owners of two of Edinburgh’s most prestigious cafes tried to enforce a ban on Indians entering the premises. The issue was taken up by the communists and reported on in the *Daily Worker* and readers were told that Saklatvala was being sent to Scotland to help in the campaign to get the ban lifted.<sup>10</sup>

Apart from the issues already mentioned; fighting against the colour bar, uniting black and white workers in struggle, agitation within the black community to win black workers to the cause of communism; the communists also had an internationalist duty to defend black people abroad whenever their rights were under attack. One of the CPGB’s most successful campaigns in this arena was the campaign for the release of the Scottsboro Boys.





### **Scottsboro - 'One more attempt to create prejudice'**

The Scottsboro Boys were a group of nine young black American teenagers, who, in March 1931, were arrested in the Southern state of Alabama and accused of raping two white women while travelling on a train. The Boys proclaimed that they were innocent and their case was quickly taken up by the communist controlled International Labour Defence, who provided them with legal advice and assistance and represented them in the numerous court cases that took place over the next few years. Even before the case had received much publicity in Britain the communists, through the League Against Imperialism, had promoted the Boys' cause within the Labour movement. They had sponsored and supported resolutions and petitions condemning the detainees, possible execution. The communists not only tried to win sympathy from the overwhelmingly white Labour movement, they also tried to win support for the Boys release from amongst the black community. Their paper gave publicity to the campaign and highlighted any successes in the struggle, particularly those involving black workers. Some days before the Boys were due to be executed the paper reported the following news item sent in by a worker correspondent, who were often the main providers of the paper's news,

"A comrade came into the ILD office and took away a couple of petition forms. In the space of two hours he returned with the forms completed with 66 signatures, every one being that of a Negro worker".<sup>11</sup>

In trying to involve black people in the Scottsboro campaign the CPGB was careful to emphasize that it was not simply an issue of class. Black workers were oppressed as part of the working class but the communists also realised that black people were oppressed as a race. The Scottsboro Boys were poor, they had been looking for work at the time of their arrest, but they were arrested primarily because they were black. The prejudice against them from the white southerners who tried and convicted them was because of their colour. This was the essence of the CPGB's analysis, and can be seen in an urgent appeal to party supporters which was made a few days before the Boys were due to be executed. The communists stated that, "there are only four days left in which to do our utmost for these victims of white American terror".<sup>12</sup> The ILD adopted a similar line and at a series of meetings in 1931 about Scottsboro, all of which were addressed by unnamed 'Negro comrades', the appeal was for black and white workers unity in the face of 'capitalist white terror'.

This was one of the features of the Scottsboro campaign, not only did the communists organise multi racial meetings with black and white speakers, they also recognised that race could not solely be analysed in class terms. British communists were aware that their American counterparts had had a long and in depth discussion about race and that the

CPUSA was committed to an independent black belt taking in a number of Southern states. In this area, where black people were in a majority, they could, if they so desired, establish an independent homeland. In Britain, with its much smaller black population, no such discussions about race had taken place, but nevertheless, the CPGB, in what some regard as its most sectarian phase was still flexible in its assessment of the complexities of racial and class oppression. The party's assessment of the Scottsboro case, which remained consistent throughout, was that it was, "one more attempt to create prejudice".

Not long after the Scottsboro campaign began, in July 1931, the CPGB made its own position clear as to the racial and sexual prejudices that were likely to arise when black men were accused of raping white women. The party warned that, "the experience of both British and American imperialism leads us to view a sexual charge, especially when brought against coloured working men by white men.....with grave suspicion".<sup>13</sup> In order to help overcome these kind of prejudices the party, where it could, organised meetings about Scottsboro at which black speakers were prominent. The two most popular of these speakers were Chris Jones, a communist docker who lived in London's East end, and Arnold Ward. Ward was also one of the prime movers in the formation of the short lived Negro Workers Defence League. The League, with Ward as the main speaker, held a protest rally about Scottsboro at Trafalgar Square in June 1931. The rally was sympathetically reported on in the *Daily Worker* which also carried a photograph of the event.<sup>14</sup>

The Scottsboro campaign continued throughout 1932. The party organised a protest meeting in April 1932 in the cosmopolitan area of Limehouse in East London at which Chris Jones was the main speaker. Two months later, Mrs Wright, the mother of two of the accused visited Britain as part of her European tour to secure the Boys' release. On her arrival she was met by Sakltavala at Waterloo Station on behalf of the Communist Party, and by Bob Lovell, also a CPGB member, from International Labour Defence. She addressed a number of protest meetings in Britain about Scottsboro during her stay and the

**The Scottsboro Boys with the National Guard 1931**



communists used her visit to highlight other incidents of racial injustice. Saklatvala, speaking with Mrs Wright at a public meeting in Holborn in London, drew attention to the many other Scottsboro's that were taking place throughout the world. He gave an example of blatant racism in the American controlled islands of the Philippines. There an American naval officer murdered a Philippine boy who had previously been found not guilty of rape. At the trial the white officer was declared innocent and exonerated by the authorities.<sup>15</sup> Mrs Wright, after a two weeks stay, left Britain on July 8 to continue with her European tour. At a farewell rally at Liverpool Street station organised by the CPGB and ILD, over a thousand people were in attendance to bid her farewell.

Even after the coming to power of the Nazis in Germany in 1933 when increasing the threat of fascism was occupying centre stage, the communists did not neglect their commitment to help the Scottsboro victims of racism, whose trials and retrials continued over a number of years. Towards the end of 1933, with the New Line drawing to a close, the CPGB organised a big protest rally about Scottsboro at the Grand Palais in Commercial Road in the heart of London's East end. Once again the meeting was a multi racial event, with Saklatvala and Arnold Ward as the main speakers.<sup>16</sup> In the more than two years since the Scottsboro Boys were first arrested, the communists had struggled to popularise their cause amongst the working class and Labour movement. In the end the Boys were finally released, but had it not been for the efforts on their behalf by the tiny CPGB, it is doubtful that their plight would have received the attention or publicity that it did in Britain

**Fighting Racism on every front** Throughout the period of the New Line the *Daily Worker* was indispensable in carrying the communists anti-racist message. The paper itself was a direct product of the Class against Class strategy and began publication on January 1 1930 under the editorship of the New Line champion Bill Rust. As well as giving coverage to events like Scottsboro the paper also went to great lengths to positively report on incidents, either in Britain or abroad, where workers of different races were uniting against the bosses. The seamen's strike of 1931 was a good example of this approach. The paper publicised organisations like the Negro Welfare Association, and presented black people in a sympathetic way. It constantly fed its readers a diet of anti-racism. Apart from reporting on injustices in the Empire the *Daily Worker* also spoke out against racism in the United States. The paper regularly reported on the routine lynching of black people in both the Northern and the Southern states. The overall objective was to show to the paper's readers, and the wider working class movement, that racial differences were not important and that the oppression of black people anywhere in the world

was of immediate concern to white workers in Britain.

As well as reporting on and initiating campaigns against racism, the *Daily Worker* also tried to conduct an ideological offensive against racist ideas. In the cultural arena of sport and the cinema, the communists, through their paper, attacked racial intolerance and tried to develop amongst their supporters an awareness of other cultures. Neither did they neglect their younger followers, often the sons and daughters of party members, and in the *Daily Worker* there was soon established a 'children's corner'. This section too was used as a vehicle to spread the communists' anti-racist message, specifically among the young. The *Daily Worker*, which throughout the period of Class Against Class steadily increased its circulation, was unique amongst daily newspapers at the time. It campaigned against racism and denounced the Empire during a period when most national dailies supported Britain's colonial rule and did nothing to counter suggestions that the white race was superior.

For communists during their Class against Class phase, the United States was the greatest threat to peace. This approach did not change until after the accession of Hitler to power. In exposing Scottsboro the party was also keen to show that this was not just an isolated example of injustice; racism was endemic within the American capitalist system. The *Daily Worker* regularly carried news items about the lynching of black Americans. Often the reports could be quite graphic in order to drive home the CPGB's anti-racist message. One incident in Texas reported on in the paper was particularly horrific. A black man awaiting trial was hacked to death after a white mob had first set alight the prison where he was being held.<sup>17</sup> In another example of racist violence the *Daily Worker* told how another black prisoner, who again had not even been tried, was dragged from jail and lynched by a white mob in Georgia. Although these two incidents took place in the South the paper pointed out that the lynchings were not just a Southern phenomenon, but happened all over the USA.<sup>18</sup>

The reporting of such events had the aim of bringing home to communists and their supporters the evils of racism world-wide – it also helped engender a spirit of tolerance amongst party members and their supporters. The communists, by their exposure of such injustices, hoped to develop amongst the working class an understanding of the oppression faced by black people. It was all part of the CPGB's commitment to international working class solidarity.

In the rapidly developing world of the cinema with its increasing dominance by the United States, the communists were not reticent in pointing out the dangers of allowing racist films to go unchallenged. This new mass media with its working class audiences was the vehicle for an American block buster 'The Birth of a Nation' by the famed director D W Griffith. This film, based on the book *The*



*Klansman*, was first made in 1914 and was due to make a reappearance in Britain in 1931. Although considered by many to be a classic its adulation of slavery and the Ku Klux Klan led the *Daily Worker* to describe the film as a, “vicious piece of propaganda against the Negro people”. The communists condemned ‘Birth of a Nation’ as “the most vicious anti social equality propaganda film in the entire history of the American cinema”. In its portrayal of black people it justified, in their view, “the imperialist philosophy of the domination of the white man over the coloured races”. The *Daily Worker*, in a scathing attack maintained that in the film, “Negroes are represented as a people who have no claim to equality, who must remain the willing slaves to the lordly whites”.<sup>19</sup> For the communists the film, by presenting black people as sub human, was offering little more than an ideological defence of colonialism.

The CPGB did not just defend black Americans, in yet another film critique in 1931, the party came to the defence of the original inhabitants of the United States-the native Americans. During a period when the popular image of native Americans, as gleaned through the cinema was that of scalping savages, the communists’ sympathetic interpretation of the American Indians earlier way of life was virtually unique. The film in question was called, *The Silent Enemy*, and it told the story of the Ojibwa Indians’ before the coming of the white man. The film maker was sympathetic to the Ojibwa, but despite that the communists still used the opportunity to lambast the treatment meted out to native Americans by their new conquerors. “Having robbed the Red Indians of most of their land, driven them into barren reservations, degraded and corrupted them, American imperialism can afford to sentimentalise over their nobility”.<sup>20</sup> This understanding view of the plight of others from a different race and with different cultural norms formed an intrinsic part of the communist anti racist offensive. It was to win them much support amongst Britain’s Jewish community when a few years later attacks on Jewish cultural habits became staple diet for the British Union of Fascists.

**Racism – Cartoons and Sport** Racism was not just an issue for ‘grown ups’-the communists also tried to instil an anti-racist outlook into their younger followers. The party had its own separate youth organisation, the Young Communist League, which had been established in 1921 and there was also for even younger members, the Young Pioneers. Through the *Daily Worker*, the CPGB tried to win over the paper’s younger readers and to convince them of the evils of racism. In a series of



cartoons early in 1932, the two cartoon characters, Mike and Mary are used to show how racism is nourished and how it can be defeated by a united working class. The two children are militants. Mike’s father is a lighterman who is on strike, and he and Mary offer their services to the strike committee to go and collect money and clothes in the neighbourhood on the strikers’ behalf. Whilst out collecting Mike and Mary are mocked by Sam Silver, whom Mike refers to as, “that rotten yid”. Mike and Mary are in the same class at school as Sam Silver and Mike and he are constantly fighting and making fun of each other. We are told, through the cartoon, that Mike’s father is Irish, and that he has been brought up to believe that Jews are ‘dirty, peculiar, and foreign’, and are a ‘different sort of people’. The day after the collection Mike and Mary are watching an unemployed demonstration when they are shocked to see Sam Silver collecting money for the strikers. Mary turns to Mike and says, “Are you sure he is such a horrid boy”. The next day Mike confronts Sam about his support for the strikers, only to discover that Sam’s dad is unemployed. They then realise that they are both on the same side-they shake hands and in the next cartoon Mike, Mary and Sam all join the Young Pioneers.<sup>21</sup>

The cartoons may not, in today’s terms, be seen as a subtle means of propaganda, but at least the communists were consistent, they saw racism as a means of dividing workers. Anything that they could do to promote the commonality of workers’ interests was in their view beneficial in defeating racist ideas. That they should try and develop non racist attitudes amongst children was all part of their New Line strategy of winning over the working class, be it indigenous, black or Jewish.

Another overlooked area of struggle during the period was that against racism in sport. This was conducted mainly through the party controlled British Workers Sports Federation, and the focus of the communists’ attention was the breaking down of racial barriers in boxing. It is only relatively recently in Britain that boxers of different colours have been allowed to compete for championship



titles. During the period under review black and non-white boxers were very much treated as second class citizens by the boxing establishment. This was the case not just in Britain but to a lesser extent in the United States as well; the communists pointed out that the black American boxer, Godfrey, was never allowed to compete against the world class heavyweights Tunney, or Dempsey.

The National Sporting Club in Britain, which awarded Lonsdale belts, did not allow black and white boxers to compete with each other for these trophies. This ban, according to the *Daily Worker*, had been in force since the days of Jack Johnson, the pre war black American heavyweight. The paper, which campaigned against this discrimination, was pleased to tell its readers early in 1931, that at last the ban may be lifted and that for the first time a black and white fighter could contend under the auspices of the NSC. The ban, the paper pointed out, had been particularly discriminating against Len Johnson, who was described as, “beyond question the cleverest middleweight in England”<sup>22</sup> Johnson, was a mixed race boxer from Manchester, who in his boxing heyday which coincided with the period of the New Line, was championed by the party because of his abilities. Through their paper the communists made their own anti racist position clear over Johnson, “because of his colour, Johnson was never permitted to fight for the English title or to hold a Lonsdale Belt. The plums of English boss boxing were not for a negro.”<sup>23</sup> The injustice of not allowing the mixed race boxer to compete for a British title was constantly highlighted by the CPGB. After the war Johnson joined the Communist Party and was a communist local candidate in Manchester on a number of occasions.<sup>24</sup>

The communists returned to the attack on racism in boxing the following month, in March 1931, when the *Daily Worker* declared, ‘Down with the Colour Bar in Sport’.<sup>25</sup> It was alleged that the Labour Government would ban a possible contest between a black fighter, Larry Gains, and Phil Smith, a white boxer, for the heavyweight championship of England. In condemning any such ban, the paper pointed out that there was already precedence and that promising non-white fighters in the past had been refused permission to compete against white opponents,

“rumours are already flying around that the Labour Government’s Home Office would ban any match between a white man and a Negro for the championship of England. Since the Home Office put up the bar against ‘Siki’, after the Senegalese had battered ‘Gorgeous’ Georges Carpentier to unconsciousness, no attempt has been made to stage a championship fight between principals of different colour.”<sup>26</sup>

Workers were encouraged by the communists to contrast this approach of ‘boss sport’ with the, “equality of all working class sportsmen enrolled in the Red Sport International, whatever their race, creed or colour”<sup>27</sup>

Once again the message was clear and reflected the party’s clear commitment to combat racism. Who can say what effect it had? One thing we know for sure is that at least one black sportsman belatedly responded and joined the CPGB. There was certainly no other campaign like it in the thirties by any of the political parties, even those on the left. Its nearest modern parallel would be the Football Association sponsored ‘Kick Racism out of Football’, but that is supported by a well funded organisation and takes place in a different political climate, one where racism is officially frowned upon. The CPGB’s campaign in the early thirties took place against a backdrop of innate prejudice, and was initiated by an organisation that at the time had only a few thousand members.

The *Daily Worker* in its coverage of BSWF events, which were numerous, was keen to show the anti-racist content of some of the Federation’s activities. For example, the Hackney Workers Sports Club in London, which was one of hundreds of local workers sports clubs that were established during the period, invited along Arnold Ward to address the club on ‘Negro Problems’. After hearing him speak, the club members, who were certainly not all communists, condemned racism and called for the release of the Scottsboro Boys. Interestingly enough the same edition of the paper which carried this report also had an article in Yiddish, about the conditions of clothing workers.<sup>28</sup> The Communist Party may be accused of sectarianism during Class against Class because of its anti Labour hostility, but one thing the Party can not be accused of is a lack of commitment to multi culturalism.

### **‘Class Against Class’ – preparing the way for Cable Street**

The campaign against racism conducted by the Communist Party between 1928 and 1933 was many faceted. With single issue campaigns, like that of the Scottsboro Boys, the communists strove to focus attention on the international dimension of racism, and how it was used by the ruling class to deny rights to sections of workers. In the course of its campaigning the party hoped to break down any racial prejudices that existed amongst the British working class. The party did this by attempting to show the unifying factors that affected workers everywhere. Although for the communists at this time the class struggle was everything, they also recognised that race was a factor and needed to be addressed, and in their propaganda they attempted, with some success, to show the dual nature of the two oppressions, race and class. It was a difficult task given the climate of opinion but at least the communists were attempting to raise the consciousness of the working class over racial issues.

On the home front too the CPGB was prepared to commit itself to an anti-racist agenda. Through its subsidiary organisations the League Against Imperialism and the British Workers Sports Federation, the party paid attention to eradicating racist ideas. Its role in exposing racism in sport



whether it be in boxing, or in its publicity around the denial of black athletes admittance to the Empire Games in South Africa in 1934, was pioneering. Where there were incidents of a colour bar and the party was in a position to do something about it, it did. It publicised the plight of mixed race children in Liverpool who were the subject of racist abuse in the press, and elicited the services of a Nigerian trade unionist to argue their case in its newspaper. When ramblers were arrested at the BWSF initiated mass trespass of Kinder Scout in 1932, it was the communists through their newspaper, who pointed out the significant fact that all six of those arrested had Jewish names.

Readers of the new *'Daily Worker'* were regularly treated to articles that had an international dimension. There was coverage of news of liberation movements in all of the British colonies and attention was also given to freedom struggles in every part of the globe. Whether it was in the children's corner, in its coverage of sport, or in its interpretation of issues of race or colonialism, the *Daily Worker* pushed the party line, and that line was that racism divides workers. Every incident, whether it be in South Africa, India or Britain, that showed that workers could unite, and break down the barriers of race, was sympathetically portrayed. Equally, whenever there were differences between black and white workers, as in the seamen's dispute, these were interpreted as a conflict between strikers and scabs. The strikers were black and white seamen, and the scabs, on the bosses' behalf, were trying to divide them along racial lines. It may not have been the whole truth but the intention was a positive one – to unite workers in struggle irrespective of race.

Finally, we are not just talking about a party that was somehow or other above the racial divide. As referred to earlier there are no reliable figures for the number of blacks resident in Britain at the time, but we know that it was very small. As for non-white members of the CPGB itself that too is open to speculation. What we do know is that the party's leading orator and its sole representative in Parliament from 1924-29 was Indian. The party's foremost theoretician, and according to many historians of British communism, the power behind the throne of the party leadership, was half Indian, Rajani Palme Dutt. During the time of Scottsboro and afterwards in the heart of the New Line, two of the party's most prominent spokesmen on the issue of race were black. We know from recruitment reports published in the party press that there were black people present at party meetings-but exactly how many actually joined it is impossible to say. It is also well documented that the CPGB made special efforts to recruit black people with meetings specifically about issues of race. Given this evidence it seems probable that black representation in the CPGB was higher than in the country at large.

Probably the greatest significance of the CPGB's onslaught on racism during Class against Class, is

that it laid the organisational and ideological basis for the much better known campaigns against anti-Semitism a few years later, during the period of the Popular Front. The Battle of Cable Street is well recorded and remembered unlike the communists' lone initiative around Scottsboro – yet the party's methods of confronting racism were much the same during both periods. From its beginning the *Daily Worker* was used to spotlight racism and arouse workers against those individuals, or parties, that were using racism to disunite the working class movement. During both the Class against Class and the Popular Front periods party branches and sympathetic organisations were mobilised to isolate and condemn racists, whether in Britain or abroad, and to implement the party line, which again was common throughout both periods, that is, that racism is a tool of the employers and is used by them to divide and destroy the Labour movement. Apart from this direct confrontation of racism, the communists also used their propaganda to pose an alternative to racist ideology. Of paramount importance in this battle of ideas was their daily paper which from the time of its first appearance on January 1 1930, carried on an invective against racist ideology and attempted to counter the ideas of Empire and racial superiority. All this and more contributed towards the development of a cultural and racial awareness and tolerance amongst communists and their supporters. This is not surprising given that communists were after all members of an organisation committed to world revolution and internationalism. ★

#### Notes

- 1 Minutes of Politbureau of Communist Party of Great Britain 29 August 1923
- 2 Report of the Seventh National Congress CPGB, May 30th-June 1st, 1925, CPGB 1925 pp196-7
- 3 Workers Life, 25 October 1929
- 4 Daily Worker, 15 April 1932
- 5 Daily Worker, 20 February 1931
- 6 Daily Worker, 25 October 1930
- 7 Daily Worker, 24 July 1930
- 8 See Daily Worker 1 August 1930, 2 August 1930, 5 August 1930
- 9 Daily Worker 22 August 1932
- 10 Daily Worker 4 May 1931
- 11 Daily Worker 6 July 1931
- 12 Ibid
- 13 Daily Worker 15 July 1931
- 14 Daily Worker 21 June 1931
- 15 Daily Worker 30 June 1932
- 16 Daily Worker 14 December 1933
- 17 Daily Worker 12 May 1930
- 18 Daily Worker 3 October 1930
- 19 Daily Worker 18 May 1931
- 20 Daily Worker 9 February 1931
- 21 See Daily Worker January 1932
- 22 Daily Worker 6 February 1931
- 23 Ibid
- 24 See Michael Herbert, 'Never Counted Out! -The Story of Len Johnson-Manchester's Black Boxing Hero and Communist', Dropped Aitches Press, 1992
- 25 Daily Worker 19 March 1931
- 26 Ibid
- 27 Ibid
- 28 Daily Worker 21 May 1932





## Peterloo – a turning point for the working classes

By Ray Walker

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One hundred and eighty years last August an event took place that sent shock waves around the British political scene. The incident occurred just 4 years after Wellington's victory over Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo, fifty years before the height of the Industrial revolution, and 19 years before Victoria was crowned Queen of Great Britain and the Dominions. The event was the massacre at St Peter's Field in Manchester. The Day Monday, 16th August, 1819.

Britain at that time was feeling the impact of the Industrial revolution which was to have a profound effect on the economic base of the country and on the living and working conditions on the working class. Manchester was the centre of this revolution due to its canal system, built by the Duke of Bridgewater, which allowed the transportation of raw materials, especially coal, into Manchester plus the birth of the factory system which brought tens of thousands of workers into giant factories. Within these temples of Industry were the powered looms which rapidly replaced the archaic hand-looms as a method of producing cloth. The cloth was then sold both at home and abroad at a considerable profit to the factory or mill owners.

The basis of the profit was mostly at the expense of the workers. Men, women and children were more often than not made to work excessively long hours in over-crowded, hot, stuffy conditions, with little or no ventilation or adequate rest periods. The health of the workers suffered as a result. Many

died through exhaustion and the risk of outbreaks of Typhoid and Cholera was made worse by the unsanitary conditions the workers endured at home. Even as late as 1844 Frederick Engels noted, "As I passed through the dwellings of the mill hands in Irish Town, Ancoats, and Little Ireland, I was only amazed that it is possible to maintain a reasonable state of health in such homes."<sup>1</sup>

Pay was poor. The adults worked over 10 hours a day, including week-ends, and were paid a pittance for that which amounted to wage-slavery. In 1830 machine smashing was at its height when activists were

demanding a living wage of 2s. 6d. per day in Kent.<sup>2</sup>

Conditions like these were commonplace. Orphaned children were often forced to work in the workhouses, which were nothing better than prisons. Many tried to escape. A few did. A socialist called Robert Owen looked with shock upon the harsh conditions of the working masses and set about to introduce working and living conditions which, he believed, would bring about the best efforts of the workers. He gave them clean living quarters, good and wholesome food, proper rest periods, which revitalised the tired workers, and quality education to give them all a chance to broaden their horizons. Between 1800 and 1824 he took over a factory in New Lanark Scotland, and set about the changes.

Trade Unions were illegal before 1824 and had been outlawed by the government, through the Combinations Acts. This attack on the trades unions continued well into the late 1830's when six farm labourers were gaoled and sent to Australia for trying to organise in the village of Tolpuddle in Dorset. Their case became famous. In 1819 the only way for the people to express their discontent was at peaceful rallies such as that at St Peter's Field.

There was a growing concern by the working classes as a result of an economic downturn, which encouraged the factory owners to cut wages, together with the onset of high unemployment brought about by the return of the soldiers from the war. The people had no voice in Parliament, only the landowners voted for the MP of the day. This contributed to what became known as "Rotten Boroughs", whereby a handful of landowners or in some cases one, could manipulate local politics. This was at a time when Thomas Paine's "Rights of Man" was being published and circulated. It was a clarion call for liberty and free speech. There was also at the time taxation of the free and radical press, which was introduced to try to curb the more radical newspapers. The radical reformers of this period such as Henry Hunt and others, saw the need for free speech as an intrinsic part of people's democratic rights.

So, it was for a variety of reasons and grievances that the meeting took place that fateful, "very hot, sultry day"<sup>3</sup> in Manchester. The local magistrate called upon people to boycott what they saw as a revolutionary meeting. However, most historians agree that Henry Hunt was to address a very amiable but nonetheless determined crowd who were going to have this rally and hear 'Orator' Hunt call for greater democracy, decent living standards for the poor and freedom of speech. The crowds had begun to gather early that day, coming from the mill towns surrounding the area and the City itself. Right



up to the very start of the rally, the people were in a good mood, despite heat of the midday sun.

The magistrates would have none of this. The Manchester Yeomanry, made up of volunteers, had been called upon from early morning to watch the crowd and to try to scare people away from attending the rally. Some of them had been drinking, quite heavily, others enjoyed pushing their weight about and were known personally to the locals. The atmosphere began to grow tense as Henry Hunt appeared on the hustings, together with some women reformers, and as soon as he was spotted the Yeomanry were instructed by the magistrates to go in and get Hunt.

As there were numerous people in the way of the Yeomanry, they took it upon themselves to push the crowd out of the way, using the horses to drive a wedge into the people gathered. The people were slowly being crushed. Henry Hunt stepped down, off the back of the cart being used for the hustings, to be arrested. The scene turned ugly as the Yeomanry began slashing down their newly sharpened sabres upon the defenceless people. Seeing the chaos unfold, the magistrates ordered the recently arrived Hussars to intervene. One woman holding her baby was cut down. Men, women and children were also cut down or crushed in the panic that followed.

11 people were killed that day and many more disfigured for life. Hundreds were hurt. Bonnets, hats and personal items lay strewn in the field amongst the scattered bodies. What had began as a peaceful protest, ended resembling a battlefield in France.

The biggest cause of the injuries were by far the crushing of the people trying to escape injury. As has been seen in more recent crush incidents, people ran to the nearest exits from the point of crush. This in turn created bottlenecks, which contributed to the crush. As it was a hot day, dust was thrown up by the movement of the people. This also caused disorientation and more panic. Anger was expressed around the country for weeks after. Shelley, the poet, wrote a poem in tribute to those who suffered that day in his 'Mask of Anarchy',<sup>4</sup> expressing the horror of that period but also spoke of the hope of a better life to come. For years after the people of Manchester and Salford remembered the day free speech was attacked by the establishment. Henry Hunt was eventually gaoled after being held firstly at the New Bailey Gaol and then on to Lancaster.

He was the champion of the people and the campaign he led and that other died for paved the way for the growth of Chartism and the legalising of the Unions. ★

Notes:

1 Conditions of the Working Class in England in 1844 – Frederick Engels – George Allen, 1892

2 People's History of the England – A. L. Morton – Gollancz, 1938

3 Radical Salford (Salford men and women at Peterloo) – E. & R. Frow – Neil Richardson, 1984

4 Shelley's Socialism -Aveling, Edward & Marx, Eleanor- Preger, 1947

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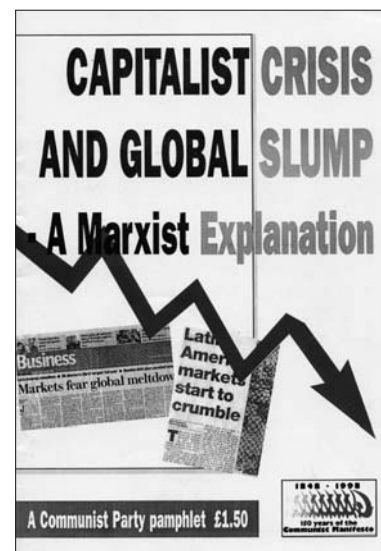
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# Marx And Lenin On Black Liberation

## Ken Biggs

In his writings on the history of capitalism, slavery and the American Civil War (1861-65), Karl Marx not only dealt with the role of black slave labour in the development of capitalism. He also had something to say about the role of the slaves in their own liberation. So did Lenin in his writings and revolutionary activities between 1913 and the 4th Congress of the Communist International in 1922. Of special interest is his article *Russians and Negroes*, published posthumously in 1925.

The slogan of the Communist International under Lenin's leadership – “Workers and oppressed peoples of all countries, unite!” (unfortunately later abbreviated to omit the reference to the oppressed peoples) – bound together the destinies of the working class and the nationally and racially oppressed colonial peoples in the struggle against imperialism. It was at Lenin's insistence that “the Negro question” was a main item on the agenda of two of its first four world congresses.

**Slavery** Marx called the exploitation of black slave labour in the United States “the lowest and most shameless form of human oppression ever met in history”.

In 1846, two years before publication of the Manifesto of the Communist Party, he wrote:

*“Direct slavery is just as much the pivot of bourgeois industry as machinery, credits, etc. Without slavery you would have no cotton; without cotton you would have no modern industry. It is slavery that has given the colonies their value; it is the colonies that have produced world trade, and it is world trade that is the pre-condition of large-scale industry. Thus slavery is an economic category of the greatest importance.”*

Marx was also aware of the cost of slavery to Africa. Of slave-operated agriculture in the West Indian colonies, he wrote in *Capital* that it “has engulfed millions of the African race.”

*Capital* also contained material on the relationship of slavery to capitalism. Marx described the role of slavery in the transition from feudalism to capitalism, specifically in relation to the primitive accumulation of capital, and analysed the nature of exploitation on the South's plantations.

Of the period from the 16th to the 18th centuries, when European capitalism was accumulating the capital necessary to launch itself as a world industrial system, Marx wrote:

*“The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines*

*of the aboriginal population, the beginning of the conquest and looting of the East Indies, the turning of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of black skins, signaled the rosy dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief momenta of primitive accumulation.”*

**Walter Rodney** In his book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, the Guyanese Marxist historian Walter Rodney regretted that some of Marx's followers had not appreciated the implications of this passage: “Marx himself had laid great emphasis on sources of overseas capital accumulation. But even Marxists as prominent as Maurice Dobb and Eric Hobsbawm for many years concentrated on examining the evolution of capitalism out of feudalism inside Europe, with only marginal reference to the massive exploitation of Africans, Asians and American Indians.”

**Special oppression** Marx was careful to distinguish between the slavery of antiquity and the intense regime of exploitation which existed on the plantations in the Deep South of the United States. Implicit in his writing is the view that the black slaves suffered a special oppression based on super-exploitation. It was a view independently developed by Lenin in his 1913 article.

Marx argued that plantation slavery was very different from slavery in the ancient world, or even in the early days of the North American colonies, when it had a patriarchal character. The treatment of black labour on the plantations was utterly ruthless: *“When (the slaves’) place can at once be supplied from foreign preserves, the duration of his life becomes a matter of less importance than its productiveness while it lasts. It is accordingly a maxim of slave management, in slave importing countries, that the most effective economy is that which takes out of the human chattel in the shortest space of time the utmost of exertion it is capable of putting forth. It is in tropical culture, where annual profits often equal the whole capital of plantations, that Negro life is most recklessly sacrificed.”*

Hence the fall in the average length of the working life of a plantation slave from ten years in the 18th century to seven in the 19th: *“In proportion as the export of cotton grew to be a vital interest of the slave states, overwork became a factor in the calculated and calculating system, so that in places it was ‘good business’ to use up the Negroes’ lives in seven years. No longer did the slave owner aim merely at getting a certain quantity of useful products out of the work*





of his slaves. He now wanted to extract surplus labour itself.”

### **The American Civil War – an epochal struggle**

In the articles he wrote for the New York Daily Tribune during the first two years of the US Civil War, Marx connected the oppression of the black slaves to the struggle of the working class. They provide a fascinating insight into a struggle which he and the workers’ movement in Europe regarded as epochal – one in which the victory of the industrial capitalists of the North over the planter oligarchy of the South was desirable, because of the new opportunities it would open up for working class advance, not just in the US but throughout the world.

In a letter to Abraham Lincoln, written on behalf of the newly-formed First International, Marx wrote: “*The working men of Europe feel sure that, just as the American War of Independence (1775-83) initiated a new era of ascendancy for the middle class, so the American Anti-Slavery War will do for the working class.*”

**Solidarity** In 1862 English workers staged mass demonstrations against their government’s attempt to embroil them in war against the North. Even mass unemployment in the cotton counties of Lancashire and Cheshire (and elsewhere in Europe), caused by the North’s blockade of Southern ports, could not dent the workers’ support for the cause of anti-slavery.

Marx called their action in refusing to demand British intervention on the side of the South “heroic and noble”, adding: “*It was not the wisdom of the ruling classes, but the heroic resistance to their criminal folly by the working classes of England that saved the West of Europe from plunging headlong into an infamous crusade for the perpetuation and propagation of slavery on the other side of the Atlantic.*”

**Marx on the slave movement** In 1860, on the eve of the American Civil War, Marx had written that “the most momentous thing happening in the world today is the slave movement – on the one hand, in America, started by the death of (John) Brown”, which was the signal, for example, for a black uprising in Missouri, “and in Russia, on the other.”

Once the civil war was underway, Marx regarded the role of the slaves in their own liberation as critical. He attacked Lincoln’s conservatism on the issue. It had “smitten the union government with incurable weakness since the beginning of the war, driven it to half measures, forced it to dissemble away the principle of the war and to spare the foe’s most vulnerable spot, the root of the evil – slavery itself.”

It was vital, Marx argued, that Lincoln should announce the emancipation of the slaves and enlist them in the union army.

In 1862 he wrote to Engels: “*The North itself*

*turned slavery into a pro-instead of an anti-Southern military force. The South leaves productive labour to the slaves and could thus take the field undisturbed with its fighting force intact... The long and the short of it is, I think, that wars of this kind ought to be conducted along revolutionary lines, and the Yankees have so far been trying to conduct it along constitutional ones.*”

**Marx on “Negro regiments”** Marx called for the formation of Negro regiments. “One single Negro regiment would have a remarkable effect on Southern nerves.” Events after the enlistment of black troops in January 1863 proved him right.

As a Soviet scholar noted: “*The merits of the Negro regiments and feats of the black soldiers fostered a certain shaking of the race prejudices that poisoned many white Americans’ minds. During Reconstruction (1865-1877), the Negroes showed themselves to be energetic workers in the field of education and on local authorities. A whole host of talented public figures and political leaders, writers and poets came forward among them. Their relations with the white population were altered.*”

**Black aggregation** What Marx and black proponents of armed black involvement like Frederick Douglass understood was the power of black aggregation – the coming together of black people in a form which would enable them to play the leading part in their own liberation. It was an analysis which it took the working class movements of Britain and the USA a long time to appreciate.

In Capital Marx noted the capacity of the black slaves in the Deep South for struggle. He pointed out that the scale of their sabotage of the means of production in earlier days had rendered the system of slavery inefficient. “Hence the principle, universally applied in this method of production only to employ the rudest and heaviest implements and such as are difficult to damage owing to their sheer clumsiness.”

This appreciation of the role of black resistance to slavery broke new ground since bourgeois historians had claimed that there was little or no resistance by black slaves and that this passivity was characteristic of them.

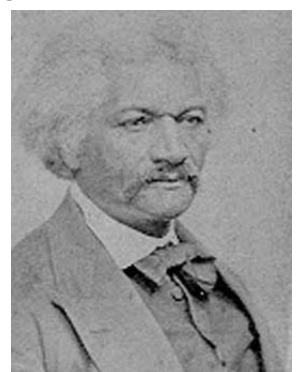
### **The cost of slavery to white workers**

That there was a price to be paid by white workers for black slavery and the denial of civil rights to black people Marx was in no doubt.

In 1858 he attacked Louis Bonaparte of France for wanting to restore the slave trade: “To convert France into a slave trading nation would be the surest means of enslaving France...”

Seven years later, at the end of the American Civil War, in an address to the people of the United States written on behalf of the First International, Marx congratulated white Americans on the fact that “slavery is no more”. But he added: “An

**Frederick Douglass**



*injustice to a section of your people has produced such direful results, let that cease. Let your citizen of today be declared free and equal, without reserve."*

He continued, in a passage which anticipated the ghetto rebellions of a century later: *"If you fail to give them citizens' rights, while you demand citizens' duties, there will yet remain a struggle for the future which may again stain your country with your people's blood. The eyes of Europe and of the whole world are fixed upon your efforts at reconstruction and enemies are ever ready to count the knell of the downfall of republican institutions when the slightest chance is given. We warn you then, as brothers in the common cause, to remove every shackle from freedom's limb, and your victory will be complete."*

**Labour in black and white skins** In 1866 Marx welcomed the electoral defeat of the Democratic Party President Andrew Johnson. Calling him "a dirty tool of the slaveholders", Marx commented: *"The workers in the North have at last fully understood that white labour will never be emancipated so long as black labour is stigmatised."*

In Capital he wrote: *"In the United States of America, any sort of independent labour movement was paralyzed as long as slavery disfigured a part of the Republic. Labour with a white skin cannot emancipate itself where labour with a black skin is branded."*

Marx's identification of the cause of the black slaves with the destiny of the white working class was a profound analysis, pointing the way forward today as much as it did in the period when it was written.

**Lenin on Russians and Negroes** Lenin's first article on "the Negro question" – Russians and Negroes – was written early in 1913, but not published until 1925, a year after his death. It was short – less than 500 words – but enormously rich in ideas.

The title was intended to provoke. "What a strange comparison, the reader may think," it began. "How can a race be compared with a nation?"

He went on to show just how fruitful a comparison it was.

**'Traces of slavery'** Noting that serfdom in Russia and slavery in the United States were abolished at approximately the same time – the former in 1861 and the latter as a result of the Civil War, 1861-5 – he concluded: (a) that revolutionary

struggle produced positive results, even when it was led by the bourgeoisie, as it had been in the US in 1861, and (b) that capitalism could not provide either social equality or emancipation for the black Americans freed from slavery during that struggle.

The proof, wrote Lenin, that revolutionary struggle was always positive in its effects, wrote Lenin, was the fact that in 1913 in the US there were fewer visible "traces of slavery" than there were in Russia.

As "a little illustration" of this, he referred to the 73% illiteracy rate among Russians aged nine years and over, as against the corresponding figure Black Americans of 44.5%. Why, he asked?

In North America slavery had been overthrown by struggle. As he wrote later in a letter addressed to Americans: *"The people routed the American slave-owners, crushed that serpent and completely swept away slavery and the slave-owning state system and the political privileges of the slave-owners in America"* and *"set the world an example in waging a revolutionary war against feudal slavery."* In Russia, on the other hand, serfdom was abolished from above, by legislation. *"That is why today, half a century later, the Russians still show many more traces of slavery than the Negroes."*

Lenin did not in any way intend by this remark to diminish the significance or the justice of the struggle of the black Americans in the opening decades of the 20th century. Lenin championed that struggle. He rebuked the US Socialist Party for its indifference towards it. In the early 1920s he criticised the US Communists for their lack of work among African-Americans. He took the lead in ensuring that "the Negro question" was on the agenda at the 2nd and 4th Congresses of the Communist International in 1920 and 1922.

**'The cruel marks of slavery'** "Such a scandalously high proportion of illiterates (as exists among the Black Americans)," he continued, *"is a disgrace to a civilised, advanced country like the North American Republic. Furthermore, everyone knows that the position of the Negroes in America in general is one unworthy of a civilised country – capitalism cannot give either complete emancipation or even complete equality."*

He went on to suggest that black Americans suffered a unique oppression: *"The Negroes were the last to be freed from slavery, and they still bear, more than anyone else, the cruel marks of slavery – even in advanced countries – for capitalism has no 'room' for other than legal emancipation, and even the latter it curtails in every possible way."*

**Revolutionary potential** This is why for Lenin black workers and people in general possessed great revolutionary potential. Their struggle for actual equality, for civil rights, brings the black community into constant conflict with white European and North American capitalism, which, as Marx showed, from its earliest days had relied on super-exploitation of black labour in its drive for capital and the maximisation of profit, so

Poster  
advertising  
slave sale

**TO BE SOLD**, on board the  
Ship *Bance-Yland*, on tuesday the 6th  
of May next, at *Ashley-Ferry*; a choice  
cargo of about 250 fine healthy  
**NEGROES**,  
just arrived from the  
*Windward & Rice Coast*.  
—The utmost care has  
already been taken, and  
shall be continued, to keep them free from  
the least danger of being infected with the  
**SMALL-POX**, no boat having been on  
board, and all other communication with  
people from *Charles-Town* prevented.  
*Aulkin, Laurens, & Appleby.*

*N. B.* Full one Half of the above Negroes have had the  
**SMALL-POX** in their own Country. .




that capitalism cannot concede “even complete equality” to blacks any more than it can return to workers in general the full value of what they produce. Black emancipation, therefore, is a task which only socialism can accomplish.

**White paternalism** This refusal to regard blacks merely as victims of oppression, as suitable cases for white paternalism, is the essence of the Leninist approach to racism. This was why Lenin himself raised the “Negro question” at the 2nd Congress of the Communist International in 1920, when it was agreed that “Negro revolutionaries” should be invited to take part in the work of the Comintern and that the US Communists should convene a national congress of Black Americans, as a prelude to the convening of a World Negro Congress.

**Theses on the Negro question** At the 4th Congress of the Comintern, the National and Colonial Commission’s Theses on the Negro Question were adopted. They were four in number:

- i) The fourth congress recognises the necessity of supporting every form of the Negro movement which undermines or weakens capitalism, or hampers its further penetration.
- ii) The Communist International will fight for the equality of the white and black races, for equal wages and equal political and social rights.
- iii) The Communist International will use every means at its disposal to force the trade unions to admit black workers, or, where this right already exists on paper, to conduct special propaganda for the entry of Negroes in the unions. If this should prove impossible, the Communist International will organise the Negroes in trade unions of their own and use united front tactics to compel their admission.
- iv) The Communist International will take steps immediately to convene a world Negro Congress or Conference.

**Race consciousness** A report on the Negro Question was adopted by the 4th Congress in which the awakening “race consciousness” of blacks across the world was welcomed.

In the same year, 1922, Lenin gave an enthusiastic response to Foreign Affairs Commissar Chicherin’s idea that the Soviet government’s international programme “must be that the Negro and other colonial peoples participate on an equal footing with the European people in conferences and commissions and have the right to prevent interference in their internal affairs.” In Lenin’s annotation of Chicherin’s letter, dated March 10, he underlined the words “on an equal footing” four times and wrote “True!” in the margin.

**Qualitatively different forms of exploitation** Lenin’s distinction in his 1913 article between the visible “traces of slavery”, which he said were greater in Russia, and the “cruel marks of slavery” on Black Americans, which are residual

and borne by them “more than anyone else,” is important. He implies a qualitatively different form of exploitation arising from the Black Americans’ experience of slavery, one which leaves “cruel marks” that were untouched by the gains made in the upheaval of 1861-5.

**Lenin and black liberation** It was Lenin’s sensitivity on this issue, together with his understanding of the strategic relationship of the struggle for black liberation to the struggle of the working class as a whole, which recommended him to black militants in the USA: “Lenin’s influence upon the Black Liberation movement,” wrote Daniel Mason and Jessica Smith in their book on Lenin’s impact in the USA, “was almost immediate as soon as the Blacks became aware of him”, as is evidenced in such incidents as the call upon the US Socialist Party in 1918 by leading Black Socialists to follow the road of Lenin and fight for the freedom of the Black people to achieve socialism in the US; by the cable of the Garveyite movement, the biggest mass movement of the Black people in the early 1920s, on Lenin’s death, expressing the the ‘deep sorrow’ of ‘four hundred million Negroes of the world’ and declaring that ‘to us Lenin was one of the world’s greatest benefactors’; by the eloquent recollection, published in *A Long Way from Home*, of Claude McKay, the noted Black poet (who was an observer at the 4th Comintern Congress):

*And often now my nerves throb with the thrill  
When in that gilded place, I felt and saw  
The single voice and presence of Lenin.*

**Racism and the working class** Lenin’s argument that capitalism can only offer “legal emancipation” to black people rather than “complete emancipation or even complete equality” has been vindicated by the events of the 75 years since he wrote his article. The “cruel marks of slavery” are manifest today in the realities of life for black people, which contrast with their formal equality under capitalism: institutional racism and discrimination affecting wages and employment, living standards, housing, education, health care and political representation.

Racism threatens the working class and the white workers. Lenin followed up the reference to the 44.5 per cent illiteracy rate among black Americans in his 1913 article with this comment: “It is instructive that among the whites in America the proportion of illiterates is not more than 6 per cent. But if we divide America into what were formerly slave-holding areas... and non-slave-holding areas... we shall find 11 to 12 per cent illiterates among the whites in the former and 4 to 6 per cent in the latter areas! The proportion of illiterates among the whites is twice as high in the former slave-holding areas. It is not only the Negroes that show traces of slavery!”

This drag effect of “the cruel marks of slavery” on all workers makes the fight against racism a central issue for the working class movement. ★



Japanese  
Communist  
Party Chair  
Tetsuzo Fuwa



## Tetsuzo Fuwa discusses the Japanese Communist Party's theoretical position

*The JCP organ paper, Akahata, in its January 1 and 3, 2000 issues carried an interview with Japanese Communist Party Chair Tetsuzo Fuwa. The interviewers were Tomio YAMAGUCHI, JCP Culture and Education Bureau director, and Shojiro SHOJI, vice director of Akahata. The following is an extensive summary/translation of the interview.*

*(It has been shortened for 'Communist Review' but otherwise remains unaltered -Mary Davis)*

### I. The JCP and scientific socialism

**SHOJI:** In the broad context of scientific socialism, the JCP position of founding itself on theories of scientific socialism apparently is drawing new attention. Next year will be the 40th anniversary of the JCP Program. Far from becoming outdated, the Program shows its fresh and contemporary power. Could you tell us about the meaning of the JCP position having scientific socialism as its theoretical basis.

**FUWA:** The JCP as a party of scientific socialism has followed Marx's and other predecessors' spirit of change and scientific vision with which it looks at today's Japan to pursue and explore a prosperous future.

If we get obsessive about what was actually stated by Marx and Engels in the 19th century and by Lenin in the early 20th century and try to adapt the reality to their propositions, it will be tantamount to reneging on the spirit of scientific socialism, and that's something we must not do as we try to succeed the great cause of Marx. The most important thing is that we have succeeded to the spirit of reform and scientific viewpoints; in considering present-day Japan and the world, we will try hard to look at the facts with a scientific vision, work out reasonable solutions and develop fertile prospects. If our solutions have stood the test of actual practice, then we will be able to make further headway with great confidence; if the actual development has been different from what we set as our conclusion, then we will reconsider our conclusion to find out what our mistakes were, and will make efforts to improve our understanding and policies in such a direction as would get closer to the reality. This attitude is essential for a party of scientific socialism under any circumstances.

This was the standpoint we had when we decided the present JCP Program at the JCP 8th Congress 39 years ago. We have since developed a road that has led to the present development, during which we have constantly checked its text against

developments on the ground, and even made amendments whenever necessary to do so in order to reflect advances in our understanding. We are confident, based on the achievements in the last 40 years, that on the whole the course the Program sets out provides us with a correct viewpoint to consider the present situation in Japan and the direction of the world's progress and development with "the spirit of reform" and "the scientific vision."

**SHOJI:** Some people criticize the Japanese Communist Party for being unscientific in claiming itself to be "scientific." The fact is that the JCP never boasts that its arguments about and analyses of various questions have all been scientific. The JCP explores "scientific" ways to grasp the law of social development and to solve various social contradictions in conformity with the law of social development.

**FUWA:** If a party can get at a scientific answer just by introducing itself as being scientific, there will be nothing difficult. Scientific socialism isn't a convenient tool for lazy folks.

**YAMAGUCHI:** Marx said that his and Engels's position is one of studying things and matters in earnest and with a down-to-earth approach. As a JCP candidate-designate for the House of Representatives, I often speak with people of various strata about the JCP view of present Japanese society and about how we are going to change it. I find the JCP view and proposals embraced with surprisingly little difficulty by those who have had little contact with the JCP. And lively conversations can take place in such a meeting, because the audience understands that the JCP views things not as static but in phased development.

**FUWA:** The JCP adopted its Program 39 years ago based on a conclusion we arrived at after an in-depth analysis of Japan's condition. The conclusion was that the correct course for wholesome social development is for the JCP to stand for national sovereignty, independence, and democracy, and to strive to end Japan's subservience to the U.S. and to curb and eventually end the outrageous rule by monopoly capital of the Japanese society. In scientific socialism it is called "anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly democratic revolution," or plainly, "democratic reform within the framework of capitalism."

Discussion of the Program started shortly after the Liberal Democratic Party came into being as

The JCP as a party of scientific socialism has followed Marx's and other predecessors' spirit of change and scientific vision with which it looks at today's Japan to pursue and explore a prosperous future.



the result of a merger of the major conservative parties. While the discussion of the draft JCP Program was going on, a full-fledged Japan-U.S. military alliance was set up with the revision of the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty. The discussion also coincided with the beginning of an era of "high economic growth rate" policy that favored large corporations. This is how two diametrically opposed courses for Japan were before the people: one put forward by the JCP program for social development and the other formulated in LDP policies based on the Japan-U.S. Security Treaty and the interests of large corporations.

Forty years have passed since then. I think that Japan now stands again at a crossroads regarding a choice for the development of Japanese society. Under LDP politics which have continued for over 40 years, the political errors in Japan's economy, politics and society have increased to the extent that action to remedy them can't be delayed to a later time.

The root cause of this extraordinary aberration has become clearer. In the economy, "capitalism without rules" is a problem. In my speech at the 1991 Akahata Festival I pointed out that Japan has not established universally recognized rules to defend the people's rights and livelihood, rules that are in place in other capitalist countries through the people's long struggles. This explains why Japan's large corporations have carried out outrageous actions unrestricted, which has no parallel in the world.

The other aberration can be found in wrong national budget priorities. I pointed this out at the 1997 Akahata Festival. Now it is common knowledge that 50 trillion yen is allocated for public works projects, with only 20 trillion yen for social security measures; that these upside-down priorities are the most serious underlying cause of the misgovernment.

These two points concern the main issues we considered in making the JCP proposal for "remaking Japan." And this view is now more convincing than ever because what the JCP argues isn't our invention; it is a conclusion we arrived at after analyzing the reality of the Japanese economy and Liberal Democratic Party politics. That is why the argument has persuasiveness as well as political effectiveness.

## 2. Capitalism and Socialism

**YAMAGUCHI:** How would you describe the 20th century in terms of relations between capitalism and socialism?

**FUWA:** It is premature to sum up the 20th century in relation to socialism.

This was a question the JCP in its Congress in 1994 discussed in order to make amendments to the JCP Program.

The Soviet Union broke with capitalism and set out to build socialism. Later, in the Stalin era, the Soviet Union deviated from the way to socialism and degenerated into an oppressive society which has nothing in common with socialism and collapsed on account of internal and external contradictions. In analyzing the radical change in East European countries, we said that these countries collapsed because they were forced to

# Japanese Communist Party factfile

## JCP in Figures

**Membership:** 370,000 belonging to 26,000 branches.

**Newspaper:** Newspaper Akahata (Red Flag) is published daily (from Sunday to Saturday) and weekly (Sunday edition), with a combined readership of 2.3 million. Akahata has correspondents in 12 cities around the world: Beijing, Hanoi, Manila, New Delhi, Washington, D.C., Mexico City, London, Paris, Rome, Berlin, Vienna, and Moscow.

**Diet (parliament) members:** 26 JCP seats in the House of Representatives. In the 1996 general election, the JCP received 7.27 million votes, or 13.1%. 23 JCP seats in the House of Councilors. In the 1998 election the JCP received 8.2 million votes, or 14.6%.

**Local Assembly Members:** Total number of JCP members in local assemblies is 4,421 as of September 5, 1999.

In 1995 the JCP overtook the Liberal Democratic Party and became number one in terms of the total number of local assembly members.

## History of Japanese Communist Party

The Japanese Communist Party (JCP) was founded on July 15, 1922. At the time Japan was under the despotic rule of the absolute Tenno (emperor) system. As the country was embarking on wars of aggression and imposing colonial rule on Asian countries, the Japanese people were deprived of all democratic rights. Outlawed from the outset of its founding, the JCP was subjected to all forms of repression and persecution. In spite of this difficulty, the JCP kept fighting for democracy, sovereignty residing with the people, and for the establishment of freedom and the people's basic human rights. Internationally it opposed the war of aggression and the colonial rule of Asian peoples by Japanese militarism. The JCP was the only political party in Japan that stood firmly in opposition to the war of aggression. In 1945, with Japanese imperialism's defeat in the Pacific War, the JCP for the first time won legality, which marked the beginning of its new advances.

The Constitution of Japan came into effect in 1947. It expresses the resolve of the Japanese people that "never again shall we be visited with the horrors of war through the action of government" and declared that "sovereign power resides with the people." This proved the correctness of the position of the JCP in consistently opposing the war of aggression and calling for the establishment of the principle of sovereignty resting in the people.

From 1950-1955, as repression by the U.S. occupation forces swept Japan, the JCP had to undergo difficult years because of a split. One of the two groups had connections with the Soviet Union and China and worked to bring into Japan fallacious policies from abroad (The "1950 Question"). Party unity was restored after two JCP Congresses that took place during the period 1958-1961. These congresses completely resolved the problems related to the party split and established a new course as set down in the JCP Program. It has two pillars:

- (1) a democratic revolution to achieve democratic change in politics and the economy, and the complete restoration of Japan's sovereignty; and
- (2) adherence to sovereign independence that does not tolerate outside interference in the Japanese people's movement.

In 1964 interference and attacks began from the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). JCP-CPSU relations were normalized in 1979 when the CPSU admitted its error.

In 1966 the Communist Party of China started interference in and attacks against the JCP. JCP-CPC relations were normalized in 1998 following the CPC making clear its attitude of "summarizing and correcting" the error it committed during this period. The JCP 13th Extraordinary Congress in 1976 adopted the "Manifesto on Freedom and Democracy," which clearly states that the people's freedom of existence, civil-political freedom and the freedom of the nation must continue development in Japan's future.

*By Japan Press Service.*



adopt a Soviet-type political regime; the demise of the East European countries and the Soviet Union was not due to the failure of socialism; it was a consequence of hegemonism and despotism. Since then, we have had opportunities to discuss this subject with people of other countries and found that our analysis is quite significant internationally.

It is important to remember that in the 20th century the Soviet Union and East European countries were not the only countries that abandoned capitalism to become socialist countries. In terms of population, they are only a minority among those countries which sought to build socialism

The JCP Program calls these countries “would-be socialist countries.” But it is necessary to study the actual situation in these countries individually to make an objective analysis of which directions they are heading for. I visited China the year before last year and Vietnam last year. I exchanged opinions with leaders of these parties and got some first-hand information on the actual situation in the two countries. Depending on the paths they will be taking in the 21st century to become socialist countries and depending on what they will achieve, assessment of the 20th century in relation to socialism will be very different.

It is too early to discuss the 20th century based only on the demise of the Soviet Union and the East European systems.

**YAMAGUCHI:** At present there are many different views about capitalism in relation to the prospects for the 21st century. Citing the fiercely competitive market and the global phenomena of unemployment and poverty, some people say that these problems need to be addressed by Marx in the 21st century. Others say that the 21st century should be viewed from a Marxian standpoint, saying “Marx’s ‘Capital’ is alive”; and “Marx’s criticism of what capitalism and the market economy are about was to the point.” Interestingly, these opinions are being raised by modern economists who theoretically are critical about Marx.

**FUWA:** Some time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, I read an article by a modern economist about Marx in a Japanese magazine. It had two themes. One was that Marx completely failed to work out a blueprint for a future society. This is a misunderstanding. Marx consistently opposed drawing up such a blueprint. Accordingly, it was not what is described as Marx’s blueprint that failed.

Another thesis was that capitalism is still held captive of a Marxist curse. “Curse” here means what Marx studied and elaborated on the contradictions of capitalism, which they say are still alive; unless these contradictions are solved, capitalism cannot defeat Marx. I found this analysis accurate.

Several years since then, Marx’s “curse” has grown worse not only in every capitalist country but globally.

I take note of the fact that the demise of the Soviet Union has had a negative effect on world capitalism. The development of world capitalism hinged on its antagonisms with the social system represented by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union degenerated into repressive society. Its “socialism”

was in name only, but at any rate it was capitalism’s main competitor. A satellite launched by the Soviet Union would immediately be followed by one from the U.S. But this was not all about competition; in order to win competitions, capitalism had to show some restraint in pursuing profits. This was one of the characteristics of the world before the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union is gone. The United States is the remaining superpower, which led to the removal of some self-restraint. In international politics, U.S. hegemonism has emerged as the greatest danger in the world.

Globally, economic hegemonism has become apparent. It tries to impose the self-proclaimed principle called “global standards” on the world’s economy, an outrageous capitalist theory that puts profits above anything else. Criticism of capitalism is arising from within capitalist circles in connection with U.S. economic hegemony.

The failure of the WTO ministerial conference (in Seattle) symbolizes such contradictions. As we are moving into the 21st century, I keenly feel this indicated the advent of a new era for the whole world. The 20th century marked milestones in social progress: the people’s sovereignty, the right to self-determination, and fundamental human rights. I expect that the 21st century will be epoch-making and achieve new advances building on these achievements to overcome capitalism globally.

### **3. Why Lenin Now?**

**YAMAGUCHI:** Looking back on the 20th century history of scientific socialism, one must deal with an assessment of Lenin. Around the time of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, those who had regarded Lenin as absolute were really disgusting when they suddenly changed and began to deny Lenin.

I believe it necessary to establish fair evaluation of Lenin who greatly influenced the 20th century.

**SHOJI:** Your articles entitled “Lenin and ‘Capital’” published serially in *Keizai* (Economics) magazine are very helpful. In the speech on the JCP’s 77th founding anniversary last year, you said, “Making a complete review of Lenin’s work before the end of the 20th century is an important task for paving the way for a new theoretical development of scientific socialism in the 21st century.” I find that work significant. It is already four years since the series started with the October 1997 issue of *Keizai* magazine.

**FUWA:** That’s right. It has lasted longer than I expected. I am trying to complete the series before five years have passed.

Lenin was a person who during a certain period of time represented scientific socialism. In understanding scientific socialism, I usually read Lenin’s theoretical study of Marx and Engels first and then moved on to Marx and Engels. Their study of society and nature is really multifaceted. Apart from economics, they did not develop their views systematically. So, in my early days I used to read Marx and Engels through Lenin’s writings. Then I read Marx’s writing to find what Lenin was pointing out.



Lenin died in 1924, but he had long had great influence on the movement since then. So, I thought that as a man of scientific socialism living in the 20th century I cannot avoid trying to get at the theoretical position of Lenin. And I set out to work on it.

When the Soviet Union broke up, evaluation of Lenin was divided into two opposite extremes, which actually existed since long before.

One was a view that Lenin was absolutely right. Lenin was a leader of the first socialist revolution. During World War I, when leaders and theorists of the socialist movement reneged on their own position and praised the war, Lenin firmly adhered to the position of socialism, the revolution and opposition to the war. His international role and his role in the revolutionary movement in Russia and the rest of the world, particularly his contribution to theoretical development, was outstanding. All this explains why Lenin was widely viewed as absolute.

We read Lenin first, then proceeded to Marx and Lenin. That was not all. It was somewhat fashionable to say that Marx and Engels are outdated and that Lenin was the leader of the modern revolutionary theory.

It is Stalin that boosted the tendency to regard Lenin as absolute. He said, "Leninism is Marxism of the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution," thus strengthening it. By this definition he meant that the theories of Marx and Engels represent the old Marxism of the 19th century when neither imperialism nor revolution came into question; those who live in the 20th century can take Lenin's theories as guidelines. Stalin was exalted as the greatest expositor of Lenin's theory. I suspect that by praising Lenin, Stalin intended to give absolute authority to himself and the Soviet Union he ruled. Stalin's attitude toward Lenin was a kind of "praise to kill."

At the other end there was a total rejection of Lenin. This argument had existed since long time ago. After the breakup of the Soviet Union it became further fashionable and was linked to the opinion that blamed Lenin for all evils Stalin had done.

The JCP is taking neither of these views. In fact, we have always kept out of the view that Lenin was absolutely right.

The JCP 13th Extraordinary Congress (1976) decided to stop using the name "Marx-Leninism." It emphasized that the JCP rejects a view that shows absolute faith in what a particular person stated, no matter who that person is, Marx, Lenin or any of the other great theorists.

In the same year, I wrote an article entitled "Scientific Socialism and the Question of Dictatura – A Study of Marx and Engels" to make critical comments on Stalin's view that Lenin represents modern Marxism while Marx and Engels are out of date.

When the Soviet Union collapsed and negative evaluation of Lenin became prevalent, we insisted on the need to divide the history of the Soviet Union into two parts: the early stage under Lenin's leadership and the subsequent stage in which Stalin reversed his line following Lenin's death. We studied how Stalin turned Soviet society into a non-socialist, repressive one.

We also unraveled the role Lenin's leadership era

played and what it contributed to the progress of humanity. In doing this we took into account that Lenin's period was short and there were serious mistakes as well as trial and error.

**SHOJI:** These two opposing views of Lenin are both based on the notion that Stalin's opinion on Lenin embodies socialism.

#### **4. "Study Lenin's history to understand Lenin's ideas"**

**FUWA:** I described my method of my recent study of Lenin as "studying Lenin's history to understand Lenin's idea." I believe this can apply not only to the study of Lenin, but to the study of Marx and Engels.

Before I wrote "Lenin and 'Capital'" in *Keizai* magazine, I wrote a series of articles entitled, "Engels and 'Capital' (15 parts)." In retrospect, writing the series was also part of "studying 'Capital' history to get at 'Capital.'" These articles focused attention on the history of 'Capital' in relation to Engels' involvement. But I also placed significant weight on studying the history of Marx himself, in connection with *Capital's* Part II and Part III. Having studied 'Capital' by placing it in historical context, I found that the origin and development processes of various aspects, parts and propositions in Marx's economics were brought to light. I often came to grasp the true meaning of what I had not understood about Marx's ideas. I noticed things Marx intended to write but left unfinished. I also found things that Engels misinterpreted in editing *Capital*. In this way, through my study, I keenly felt the importance of reading *Capital* in *Capital's* history.

I am planning to set out to work on "Marx and 'Capital'" after I finish "Lenin and 'Capital.'" Although I will not deal with the whole history of Marx's economics, I will first focus on the theories of depression and reproduction by reviewing the *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58* and the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, and further, will follow the entire process of drafting 'Capital'. I strongly felt the need for this focus in the study, while I examined Lenin's theories on the market. But since my study on Lenin has extended longer than I had planned, the study on Marx may be put off into the 21st century.

**YAMAGUCHI:** This method has been extremely effective in your study of Lenin, hasn't it?

**FUWA:** The Soviet Union's "authorized" study of Lenin lacked the factor of history. In the Soviet era, Lenin was regarded as having a perfect mastery of scientific socialism by nature as a person who had a systematic understanding of everything about Marxism and would unfold it in accordance with actual events taking place. Everything was studied in this way in the Soviet Union. I remember Hegel saying that there is no history in nature. In Soviet historical science "there was no history in Lenin's theory."

In fact, however, on any question or in any field, Lenin's theoretical work shows continuous historical development. Drawing it out as accurately as possible was exactly what I had in mind throughout my study. As a living revolutionary





firmly committed to social change, Lenin since his early days, tried very hard to read, study and absorb Marx and Engels' theories, seeking to find the guidelines for change. As literature and documents available were limited, his study of Marx was a historical process. And upon grasping a core in the study, based on his understanding of it, he immediately applied it to the living problems facing the revolutionary movement of Russia and the world. As such was

the situation through which Lenin's theoretical activity was conducted, its historical process is very interesting.

Lenin made many significant achievements by accurately succeeding Marx and Engels' studies and developing them to adapt to new questions and a new era. Of course, he jumped the gun, experienced trial and error, and made errors, including serious ones. But this historical method will lead you to understand the theoretical cause and background of such errors. In my recent study, I tried to take such an approach in tackling Lenin squarely all through the volumes.

I thought I had been fairly familiar with Lenin, but this approach has made me marvel at numerous new findings in his works.

**SHOJI:** I see your close historical examination covers almost the whole of Lenin's theoretical activity.

**FUWA:** When I started this series, I did not intend to extend the scope of my study this much. The first aim of my study was to explore as widely as possible the interface between 'Capital' and Lenin's theoretical activity. But in the theory of scientific socialism, economics and revolutionary theories are not separated by the "Great Wall"; there are many cases in Lenin's works such as *The Development of Capitalism in Russia and Imperialism – The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in which economic studies are directly linked to revolutionary theories. So, when I started this study, I had a feeling that the scope of my study would be without limit. That was why I wrote in the preface to this series, "The whole plan of my study is not yet in place, but as usual, things will develop as I write on." Apparently, the editor was not happy about that; he told me not to say that the plan was not definite when the magazine was launching a new series (laughter). But that was exactly the fact of my study, and I dared to write as it was.

**YAMAGUCHI:** I am an avid reader of "Lenin and 'Capital.'" As I said before, in this study, the method of "studying Lenin's history to understand Lenin's ideas" proves very effective. So far, your work has been published in the following books: "Market

Theory and Russian Capitalism (Volume 1)"; "Before and After the 1905 Revolution (Volume 2)"; "On Marxism (Volume 3)"; and "War and Imperialism (Volume 4)." And now the study of the 1917 Russian Revolution is in progress. The historical development of Lenin's theoretical activity is very clear from these works. He did not support a method of adapting established theory to the reality; his position was on tackling problems emerging in the real situation, and in squarely struggling with them, he tempered the theories. He also expected that there may be errors.

**SHOJI:** Reading "Lenin and 'Capital,'" I feel like I have witnessed a "life-sized" Lenin, not a deified or exaggerated character of him. I was able to understand clearly that both in theory of cognition and in revolutionary theory, Lenin went through the process of growth and development as a person. Regarding Marx, in the past there was an argument that Marx in his early years was the genuine Marx. What you discussed in your work was fundamentally different from that argument. I feel that Lenin's own development and problems were brought to light historically and clearly from all angles.

**FUWA:** Just a word about it. The argument about "Early Marx" was once fashionable, but it was a very unfortunate argument for Marx. For it turned out to mean that Marx continued to retrogress throughout his life, and he was at his best when he was immature and had not started his study at all.

##### **5. Historical reading *The State and Revolution***

**SHOJI:** At the Akahata editorial office, we had a study meeting on your article "Historical reading of *The State and Revolution*" which was printed in installments in the November and December issues of *Keizai* magazine. There, one of the veteran reporters gave his impressions, saying, "On joining the JCP, the first book I studied was 'State and Revolution', which, opened my eyes to the nature of the State. However, I have felt that there was some inconsistency with what the JCP's Program said, which left me with uncertainty. Fuwa's serials have sorted out my problem." Many more people may have felt that way.

**FUWA:** To be frank, from the beginning, there was a serious contradiction between the revolutionary line set out by the JCP's Program and the theory that Lenin developed in his "State and Revolution."

While the JCP Program states that securing a stable majority in the Diet (Japanese parliament) would set an important condition for a victory of our revolution, Lenin's "State and Revolution" flatly opposes the course of securing a majority in the parliament and making it a foothold for a revolution.

We first made an analysis of this contradiction in a commentator's article entitled "On Slanders and Provocation by Ultra-Left Opportunists" published in April 1967 – often referred to as the "April 29 Article" from the date of publication. At the time, the Mao Zedong faction in China was launching an attack against and interference in the JCP, saying, "The JCP tends to focus only on parliament and





elections, which is a betrayal of Lenin.” This historical problem we had with the Communist Party of China was duly solved in the bilateral talks in 1998, paving the way for friendly relations between our two parties.

At that time, in countering their attacks, we clearly asserted, “Just take a look at the history of the movement of scientific socialism since Marx, and you will find that the great cause of scientific socialism as sought by Marx and Engels is one of seeking revolution by the majority in the parliament, when there are such conditions for it. Taking such a broader view, Lenin’s argument in his “State and Revolution” might have been valid in the particular historical condition of his time, but was not to be taken as the principle that should hold true anywhere anytime.” This was the rough summary of our statement.

At that time, however, we did not have sufficiently good literature to study the revolutionary theory of Marx and Engels. The Japanese version of the Collected Works of Marx and Engels was only halfway published. Among the citations made in that article, there was an important memorandum by Marx, in which he referred to the process of a revolution possibly happening legally in Britain or the United States, on the strength of a majority in the parliament. Though we found a part of the memorandum cited in foreign literature, we had been unable to obtain the whole text of it. But with great effort and difficulty, we finally found out that the memorandum had been included in the collection of works of Marx and Engels on the history of Germany, which was published in East Germany. Only then, were we able to read the whole text of it.

Given the situation, despite the confidence we had in the basic principle of Marx and Engels’ revolutionary theory, we were not in a position to describe the whole picture of it with full knowledge on their activities throughout their lives.

Today, I read the “April 29 Article” of 1967 to find that the fundamental points in their revolutionary theory are correctly presented there.

**YAMAGUCHI:** The “April 29 Article” was the first theoretical piece that I read after I joined the JCP 26 years ago. A student at my university recommended that I read it, saying that the article was available only in *Sekai Seiji* (World Politics) magazine. I still treasure my copy of it. I can see that it really reflected the great effort made then to grasp the essence of Marx and Engels’ revolutionary theory out of very limited historical resources.

In your latest work, Mr Fuwa, you describe historically their revolutionary theory in a broader perspective, and at the same time, you are making a clear criticism of Lenin’s propositions about his absolute affirmation of revolution by force and abolition of the state apparatus, calling them mistakes deviating from Marx and Engels’ theory on the revolution. This I believe reflects further progress in your study since the time of the “April 29 Article.” Based on that, you have analyzed where Lenin misinterpreted Marx and why he was led to such wrong conclusions, with a full account of the historical situation surrounding him.

I have to admit that I also had difficulty in accepting the theses of *The State and Revolution*. I tried to accept them as the result of the historical situation of his time. Your work shed light on that point from both the theoretical side and the historical side, and seems to have brought the review of *The State and Revolution* to a new stage.

**FUWA:** Yes, we are now in a position to be able to explore the full scope of the revolutionary theory of Marx and Engels with almost everything they authored available to us for our study. Thanks to this, I believe I was able not only to make criticism of this or that particular proposition among the points at issue in *The State and Revolution*, but also to elucidate to a considerable extent the structure of Lenin’s argument itself, including the root-cause of his deviation from the study of Marx and Engels.

In this study, I have followed closely Lenin’s theoretical activity since his early days described as “young Lenin.” In the course of my study, I have not a few times highlighted his outstanding ability of grasping the essence of Marx and Engels’ works, and of his magnificent achievement of introducing it in clarifying the reality in Russia and the world through the scientific point of view he had acquired in his study, without dogmatically applying their theory to the reality. However, even Lenin, as a living revolutionary of scientific socialism, sometimes committed serious errors. Among them, the most serious one was his wrongly framing of Marx and Engels’ theories on the State and revolution that he presented in his “State and Revolution”, where he ruled out the principle of “revolution based on achieving the majority in the parliament.” This error had a serious impact on the world communist movement that followed.

Feeling strongly the gravity of that error, I believe that an overall historical review of Lenin’s theoretical activity and a historical sifting of his achievements and errors have an especially important meaning.

This historical sifting cannot be completed by simply defining correct parts and wrong parts in Lenin’s theoretical activity. We need to analyze both achievements and failures he made as the theoretical work of one revolutionary, framing them within the history that he himself lived through, and to clarify the historical ground on which he committed these errors.

Among the mistakes were some problems Lenin himself found and tried to correct during his later years, wondering to himself why he had made such mistakes. There are also some others, the theoretical rectification of which was put into the hands of future generations after he died without any chance to work on them.

The historical shifting of Lenin’s works, in the true sense of the word, can only be completed by taking the approach of “reading Lenin within Lenin’s own history” through to the end. And only by doing this, I believe, can I make a small contribution from the theoretical side, to carrying on the value of the current of scientific socialism into the 21st century.

**SHOJI:** Thank you very much. ★





## China Crises

**Paul White replies to Ken Fuller's article  
"China - the Unfinished Question"  
Communist Review No.29 Spring 1999**

Comrade Fuller identifies the Communist Party of China (CPC) from its very inception in 1921 with the interests of the Chinese petty-bourgeoisie and the forces of Chinese nationalism. Yet nowhere in the article is there a single mention of the Kuomintang (KMT)! It is true that in less-developed countries the interests of the petty-bourgeoisie and those of the peasants and workers can merge for a time when both face enslavement by foreign imperialism. Nationalism papers over the seismic class contradictions, but not for long. Sun Yat-sen built the KMT on the Leninist model, and sent officials to study in the Soviet Union. Jiang Jinguo, Chiang Kai-shek's son and later president of Taiwan, himself studied in Moscow. The CPC, for its part worked closely with the KMT in the 1920s, and individual members joined the KMT.

Mao Zedong was alert to the dangers of such an alliance early on. In his report on the peasant movement in Hunan, early in 1927, he warned that "Our party is out of step with the revolutionary mood of the masses.

The KMT is even more out of step." After the KMT expelled Communists from its ranks and massacred thousands of Communists and workers in Shanghai in the same year, Mao's star began to rise. Needless to say, it began to rise not among the petty-bourgeoisie, but among the workers and peasants, as Mao led the Red Army on its Long March and saved socialism from extinction in China at the hands of the KMT regime – an odd role for someone who was supposed to represent the petty-bourgeoisie.

Comrade Fuller says that Mao opposed the anti-Japanese united front urged on the CPC by the Comintern. He fails to mention that the CPC was being urged to unite with the butchers of Shanghai. Mao certainly did not oppose an

anti-Japanese united front; on the contrary, he strongly urged the broadest possible united front at the Wayaobu meeting, Dec. 17 - 25, 1935. But, remembering all too vividly the disaster visited on the workers' movement by the previous united front, he successfully led the party in its rejection of Wang Ming's (and the Comintern's) line of total subordination of the party's armed forces to the KMT.

It is not clear if Fuller makes a distinction between the national bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie. But after talking about the "petty-bourgeois character of the leadership of the CPC" he then makes the extraordinary statement that "...in 1949 the national bourgeoisie [sic] (and Mao!) were powerless to prevent China from embarking on the socialist road." It is just possible to do what Fuller does, and represent the CPC as the standard bearer of the Chinese bourgeoisie (national or petty) throughout its history. But only if one forgets that the Chinese bourgeoisie had its own monolithic political party and armed forces, and ruled China from 1911 to 1949. One would also have to consign to amnesia the fact that the bourgeois KMT regime had the backing of the imperialist powers up until 1979.

Meanwhile, it is difficult to reconcile the extermination of the landlord class and the sweeping land reform, which were the first steps after the founding of New China in 1949, with Mao's "championship" of the national bourgeoisie. When Mao called for leeway for the private capitalist economy because its members had "often taken part in the people's democratic revolutionary struggles," it was because they had done just that. But more importantly, he did not want to alienate the millions of overseas Chinese, large numbers of whom were, and still are, wealthy businessmen. They would prove pivotal to the revival of the mainland's economy and the reunification of the country. We can see this happening today. Mao foresaw it 50 years ago.

The Cultural Revolution was, of course, a complex phenomenon; too complex to be dismissed as "an attack by Mao upon the CPC itself, using politically immature students." It was also too complex to be dismissed simply as ultra-leftism, but Mao's pendulum certainly swung that way rather than in what Comrade Fuller seems to see as a defense of bourgeois privilege. Let me quote Deng Xiaoping, who should have known what it was all about: "In those days people thought that rousing the masses to headlong action was democracy, and that it would solve all problems. But it turned out that when the masses were roused to headlong action, the result was civil war. We have learned our lesson from history." (Fundamental Issues in Present-Day China, P.170)

When it comes to the "democratic parties", it is Comrade Fuller who is confusing base and superstructure. These parties are remnants of parties and other associations which joined the united front with the CPC in the 1940s. Like the "patriotic capitalists", they have been rewarded for their loyalty.



But, again like the “patriotic capitalists”, they have a special role to play in the reunification of China. They are conduits of dialogue between the CPC and organizations, political and otherwise, in Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan and among overseas Chinese. They sit with representatives of such bodies on the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Committee. The “more active role” that the Beijing Review has claimed they are playing is certainly not one of organizing any political opposition to the CPC. Incidentally, non-Communist parties play a similar role in the DPRK, another case of a divided country.

One of the cakes being had and eaten in Comrade Fuller’s article is his lumping the trend represented by the Gang of Four (“extreme Maoism” characterised by “leftist excesses”) together with the modernisation strategy of Deng Xiaoping (“many of the rightist components of Maoism remained intact”) under the heading “Maoism.” It takes a pretty elastic mind to see any ideological affinity between Yao Wen-yuan’s warning “When the economic strength of the bourgeoisie has grown to a certain extent, its agents will demand political rule.....and openly restore and develop the capitalist system” and Deng Xiaoping’s warm espousal of “some will get rich before others.”

The observation that “to a surprising number of party members, the mission of the party...is to find a way for the Chinese people to return to its former glory” has a lot of validity. In fact, it was precisely the accusation that the CPC had failed to do this that led to the turmoil in 1989. The accusation was leveled by elitist academics like Fang Lizhi, mobile phone-toting yuppies like Wan Runnan (before he fled, head of China’s biggest private company) and bemused Han chauvinists like Wei Jingsheng (“The Chinese people are the most intelligent people in the world; so why are we poorer than foreigners?”).

As a Marxist, Fuller must surely know that the last

nation on earth ever to be allowed to develop a fully-fledged capitalist economy was Japan. And that was in 1870. Broadly speaking, ever since then the world has consisted of the old metropolitan capitalist countries and their appendages and colonies, and the socialist nations (The fate of those trying to take a third road has been tragic, hasn’t it Yugoslavia?).

Therefore, a capitalist China can no more come into being than a capitalist Russia. And China certainly does not have a “capitalist base.” But a war-torn, poverty-stricken and re-colonised China can come into being – just as is happening to Russia. Therefore, it is important that the CPC firmly maintains the commanding heights of the economy, and continually battles the reactionary forces. The only way it can do this is by achieving modernisation as rapidly as possible, and raising the standard of living of all the people of China on the basis of the party’s principles of social justice.

Is this wishful thinking? I don’t know, but “socialism with Chinese characteristics” may well be the way forward. Indeed, Comrade Zyuganov himself has said that he sees hope for the revival of socialism in Russia along the trail that the CPC has blazed. ★



Poster (left) published by: Shanghai People’s Art Publishing House

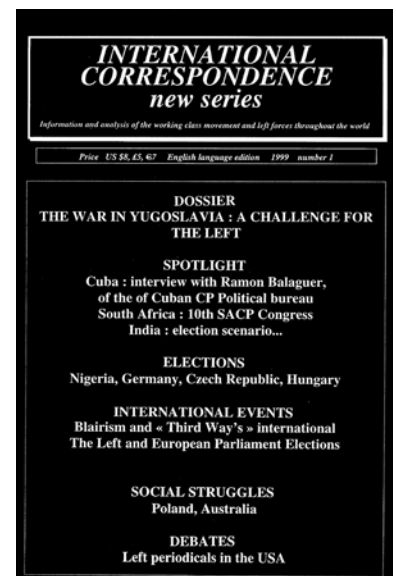
## INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

The appearance of an English-language version of International Correspondence is a significant boost to those on the British left frustrated by the lack of information and analyses available on communist and left parties worldwide.

Established in France in the early 1990s, International Correspondence was the collective effort of a group of activists with wide-ranging and in-depth knowledge of international and regional issues who were able to put out 22 successive issues in French.

Now that an English-language version is available, it promises “Information and analysis of the working class movement and left forces throughout the world”. Priced at £5, its 48 pages cover a whole range of issues from a dossier on how the left reacted to the NATO war against Yugoslavia, an interview with a Cuban CP leader, the Cyprus question, the direction of the Socialist International, and many other issues. The continuing importance of mass-based communist parties in countries such as Greece, Portugal, Cyprus and India, to name but four, is particularly interesting and is discussed in some depth. The Communist Party will be discussing issues of distribution with a representative of International Correspondence in the near future and we will keep Communist Review readers informed.

Those interested in this first issue can contact the Communist Party office (please note our new address) or International Correspondence directly at BP 95, 92153 Suresnes Cedex France. Subscriptions are £20 for four issues.



# Sylvia Pankhurst



Sylvia Pankhurst (1882-1960) was a socialist feminist who during the campaign for women's suffrage at the turn of the 20th century, not only braved the horrors of hunger striking and forcible feeding, but also founded and built a remarkable women's organisation in the East End of London. This group, the East London Federation of Suffragettes, was composed of working class women who campaigned for the vote and for social change in the period 1912-1920. Their weekly paper *The Women's Dreadnought* (later, *The Workers' Dreadnought*), owned and edited by Sylvia, had an enviably high circulation and was influential outside London. Sylvia's strategy, which linked class and gender, did not find favour with the most famous of the suffrage organisations, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), to which she belonged and the East London Federation was affiliated. The WSPU, (popularly known as the Suffragettes) was founded in 1903 and led by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, Sylvia's mother and older sister respectively. Sylvia was expelled by them from the WSPU in 1914.

The WSPU abandoned its early links with the labour movement in 1907 and in 1914, with the outbreak of World War One, it abandoned the suffrage campaign itself. Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst ardently supported the war effort and urged all women to do the same. Sylvia did not take their advice. Her organisation was one of the very few to maintain the fight for the vote (its first instalment was granted in 1918).

We believe that Sylvia's strategy, based as it was on an alliance between class and gender, did far more to win the vote for all women than the more elitist and ultimately diversionary politics of her mother and elder sister.

It is thus richly ironic that the British State has chosen to honour Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst's contribution to women's suffrage, with a statue for the former and a plaque for the latter, both outside Parliament, whilst ignoring the role of Sylvia Pankhurst.

Sylvia would not have liked a memorial, but as a symbol of the unsung heroism of thousands of working class women who fought for the franchise and for socialism,

some kind of recognition in the form of a statue of Sylvia Pankhurst is not only long overdue, but would, at long last, help correct the historical record.

Sylvia Pankhurst was a pioneer in other ways. Apart from the fact that during her long and active life she founded and edited four newspapers, wrote and published 22 books and pamphlets not to mention literally countless articles, she was a founder and tireless activist in a variety of women's, labour movement and international solidarity organisations. She was a deeply committed anti-racist and anti fascist and involved for over 30 years in campaigning on such issues which included the cause of Ethiopia -the country which became her home for the last four years of her life and in which she was buried. ★

**The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee was launched a year ago; since then, we are pleased to welcome many national trade unions as sponsors as well as individuals and other organisations. We began yet another committee because we feel a public image of Sylvia Pankhurst should be created and it to this end we invite you to sponsor the campaign.**

**We intend to unveil a memorial to Sylvia's life and contribution to working class women and have commissioned a prominent labour movement sculptor and opened negotiations with the appropriate public authorities for our chosen site. Place your, and your organisation's, name on the roll of sponsors and send in your donation. No donation is too small; equally, no donation is too large!**

**If you would like more information on Sylvia's contribution to the women's and labour movement please contact us at: Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, SERTUC, Congress House, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3LS, UK.**

**To keep up to date visit our website on [www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst](http://www.gn.apc.org/sylviapankhurst)  
Yours in sisterhood  
The Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee**

**Sylvia Pankhurst paints the shopfront of the building that forms the headquarters of the Women's Social Defence League with the suffragettes' slogan "Votes For Women".**



**Miss Sylvia Pankhurst, daughter of the famous Suffragette, shakes hands with Jomo Kenyatta at the 'Abyssinia and Justice' conference, September 9, 1937.**



**Sylvia Pankhurst after her Release from Prison, May, 1921**



## Reviews

### A Dedicated Revolutionary and historian

#### Edmund Frow (Eddie) – the making of an activist

by Ruth Frow

Published by Owain Hammonds Associates.

ISBN 0 9523410 9 3

Price £6 .00.



Ruth and Eddie Frow

By RAY WALKER

Eddie Frow's legacy to the working class was, with the joint effort of Ruth, the Working Class Movement Library, housed at 51 The Crescent in Salford. Between them they have written many articles for *Marxism Today* (in its heyday) and trade unions journals, they wrote numerous books and pamphlets, and enjoyed taking many people on walks in Manchester, revealing the vital role Manchester played in Capitalism's development and the working class struggle. The life of Eddie has never been written to any lengthy extent, until now.

Eddie was born on a Lincolnshire farm in 1906. His parents had a number of jobs until they moved to Leeds. It was there that the teenage Eddie became educated at Holbeck Boy's Day Preparatory Trade School for his future work as a toolmaker. It is interesting to note that Eddie learned the violin at an early age, accompanying his sister, Millicent, on the piano.

Eddie's school teacher, a Mr Arthur Haigh was a socialist and it was from this influence that Eddie became interested in politics. He joined the Communist Party in 1924 and was quickly embroiled in the movement. As a young militant Eddie engaged in meetings, Sunday Worker sales, buying and reading Lenin and activities that had him frequently at odds with the local bosses and out of work!

Eddie eventually moved to Merseyside and then Manchester,

becoming a dedicated revolutionary. Notes taken at meetings and Marxist classes give a deep understanding of the ideas fermenting within the CP at this time. The disastrous class against class, his involvement in the General Strike of 1926 and the successful activism he engaged in within the National Unemployed Workers Movement showed the failures and the capabilities within the CP. The rise of fascism and the heroic role of the International Brigades are given fair coverage in the biography. Eddie worked at both Metro-Vickers in Trafford Park and Ward and Goldstones.

Ruth gives considerable space to Eddie's involvement at district and national level of the AEEU. When Eddie was successfully elected to District Secretary, attempts were made to discredit him, but they failed. Eddie's commitment to the Communist Party and the Union had a price to pay earlier on in life in that his first marriage fell apart but not before they had Eric, who now resides in America.

Ruth enters the story when Eddie went to a Party school on Labour history at which he and Ruth played each other at tennis. A new friendship and lifelong companion was found. They soon discovered each others book collection and the seeds of the WCML were sown. They became a couple and, after a little dispute with the CP, settled at Kings Road Trafford. Ruth brings to life the early excitement as they scoured the second-hand bookshops doing without a good meal if it meant grabbing a much-sorted Chartist

periodical or undiscovered political tract.

Eddie was guided through his life by developing education both of working class history and his deeply held Marxist ideas. He was both a teacher and pupil and was rarely seen without a book in his hand. I personally recall with a smile the times he would bound up the many stairs, of the Victorian house that became the Library's second home, leaving me behind. I got used to it and was fortunate to know Ruth and Eddie when they still lived in the Library.

Eddie developed Cancer and was diagnosed months after having his 90th birthday celebration at the Salford Art Gallery and Museum. His remaining days were spent at a bungalow in Worsley and when he died the Labour Movement lost a great friend and ally. Up to his last months he spoke strongly of the need for Left unity.

Ruth's biography may not be the last word on Eddie. In fact she points out that there is a great deal of archives which may one day be sifted through and more detailed and "objective" book appear. In saying that I believe Ruth has done well both in terms of covering Eddie's highs and lows in life and his ability to use his Marxist understanding to develop his political struggles. His legacy is the Working Class Movement Library and his spirit and enthusiasm for history and class struggle lives on daily as researchers and visitors develop their political understanding by use of the collection. ★



# Never Counted Out!

## **The Story of Len Johnson, Manchester's Black Boxing Hero and Communist**

by Michael Herbert  
Dropped Aitches Press  
Manchester: 1992  
Price £4.95 110pp

REVIEWED BY LIZ ELKIND

Only 110 pages of narrative text, yet it is difficult to typecast (no pun intended) this tightly written but wide ranging book. In a bookshop it could be shelved as Sport, Politics, Social History and sub-shelved as Boxing, 20th Century Imperialism, Local History (Manchester) Black History (Global), but categorising it is misleading as all these themes and more are interwoven.

Len Johnson was born in Manchester in 1902, the son of a West African apprentice engineer and an Irish mother. Themes within the story of his family and early life include immigration, housing, schooling, communities, and as Len reached his early teens war, employment and eventually boxing, and through it all the significance and impact of race and racism.

The two chapters on racism in boxing and on Johnson's career in boxing clearly locate racism within the underpinning ideologies of imperialism. Michael Herbert, having covered in detail the history of race and racism in British boxing, argues that the ban on black boxers' competing for British titles was not because of the individual racism of those who set the rules of the sport, however racist they might have been, 'but in a collective reaction by the British establishment to perceived threats to the stability of the Empire.'

The well researched and notated account makes clear that Johnson was also hampered by his assertiveness and refusal to conform to white requirements of an 'acceptable' black man. Eventually

he gave in to ill health and disillusionment and retired from the ring in 1933.

Johnson joined the Communist Party of Great Britain toward the end of the Second World War. A specific reason is not given but Herbert suggests that Johnson's personal experiences along with the political context of the times would have attracted him to the Party's participation in activist movements. He also may have been influenced by a meeting and subsequent friendship with Paul Robeson and Robeson's links with black radicals living in Britain. Herbert weaves the story of Johnson's life around accounts and influences of significant black political thinkers and activists and their times.

Over a ten year period Len Johnson was active within the Communist Party and stood for the Council as a Communist six times. He also was centrally involved, along with two Communist Party comrades, in establishing the New International Society in response to growing racial antagonisms in Moss Side. The NIS in Johnson's words was to be 'a place where people of all lands could meet fraternally, thus helping materially to create greater understanding between them.' The NIS was an active, campaigning organisation which fought racial discrimination in industry and all other areas. Their activities brought them into contact with black radical campaigns and campaigners in the United States and elsewhere.

The relationship between the NIS and the Communist Party became complicated, and Herbert cites a Party document of 1948 as indicating that '...the Communist Party viewed the NIS as a potential means of establishing its leadership over the local black political groups and individuals or alternatively as a means of blocking their activities.' Financial issues and their impact on political direction were criticised by the Party as was the perceived failure of the NIS to bridge the gap between social and political expectations of its members. The NIS folded in 1950, and Herbert suggests that the ambivalence of the Party's relationship with the NIS was a key factor in its demise.

Len Johnson died in 1974. Herbert's descriptions of his funeral, local press accounts of Johnson's life, and a celebration of that life in a drama production in 1987 make clear that in and around Manchester Len Johnson's works and worth were acknowledged and celebrated. However this story has more than local relevance.

In this brief review it is difficult to convey the extent of information contained within this book and the depth of its presentation. No mere chronology of personal or political events, this history of a life is set fully in global and local contexts and, most significantly, makes clear the significance of black political figures within those contexts. A good read and a good education, worth far more than the jacket price of £4.95. ★



# Useful websites

**Communist Party of Britain and Young Communist League**

<http://www.communist-party.org.uk>

**Morning Star socialist daily newspaper**

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/morning-star>

**Searchlight anti-fascist magazine**

<http://www.searchlightmagazine.com>

**Trades Union Congress**

<http://www.tuc.org.uk>

**International Centre for Trade Union Rights**

<http://www.ictur.labournet.org>

**Cuba Solidarity Campaign**

<http://www.poptel.org.uk/cuba-solidarity>

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