



COMMUNIST REVIEW

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The International Economic Crisis and the Position of Greece



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MARGARET KASRILS**
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By Eleni Mpellou

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Front cover: Greek communists demonstrate at the Acropolis against the EU-imposed austerity programme

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editorial



By Martin Levy

APOLOGIES TO READERS for the delayed appearance of this issue of *CR*. Quite apart from the logistical difficulty of putting the journal together during the recent intense period of election campaigning, we thought it sensible to wait a while until the dust had settled afterwards. Well, the Con-Dem coalition government has set to work at breakneck speed, and the axe is really swinging.

At the time of writing, George Osborne is due to present his 'emergency' budget, but cuts totalling £6 bn have already been announced. There will be a freeze in civil service recruitment; over £1 bn is being lopped off central government grants for local authorities; and £836 mn is being slashed from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, which funds universities, colleges and job creation programmes.

And this is just the start. The coalition intends to make deep cuts in public spending in order to reduce Britain's budget deficit of some £156 bn. This is bound to lead to massive job losses and a dramatic worsening of services on which people depend. Sooner rather than later, we can also expect a hike in VAT, a freeze in benefits, an early increase in the state retirement age, an attack on public sector pay and pension schemes, and a ratcheting up of student tuition fees.

We already know from the Queen's Speech that the Con-Dems mean to force many more people to work for their benefits and plan to part-privatise Royal Mail.

An enormous con-(dem-)trick is

being played on the British people: that these spending cuts are necessary to plug the deficit, and that we are 'all in this together' and have to 'share the pain'. There is precious little sign of any pain being inflicted on the super-rich and



George Osborne, Tory hatchet man
Photo from flickr by altogetherfool

their friends in the City of London whose speculation led to the 2008 credit crunch. In fact, as the Communist Party argued in the election campaign, the deficit could immediately be eliminated by closing tax-avoidance loopholes for the wealthy and corporations, and by imposing a 20% windfall tax on the super-profits of British-based banks and monopolies, a 'Robin Hood' tax on major financial transactions, and a 1% wealth tax on the richest 10% of the population.

The slogan on which the Communist Party fought the General Election, "Britain for the People, not the Bankers", put the issue clearly and still remains valid today. It sums up what many people feel, but of course – like almost all other left-wing voices – it failed to make inroads against the media saturation coverage of the leaders of the three major pro-big business parties. The Tories, Labour and LibDems were all committed to public spending cuts, though none was prepared to say exactly how much or what they would actually mean, an omission which the media largely did not challenge. The only real difference was that Labour was going to postpone the intensification of the misery until next financial year. That was never going to encourage the return to Labour of the many working class voters who had deserted it over the last 13 years, because it had failed to deliver for them. But people certainly did not vote for the massive onslaught on the working class that is now being unleashed.

There are lessons which need to be



drawn from this. In particular, those trade unions which largely bankrolled Labour need to ask whether that investment was worthwhile, given that they have ventured all, and ended up with nothing. Not that any of the other horses was worth backing, but if you are going to put money on one, isn't it sensible to make sure that it will run in the right direction? What the unions got from the Warwick Agreements were minimal reforms leaving untouched the big issues of the Tory anti-union laws, the privatisation of public services, the shortage of decent affordable homes and the widening gap between rich and poor. As always in the past, Labour in government failed to stand up for the working class – only this time with even fewer crumbs thrown from the table.

But the election also provides a lesson for those who argue that Labour is finished – or at least ought to be dumped, in favour of a new workers' party or socialist political alternative. You cannot simply put the word 'socialist' on the ballot paper and expect to get thousands of votes, or even win. When people vote, they do so largely in the hope of making their vote 'count', and very often therefore vote tactically and for limited purposes. Many who agreed with what the left candidates were saying will have decided to put their cross against Labour, because they were worried about the prospect of a Tory victory. A little bit of class consciousness, perhaps? Only a little, unfortunately. Strong votes for the left are a pipe-dream in such circumstances. Furthermore, with such a level of class consciousness, you cannot expect that people will automatically see the big picture and fight the oncoming onslaught on the basis that "an injury to one is an injury to all".¹

What do we understand by 'class consciousness'? It isn't some kind of mystic fluid which permeates people's minds and somehow binds them together. Class in any case is an abstraction from the individuals who make it up, all with their individual psychologies. In the words of Hans Heinz Holz, "Class consciousness is the 'self-confidence' of a generalised person at a particular historical period"², behind which every individual actually remains. It is not the same, as Lenin pointed out in *What is to Be Done?*,³ as the spontaneous articulation of class-



determined interests, important as it is. Even that is at a relatively low level in Britain today, although there are notable expressions in the battles of BA strikers and other workers. *Educated class consciousness*, however, understands that the individual experiences are more general, and are inherently linked to the existing social system.

The past 30 years of Tory and New Labour governments have done their damage here. Defeats suffered by the working class, and the destruction of manufacturing industry – traditionally strongly-organised – have played a role. However, changes in the organisation of work have also contributed, making the real opposition between labour and capital appear more impersonal and anonymous.

A key task for the left is to reverse this process. There has to be, as Holz says, a mediation between the individual and general consciousnesses, and opportunities are provided for this at the level of working class struggle. The left needs to draw out to workers the understanding that they are not just fighting a particular boss, or the government, but that they have a commonality of interests with all other groups of workers, against the monopoly capitalist class. And one of the best ways of building that understanding, and reinforcing it, is developing solidarity. That is why the Communist Party's message in the election was not so

much 'vote for us' as 'unite and fight'. Our manifesto urged "working people not to rely on elections or parliaments to defend their interests. If they want to protect jobs, wages, services, pensions and their rights at work, they must take action wherever and whenever necessary."⁴

The forthcoming period places such an approach on the order of the day. Whichever New Labour clone wins the Labour Party leadership, or indeed whether the working class needs a new mass party, is much less important than winning recognition in the trade union movement that campaigning means more than passing resolutions, and that the only response capable of halting this government is the building of the widest possible unity, across workplaces and communities, in a campaign of resistance involving coordinated industrial action. This will not happen overnight, of course, and it will not happen if the trade unions try to go it alone. They need the support of communities fighting to protect their services and employment opportunities; and there is a vital role for trade union councils to play, not only in making the links with the communities, but in bringing workers together across different services and industries, to see their common interests.

It would be a mistake to think that this will be easy. The Con-Dems are not stupid, and will not unleash a frontal assault on all areas at the same time. Many of the initial £6bn cuts have been

carefully decided so that the workers affected are relatively isolated, and the same will happen in the future. Having the Lib Dems in government actually helps the Tories to sell their approach, because the government's programme includes a number of 'populist' LibDem measures which can be presented as softening the Tory policies without having any such effect in reality. Osborne's plan to involve the public in a 'debate' about where the cuts should fall, and Cameron's vision of a 'big society' rather than a 'big government', show that the Con-Dems understand the role of obfuscation and ideology in pushing through their policies.

The left and the labour movement need to be able to respond to that with an ideology of their own, building on the development of educated class consciousness to make connections with the issue of who really controls the levers of power in society, and therefore the measures needed to provide a real government by the people, not the phoney one that Cameron and Clegg are offering. This is where the People's Charter becomes crucial, as it makes the links between, on the one hand, fighting the cuts in public services, and providing jobs and homes, and on the other, the necessary economic measures to marshall the resources currently in the hands of the banks, speculators, financiers and the super-wealthy. The perspective of the People's Charter has to be built at the same time as the movement against the cuts.

Of course Britain is not alone in having a government determined to push through measures to make the working class pay for the crisis. Last Autumn the Irish government cut spending by €4bn, equivalent to £50bn in British terms, and many public sector workers saw actual

pay reductions. Greece cut £10bn last year, then another £4.4bn this year, under pressure from the European Union. Portugal, Spain, Italy and Germany have also announced massive cuts too.

Arguably the measures have had the strongest impact in Greece, and the response from the working class there has been the most vigorous – due in large part to the resistance mobilised by Greece's strong communist party, the KKE. Their analysis of the situation is therefore of considerable interest, and we are pleased to be able to present it as the feature article in this issue of *CR*, although it does require careful reading. Discussion contributions on this article would be welcome. The KKE is particularly scathing about the role of social democracy and the class-collaboration trend in the trade union movement, reflecting their own experiences. Their strategy also appears to exclude any intermediate stage between capitalism and socialism, such as the People's Charter in Britain.

In the following article, Ian Pinkus argues that the left needs to learn from the achievements of capitalism as well as from the inequality and misery that it creates. Profit and monopoly, he says, are not solely characteristics of a capitalist society; it is a question of how they are used. He goes on to argue for trade unions to campaign to take over the collection and investment of their members' savings in pension funds, as a

step to owning and controlling the means of production.

The international flavour starting with the article from the KKE continues throughout this issue, with contributions from the Chinese delegation to last November's international communist meeting, from Ken Fuller on the Philippines Communist Party, PKP, and from Fidel Castro on the threat to humanity from nuclear weapons and climate change. One of our three book reviews deals with education in Cuba; and even Soul Food this time is internationalist, featuring the poetry of German playwright Bertolt Brecht.

Finally, we are proud to be able to present here the moving tribute by leading South African communist Ronnie Kasrils to his late wife Eleanor: a marvellous person and a real role model. Belatedly, we extend our sympathies to all who knew her.

Notes

- 1 Motto popularly used by the original Industrial Workers of the World, and attributed to David C Coates; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_injury_to_one_is_an_injury_to_all.
- 2 H H Holz, *Communists Today*, Chapter 4: *Class Struggle*; <http://www.northerncommunists.org.uk/content/view/29/43/>.
- 3 V I Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 5, p 347.
- 4 *Britain for the People, Not the Bankers: Make the Fat Cats Pay!*, Communist Party of Britain 2010 General Election Manifesto.

■ *Communist Review* welcomes submission of articles (normally up to 5000 words), discussion contributions and letters – send to editor@communistreview.org.uk. Articles will be reviewed by members of the Editorial Board and/or Advisory Board, and we reserve the right not to publish.

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Capitalism is in its biggest slump since 1929. Britain's banks have been bailed out to the tune of £1.3 trillion while workers are paying for the crisis with job losses, public spending cuts, frozen pay and home repossessions.

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The International Economic Crisis and the Position of Greece

Theses of the Communist Party of Greece (ΚΚΕ)

By Eleni Mpellou





The international capitalist economy is going through a profound crisis, characterised mainly by its extensive synchronisation. It materialised initially in 2007 in the construction sector in the USA, with the depreciation of banking capital, as a result of the extensive circulation of investment derivatives in securitised precarious housing loans. The danger of collapse of US financial giants – which hold powerful positions in the international money markets – caused a gradual and generalised large decrease in prices in the most important stock markets in the world. It was the tip of the iceberg in the outbreak of a generalised crisis of overproduction, of overaccumulation of capital.

An optimistic version of the current data, and assessments of international economic organisations, pinpoint 2010 as the low point of the recession. Unemployment has already increased by 25 million, and it is estimated that another 40 million will be added by the end of the year.

KKE and KNE (Communist Youth) march for Gaza in 2009. Photo from flickr by solidnet_photos

In 2009, the Gross World Product (GWP) was expected to shrink by 1.7% according to the World Bank, and by 2.75% according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The latter estimated that international trade would shrink by 13.2% in 2009. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates that money capital has depreciated by 4.1 trillion dollars since the start of the crisis.

The Outbreak of the Economic Crisis in Greece

In Greece the crisis was slightly delayed compared to the rest of the Eurozone. The expansion in gross domestic product (GDP) slowed in 2008, and the economy went into recession in 2009. However, the most significant element is that the industrial sector (mining and quarrying, manufacturing, electricity and water supply) was already in recession in 2005, and shrank by 4% in 2007-8. All branches of manufacturing were in recession in 2008, except for the food industry, which showed a 1.2% increase. The crisis in manufacturing is

reflected in the large decrease (-7%) in the output of industrial commodities. The construction sector has likewise sustained a large decrease (9.4%).

During the period 2002-2008 there has been a tendency towards significant production decreases in most of the basic agricultural products – with the exception of soft wheat, maize and peaches. According to data provided by Eurostat, real agricultural income declined by 7.1% in 2008, due to stagnation in producers' sale prices and to the large increase in the prices of industrial products. Net agricultural income per unit of labour input fell from 100 in 2000 to 80 in 2008.¹

In 2008 there was a large drop in prices on the Athens Stock Exchange. Its total market value at the end of that year, as a percentage of the GDP, was estimated to be approximately 1/3 of that at the end of 2007 (December 2008: 28%, December 2007: 86%).² A significant part of this drop was due to the mass withdrawal of foreign investors in October 2008.

Regardless of the phase of the crisis, a particular feature



of the Greek economy is its long-term sharpened and deficient fiscal condition. The slowdown in GDP growth – which accelerated during the second semester of 2008 – worsened the terms of state borrowing dramatically.

The latest assessments predict a 1% decline in GDP in 2009. The extent of the recession in the Greek economy will certainly depend on the course of the crisis:

a in Balkan countries, where important investments have been made by companies based in Greece (this concerns economies with high capitalist growth rates, such as Romania with a 7.7% growth in 2008 and a prediction of a -1.8% decline in 2009, or Bulgaria with a 4.4% growth in 2008 and a prediction of a -1% decline in 2009³);

b in international trade, a large part of which is carried out through maritime transport which constitutes a significant source of inflow; and

c in important European countries, such as Germany and Britain, which are the origin of a large proportion of the tourists who visit Greece, not only in absolute numbers, but also in overnight staying and earnings.

The effects of the high EU inflows compared to the industrial and agricultural shrinkage are contradictory.

The above-mentioned facts demonstrate that the outbreak of crisis in the Greek economy is going to be profound. Predictions are being made that it will last for two years. It will sharpen existing social contradictions, through increased unemployment and part-time employment and the extension of 'flexible' employment practices.

Even bourgeois data indicate that poverty has already increased, with a particular concentration (about one quarter) among children up to 15 years of age, as well as people in the 18-24 age bracket. Of course, the

poverty indices do not reflect the fact that salaries and wages are falling short of the incremental growth of GDP and productivity growth, in a phase of extended reproduction of capital in Greece.

The Assessment of the KKE 10 Years Ago

In order to assess the current crisis, and the predictions being made for getting out of the recession, both internationally and in Greece, we believe that it is useful to mention our general assessment of the crisis of a decade ago. We should also recall our forecast regarding the period that was to follow that crisis.

In 1998 an earlier phase of recession was in progress. It had started in the countries that until then were considered to be the 'economic miracles' and were characterised as the 'Asian tigers'; it had enveloped the economies of SE Asia, as well as Japan and countries in Latin America; with a slight time delay, it also manifested itself in the USA in 2000. Global gross product shrank by 1%, while international capital flows for direct investment and international trade sustained big reductions.

It was at that point that – for the first time since the victory of the counter-revolutions in the USSR and Eastern Europe – bourgeois circles once again expressed circumspection about the robustness of capitalism. There was concern that at some point there might be difficulty in controlling the workers' and people's discontent – a reaction to the consequences of the crisis.

The various bourgeois theories of the causes of the crisis were part of the effort to control the situation from the point of view of stabilising the power of capital.

They focused on the way that the stock markets functioned, and emphasised the management-transparency

of high-risk investment funds (hedge funds) and the terms of IMF and World Bank lending to states. In other words, they focused on the apparent disfunctions in the sphere of circulation of capital in its monetary form.

At that time the KKE estimated that a crisis of overproduction, or alternatively a crisis of over-accumulation of capital, had occurred, as had happened previously, with the crisis of 1973 being the most characteristic example.

We argued that, irrespective of its initial forms of expression, it was a crisis of over-accumulation of capital.

Bourgeois arguments, originating from the IMF itself, concerned the management measures necessary for speeding-up the exit from the recession, or the alleged possibility of preventing a recession in the USA and other capitalist countries. In contrast, the KKE predicted that, in one way or the other, the exit from the recession, the recovery, even the passage to a new upward course of expanded capitalist reproduction, would lead to the outbreak of a new crisis of overaccumulation, deeper and more synchronised than the previous one. In addition the KKE warned that the working conditions, wages and the life conditions of the working class in these countries would not improve, but, on the contrary, that they would deteriorate even in the phase of capitalist growth.

This forecast was based on the fact that the division in the world capitalist production and market was changing to the benefit of new developing capitalist economies with large domestic populations and still very cheap labour forces.

The counter-revolutionary overthrows of socialism, the opportunist erosion and crisis of the communist movement and in general the retreat of the labour movement, as well as the assimilation of trade

union organisations into the capitalist system, have also contributed in a similar direction. Thus, under the conditions of expanded reproduction of capital, the tendency for the workers' income to fall has prevailed, in parallel with an increase in the rate of exploitation.

This tendency took on the character of unified strategic choices. In the EU, for instance, these choices were codified in the Lisbon strategy that promotes the restriction of workers' and pensioners' rights in order to meet the goal of so-called 'reduction of the labour cost' in the EU market.

In the period that followed, *ie* the first ten years of the 21st century, new buy-outs and mergers took place; the international interweaving of capital moved on further; and the international capitalist competition and the formation of more or less cohesive regional alliances and unions intensified.

The tendency towards changes among the unevenly developing capitalist economies has strengthened. This is leading to the overthrow of the balance of forces in the international capitalist market that was formed 70 years ago. At the same time, this tendency has been expressed through new state and interstate demands for changes in international agreements and co-operations, for instance in the WTO agreements, in the composition of the IMF and World Bank boards, in the composition of international foreign exchange reserves, in the currency being used in the trade in industrial materials and in the expansion of the G7.

During the previous cycle of the international capitalist crisis these developments were only dimly visible. However, during the current cycle they have become an irreversible tendency. It is on this ground that the new cycle of the international economic

capitalist crisis, which is in progress, has developed; it started in the USA, spread to the Eurozone – maybe more deeply – and envelopes at the same time Great Britain, Japan, Russia, Turkey and countries of Latin America. For the time being, it impacts on China and India via reduction in growth rates.

Assessments of the KKE for the Current Economic World Crisis

It is expected that the current recession will be of longer duration than the previous one and that the passage into a new phase of revitalisation and growth will be more anaemic. More important, however, are the predictions that we can make about the position of the working class and of hired labourers in general, as well as of the larger part of self-employed, during the recovery phase of the recession.

We consider that the same tendency towards deterioration that has been manifested over the two previous decades will continue and sharpen, unless there is:

- a visible ideological-political and organisational revitalisation of the international communist movement;
- an emancipation of the trade union movement from the government and from employer-led trade-unionism;
- disengagement of the trade union movement from EU mechanisms of manipulation; and
- an ideological-political emancipation of wider working forces from the deceitful influence exerted by so-called social-democracy, through old or new political formations.

The inner contradictions of capitalism and the international capitalist competition have reached a level where the working class, the salaried workers who approach the working class in terms of income and living

standards and the lower sectors of the middle strata can slow down the deterioration of their position **only if they counterattack**, if they avoid any political traps of compromise, consensus, or acceptance of an allegedly necessary class collaboration for the confrontation of the crisis.

The labour and trade union movement loses its features as a movement that struggles for wages, working hours etc when its leading organs such as the Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) reach agreements with the Federation of Greek Enterprises and Industries (SEB) for a joint solution to the crisis. The labour and popular movement can and should regroup its forces with a clear anti-imperialist, anti-monopoly orientation, an anti-capitalist orientation. It must utilise in every country any rift, any vacillation in the bourgeois governance, with a corresponding ideological-political orientation and organisational readiness.

We estimate that, when the next cycle of the crisis reaches its peak, when the next phase of recession arrives, bourgeois rule will encounter greater difficulties and will be faced with successive unstable governments; the disagreements within the EU will sharpen; and the ideological defence of the capitalist system will be profoundly shaken. With a bit of creative fantasy, but a fantasy based on scientific analysis, we can say that we are heading towards a new 1929, or a new 1937. These predictions are also being made by bourgeois analysts, by imperialist centres of strategic studies at state or interstate level.

The Special Role of Social Democracy in Rescuing the System

In order to safeguard the system, liberals and social democrats, from Sarkozy and

Obama to Braun and Lothar Bisky, are promising a 'humane, healthy capitalism'. International social democracy is exhibiting significant activity. It focuses on the effort to put the blame for the crisis solely on 'neoliberalism', on the allegedly ineffective balance between market and regulation at state, regional and international level.

International social democracy is expending a great deal of effort in order to convince the working and popular masses that it has elaborated a new recipe. It argues that it has found the correct relationship between, on the one hand, those policies (subsidies, tax cuts, etc) that promote the concentration and centralisation of capital, the support of monopolies; and, on the other, the policies that control the irregularities of the market through one or more state-owned banks or through the nationalisation of certain enterprises in industry and transportation that find themselves in financial straits. The notions of a 'green economy' and 'better distribution' constitute essential complements to this approach.

Within the field of social democracy, that is, within that current that labels itself as 'democratic socialism', *ie* the domination of monopolies alongside the existence of state-owned enterprises, new political formations, such as the European Party of the Left (ELP), have emerged. They argue that they have discovered – more effectively than previous parties – the correct balance between 'market' and 'regulation', between 'private' and 'state' capital. In addition, they argue that, in order for this recipe to be more effective, the contradictions within the EU should be eliminated through the strengthening of its structures and the formation of an EU-wide administration.

In fact, they are adjusting the old social democratic line

of reforms to the current reality in the EU. Instead of a state monopoly – a servant of the private monopolies – they pose a European-wide interstate monopoly. Above the nation-state governmental administration they pose a strong interstate administration, allegedly capable of expressing the general interests in the EU, and solving the contradictions between its member-states. They present themselves as 'more catholic than the Pope', providing a 'left' socialist alibi for the strengthening of the existing repressive mechanisms and the emergence of new ones. Their special role consists in the refurbishment of social democracy in order to serve the system more effectively. They serve the purpose of ideological manipulation as they spread the illusion of a EU in favour of the people, of a pro-people administration on the territory of the economic domination of the monopolies.

Unevenness and Contradictions within the EU are Inevitable

The current economic crisis in the Eurozone has admittedly sharpened the contradictions between the member states, even within its hard core. This was predictable, according to KKE's assessments and projections.

Despite the interweaving of capitals, despite the common strategy against the working class, the nation-state remains the organ that guarantees the economic dominance of monopolies and serves the concentration and centralisation of capital in competition with similar processes in other member states of the EU.

Capitalist unevenness exists both during the phase of expanded reproduction of capital, and during the recession phase. It is manifested at the general level of production, at the level of labour productivity, at the relativities between sectors, at





Athens demonstration on the occasion of the 1-day strike called by PAME, the All Workers Militant Front, February 2010

salaries and wages, at the exports and imports of commodities as percentages of the GDP, at the outflow and inflow of capital. This unevenness is reflected in the fiscal situation of each state, in the different sizes of public debt and deficits, in the differential lending rates of the states, as established by the international market according to the position of every state in the Eurozone, as well as in the international imperialist system.

It is this unevenness that makes the formation of a common fiscal policy impossible, even under the conditions of a recession. It has been illustrated in the different proposals (for example, between Germany and Great Britain) regarding the measures and policy packages required for the management of the crisis. It has also been expressed in the formation of interest rates above those of the European Central Bank.

The different views regarding the Stability Pact, whether it will lean more towards fiscal flexibility or towards monetary stability, express the different needs of

the member-states, not the lack of bodies for an EU-wide administration or the excessive powers of the European Central Bank, as is claimed by the ELP and SYN/SYRIZA.⁴

Under the current conditions of recession the unevenness has manifested itself in the Greek economy more sharply than in previous phases. Long-lasting problems, such as the public debt, trade deficit and the long-term stagnation of manufacturing industry, are intensifying.

The Tendency towards a Change in the Correlation of Forces in the International Market

The intensification of uneven development is of course a generalised phenomenon within the EU and in the international imperialist system. The general characteristic of capital depreciation during a crisis does not manifest itself proportionally in all states, sectors and enterprises (private or share capital). Thus, both recession and the subsequent phases of stabilisation and recovery

bring about a rearrangement in the correlation of forces between the various enterprises, sectors and national economies.

However, important changes and rearrangements are often prepared over a long time period that encompasses more than one cycle of economic crisis. The current crisis crystallises the changes in the correlation of forces that have been brewing up over the last 30 years, through approximately three cycles of crisis affecting most of the advanced capitalist economies. These changes have accelerated over the last decade.

In the period 1980-2008, the tendency for a reduction of the share in GWP of the US, the Eurozone and Japan has become dominant. In contrast, China's share has increased (440% in the period 1980-2007), so that it is in third position after the Eurozone as a whole. In addition, India's and Russia's shares in GWP have also increased (110% in the period 1980-2007 for India and 19.3 % in the period 2000-2007 for Russia). The Eurozone share has

steadily declined by 12.8% in the period 2000-2007 while Greece's has dropped by 24%. The tendency towards a worsening share has continued in 2008 and 2009 for the USA, the Eurozone (including Greece) and Japan.

Some parallel tendencies are reflected in the percentage shares in world capital inflows and outflows for direct investments. In the period 1980-2006 the shares of China, Russia, and India grew (with fluctuations), while the those of the USA decreased. However, Japan has maintained its share in outflows while the Eurozone increased its share in both inflows and outflows, retaining first position internationally. On the other hand, in the period 1980-2006, the Greek share in inflows decreased (from 1.22% to 0.41%) while its share in outflows increased (from 0% in 1990 to 0.34% in 2006). During this period Greece has become, therefore, a net exporter of capital.

The shares in world imports and exports constitute another important index. Over the period 1980-2007 the following changes have



- from 6.8% to 4.4%
- Greece's share has fluctuated around the level of 0.52%.
- China's share has increased and it now occupies third position internationally.
- Russia and India recorded limited increases in their shares.

Relative changes are also taking place among private and enterprise capitals. According to the *Sunday Times* Rich List of the 1000 richest individuals in Britain, half of the top 10 in the list have increased their wealth in the midst of the crisis, by €1.05 bn (up 43%), while the other half have faced a shrinkage by €33.74 bn (-242%).⁵ While the number of loss-making companies is increasing in this recession, there are still some that are accumulating profits, at either reduced or even increased rates. In the later category we can include, for example, the German enterprise Siemens which, in the first trimester of 2009, showed profits of €1.01 bn, a 145% increase on the corresponding period of 2008, with a 5% annual sales increase.

Similar phenomena also apply to the Greek economy. The profits of the 8 major banks (National, Alpha, Eurobank, Pireaus, Cyprus, Marfin, Agricultural Bank of Greece, Emporiki) during the first trimester of 2009 are estimated to have fallen by 50% to €610 million, compared with the corresponding period of 2008. Redistribution of market share is taking place within subsectors of the economy, such as in air transport, among Olympic Airways and Aegean Airlines. These changes are also being promoted through acquisitions, such as those made, for example, by the Marfin Group (Vivartia and Olympic Airways) and through new mergers of financial enterprises that are

being prepared in Greece. This trend is obvious in the international market, particularly in those sectors where the crisis of overproduction was initially manifested, such as the automotive industry.

It is thus that a new cycle of centralisation of capital, that has depreciated during the recession phase, is being prepared, in order for it to enter a phase of self-increase through the production process, the process of exploitation of labour power. The exit from the recession is being made with the goal of attaining additional profit through the conquest of new markets. Competition is increasing, old regulations are being put into question and new ones are being established, even by taking advantage of conditions created by imperialist wars.

These tendencies can be codified as follows:

- The USA remains the primary force in the GWP, but with a deterioration in all other indices.
- The deterioration of the competitive position of Japan has also become apparent.
- The rise of China is impressive, although it is still lagging behind in overall per capita productivity.
- The competitive position of the commodities of the Eurozone (with the exception of Greece) has improved.
- The competitive position of India and Russia remains low though with a tendency towards improvement.
- The position of Greece is exhibiting a more contradictory outlook. On the one hand, its share in the GWP is decreasing and its position with regards to exports is deteriorating, characterised mainly by a relatively lower share than that in the GWP; while, on the other hand, the

position it holds in the outflow of capital has improved.

The index 'net international investment position' (sum of direct investments, portfolio investments, derivatives, other investments, exchange reserves) for Greece remains negative, at €184 bn in 2008, though it has declined as percentage of GDP (2006 -83.6%, 2007 -94%, 2008 -75.7%).⁶ In combination with the progress of other economic indices already mentioned, we can conclude that during the period of its incorporation into the EEC – and particularly within the Eurozone – the Greek economy has sustained losses with regards to the competitive position of domestic industrial production (mainly of manufacturing), but, at the same time, it has exhibited an increase of capital accumulation and its export in the form of direct investments.

We must note at this point that among the 1000 magnates who are economically active in Great Britain, there are 10 Greeks, 4 of whom are among the top 100 (D Leventis, M Laimos, F Niarchos, S Hatzioannou).

These data confirm the assessment of the 18th Congress of KKE that the Greek economy holds an intermediate position in the international imperialist system, maintaining the same – penultimate – position in the Eurozone, though with an enhanced position in the Balkan market.

On Certain Bourgeois Interpretations of the Crisis

All of this uneven and contradictory capitalist development in Greece, in the EU, in the USA and internationally bears no relationship whatsoever to theories concerning 'casino-capitalism', 'over-consumption', etc.

occurred for exports:

- The USA's share dropped from 11.1% to 8.4%.
- Japan's share also fell, from 6.4% to 5.1%.
- The Eurozone retained first place, and almost maintained its share (30.8% in 1980 and 29.2% in 2007), although that did fall from 35.0% in 1990.
- Greece saw a reduction from 0.25% to 0.17%.
- China's share has exhibited a spectacular increase from 0.89% to 8.8%, taking second place, ahead of the USA.
- Russia's and India's shares have also risen, but are still quite small (2.6% and 1.05% respectively in 2007).

The following trends have been observed in the shares of world imports over the same period:

- The Eurozone has retained first place, but its share has fallen from 34.3% to 28.0%.
- The USA remains in second place but its share has grown.
- Japan's share has declined



1. 'Casino Capitalism'

This theory lays the blame for the crisis and for the slump in industrial production on the financial system. In the best case scenario, it blames the existing structures and regulations of the financial system at an international level, among which are included the IMF, the World Bank and the credit rating agencies – companies ranking the credit-worthiness of state institutions.

The isolation of parasitic phenomena, and their characterisation as either 'casino capitalism' or as distortions in the financial system at an international level, is at least a case of oversimplification – if not an outright deception. It is not by chance that the Bretton-Woods Agreements collapsed during the 1971-3 crisis.

The decay and parasitism of capitalism – *eg* the fact that, in 2008, economic derivatives internationally were equivalent to 976% of GWP – is a product of capitalist development at its monopoly stage, a product of shareholder ownership of the means of production, a product of the merger of industrial and banking capital; that is, of finance capital. This is the basis for the existence of fictitious capital (*eg* the well-known 'toxic bonds') or the fictitious stock-exchange prices of industrial and commercial

capital. This is the basis of parasitism.

It is not a surprising phenomenon that the over-accumulation of capital makes its appearance through financial companies that function as a centre for the accumulation of all unused income (of capitalists and of working people) and its transformation into capital. The tendency towards over-production and over-accumulation of capital is within the very nature of capitalism, as is the tendency towards an expansion of fictitious capital and the obligatory cessation of over-production and the devaluation of capital. The availability of credit promotes over-production and over-accumulation of capital, until the inevitable moment when the over-production or expanded capitalist production comes to a halt. It will be interrupted when it has been pushed to its extremes and when the consequences of the anarchy and decay (fictitious capital) of capitalist production, the contradiction between capital and labour power, have intensified.

2. 'Over-Consumption Distortion' of Capitalist Development

Certain theorists project the need for a 'new model' for the Greek economy. They assert that the extremely rapid

development of Greece during the period 2000-2008, according to UN standard-of-living indices (Greece was in 24th place out of 175), was the result of an over-consumption and over-indebtedness of the state, of households and businesses. They claim that this 'model' has exhausted its potential, while a new model will be necessarily more controlled, more productive, more austere. The statements made by the Governor of the Bank of Greece are in the same vein.

This viewpoint consciously attempts to revamp capitalism in people's consciousness. The direct dependence on the banking system (mortgages, consumer loans, and credit cards) and so-called 'over-indebtedness' (and not 'over-consumption') are characteristics of developed capitalism. This is evident if we look at the over-indebtedness in the USA, which has taken the form of a mass use of plastic money.

The theory of over-consumption, or reversely that of under-consumption, disregards the motive of capitalist production which is profit, the appropriation of surplus value and not the production of use-values for the satisfaction of social needs. It conceals the fact that initially the anarchy and unevenness are expressed among the capitalists themselves who buy and sell

to each other commodities which are then used in capitalist production, as well as the fact that the anarchy is expressed between the branches of industrial production.

The anarchy and unevenness of capitalist reproduction are first and foremost expressed, on the one hand, in the exchanges between capitalists within the category of production of means of production and, on the other hand, in the exchanges between the former and those capitalists engaged in the production of means of direct consumption. At a secondary level, the anarchy is expressed in the sphere of the circulation of commodities of direct consumption, in the portion that concerns the exchange between the consumer and the businessman. That is, it is only secondarily that it is expressed as a weakness in consumer spending of the working class income, whose aggravation is of course directly related to the degree of exploitation.

During a crisis expanded capitalist reproduction is abruptly curtailed. It is through a recession that a partial and temporary restoration of the extreme disproportions is effected, in order to begin a new cycle of the anarchic expanded capitalist reproduction.



Cartoon strip reproduced from from May 2010 RMT News

Summing up the Crisis

What is occurring today, namely the devaluation of capital in whatever form (commercial, financial) and the devaluation of labour power as a commodity, has occurred repeatedly in the past, with its first appearance at the beginnings of the 19th century; it will occur again in the future as long as capitalism exists.

The inevitability of crises is found within capitalism's DNA: it is found within the contradictory commodity character of capitalist production, in its anarchy and unevenness, in the tendency initially to achieve a supplementary capitalist profit through the introduction of new, more productive machinery, as well as through the export of industrial capital to countries with cheap labour power. These factors sharpen the contradiction between capital and labour power, the contradiction between the social character of production and the private appropriation of its products, due to private ownership of the means of production. It is the drive for supplementary profit that determines the tendency for the rate of profit to fall.

The capitalist economy entails a motive to push capitalist reproduction to its extremes, to accumulate immense profits, that is to give a monetary speculative form to the appropriation of surplus value from the working class. It means that these immense profits, expressed in different forms of capital, particularly in the sphere of its circulation (mutual funds, bonds, stocks in financial institutions and financial fund companies for capital management, hedge funds), in order to be reproduced as capital, as a self-increasing value, must re-enter the production process: they must suck up new unpaid labour, like a vampire, must transform it into a commodity, which through its sale will be expressed as new profit.

The Necessity of Social Ownership and Central Planning: Fronts of Struggle

The source of the crisis can be eliminated only with the abolition of capitalist ownership, with the extinction of the anarchy of capitalist production, with central planning of a proportional expanded reproduction, having as its goal the production of use values for the ever-increasing satisfaction of social needs.

It is only on the basis of socialist industry that the distribution of the labour force, of the means and materials of production, of social wealth can be changed, that agricultural cooperative production can be supported, that money can lose its substance as the form of value, and as a means of distributing surplus value, that the speculative character of the Central Bank can be abolished. This is the future; the people's, socialist economy, the real alternative to capitalist barbarity.

This present-day necessity is denigrated, either directly from liberal bourgeois forces, or indirectly from self-styled 'democratic socialist' forces, distorting and maligning its first historic expression in the Soviet Union. However, it is a historical fact that during the 1930s there existed two worlds: the capitalist one that was racked by competition and crisis; and the socialist one that was characterised not only by impressive rates of industrial production, but, more importantly, by impressive rates of development in social prosperity.

The historically confirmed truth is that social ownership and central planning were defeated when the class struggle did not have the knowledge and the strength to proceed towards the extinction of all forms of private property, of all sources of private accumulation of wealth.



huge KKE rally in Athens, 15 May 2010

Due to its positions regarding the different course of social production and organisation of society, the KKE is accused of deferring the satisfaction of the immediate needs of the working people to socialism. This is a conscious lie of the bourgeois and opportunist parties. The KKE was, is and will continue to be firm in its support of the rights and demands of the working people, of the youth, of the pensioners, with consistency between its words and its deeds, because it has a shining compass, a strategic course.

It is for this reason that it is able consistently to defend the right to full-time, stable work, socially-guaranteed protection of the unemployed, of maternity, of working higher education students, trade union rights, farmers' incomes, the rights of small

business owners, of immigrants and political refugees, the exclusively-public free education, healthcare, pensions, the protection of the environment, the struggle against the anti-popular consequences stemming from Greece's accession into the EU and NATO.

The political empowerment of the KKE means the strengthening of a force which can struggle for rights, a force of resistance against the new anti-worker—anti-people attacks by the employers and the government, as well as a force to wrest new gains, a force for workers' and people's interests today and in the future.

■ *First published in International Communist Review, Issue 1, December 2009, at <http://www.iccr.gr/site/en/issue1>*

Notes

1 Eurostat Statistics in Focus, 18/2009; http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/cache/ity_offpub/ks-sf-09-018/en/ks-sf-09-018-en.pdf.

2 Governor of the Bank of Greece, *Annual Report for 2008*, p 33; <http://www.bankofgreece.gr/BogEkdo/seis/Annrep2008.pdf>.

3 The original states "Source: Bank of Greece, p 67" but it is not clear to what this refers. Web sources confirm the 2008 figure for Romania of +7.7% but indicate that the fall in 2009 was -7.2% (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Romania) while for Bulgaria the corresponding figures are +6.2% and -4.6% (http://www.indexmundi.com/bulgaria/gdp_per_capita_%28ppp%29.html) —Ed.

4 SYRIZA is a coalition of 'left' political parties in Greece, including Synapsimos (SYN) (essentially a successor to the Eurocommunist Communist Party of Greece (Interior)), Renewing Communist

Ecological Left (formed by former members of the Communist Party of Greece (Interior)), Internationalist Workers Left (a split from the Greek section of the International Workers Tendency), Movement for the United in Action Left (a split from the KKE), Active Citizens and other organisations. In the 2009 Greek Parliamentary elections, it gained 4.6% of the vote and 13 seats in comparison to the KKE's 7.5% and 21 seats. —Ed.

5 The 2010 *Sunday Times* Rich List showed that the collective wealth of the top 1000 in Britain is £335.5 bn, up £77.3 bn on 2009 — a 29.9% increase, "easily the biggest annual rise in the 22 years of the Rich List"; see *Sunday Times*, 25 April 2010, at http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/specials/rich_list/article7107182.ece —Ed.

6 Governor of the Bank of Greece, *op cit*, p 131.



Capitalism in the 21st Century

By Ian Pinkus

THE STARTING point for this article is that the current economic analysis of capitalism in the 21st century widely signed up to by those on the left is neither coherent nor realistic. The present orthodoxy has a tendency to caricature capitalism. This distorts the role of capitalism both in its historical context and its present-day context. This has the consequence that an achievable and progressive path for socialist theory and action is obscured beneath unrealistic utopian aspirations and plans of action.

The aim of this article is not to offer a fully fleshed-out alternative analysis. It aims to suggest the principal outlines that such an analysis might take and to suggest what the implications of that might be. Every attempt has been made to stay free of technical or esoteric terminology so that the arguments may be accessible to as many as can be bothered to read them.

The starting point must be a realistic appraisal of capitalism. This needs to be an honest critique of what has been achieved under a capitalist mode of production as well as an analysis and

assessment of the state capitalism finds itself in today. ‘Biblical’ references to the works of Marx are off-putting for many but there are few better starting places for an analysis of capitalism than a passage in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*:

“The bourgeoisie ... has been the first to show what man’s activity can bring about. It has accomplished wonders far surpassing Egyptian pyramids, Roman aqueducts, and Gothic cathedrals; it has conducted expeditions that put in the shade all former exoduses of nations and crusades.”¹

The following paragraph begins:

“The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes.”

Marx’s insights into the general, revolutionary nature of capitalist production remains as true today as they ever were.

The critique of capitalism in its present stage of development that appears to hold most sway among those on the left is often distorted by a handful of misunderstandings. Now, it may be that these misunderstandings are more in the minds of the populist commentators than they are in the writings of more profound economic analysts. But it does seem that, even among the ‘professionals’, there is a ‘distaste’ for the capitalist system that distorts a proper appreciation of its revolutionary contribution to human development. This dislike of the capitalist system obscures much of its achievements and leads to an aversion for parts of the system that is not logical – and has serious consequences. It leads to a failure correctly to identify potential growth paths for 21st century socialism.

Capitalism has been extraordinarily successful as a system for organising human economic endeavour. It is not possible to put an accurate statistical

measure on this, but econometric studies do give some idea of just how revolutionary the capitalist system has been. For example, it has been estimated that it took 15,000 years for world per capita gross domestic product (GDP) to double from the time when humans were hunter-gatherers to the middle of the 18th century. In the 250 years that followed, world per capita GDP grew approximately 37-fold. Such calculations may contain all manner of exaggerations and accounting inaccuracies. Nevertheless, it would fly in the face of the obvious to deny that the capitalist system has permitted a spectacularly rapid growth in economic wealth.

Any serious appreciation of this achievement and, thereafter, any critique must start with some attempt to place the emergence and growth of capitalism in its historical perspective. It is important to remember that it took several centuries for the capitalist mode of production fully to supplant the feudal mode of production. It was certainly true that individual capitalists were active, at least as early as the 13th century, especially that group of wool and cloth merchants referred to as ‘clothiers’. But they were individuals who were not, in terms of their economic functions, typical. It would not be until the 19th century that it would be accurate to describe the British economy as capitalist. The feudal mode of production did not suddenly disappear. Feudalism was not suddenly supplanted by capitalism. Rather, it was the case that feudal production and social organisation underwent many changes, some of which came relatively speedily like the change to a money economy, some fairly slowly like the changes in land tenure. These changes, although not in themselves signalling the change to a capitalist mode of production, were necessary preconditions for the emergence of capitalist forms of production, distribution and exchange.

An assumption underlying this article is that such long-term transition from one mode of production to another is a model. It reminds us that such enormous changes in economic and social organisation happen with some degree of haphazard historical occurrence and take place over long periods of time.

I believe that a similar process of transition is occurring from a capitalist mode of production to a socialist mode of production. Feudal society altered as it was required to adapt to changing economic and social circumstances. In so doing it increasingly adopted social,

political and economic structures that were consonant with a capitalist mode of production. My contention is that we should examine modern capitalism from a similar perspective. It should be seen as an economic and social system undergoing continual structural change as it adapts to changes in the economic environment. As these changes occur, appropriate analysis allows us to discern the fledgling beginnings of a new, socialist mode of production.

In this brief contribution I want to concentrate on just three misunderstandings I believe are widely held. These concern:

- 1 the concept of shareholding as a form of business ownership under capitalism;
- 2 the significance of monopoly as a form of business enterprise under capitalism;
- 3 the role of profit under capitalism.

Shareholding

In the consciousness of many on the left the whole idea of company shares, trading in shares and shareholdings is intimately attached to ideas of what it is to have a capitalist system. It is inconceivable that capitalism could exist without this most basic of mechanisms for raising capital, through the sale of shares in a company. And it is just as inconceivable that the system could continue to exist if those shareholders did not receive their share of the profits in the form of dividends. Finally, it is necessary for the continued smooth working of the system that people are free to buy and sell those company shares.

But because the sale of shares, the establishment of joint-stock companies, is a pre-eminent feature of capitalism, it does not necessarily imply that such a method for raising capital is exclusive to capitalism. There is some evidence of joint-stock ventures in Roman times. The trading companies of the 16th and 17th centuries, such as the East India Company, were unquestionably joint-stock companies. In neither this nor the Roman case were such joint-stock ventures operating within a share-trading system and in neither case were they operating within an economy that could be deemed capitalist. Of more modern interest is the manner in which the fundamentally non-capitalist, cooperative movement has, from its first successful inception with the Rochdale Pioneers, mimicked the capital-raising and business organisation

of the joint-stock company. In the formation of a cooperative, as in joint-stock companies, share ownership is especially valuable because it permits an accurate acknowledgement of each individual’s contribution.

The economic importance of cooperatives should not be exaggerated. They are a relatively small part of the British economy. In the second half of the nineteenth century, contemporary with the growth of the cooperative movement, but growing in far greater proportions, was the public company with limited liability. This legal appendage of ‘limited liability’ was to prove crucial and of paramount importance. Much of the attention of economic historians has concentrated on the role played by the introduction of limited liability in permitting private companies to grow larger. Less attention has been paid to the role played by the introduction of limited liability in making feasible the mobilisation of personal savings for the needs of private industry and commerce.

This is important because it helps explain the rapid growth of capitalist forms of production. But, from the point of view of a socialist critique, it is more important because it also marks fundamental changes in the ownership of the capital formation of the country.

In early capitalist Britain the vast bulk of industry and commerce was internally financed. Joint-stock companies were relatively few and far between. Most firms were small family businesses. Investment, both new and to replace worn-out capital, was financed largely through the ploughing back of profits into the business. Of course, some of these family firms flourished and grew both in wealth and influence. By the 1840s this ‘millocracy’, as Marx called them,² was able profoundly to affect parliamentary legislation. But this growth in size posed a problem: larger and larger sums were required for investment.

Joint-stock companies provided the only realistic means of raising such funds. But, for the public at large, buying shares in such companies held real risks. The débacle of the crash in railway shares in the late 1840s demonstrated this amply. Many shareholders were impoverished as their shares proved worthless and their private wealth was taken to pay company creditors. The Limited Liability Act of 1855 was essential. Whether or not it was in the intentions of legislators, this Act, by limiting potential losses shareholders would incur in the case of the company



folding, opened a huge new source of investment funds.

In the second half of the 19th century these new sources of share capital were predominantly provided through the savings of the better-off social classes. Then remarkable changes occurred in the 20th century. Less and less were shares bought and held by individuals. Increasingly, household savings were channelled into funds where so-called professionals (experts!) managed the day-to-day buying and selling decisions. Through the activities of pension funds and other financial institutions, often utilising the savings of low-paid working women and men as well as those of better-off households, a broad section of the British population came to be the owners of vast swathes of the private sector, albeit indirect owners.

These financial institutions are so powerful today that few important decisions can be made by public companies without their agreement. Their shareholdings are so large they cannot be ignored. In most of the major takeover and merger proposals it is these institutional shareholders that make the decision to accept or reject. About 40% of shares on the UK Stock Exchange are in the hands of British financial institutions such as pension funds, insurance companies, unit trusts, investment trusts and banks. The funds used to purchase these shares come from the savings of the household and corporate sectors of the economy. Moreover, the growth of global trading has resulted in these institutions also making significant purchases on foreign stock exchanges. Correspondingly, foreign financial institutions, mobilising the savings of their clients, have purchased a substantial portion of the shares traded on the London Stock Exchange.

If for a moment we distance ourselves from these statistics, stand back and observe what is happening, we cannot help but marvel at the way households all over the land, in all sorts of occupations and with widely varying levels of income and wealth, have allowed their savings to become the working capital of financial institutions that exist largely through the buying and selling of shares. It is not so much the activities of the pension funds and their like that is surprising. Rather it is the way the savings of households have become alienated from their true owners. Typically, those savings are the stored value of people's labour. That labour value, or at least much of it, once it is embodied in savings in the hands of these financial institutions, becomes the

wherewithal of share trading, a great deal of which is purely speculative.

Thus, two remarkable changes have occurred in the development of capitalism. A large part of household savings has been purloined, and siphoned into financial institutions. Some of those savings are used to buy shares, which is to say they are used to buy parts of public companies. Some of those savings are used to buy shares and other financial instruments for purely speculative purposes.

The Significance of Monopoly

A convenient way to highlight the issues raised by monopoly capitalism is to start with the firm that, in Britain, has become the most recognised and most vilified of monopolies – Tesco.

Recent years have seen the full-scale emergence of Tesco as an arch-figurehead of all that is evil in monopoly capitalism. Those on the left, heavily egged-on by some articulate verdant fellow-travellers, have painted a picture of a monopoly which as an employer exploits its employees, as a buyer exploits its suppliers and as a seller exploits its customers. An attempt has been made to encapsulate this malignancy in the term "Tescopoly", which also became the title of a book.³

It is tempting to diagnose the vilification of Tesco as a case of "Tescophobia".⁴ Of course, many of the accusations made against Tesco are justified. They do exploit their workforce, their consumers and, to some extent, their suppliers. But that is not unique to Tesco – it is how capitalism works. By its nature and in essence, capitalism is a competitive system that

encourages all participants to exploit other participants. In this respect Tesco is no different from any other capitalist firm. More to the point, Tesco is probably no less exploitative than the other large supermarket chains or indeed the many small sellers that people the local high streets and markets.

Tesco is successful because large numbers of people choose it for their shopping. These consumers are not acting irrationally. They go to Tesco rather than elsewhere because they can rely on the quality of the goods, the standards of hygiene, the wide choice, the ease with which unsatisfactory goods can be returned, the helpfulness of the staff who work there and, most of all, the lower prices. Generally speaking, the staff at Tesco are paid at least as well as they would be if employed by a small shopkeeper. In addition, their terms of employment are generally better and so are staff facilities.

But the purpose of writing about Tesco is to draw attention to features that are widespread among a number of very large firms in the British economy, firms that are frequently referred to as monopolies. Tesco merely illustrates what is largely the case within capitalism. Large monopoly firms achieve their market domination more through being able efficiently to exploit market conditions than through diabolical degrees of exploitation.

One group of monopolies needs to be mentioned, if only to exclude them from this analysis. These are the state-owned monopolies brought about by the nationalisation of firms in a range of large industries in the 20 or so years after 1945. These were then sold off to the



private sector during the 1980s and 90s. Both as large monopolies in state ownership and as less large and often limited monopolies in the private sector, these firms did not achieve their monopoly power through successful competition against other firms.

There is insufficient space here to analyse the economic and social significance of these monopolies. This is not meant to suggest that they are of less importance. On the contrary, they are a hugely significant aspect of the transitional process through which capitalism has progressed over the last 200 years or so. But that is a story largely built round the failure of some capitalist enterprises and the need for the state to intervene to ensure that failing industries central to the economy could continue to provide external benefits for the rest of industry and commerce.

This article is not about failures of capitalist enterprise, but about successes. It has been a shortcoming of socialist critiques of the development of capitalism that they have too often concentrated on the failures and paid too little attention to the successes. This obscures the possibility that those on the left, trying to navigate a road to socialism, may have much to gain from studying the successes of capitalism.

It is important to clarify what we mean by 'monopoly'. First, Tesco is nothing like a 'true' monopoly. It controls something in excess of 30% of what the Competition Commission refers to as the "one-stop grocery market".⁵ That qualifies it as a monopoly for legal purposes, as it has in excess of 25% control of the market. Nationwide Building Society controls

over 50% of the building society market and Microsoft controls an even higher percentage of the market for computer search engines. Neither of those firms, or for that matter any of the other monopolies and oligopolies such as the big high street banks or the oil companies, appears to arouse anything like the indignation and hostility that Tesco manages to arouse.

It is clear that the word 'monopoly' is broadly used in modern times to refer to very large companies that appear to have some sort of ill-defined control over the market or markets in which they trade. It has a pejorative connotation. Partly this is because not just economists on the left but also traditional, bourgeois, economists are often critical of monopoly and monopoly power. Much space in economics textbooks is taken up with both theoretical and empirical criticisms of monopoly. The problem for bourgeois economics is simple enough. Market competition, whether free or regulated, is regarded as the core guarantee of the capitalist economy. It is market competition that ensures appropriate responses to consumer demand and the consequent efficient allocation of resources in the economy. But monopoly threatens that idealistic competitiveness because monopoly reduces competition. Consequently, all over the world (China included!) countries have laws restricting monopoly activity.

Of course, the reality is that all over the world private-sector monopolies continue to prosper. Rarely does a government dare to intervene and go as far as breaking up a monopoly. Instead, bad-behaving monopolies are fined. For obvious reasons this is a doomed policy. In order to develop as monopolies it is essential that these firms have been able to produce goods or services that consumers perceive as having few close substitutes. This gives those monopolies considerable price-setting power. It follows that, in the vast majority of cases, these monopolies are quite able to pass any fine on to the consumer in the form of higher prices and for the most part they are able to do this without damaging their profits. The consumer pays the monopoly's fine.

Governments and the bureaucrats that implement government policies appear to be inherently suspicious of monopolies, and their distrust often spills over into dislike. Despite this hostility,

there are several reasons why monopolies are able to survive and thrive in capitalist economies. It is not relevant to list them all here but for the purposes of this article two reasons in particular merit attention.

First, there is the innovation argument: that large firms, especially the very large firms frequently referred to as monopolies, are more likely to innovate than small firms. Of course, opponents of this argument are able to point to numerous innovations which have been developed by small and medium large firms. But, there are some industries – the pharmaceutical industry, the aircraft construction industry and the car industry are good examples – where innovation requires such spectacularly large sums of money to be spent on research and development that only very large firms can afford it.

The second reason monopolies are able to live a charmed life under capitalism is the existence of economies of scale. In some industries – perhaps many industries – average costs per unit of output fall as the size of the enterprise grows. This gives larger firms a significant cost advantage over their smaller competitors. These economies of scale are often closely tied in with the innovations already mentioned. For example, it is unlikely that the one-stop grocery firms (Tesco included) would ever have been able to expand to the extent they have, were it not for the introduction of bar-coding.

It should be noted that neither argument – innovation or economies of scale – is dependent on the economic system. In a socialist economy both the introduction of innovations and the exploitation of economies of scale would be highly desirable. They both contribute to the well-being of society. Large monopoly-style producers, suitably motivated to innovate and take advantage of economies of scale, would be highly desirable if the objective of more efficient production techniques was to be integral to a socialist economy.

Profit

Bourgeois economists are prone to play up the role of profits. They would be likely to object to the assertion that the introduction of innovations and the exploitation of economies of scale could be achieved in a socialist economy. They would object that the introduction by firms of innovations and economies of scale is dependent on the incentive provided by the profit motive in capitalist society. In other words, no



Tesco an arch-figurehead of all that is evil in monopoly capitalism
Photo from flickr by SiriolG



profit means no innovations, no economies of scale.

There are two ways of confronting this argument. One is to examine the social, economic and psychological factors that encourage and result in scientific and technological advances. That is a serious and important matter for consideration. It may also be seen as likely to be a long-term project, subject to considerable empirical testing. A second and more immediate approach is to examine the concept of 'profit' and to ask just how intimately it is attached to the bourgeois mode of production.

Taking this second approach may lead to the surprising, but logical, conclusion that there is no reason why socialist enterprises within a socialist economy should not make profits. Here is not the place to suggest a full-blooded analysis of this argument but it is based on a simple enough proposition. This argues that profit in a capitalist society is expropriated surplus wage-labour that is alienated from the worker and appropriated by the owners of capital. The centrally significant feature in that description is not that profit is *surplus wage-labour* but that it is *surplus wage-labour that is 'stolen' from labour*. If, however, that surplus value, that profit, is returned to the worker, as perhaps it might be in a cooperative and as it might be in any socialist organised economy, then the notion of profit loses its negative, inherently capitalistic, bourgeois meaning whilst retaining its ability to act as an incentive to improve production.

It is very easy to fall into the trap of attaching a moral value to the concept of profit. This is probably a mistake and it looks like a form of what philosophers refer to as the naturalistic fallacy. The error is supposedly to take a concept, like profit, that in some way describes an aspect of the objective world and attach to it a moral or ethical value. In this case a reasonable definition of profit might be: the amount by which a business's total revenues exceed its total costs. There are no obvious value-judgements involved in that definition. It says nothing about the goodness or badness of profit nor about the goodness or badness of how that profit is obtained. How profit is obtained, and how it is distributed and used, is another matter and is surely open to value-judgements. There are, we believe, morally acceptable and morally unacceptable ways of obtaining, distributing and using profits. But profit itself is neither good nor bad.

That being the case, we are free to

look at the whole notion of profit and decide whether there are ways in which profit can be integrated into a non-exploitative, socialist economy. For example, it may be that in the long-run, in a socialist, utopian vision of the future, incentives based on individual or corporate greed will no longer be required. In the meantime it might be appropriate to use profit as an incentive. If workers in an enterprise know that the profits they help create will be distributed back to them – similar to a situation that might prevail in a cooperative – then that might well act as an incentive to increase efficiency, to innovate, to invest, to grow.

Conclusion

On the left we share, broadly speaking, a view of capitalism as a form of economic and social organisation that is organised as an exploitative, class-based system leading to widespread inequality and human misery. We must also appreciate its achievements. Above all, it has raised living standards across a large part of the world – and continues to do so. Some of the ways in which this has been accomplished are not exclusive to capitalism.

I have suggested that the concept of profit needs to be detached from its capitalist associations. Wherever economic activity has taken place, most commonly but not exclusively in a money-based economy, profit is derived by economic agents whose total revenue exceeds their total costs. Yes, profit in a capitalist society is the way labour-value is expropriated from one class and appropriated by another. But profit in a socialist society would be labour-value alienated temporarily from one class but then returned to that class.

I have suggested that monopolies that emerge under conditions of capitalist market competition may do so because they are able successfully to innovate and to exploit cost advantages that go with getting bigger. Again, these are not characteristics which are the sole property of a capitalist society. They would be desirable under any progressive organisation of society. Like profit, monopoly describes a particular feature of the world we live in. Neither concept properly contains a value-judgement. Hence, neither concept has a moral denotation.

Finally, this article has noted that under capitalism there has been a hugely significant transfer of the ownership of capital. I have outlined, albeit briefly:

- how at first most capitalist businesses

were financed internally or with contributions from family and friends;

- how subsequently, with the joint-stock company, sources of finance were widened, inviting those willing to speculate with their savings, to buy shares;
- and then how, in the 20th century, these savings, were channelled into industry and commerce through financial institutions.

We might add that government support in 2008 and 2009 for financial institutions that would otherwise have gone to the wall took the process a stage further. The taxpayers' money used to bail out the banks was borrowed money. In other words, not only current savings were finding their way into the finance of industry and commerce, but so now also were future savings.

Yet the truly significant feature of this process is that the people of Britain, people from all social classes, own the bulk of the capital formation of the country. The ownership may be indirect and in many cases it may be complicated by the internationalisation of the process, but ownership it is.

It is here that action from the left might re-focus. It is clear that the financial institutions have not been doing a particularly good job. The pension funds in particular have been performing poorly for a good few years. It is high time that the workers' own organisations took over the collection and investment of their members' savings. No doubt such a project would require changes to the law and would require much campaigning, above all by the trade union movement. But this would be a liberating project. The target would be not just ownership by the working people of Britain of the means of production but, more importantly, the control of the means of production.

Notes

- 1 K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 6, p 487.
- 2 K Marx, *The Future Results of British Rule in India*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 12, p 218.
- 3 A Simms, *Tescopholy: How One Shop Came Out on Top and Why It Matters*, Constable & Robinson, London, 2007.
- 4 See, eg, <http://tescophobia.wordpress.com> – Ed.
- 5 See, eg, Competition Commission, *Supermarkets: A report on the supply of groceries from multiple stores in the United Kingdom*, at http://www.competition-commission.org.uk/rep_pub/reports/2000/446super.htm#full – Ed.

11th international Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

By Ai Ping

It is an honour for me and my colleagues to be delegated by the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to attend this gathering of the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties (IMCWP).

First of all, allow me to convey to you the warm greetings and best wishes of our minister Wang Jiarui and his deputies in the department. This IMCWP is an important platform for communist parties across the world to share information, exchange ideas and hold discussion on certain issues. So far, 10 conferences have been held successfully and today we are gathered here in New Delhi to witness the opening of the eleventh IMCWP.

Secondly, I would like to take this opportunity to brief you on new developments in China and recent endeavours of the CPC. The financial crisis that originated from the United States in 2008 has seriously affected the economy and the livelihood of people of countries in the world. Due to the bad impact of the crisis, the year 2009 has been the most difficult year for China's economic development since the beginning of this century.

In order to deal with this crisis and maintain steady and rapid economic growth,

the CPC and the Chinese government adjusted macroeconomic policies in a timely manner, by adopting a proactive fiscal policy and a moderately relaxed monetary policy, and formulated a package plan to expand domestic demand and promote growth:

- A two-year investment plan with a total amount of 4 trillion yuan has been implemented, involving greatly increased government spending to boost domestic demand and improve the people's livelihood.
- Structural tax relief policies were put in place bringing about several interest rate cuts to allow liquidity of the banking system and to stabilise external demand.
- A wide-ranging industrial restructuring and rejuvenation programme has been initiated to encourage innovation and to enhance energy conservation, emissions reduction and environmental protection.
- Great efforts have been made to expand the domestic market – especially the rural market – to stabilise agricultural development and to increase farmers' income.
- Effective measures have been taken to reform the social security system, in order to ensure access to



Photo from flickr by smiling camel

basic medical services, free compulsory education and affordable housing for urban and rural residents so that they can be free of worries.

Now, these measures have had initial effects, producing some positive signs. From January to September, our gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 7.7 %, the volume of retail sales increased by 15.1 % and state revenue grew by 5.3 % while the consumer price index dropped by 1.1 %. These data show that our domestic consumption is

robust, demand for investment is increasing steadily, the society on the whole is stable and the overall economic situation is about to turn for the better. These countermeasures China has taken against the crisis have not only worked positively on China's economy, but will also serve to help the economy of the region and that of the world at large.

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of new China. In the past 60 years, the CPC and the Chinese people under its leadership have achieved glorious accomplishments



that have attracted world attention: China's economic and overall strength have been greatly enhanced and China has become the third largest economy in the world, with a ranking of third in trade volume also. The livelihood in China has been markedly improved with per capita GDP increasing from \$35 in 1949 to \$3266 in 2008, and life expectancy extended from 35 to 73 years. The moral and ethical standard of Chinese society has been uplifted. A socialist legal system with Chinese characteristics has taken shape; constant effort has been made to promote the rule of law and to improve the overall cultural integrity of our people. The relationship between China and the world has undergone historic changes, whereby the world is paying more and more attention to China. The fate of China and the fate of the world are ever more closely linked together.

Experience in the last 60 years shows that, throughout the primary stage of socialism, we must always take economic development as the central task, take reform and opening up as the driving force to promote all-round economic, political, cultural and social development and to cultivate a sense of conservation among the general public. We must push forward economic and political reform, and reform in other areas, to motivate the entire population for greater enthusiasm, initiative and creativity so as to realise social equality and justice and to fill the country with vitality. We must carry forward socialist democracy, improve the socialist legal system, stick to the rule of law and guarantee the lasting stability of the country. We must enhance and improve party building, carry out in-depth anti-corruption campaigns and bond the party and the

people closer together.

Some parties, due to lack of knowledge about the national conditions of China, think that China has given up Marxism and has deviated from the socialist path, and some even call China's system "authoritarian capitalism". But these accusations are not true. As you all know, China is a large oriental country with a relatively backward economy and culture. China is – and will for a long time remain – at the primary stage of socialism. There are no references in the classics on how to carry forward Marxism and develop socialism with our special national conditions. The CPC has always upheld Marxism as its fundamental guiding ideology, insisted in adapting the basic tenets of Marxism to Chinese conditions and the features of the times, and tried to explore a new road for building socialism. CPC leaders of successive generations have pooled the wisdom of the whole party, drawn upon the experiences and lessons of other countries and established a system of theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the way of exploration, the CPC as the ruling party must learn from all the excellent achievements of human civilisation, including means and management systems which can reflect the laws governing modern social production such as the capitalist market economic system. However, this does not mean that we are pursuing capitalism, let alone changing into it.

On the contrary, our purpose is to improve, consolidate and develop socialism. I am convinced that the unremitting exploration of the Chinese communists, their success in building a stronger China, can not only help enrich and develop Marxism, but also encourage and inspire communists across the world to stick to

socialism. This, I believe, will be a great contribution to the international socialist movement.

Last September, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee was held, where the *Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Strengthening and Improving the Party Building* was adopted and concrete measures were planned out for party-building endeavours in the new period. The main ideas of this document are as follows:

1. The importance of party building under the new situation

Having been at the reins of the government for 60 years, the CPC has proved to be the key to every success made in the country, and its leading position must be upheld unswervingly. In a world that is undergoing great development, transformation and adjustment, China is now faced with a series of new circumstances and new problems. The CPC shoulders huge, complex and heavy tasks in pressing ahead with reform and opening up and with the socialist modernisation drive.

Therefore, it is imperative for the Party to be vigilant to the challenges lying ahead, to be courageous in blazing new trails and to make relentless efforts in self-improvement.

2. Basic lessons for party building

Ideological and theoretical building must be put in first place, to enable the entire membership to have a better command of the essence of Marxism. Party building endeavours must be integrated with the ultimate mission of the Party so as to guarantee its core leadership in socialist development. We must focus our effort on strengthening the Party's governance capability and maintaining its vanguard

nature so that the CPC is always at the forefront of the times. We must always bear in mind that the CPC is meant to serve the public interest and is mandated to exercise state power for the people, and it must maintain close ties with the populace. What is more, the Party must embrace new ideas and new practices in order to enhance dynamism. Last but not least, the Party must exercise self-discipline, be strict with its members and improve management of Party affairs.

3. Future tasks of party building in the new period

The CPC will build itself into a learning-oriented Marxist party and raise its ideological and political consciousness. We must improve democratic centralism and expand internal Party democracy. We must also deepen reform of the personnel system and build a contingent of high-calibre cadres who are more competent in promoting scientific development and social harmony. What is more, redoubled efforts must be made to reinforce primary party organisations, to consolidate the organisational foundation of the Party. Meanwhile, it is also imperative for the Party to carry forward its good style of work and maintain close ties with the people. We must intensify the fight against corruption, accelerating the building of the system for preventing it and punishing it.

FINALLY, I'd like to share with you some of my personal views inspired by the theme of this meeting. At present, the global financial crisis has not yet bottomed out and there are still many potential risks in the world economy. Many politicians and scholars have made extensive studies of the crisis and provided

valuable views. Here are my own perceptions of the cause of this crisis and its impact on global capitalism.

Many people put the blame of this global financial and economic crisis, triggered by the sub-prime mortgage crisis in the US, on 'rampant speculation in the financial market', 'vicious competition' or 'excessive lending' and are expecting to tide over the crisis and achieve recovery by 'regulating' capitalism. In my opinion, this crisis is no different from other crises in history which were caused by the inherent contradiction of capitalism. Such crises cannot be eradicated and will recur periodically as long as the private ownership of capitalism and its inherent contradiction remain unchanged. That is why we have witnessed the repeated crisis-boom-crisis cycle in the development of capitalism. The temporary prosperity at certain times is in fact the presage of another crisis. This ongoing crisis is but another testimony: Karl Marx was right in his judgement of the capitalist economic cycle and that the capitalist mode of production is doomed to failure.

But can we rush to the conclusion that capitalism will die in this crisis? My answer is "No". What we can say is that this crisis will accelerate the transition of capitalism to socialism. Since the mid-20th century, with the new scientific and technological revolution and the self-adjustment of capitalism, coupled with economic boom followed by capital expansion, the capitalist world has experienced a relatively stable and prosperous period. In the past 360 years, since the English bourgeois revolution, the capitalist world has accumulated much experience in handling its crises. At present, there is still room for growth in

capitalist productivity, and the self-adjustment capacity of the capitalist mode of production has not been exhausted. The inherent contradiction of capitalism is represented in complex forms of motion which can be radical at one time and mild at another. As a result, it will take a long time for socialism to replace capitalism. This was also embedded in Marxist thought: "No social order is ever destroyed before all the productive forces for which it is sufficient have been developed, and new superior relations of production never replace older ones before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the framework of the old society."¹ A correct understanding of and response to the development of capitalism can help us obtain a scientific view of reality and adopt the correct policies. I think that, given the current balance of power, capitalism will remain more powerful than socialism for a certain period to come and that socialist countries should deal with capitalist countries with both struggle and cooperation, to sharpen our horns² and broaden our space for survival.

Finally, I wish this conference a complete success.

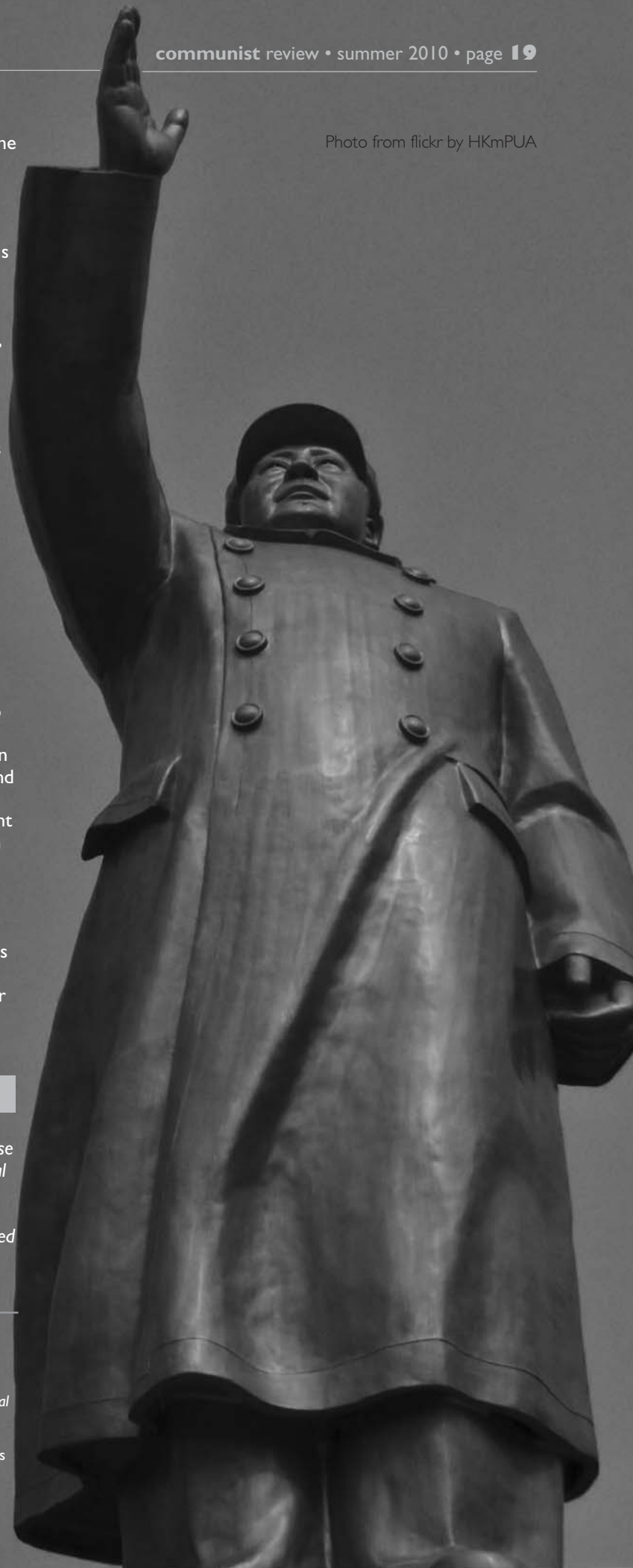
■ *Contribution of the Chinese delegation to the International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties, New Delhi, November 2009 first published at <http://11imcwp.in/content/presentation-cp-china>.*

Notes

¹ K Marx, *Preface to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 29, p 263.

² See, eg, F Piggott, *The Free Seas in War*, p 73, at http://www.archive.org/stream/freeseasinwartal00pigguoft/freeseasinwartal00pigguoft_djvu.txt – Ed.

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Keeping the fires burning

Interview with Antonio E Paris, General Secretary, Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (PKP-1930)

By Ken Fuller

The New Leader

Tony Paris joined the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (now called the PKP-1930 to distinguish it from the Maoist CPP) in late 1969, when it was still illegal.

From the late 1970s onwards, he was given party assignments involving translation work for the Pilipino-language edition of *World Marxist Review*, party work among the urban poor, and leading activity in the peace, friendship and solidarity movements.

Co-opted as an alternate member of the central committee in 1982, Tony became a regular member three years later. The 9th PKP congress in late 1986 saw him elected as an alternate member of the politburo, and he first became a regular member of that body in December 1989.

For some time, he had been planning to take early retirement from his job at the National Food Authority around mid-2009 so that he could devote more time to his party work. Little did he know what was in store for him.

Two weeks after the untimely death of general secretary Pedro (“Ka Pete”) Baguisa on May 30, 2009, the PKP’s political bureau elected Antonio E (“Ka Tony”) Paris to that position, a decision confirmed by the central committee in July 2009.

For some time, however, Ka Tony had been playing a crucial though uncredited role – being employed by a

state-owned company, he could not be publicly identified as a PKP member – by drafting many of the party statements in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The consequence of that momentous event was – as he told me in Manila last December – that in 1993 the PKP “lost practically all our intellectuals, and there were also a great number who left or became passive. Thinking that socialism was something irreversible, they did not expect this to happen. We have to credit Pete Baguisa for taking over the reins of the party. I helped in any way that I could.”

Healing the breaches

Aside from the exodus in the early 1990s, the PKP has suffered a number of splits over the years. Principal among these was the departure of what was in 1967 a small group led by Jose Maria Sison, who had embraced Maoism, but this went on to become the Communist Party of the Philippines, which was itself afflicted with a series of splits in the 1990s. More recently, the PKP’s trade union base was adversely affected by a split calling itself PKP Proletaryo.

Regarding the possibility of healing some of those breaches, Ka Tony says that “there are a number of people who have the qualities we need – they’re ideologically equipped – that we can have back.” He draws the line, however,

against those whose activities have degenerated into “labour-dealing.”

Then there is the prospect of unity on specific campaigns. “We would be open at any time for joint activity on particular issues with any group,” says Ka Tony, “including the Maoist group. The struggle against the continuing presence of the forces of the USA under the Visiting Forces Agreement would be the central point of any unity.”

There are, however, several other areas where joint activity is possible and, indeed, ongoing. “On the issue of solidarity with Cuba, we are able to maintain three groups working together – the Maoist group, the group of Dodong Nemenzo¹ and his friends, and our group.” Then again, “the trade unions, of all groups, will see the need to unite after the 2010 elections,” due to the determination of Congress to review the Labour Code.

In the National Coalition of Rural Women, which played a key role in the campaign to ensure that Congress passed a “Magna Carta for Women,” and is now seeking to ensure that its implementing rules and regulations are not diluted, “the Maoists and some other groups are affiliated, so the unity in the women’s movement is something tangible, at least on very specific issues.”

Strengthening the Party

The strongest PKP-led mass organisation

PKP greetings card depicting a mural of the 1896 Philippine Revolution, and its leader Andres Bonifacio



is called Patamaba² which, ‘midwifed’ by the party-led KaBaPa (Association of New Filipinas)³ and originally based on home-workers, has now organised in several areas of the informal sector of the economy – tricycle-drivers, small vendors, etc. It is largely due to the influence of these two organisations that the National Coalition of Rural Women is headed by Trinidad Domingo, president of KaBaPa and a member of the PKP’s political bureau.

The PKP’s new leadership is devoting considerable attention to strengthening the party.

“One of the changes,” says Ka Tony, “is open recruitment. Instead of people recruiting in an underground fashion, they should give out party statements and ask people what they think of them. We are issuing a sort of primer on what the party is, and at the end we give contact details.

“We have designated people up to the city and municipal levels who should be approached. It’s not an effort that has to be directed by the political bureau or the secretariat; the responsibility of party members at the grassroots level has to be stressed.”

At a meeting to celebrate the PKP’s 79th anniversary last November 7, thirty-five new recruits from Bulacan province were sworn into membership.

Elections 2010

For the May 2010 elections, Ka Tony

said, the party’s vehicle would be the Alyansa ng Mamamayang Naghirap (Alliance of Poor People, or ALMANA), which would vie for congressional seats in the party-list section reserved for organisations representing the marginalised sectors.

“We have to ask comrades to be more active now insofar as ALMANA is concerned, so aside from the organisations that are the core of ALMANA, we told them to organise other people and make ALMANA a real mass organisation. It’s not supposed to be a party organisation.” Interestingly, Ernesto Arellano, who leads ALMANA’s list of nominees, is a former general secretary of the Kilusang Mayo Uno, the trade union centre founded by the Maoists.

The PKP was not committing itself to supporting any candidates for national office until nearer the May 2010 election, but, said Ka Tony, there are “local people who can be supported – mayors, vice-mayors, councillors, even governors – on condition that they have some pro-people track records and will support ALMANA.

“There’s an agreement among the nominees of ALMANA that if only one slot is won, the first three will become congressmen, one for each year. If we get two slots, all five nominees will be able to get a term of at least one year.”

Ka Tony addressing the PKP 79th anniversary celebration



National-Democratic Struggle

The PKP-1930 has long distinguished itself by its consistent anti-imperialism. Indeed, Tony Paris first joined the party as an activist in the Movement for the Advancement of Nationalism, a very broad organisation formed with party leadership in 1967. In the era of globalisation, the party sees part of its role as one of emphasising the anti-imperialist aspects of Philippine history and the consolidation of a national identity which, almost as soon as it sprang to life in the struggle against Spanish rule, was besieged by a new set of foreign influences.

“The national-democratic struggle is primarily a patriotic struggle to free the country from imperialism. That is something with which our party has always been associated. We have our activities during special national days like the recent Bonifacio Day,⁴ when we had a seminar to which we invited people even from government, and it was an attempt to keep the embers of the Katipunan⁴ burning.

“We discussed things like the essence of the Katipunan, and its *Kartilya*,⁵ where we can find some very patriotic and progressive ideas, and of course we proposed that there should be a consistent effort to propagate August 23 as the real Independence Day, because it was the first time on a national basis that the people struggled for freedom under the Cry of Balintawak or Cry of Pugadlawin.⁶ So it should be designated as our real independence day instead of June 12, which was a declaration of the Philippines being a protectorate of the United States, in the words of Aguinaldo himself.⁷

“We also proposed that there should be a consistent effort always to stress that Bonifacio was the first president of the country because he was the president of the Republika ng Katagalugan and it was very clear during those days that ‘Tagalog’ meant the whole people of the Philippines.

“Up to the end of the 19th century in the Philippines, there was a very strong aversion to the use of the term ‘Filipino’, because the name came from Spain, from King Philip. At that time, there was even a clear distinction between the *peninsulares* – the Spaniards who came from Spain – and the local Spaniards, who were the offspring of the Spaniards born in Spain, and who were called ‘Filipinos’. The native people were merely called ‘indios’, and they resented it and wanted to be called ‘Tagalog’. In the documents of the Katipunan, as

well as in the *Vocabulario de la Lengua Tagala* published in Manila in 1860, it is very clear that ‘Tagalog’ referred to all natives of the Philippines.⁸

“These are things we have to stress to keep the fires of patriotism burning”.

Internationalism

“Of course, we’re very consistent with our internationalist work – our solidarity with socialist countries like Cuba and Venezuela, our association with national liberation movements like the Palestine Liberation Organisation, and our work in the international meetings of the communist and workers’ parties.

“We hope we can be more active internationally. Unfortunately, we have a shortage of comrades who can express themselves well in English. We wish we could send more people to these international conferences, but there is also a financial problem. In fact, this was the main reason we were unable to send a representative to the international meeting held in New Delhi in November. I attended the meeting in Syria earlier in the year, but that was a special meeting on Palestine and Arab issues.”

Maguindanao

Tony Paris concluded our interview with a discussion of urgent contemporary issues – the massacre in Maguindanao and the declaration of martial law in that province, and the question of Islamic separatism. Some background information is required regarding the former issue.

Last November 23, at least 57 people, some 30 of them media workers, were massacred in the province of Maguindanao on the southern island of Mindanao. On their way to register the candidacy of Esmel Mangudadatu for the position of provincial governor in the May 2010 elections, they were intercepted by 100 men allegedly led by Andal Ampatuan Jr, a local mayor and also a prospective candidate for governor. Every member of the Mangudadatu convoy was shot dead, the bodies being piled into mass graves dug earlier.

The Ampatuan family has controlled the province since 2001, and is alleged to have played a key role in gaining a dubious victory for Gloria Macapagal Arroyo in the 2004 presidential election and to have engaged in widespread poll-fraud three years later to ensure that the administration’s 12 senatorial candidates were supported in each of the province’s 22 municipalities.

The November massacre was greeted with nationwide outrage, and the

government, regardless of past debts, was forced to act. Initially, a state of emergency was declared in Maguindanao, but there were few arrests apart from that of Andal Ampatuan Jr. Then, claiming that thousands of members of the Ampatuans’ private army were on the brink of rebellion, the government declared martial law on December 4.

The houses of the Ampatuans were raided and huge numbers of arms and ammunition, many of them originally issued to the government’s forces, were recovered. Further members of the Ampatuan family, along with hundreds of their militiamen, were charged. Also recovered were various electoral materials.

There was concern that Ms Arroyo, who must vacate the presidency after the elections, would extend martial law to the rest of the country, or parts of it, as part of a scheme to prolong her stay in power. As various groups challenged the declaration in the Supreme Court, however, martial law was lifted after eight days.

“We issued a statement in Pilipino condemning the massacre,” says Ka Tony, “and of course it’s part of the warlord system in Mindanao, and at the same time a part of the machinery of the administration.

“But we were against the declaration of martial law from the point of view of human rights and civil liberties. Definitely, it was not necessary. President Joseph Estrada was practically able to crush the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) without declaring martial law. It was just a matter of political will.

“We don’t even think that the reaction by the Ampatuans can be considered a rebellion. What we know is that the Ampatuans were calling the administration ingrates and they were talking of certain debts of gratitude that Arroyo should at least acknowledge, and there was some talk that they would be revealing some of their activities to get her elected in 2004 and also during the 2007 senatorial election – where they were the swing-votes and it was a matter of ballot-switching to get 100 percent, and a statistically improbable zero percent vote for the opposition.

“The immediate raids, I think, were more targeted at getting the old ballot boxes and documents of the 2007 elections. I don’t think there will be any more documents of the 2004 election, but definitely the 2007 documents would still be with them.”

Islamic Separatism

The PKP-1930 is also opposed to the memorandum of agreement on ancestral domain (MoA-AD) that was on the brink of signature by the government and the MILF in August 2008 when it was declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. The document would have enlarged the current Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), of which Maguindanao is a part, into a Bangsamoro Juridical Entity (BJE), granting its leaders much broader powers.

“The concept of the Islamic state is something which is anathema to our party,” says Ka Tony, “and definitely the women’s organisations are very concerned. Women will have to wear veils, the practice of polygyny and child brides based on a man’s wealth would be tolerated, and shariah law will have to apply where women will have a very inferior stake in society, whereby the inheritance that women can get is only half of the inheritance of men.

“The MoA was practically produced by the US foundations which are supporting the oil and gas exploration companies in Mindanao, and they wanted an expanded ARMM – even part of Palawan – so that they get the say of the so-called Islamic state regarding the exploitation of resources in the whole area of Mindanao, Sulu and Palawan.

“The MILF is practically just a Maguindanao group. The Moro National

Liberation Front⁹ used to be an amalgamation of all the main tribes in Mindanao and they were forged together by Malaysia during the 1970s after the Jabidah Massacre,¹⁰ when it was learned that there was a move by President Marcos to infiltrate certain agents into Sabah to try to have that state secede from Malaysia and become part of the Sulu sultanate. The original MNLF leaders were trained in Malaysia.

“There were three main tribes in the original MNLF – the Maguindanaos from the Maguindanao/Cotabato/Sultan Kudurat area; the Maranao tribe from the Lanao provinces; and then the Tausugs from Sulu and Tawi-tawi.

“It was Nur Misuari, a Tausug and the foremost intellectual among them at that time, who became chairman of the MNLF, but later on the Americans were very concerned about the influence of Libyan strongman Muammar Gaddafi, so they wanted to break the MNLF, and the best way was along tribal lines.

“The Maranaos became the MNLF reformist wing and broke away from Nur Misuari’s hardline group. Then the Maguindanaos’ leaders were brought to Pakistan and became the MILF. It was primarily from the MILF that some members were recruited to the Taliban – they were trained during the time of Benazir Bhutto to help in overthrowing the national-democratic government in Afghanistan. From the MILF and some

other groups came the Abu Sayyaf.”¹¹

“The MILF now wants to become the head of the Islamic juridical entity. I don’t think even the Maranaos and the Tausugs want that, and I think the only attraction for them is that it would have more powers and tax shares for the BJE bureaucracy. Definitely, the people in the expanded areas of the ARMM will not want to be part of the BJE, as they have already rejected inclusion in the ARMM in the plebiscite held before the formal organisation of the ARMM. The Lumads – or indigenous (non-Moslem) tribes in Mindanao – also do not want to be part of the ARMM.

“The main reason the US wants this BJE to be approved, despite the Supreme Court decision that it’s unconstitutional, is that the Islamic juridical entity will give the US imperialists the authority to undertake all the exploration without having to pass Manila. Because if we talk about the national government, we talk about the constitutional requirement that 60 % of any company undertaking the exploitation of natural resources should be owned by Filipinos.

“By talking just to the MILF, who are practically their stooges, the US imperialists will get everything. This is the main issue in Mindanao.”

■ Ken Fuller’s book, *Forcing the Pace, can be ordered from <http://uppress.com.ph>.*

Notes

1 Francisco ‘Dodong’ Nemenzo Jr., who retired a few years ago as President of the University of the Philippines, led a split from the PKP in 1972.

2 *Pambansang Tagapag-ugnay ng mga Manggagawa sa Babay* (National Network of Homeworkers) was formed by homeworkers from nine provinces in 1989.

3 *Katipunan ng mga Bagong Pilipina*, formed in 1975.

4 This celebrates the birthday of Andres Bonifacio on November 30. Of relatively humble origins, Bonifacio was the founder of the *Kataastaasan Kagalanggalang na Katipunan ng mga Anak ng Bayan* (Highest and Most Respectable Society of the Sons of the People, or Katipunan) in 1892 and the first leader of the Philippine Revolution against Spanish rule in 1896. After more prosperous elements joined the revolutionary cause, Bonifacio was eliminated and replaced by Emilio Aguinaldo.

5 The *Kartilya* was basically a primer, written by Emilio Jacinto, issued to Katipunan members. Jacinto was also editor of the Katipunan newspaper *Kalayaan* (Liberty).

6 On August 23, 1896, the Katipuneros, after a meeting at which it was decided to proceed with the Revolution, destroyed their cedula [identification cards that had to be carried at all times –Ed] and cried “Long live freedom! Long live the people!” There is some dispute as to whether this occurred in

Balintawak or Pugadlawin.

7 Philippine independence was ‘granted’ by the USA on July 4, 1946. Thus, for two decades the date of the former coloniser’s own Independence Day was also celebrated in the Philippines. During the presidency of Diosdado Macapagal (father of the current incumbent), in 1964 the date was changed to June 12, based on the declaration of independence by Emilio Aguinaldo in 1898. Macapagal, however, was being less of a nationalist than he pretended, for Aguinaldo had compromised the independence he declared by stating that the proclamation was made “under the protection of the Mighty and Humanitarian North American Nation.” In February 1899, after the USA had already ‘purchased’ the Philippines from Spain for \$20 million by means of the Treaty of Paris, the outbreak of the Philippine-American War ensured that the US Congress accepted its new status as a colonial power.

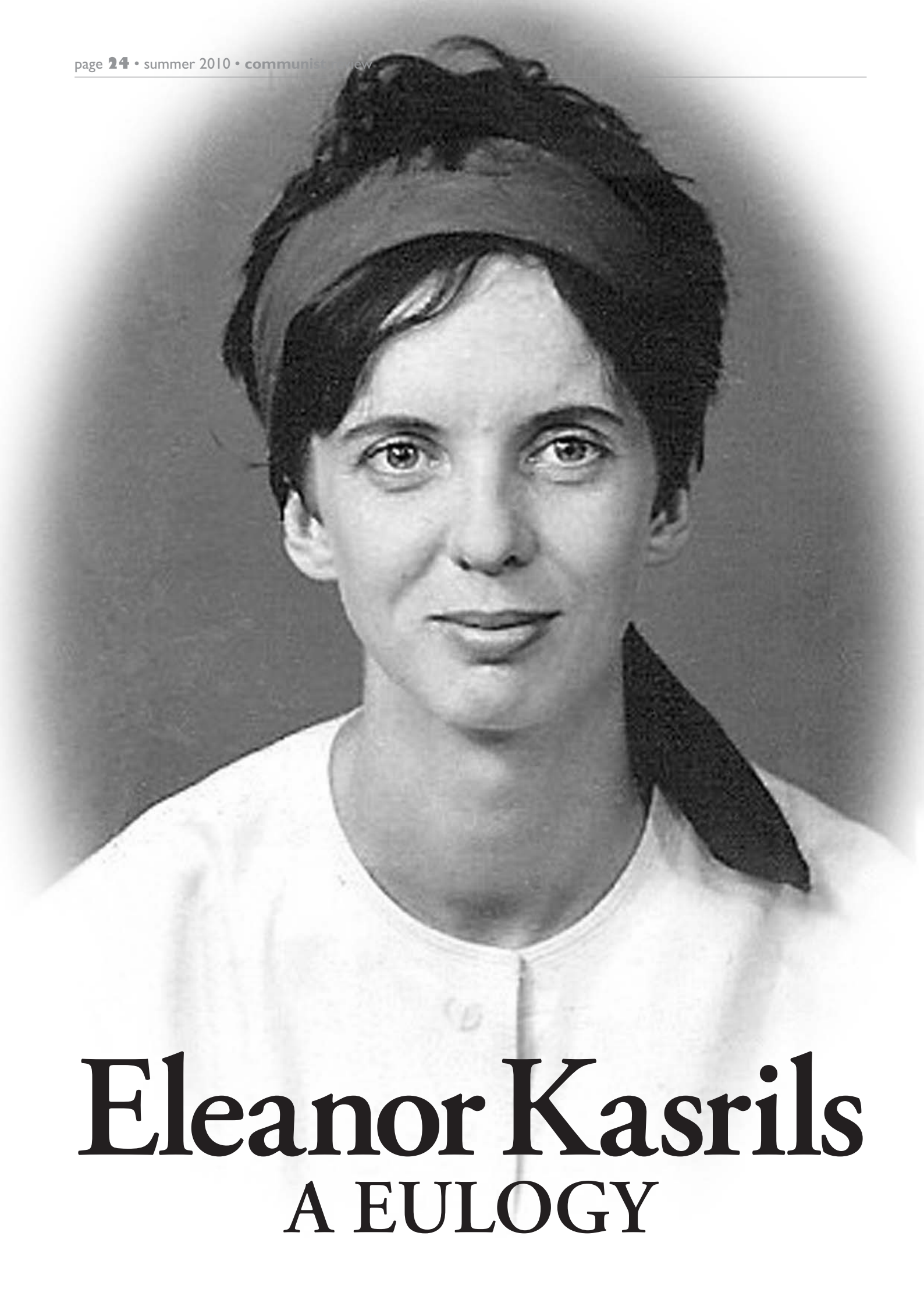
8 There are 40-odd major cultural-linguistic groups in the Philippines. The Tagalog region covers the provinces of Bulacan, parts of Nueva Ecija, Cavite, Rizal, Bataan, Quezon, Laguna, Batangas, Aurora, Marinduque, Mindoro, parts of Camarines Norte and northern Palawan, and Metro Manila. The national language, Pilipino, is based on Tagalog.

9 Formed in 1972, the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) signed a peace deal, brokered by Libya, four years later. This failed and hostilities

resumed. In 1996, a more comprehensive agreement was signed, as a result of which MNLF leader Nur Misuari became governor of the ARMM. Under-funded and with insufficient powers, the ARMM has also failed. Frustrated, Misuari on several occasions threatened a resumption of the independence struggle. In 2001, several hundred of his supporters attacked government positions, as a result of which Misuari fled to Malaysia, which promptly repatriated him. Charged with rebellion, he was confined for several years, but released in 2007 to campaign for the governorship of Sulu as an administration candidate. The charges against him were withdrawn in 2009 as the judge deemed that the government was unable to prove its case. In 2010 he is again running for the governorship of Sulu – as a candidate of the party headed by Christian evangelist Eddie Villanueva!

10 In 1968, Muslim soldiers (between 28 and 60 according to the government, over 200 according to the MNLF) were murdered while training on the island of Corregidor in Manila Bay after they rebelled, having learned that the government’s intention was to send them to Sabah (North Borneo), held by Malaysia since the creation of that country in 1963 but claimed by the Philippines.

11 Activity in Afghanistan also figured heavily in the formation of the more extreme Abu Sayyaf (Bearer of the Sword), a group which engages in plain banditry.



Eleanor Kasrils

A EULOGY

By Ronnie Kasrils

My wife of 45 years, Eleanor Kasrils, who famously escaped from South African police custody in 1963, was unassuming and modest to a fault. She would have been among the last to believe she merited an obituary in the London *Guardian*, let alone much of the South African press, which unanimously referred to her as “a staggeringly courageous woman ... who will not be forgotten.” Neither would she have expected a memorial of the magnitude that took place in Cape Town or London “to celebrate her life” – with moving tributes from President Jacob Zuma and former President Thabo Mbeki, and messages from China, Cuba, Russia, Palestine and Ireland’s Gerry Adams, amongst others.

She was a naturally kind person with no pretensions and never sought the limelight. She was elegant and refined in her manner and it was my privilege to share a life-time’s relationship with her.

President Zuma’s words recalled a woman of principle who “demonstrated great bravery, resourcefulness and initiative ... resolute in her commitment to the people of South Africa and to the cause of freedom everywhere.” Former President Mbeki wrote: “... as she moved among us with an easy grace, she carried no megaphone to broadcast a message of self-praise, nor any banner to proclaim that she had courageously dedicated her life to serve the people.”

The South African Communist Party (SACP) paid tribute to Eleanor’s

courageous contribution in sabotage actions against the apartheid regime in the early 1960s, her arrest and escape from custody, and her “work in exile which epitomises all of the best features” of her remarkable contribution.

The Congress of South African Trade Unions stated: “She will always be remembered as one of the heroines of our struggle, who spurned the opportunity for a privileged lifestyle in apartheid South Africa, so that she could devote her life to the service of the people.”

Cuba’s former foreign minister, Jorge Risquet, wrote: “News of the passing of Eleanor has shocked and saddened us. We remember the way she obtained Che Guevara’s book when she worked in the Durban bookshop [in 1962] and the way in which the strong bond of friendship between us was born ...”

From Ireland Gerry Adams wrote: “I am honoured to have known Eleanor Kasrils, as a sister in struggle and as a friend The role of support to Sinn Fein that friends like Eleanor have given cannot be overstated ...”

A young Palestine Solidarity activist who attended the *Celebration of Eleanor’s Life* in Cape Town, and like Eleanor had studied and loved art, offered the following observation: “Whilst sitting in the service, listening to the speakers – all of whom seemed to reflect different dimensions of Eleanor’s life – and looking at the wonderful photographs of Eleanor ... I thought, Eleanor’s life *itself* is her masterpiece – a true work of art. And it will live on in every person she has

touched along the way.”

Eleanor would have been surprised by the outpourings of love and affection that so many friends from all over the world have conveyed. Such tributes have greatly fortified us as a family. It was fitting to have a memorial service in London, the place where Eleanor lived as an exile for over 26 years, from 1965 to 1991 – all that time in a modest, low-budget apartment off a narrow service lane in Golders Green. She resided there longer than anywhere else – including Durban where she grew up.

The memorial events have been extremely moving and inevitably sad and bitter-sweet; for with the agony of her passing is the acknowledgement of a life rich in joy and fulfilment, with uplifting and inspiring memories. The photographic slide-show was lovingly put together with musical selections which Eleanor – a person whose home was filled with melody and flowers – adored.

With respect to the musicians featured, she had met Pete Seeger in Dar es Salaam in 1964 and took him to the ANC office to perform for the comrades. His *If I Had a Hammer* became something of an anthem for the ANC and Eleanor admired its simple call for love, freedom and justice. When she worked as a geology technician at South London College in 1973, a jazz musician colleague roped her in to help stage a tour for the legendary Sonny Terry and Brownie McGee from America’s Deep South, whose *God and Man* became one of Eleanor the atheist’s favourites. On hearing this played at our

secular memorial meeting in Cape Town, Archbishop Desmond Tutu beamed with sheer delight.

Of some of the other music played, we danced cheek-to-cheek to Ella’s *Our Love Is Here To Stay* from the early days of our passion way back in the Durban of 1961, to most recently in the quiet of the evenings in our new home by the sea overlooking the grandeur that is False Bay, near Cape Town. Robbie Burns’ *My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose* was our best loved poem. She was of course a Scottish lassie who came to South Africa as an infant – one of Scotland’s “finest exports” as Brian Filling, of Scottish Anti-Apartheid, has reminded us. Her father and male lineage on both parents’ sides were Kilmarnock engineers, who came out of working class apprenticeships as fitters-and-turners and boilermakers. Her maternal uncle, Jack MacDonald, was a fighter pilot killed in action in 1943.

This stood us in great stead, when Joe Modise, former commander of the ANC’s military wing, asked me to propose a toast to the South African Air Force at a banquet in Pretoria in 1993, prior to our first democratic election, and before amalgamation of our armed forces. Rising next to my elegant wife, and mentioning that her uncle had been a pilot in the RAF, I soon put paid to their nightmares about having to work with ‘terrorists’ such as Joe Modise and Red Ron.

Eleanor explained her Scots background to Hilda Bernstein in a 1990 interview: “My father ... went to Scotland [in 1935] to serve an apprenticeship. He met my



mother there. They returned to South Africa just before the war when I was six months old. I never knew myself as being Scottish, but always South African. And now there's this anomaly: I've got a British passport, and it says 'Born in Scotland'. But in fact I am South African."¹

Eleanor was influenced by the works of Robbie Burns – lines such as “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn.”² She had an abiding sense of what was right and what was wrong and the need to stand up for justice and the poor – which was why she loved Pete Seeger’s *Hammer Song*. As a dutiful daughter growing up in Durban, under rather tight parental control, she enjoyed the artistic leftish circles her parents gravitated to which fed her curiosity about life’s magic. Amongst other pursuits she loved to go fishing with her father. She would adroitly bait the hooks and learn many skills from him.

After the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960, and a divorce from a claustrophobic marriage, she exulted in a new-found freedom she had never in her life experienced and joined the fight for justice, equality and democracy in South Africa. Eleanor was soon defying the apartheid state in protest demonstrations and joined the outlawed South African Communist Party (SACP). She became one of the first women to be recruited into the ANC’s military wing, Umkhonto We Sizwe (Spear of the Nation or simply MK). After serving as a get-away driver, she graduated into carrying out acts of sabotage – priming with her deft fingers the first home-made timing devices in active service for the freedom struggle. She personally participated in several operations, including audacious bomb attacks on the Durban Central Post Office, offices of the Security Police, and the destruction of

electricity pylons.

Her creativity was displayed when she assisted in breaking into a dynamite depot near Durban. She pre-empted muscular male plans to use heavy-duty metal cutters by managing to check the trade-mark and number of the huge padlock on the outer gate and patiently shopped around at hardware stores for a matching set with accompanying key – which she duly discovered. It did the trick and a huge haul of commercial explosives was the reward which was put to exceptional use. When the Security Police later raided her small Durban cottage in search of her partner she sat cross-legged on the bed, coolly deflecting questions about his whereabouts, knowing it would just be a matter of time before they discovered her own seditious activities. He was hiding in a cavity under the floorboards. She lived on her nerves for several months, providing the comrades on the run with desperately needed support. Fellow MK operative Ebrahim Ismail (ex-Robben Island prisoner and currently a deputy minister in South Africa’s Government) recalls Eleanor’s contribution during those turbulent times:

“I knew Eleanor from 1960 when she was a young revolutionary activist in Durban I have fond memories of participating with her in many public demonstrations ... it was a time when the ANC was banned and the apartheid regime was determined to destroy all forms of resistance Eleanor worked for a large book firm and was of great assistance to the underground, often using the bookshop for clandestine messages ... she was our contact point ... even in the most difficult of times she had a fantastic

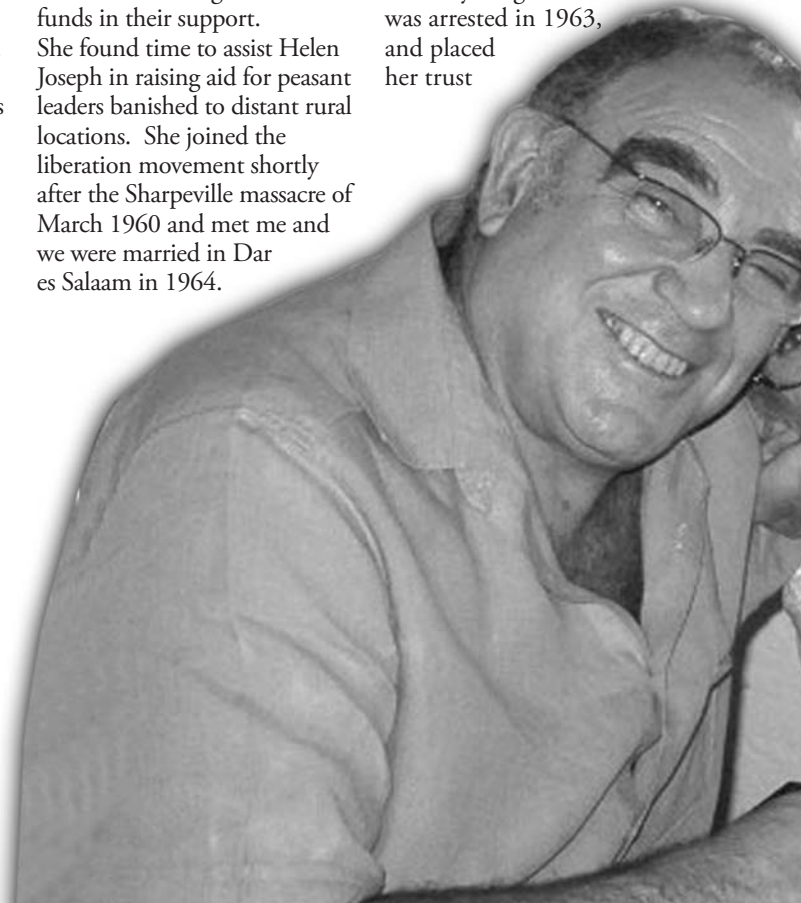
sense of humour, and for many of us who lived underground, being hunted by the security police, she was a great source of inspiration She never lost her discipline and her commitment to the liberation of South Africa never wavered.”

In the wake of the Rivonia arrests of the ANC-Communist Party’s leadership in 1963 Eleanor secretly liaised with Bram Fischer, Hilda Bernstein and the remnants of the underground, taking huge risks to keep the fugitives supplied with funds, information and instructions.

She had graduated to MK activity after first serving in trade union work. As a shop assistant in a bookstore she succeeded in organising shop workers into the South African Congress of Trade Unions. When black nurses at the King George VI Hospital went on strike Eleanor was in the forefront of raising food and funds in their support. She found time to assist Helen Joseph in raising aid for peasant leaders banished to distant rural locations. She joined the liberation movement shortly after the Sharpeville massacre of March 1960 and met me and we were married in Dar es Salaam in 1964.

Eleanor was one of that rare breed of white South Africans who was willing to give up the privilege of their colour and background and had the courage to opt for active struggle. This was despite the fact that she was a divorced, single parent with a young daughter from a marriage entered into when she was only nineteen and which she soon discovered had been a grave mistake. ANC leader Pallo Jordan referred to Eleanor as “a human being who could not stand by” as apartheid destroyed her country and its disenfranchised people.

South Africa would be a different place indeed if the Eleanors of this world had opted for personal security, ease and privilege and simply the wringing of hands in the face of tyranny. She was most protective of her daughter and did everything she possibly could to shield her from danger. She was able to utilise the convenient presence of her parents to assist with caring for her young child when she was arrested in 1963, and placed her trust



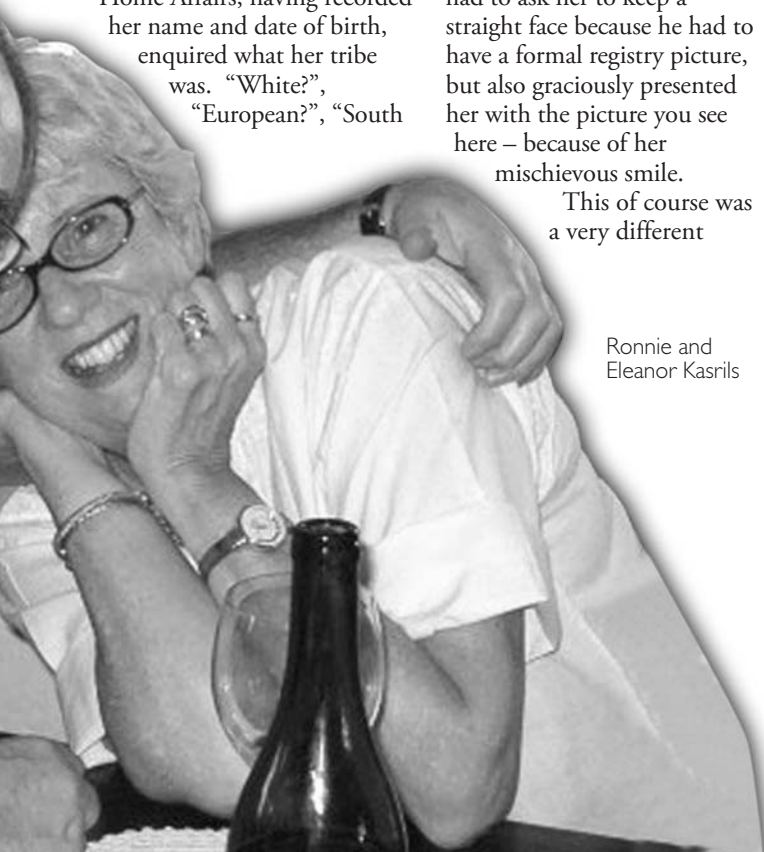
in them. Unfortunately the wealth they made from their business during the apartheid years, and the climate of fear and intimidation that prevailed, saw a rift opening between them and their communist daughter after her daring escape from custody and flight across the border into exile. Eleanor's expectation that her parents would send her daughter to join her was not to be. Hilda Bernstein carefully chose the term 'rift' in her book title about the pain of exile.

The photograph on page 24 is of a young twenty-seven year-old Eleanor with her natural blond hair dyed black, wearing a headscarf. That was taken at Home Affairs in Dar es Salaam where we registered as new arrivals, having just escaped from South Africa at the end of 1963. Her hair was dyed because of her daring and dramatic escape from police custody. She was disguised 'on the run' first as a boy and later as a Muslim woman. She has an impish smile in that picture. The official from Home Affairs, having recorded her name and date of birth, enquired what her tribe was. "White?", "European?", "South

African?" were all tried and found unacceptable. "Scottish!" she suddenly suggested, and that was appropriate. "A fine tribe" the official commented. The occupation of her father was the next question. "Agent" she demurely answered, for indeed he was an agent for some German firm. The room went quiet – much too quiet. A second official, to our horror, now showed interest. "An agent for what country?" he enquired. "For Germany" was the answer. "How is it that your father, a Scot, is working as an agent for the Germans?" Now she realised the mistake, and hastily made amends, putting them perfectly at ease by explaining that she meant her father was an agent for a German manufacturing company. "You know, like the Wabenzi" she joked, using the Swahili term for the Mercedes Benz their elites aspired to, and everyone laughed. By the time it came to take the passport-type photographs, everyone was still smiling. The photographer had to ask her to keep a straight face because he had to have a formal registry picture, but also graciously presented her with the picture you see here – because of her mischievous smile.

This of course was a very different

Ronnie and Eleanor Kasrils



experience to her arrest by the South African security police. They were brutal, and vindictive too, and she fought back by going on hunger strike. This greatly disturbed them because they were nervous of holding a white woman in detention. There is a picture of a police mug-shot, taken at that time, in which she looks exhausted, drawn, tense, but seething with anger and utterly defiant. A slight person physically, she could show great mental toughness in the face of adversity. Feeling desperate, knowing that senior leaders she had worked with had broken in interrogation, and were in the words of the police "singing like canaries", impelled her to get out word of such setbacks, and to plan an escape. She outwitted her interrogators and compelled them to transfer her under doctor's orders to a mental home, Fort Napier. When they arrived at the forbidding-looking Victorian institution they told her that she thought she was smart, "but just wait until you see where you will now be housed." Confinement was in the lock-up for the criminally insane, with barred windows, padded cells, fortress-type doors. She amazingly adapted and soon got used to the poor drugged women she had to spend time with, pilfering a little money and some articles of clothing for the escape she was planning. When she heard that the Security Police would be coming to transfer her back to prison, she managed to persuade an African nurse to leave a door unlocked for a crucial few minutes very early one morning, and strolled out of the lock-up, through the asylum's grounds disguised as a staff member, past the unsuspecting guards, and exited by the main gate.

A young friend has written about how she got Eleanor to talk of the escape. Eleanor did so "without a hint of bravado, as if anyone could have arranged such an escape," she

wrote and continued, "She seemed to feel that her own role in the struggle, and the years of support for Ronnie and the children, hardly merited a mention"

Wonderful photographs of Eleanor were on view at the memorial. Her lovely smile, vivacious laugh, and zest for life are apparent in virtually all of them: from the gorgeous child, through to the endearing teenager, adoring young mother, and the elegant adult in the autumn of her life. There is a wedding-day photograph in Dar es Salaam where for the first time in over two years Eleanor had been to the hairdresser. Her fair hair is piled high in the then current style. When the ANC comrades beheld this transformation from the down-at-heel, emaciated refugee with whom they had been living and working, they exclaimed in surprise: "You look like a European lady!"

I am reminded about these anecdotes because of the wit, verve and delight in life they show – qualities she maintained to the end. It is a huge testament to her inner strength and will that she remained staunch and true to her principles and commitment through the decades. Whilst she kept the family together through love and hard work, uncomplainingly enduring many years of privation and domestic grind in exile, imprinting on her young sons, born in London, the shining values they possess, she still found time to teach and inspire a younger generation of revolutionaries the skills of clandestine work and disguise.

In 1988 she was accused by a Tory MP, close to the South African security police, of "recruiting and training terrorists" from her Golders Green residence in London; but when she challenged him to make his statements outside the British Parliament he backed off. Under the banner headline "MP names London Terror Cell" an *Evening Standard* (3 November 1988)



front-page story ran: “Leading members of the ANC ... are openly walking the streets of London and recruiting potential terrorists, a Tory MP (Andrew Hunter) has claimed ‘From a flat in Golders Green, Ronnie Kasrils’s wife, Eleanor, orchestrates terrorist activities in South Africa’”

She had indeed continued with her quiet, behind-the-scenes role of assisting MK and the underground movement from exile, but this was never the work of ‘terrorism’ as the apartheid regime alleged. Under the threat of spies and surveillance, and the dangers that dogged her no less than others, she managed somehow to find the precious time – even whilst working for a living as a chief technician and administrator in London educational institutes – to continue to take the risks for the cause. And few in the movement were aware of this fact or the huge personal sacrifices that were entailed.

Her comrade and fellow underground worker Bill Anderson has provided a unique portrait of Eleanor which is worthy of quoting:

“The obituaries to Eleanor have spoken of her courage and loyalty in the early years of MK. I would like to place firmly on the record the role that Eleanor played for three whole decades in the ranks of MK. Throughout the years of exile London was an important sphere of the underground struggle. It provided a range of services, technologies and resources that were hard to come by [elsewhere] And it was not always friendly terrain. It required operatives who were credible, discreet and professional. Eleanor was one of the best.

“Communications

between the independent African states and South Africa were often treacherous. Eleanor provided an array of relays: public phone boxes, safe postal addresses, clean couriers. And in moments of crisis, as when an operational unit faced meltdown, Eleanor was there – to calmly patch links together between the comrades in the field and their commanders in the rear. In matters of disguise she was an expert. Where do you find a wig for an African that won’t make him look like Shaft? Where can you buy a priest’s cassock and dog-collar? And what kind of questions are they going to ask you in this very proper shop in the backstreets of Victoria? Sophisticated surveillance technology went commercial in the eighties. Eleanor not only knew her way round the catalogues; she discovered a string of gadget shops on the Edgware Road that were as good as the posh establishments of Mayfair. And a whole lot safer.

“Eleanor was a supremely good people-person. She had a particular ability – a mix of the personal and political – to recruit non-South African sympathisers into the struggle, and to persuade them to do some pretty brave things. Not only from abroad but inside South Africa as well. Safe houses, couriers, reconnaissance missions – Eleanor handled them all.

“So how does one assess Eleanor’s role?

“It is possible to

paint a picture of Eleanor as loyal mother, wife and comrade – earning a living, looking after home and family – with Ronnie away at the front – and helping out whenever she could. This is indeed true, but insufficient.

“To the extent that the ANC was, for thirty years, dependent on its underground structures to keep the movement alive, and to the extent that the underground, operating primarily in an urban terrain, required a multifaceted technical infrastructure to survive, it was people like Eleanor who provided one indispensable part of the skeleton on which the political body flourished. In this role she was a true professional, and judged as such she emerges with flying colours.”

Working for the ANC in exile and later in government as wife to an activist and then minister, was no bed of roses and entailed much hard work and responsibility. Eleanor had worked in the Dar es Salaam office for the ANC during 1963-65, where she was amongst the few relied on by a very demanding Moses Kotane, formidable leader of both the ANC and SACP. He selected her as his driver and entrusted her to assist him with banking ANC funds. She had been singled out also to assist ANC President Oliver Tambo in Tanzania; and again after he returned to South Africa in 1991, until his death in 1993.

In later years, after returning to South Africa in 1991, she was constantly at my side after I became a minister in the new democratic government. She was an outstanding representative of South Africa on ministerial visits abroad or when needing to entertain

important guests at home. She never failed to impress with her easy-going charm and cultural knowledge and pursuits. She made life-long friendships across the international divide – east and west – with government representatives and popular movements alike, as attested to by the tributes received from Russia, Ireland, Palestine, Algeria, Holland, Britain, China and Cuba. The last-mentioned never forgot how, as a book-store assistant in the early 1960s, she had outwitted apartheid censorship by importing Che Guevara’s *Handbook on Guerrilla Warfare*, distributing copies to comrades before the loophole was plugged.

Her personal kindness has been much referred to. A female government official whom she befriended wrote that she “was always there supporting Ronnie, a quiet but powerful force in the life of the Department of Water Affairs.” Eleanor’s caring touch is remarked upon by the same friend: “I still have a precious little orchid that Eleanor bought for me at a street market in Bali during the negotiations in the run-up to the World Summit on Sustainable Development, knowing how much I like orchids. That generosity of spirit and her irreverent spirit that brought that orchid back home I will always carry with me”

Eleanor was a true, dear friend to so many. The perception some may have had of her initial reserve was generally regarded as shyness or even a slight aloofness. But this was rather because she never rushed into making hasty, impulsive decisions or friendships. She needed the space to decide whether she could trust new acquaintances. Where she felt at ease, a natural rapport would flow.

It is thought that revolutionaries have to combine the qualities of both love and ruthlessness, comparable to the metaphors

of flowers and stone – soft and beautiful yet at the same time hard and tough. She was certainly as diaphanous as daffodils but never harsh and unfeeling. She was like bamboo – with the suppleness and strength of that lithe plant – capable of riding out the fiercest and most prolonged of storms. That was the strength she shared with her African sisters, best exemplified in the struggle song: “Once you have struck a woman you have struck a rock.”

A young friend of our sons, who played with them in our Golders Green home many years ago, now a university lecturer, has written: “I remember Eleanor as a warm and funny adult, one of the fixed points of kindness in our child’s eye view of the world. It is extraordinary to learn that she managed to be all those things while also pursuing a political vision with such commitment. It makes me think of something I have just been teaching – W B Yeats has a line about the woman he was in love with, regretting the way her commitment to revolutionary politics had hardened her (‘Too long a sacrifice can make a stone of the heart.’³) – now whenever I read that line, I think of Eleanor and know that it isn’t inevitable.”

The same writer remembers how Eleanor had provided a lunch of hot dogs and had assured him that she had specially bought kosher sausages for him. He comments: “What an extraordinary thing for a revolutionary communist to bother over. It suggests a kindness of humanity, a generosity, where you might expect to find revolutionary intolerance.”

So many friends have remembered Eleanor in touching ways. A Durban struggle veteran from the 1960s, Eric Singh, writes: “If looks can deceive then that person was Eleanor. For the stranger it would be difficult to believe that this quiet-spoken,

dainty woman had the heart of a lion ... with guts unlimited ...” Magdalene Louw, our house-keeper in government residence, paying tribute at the Cape Town memorial service, said: “Thank you Eleanor for everything you have done for me. Since the first day I worked for you in 1994, I appreciated your fairness. Sometimes without saying a word, but seeing you with a beautiful smile made me feel comfortable You were my doctor when I was sick. You were my psychologist when I felt depressed. You were my financial advisor when I struggled. You were my life saver when my problems became too much, I never regret sharing my confidential life with you. I always knew you were there to help me. Oh, my special days with you!”

From Ireland, Declan Kearney of Sinn Fein wrote: “As we exchanged hugs and goodbyes outside historic Kilmainham gaol, Dublin, in February 2007, Ronnie said we ‘are family now’. We think fond memories of Eleanor ... a lovely woman with whom we really connected We will always recall that evening in Dublin when we dined, drank, laughed and danced ... and you Eleanor led the way. And then, how we all stood and watched the lunar eclipse. Now Eleanor has become one of the beacon stars in the sky to guide us all.”

Eleanor was a revolutionary, courageous, principled and of high moral integrity, who gave up her own security and privilege to fight for freedom and justice for the oppressed. This she did without any thought of gaining high position or reward. She suffered immeasurably in the process, as a very vulnerable mother, from the long estrangement from her daughter. Yet Eleanor came to reconcile with her parents, which for them was made easier by the ANC’s rise to power, vindicating the choice

their daughter had made. Back in South Africa she affectionately nursed them both through long periods of illness before they died. She loved her children and did everything she could for them. As President Zuma stated: “She was the glue that held her family together ... she had to overcome the hardships of separation, uncertainty and insecurity. She did so with grace and resolve, without complaint or self-pity.”

Despite those times, including over many years physically living apart from her husband (between 1977 and 1991) when he was deployed in southern Africa, the relationship managed to deepen and mature. It was indeed a joyous and privileged bond of affection that lasted 48 years – not the fortune of that many couples.

When death came – as it must come to us all – it crept in on us suddenly, like a thief in the night. She had been under the surgeon’s knife more than once and she bore the scars, the aftermath, the constant medication bravely and stoically. Mercifully the massive stroke that smote her took her life swiftly, within a matter of hours. The preceding days had seen her in delightful spirit. We had taken our favourite walk along the coastal shore, where the whales visit to calve in spring, down to the small fishing harbour, hand in hand like a pair of young lovers, delighting in a wonderful sunlit day that tinged, as ever, her limpid grey eyes with a blue sparkle. We sat at our favourite restaurant sipping chilled wine and eating freshly-caught fish and watched the fishing boats come in and the sun set over the magnificent bay where we had made our home.

Her beautiful white hair was feathery soft and downy, and much remarked upon. She showed confidence and ease in her stylish preferences for she had long resisted any attempt to interfere with the

inevitable greying process and looked even more glamorous as a result. Everyone who knew her, and had seen her in the previous weeks, remarked how happy she looked and they have that as their abiding memory of her – and of the two of us together.

Birth and death are the book-ends of a life that can encase few or many chapters; eventful or mundane, heroic or apathetic, significant or trivial. Eleanor’s life-span was 73 years, and the episodes that made up her life are truly amazing in their relevance and value: for us as a family; for her many friends; for the people of South Africa; for the international community. This was a remarkable woman, whose ashes merge with the indigenous Assegai tree, so symbolic of the ANC and MK, which we planted in Kirstenbosch Gardens. She was indeed a lovely human being for whom it can be said: “*she never lacked appreciation of earth’s beauty or failed to express it; she looked for the best in others and gave the best she had*”.

**ELEANOR JANETTE
MARGARET KASRILS**
9 March 1936 –
8 November 2009.

■ *Based on Ronnie’s address at the memorial meeting, “A Celebration of Eleanor’s Life”, Cape Town, 14 November 2009, and South Africa House, London, 14 December 2009. Slightly edited, with Ronnie’s agreement, by Ken Keable.*

Notes

1 H Bernstein, *The Rift: The Exile Experience of South Africans*, Jonathan Cape, London, 1994 – Ed.

2 R Burns, *Man Was Made to Mourn*; see, for example, *Poetical Works of Robert Burns*, W Wallace ed., Chambers, London & Edinburgh, 1948, p 85 – Ed.

3 W B Yeats, *Easter 1916*; see <http://www.online-literature.com/frost/779/> – Ed.

REFLECTIONS OF FIDEL

The Dangers that are

By Fidel Castro Ruz

THIS IS NOT an ideological issue related to the irremediable hope that a better world is and must be possible.

It is known that homo sapiens has existed for approximately 200,000 years, equivalent to a minuscule space in the time that has passed since the first forms of elemental life on our planet emerged around three billion years ago.

Responses to the unfathomable mysteries of life and nature have basically been of a religious nature. It would lack sense to pretend that that was otherwise, and I have the conviction that it will always be like this. The more profound the explanations of science in relation to the universe, space, time, matter and energy, infinite galaxies and theories on the origin of constellations and stars, atoms and fractions of the same which gave rise to life and the brevity of the same, and millions and millions of combinations per second that govern its existence, the more questions humans will make in search of explanations that will be constantly more complex and difficult.

The more that human beings immerse themselves in seeking for answers to such profound and complex tasks related to intelligence, the more worthwhile are efforts to lift them out of their colossal ignorance of the real possibilities that our intelligent species has created and is capable of creating. Living and ignoring that is a total negation of our human condition.

However, one thing is absolutely certain: very few imagine how close the disappearance of our species could be. Twenty years ago, in a World Summit on the Environment in Rio de Janeiro (the Earth Summit), I spoke of that danger before a select audience of heads of state and government, who listened with respect and interest, although with no concern about the risk that they perceived at a distance of centuries, perhaps millennia. For them, without any doubt, technology and science, plus an elemental

sense of political responsibility, would be capable of confronting it. That significant summit ended happily with a large photograph of important figures.

There was no danger of any kind.

Climate change was barely mentioned. George Bush senior and other luminaries of the Atlantic Alliance enjoyed the victory over the European socialist camp. The Soviet Union was disintegrated and ruined. A vast hoard of Russian money passed into Western banks, its economy fell apart, and its defence shield against NATO military bases had been dismantled.

The former superpower that contributed the lives of more than 25 million of its sons and daughters in World War II was left only with the strategic response capacity of nuclear power, which it had been obliged to create after the United States secretly developed the atomic weapon launched on two Japanese cities, when the adversary, defeated by the uncontrollable advance of the allied forces, was no longer in combat conditions.

Thus began the Cold War and the manufacture of thousands of thermonuclear weapons, constantly more destructive and precise, capable of annihilating the population of the planet several times over. Nevertheless, the nuclear confrontation continued, weapons became still more precise and destructive. Russia is not resigned to the unipolar world that Washington is trying to impose. Other nations like China, India and Brazil are emerging with uncommon economic force.

For the first time, the human species, in a globalised world replete with contradictions, has created the capacity to destroy itself. That is compounded by unprecedented weapons of cruelty, such as bacteriological and chemical weapons, napalm and live phosphorus, which are used against civilian populations and enjoy total impunity, electromagnetic weapons and other forms of extermination. Not one corner in

the depths of the earth or sea would remain beyond the reach of the current military means.

It is known that, in these ways, tens of thousands of nuclear artefacts, including those of a portable nature, have been created.

The greatest danger is derived from the decision of leaders with such decision-making faculties, in that error and insanity, so frequent in human nature, could lead to incredible disasters.

Almost 65 years have gone by since the first nuclear artefacts were exploded, resulting from the decision of a mediocre subject who, after the death of Roosevelt, remained in command of the powerful and rich US power. Now 8 countries – in their majority with the support of the United States – have those weapons, and a number of others have the technology and resources to manufacture them in a minimum space of time. Terrorist groups, alienated by hatred, could be capable of turning to them, in the same way that terrorist and irresponsible governments would not hesitate to use them, given their genocidal and uncontrollable conduct.

The military industry is the most prosperous of all and the United States is the largest exporter of weapons.

If our species should be liberated from all the abovementioned risks, another and even greater, or at least inescapable, one exists: climate change.

Humanity today has 7 billion inhabitants and soon, within a space of 40 years, it will reach 9 billion, a total 9 times greater than barely 200 years ago. In the times of ancient Greece, I venture to suppose that we were approximately 40 times fewer throughout the planet.

The most astounding aspect of our era is the contradiction between imperialist bourgeois ideology and the survival of the species. It is no longer about justice existing among human beings, today more than possible and something that cannot be renounced, but of the right and

Threatening Us

possibility of our very survival.

While the horizon of knowledge is extending to limits never imagined, the closer the abyss into which humanity is being led is approaching. All suffering known to date is barely a shadow of what could lie ahead for humanity.

Three events have taken place within a space of just 71 days, which humanity cannot overlook.

On December 18, 2009, the international community suffered the greatest disaster in history, in its attempt to find a solution to the gravest problem

that is threatening the world at this moment: the need to bring to an end, with all urgency, the production of greenhouse gases. All hopes had been placed on the Copenhagen Summit, after years of preparation subsequent to the Kyoto Protocol, which the government of the United States – the largest contaminator in the world – had afforded itself the luxury of ignoring. The international community, 192 countries, this time including the United States, had committed itself to promoting a new agreement. The US's attempt to

impose its hegemonic interests, in violation of elemental democratic principles, by establishing unacceptable conditions for the rest of the world in an anti-democratic manner, in virtue of bilateral commitments with a group of the most influential countries of the United Nations, was utterly shameful.

The states comprising that international organisation were invited to sign a document that is nothing more than a joke, and which merely mentions theoretical future contributions to halt climate change.

Copenhagen Climate Change
March of the Peoples
Photo from flickr by
Green_Mamba





Not even three weeks had gone by when, at dusk on January 12, Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere and the first to put an end to the odious system of slavery, suffered the worst natural disaster in the known history of this part of the world: an earthquake of magnitude 7.3 on the Richter scale, at just 10 kilometers of depth and at a very short distance from the shores of its coast, struck the capital of the country, in whose flimsy houses made of mud lived the vast majority of people who were killed or missing.

If there is one place on the planet where a natural disaster has constituted an immense tragedy it is Haiti, a mountainous and eroded country of 27,000 square kilometers, where firewood constitutes virtually the only source of domestic fuel for 9 million people. That country is a symbol of poverty and underdevelopment, inhabited by the descendants of those transported from Africa by the colonialists to work as slaves for white masters.

The event moved the world in all corners of the planet, shaken by film footage circulated that bordered on the incredible. The wounded, bleeding and gravely injured moved among the corpses pleading for help. Under the rubble were lying the lifeless bodies of their loved ones. The number of fatal victims, according to official sources, is in excess of 200,000 people.

The country was already under the control of the MINUSTAH forces that the United Nations sent in to restore the

order undermined by Haitian mercenary forces which, at the instigation of the Bush government, attacked the government elected by the Haitian people. Some of the buildings in which soldiers and chiefs of the peace forces were resident also collapsed, causing distressing victims.

Official reports estimate that, apart from the dead, around 400,000 Haitians were injured and several million, almost half of the total population, were affected. It was a veritable test for the world community which, in the wake of the shameful Denmark Summit, had the duty to show that the developed and rich countries were capable of confronting the threats of climate change to life on our planet. Haiti must constitute an example of what the rich countries should do for the Third World nations in the face of climate change.

One can believe it or not, defying the data, in my judgment irrefutable, of the most serious scientists of the planet and the vast majority of the most instructed and serious people in the world, who think that, at the current rate of global warming, greenhouse gases will raise the temperature not only by 1.5 degrees, but by up to 5 degrees, and that the average temperature is now the highest in the last 600,000 years, far before human beings existed as a species on the planet.

It is totally unthinkable that the 9 billion human beings who will inhabit the earth in 2050 could survive such a disaster. The hope remains that science itself can find a solution to the energy problem which currently obliges the consumption in 100 years of the rest of the gaseous, liquid and solid fuels that nature took 400 million years to create. Perhaps science can find a solution to the necessary energy. The question is to know how much time and at what cost human beings can confront the problem, which is not the only one, given that many other non-renewable minerals and grave problems require solutions. But we can be sure of one thing; on the basis of all the concepts known today: the closest star is at 4 light years¹ from our Sun. A spaceship could possibly cover that distance in thousands of years. Human beings have no alternative but to live on this planet.

It would have seemed unnecessary to approach the issue if, just 54 days after the Haiti earthquake, another incredible quake of magnitude 8.8 on the Richter scale, whose epicentre was at 150 km distance and 47.4 km depth, northeast of the city of Concepción, had not caused

another human disaster in Chile. It was not the largest in the history of that sister country; it is said that another one had a magnitude of 9, but this time it was not just a seismic phenomenon; while in Haiti a seaquake that was anticipated did not materialise, in Chile the earthquake was followed by an enormous tsunami, which appeared on its coast from 30 minutes to one hour afterward, according to the distance and data that are not as yet known with precision, and whose waves extended to Japan. If it had not been for Chilean experience in the face of earthquakes, its more solid constructions and its greater resources, the natural phenomenon would have cost the lives of tens of thousands or possibly hundreds of thousands of people. At any rate, according to official data, the earthquake caused around 1,000 fatalities, and thousands of injured, while possibly more than two million people suffered material damage. Almost the totality of Chile's population of 17.94 million inhabitants suffered terribly and are still suffering from the consequences of the quake – which lasted for more than two minutes – its repeated aftershocks, and the terrible scenes and suffering left by the tsunami along its thousands of kilometers of coast. Our homeland is in full solidarity and is morally supporting the material effort that the international community has the duty to offer Chile. If it was in our hands, from the human point of view, the people of Cuba would not hesitate to provide material relief for the sister people of Chile.

I believe that the international community has a duty to inform people with objectivity about the tragedy suffered by both peoples. It would be cruel, unjust and irresponsible not to educate the peoples of the world on the dangers that are threatening us.

Let the truth prevail above the ignoble acts and lies with which imperialism deceives and confuses the peoples!

■ *Published in Spanish in CubaDebate, 8 March 2010*

(<http://www.cubadebate.cu/reflexiones-fidel/2010/03/08/los-peligros-que-nos-amenazan/>) and in English in Granma International Digital on the same date (<http://www.granma.cu/ingles/reflexions-i/2010march8.html>)

Notes

¹ 1 light year = distance travelled by light in one year. The speed of light is 300,000 km/second –Ed.

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BOOK REVIEW

Considering new imperialism, taking a long view of the long war

Review by Carol Turner

AS ITS TITLE SUGGESTS, Andrew Murray's book addresses the attempts of western intellectuals to provide a justificatory gloss for US and British military aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere. It is neither an account of contemporary wars nor an exposition of the anti-war movement, in which the author has played a leading role, but a political and historical polemic directed at those who defend George Bush's war on terror from the safety of their libraries and offices.

Murray argues that, just as capitalist economic crisis has "often been the introduction of the politics of war. So the study of the ideological and political debates around the wars of the 21st century remains, alas, relevant." Accordingly, his aim is to evaluate the debates which have been used to underpin Bush's long war.

As George Galloway points out in his foreword, the author "allows today's wannabe imperialists to damn themselves out of their own mouths". Murray's literary scalpel cuts straight through the subterfuges of the pro-war intellectuals. By contrasting their claims with well-documented colonial history and perspectives, he leaves his reader in no doubt of what is on offer from today's empire apologists: an intellectually sloppy prettification of a shameful and shaming period of British and western history.

In the first two chapters of *The Imperial Controversy* Murray revisits the arguments used by historians such as Niall Ferguson, Andrew Roberts and Paul Johnson to rehabilitate the notion of empire, and he provides a truer reading of 19th and 20th century expansionism. Later chapters tackle the notion of liberal interventionism and the role of the pro-war left,

examining in particular Tony Blair's premiership and the Iraq War. Finally, Murray turns his fire on the Bush administration, castigating the journalists and pundits who sought to put a sheen on the dirty doings of the neo-cons and their Project for a New American Century.

Murray pays special attention to the historical record of the Middle East. He documents Britain's role in its geographical division, and charts first European then US political and military intervention in Middle Eastern politics to aid their oil grabs, quoting Lord Crewe at the beginning of the 20th century: "What we want is not a united Arabia, but a disunited Arabia split into principalities under our suzerainty."

The book's great strength, though, lies in the breadth of examples – over more than 150 years, from Asia, Africa and Latin America – which

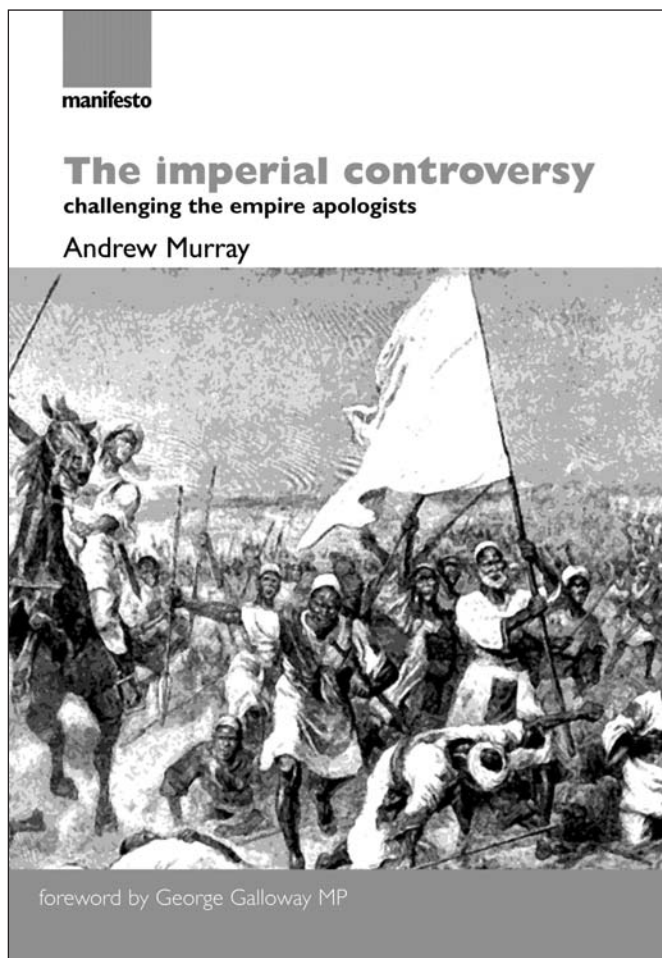
the author cites to show the real and gory history of imperialism, and the racist and xenophobic ideology on which its foul practises rest.

British intellectuals have led revisionist attempts at popularising empire. In 2003, Murray recalls, with the Iraq War upon us, Ferguson was among the most prominent of those who expounded the virtue of British imperialism, his grand platform that of the controversial Channel 4 TV series, *Empire*. Ferguson argues that despite its 'excesses', British imperialism was beneficent in spreading civilisation and capitalism across the globe. Roberts likewise insists "the British empire delivered astonishing growth rates, at least in those places fortunate enough to be coloured pink on the globe".

The Imperial Controversy reminds us just what those 'excesses' were, and chronicles their fundamental, rather than accidental, role in spreading

The Imperial Controversy: Challenging the Empire Apologists

BY ANDREW MURRAY
(Manifesto Press, 2009,
152 pp, pbk £12.95.
ISBN 978-1-907464-00-3)



the capitalist economic order. China was attacked so Britain could profit from selling opium to the Chinese; Egypt was occupied to force it to pay its debts; Nigeria was attacked to secure the free entry of British goods; the Boer War was launched to protect City of London investments; and so on and so on.

Neither is the human meaning or cost of imperialism overlooked. Economic advance in the 19th and 20th centuries was, of course, confined to the colonial powers. Murray recounts how millions died of poverty and disease in Asia and Africa. Under the Raj, for example, Indian life expectancy dropped by 20%. He cites among others the work of Walter Rodney, whose book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* is a 300-plus page statistical as well as political indictment of the claim that capitalism brought economic

development in its wake.

Then, as now, imperial plunder was underpinned by institutional racism, and its theorisation formed the backbone of pro-empire apologias. This is central to Murray's argument, and he backs it up with a succession of revealing narratives. Take, for example, the Australian colonial governor, who reported to Gladstone that cultured and refined white Queenslanders talk "not only of wholesale butchery ... but of the individual murder of natives, exactly as they would talk of a day's sport".

More controversial perhaps, is the book's tendency to equate imperialism and fascism. In a chapter entitled *Colonialists and Nazis*, Murray argues: "That Hitler's regime is seen as the most bestial of modern times is not of course objectionable. What needs to be confronted, however, is the view that the crimes of other

great powers of the last 150 years or so, being somehow less lurid and dramatic than those of the Nazis, can therefore be subjected to a more nuanced judgement in which the deaths of millions of people on the one hand can be offset against the construction of railways on the other."

Right as this is ethically, morally, politically, rationally, humanly, it does not mean that imperialism and fascism are the same thing. Implying that they are clouds the otherwise astringent political polemic of a book which aspires to arm the millions opposed to the war policies of the US and UK. And, as the author himself says, these debates are far from academic.

Fascist ideology rests on the notion of blood and belonging, the superiority of a pure race. As such it has of course much in common with the ideology of empire, as Murray so clearly draws out.

But, as he also ably demonstrates, ideology plays a very practical role in the project of empire: that of marshalling intellectual resources in the service of concrete economic and political goals.

Fascism, colonialism and imperialism have precise – and different – meanings which differentiate them from each other despite their similarities. In essence (though oversimplified) empire represents a period of capitalist expansion; fascism on the other hand is big capital's way of replacing the bourgeois democratic political system in its own heartlands in circumstances where capitalism's decline brings a threat of imminent revolution. Each is to be resisted, but with a different political strategy.

The author has promised a sequel that deals with today's capitalist crisis. When and if he writes it, I'd urge him to bear this in mind.

BOOK REVIEW

The bloody sequel to Tonypandy

Review by Mike Squires

Killing No Murder by Rob Griffiths unravels a little-known incident that occurred in the Great Railway Strike of 1911. In Llanelli in Wales the army opened fire on crowds, killing two young men and wounding two others. Griffiths relates this fascinating story in a very readable way, using a mixture of archival research and oral history. And this incident, which happened almost 100 years ago, has some important lessons for today.

Railway men and women were amongst the poorest paid workers in Britain – only agricultural labourers were below them on the wages scale. Compared with coal miners they were very much the poor relation. In South Wales most miners earned 30-34 shillings a week, but only 10% of railway workers earned anything like this; for over a third, the wages were less than 20 shillings a week.

Hours of work were no better. In many industries, workers had won shorter hours, and 48-54 hours a week were not uncommon; however, on the railways most workers toiled for 60 hours a week and many worked 72 hours.

Railways were also a dangerous place to work. In the years before the strike, on average 500 rail workers were killed and 15,000 injured every year.

The railway employers were intransigent. These magnates refused to meet, or even be in the same room as, rail union leaders. The profits of the railway companies were phenomenal – so much so that often the payment of dividends had to be delayed for fear of provoking the embittered workforce.

It could not go on. After a number of threatened strikes were cancelled, the rail unions finally called for a national stoppage of work on 17 August 1911. From the start the strikers were vilified in the press (nothing new there), and Churchill, the Home Secretary, circulated

a story that the stoppage was the work of a German agent based at a Glasgow railway station. Throughout the dispute the strikers were referred to in the papers as ‘aliens’ – a claim refuted by Griffiths, who draws on meticulous research from court records.

While Churchill represented the belligerent wing of the ruling class, Lloyd George reflected the more conciliatory elements. He wanted to keep the working class wedded to Liberalism, and was fearful that the clutch of Labour MPs, first elected in 1906, might grow.

Llanelli, a Welsh-speaking town in South West Wales, was the backdrop for a sharp and bloody struggle between striking railway workers and their allies, on the one hand, and the forces of the state, with Churchill in the driving seat, on the other. Llanelli had two railway crossings and these two strategically important points were the scene of clashes between pickets and the army. Soldiers, on Churchill’s initiative, and with the connivance of the railway companies, had already been despatched to Llanelli before the strike began.

On the second day of the stoppage, 18 August, there was a stand-off at one of the crossings between thousands of pickets, including the town’s numerous tin-plate workers and miners who were all acting in solidarity, and soldiers from the Royal Worcestershire regiment. Crowds gathered to watch the *mêlée* and suddenly the order was given to open fire. Four innocent young bystanders, not pickets, were shot. Two were killed and two were seriously wounded. One of the dead was John John, a local rugby star and the other his friend Leonard Worsell.

The news of the shootings quickly spread and the town erupted. Railway carriages were burnt, track torn up, senior magistrates’ windows were

smashed, and five residents were injured and taken to hospital.

Churchill had got what he wanted, but who was to blame for the order to open fire? The army denied any accusations of provocation and there the story may have ended, but for the appearance two days later of one Private Harold Spiers of the Worcestershire regiment. He turned up in New Radnor, 90 miles from Llanelli, and was interned for desertion. He claimed that his desertion was caused by a senior officer ordering him to fire on civilians at Llanelli – an order he refused.

Once the story broke Spiers was hailed as a hero by the Labour movement, and a liar by the army. Subsequently, the charge of desertion was dropped against Spiers and substituted with a lesser charge. This, claims Griffiths, was because of Churchill’s intervention, who didn’t want Spiers becoming a cause célèbre.

Demonstrations against the killings occurred on a regular basis in Llanelli and more sporadically in the rest of the country. A government enquiry, weighted as always in favour of the employers, found the killings ‘justifiable homicide’. However, the Liberal press in Wales, with an eye on retaining working-class Liberal support, was critical of the army’s behaviour.

The strike ended with the inevitable short-term compromise. In the longer term, however, the pre-First World War industrial unrest of which the rail strike was a part was to change forever the industrial and political landscape of Wales and the rest of the United Kingdom. In this process the events at Llanelli had played their part.

Within 18 months of the ending of the strike the fragmented rail unions had voted to unite, and formed the National Union of Railwaymen. In the same year,

Killing No Murder: South Wales and the Great Railway Strike of 1911

BY ROBERT GRIFFITHS
(Manifesto Press, 2009, 126 pp, pbk,
£12.95. ISBN 978-1-907464-01-0)

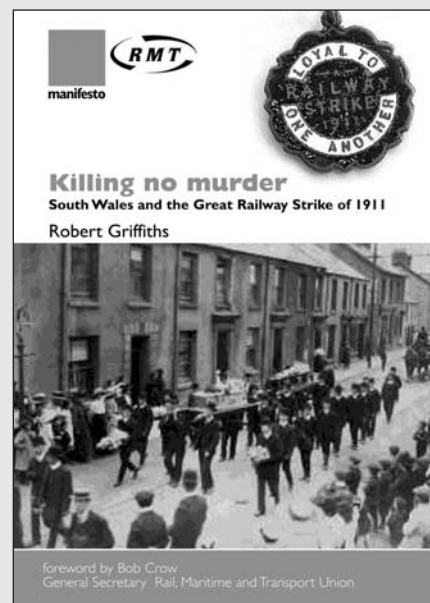
1913, the NUR formed an alliance with the miners and transport workers – the Triple Alliance. Workers across industries, learning the lessons of the immediate past, were seeing the need to unite with others.

Politically, Llanelli drove a further wedge between Liberalism and its working-class backbone. Unequivocal support for the strikers and condemnation of the army by the Labour MP for Merthyr Boroughs, Keir Hardie, helped mobilise further working-class support for the nascent Labour Party.

Churchill, who may have triumphed

on this occasion, could never again rely on the army to fire on British civilians. This was the last time it was to happen on the British mainland. Lloyd George was left in the netherworld of a fast disappearing Liberalism that within a few years was to be defeated by ‘the forward march of labour’.

Rob Griffiths, by focusing on the railways in South Wales, has shown us that it was not just miners that played a role in developing class and political consciousness in the principality – other sections of the working class were also important.



Most readers with an interest in labour history will have heard of Tonypany and what happened there in 1910 – not so many will have heard of the shootings in Llanelli a few months later. This book helps to redress that balance.

Rob Griffiths gives us a spellbinding and gripping account of these events and draws valuable parallels with today. Labour history at its best – buy it.



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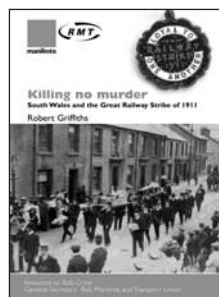
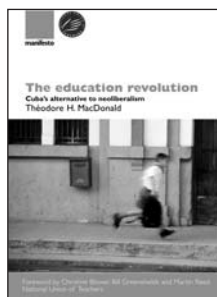
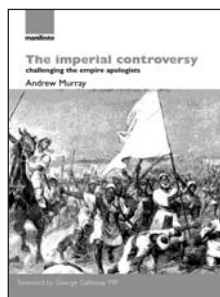
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BOOK REVIEW

Cuba, education and the ‘Battle of Ideas’

Review by Bill Greenshields

HOW IS IT that a small developing nation, subject to political hostility and economic embargo for 50 years, can have eradicated illiteracy within a two-year period, gone on to meet and surpass the UN’s Global Development Goals before they were even formulated, and to have built a free, comprehensive and lifelong education system with better outcomes than that of the USA?

Professor Théodore Macdonald’s authoritative and comprehensive work on the Cuban education system is not only one for those involved in international, solidarity or global development work. It is one that should be read by all those who are concerned for the future development of systems of education anywhere in the world that are designed to meet the needs of ordinary people rather than the demands of “powerful and predatory entrepreneurial interests”, as Richard Langlois, consultant economist to Education International, has called them. It is a book that all teachers should read.

MacDonald’s central premise is that the massive achievements of Cuba in the field of education since the revolution of 1959, recognised by UNESCO and just about all other educational bodies (with the exception of a very few loyal to the US State Department), cannot be understood without the context of that continuing revolution and the social and economic policies of the

Cuban government. They are, he says, “inextricably entwined, and mutually dependent” and again “... we see an example of reform in the society reflecting itself in reform in the schooling system and this, in turn, leading to further social reform.”

In his first few pages he asserts, with convincing contextual evidence, that “Neoliberalism ... has always tended to regard health and education as mere commodities, with the well-off (and well-placed) naturally having better access to both than the less well-off But Cuban social policy regards neither education nor health as commodities, but as inviolable universal rights and twin linchpins of human dignity and of social harmony.”

He quotes a 1975 UNESCO Report as saying, “So much in the Cuban educational system constitutes a break – not only with the past – but also with what exists elsewhere.” As part of their 2009 *Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO again celebrates Cuba’s “remarkable achievements”.

Professor MacDonald explores in detail the success of the mass Literacy Campaign of the 1960s which now acts as a model in many developing countries and in some more developed such as New Zealand. He analyses its organisation – a massive mobilisation of 250,000 volunteer literacy workers – and its materials, and shows

that its success was based on the fundamental respect shown to the students. “Many of the steps taken in the campaign reflect the fact that it did not have as its sole aim the teaching of illiterates how to read. It was, from the first, an essentially revolutionary undertaking, with the objective of bringing about a fundamental change in social attitudes and relationships.”

He quotes Mier Febles, one of Cuba’s senior educators as saying, “The peasants discovered the word. The young literacy workers discovered the poor. Together, they all discovered their own *patria*”, and Mercedes Benitez Cabrera, one of those literacy workers who says, “They were people just like us, but because they thought they were nobodies, they looked at life completely differently. Literacy changed all that. The new literates could now see that they had power – or could go about getting it. I tell you, comrade, we were teachers then!”

The great educational and social success of the Literacy Campaign has, MacDonald argues, been important in shaping all subsequent educational policy. For example in discussing ‘pupil achievement’ and ‘school accountability’ in Cuba, he says, “A society which spawned an educational system that undermined its values would not survive long. Thus the choice as to whether to use competition or emulation as the driving force

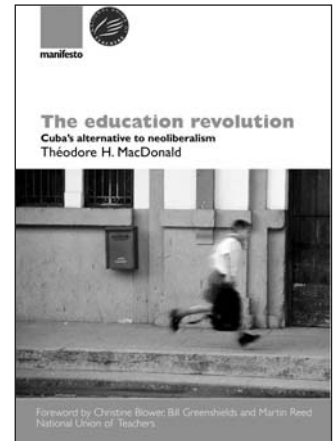
in a school system depends less on considerations of cognitive psychology than of politics.” Turning its back on individual competition and the resultant creation of ‘winners’ and ‘losers’, Cuba promotes ‘emulation’. “Emulation,” explains MacDonald, “... is essentially a group process and is not based on beating other people but on overcoming an obstacle. Thus, a Grade 6 primary school class might be involved in learning decimal fractions. The idea is to demonstrate, by sitting a test, that they as a class have mastered the topic. It is therefore to each individual pupil’s advantage for everyone else to do as well as possible. The emphasis is thus on co-operation, not competition; the more able feel compelled to help the less able; no satisfaction can be gained by one’s relative performance. A wholly different train of psychological processes is thus set in motion.”

MacDonald’s point, again, is that a competitive society based on self-interest and personal gain could not allow such an approach to ‘achievement’, despite its demonstrable success. It would “undermine its values”. Similarly, a society based on collective activity and the social good would be undermined by competitive approaches.

MacDonald explores many other approaches, programmes and priorities of the Cuban education system in the same way – and in so doing

The Education Revolution: Cuba's Alternative to Neoliberalism

BY THÉODORE H MACDONALD
(Manifesto Press, 2009, 255 pp, pbk £14.95.
ISBN 978-1-907464-02-7)



challenges many of the assumptions and conventions that we as British teachers might have grown up with and operated.

Others mirror and complement our own professional priorities – for example the emphasis laid on early-years education, which he describes in detail. He shows again that this development relies very much on the organisation of society in general. “Provision for pre-school education became a matter of revolutionary principle, almost synonymous with the recognition of women’s rights – largely due to the work of the Federation of Cuban Women (FMC). The FMC ... did not allow revolutionary political rhetoric about the ‘dignity of women’ uttered by the leadership to pass by without seeing that it had social impact.”

He quotes Clementine Serra, a Director of the National Programme of Childcare Centres. “The programme has two main objectives; to liberate women so they can become an active part of the productive work force, and to aid in the social development of all children The main focus of the *circulos infantiles* is the formation of the New Man and New Woman, with their own concepts. We want an individual, we don’t want a mass of people who all think alike and accept everything.”

Throughout the education system the parents and community are centrally

involved in the decision-making and development process. He shows how, “By example and experience, children learn in school how to interact with a broader range of people than the family provides. Thus there is a strong bond between school and community and between child, family and school.”

Of course, Professor MacDonald identifies problems too, some of which he identifies as “The Perils of Success”. Not only do all Cubans have a right to free schooling, with free uniform, two or three meals a day and free school based health care – they also have a right to education and vocational training throughout their lives. They also have a statutory right to employment. As MacDonald says, “Cuba’s successes ... caused administrative snarls in the sense that the country’s economy had to be flexible enough to provide meaningful employment for masses of highly articulate and well educated Cubans ... the fact is that its workers were often too well educated for the jobs they were doing This presented the revolution with a political-philosophical problem which could only trouble a society that claims to be socialist. Socialist theory regards education as a vehicle for enhancing the dignity of every person by exploiting her or his potential for development. Thus education should not primarily be a means of training people to fit into slots

critical to the economic survival of the society.”

In part to tackle this issue, the Ministry of Education launched *Perfeccionamiento*. Macdonald says, “Teachers, students, people from all walks of life were encouraged to comment on how the educational system might be improved. These were instrumental in determining the Ministry’s responses In general, *Perfeccionamiento* envisaged a continuing rise in educational levels for the Cuban population as a whole.

“This raises the question of political intervention and whether it is moral or just for each student to choose what they would like to do by way of training.”

This has become part of what is known in Cuba as ‘The Battle of Ideas’ – Cuba’s reaffirmation and recommitment to socialism.

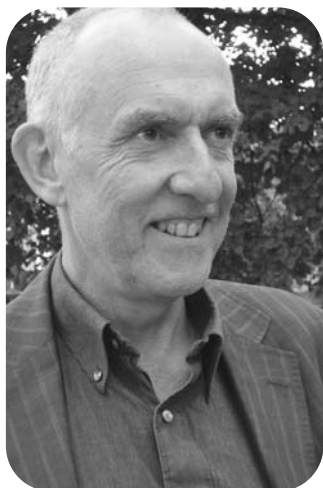
Professor MacDonald ends his book with this and how it relates to the structures of modern day Cuban education from pre-school to university and worker-farmer lifelong study and development. He is interested in how these formal structures relate to other ‘mobilisations’ such as the recruitment of 28,000 young ‘social workers’ to fight for the further development of New Man and New Woman, “making contact with disaffected young people in their local communities, offering them advice and support to deal with personal and social problems, encouraging them to engage

in employment, education and volunteering opportunities, kindling fresh enthusiasm for the ideals of the Revolution.”

But in the process of this work the young social workers also “identified 37,000 elderly citizens living alone and in need of social support. The Government responded ... by raising the state pension and introducing targeted programmes of assistance.” Then the young campaigners discovered corruption in some enterprises – such as petrol stations – and took them over to make their point. MacDonal says, “They are widely lauded as ‘heroes’ for contributing so effectively to Cuba’s economic recovery and the socialist redistribution of wealth to deprived sectors and people.” He illustrates the link between education, society and the Battle of Ideas and comments particularly on “the increasing enthusiasm with which youth are becoming politically involved.”

Professor Macdonald’s excellent book is packed full of observation, evidence, analysis, comment and argument on all aspects of a very well developed education system, its complex, symbiotic relationship with the wider society and the continued social developments known simply in Cuba as ‘The Revolution’.

It’s a ‘must read’ for all progressive educationalists – and a ‘you must read’ for educational reactionaries in our very own continuing ‘battle of ideas’ in Britain.



SOULWOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

Bertolt Brecht

Did you know him? He wore
A gray coat to make himself
smaller.
For he fought, the mover,
for equality.
When a giant rises to fight
for equality,
Yes, he would make us all
giant-like.
Peter Hacks, *Brecht*¹

Many of you will have seen *The Lives of Others*, a recent German film set in East Germany in the Orwellian year of 1984.² In the film, a Stasi officer is assigned to monitor a politically dissident playwright. He gradually becomes disillusioned by the corruption of his superiors and the human warmth of his target, and ends up subverting the operation and allowing the playwright to avoid arrest. One of the main reasons for his change of heart is the effect of reading a book of Bertolt Brecht's poetry, which he has taken from the playwright's apartment.

How would Brecht himself have interpreted the film? He may not have endorsed the film's implied criticism of the political culture of Communist East Germany, but surely would have agreed with the message that art fires the imagination, changes minds and can

motivate subversive political action. Brecht had an evolving, flexible but lifelong commitment to a 'socialist realist' approach to art, to an art which (to paraphrase Marx) does not just interpret the world, but seeks to change it. Like his plays, his poetry is what he called 'gestic': it seeks to inform, influence, even instruct the reader. Reading Brecht can be a pleasurable and even joyful experience, as you begin to appreciate the fundamental kindness and compassion that runs deeply through his poetry. But it can also be cleansing, chastening experience, even for committed communists. It is a poetry of engagement, not of escape.

In a column like this, what is the best way to explain, express and honour this artistic and political commitment? A few biographical details, a few of the poems, some points of explanation, hardly do justice to the power of Brecht's writing to move us, inspire us and energise us for the struggle against capitalism. So in this article I'm going to try something different. I'll present a brief sketch of Brecht's life and the historical background against which (in both senses) he wrote his poems, including a few of those poems. But then you'll find a Do-It-Yourself Brecht poetry toolkit, for readers to have a go at studying some

poems in more detail and then applying Brechtian poetics to the current political and economic situation – by writing something yourselves! Then, in a following issue of *CR*, we'll publish some of your poetic responses, of which there'll be hundreds, of course.

And then, why don't we start a 'Brecht'? Brecht, in his lifetime, meant not only the individual man but the collective and collaborative artistic and political project which he started in the theatre. Given the current crisis in capitalism, and the need for a creative response to capitalist economics and politics, what better time is there to start a 'Brecht' in poetry?

Bertolt Brecht lived from 1898 to 1956. From his birth until 1933, he resided in Germany. He studied philosophy and medicine at university, and was enlisted in the German army for the last six months of the First World War. This experience, and the revolution in Russia, radicalised him and led to his support for the uprising in Berlin in 1919. In the light of Britain's current militaristic adventures in Iraq and Afghanistan, let's hear him on the subject of war:

THE GOD OF WAR

I saw the old god of war stand in
 a bog between chasm and
 rockface.
 He smelled of free beer and
 carbolic and showed his
 testicles to adolescents, for
 he had been rejuvenated by
 several professors. In a hoarse
 wolfish voice he declared his
 love for everything young.
 Nearby stood a pregnant
 woman, trembling.
 And without shame he talked on
 and presented himself as a
 great one for order. And he
 described how everywhere he
 put barns in order, by
 emptying them.
 And as one throws crumbs to
 sparrows, he fed poor people
 with crusts of bread which he

had taken away from poor
 people.
 His voice was now loud, now
 soft, but always hoarse.
 In a loud voice he spoke of great
 times to come, and in a soft
 voice he taught the women
 how to cook crows and
 seagulls. Meanwhile his back
 was unquiet and he kept
 looking round as though afraid
 of being stabbed.
 And every five minutes he
 assured his public that he
 would take up very little of
 their time.

In the later years of the Weimar
 Republic in Germany, Brecht gradually
 fused an experimental poetic technique
 with a committed Marxist philosophy.
 From then on, all his drama and poetry

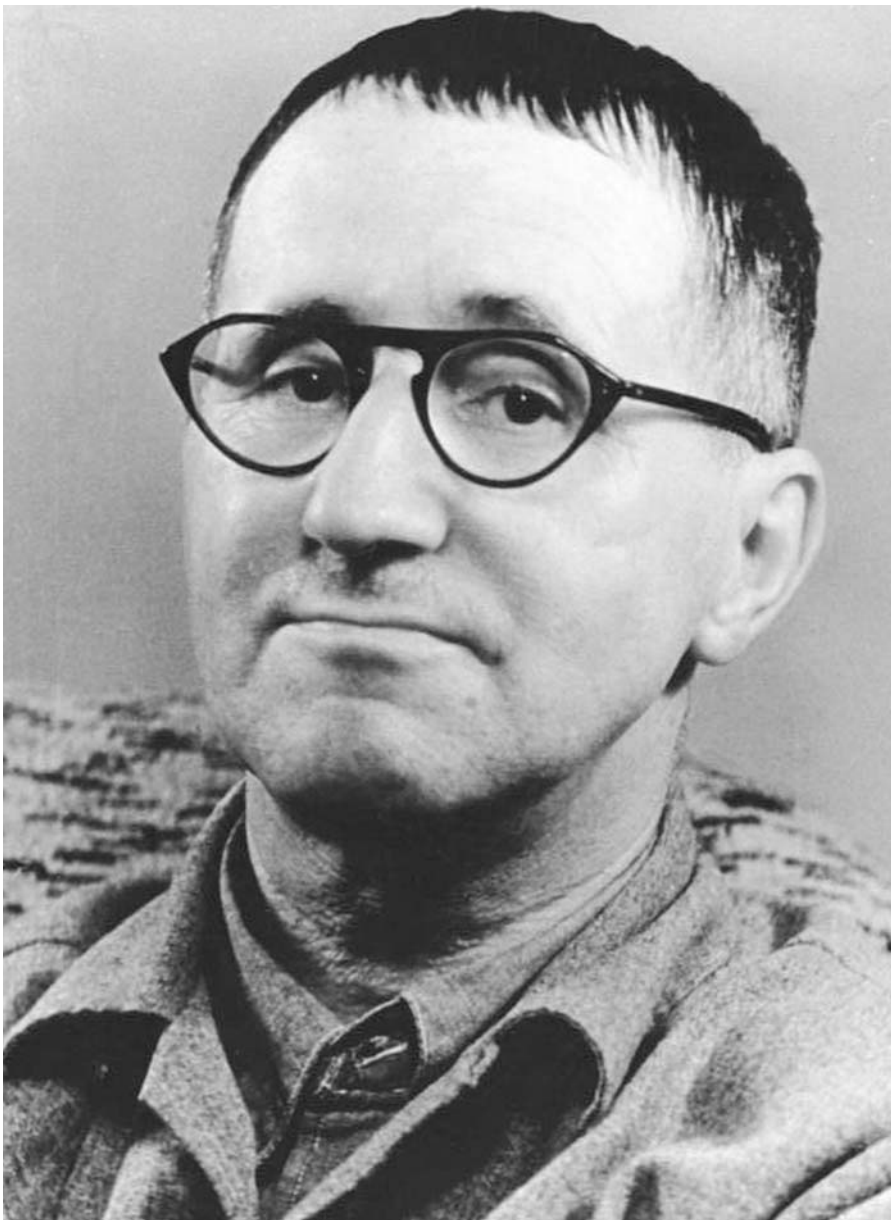
had a clear (though not always direct)
 political content. This fusion is well
 expressed in the following poem:

**SOLELY BECAUSE OF THE
 INCREASING DISORDER**

Solely because of the increasing
 disorder
 In our cities of class struggle
 Some of us have now decided
 To speak no more of cities by the
 sea, snow on roofs, women
 The smell of ripe apples in cellars,
 the senses of the flesh, all
 That makes a man round and
 human
 But to speak in future only about
 the disorder
 And so become one-sided,
 reduced, enmeshed in the
 business
 Of politics and the dry,
 indecorous vocabulary
 Of dialectical economics
 So that this awful, cramped
 coexistence
 Of snowfalls (they're not merely
 cold, we know)
 Exploitation, the lured flesh, class
 justice, should not engender
 Approval of a world so many-
 sided; delight in
 The contradictions of so
 bloodstained a life
 You understand.

This fascinating poem goes to the
 heart of what 'socialist realism' is.
 Brecht is rejecting any complicity with
 what might be called capitalist or
 bourgeois poetics. He thinks artists and
 poets, if they do not criticise the world,
 exposing the ugly truths of economic
 exploitation and social injustice, tend to
 support, prettify, even ennoble the
 world. If they do not curse it they
 praise it, by default almost.

How does his poetic technique get
 that message across? Note the spare,
 stripped-down vocabulary and imagery
 in the poem. Metaphor is to be
 avoided, Brecht is arguing, because it
 creates the illusion of transcendence,
 the illusion that we can rise above how
 things are through our imaginations,
 avoiding X by seeing it as Y. So there is
 no emotional solace, no tidy
 resolution, no comfort in Brecht: why
 would there be? To see how things
 really are, you can't be made to feel at
 home. The poem works as a 'call to
 arms', the summoning of a special
 audience, a group of potential warriors,
 willing to fight and struggle poetically
 against injustice.



Do-It-Yourself Brecht Poem Tool Kit



Contents:
I Introduction
4 Poems
4 Notes on the Poems
4 Exercises

Not included:
Pen and paper
Energy
Time, and
A desire to change the world

INTRODUCTION

Karl Marx wrote, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in different ways; the point is to change it."³ He meant not that philosophy (or poetry, or thinking and writing generally) is unimportant, but that it doesn't on its own solve the problems of the real world. It has to be put into practice, political practice, the practice of class struggle, in order to prove its truth.

No poet has done more than Bertolt Brecht to write poetry which seeks to change the world. His poems seek not just to express the way the world is, but to demonstrate the contradictory and dialectical nature of that reality. They also aim to make us more alert, more open to the possibilities of change, and to practical engagement and action. Brecht wants us to enjoy his poems, but also for them to be useful: to liberate and change our thinking, and to act upon that liberated and changed consciousness. Here's what he wrote about his work:

On a Chinese carving of a lion

The bad fear your claws.
The good enjoy your elegance.
This
I would like to hear said
Of my verse.

While reading Brecht's poems, it struck me that the best test of whether his verse succeeds in this way would be to see whether they could help our writing, even our actions, in some way. Maybe sharpen our claws, improve our elegance? So I'd like to suggest that we all try and write some poems, using Brecht's poems as an example and guide.

This might sound like a tall order, especially to those of you who haven't tried writing poetry. But it isn't really that hard, believe me. Like any craft, it needs time and application and thought, but there's no particular magic involved. To help you, below are some of Brecht's poems; some comments on them to stimulate your thinking; and some exercises.

We'll publish the results in a future issue of *Communist Review*. There may even be a Brechtian prize of some sort, for the best entry!

Poem 1: Sister

Refresh yourself, sister
With the water from the copper bowl
with bits of ice in it –
Open your eyes under water, wash them –
Dry yourself with the rough towel and
cast
A glance at a book you love.
In this way begin
A lovely and useful day.

Notes

This is one of the most straightforward, least political of Brecht's poems. It evokes an elegant, austere image, almost like a painting in words, of a supportive solidarity and comradely feelings towards a comrade and/or lover. It's almost like a painting in words, isn't it? Like one of those old Dutch paintings, it's simple, even severe, but at the same time it communicates a real human warmth and compassion.

Exercise

Think of a similar scenario in your own experience, where you've worked closely with someone and felt tenderly towards them, in any sort of relationship. It could be political activity, but it doesn't have to be. Imagine your pen is a brush, and write down seven or eight sentences which 'paint the picture'. Keep it as simple and direct as possible. Pare each sentence down, and pare the whole piece of writing down, until you've got just a few, maybe three or four, sentences. Read them out loud to get a sense of their rhythm, of where the natural emphases lie. And then fashion them into a poem.

Poem 2: Swansong

Let the last inscription then run
(That broken slab without readers):
The planet is going to burst.
Those it bred will destroy it.
As a way of living together we merely
thought up capitalism.
Thinking of physics, we thought up rather
more:
A way of dying together.

Notes

This poem was written by Brecht in the 1950s and is one of his last poems. It contains a short, apocalyptic vision of the end of the world and the reasons for that end. And although there's a note of despair, it also works as a kind of warning poem, making us think and perhaps acting to stop whatever 'it' is. Brecht probably had the threat of nuclear war in his mind, but it could also be applied to the current threat of ecological catastrophe.

Exercise

Think about the issues around climate change, and its potentially disastrous effects on humanity. Think also of its relationship to capitalism, and to the class struggle. Think about how you feel about the problems, and what needs to be done to prevent disaster. Write down those things in a few, succinct-as-possible sentences. It might be helpful to try and make the poem sound like a song, or a collection of marching slogans.

Poem 3: Questions from a worker who reads

Who built Thebes of the seven gates?
 In the books you will find the names of kings.
 Did the kings haul up the lumps of rock?
 And Babylon, many times demolished
 Who raised it up so many times? In what houses
 Of gold-glittering Lima did the builders live?
 Where, the evening that the wall of China
 was finished
 Did the masons go? Great Rome
 Is full of triumphal arches. Who erected them?
 Over whom
 Did the Caesars triumph? Had Byzantium, much
 praised in song
 Only palaces for its inhabitants? Even in fabled
 Atlantis
 The night the ocean engulfed it
 The drowning still bawled for their slaves.

The young Alexander conquered India.
 Was he alone?
 Caesar beat the Gauls.
 Did he not have even a cook with him?
 Philip of Spain wept when his armada
 Went down. Was he the only one to weep?
 Frederick the Second won the Seven Years' War.
 Who
 Else won it?

Every page a victory.
 Who cooked the feast for the victors?
 Every ten years a great man.
 Who paid the bill?

So many reports.
 So many questions.

Notes

In this poem Brecht is using the voice of someone who is politically aware, a "worker who reads", to question the gaps in bourgeois history. So often we read and experience history as a story of Great Men, or Kings and Queens, or Great Thinkers/Scientists/Politicians/Generals/Businessmen. And so we become conditioned to look at reality in similar ways, to airbrush 'ordinary' working people (that's us, remember!) from history and reality, and to accept and defer to the authority of these Great Men.

Who of us has not had the same experience as Brecht's worker that reads? Who of us has not experienced the denial or rejection of our labour, our histories, our opinions? Or prejudice against our class, gender, or ethnic background? When I read this poem, it reminds me of when I visit one of these historic monuments or stately homes, which always seem to present glorified, 'de-laboured' versions of history. And, depressingly, it happens in some meetings, even in political discussion and action with like-minded comrades. You might even ask, where are the women workers in this poem?

Exercise

Try and write something like this. The poem is a list, one of the most straightforward poetic devices. It avoids the dryness of a simple list by concisely evoking images of each scene: the Great Wall of China, Roman monuments, Caesar in Gaul, The Spanish Armada. You could look at

imperial histories as sweepingly as Brecht, or you could try something smaller scale and closer to home, rooted in the experience of your particular geographical area, occupation, background or other personal circumstances. Try and keep the witty, ironic tone, the sense of an aware, class conscious worker interrogating and unmasking ideology disguised as reality.

Poem 4: The price of milk

The peasant's concern is with his field
 He looks after his cattle, pays taxes
 Produces children, to save on labourers, and
 Depends on the price of milk.
 The townspeople speak of love for the soil
 Of healthy peasant stock and
 Call peasants the backbone of the nation.

The townspeople speak of love for the soil
 Of healthy peasant stock
 And call peasants the backbone of the nation.
 The peasant's concern is with his field
 He looks after his cattle, pays taxes
 Produces children, to save on labourers, and
 Depends on the price of milk.

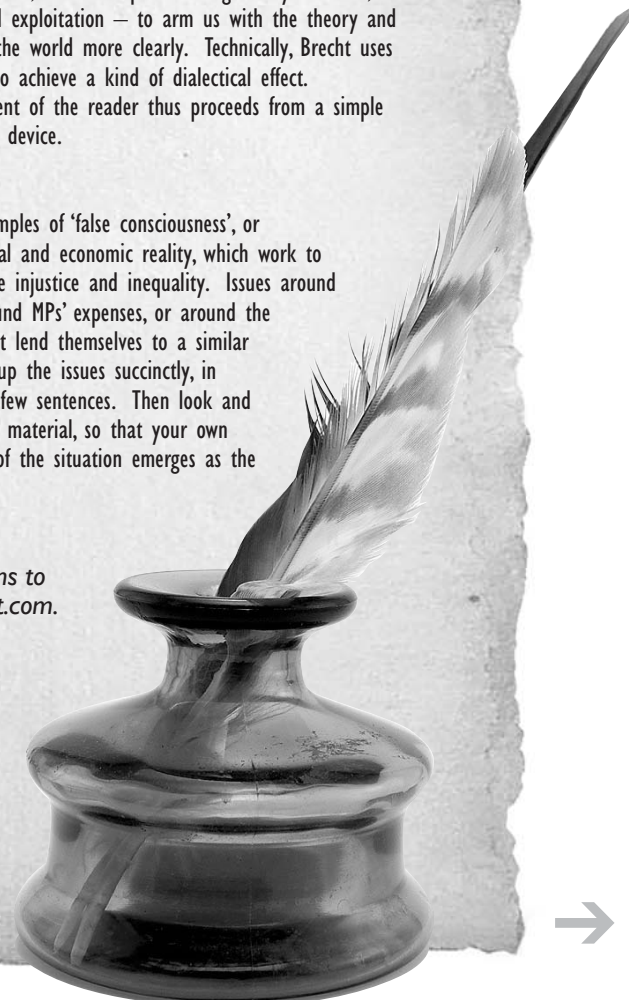
Notes

This poem describes the political situation in which the peasant serves the townspeople, but the townspeople depend on the peasant. Brecht wants the peasant (and us) to see the irony and injustice of the situation, wherein the townspeople think of the peasants as 'healthy peasant stock', and yet the peasant has children to save on labour costs. This poem, like the last one, aims to expose ideological mystification, the denial of oppression and exploitation – to arm us with the theory and the imagination to see the world more clearly. Technically, Brecht uses reversal and repetition to achieve a kind of dialectical effect. The political enlightenment of the reader thus proceeds from a simple but very effective poetic device.

Exercise

Think about similar examples of 'false consciousness', or misperceptions of political and economic reality, which work to perpetuate and legitimise injustice and inequality. Issues around the economic crisis, around MPs' expenses, or around the war in Afghanistan might lend themselves to a similar treatment. Try to sum up the issues succinctly, in ordinary language, in a few sentences. Then look and see how to re-order the material, so that your own insight as to the truth of the situation emerges as the poem develops.

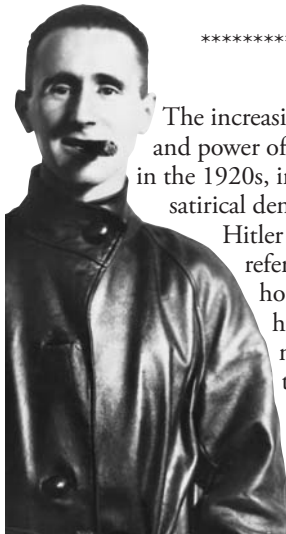
■ Send your poems to mquille@btinternet.com.



continued from p 41

In some ways the questions this position raises are not unlike the debates in 17th century England, before and during the English Revolution. Then, to put it rather crudely, there were the contrasting approaches of ‘Cavalier’ writers who supported the gentry and royalty, and their project of art as diversion and entertainment, and the ‘Roundhead’ or Puritan approach which insisted that art should not be used to legitimise an unfair (expressed as ‘ungodly’) social order, but should be deployed for didactic purposes, to further the cause of progressive political enlightenment.

Do the peculiarly dreadful extremities of twentieth century world history (two world wars, revolutions and civil wars in Russia and China, the Great Depression, the partition of Europe) lead Brecht to overstate the case for that kind of socialist realist art? Is it possible to fuse left-wing thinking into a less austere, less bleak artistic framework, as attempted in (for example) *Billy Elliott*, *The Pitmen Painters*, *Brassed Off*, or *The Full Monty*?



The increasing directness and power of Brecht’s work in the 1920s, including his satirical denunciations of Hitler (who is referred to as “the housepainter” in his poems) made him a target for Nazi persecution, and in 1933 Brecht went into exile. For the first

few years he lived in Scandinavia, Finland and the USSR. And then, from 1941 to 1948, he moved to California, where he attempted, mostly unsuccessfully, to become a screenplay writer for the big Hollywood movie studios. This didn’t work out, due partly to his well-known communist sympathies. Here’s Brecht on Hollywood:

HOLLYWOOD

Every day, to earn my daily bread
I go to the market where lies are bought
Hopefully
I take up my place among the sellers.

This kind of austere, dry humour is not uncommon in Brecht’s poetry.

Brecht’s communist sympathies brought him to the attention of the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), which was at that time conducting its infamous witch-hunt in Hollywood. HUAC interviewed him but could not penetrate his alternately provocative and stonewalling responses.⁴ His exile ended when he left the United States for East Germany in 1948, where he lived until his death in 1956. He was not a completely uncritical supporter of the German Democratic Republic, as the following poem illustrates:

THE SOLUTION

After the uprising of the 17th June
The Secretary of the Writers’ Union
Had leaflets distributed in the Stalinallee
Stating that the people
Had forfeited the confidence of the government
And could win it back only

By redoubled efforts. Would it not be easier
In that case for the government
To dissolve the people
And elect another?

However, it should not be concluded from this example that Brecht was critical from a bourgeois-liberal perspective. At the time of the uprising in 1953, the East German Government was under severe pressure from the USSR to help provide more reparation payments, which West Germany had failed to make. Brecht expressed his public support for the regime, and knowing that the ironic tone of the poem could lead to it being misused by Cold War propagandists, left it unpublished. Nevertheless, it is clear from the poem, and others Brecht wrote during the fifties, that his capacity for independent, critical, Marxist thinking, the kind of thinking that had led him to oppose the dominant political cultures of both Nazi Germany and capitalist America, was not completely muted by the experience of Eastern European Communism.

Acknowledgements

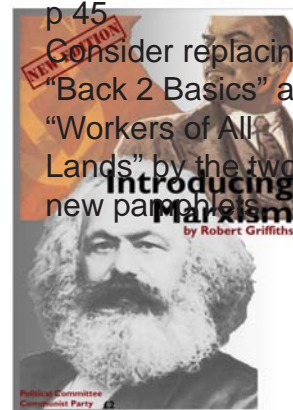
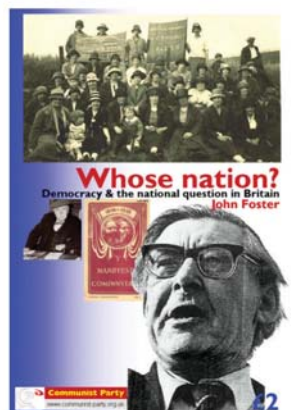
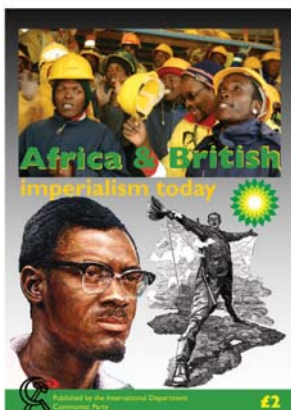
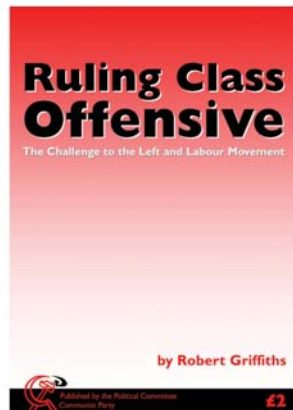
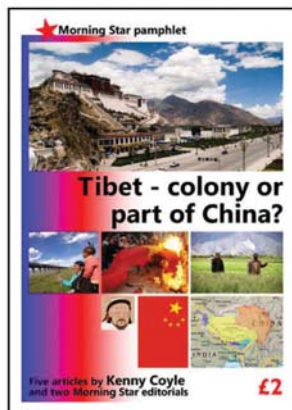
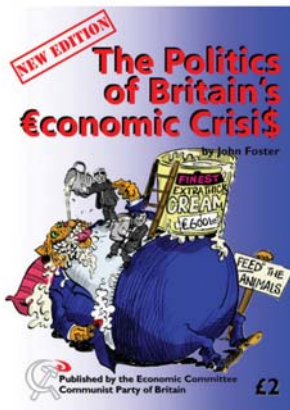
Acknowledgements are due to Eyre Methuen, publishers of *Bertolt Brecht: Poems 1913-1956*, edited by John Willett and Ralph Manheim, 1976, from which all the poems in this article are taken.

Notes

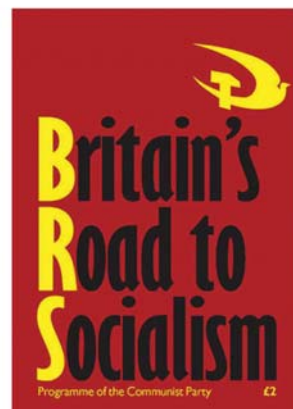
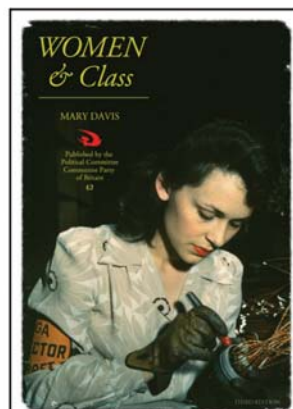
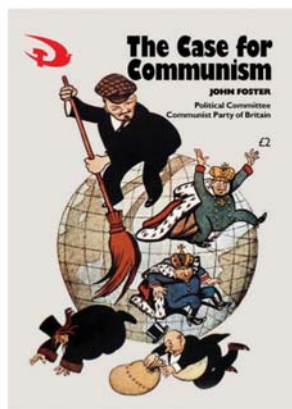
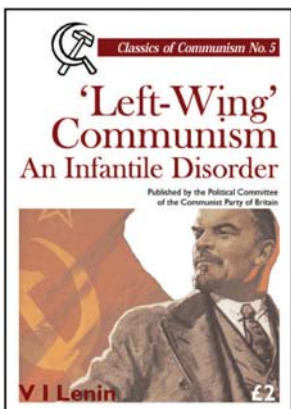
- 1 Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times*, Calder Boyars 1970, p 23
- 2 *The Lives of Others*, directed by Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, Germany 2006.
- 3 K Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 5, p 8.
- 4 The transcript of the interview is well worth reading – Brecht runs rings round the Committee. It can be found at [http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_\(1947-10-30\)_transcript](http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Brecht_HUAC_hearing_(1947-10-30)_transcript)

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip





p 45.
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