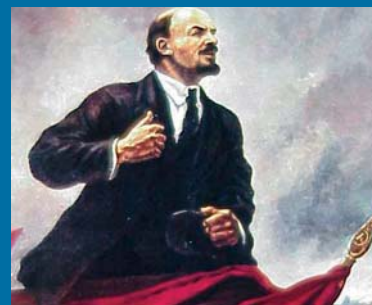


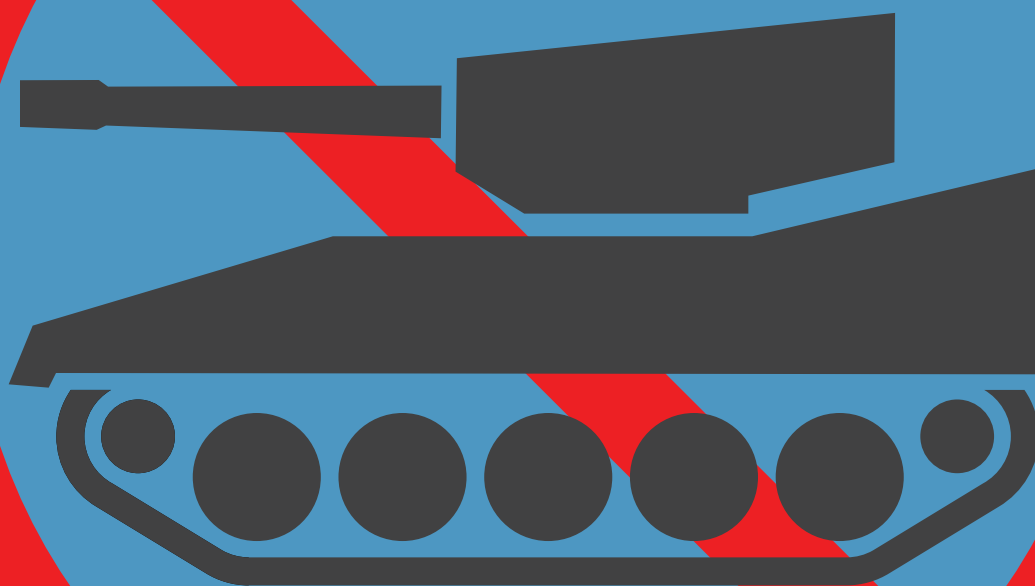


COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Andrew Murray** 21st Century Anti-Imperialism
- **Lars Ulrik Thomsen** Lenin's Analysis of Imperialism – a Pioneering Work
- **Gretchen Binus** The Financial Crisis
- **Hans Heinz Holz** György Lukács: A Militant Humanist
- **Richard Maunders** Why the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact Was Necessary



Anti-Imperialism



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contributors

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editorial



By Martin Levy

THE ONLY REAL SURPRISE of the Labour leadership election was the narrowness of the final majority. It was already on the cards that Miliband ii, rather than his elder brother, would win the final ballot, but the outcome has hardly been a glorious success for the trade unions. From the outset, there was no unified common strategy, as the GMB, Unite and Unison leaderships backed Ed M, while other unions supported different candidates. Then, as contenders were eliminated in turn, the two brothers' shares of votes from members of affiliated unions and societies stuck consistently at around 3:2 in favour of Ed. So it is clear a substantial proportion of union members paid little heed to their leaders' advice – something which should give those leaders food for thought.

But the problem actually goes much deeper. Whichever of the male candidates had won, the outcome was not going to change the main policy direction of the Parliamentary Labour leadership – because all had been leading representatives of the New Labour project. The rhetoric may now have changed, but the underlying reality remains the same. Miliband E may say that “New Labour is dead” and that Labour has to change, but in his objective of unifying the Party he will have to make compromises with his rivals and their Parliamentary supporters. Indeed, in his first announcements since becoming leader he has distanced himself from the unions, stating that he will not oppose every government cut in public spending, and failing to give

wholehearted support to the campaign to defend jobs and services.

In contrast, the 2010 Trades Union Congress was a watershed. As CPB general secretary Robert Griffiths said, the event might well be seen in future as “the class war Congress Not in the sense that the TUC has declared class war but that it resolved to unite in defence of the working class against the Tories' class war.”¹

All but one of the 700 delegates endorsed composite motion 10, ‘Defending Public Services’, which rejected and deplored the government’s public spending cuts, resolved “that all TUC affiliates will urgently work

together to build a broad solidarity alliance of unions and communities under threat and organise a national demonstration, lobby of Parliament and national days of protest against the government austerity measures” and called upon the General Council to “support and co-ordinate campaigning and joint union industrial action, nationally and locally, in opposition to attacks on jobs, pensions, pay or public services.”²

Joint campaigning has already begun, as shown by such developments as the formation of a Northern Region Public Services Alliance, the launching by UNISON and PCS of a national version of that, the rallies on September 29 in connection with the European TUC Day of Action against Austerity, and the lobby of Parliament on October 19, just before the scheduled publication of the ConDem’s public spending review. Such joint actions need to be built in all communities, linking in with trades union councils, pensioners’ organisations, faith groups, voluntary sector organisations and many more. However, that alone will not be enough.

The chasm between the fighting spirit at the TUC and the affiliated unions’ approach to the Labour leadership tussle reflects the longstanding weakness of *economism* in the British labour movement – constraining the main direction of trade union activities to the workplace, and largely leaving politics to the (Labour) politicians. Where were the union leaders when candidates were seeking nomination?



New Labour leader Ed Miliband Photo: Department of Energy and Climate Change





Photo: The People's Charter

Why did they not throw their weight behind John McDonnell, who was articulating their interests, and demand of their sponsored MPs that he be put on the ballot paper? And, when that did not happen, why did not more unions than ASLEF and TSSA support Diane Abbott who, despite everything, still managed to secure 12% of the affiliated trade union and society members' vote? The answer, of course, is that the union leaders adopted a minimalist approach, focusing on one or two sound bites instead of seeking to win the heart and soul of the labour movement for a change of course. It is the same approach that led to the disaster of New Labour.

As the Communist Party of Britain observes in the draft resolutions for its 51st National Congress at the end of October,

“Every struggle by the working class is essentially political, and this is even clearer when the class as a whole is under coordinated and strategic attack, as now.”³

Failure to deal with the political dimension not only weakens the overall struggle, but risks the possibility of diverting it down the road of the lesser of two evils, namely supporting Labour with its commitment to make public spending cuts on the scale of the

ConDems, but not quite so fast. Yet, as the CPB also observes:

“In the context of an economic crisis which, around the world, is eroding the basis of reformism and raising the urgency of an alternative to the world capitalist system, [the] struggle must also attack the deeper roots of social-democratic ideology in the labour movement. The alternative to ‘New Labour’ cannot be a return to the ‘old’ Labour of the 1960s and 70s, but has increasingly to focus on ending capitalism and moving towards a socialist society.”⁴

A first step towards building that alternative – whether or not the Labour Party can be reclaimed for it – is the injection into the campaigning of a comprehensive set of policies. Unison’s ‘Million Voices’ campaign, and PCS’s ‘There is an Alternative’ have valuable roles to play here, but are limited by their narrow focus towards the services in which their members work. A comprehensive alternative has to deal with the economy as a whole, and democratic and social issues in connection with it.

That is the value of the People’s Charter for Change. It is not a socialist programme but it starts to challenge the

power of the monopoly capitalist class. It establishes the class links between many areas of struggle. It demands not just activity and organisation but debate and education about how to move forward. It provides the basis for the promotion and development of a fuller alternative economic and political strategy, such as that articulated in the Communist Party’s ‘Left Wing Programme’.

In working out the strategy for moving forward, it is essential to build an understanding of the real nature of society in which we live. A second major weakness of the British labour movement, and one very much linked to economism, is a lack of appreciation of the imperialist nature of the British state. For that reason we are very pleased to include in this edition of *CR* the James Connolly Memorial Lecture on *21st Century Anti-Imperialism* given by Andrew Murray. In this incisive article, Andrew traces the development of modern imperialism through several distinct phases over the last 150 years, and argues that we must “not refrain from supporting those who are fighting for their freedom under a religious flag just because we cannot identify with them as comrades as easily as we might have done with a previous generation of freedom fighters.” Defeating the ‘new world order’, he says, is a prerequisite for any lasting form of social progress, and “Uniting the mass

movements against war and for social justice in Europe with the states and movements fighting for social progress in Latin America and those struggling for national liberation in the Middle East must be the foundation for the renewal of a progressive politics in the 21st century.”

In the following article in this issue, Lars Ulrik Thomsen from Denmark takes a theoretical perspective, defending the continued relevance of Lenin’s analysis of imperialism as a stage of capitalist development associated with the rise of monopoly capital and an enhanced role for the state. Referring to Lenin’s study of Hegel’s dialectics before writing *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, he urges a major philosophical undertaking as a preliminary to the analysis of contemporary imperialism. In this context it is worth observing, as German philosopher Hans Heinz Holz has done, that “During critical moments of the revolutionary movement Lenin ... frequently reassured himself of the philosophical fundamentals of his own political theory and practice.”⁵

Comrade Thomsen claims Gretchen Binus as one of only a few economists analysing the current crisis in terms of state monopoly capitalism. In Britain we might dispute that, especially considering

John Foster’s article in CR56,⁶ but Professor Binus does have interesting things to say. Her article from *Marxistische Blätter* in 2009, reproduced in this issue of *CR*, demonstrates clearly both the way in which finance capital operates and the role of the state in propagating its interests. Although focusing partly on Germany, and writing before the recent round of austerity measures, she gets behind all the hype about massive state interventions as being in the interests of the whole population to disclose the finance capitalist nature of such interventions, and their intention of safeguarding the system to the detriment of working class interests.

The remaining contributors to this issue cover a wide variety of topics. Hans Heinz Holz pays a warm, if not uncritical, tribute to Hungarian philosopher and literary scholar György Lukács, which some may find surprising, in view of comrade Holz’s previous articles in *CR* on Stalin. Richard

Mauders gives a robust defence of the the Soviet Union’s urgent need in 1939 to sign the non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany. Jimmy Jancovic takes up the issue of the left and the state, and Kenny Coyle responds to criticisms in *CR56* of his own discussion contribution in *CR55*. Finally, in Mike Quille’s *Soul Food* column, we have a bumper set of readers’ poems and a review of Francis Combes’ anthology *Common Cause*.

Notes

- 1 *Morning Star*, 17 September 2010.
- 2 http://www.tuc.org.uk/the_tuc/tuc-18526-f0.cfm.
- 3 CPB, *Executive Committee Domestic Resolution for 51st National Congress*, 2010, para 44.
- 4 *Ibid*, para 63.
- 5 H H Holz, *Lenin’s philosophisches Konzept (Lenin’s Philosophical Concept)*, in *Topos*, Heft 22, 2003, p 11
- 6 J Foster, *Superprofit, the Super-Rich and the Failure of Britain’s Ruling Class*, in *CR56*, 2010, p 8.

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HARRY POLLITT

22.11.1890-26.06.1960

HARRY POLLITT, long-time leader of the Communist Party, died 50 years ago this year, just a few months short of his 70th birthday. Writing in the August 1960 edition of *Labour Monthly*, Rajani Palme Dutt paid tribute to his “unquenchable energy”, “creative leadership” and “the persuasive eloquence, cool logic and burning intensity of his voice”.

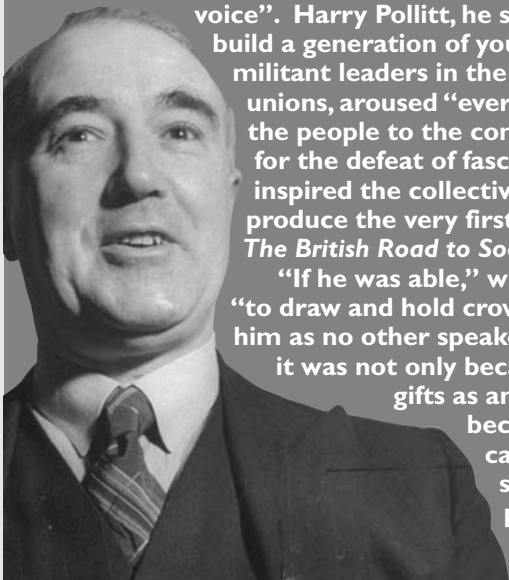
Harry Pollitt, he said, helped build a generation of younger militant leaders in the trade unions, aroused “every section of the people to the common fight for the defeat of fascism” and inspired the collective effort to produce the very first edition of *The British Road to Socialism*.

“If he was able,” wrote Dutt, “to draw and hold crowds to hear him as no other speaker in Britain, it was not only because of his gifts as an orator, or because of his capacity for simple political explanation,

and for kindling enthusiasm, but because he was close to every man and woman in his audience and able to express for them their own hopes, fears and aspirations, and at the same time to give the answer to their problems and show them the way forward.

“Above all, Harry Pollitt was the embodiment of incorruptible loyalty to the cause of the working class and of socialism. ... There was no position in the Trades Union Congress and the Labour Party, as the leaders in those early days did not fail to convey to him, which could not have been his for the asking, if he had consented to break with the Marxist party of the working class, with communism. But Harry Pollitt was not one of those who ‘haul the glorious emblem down’. For him there was no higher position in the entire working class movement than that of General Secretary of the Communist Party. He never forgot the burning hatred of capitalism, imbued from his earliest memories and only strengthened by experience. He never weakened in his passionate devotion and unquenchable confidence in the victory of the working class and socialism.”

COMMUNIST REVIEW SALUTES HIS MEMORY



James Connolly Memorial Lecture 2010

21st CENTURY ANTI-IMPERIALISM

By Andrew Murray



James Connolly is evidently a man of our times. He stood at the juncture of three great movements one hundred years ago, movements which shaped the world of the twentieth century.

First, he was an anti-imperialist whose fight for the emancipation of his nation from the British Empire led to his glorious death. Second, he was a socialist, immersed in all the controversies of the rising international socialist movement in the years before the First World War. Third, he was a militant trade unionist, at the centre of the Dublin lock-out and the Great Unrest which marked the eruption of fighting, class struggle, industrial organisation in Britain and Ireland alike.

Few people in the history of the revolutionary movement can claim such a position. In the 94 years since his death many of his admirers have emphasised one or other of these aspects of Connolly's life and thought. In reality, of course, they were entirely inter-related. National and social emancipation, through

all means from strike action to armed uprising, was for Connolly an entirely integral project, directed at the overthrow of the imperialist ruling classes, the British in the first instance, the prerequisite for any progress, national or social.

When Connolly said that "the two currents of revolutionary thought in Ireland, the socialist and the national, were not antagonistic but complementary"¹ he was taking an advanced position, compared with most revolutionary opinion of his time, the very opposite of the views of Rosa Luxemburg, his comrade in martyrdom for the cause, who was sweeping in her dismissal of Polish national aspirations.

It is almost superfluous to underline the contemporary significance of Connolly's work a century on. The great economic crisis which has, like the Great Unrest, marked the end of a *belle époque* for world capitalism, demands a strong trade union response. What James Connolly would make of the soporific social partnership which has disarmed the

working class is easy to imagine, but so too is his likely response to episodes like the sit-ins at Waterford Glass and Visteon Components in Belfast.

The world crisis also urges on us a revival of the socialist movement worldwide. That is still more challenging after all the triumphs and disappointments of the twentieth century. Yet it remains the fact that the case for socialism rests 90% on the shortcomings of capitalism, now on lurid display.

The revival of interest in the works of Karl Marx is a welcome consequence. In rebuilding a mass socialist movement, Connolly has much to teach us too, both in his determination to spread the message among the working class itself and in the course of his own personal struggle of ideological self-emancipation from sectarianism, in his case represented by the now-forgotten doctrines of DeLeonism, the leader whose arid and sectarian reading of Marx considerably retarded the development of socialism in the USA, where Connolly lived for many years.

But it is the lessons of Connolly and his times for anti-imperialism that I wish to address today. This has become, of necessity, the central question of world politics of this century. I am proud to be a leader of the Stop the War Coalition, which has organised the biggest demonstrations London has ever seen, in opposition to the imperialism of the British government.

The Development of Imperialism

When we set out in Stop the War nine years ago, we were reticent about calling the wars of Bush and Blair 'imperialist' – not because we had any doubts that they were, but for fear of being thought to be lapsing into the jargon of the left and losing a mass audience. Yet within a year or two, the term had become a commonplace. Millions of people, even in the belly of the beast, were ready, willing and able to call the enemy by its proper name.

It is an imperialism which of course James Connolly would have recognised. But that is not to say that it is



THE CAUSE OF SOCIALISM AND IS THE CAUSE OF LABOUR



exactly the same beast now as it was then. It would be foolish to attempt to cram the reality of today's world back into the framework of a century ago. Imperialism is different, and so is the anti-imperialist movement worldwide – different not just compared to Connolly's time, but compared to thirty years ago, well within living memory.

The simplest and most useful definition of imperialism that I have come across was given by the late Marxist historian Victor Kiernan, who wrote, "Imperialism today may be said to display itself in coercion exerted abroad, by one means or another, to extort profits above what simple commercial exchange can procure."²

This definition has the merit of indicating both the source of imperialism in the imperatives of capitalism, and in laying stress on its political aspect as a system of world domination – the coercive dynamic. The synthesis of the mobilisation of capital around the world in search of the higher returns required to keep the system functioning and the

political expansion, via the use of the military apparatus above all, of the capitalist state system seems to capture the essence of the process.

On that general basis, modern imperialism (that is, imperialism arising on a monopoly capitalist basis) has developed through several distinct phases in the last 150 years and many of the insights first developed by Connolly's contemporaries like Hobson, Hilferding, Bukharin and Lenin need reformulating if they are to help explain today's imperialism, shaped as it is by the neoliberal offensive of the last generation. A 'new imperialism' is announced from time to time – all good bookshops are filled with works on the subject today. Indeed, the modern imperialism described at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries was often called 'new' to distinguish it from the preceding phase of settler or mercantile colonialism, and the still earlier empires of antiquity and medievalism.

The imperialism studied in the classic works had as its typical features the creation of the joint-stock company with an enlarged role for banks in

circulating capital; the division of most of the world into colonial and neocolonial spheres of influence; while the great majority of industrial production was retained in the imperial powers themselves. The export of capital, most usually invested either in raw material exploitation or essential transport infrastructure, was the main expression of the search for a higher rate of profit than that pertaining in the centres of world economy. According to Harvard economist Jeffrey Frieden³ in this period "the average rate of return on British investments abroad was 50 to 75 % higher than at home", and even higher in the railway industry, in which foreign investment was twice as profitable as domestic. Moreover, the government guaranteed the rate of interest on railway debentures in India, creating "private enterprise at public risk", much as the contemporary bank bailouts have done. The City, unsurprisingly given such rates and such protection, put £156 and £161 respectively into foreign and imperial companies for every £100 invested

domestically in the period before 1914. From such rates of return, and the competitive drive to grab access to the super-profit, a profound inter-imperialist rivalry emerged.

That rivalry led in turn to the First World War, following which the world system broke down and was recomposed in the inter-war years.

Fascism and the Second World War itself had the effect of substantially increasing the rate of exploitation of labour in most of the developed world (Britain being a notable exception), itself laying the foundation for a new phase of imperialism after 1945.

This next 'new' imperialism started on the twin basis of a considerable spatial contraction of the capitalist world market with the growth of Soviet power and the Chinese revolution; and the emergence of the USA as the undisputed hegemon in the capitalist world, leading to an abatement of the inter-imperialist rivalry which had pushed the entire system to the point of collapse in the first half of the twentieth century.

The typical economic actor now became the transnational company and the shift of



The National Executive of the Irish TUC and Labour Party, 1914 (see Connolly, far left, and Larkin, seated second from right).

industrial production capacity beyond the territories of the great powers began, slowly at first but accelerating from the 1970s onwards. The economies of those powers became increasingly oriented towards financial domination within the world system, although this shift was much more pronounced in Britain and the USA, say, than Japan or West Germany. Colonialism and the more blatant forms of neo-colonial manipulation were gradually driven out, to be replaced in part by the development of elements of 'ultra-imperialism' in the shape of global institutions devoted, under US control, to maintaining the conditions for capitalist expansion.

Stage two of the 'new imperialism' entered its own phase of breakdown in the late 1960s and 1970s as US hegemony eroded (in part a consequence of the massive spending on the Vietnam war). 30 years ago, a third of the world declared itself socialist; in the big capitalist states the ruling class ruled, of course, but with its freedom of action (in particular, freedom to raise the rate of profit) intolerably circumscribed, as it felt it, by powerful labour movements and an established welfare and Keynesian consensus; while in the liberated countries of what was called the third world as long as there was a second world, ambitious plans for national economic independence, or at least a fairer world economic order, were still on the agenda. In the 1970s, imperialism was being squeezed from all sides, as it had been in the period after 1918.

This called for a class-struggle counter-offensive, by the ruling class. Rather than fascism, which would have engendered massive resistance (but was nevertheless imposed in Chile) or war (severely complicated as an option by the strength of the USSR and the existence of nuclear weapons) the ruling classes

began the neoliberal offensive, the supreme object being the transfer of wealth from labour to capital worldwide.

The policies first pounded by Thatcher and Reagan since swept across the world, powered by instruments as apparently diverse as the US Department of Defense, the International Monetary Fund and Rupert Murdoch's media empire. Its economic record has been mediocre to say the least – global GDP growth averaged over 5% before 1970, 4.5% in the 1970s, 3.4% in the 1980s and 2.9% in the 1990s – but as an exercise in the reassertion of class power, it has been a staggering success.

As well as weakening or breaking the power of labour in western Europe and North America, this offensive contributed to the collapse of the USSR and its allied states in Europe. This in turn made the imposition of a 'new order' on the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America all the easier.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and its allied states not only deprived the world of the hope (or fear) of an alternative to capitalism in the here-and-now, it also opened the way both for capitalism to bring millions of workers into the circle of exploitation and for the political 'terms of trade' to be turned to the advantage of the centres of high finance just about everywhere. It was the crowning achievement of the neoliberal offensive.

This then was the basis for the latest 'new imperialism', the one striving to master the world today.

In his recently-published masterly *Companion to Marx's Capital*, the geographer David Harvey posits that today we are seeing "... a different kind of imperialism, which is not about robbing values and stripping assets from the rest of the world, but about using the rest of the world as a site for opening up new forms of capitalist production."⁴ That would seem to me to be

an accurate evaluation of the newest 'new imperialism'.

Certainly, it defined the context for the 'war on terror' which started to emerge under Clinton's presidency, attained its military (and rhetorical) apogee under George Bush and is being recalibrated today. In a nutshell, this has been an ambitious attempt to create an integrated world capitalist economy centred on US political power, which itself extracts a 'rent' for its ruling elite from the world system in return for maintaining a military and currency domination for the ruling classes of the world. The removal of any and all obstacles to the spread of capitalism *within that integrated power structure* has been the central aim of the war project.

Neoconservative Strategies

There has been an ideological foundation for the project – Fukuyama's famous Hegelian "end of history"⁵ asserting that human progress had reached its terminus in liberal democratic capitalism, displacing of course Marx's communism. It hardly needs emphasising today that this ideological foundation is cracked. It has been subverted not by a particularly strong challenge on the political front, but by the working out of its own practice, particularly the two neos – so all-conquering just a few years ago – neoliberalism and neoconservatism.

Neoliberalism has now had an epic crash, a truth bearing exceptionally heavily in Ireland (and let me say in passing I do not think Connolly would have been all that happy to hear the Irish people being praised by the head of the European Central Bank in April 2010 for the exemplary way they have responded to the crisis). Neoconservatism is equally discredited – gorged on the blood of a million people in Iraq, of course, but also

symbolically checked by the war in Georgia in 2008 which marked the passing of the 'unipolar moment' in world politics, the unrivalled dominance of the US, of which neoconservatism was a political expression.

The material foundation for the new imperialism has been the overwhelming military power of the USA, embodied in the fact that Washington spends more on its armed forces than everyone else in the world put together.

On this basis, neoconservatism devised different strategies, based where necessary on different alliances, for every region to make the world safe for uninhibited capitalist exploitation.

Russia was to be kept weak, and the former Soviet space fragmented and prevented from reintegration. That was the underlying theme of the so-called colour revolutions in several former Soviet republics, 'revolutions' which are now almost universally discredited and in considerable measure reversed.

China was to be kept encircled and pressured. Virtually the first act of the Pentagon in the 'war on terror' was to extend its network of military bases in Asia. Of course, isolating China was not only impossible but also unprofitable for the US, but using all methods to stall its relative rise in the world was a clear Bush priority.

European integration was to be kept diluted to prevent the EU emerging as a superpower (a highly unwelcome prospect from a progressive point of view, it needs to be said). When Richard Perle, for example, advocated Turkey's admission to the EU, it was for the explicit purpose of rendering the EU politically incoherent and incapable of challenging US hegemony.

Africa was originally left to Britain and France, former colonial empires, to control – a sub-contracting system which led to Blair's war in Sierra



Leone, propping up a corrupt elite. Now, however, Africa too is favoured with one of the Pentagon's globe-straddling regional commands.

Latin America was for a time taken for granted, and indeed Bush came under considerable conservative criticism for his neglect of the 'backyard' because of his concentration on the Middle East, a neglect which the right wing believed cleared the space for the progressive and socialist advances in a number of states, Venezuela above all.

And then there was the greater Middle East cauldron, the prime focus of the 'new imperialism' extending from North Africa into South Asia. This, the most resource-rich and politically-volatile region in the world, has been the hardest to control in the post-1991 order. The US strategy here has been to try and find new ways, through direct military intervention and support for Israel, to maintain the imperialist hegemony first established after the First World War in the teeth of resistance by most of the region's peoples, if not their governments.

Little elaboration is now needed as to the consequences of that policy. It has been the most infamous chapter in world politics for a generation or more. The golden thread however, was the free market, the opening up of space to an integrated capitalist world economy, the drawing of millions – even billions – into wage labour, the privatisation of common assets, the free flow of capital.

That is why, adding considerable insult to massive injury, the Republican party praetorian guard dispatched to Baghdad to manage the occupation of Iraq treated the state as a sort of 'ground zero' laboratory for the imposition of a privatised free market regime more radical than they could even dream of imposing on the USA itself.

Of course, it is reasonable to ask – is this still the US



Venezuelan president
Hugo Chavez with US
president Barack Obama

agenda? I am not one of those who believe that the election of Obama represents nothing – that would be to belittle the tremendous impact of the worldwide anti-war movement, including within the US itself, and the struggle of the US people for social progress.

However, neither can we afford to be starry-eyed. On some issues, a different policy is being followed – progress on nuclear disarmament, the start (only a start) to withdrawing from Iraq. On other issues, a better game is being talked – Palestine, for example – but nothing changes in practice. And then there are issues like Afghanistan, where the continuity with the Bush policy is near total.

Overall, it would be foolish to imagine that the strategic agenda behind the ‘new world order’ has been discarded or even significantly diluted under Obama. So challenging the over-arching imperatives of US power, looking past any shift in rhetorical gear, will remain the decisive issue for the future – this remains the key to advancing on any other agenda.

Religion and Resistance

The ‘war on terror’ has involved several concurrent wars against countries overwhelmingly inhabited by Muslim people.

Does this make it, as some argue, a ‘war against Islam’? No. As argued above, it is rooted in greed, not God. The devouring dollar recognises no religion, and the only reason Bush’s ‘axis of evil’ onslaught did not extend to a war against North Korea was the latter’s possession of nuclear weapons, not its failure to embrace the Muslim faith.

However, opposition to the ‘war on terror’ at the sharp end has taken often a religious form, with groups of explicitly Islamist politics playing the leading part in the struggle to expel the occupiers.

This fact has baffled some

people, and led them to defend occupation and imperialism on the grounds that the latter are ‘secular’ while the opposition is ‘fundamentalist’. They have damned the resistance to occupation in Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon and Afghanistan as fundamentalist and sectarian.

Even if this were true (and it is for the most part not), it could not justify the wars which are being fought today. It is not a novel conundrum. Many times imperialist ‘civilisation’ has been confronted by allegedly backward peoples fighting for their own independence and self-determination.

The Victorian British socialist leader William Morris was a hundred times right when he condemned Britain’s war in the Sudan as a “wicked and unjust war now being waged by the ruling and propertied classes of this country, with all the resources of civilisation at their back, against an ill-armed and semi-barbarous people whose only crime is that they have risen against a foreign oppression.”⁶ Morris was quite clear when he said that he would welcome a victory for the Mahdi in Sudan as signalling that the Sudan was once more under the control of its own people.

That the burden of the struggle against the ‘new world order’ is now being carried in many places by religious rather than secular forces, and by movements whose social agenda is radically different from ours (although this difference may be exaggerated) is one of the signal differences between anti-imperialism now and the anti-imperialism of the post-World War Two period.

This difference needs to be acknowledged and the consequences of it politically addressed, but we should not let it hypnotise us, still less divide us to the profit of the imperialists.

Some left-wing and liberal critics of the resistance to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan, for example,

appear themselves to be mesmerised by the religious form of the struggle, taking the so-called ‘fundamentalists’ at their own evaluation, without looking at the actual motivations, history, and demands of those movements. To quote Terry Eagleton in his polemic against eminent atheist Richard Dawkins:

“Dawkins seems to nurture a positively Mao-like faith in faith itself – in the hopelessly idealist conception ... that religious ideology (as opposed, say, to material conditions or political injustice) is what fundamentally drives radical Islam.”⁷

Their objectives are, of course, entirely secular and in most cases are the same objectives as those long advanced by nationalist, populist and socialist movements in the past. Indeed, movements like Hezbollah and Hamas have to some extent filled the vacuum created by the shortcomings, on the one hand, of the secular left in the Middle East (above all its failure to consistently articulate the national aspirations of the broadest mass of people in societies where the working class has generally only been a small proportion of the population), and their brutal suppression by imperialism and its local satraps on the other. At any event, the popular support of these rising Islamist movements cannot be gainsaid.

Even al-Qaeda, which is undoubtedly rooted in religious fanaticism, makes demands which can be met in this world, not the next. It is not to excuse the horror of 9/11 – nor to suggest that bin Laden can form part of some global anti-imperialist alliance, which the anti-popular sectarianism of his politics and methods entirely precludes – to point out that this atrocity was not carried out to restore the Caliphate or even to impose the *burqa* on the women of the USA. It was

directed against the presence of US troops in Saudi Arabia, the suffering of the Iraqi people under the sanctions regime, and the oppression of the Palestinians by the Israeli state.

These may be good or bad demands, but they do not depend on any particular view of Islam or God. Merely to draw attention to this fact draws down the charge of ‘root-causism’ – the attempt to look at the roots of terrorism, rather than being content simply to denounce it as an evil rooted in an unshakable religious fanaticism. ‘Root-causism’ is in fact the foundation of rational political debate of these issues. To quote Professor Eagleton once more, “all these potential recruits to al-Qaeda stem from countries that have long, discreditable histories of European domination or colonial occupation.”⁸

On the point of root-causism, I take my stand with Lord Salisbury, the great Victorian Tory imperialist, who when invited to condemn the Phoenix Park murders in Dublin did so while also insisting on “drawing out the close connection between the crimes and the British government policy which has caused it”⁹ – the policy of what he regarded as Gladstone’s excessive liberalism in handling the Irish question. So the imperialists are not beyond a bit of root-causism when dealing with terrorism, when it suits!

So we have to insist on not just drawing out the close connection between all these phenomena – ranging from terrorist attacks to armed struggles for independence – and the British and US government policies which have caused them, but also not refrain from supporting those who are fighting for their freedom under a religious flag just because we cannot identify with them as comrades as easily as we might have done with a



previous generation of secular freedom fighters.

And it is worse than wrong – it is reactionary – to refuse to join hands with movements which are fighting imperialism and national oppression because they draw religious inspiration, while embracing blood-thirsty neocolonial secularists.

For example, take that leading apologist for the Iraq invasion and song-and-dance-man for the military industrial complex, Christopher Hitchens. Is his support for a war which killed hundreds of thousands balanced by his strident atheism?

Even the title of his anti-religious polemic is illuminating. *God is not Great* is of course a reversal of a central Muslim invocation. Calling his book *Our Father is Not in Heaven* would have been braver in a predominantly (and often fundamentally) Christian country like the USA – too brave, evidently.

To take another example, the *Financial Times* journalist John Lloyd denounced the Stop the War Coalition for allegedly forming alliances with Islamic groups which did not respect rights for women and gay people¹⁰ – while himself uniting with George Bush and Dick Cheney, whose views on such questions would raise few eyebrows in Kandahar. If one is to unite with people you have disagreements with, it is better to do so for peace than for war.

It cannot be denied that some movements fighting imperialism are deeply conservative on social and democratic questions. But the problem is exactly that – social conservatism, not religion. Religion itself can often be allied to socially progressive politics, although it can also sometimes degenerate into sectarianism, which has always been used by colonialists to divide opposition to their rule, from Ireland to Iraq.

Defeating the 'New World Order'

Working through those contradictions, fighting for trade union freedom, for women's rights, for democracy, are causes we should all stand in solidarity with. But they can only be attained through the struggles of the people themselves in their own countries, and above all they cannot be imposed at the point of a neoconservative bayonet.

We will certainly not make any progress if we insist on uniting only with those who accept our maximum socialist programme, or with those who celebrate the European Enlightenment one-sidedly, not seeing that it not only co-existed with a worldwide reign of blood and terror visited on Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America, but that intellectual and political progress in western Europe in large measure actually depended on the massacres and the pillage.

To state the obvious, the opposite of struggling for unity is acquiescing in division. That is what unites the prosecution of the 'war on terror' abroad and the growing assault on the Muslim communities 'at home'. Islamophobia is now rampant in Britain and many other European countries, with the Muslim minority under attack for its lifestyle, political engagement, culture, indeed its very right to be.

This draws on a deep well of imperialist racism and, since Muslims in Britain are overwhelmingly also working class, it represents another way to divide the working class against itself.

How the bankers must smile, as a distraction from their troubles, when they see dispossessed and exploited white workers marching under the banner of the English Defence League to express their hopelessness by attacking Muslim people.

Muslim-baiting is also the thin end of the anti-civil



liberties wedge which has formed another part of the 'war on terror' fought on the domestic front in the USA and Britain in particular. Measures like extended detention without trial may be introduced 'temporarily' against 'just a tiny minority' but experience teaches that once on the statute book they will remain to be deployed against ever-wider sections of society indefinitely.

So this is a cause for everyone who calls themselves left, or liberal. And it is part of the struggle against an imperialism that has never fought wars abroad without also being forced to open a domestic front too.

How will the new world order be defeated? It will not – cannot – be the work of the left in the west alone, or of the labour movement in isolation. That is not only undesirable, but impossible.

It is a class issue, and not just in the simple sense that all the movements I have mentioned are rooted amongst the poor. Defeating the 'new world order' is a prerequisite for any lasting form of social progress. Nothing worthwhile can be achieved under the global domination of the

Pentagon, Wall Street, the City of London, News Corp etc.

That is why I would draw your attention to remarks made in an interview by Julio Chavez, a leader of Venezuela's ruling United Socialist Party, discussing the basis of a possibly soon-to-be-founded Fifth International:¹¹

"Why is anti-imperialism being proposed as the common element and not just socialism?"

"We say that this call has to have a broad character, and it is possible that in some countries, such as in the Middle East, there are organisations and movements fighting against some expressions of imperialism and Zionism as such, but that are not socialist in essence, in the programmatic sense. But, undoubtedly, they are fighting imperialism. That's why we say that it could be that in some Islamic countries that do not have socialism as an ideological element, for example the case of the Islamic Revolution of Iran, which is anti-imperialist, that this element will be an element that will convoke as many parties, organisations, movements of the world to raise the battle, the confrontation with imperialism."



Islamophobia: EDL demonstration in March 2010
Photo from flickr by Belkus

“From this perspective of an anti-imperialist character ... it is possible to call as many parties, movements, and currents in the world ... in order to agree on a plan, a minimum transition program, to move concretely towards a socialist project at a world level.”

Let me say that while the Islamic revolution in Iran was undoubtedly anti-imperialist, the anti-popular policies of the regime in Tehran have in large measure robbed it of that aspect, and complicate the worldwide struggle to prevent the extension of the war to Iran. But the essence of the point more broadly seems to be correct. Uniting the mass

movements against war and for social justice in Europe with the states and movements fighting for social progress in Latin America and those struggling for national liberation in the Middle East must be the foundation for the renewal of a progressive politics in the 21st century, founded on the defeat of the US hegemonic project.

Can we do it? Let me end with three quotes from James Connolly:

First, from the manifesto of the Socialist Party of Ireland: “The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects: it is national and it is social.”¹² I believe that reflection holds good on a world scale today

Secondly: “Old political organisations will die out and new ones must arise to take their place; old party rallying cries and watchwords are destined to become obsolete and meaningless, and the fire of old feuds and hatreds will pale and expire before newer conceptions born of a consciousness of our common destiny.”¹³

And finally, in answer to those paralysed by an assessing the balance of forces and forever waiting for another, more decisive, day: “But is the time ripe? You never know if the time is ripe until you try. If you succeed the time is ripe”¹⁴

■ *James Connolly Memorial Lecture, given in Dublin, 15 May 2010.*

Notes

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- 2 V G Kiernan, *America, The New Imperialism*, Verso, London, 2005, p xv.
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Lenin's Analysis of Imperialism – a Pioneering Work



By Lars Ulrik Thomsen

Currently fashionable theories on the left, such as the concept of transnational capital, propose that the concept of imperialism, and more specifically Lenin's theory of imperialism, is out of date and irrelevant to the worldwide labour movement. However, careful consideration shows that Lenin's theory of imperialism, which sees it as a stage of capitalist development associated with the rise of monopoly capital and an enhanced role for the state, is still the only solid foundation for grasping the nature of today's capitalist world economy, even with all of the changes that have taken place since Lenin's time.

Prologue

The process of dialectical materialism can be compared with the work of an artist. He renders his motive on the canvas, and – if he is a gifted artist – he will not be satisfied by just reproducing that motive. He will try to get to the essence of his motive, either by emphasising or pitching part of it. In a figurative sense, what happens between the artist and his motive is the material process. Dialectical logic is the process in the head of the artist and, together with the reflection of reality, constitutes dialectical materialism.

This is beautifully expressed in one of Shakespeare's sonnets (No 24):

“Mine eye hath played the painter, and hath stell'd
Thy beauty's form in table of
my heart;
...
Mine eyes have drawn thy
shape, and thine for me
Are windows to my breast,
where through the sun
Delights to peep, to gaze
therein on thee;”

This is dialectics in arts at its best. It gives the full richness of reflection and one that we can also find in the theoretical works of the classics.

The American author Francis Fukuyama predicted in the 1990s that history had reached an end. Capitalism had prevailed as the final answer to all modes of production.¹ But history in general is unpredictable and is not governed by fortune-tellers.

The major changes in capitalism, and the collapse of the socialist system in 1991, have led to political reaction and a major set-back for labour movement and democratic forces. But there is no reason to distrust the future or to fear the great changes which our time will experience. Capitalism and imperialism create the foundation for the coming socialist societies, not in a steady and evolutionary way, but in catastrophic leaps and through revolutions, from one type of formation to another.

Class struggles of social forces are the makers of history. If we look at the history of capitalism, we see that the French revolutions of the 19th century



evolved in a contradictory fashion. The feudal system that collapsed in 1789 was reinstated with the restoration of the monarchy in 1814, but the bourgeois revolution still prevailed. We know similar events from all the other major European countries. What we see now in Russia and Eastern Europe is a capitalist restoration, with fatal consequences for the working people. But, like the French Bourbons, the power of the Russian oligarchs is only temporary.

I. Positivistic and Scientific Analysis

In the late 1990s and with the beginning of the new millennium, a number of new works on imperialism were published, primarily written by American, English and German authors. These writers are characterised by a positivistic outlook and, in contrast with Lenin, by a lack of understanding of dialectical materialism. Their analysis gives a picture of new tendencies in imperialism, but not in a scientific way.² It is as if Lenin's works, which were popular in the 1970s, have almost



disappeared from the present debate. With a few exceptions, they are seen as irrelevant for contemporary analysis.

So anti-communism has achieved its goal of undermining the theoretical foundations of the labour movement. Our job must be to use the new publications on imperialism, as far as possible, and link them into a new analysis. The lack of investigation using Lenin's method has had perceptible consequences for the labour movement. It leads to miscalculations, as for example in the concepts of liberalisation and globalisation.

In a scientific sense, these authors are giving an incorrect picture of the present stage of capitalism. The same applies to the theory that transnational capitalism has replaced state monopoly capitalism.

In contrast to these recent publications, a very interesting book appeared as long ago as 1968: Fritz Kumpf's *Problems of Dialectics in Lenin's Analysis of Imperialism*.³ At that time Kumpf was a lecturer in philosophy at the Humboldt University in Berlin.

In his book Kumpf investigates Lenin's work and method, contributing to the development of the scientific analysis of imperialism. He starts by evaluating the most recent results in dialectical logic, and presents various opinions of Marxist lecturers on the subject. This is a very valuable approach, because every new investigation has to verify its concepts and categories.

Kumpf studies the process that has to be followed in the analysis, if the result is to be in accordance with philosophical logic. This includes the transition from the abstract to the concrete, and the relation between formal and dialectical logic in the investigation. The book gives us a clear impression of the depth and quality of Lenin's work. It emphasises that every step in the analysis must follow a special procedure to make the laws of motion visible in capitalism.

This is the important difference between Lenin's analysis and those of other authors. Lenin does not just deliver a number of pieces of factual information, but the actual substance of the matter is discovered and elaborated.

Kumpf also investigates the works of authors like Hilferding, Kautsky and Bukharin who were contemporary with Lenin. Kautsky came to quite different conclusions from Lenin, leading to a split in the labour movement, with consequences for our own time.

In the third chapter of his book, Kumpf analyses the new forms of state monopoly capitalism. He shows how –

despite of the efforts of the bourgeois parties – it is impossible to solve the inner contradictions of the system. His main thesis is that, although the monopolies undertake a form of planning, overall production is still anarchical. This is an important conclusion, because it gives us the key to understanding why society must change into a new formation.

Kumpf's work has to be seen in the critical light of later philosophical writings. The way he examines the relationship between natural science and logic requires closer analysis. His apology for making dialectical logic into a separate discipline is in contradiction with the work of E.V. Ilyenkov and his *Dialectical Logic*.⁴

2. Lenin's Work

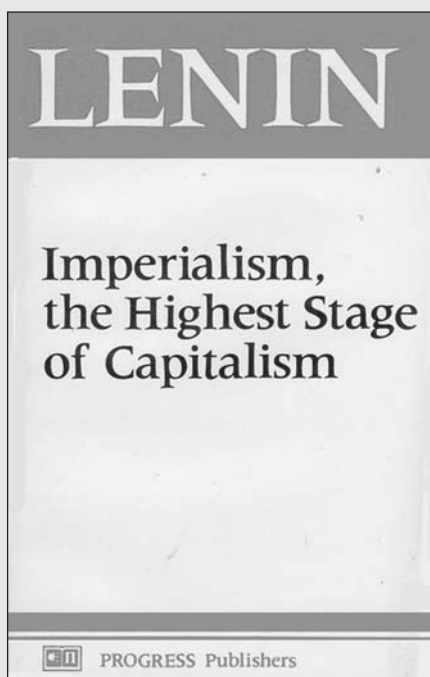
What distinguishes the Marxist analysis from other methods? It does not simply register the eventual changes, but goes deeper and tries to show connections that are not visible to the naked eye. This was the method which Lenin developed in *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*.

Before he started his analysis of capitalism, Lenin studied the development of philosophy from antiquity to his own time. In particular he studied Hegel's dialectics, which enabled him to develop a materialistic standpoint. Without these investigations, he would not have been able to solve the analysis of imperialism. One of his great achievements was the definition of dialectical logic:

"Logic is the science not of external forms of thought, but the laws of development 'of all material, natural and spiritual things', *ie*, of the development of the entire concrete content of the world and of its cognition, *ie*, the sum-total, the conclusion of the *History of knowledge of the world*."⁵

Lenin wrote *Imperialism* in the first half of 1916, claiming a number of developments in capitalism, which would have a decisive impact on the labour movement in the 20th century. His most important discovery was that the centralisation and concentration of capital leads to the formation of monopolies, which due to their position in the society become decisive in the general development of social production. As a result Lenin gave the following short definition: *Imperialism is the monopoly stage of capitalism*.⁶

This definition was elaborated in the well-known 5 points which followed, rooted in the economic categories of those days. The condition for reaching



"What distinguishes the Marxist analysis from other methods? It does not simply register the eventual changes, but goes deeper and tries to show connections that are not visible to the naked eye"



this conclusion was a comprehensive theoretical study. This meant collecting bourgeois statistical data, studying bourgeois authors and making a thorough study of philosophy. New scientific discoveries had to be part of the definition and decide the content of our terminology. This, Lenin concluded, was the only way to present an adequate analysis.

In *Imperialism*, Lenin investigates the preceding period in the history of capitalism, *ie* the transition from free competition to the emergence of monopolies. Subsequently he analyses the changes in monopoly capitalism and the dominance of finance capital. By examining the accessible data, he shows how these changes in capitalism will have far-reaching consequences for labour. He concludes that the labour movement should not submit to imperialism, but on the contrary, sharpen its inner contradictions to the outmost. Only in this way can imperialism be fought and the transition to a higher level of society be accomplished.

3. The Theory of State Monopoly Capitalism

Currently, the theory of state monopoly capitalism has almost been forgotten. Only a few economists, such as Gretchen Binus from Germany, are analysing the present economic crisis by using this method.⁷ By accepting the theory of neoliberalism and globalisation, most economists have concluded that it meant the termination of state monopoly capitalism. The misunderstanding arises because this theory was perceived in a narrow way and only seen in a specific form.

Monopolies and finance capital do not follow the same course under all political conditions. They are subject to the laws of development of capitalism, and the changes in the relative strength between the classes.

The present crisis in the world economy confirms that the theory of state monopoly capitalism is still valid. It is national governments that promote subsidies, political intervention and bailing out of the banks. They are trying to mitigate the consequences of the crisis. If the philosophy of neoliberalism were still in force, then national

governments would not interfere in the way they do today.

What can we learn from Lenin's work on imperialism? All the questions discussed in it became the substance of the most important questions which dominated the 20th century. That is why a new investigation has to build on the method of his work.

In to-day's society the new forms of state monopoly capitalism are one of the central issues for the labour movement. These new forms are no longer limited by national borders, but defined by regional cooperation of states. That is why internationalism is so important for the labour movement and has to be developed in qualitatively new ways. Only by international cooperation will it be possible for the labour movement, to become a counterweight to imperialism and state monopoly capitalism. It must visualise the difference between the specific and the general: what is nationally conditioned and what has to

be raised through common claims in international fora.

The present crisis is also the crisis of the state monopoly capitalist system. It is symbolised by the legendary Greek King Tantalos, who was chained in water up to his neck. Every time he wanted to drink, the water level sank. Fruit hung over his head, but he could never reach it. Today capitalism has generated unbelievable productive forces, which submerge the markets with commodities. But, if there is no purchasing power to keep the wheels running, millions of workers become redundant.

The depth of the present crisis is also rooted in the deregulation and liberalisation of the economy. This deregulation has been claimed as the proof that the state no longer has the same role as previously. In reality this policy was a means by which the imperial powers dominated smaller countries.

The critical reader will object that state regulation had already been replaced



"The present crisis is ... symbolised by the legendary Greek King Tantalos, who was chained in water up to his neck. Every time he wanted to drink, the water level sank. Fruit hung over his head, but he could never reach it."

by monetarism in the 1980s. But the promised free competition and liberalisation of the markets is refuted by economic facts. In the European Union, 40 banks control 60% of the capital market. Given the close connections between the big banks, there are in fact roughly 10 banks that control 60% of the market.

This kind of monopolisation is to be seen in all vital sectors of the economy. It has been advancing by leaps and bounds, prohibiting effective competition and price control, to the detriment of consumers. Monopolisation has also been used to redistribute wealth in society, which also tends to escalate the economic crises.

As a consequence of the current crisis, parties in the labour movement are proposing state intervention and subsidises for banks and private enterprises. In reality this is an attempt to reinstitute Keynesianism.⁸ But the relative success of that policy was under

the quite different circumstances of the 1930s and the period after the Second World War. Just to take one aspect, the scientific and technical revolution makes many of his predictions for the economy non-applicable. In contrast to Marx, Keynes did not consider new inventions as part of his theory.

An alternative approach could be the anti-monopoly strategy, which was launched in the 1970s. The idea was to connect all democratic demands with control of the big monopolies, giving new rights to the people, and strengthening democratic influence on all decisions in society. This kind of policy is still applicable, but needs to be combined with a new analysis of the contradictions in state monopoly capitalism and imperialism.

4.A New Analysis of Imperialism

The present conditions promote Lenin's work on imperialism, and give us new inspiration for a contemporary analysis. Lenin emphasised that his work was dominated by Tsarist censorship. Therefore he limited himself to the economic analysis of the war powers, and the world economy as a whole.

Since his time roughly 100 years have passed, with rapid developments in the economy and politics, which have changed the world decisively. One example is the emergence of a socialist camp, which in the 1980s comprised one third of the world's population. Another is the scientific-technological revolution, and a third is the dislocation between the imperialist powers since the Second World War.

That is why a contemporary analysis will appear different from that in Lenin's time. Referring to Kumpf's work, the new analysis must comprise a major philosophical preliminary undertaking. The new results in science and the way they were achieved must be investigated in defining new notions and categories.

Here we are not short of ideas, because the discussion on 'new thinking' started already in the 1980s.

One of the great questions in those days was the relation between class interests and common human values. Which should have priority? The solution is to determine the dialectical relation between them, and how priority grows out of the concrete analysis. These debates are still of great interest, because the labour movement has not reached a conclusion on this new topic.

The task that we face to day is even greater, because the tensions in the state-monopoly capitalist system have accelerated immensely. All these conflicts, and the collapse of the socialist system, lead to new formations and currents in the labour movement.

In the preface to the French-German edition of *Imperialism*, Lenin mentioned a new international ideological current – Kautskyism.⁹ Lenin's criticism was directed towards Kautsky's role in the Second International and its collapse in 1914.

To-day we experience a new current in the labour movement – a relapse to *utopian socialism*, an idealistic current which has gained widespread influence. It is known by the name 'New Left' and emphasises the moral and ethical aspects in the movement, downgrading the socialist goal. Taking its inspiration from former Marxists, like the French philosopher André Gorz¹⁰ and others, it is hardly distinguishable from the revisionists of Eduard Bernstein's time.

As Lenin had to fight Kautskyism at the beginning of the 20th century, so we have to fight the utopian socialism of our century. A new analysis of imperialism can mean that the dialectical method will experience a rebirth. Only by developing new forms of dialectical materialism will it be possible to accomplish a true understanding of the laws of motion in our society.



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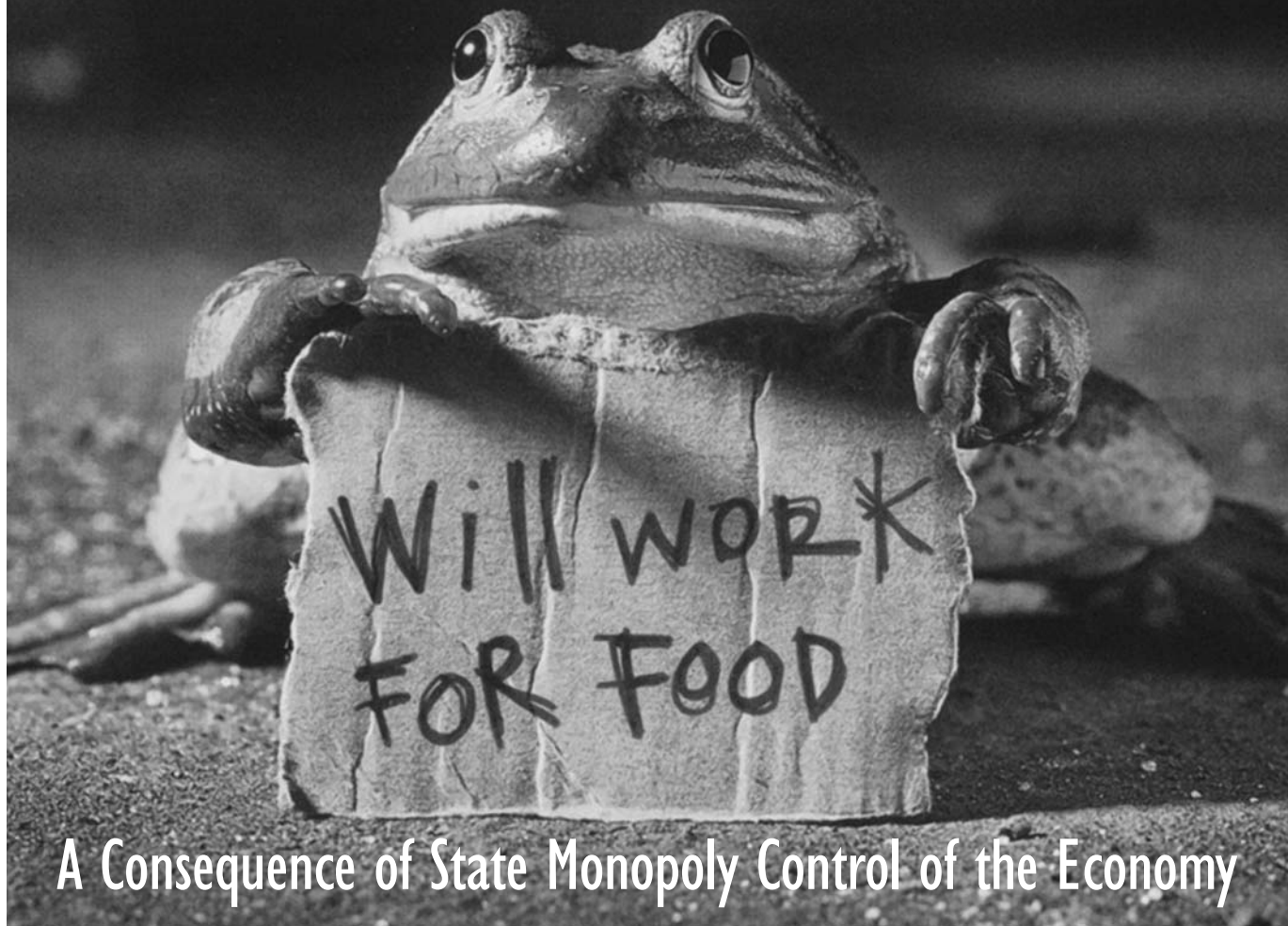
7 G Binus, *The Financial Crisis – A Result of State Monopoly Control of the Economy*, CR, following article (originally published in German as *Finanzkrise – Resultat staatsmonopolistischer Regulierung der Wirtschaft*, in *Marxistische Blätter*, 2009, Heft 1, p 21).

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The Financial Crisis



A Consequence of State Monopoly Control of the Economy

By Gretchen Binus

THE INTERNATIONAL financial crisis is ubiquitous – it is occurring not only in the USA and the EU. It is drawing the whole world economy into a chaos whose entirety cannot yet be seen, and even leading whole countries into state bankruptcy. Faced with turmoil on the financial markets, scenarios of fear and the panic of capital, governments have frantically put in place packets of state measures to support the banks and financial markets, to hitherto unknown financial dimensions. The increasing calls upon the state, especially

by those who up till now have fostered the myth of the free market, are frequently accompanied by demands for a new regulation of the financial system, for a new political framework of rules for the functioning of the capitalist mechanism. Bourgeois scholars and bankers even speak of a ‘systemic crisis’, and demand state guarantees for an enduring new order directed towards securing the existing profit system.

On the Left¹ a lively debate has arisen about the condition of present-day capitalism. Here the question of the system is also put, but in

respect of other and totally different aspects. They ask whether the state is returning and neoliberalism is stuck in crisis, whether state and economy are to be redefined or whether indeed one can speak of a crisis of capitalism.

The crisis-charged shock to the total economic system marks a deep breach in the development of capitalism *in toto*. In the present political confusion, however, effective counter-strategies are not to be found. But in all the publicity one tendency, grounded in the developments and dominance of the monopoly capitalist ruling structure of society, is

becoming quite clear: the state intervenes directly in the economy with all its economic and political power when the existence of this system is threatened or the conditions for investment of monopoly capital seriously worsen. Therefore there can be no solution to the crisis in the interests of the great majority of the population, without generally endangering this social system.

State Interventions as a Life Necessity for Advancing Monopolisation

To understand this serious

world economic upheaval we should very briefly refer to the almost forgotten theory of state monopoly capitalism. In the 1970s this concept, underpinned by fundamental works of Marxist scholars, was a component of the analysis of capitalism among the whole of the Marxist Left.² It connected with statements by Marx and Engels on the historical tendency of capitalist accumulation, that the inner contradictions of capital utilisation force capitalism ever more strongly to adapt to the increasingly social character of the productive forces with forms of 'social capital', without being able to break through the social order – shown in the building-up of share ownership in businesses and in the role of the credit system. With advancing monopolisation of the economy, such forms of social capital develop into, or are newly created as, economic monopoly ("Everything hinges on economic monopoly", as Lenin said³) – ever as adaptation to changed concrete historical conditions and under the pressure of social challenges. One may think only of the development of finance capital or of transnational or international monopolies. And this provokes 'state intervention' ever more strongly.

Rudolf Hilferding characterised such a development at the beginning of the 20th century. He wrote:

"Finance capital signifies the unification of capital. The previously separate spheres of industrial, commercial and bank capital are now brought under the common direction of high finance, in which the masters of industry and of the banks are united in a close personal association. The basis of this association is the elimination of free competition among

individual capitalists by the large monopolistic combines. This naturally involves at the same time a change in the relation of the capitalist class to state power."⁴

The core of the state monopoly capitalist theory is substantiated in the statement that, with further development of the productive forces and the rapid progress of the social division of labour, the yardstick of 'private' monopolisation no longer suffices to secure the utilisation of capital. Consequently state intervention has developed as a permanent feature.

"To the same extent as the state power becomes economically active, the extent of monopolistic rearrangement and of breaking up of the competition mechanism enlarges. With all its branches, the state has the whole society as sphere of activity, totally in contrast even with the greatest monopolies."⁵

That the state is ever more comprehensively incorporated into what takes place in the economy is a characteristic feature of the development of capitalism in its totally monopolistic phase. Also, the internationalisation of capital, or globalisation, is unthinkable without this state monopoly mechanism. Intensive relations with the state are a life necessity for monopolistic expansion.

Nevertheless the relationship of the state and the monopolies is extremely ambivalent. On the one hand, the different lobbies of high finance operate in competition with one another; on the other the intervention of the state appears as independent from the concrete historical conditions of social develop-

ment at any given time. In this extremely confined network of relations the state in no way functions as a simple executor of business interests. In its relative independence it has, now as ever, to safeguard total-social, profit-alien responsibilities, it has to make social processes and conflicts safe for the benefit of the ruling power configuration, while however at the same time accepting as much responsibility as possible for monopolistic accumulation. State interventions in the economy are moreover subject to the prevailing political power relations and are therefore subject to influence by other social currents or movements. Superficially, the regulating function of the state appears as such with increasing extent; and the multiformity and novelty of its methods often appear, not as a capitalist procedure for regulating profit, but rather as an intervention in the economy in the interests of society.

The permanence of state interventions in the economy characterises capitalism at every level of its development, but with significant differences in forms, weight and also in quality, as well as with variable applicability. The arsenal of state control measures includes the whole equipment of state economic policy of subventions, tax measures and state contracts up to direct interventions in the structure of businesses and the economy. Especially with 'globalisation', the narrow entwining of the national economies has increased the scope and intensity of state intervention in the economic process.⁶ That is becoming visible in the cooperation with international high finance of states and international organisations of the most diverse kind – such as institutions of the European Union (EU), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank as well as world economic or

financial summits.

It should be added that the relationship of monopoly and state does not only refer to the totality of socio-economic and political relations, but rather also directly to the setting of emphasis in the formation of economic and social policies and in their justification; *ie* the state interventions are bound up with different variants regarding direction and content.

The current discussion about neoliberalism and Keynesianism reflects this. Both variants are based in principle on the same socio-economic foundation and in both directions it is a matter of stabilising the capitalist economy on account of economic crises or insufficient conditions for accumulation of capital. But they differ in the placing of emphasis on the economic and socio-political interventions of the state.

The neoliberal direction, originating from the 1940s and 50s and especially strengthened since the 1970s in most of the dominant countries, can be described as a confrontational variant or as a radicalised model of utilisation of capital. With the concept of a long-term economic policy it is oriented towards a 'market economy' with 'free competition' as central categories and a 'strong state' above the economy, which sets the basic conditions for utilisation of capital. It relies on a whole arsenal of measures favourable to capital expansion, such as privatisation of public property, deregulation, cancelling state investments and taxation, destruction of the social security system etc.

Against this the Keynesian variant – originating in the period after the Great Crisis of 1929-32 and known in the USA as the New Deal; or in Germany, Italy and other industrial countries originating repeatedly from the post-war years until well into the 1970s as a valid economic-political concept –



backs an anticyclical and demand-oriented policy, in order to stimulate the economy. It comprises state-financed investment, including via government borrowing, as well as guidelines on employment and socio-political measures. Within the neoliberal dogma, this variant is certainly also present with regard to military expenditure and the armaments industry.

Today, many on the Left see in the Keynesian variant, with its macroeconomic regulation, the opportunity for a reorientation of economic policy in the direction of a more just society. The currently much discussed 'Swedish model' shows that this direction of state monopoly control offers democratic forces and the Left the possibility of introducing alternative ideas into the economy and society. It is a totally specific form of national state monopoly development on the basis of a social compromise between labour, capital and the state, originating after the world economic crisis of 1929 and a consequence of the political balance of power, with strong trade unions and a strong social democracy in Sweden. It indicates that, with a strong anti-capitalist political force, variants directed towards a greater degree of social justice and to safeguarding employment can at least become accepted. However, unless the socio-economic foundation substantiating the power and political influence of capital is substantially changed, then this model has no permanence – as seen in the current neoliberal direction of economic policy in Sweden.

The Finance Market as a Parasitic Accompaniment to Monopoly Expansion

The present depth of the crisis is the outcome of rigorous profit-oriented control of the economy and society on the basis of the neoliberal

alignment of economic and social policies. Various measures of taxation policy, deregulation and liberalisation of the markets as well as a large-scale privatisation campaign have essentially improved the return on high-finance capital, at the same time however creating the conditions for a huge stock-market bubble. In no way, therefore, can one speak of the last decades in terms of a 'dominance of rolling back state intervention'. By means of a whole number of laws and other methods, the state and its institutions have – most of all in the last decade at the national and international level – favoured the expansion of firms into new and profitable areas of investment.

We may refer here only to the legislative measures of the German 'Red-Green' government from 1998 onwards. At the beginning of 2001 the reform of corporate taxation came into force, by which businesses are spared annually about €12bn in tax payments. Likewise, the introduction of 'tax freedom on capital gains' on the sale of German businesses furnished further taxation-linked encouragements. In addition there were billion-euro presents to large-scale enterprises by suspension of the wealth tax, reduction of the top rate of tax and the lowering of the tax on profits. At the beginning of 2004 the 'Investment Modernisation Law' came into force. It made possible the admission of hedge funds into Germany, with which certificates speculative dealing could be pursued. Besides that the demands on the Stock Exchange were relaxed, investment possibilities on funds were extended, trade in derivatives on real estate transactions was permitted and 'bank supervision with judgement by eye' was allowed.

Also, within the EU framework, a multiplicity of state instruments was created, which with the completion of the financial services market,

above all, facilitated the entry of the major banks and other high finance institutions into new capital markets.

Alongside flexible capital regulations for businesses or the valid credit assignments of the European Central Bank to big business, we should also mention especially the integration of the finance market. On the basis of the Financial Services Action Plan 1999-2005 (drawn up in 1999), with a multiplicity of measures, and the White Book *Financial Services Policies 2005-10* as a sequel, together with a far-going liberalisation of the capital market, the finance market was brought into line with the expansion of the major banks into the European economic space and with an enormously applied mobilisation of capital, by opening up profitable sources of finance. Even in the current crisis, the banks are able, due to the recently slackened EU Balance Rules, to achieve tax gains and thereby prevent higher losses. Finally, international organisations such as the IMF, the World Bank and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development were pioneers of the neoliberal course. They connected the supply of means of finance for projects with the conditions, *eg* privatisations, which the commercial banks and other financial institutions guaranteed via different types of high-yielding finance.

On the other side of state-aided capital accumulation, there have been legally enforced cuts in social welfare in all industrial countries over the last few years. The outcome of such extensive 'reforms' has been a shift in the primary distribution between wages and profits in favour of high finance, seen clearly in the increase in the enormous profits of the powerful corporations. Thus, in Germany, the share of profits in the national income rose from 27.8% to 35.4% between 2000 and 2007, while wages stagnated and in real terms fell

on account of price rises and taxation policy. Consequently the reduced purchasing power no longer offered any profitable prospects for increased earnings of businesses in the real economy. The flow towards excessive profits in the liberalised profitable investment spheres on the finance markets became a torrent, in particular via new 'innovative' financial products with promised super-returns. Banks, investment funds, insurance companies and the financial institutions of international corporations pursued returns on the finance markets to astronomical heights (compared with sinking profit rates in the real economy), and strengthened the suction of investment-seeking capital into the finance sphere.

The neoliberal control – purposefully oriented to the benefit of high finance through the exploitation of sources of financialisation – has advanced the worldwide overaccumulation of capital to a hitherto unknown extent and has extraordinarily broadened the finance market. Enormous masses of money have migrated there in the last few years. The ISW Report *Finance Capital*⁷ illustrates this with the following data from international institutions:

- The global private financial resources, which are administered by banks, funds, insurance companies and other financial institutions rose over the period 1999-2007 from \$71.5 trillion to more than \$100 trillion.
- The financial resources of the dollar millionaires rose over the period 1997-2007 from \$19.1 trillion to \$40.7 trillion.
- The institutional investors such as pension funds, investment funds and insurance companies raised their collective wealth from \$21 trillion to \$56 trillion over the 10 years 1995-2005.

The outcome of this development has been an extraordinary increase in the gap between the real and financial economies. In 2007 financial assets totalled \$500 trillion compared with a gross world product of \$50 trillion. This discrepancy indicates the degree to which capitalism is driven by the finance market, in order to maintain the maximum profit-oriented system against redistribution and expropriation.

The relative independence of the financial sphere in relation to the real economy is a general characteristic of the development of monopoly capitalism. It is the outcome of the enormous advance in the separation of the ownership and function of capital with the tumultuous progress of the productive forces. It is the way in which finance capital can still realise itself as centralised and monopolised property. Only in the finance capitalist detachment of ownership, and its concentration in new forms, does capital achieve the necessary size, versatility and elasticity which allows it to integrate itself nationally and internationally. As Peter Hess wrote 20 years ago:⁸

“The characteristic role of finance capital is not exhausted by the corporations’ enormously increasing superstructure of immediate credit. The tumultuous self-dynamics of the secondary, tertiary etc markets for interest-bearing capital is essential. The markets arising for these businesses come about in differentiated ways and have differing conditions of movement and exploitation Banks and bank consortia, investment houses, money funds etc push themselves into the midst of all such

individual businesses, pressing on with the trade and on that basis drawing their profit. This is speculation to huge extent, parasitism squared – but both are necessary in modern capitalism.”

In the first rank of the profiteers from this development in the international finance market were the big banks which dominate the market and have gained maximal returns from a mass of ‘product innovations’. Thus *die bank* wrote, with respect to an analysis for the year 2006:⁹

“The trend is impressive. In their entirety the 1000 largest banks know only one direction as regards returns and profitability – upwards.” (see Table 1)

Furthermore, the most recent principal opinion of the German Monopoly Commission¹⁰ attests to the further strengthened position of the largest German banks. Thus the 10 biggest credit institutions raised their market share, measured by the total balance of all credit institutions, from 47.7% in 2004 to 51.3% in 2006. Deutsche Bank, as the biggest German monopoly bank and, in the rank of international finance capital, No 11 among the 1000 most powerful banks in the world, was involved in the finance débacle. Due to its international structure and commitments in the investment sector, as well as its position nationally and internationally in the banking lobby, it is like a consultant for the speculative investment businesses of the US real estate market; and, through its credit policy vis-à-vis the IKB Deutsche Industriebank¹¹ it was complicit in its crash. At the same time Deutsche Bank benefits from the crisis-charged situation, in which it

has converted dubious special loans into core capital and thus increased its own equity. Through its growth programme it plans to expand Europe-wide into the private and business customer region, with around 400 new branches, in order to become independent of a business ‘susceptible to fluctuation’.

In conformity with the enormous accumulation of financial instruments on the market, the tempo of capital concentration has quickened. In the EU in 2006/7, 758 mergers were reported by the competition regulator, more than at the time of the massive wave of fusions in 2000/1.¹²

But the financial crisis is at the same time the starting point for a further powerful concentration process, even though the private equity companies – which collected money for their funds worldwide, bought businesses and, tax-exempt by the Treasury, re-sold them profitably – were affected by a reversal in takeover volume at the end of 2008, due to the crisis. The centralisation of finance capitalist ownership continues. Big companies enter alongside their crisis-weakened competitors and strengthen their position of power. Thus the Bank of America took over the financial services provider Merrill Lynch. The French bank BNP Paribas took a share interest in the damaged Belgian-Dutch finance and insurance company Fortis for €14.5bn and has thereby become the largest bank in the Eurozone. Deutsche Bank has secured entry for itself into Postbank, and Commerzbank is taking over Dresdner Bank from the insurance company Allianz AG. The latter in turn wants to take a share in the crisis-ridden financial services provider Hartford Financial.

While therefore, on the one side, a massive fortune in capital form can be amassed on the finance market and the international finance capitalist monopolisation process goes

Table 1: Profits of the 1000 Largest Banking Firms in the World

Year	Profit/\$US billions
1998	174.4
1999	309.7
2000	317.0
2001	222.8
2002	252.4
2003	417.4
2004	544.1
2005	645.1
2006	786.3
2007	780.8

Source: *The Banker*

ahead, at the same time a powerful capital expropriation and destruction is taking place. The culmination of this process creates places for speculative bubbles with billions-worth depreciations. In October 2008 the IMF estimated that the banks needed to write off \$1.4 trillion and that the global loss by finance businesses was \$2.8bn.

Through its interventions, the state shares responsibility for this débacle in the finance world. In all the developed countries it has hastened this process through its neoliberal policies. That has contributed to the fact that the finance market, as an essential condition of the functioning of the economy, has become the hub of an uncontrolled power of capital, with obscure businesses and uncontrolled granting of credit.

Solution of the Crisis in the Direction of Stabilising the Finance Capitalist System

Today a qualitatively new situation is arising for capitalism, since the financial crisis has, with the neoliberal course of state control, led the international economic system directly to the abyss. The consequences for the whole of society are still by no means foreseeable, especially



the collapse of the finance markets, ever more bound up with the already longer operating factors of the recession due to market conditions. The threatening situation thus presents, for the dominant high finance and the representatives of its political interests, a great challenge to the development of the state monopoly-shaped economic system. On account of the international dimension of the crisis, it is becoming patently obvious that the switches in the control mechanism must be set in a different direction. However, in general a new indicative strategy is as yet neither envisaged nor visible. A change of attitude in the bourgeois camp has only just begun. "One thing is certain", said Nobel Economics Laureate Joseph Stiglitz in an interview,¹³ "the philosophy of deregulation is dead." Nevertheless the first announcements of the ruling elites and the measures already decided show that the hitherto neoliberal variant, as a radicalised model of exploitation of finance capital, will be continued in a modified form.

The activities of the heads of state and government of the leading capitalist countries, and of the banking and business associations as well, are breathtaking and hectic, as documented by the multitude of meetings, summits and plans. Even if such proposals as that of French president Nicholas Sarkozy – for construction of a common EU economic government, due to the national competitive interests – turn out to be castles in the air, the heads of state of the industrial countries are attempting more strongly to find common interests in view of the threatening situation. Indeed, in preparation for the G20 world financial summit in Washington in November 2008, the EU countries were at least able to unite on the demand for a reconstruction

strategy for the world financial system. Certainly the international financial summit of representatives of the most important countries, which account for 85% of the economic power of the world, has hitherto not brought more than one declaration with a few principles of 'proportional and suitable regulation or at least supervision' and with the announcement of a 'comprehensive reform of the architecture of the international financial market'. But it emphasises that, in view of the international economic crisis and the political power situation in the world, the balance between common interests and rivalries, sustained by monopoly capitalist competition, is shifting somewhat more in favour of 'international coordination' and 'ordered markets'. This flows both from the interest in maintaining this profit-oriented order, as well as from the development of mutual economic relations in the changing world. Despite this the conflicts of interests between the states remain immanent, since the current national solutions are above all also reached in the interests of strengthening the competitiveness of the respective dominating big businesses.

The precariousness of the whole situation for the further existence of the capitalist system is clear from the gigantic means and measures employed to prevent the headlong fall of the national economies. Never in the history of capitalist crises has there been such a massive state intervention in the economy. And one thing is thereby clear: as necessary as may be the plans for a rapid stabilisation of the finance system, it is the tax-payers – not the profiteers – who will have to carry the costs of the finance debacle.

The next struggles will be around crisis management of the financial sphere on a

national basis. This is costing vast sums of money, which are made available by the states for saving their financial markets, for bank guarantees, for financing equity capital and buying up bad loans – in total up to now estimated at more than €3200bn. For the USA €519bn, for Great Britain €571bn, for Germany €500bn, for France €360bn, for the Netherlands €220bn and for Spain €100bn have been quoted.¹⁴ At the level of the European Union the EU Commission wants to help beleaguered member states via a European rescue fund in excess of €25bn. Hungary, the first such country, is getting not only €1bn from this fund, but also a credit of €6.5bn, as well as €12.5bn from the IMF and €1bn from the World Bank. Furthermore, other states such as Russia and China are affected by the finance crisis unleashed in the USA and react to it with state measures to safeguard their economies.

The finance capitalist characteristic of the massive state intervention is evident in all the leading industrial countries from the complexity of the measures applied. Thus in October 2008 a 'finance market stabilisation fund' dated up to 2009 was proposed by the Federal German government, and passed within one week by the Bundestag. With a 'risk protection shield' in excess of €400bn and an allocated credit volume of €80mn as well as €20bn for eventual losses, it is intended to restimulate the banks and strengthen the equity basis of the credit institutions. The plan includes a range of technical regulations, on legal entitlement, guarantee- and credit-empowerment, recapitalisation of banks and changes in drawing up balance sheets. Indeed, with the utmost delegation of powers for the Minister of Finance, these regulations afford state interventions into the mechanism of the finance

market, but are nevertheless clearly oriented to the stabilisation and strengthening of the finance capitalist structures. This is no wonder, since the bank lobby collaborated in framing this concept. Taking part, besides representatives of the Chancellor's office, the Ministry of Finance and the Bundesbank, were Klaus-Peter Müller, president of the Federal Union of German Banks (BdB), Deutsche Bank chair Josef Ackermann and Commerzbank head Martin Blessing.¹⁵ Thereby the plan at the same time found support from the whole ruling elite of the economy. It is emphasised by the employers' associations that the 'correct direction' has been found for securing the 'system-supporting banks' with means of credit.

Although the consequences and the financial costs of this crisis are still unfathomable, the rescue package, put together in great hurry, is being trumpeted in the media as a measure in the interests of the entire population. Behind the publicity, the content of this action as a capitalist method for safeguarding the monopoly banking sector's profit system totally disappears. Because the situation on the finance market affects everyone, 'trust' is courted, 'confidence' is sought to for intercession, and – with a view to 'social peace' – Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel utters such empty rhetoric as "We are doing this not in the interests of the banks, but rather in the interests of the people."

The nationalisation or part-nationalisation of banks is playing a role for a time in all the action plans of the different countries. In the USA the administration has already put a few financial institutions under state control and now has allocated \$50bn from the budget for entry into the banks, has taken over shares in the 8 largest banks and is the majority shareholder – 80% – of the largest

insurance company, the American International Group (AIG). In Great Britain the state is becoming a major bank shareholder: the government has partly nationalised 8 of the biggest banks. According to calculations by finance analysts, the financing of this process by taxation will amount to £2000 per head of the population. The Italian government wants ‘in emergency’ to take over shares of institutions in crisis. In Spain a massive state fund of €50bn is being created, which can also take shares in the banks.¹⁶ Also, an option for state participation is included in the ‘finance market stabilisation fund’ of the Federal Republic of Germany, *ie* the state can participate in a recapitalisation of the banks, in which it gains active share ownership or ‘sleeping partner’ interests. Meanwhile, in Iceland the whole banking system is under state control on account of the enormous external debt.

There is no doubt that nationalisation is a horror story for finance capital and provokes alarm: after all, it sees its very existence threatened thereby. But nationalisation is generally not a socialist measure. As Frederick Engels wrote, state ownership does not abolish the capital relation, rather brings it to a head, “but concealed within it are the technical conditions that form the elements of that solution.”¹⁷ The banks accordingly fear this measure as the Devil fears holy water. Even in the part-nationalisation by the state they see an influence over their business strategy. “Naturally it is catastrophic in terms of regulation. But if the house is burning, you can no longer conduct fundamental debates”, was the opinion of one bank manager. The governments are therefore also hastening to make declarations that state participation is not an objective, rather only a necessary measure, which will

be reversed when the market is restored to economic health. That underlines the fact that these state interventions to recapitalise the banks are primarily measures to safeguard finance capitalist ownership, in order to prevent the possible ‘nuclear meltdown of the system’.

That state participation boils down to the socialisation of the losses of the banks, is shown by the first runs of the rescue packages in a two-fold respect. On the one hand, the safeguarding measures of the states are unconnected with any sort of decision-making rights over the strategy or business policies of the banks. On the other, in Germany the Bundesbank has established a steering group for the finance market stabilisation fund, and this has, as refinancing source of the commercial banks, a short route to the budgetary decisions of the government.

The massive state interventions do not touch on the causes of the crisis, which is grounded in the dominance of the profit system. They document above all the incapability for a successful solution to the finance crisis in the interests of a population threatened by economic insecurity. However, at the same time they underscore the necessity of a change in the system of control. The ruling economic elites are accordingly orienting to a new ‘political framework’, to ‘a better set of rules’ which would henceforth safeguard the ‘freedom of the market’. Thus Joseph Ackermann of Deutsche Bank has been pleading for an extremely narrow relationship of the state, the Bundesbank and the banks, in order to safeguard the locational advantage of the financial centre of Germany in the world. At the same time, as head of the Institute of International Finance (IIF), he demanded in a letter to the US president and to the representatives of the world financial summit G20 that “Aid packages must not be the

basis for a lasting greater role of the public sector in the international finance system.”¹⁸

The “technical conditions that form the elements of that solution” must nevertheless be something entirely different, since we have to deal today with a significant breach in the development of capitalism, a great instability of the whole system. It is not only that the volume of nationalisations – the largest hitherto in the history of capitalism – goes with the socialisation of the losses to the cost of the taxpayer and has further aggravating consequences for the social security system. The financial crisis with its state monopoly solution is ushering in a new system of expropriation and exploitation. Business failures, drives to rationalisation, changes in corporate structures and associated job losses, pressure on wages and the imminent shifting of the burden onto

the developing countries are the general conditions for that. The time is ripe for a new mode of regulation of the economic and financial system. This must – if one thinks only of the great challenges in the world such as poverty and hunger, climate and energy – be international and democratic. Radical as the reality, the Lefts and all democratic forces should go on the offensive and emphasise in publicity the need for a state regulation in which the most powerful firms no longer determine the direction and which no longer depends on the old outmoded finance-capitalist basis with all its power relationships.

■ *Published originally in German in Marxistische Blätter, 1-09, pp 21-30, see http://www.neue-impulse-verlag.de/media/filebase/ausgabe/n/MB_1_2009.pdf. Translation by Martin Levy*

Notes

- 1 The author uses, here and elsewhere, the German ‘die Linke’, and it is not clear whether this means the German political party of that name or the Left generally –Ed.
- 2 H Heiniger, *Monopolkapital und staatsmonopolistische Regulierung heute – Zur Aktualität der Herforder Thesen (Monopoly Capital and State Monopoly Control Today – On the Topicality of the Herford Theses)*, in *Topos*, 16, p 41 ff (December 2000).
- 3 V I Lenin, *A Caricature of Marxism and the Imperialist Economy*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 23, p 42.
- 4 R Hilferding, *Das Finanzkapital*, Berlin, 1947, p 408; see <http://www.marxists.org/archive/hilferding/1910/finkap/ch21.htm>.
- 5 R Gündel, H Heininger, P Hess, K Zieschang, *Zur Theorie des staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus (On the Theory of State Monopoly Capitalism)*, das europäische Buch, West Berlin, 1967, p 323.
- 6 cf H Heininger, L Maier, *Internationaler Kapitalismus, Tendenzen und Konflikte staatsmonopolistischer Internationalisierung (International Capitalism, Tendencies and Conflicts of State Monopoly Internationalisation)*, Dietz Verlag, Berlin, 1987.
- 7 ISW Report No 75: *Finanzkapital ‘Entwaffnet die Märkte’ (Finance Capital ‘Disarms the Markets’)*, Institut für sozial-ökologische Wirtschaftsforschung, Johann-von-Werth-Straße 3, 80639 München, September 2008, p 4.
- 8 P Hess, *Das Finanzkapital – Eigentumsform der Produktivkraftentwicklung im gegenwärtigen Kapitalismus (Finance Capital – Property Form of the Development of Productive Forces in Present-day Capitalism)*, in *IPW-Berichte*, 9/1989.
- 9 cf *die bank*, Berlin, No 10, October 2008.
- 10 German Bundestag, 16th voting period, DS 16/10140, *Siebzehntes Hauptgutachten der Monopolkommission (17th Principal Opinion of the Monopoly Commission)* 2006/7, 19.08.2008, p 168.
- 11 cf J Elsässer, *Die gefährlichste Bank Deutschlands (The Most Dangerous Bank in Germany)*, in *Neues Deutschland*, Berlin, 8.10.2008.
- 12 German Bundestag, *op cit*, p 34.
- 13 *Berliner Zeitung*, 9.10.2008.
- 14 *Der Spiegel*, 46/2008, p 61.
- 15 *Financial Times Deutschland (FTD)*, 12.10.2008
- 16 cf *Volkseigene Bank (People’s Own Bank)*, in *Berliner Zeitung*, 10.10.2008.
- 17 F Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 25, p 266.
- 18 *FTD*, 11.11.2008.

A Militant Humanist



By Hans Heinz Holz

On the 125th Anniversary of the birth of the philosopher and literary scholar György Lukács

AMONG MARXIST SCHOLARS

György Lukács is nothing short of a legendary figure. His impact ranges from studies of literature to sociology and philosophy, and none of his disciples – even if they are extremely critically opposed to him – could deny the influence which his passionate teachings, full of implications for practice, have had on them.

The name of György Lukács is well regarded in bourgeois scholarship also. It is bound up with the current debates over ideological positions in the intellectual circles of our time, as well as with the profound analysis of philosophical and literary developments since the Enlightenment. Lukács's theses, unrelenting against established judgements and militant as in the best traditions of classical polemics, are the dynamite of scholarly discussions. Well-grounded in the most profound expert knowledge, and sustained by the *élan* of an exact method, uniting theory

and practice, Lukács can also exact respect and regard from his opponents.

Who does not remember his appearance at the *Rencontres Internationales of Geneva*,¹ where, as a discussion partner and opponent of Jaspers² and Starobinski,³ of Merleau-Ponty⁴ and Bernanos,⁵ he made clear the connection of politics with philosophy? Who has not read his polemic, *Existentialism or Marxism*?⁶ written originally in French, with which he contributed substantially to the overcoming of the nihilist tendency in French postwar philosophy? If Jean-Paul Sartre, at that time an opponent of his polemics, later together with Lukács led the struggle for the preservation of humanity in the world peace movement, then that book, which pointed out the faulty reasoning in existentialism and the anti-humanist tendency of despair and loneliness, certainly helped Sartre find the way back to his progressive start at the time of the anti-fascist struggle in France.

On Revolutionary Practice

The clarity and precision which marked out the thought of György Lukács allowed him to become a sort of scholarly conscience for all those who had lost their way or could not find it in the labyrinth of the prevailing delirium. Thus his achievement, like those of all genuine ground-breaking scholarship, lies not in the contemplation of the object, but so much the more in his active influence on the development of consciousness. Whoever bears him in mind must lay emphasis precisely on this influence, through which Lukács became a major factor in the ideological process of the 20th century. The corroboration of his creative activity lies in this appreciation.

As a Marxist György Lukács wanted cognition to be political activity. He did not want to pursue unworldly scholarship, but rather to translate theoretically scientific truth into revolutionary practice. It did not only occur to him to discover

what had been; from the past he sought the coming into being of the present, in order to understand the motive forces and factors of our time and at the same time to deduce the knowledge of their own historically correct and necessary relationships. Not, *what has become*, but rather, *what is needed*, is the fundamental question of all generally understood scholarship. Not the past but rather the future is its concern. And this future ought to be better. Thus the ardour of a great idea stands in the background of his work.

This short agile Hungarian, with the sharp-cut features and even more sharply tailored intellect, was always a fighter. Already his early writings, put together before the First World War, included intellectual dynamite. They belong to the movement of awakening political consciousness of those years, which broke with the old forms of knowledge and art, which rejected the existing order of society, which brought about a revolutionising of temperaments and prepared the ground for the political revolution, true to the principle, 'The avant-garde stands on the left'. Later Lukács spurned his first works, *Soul and Form*, *The Theory of the Novel*, *History and Class Consciousness*; he rejected 'avant-gardism' and expressionism, even surrealist montage, as forms of degeneration of literature, and placed in opposition to them the classical ideal of an integral realism (in the sense of Thomas Mann). Nevertheless, even in the alteration of his views, he remained filled with the impulse of his youth, an impulse which pushed him towards activation of theory, which understood scholarship and art as a means of changing the world and wanted to transpose them into political deed.

Classical Heritage as a Plumb-Line

Thus, for György Lukács, cognition became activity. Twice he took part in social upheavals: on one occasion as Commissar for People's Education in the revolutionary government of the Hungarian communist leader Béla Kun at the end of the First World War; for the second time briefly as Minister of Culture in Imre Nagy's cabinet – not for the first time in his life losing his way – in the fateful autumn days of the Hungarian counter-revolution of 1956. The overthrow of the revolution in 1919 by the Horthy-fascists forced him into exile. In 1956 he was permitted, after a short period of banishment, to return to Budapest; and, in the course of Janos Kádár's pacification policy he was able to



continue his academic work. Today his collected works have been published in Germany, first in Luchterhand-Verlag and currently in Aisthesis-Verlag. Summing up, as it were, his long life in the confusions of our era – erring, seeking, engaged – the octogenarian Lukács announced a comprehensive study on Marxist ethics, to which elaboration however he was unable to return.

For more than 20 years Lukács was engaged in struggle against fascism. His attachment to the Enlightenment, his criticism of irrationalism under the title *The Destruction of Reason*, his dispute with Hegelian philosophy, were aimed at mobilising powers of ideological resistance against Hitler barbarism. This passionate engagement for humanitarian traditions and for a human realism of the future led him to the classical heritage in literature, to Sir Walter Scott and Honoré de Balzac, to Goethe and Tolstoy. In the world literature of the 18th and 19th centuries he sought to uncover the active forces of unalienated humanity, which could be a yardstick and a plumb-line for the present. In the 1930s his great literary-philosophical essays on realism appeared. To this we should add the political dispute with the German phenomenon: the essay on Prussianism, the studies on Nietzsche and German fascism, and on Hegel and German fascism. Indefatigable as a writer, who contemplates and effectively conserves the intellectual heritage as an active power in the debate around people's living forms of today and tomorrow, György Lukács ploughed his own furrow.

Sociological Viewpoint

In line with the general direction of his activity, Lukács developed a method of his own, which since then has found followers: the sociological consideration of literature and philosophy, which understands a work of art, and the corresponding system of thought, as a response to the particular social situation, determined by the social structure of the era. A masterwork in the application of this method is his investigation of the historical novel. Here Lukács traces a literary type back to its sociological background and shows how changes in the way in which this type is organised relate to the change in the attitude to history, to the way in which this change is a reflection of the historical process; and, as it happens, he thereby obtains a measure of value for judging the historical novel, which can be derived from its 'social accuracy'. Walter Markov, an exact historian, certainly did Lukács

no injustice, when, in the commemorative publication on his 70th birthday,⁷ he attributed to the historical novel, critically received in such a way, an extensive objective value of perception over the boundaries of scientific history – and we can say that Bertolt Brecht's posthumous novel fragment, *The Business Affairs of Mr Julius Caesar*, thereby provides a proof of the example.⁸

Exposure as Method

The ardour of the class struggle in no way mars the integrity of Lukács's investigations; it sharpens much more the view of what is essential and converts the method into a surgical instrument, which lays bare the central agents of a life's unity dedicated to the history of ideas. Thus, for example, in his fundamental presentation of the young Hegel, in which he made prominent the relationships between philosophy and economy, or in his criticism of German irrationalism of the 19th and 20th centuries. The historical-philosophical method here is that of exposure: the bombastic claims of the irrationalist philosophies are reduced to their socio-historical conditions; and their social function – camouflage, diversion, suppression of progressive development – is revealed. Alongside that stand his works which are devoted to realism in 19th century literature. In these the positive heritage of the past is made prominent and a definitive perspective is brought. The chief viewpoint is the reflection of the contradictory tendencies and powers of the bourgeois world.

Thus Lukács's literary- and philosophical-historical works are the broad basis for a comprehensive presentation of the bourgeois world. Lukács deliberately restricts himself to this social epoch. The questions of antiquity, of the feudal society of the Middle Ages, of the problem – tackled by Mehring⁹ – of the origin of modern times are far from his consideration. His studies begin with the Enlightenment and the period leading up to the French Revolution and follow the course of capitalist society up to its extreme, fascist, form. Certainly no-one has penetrated as deeply into the inner dialectics and ambiguities of this historical development as did Lukács, who described in every detail, and explained, the ideological reflexes of this process in reference to its base. Many of his judgements could yet be disputed. However, the total conception offers the most complete and convincing picture of that period that has hitherto generally been given.

Polemical Style

To the political-historical aspect of Lukács's theory corresponds also a style of his own, which we could in a two-fold respect describe as 'polemical': in a superficial sense, as a polemic against the idealistic treatment of the history of ideas; but, in a deeper sense also, as a polemic with his very own subject material, as a critical laying bare of the weaknesses and the social sources of errors of the great achievements of world literature, as an exposure of the connection between the thought of the writer and his position in the social controversies of his time. Lukács was too great a scholar to be one-sided.

He recognised throughout that it is precisely the political position of an author which can lead him to a literarily deficient narrowness of ideas and presentation, while inner conflict, creatively applied, allows the great variety of a social situation to be better presented. Thus, for him, Zola is indeed politically clearer and more conscious, but Balzac is artistically richer, 'more correct', more realistic (in contrast to a naturalism not fully reflecting reality). For applying this mode of analysis critically to the literature of 'socialist realism', Lukács was reproached by his Marxist colleagues.

From his historical studies onwards, Lukács had one essential systematic concern: the aesthetics of works of literature. His encroachment into the debate on expressionism in the 1930s was his first step towards working out his concept of realism. This category then became ever more central for him, as he sharply demarcated it *vis-à-vis* naturalism and characterised it as the "discovery of the typical in the exceptional". For him, realism in art is the reflection of reality by means of typical figures and situations, in which reality is enhanced and clearly represented. His literary-historical essays lay bare the category of the typical in the empirical material; in his *History of Aesthetics*¹⁰ he considers the development of the theory; but a final systematic work remains incomplete, likewise a *magnum opus* of the theory of art in two thick half-volumes.

Emphasis of the Subjective Factor

It is a necessary restriction that the method of ideological criticism can only approach a work of art from one of many possible perspectives. Questions of style of language, therefore of syntax, metaphors, musicality, semantics, artistic construction, of the actual

‘workmanship’, remain outside Lukács’s consideration. The sociology of literature is obliged to and in fact wishes to ignore the fact that a work of art is a closed realm whose criteria lie within it. The sociology of literature brings its judgements on the subject matter in from outside, *ie* it is a heteronomous means of contemplation. Therein lies its limits, its necessity for complements. Only in his advanced years did Lukács bring forward *The Individuality of the Aesthetic*¹¹ and begin to investigate the relationship between the ideological superstructure and pure ‘art for art’s sake’.

The revolutionary impulse with which Lukács started out stamped not only his ideological-critical method, not only his polemical style. It was maintained much more directly in the general – I may say ‘metaphysical’ – aspect of his theory. The subjective factor in history appeared to him always to be a decisive factor, a prime mover. The dependence of consciousness on the social conditions did not signify for him that consciousness could not also act upon these conditions to change them.

In this way history presented itself to him as complex subject-object dialectics, in which the person – in whom the objective, contradictory, world and his/her subjective, high-flying aspirations happen to meet – occupies the key position.

The life’s work of this great thinker and fighter thus roamed over the space between economics, philosophy and works of literature. The reciprocal relations between the economic base and the superstructure of ideas were investigated by the methods of historical and dialectical materialism; the role of objective conditions and the function of the subjective factor were defined in relation to each other and reconciled together. The application of a Marxist appreciation of history to literature – first attempted by him and in such a comprehensive way – has led to outcomes which point the direction for all further pursuit of problems in the arts and humanities.

From the first writings of his youth the active factor in Lukács’s ideas was maintained; however, the carrying

forward of these ideas, the ‘class-fighting humanism’, which is the nucleus of this theory, sometimes loses sight of the real person and solidifies into a schema – a danger from which Lukács himself also did not always escape. Thus, in his case occasionally, and more often with his followers, the pregnant concepts of the sociology of literature become empty patterns, with which only the skeleton, but not the human richness, of the work of art can be presented.

György Lukács was also worried by this – and the significance and greatness of his work is displayed by the fact that he was able over and again to overcome his own schematism and to reproduce the whole unrestricted reality of human beings in his thinking.

■ *Published originally in German in Junge Welt, 13 April 2010, see <http://www.jungewelt.de/2010/04-13/019.php?sstr=En|streitbarer|Humanist>, and also <http://www.kominform.at/article.php/2010041220255934/>. Translation, English bibliography and endnotes by Martin Levy*

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- *Conversations with Lukács* (with H H Holz, L Kofler, W Abendroth, T Pinkus), Merlin, 1974
- *Essays and Reviews*, Merlin, 1983
- *Essays on Thomas Mann*, Merlin, 2007/1964
- *Existentialism or Marxism, in Existentialism versus Marxism*, G Novak ed, Dell Publishing, 1966
- *Goethe and His Age*, Merlin, 1968
- *History and Class Consciousness*, Merlin, 1971/1968
- *Lenin: a Study on the Unity of his Thought*, New Left Books, 1970
- *Marxism and Human Liberation: Essays on History, Culture and Revolution*, Dell Publishing, 1973
- *Political Writings 1919-1929*, New Left Books, 1972
- *Solzhenitsyn*, Merlin, 1969
- *Soul and Form*, Merlin, 2007
- *Studies in European Realism*, Merlin, 1972/1950
- *The Destruction of Reason*, Merlin, 1980
- *The Historical Novel*, Merlin, 1962
- *The Meaning of Contemporary Realism*, Merlin, 2006
- *The Ontology of Social Being*, 3 vols, Merlin, 2007/1978
- *The Process of Democratization*, State University of New York Press, 1991
- *The Theory of the Novel*, Merlin, 2003
- *The Young Hegel*, Merlin, 1975.
- *Writer and Critic and Other Essays*, Merlin, 2007

Extracts from some of these, together with a few other articles translated into English (including his *Reflections on the Cult of Stalin*) can be found at <http://www.marxists.org/archive/lukacs/works/>

Notes

- 1 The *Rencontres Internationales de Genève* originated in 1946 on the initiative of a group of Geneva personalities, “conscious of the need for resuming dialogue in a world in tatters”, see <http://www.recontres-int-geneve.ch/historique.html>. The first *Rencontres* were around the theme of the “European spirit”, raising issues of European unity and federalism, see <http://www.memoriadellealpi.net/download/GRUPPO01-CD-Federalismo-FR/4.6.pdf>.
- 2 Karl Theodor Jaspers (1883-1969), German psychiatrist and philosopher, often viewed as a major exponent in existentialism in Germany, although he did not accept that label. After the Nazi seizure of power in 1933, he was considered to have a “Jewish taint” owing to his Jewish wife, and was forced to retire from his post at Heidelberg University in 1937. He and his wife were under constant threat of removal to a concentration camp until Heidelberg was liberated by American troops. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Jaspers.
- 3 Jean Starobinski (b 1920), Swiss historian of ideas and medicine, and a literary theorist, as well as being a qualified doctor and psychiatrist. He was president of the *Rencontres Internationales de Genève* from 1965 to 1996. See http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jean_Starobinski.
- 4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961), French phenomenological philosopher, strongly influenced by Karl Marx, Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, in addition to being closely associated with Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maurice_Merleau-Ponty.
- 5 Georges Bernanos (1888-1948), French novelist and essayist, considered one of the most original Roman Catholic writers of his time. Originally a supporter of the right-wing Action Française, he broke off all contacts with it in 1932 and later denounced Franco’s revolt against the Spanish Republic. See <http://kirjasto.sci.fi/bernanos.htm>.
- 6 G Lukács, *Existentialisme ou Marxisme*, Nagel, Paris, 1948; English edition in *Existentialism versus Marxism*, G Novak ed, Dell Publishing, New York, 1966, pp 134-153.
- 7 W Markov, *Die Historie und ihr Roman*, in *Georg Lukács zum siebzigsten Geburtstag*, Aufbau-Verlag, Berlin, 1955, pp 142-158.
- 8 In the book, Brecht attempts to demystify the cult of the leader by means of a first-person account of an investigation in preparation for an official biography of Caesar, interpolated with extracts from Caesar’s secretary’s diary, and charting Caesar’s rise to power through the role of the slave trade, and the economic struggle between the City and the Senate. See reviews of the film based on the book, *Geschichtsunterricht*, by J-M Straub and D Huillet, at <http://www.sensesofcinema.com/2009/52/jean-marie-straub-and-daniele-huillet> and <http://www.constanzeruhm.net/portfolio/fate-of-alien-modes.phtml>.
- 9 Franz Mehring (1846-1919), German social-democrat, historian, friend of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg, author of *Die Lessing-Legende* (1892, *The Lessing Legend*) a study of the origins of German middle-class culture, and also of biographies of Engels, Marx and Dickens; see <http://www.marxistsfr.org/archive/mehring/>.
- 10 Possibly a reference to Lukács’s *Ästhetik*, work published in 4 volumes from 1972 to 1976.
- 11 G Lukács, *Die Eigenart des Ästhetischen*, Luchterhand, Neuwied-Berlin, 1963.

Why the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact Was Necessary

By Richard Maunders

ON 23rd AUGUST 1939 the Soviet Union concluded a non-aggression treaty with Nazi Germany, popularly known as the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The 70th anniversary of the treaty in 2009 brought forth the usual anti-Soviet distortions and rewriting of history by the media. One bourgeois historian, Orlando Figes, even had the gall to assert on the BBC website that the pact was “the licence for the holocaust”.¹ To suggest that the signing of the treaty was instrumental in causing the horrific slaughter that befell the people of Europe takes his anti-Soviet ravings to the level of insanity. Figes claims – without the slightest shred of evidence – that the pact began “a reign of terror, mass deportations, slavery and murder”. The Nazis had been committing these appalling crimes long before they invaded Poland, primarily against the communists and the left who were leading the anti-fascist struggle. Thousands of communists and socialists in Germany were amongst the first to be sent to the concentration camps, to be tortured and murdered.

The signing of the treaty I submit was an absolute necessity considering the situation that the USSR was forced into at the time. It is essential to examine the treaty,

not in isolation, but in context of the fraught and dangerous events which existed across Europe, threatening the very existence of the USSR.

There is little doubt that the Soviet government was well aware of Hitler’s intentions towards their country. He made it clear in *Mein Kampf*, writing:

“Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany. And for world power she needs that magnitude which will give her the position she needs in the present period, and life to her citizens.

...

“And so we National Socialists consciously draw a line beneath the foreign policy tendency of our pre-War period. We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement to the south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states. The giant empire in the east is ripe for collapse. And the end of the

Jewish rule in Russia will also be the end of Russia as a State.”²

It must never be forgotten that Hitler had many influential supporters both in Britain and France who viewed Germany as “a bulwark of the West against Bolshevism”. Lord Halifax, the Tory Foreign Secretary, said on 19th November 1937 that:

“the great services the Führer had rendered in the rebuilding of Germany were fully and completely recognised He (Halifax) recognised that the Chancellor had ... been able, by preventing the entry of Communism into his country, to bar its passage further West”.³

Halifax also thought Goering “frankly attractive,” and Goebbels very “likeable”. On one occasion he compared Hitler’s “mysticism” to that of Ghandi.⁴

The Tory government in Britain concluded a naval agreement with Germany in 1935, allowing the Nazi regime to increase its warship tonnage, and to build more submarines. They agreed this unilaterally – without informing the French or the Soviet Union – in violation of

the Versailles Peace Treaty.

Throughout the 1930s, Hitler’s sympathisers in Britain and France said nothing as Germany re-armed and broke treaties. Hitler’s material support for the fascist rebellion in Spain was ignored and Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia was praised in certain Conservative circles. “On the one hand were the millions of bloodthirsty tyrants On the other an honourable and humane army,” wrote the reactionary Lord Mottistone in *The Times*, 23/10/1935.⁵ The “bloodthirsty tyrants” Mottistone was referring to were not Mussolini’s fascist troops, but the Abyssinian people defending their country!

Mottistone was a member of a pro-fascist club known as the Anglo-German Fellowship, comprising, in its Secretary’s words, “of distinguished representatives of British Big Business who claim Hitler has an unanswerable case”.⁶ The fellowship had over 1,000 members, including scores of peers, knights of the realm, the Governor of the Bank of England, Montague Norman, and the editor of *The Times*, Geoffrey Dawson. These representatives of Britain’s ruling class hoped Hitler might be encouraged to turn his attention east, towards the USSR. They had the ears of right-wing Tory backwoodsmen like R A Butler

Molotov and Ribbentrop signing the non-aggression treaty, August 23, 1939



During the same year, with the support of Germany and Italy, the fascist despot Franco started a bloody rebellion against the legitimate government of Spain. Britain and France adopted a policy of 'non-intervention', blocking arms shipments to the Spanish Government from coming through France, however doing nothing to stop German and Italian arms shipments to Franco.

The Soviet Union protested against the policy as meaning in effect freedom for Germany and Italy to organise rebellion and a blockade of the legitimate government of Spain.⁹ In solidarity with the Spanish republicans the Soviet Union supplied aircraft, guns, ammunition and volunteers. Thousands of anti-fascist volunteers from around the world fought to defend Spain's democracy. Despite the heroic fight put up by the Spanish patriots and members of the International Brigades, Franco's fascists, aided by the Nazis and Italians, eventually triumphed. There is little doubt that, if the British and French had supported the legitimate Spanish government, the outcome for democracy and world peace would have been very different.

The Tories in Britain and the iniquitous French government did not want to be seen aiding a democratically elected left-wing government. This was alluded to by Thomas Jones, a former Cabinet secretary. He wrote in his diaries that Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin had told Foreign Minister Anthony Eden, "That on no account ... must he bring us in to fight on the side of the Russians."¹⁰

After the unopposed occupation of the Rhineland, Hitler turned his attention to the annexation (Anschluss) of Austria, which he had planned along with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1936. Again Britain and France remained passive when, on

MP and Lord Walter Runciman, an undisguised admirer of Hitler; both were paranoid anti-communists appointed by Chamberlain as foreign negotiators with Germany. In a note to Chamberlain, Butler described the Chairman of the Anglo-German fellowship, the industrialist Ernest Tennant, as "quite discreet and sincere."⁷

Britain's ruling class also regarded Germany as a rival imperialist state that either had to be weakened or destroyed, preferably by war

with the USSR. It was hoped that such an outcome would severely reduce their powers and result in the Anglo-French dominance of Europe.

The Soviet Government had no illusions about the conniving of the British and French ruling classes. The latter did nothing in 1936 when the Nazis marched into the Rhineland in contravention of the Locarno treaty, despite the fact that the French Army with 100 divisions at its disposal could have easily stopped the

German army that composed of just 4 divisions. Hitler later admitted this to the soon to be deposed Austrian Chancellor, Schuschnigg, telling him, "France could have stopped Germany in the Rhineland and then we would have had to retreat. But now it is too late for France."⁸ The advice of the Tory government to the French was to 'keep calm' and do nothing to upset Hitler. At the League of Nations the only opposition to Hitler's occupation came from the Soviet Union.

11 March 1938, the Nazi army, in defiance of international law, jackbooted into Austrian territory. Thomas Jones wrote in his diary that Baldwin considered “that we should not be compromised into undertaking to protect Austria from falling into the lap of Germany”, and “Lord Halifax had assured Hitler that Britain would not intervene”.¹¹ A treaty signed between Britain, France and Italy in 1935, pledging to support Austrian independence, was never invoked, and on 12 March 1938 Austria ‘ceased to exist’. Consequently, “Germany’s territory grew by 17 per cent, and its population by more than 6,700,000 people. Almost all the 50,000 soldiers and officers of the Austrian army became part of the Wehrmacht.”¹²

Whilst the cowards flinched the only nation to speak out against the takeover was the Soviet Union. Foreign Minister Litvinov issued a statement, which included the passage, “The Soviet Government ... are ready, as they have always been, to take part in a collective action of such a scope that it could aim at stopping the further development of aggression and at eliminating the increasing danger of another world-wide slaughter.”¹³ Chamberlain flatly rejected the proposal. He had no intention of upsetting Hitler or of aligning Britain with the USSR.

After Austria, the road leading to the sell-out of Czechoslovakia in Munich was now open. On 26 March 1938, the Communist Party of Great Britain issued the following statement:

“Faced as we are with a fascist war alliance which is busily engaged in seizing strategic points for a swoop on European democracy and peace, Chamberlain’s policy can only be regarded as one of deliberate

encouragement to Hitler to annex the great steel industry and arsenals of Czechoslovakia, to add to the essential war materials which Fascism grabbed in Austria and Spain.”¹⁴

At the time Czechoslovakia had the fourth largest economy in Europe including a large arms industry.

France, the USSR and Czechoslovakia had signed mutual assistance pacts in May 1935, but containing a condition that said “only in so far as help shall be furnished by France to the party that is the victim of aggression, when conditions anticipated by this pact obtain”¹⁵ – *i.e.* the USSR could only act to support Czechoslovakia if France did as well. In these circumstances, “Chamberlain, his personal advisers in England and Bonnet, the French Foreign Minister, along with the French establishment had only one fear – that of finding themselves engaged in a European war against Fascist Germany and Italy, two countries of ‘order’, and on the same side as ‘Bolshevik’ Russia, the centre of disorder and subversion”.¹² Rather than entertain any notion of coming to agreement with the USSR to thwart Hitler’s ambitions, they would accommodate him and agree to sell out Czechoslovakia.

The license for the takeover of Czechoslovakia was handed to Hitler via the Munich treaty. The reactionary Governments of Britain and France were wholly responsible for the most shameful and sordid betrayal of a nation in history. Hitler had been encouraged by the cowardice and servility of the two European powers. They had the means and power to stop him much earlier, but lacked the willpower to act. As the US correspondent William Shirer wrote, “Perhaps most

important to Hitler was the demonstration again that neither Britain nor France would lift a finger to stop him”.¹⁶

British and French policy was criticised at the time by the US ambassador in Moscow, who warned in a note to President Roosevelt’s personal adviser, Harry Hopkins:

“Chamberlain’s policy which is pushing Italy, Poland and Hungary into Hitler’s arms, may end by disgusting the Soviets to such a degree that it will induce Russia to come to an economic agreement and a political truce with Hitler. ... The reactionaries in England and France will presently, in their despair, beg for Soviets’ support, but perhaps it will be too late, if between now and then the Soviets grow utterly disgusted by their attitude.”¹⁷

Bourgeois historians rarely mention the direct assistance offered by the Soviet Union to the Czechoslovaks. At the height of the Munich crisis, Soviet President Kalinin said that the great resources of the USSR would be made available for those who resist aggression, and he made clear, “If our country is asked to do so, it will honour its obligations towards Czechoslovakia to the last letter”.¹⁸

The sincerity of the Soviet Union’s desire to aid Czechoslovakia was emphasised by the delivery of 60 bombers to the country in 1938. Winston Churchill wrote in a personal note at the time that the Soviet Union was willing to send thirty divisions to help bolster the Czech army and “would have been a substantial deterrent upon Hitler ... the Soviet offer was in effect ignored.

They were not brought into the scale against Hitler, and were treated with an indifference – not to say disdain – which left a mark on Stalin’s mind.”¹⁹

The public in Britain and France were kept in the dark about the Soviet proposition made in September 1938 by Litvinov to hold a tripartite conference between the USSR, France and Britain to agree the rendering of assistance to Czechoslovakia.

Answering a question from the French foreign minister, Georges Bonnet, as to what the USSR would do “if there was a clash between Prague and Berlin?”, Litvinov replied that the USSR would honour the pact it had signed with France and Czechoslovakia in 1935. The other question Bonnet asked was how would the USSR be able to send troops to the aid of the Czechoslovaks as there was no common border between the two countries? Both Poland and Romania had refused permission for Soviet troops to cross their territory. Litvinov replied that his government would “neither go through nor fly over Polish or Rumanian territory unless it obtains their consent”. He suggested to Bonnet that France try to obtain a right of passage.²⁰ Bonnet did and was rebuffed.

Poland’s reactionary government made it clear that they would never allow the Red Army to cross their territory in order to aid Czechoslovakia and any Soviet aircraft entering their airspace would be shot down. They were hopeful of getting a piece of Czech territory when the Germans took over. In May 1938, Poland, under pressure from Germany, had assembled an invasion force of three divisions of its army and one brigade on the northern border of Czechoslovak district of Teschen. Before the Munich sell-out the Soviet Union warned Poland of the consequences of aggression against the Czechs and

threatened them with retaliatory measures.

The Soviet Union was kept out of the Munich meeting, and disgracefully not even told about it until after the sell-out agreement had been signed. Under pressure from Chamberlain, France reneged on its treaty, and the Czechoslovak leader President Beneš was taken in by the false assurances of Chamberlain and French Prime Minister Daladier.

The Sudetenland was given over to the Nazis. The Germans never had to fire a shot to get their troops past the strong line of Czech fortifications. Polish troops occupied Teschen, and soon afterwards Poland received 60 million marks from Germany as a 'gift of friendship' for the purpose of buying equipment. Fascist Hungary also occupied a part of Czechoslovakia.

The Czechoslovak Communist Party heroically resisted the Nazis with a great cost to lives. At the time of the sell-out its membership was 75,000, but it doubled in size swiftly, with many of its members forming partisan bands and organising anti-fascist resistance. Thousands of communists and anti-fascists were rounded up and shot or shipped off to concentration camps in Germany. The entire Communist executive were

arrested and executed. As the CPGB predicted, the great arms factories of Czechoslovakia fell into Nazi control and strengthened German resources. When Germany invaded France, many of the tanks they used were made at the Skoda factory.

This is the very brief background of some of the double-dealing and skullduggery that went on behind the backs of the Soviet Union and provoked the signing of the Soviet-German pact.

It is a fact that the USSR throughout 1938-9 pressed the West for a system of collective security across Europe to prevent German and fascist aggression. The British and French governments put obstacles in the way of every attempt and proposal made by the USSR. As historian Mark Arnold-Foster observed in his famous work *The World at War*, "The summer of 1939 offered Chamberlain his last chance of averting a war with Germany by forming an alliance with Russia."²¹ Instead Halifax told the British Cabinet's Foreign Policy Committee, "we had to make a choice between Poland and Soviet Russia; it seemed clear that Poland would give the greater value."²² Chamberlain made known his "considerable distrust" of

Russia, but he was becoming worried about the growing opposition to his policy of appeasement in Westminster. On 8 May 1939, the new Soviet Foreign Minister, Molotov, told the British Ambassador in Moscow that it appeared to him that Britain did not seem eager for agreement and Soviet policy was liable to be altered.

The British government made a one-sided proposal to the Soviet Government: "Britain wanted Russia's help if an attack on Poland led to a German attack on Britain and France but was not prepared to help Russia in the event of a German attack on Poland".²³ William Strang, who was head of the Foreign Office department, was sent to Moscow. After strained negotiations he reported back that "the fact that we have raised difficulty after difficulty on points which seem to them inessential has created an impression that we may not be seriously seeking an agreement".²⁴

The British did send a junior negotiating team to Moscow by a slow cargo boat in August 1939. Recently declassified Soviet documents show that at these negotiations the USSR offered to deploy more than a million troops to the German border if Britain and France would agree to an anti-Nazi alliance and if Poland would allow the Red Army to cross its territory.²⁵ Even then the British team, led by anti-communist Admiral Drax, had no authority to sign a pact.

It was clear to the USSR that neither Britain nor France had any serious intention of signing an agreement and that a proposal from Berlin for a Soviet-German non-aggression pact had to be considered. The Germans did not have the full resources

to attack the USSR.

However, if the Soviets had refused this proposal, they might have provoked Hitler into attacking them and the Munichites would "have been rubbing their hands with glee, for their dreams of pushing Hitler against the Soviet Union would be much nearer to realisation".²⁶

In 1939 the border of the Soviet Union with Poland ran close to Minsk and Kiev. The White Finns sympathetic to Hitler were close to Leningrad and Romania's border was close to Odessa. Judging by the attitudes displayed by the British, French and US governments there was no guarantee that any of those powers would have come to the aid of the USSR if the Nazis had invaded. At the same time Japan had been sabre-rattling in the east and had invaded Manchuria, and the USSR had serious concerns about fighting a war on two fronts. The Soviet-German pact forestalled this possibility, and gave time for the Soviet Union to build up its armaments. It was only in 1940 and 1941 that production of T34 tanks, anti-tank weapons and new dive-bombers began.

If the Germans had invaded in 1939, in all probability the Soviet Union would have eventually been victorious, although the cost in lives and damage might have been even greater than that which befell the Soviet people. If, however, "the Soviet Union had indeed fallen before the Nazi hordes – and it was this that the 'Western democracies' were hoping for – Hitler would have easily crushed France and Britain and together with Japan pounced upon the United States. The history of our planet would have been thrown several centuries back."²⁷

On 3 July 1941, after the Nazi attack on the USSR, Stalin explained the purpose of the non-aggression pact in the course of a nationwide radio broadcast, as follows:



Nazi propaganda map aimed at showing the German speaking areas in Czechoslovakia in the mid 1930s.

“It may be asked, how could the Soviet Government have consented to conclude a non-aggression pact with such perfidious people, such fiends as Hitler and Ribbentrop? Was this not an error on the part of the Soviet Government? Of course not. A non-aggression pact is a pact of peace between two states. It was precisely such a pact that Germany proposed to us in 1939. Could the Soviet Union decline such a proposal? I think that not a single peace-loving state could decline a peace treaty with a neighbouring country even if that country is headed by such monsters and cannibals as Hitler and Ribbentrop What did we gain by concluding the non-aggression pact with Germany? We secured our country peace for a year and a half and the opportunity of preparing our forces to repulse fascist Germany.”²⁸

Even up to the day before the signing of the pact the French government had been

trying to get some agreement from the obdurate Polish government to allow the Soviet Union to come to their aid in event of German aggression. Beck, the Polish Foreign Minister grudgingly agreed to it but only when he knew that Ribbentrop was in Moscow and no such aid would be forthcoming. He “believed that Poland had more chance of reaching agreement with Hitler”.²⁹ The Polish Ambassador to France, Lukasiewicz received a message from Beck which stated that Poland had no military treaties with the Soviet Union and had no intention of signing any.³⁰ This was sent ten days before Poland was invaded.

It is not possible in this article to examine the entire diplomatic and political scheming that was happening at this time. The motivations however are clear. The West had the aim of trying to accommodate Hitler whilst encouraging him to move east. They viewed communism as a greater threat than fascism. All attempts by the USSR to carve out a mutual alliance against Hitler were turned down. Only the opposition in Britain (including William Gallacher, Winston Churchill and David Lloyd George) supported an alliance with the USSR.

On the signing of the Soviet-German pact, British historian A J P Taylor reasoned:

“However one spins the crystal and tries to look into the future from the point of view of 23 August 1939, it is difficult to see what other course Soviet Russia could have followed. The Soviet apprehensions of a European alliance against Russia were exaggerated but not groundless. But, quite apart from this – given the Polish refusal of Soviet aid, given too the British policy of drawing out negotiations in Moscow without seriously striving for a conclusion – neutrality, with or without a formal pact, was the most that Soviet diplomacy could attain.”³¹

The German occupation of Poland in September 1939, giving it a strategic base for the intended invasion of the Soviet Union, made it essential for the USSR to create a buffer zone between its borders and the German forces. On 17 September, after the Polish Government

had fled to Romania, the Red Army entered West Belarus and West Ukraine – territories in Poland that had been ‘annexed by force’ from Russia in 1920 – in order to prevent them from being occupied by German forces.

Ivan Maisky, the Soviet ambassador in Britain at the time, wrote in his memoirs that “the entry of the Red Army into the eastern part of Poland on 17 September, *ie* when the Polish State ceased to exist, represented genuine salvation for the Ukrainians and Belorussians living there from all the horrors of the Nazi invasion.”³² Becoming part of the USSR meant the people had the right to free education, free health care and other social amenities. Their counterparts in the Nazi occupied territory were subjected to brutality, racial oppression, imprisonment and bestial murders.

The Molotov-Ribbentrop pact was not a joint declaration of war against Poland, as has been claimed by revisionists in Polish and reactionary circles across Eastern Europe, and eagerly parroted by anti-Soviet historians in Britain. It was a tactic forced upon the Soviet government that had seen all its attempts to create an anti-fascist alliance frustrated by the leaders of Britain and France plus those in the USA.

Notes

1 O Figes, *Viewpoint: the Nazi-Soviet Pact*, at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/eur/8214391.stm>

2 http://www.hitler.org/writings/Mein_Kampf/mkv2ch14.html

3 *Documents and Materials Relating to the Eve of the Second World War, Vol 1: November 1937-1938 (From the Archives of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs)*, Foreign Languages Publishing House, Moscow, 1937-8, pp 19-20.

4 J Lukacs, *Five Days in London, May 1940*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2001.

5 I Montagu, *The Traitor Class*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1940, p 44.

6 *Ibid*, p 39.

7 Lukacs, *op cit*.

8 W Shirer; *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, BCA, London, 1985, p 327.

9 A Rothstein; *The Munich Conspiracy*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1958, p 32.

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13 H Nogueres, *Munich, or The Phoney Peace*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1965, p 374.

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17 Nogueres, *op cit*, p 380.

18 Rothstein, *op cit*, p 174.

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21 Arnold-Foster, *op cit*, p 24.

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24 *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, ser 3, Vol VI:

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25 N Holdsworth, *Sunday Telegraph*,

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<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/russia/3223834/Stalin-planned-to-send-a-million-troops-to-stop-Hitler-if-Britain-and-France-agreed-pact.html>.

26 V Berezikov; *History in the Making: Memoirs of World War II Diplomacy*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1982, p 15.

27 *Ibid*, p 16.

28 <http://historicalresources.org/2008/07/26/joseph-v-stalins-radio-broadcast-july-3-1941/>.

29 A J P Taylor, *The Origins of The Second World War*, BCA, London, 1972, p 261.

30 Shirer, *op cit*, p 537.

31 *Ibid*, p 268.

32 I Maisky, *Memoirs of a Soviet Ambassador; The War 1939-43*, Hutchinson, London, 1963, p 10.

The Left and the State

By Jimmy Jancovic

I READ WITH PLEASURE a number of recent contributions in the *Morning Star*, both as articles and as letters, which questioned and even challenged the prevailing statist attitudes of the left.

For some time I have felt that this is one of the weaknesses of the left worldwide, particularly at this time. It is understandable that, at a time when the Establishment is calling for 'less state' as part of an ultraliberal policy, the left should counter this with a defence of the state and turn to a demand for 'more state'. Understandable but not correct.

One of the reasons for the failure of social democracy – and of the Soviet Union – was the way in which forms of public ownership were run in a bureaucratic and totally undemocratic manner. While Marx opposed anarchism as a form of struggle to change society, his idea of communism was certainly not statist. Indeed he considered that a classless society inevitably involved the *withering away of the state*.

When Marx talked of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' he not only considered it a transition stage but also used the term to imply the social dominance of the working class, in the same way that the capitalist class dominates society under capitalism. He was certainly not using it to imply the kind of fascist regimes that we saw in the 20th century – which didn't exist in his days!

The repressive and dictatorial regimes of his time were all monarchical – repression was inevitably associated with kings or emperors, *not dictators*. With his classical education, he would have associated the term dictator with the Roman emergency measure of placing power – for six months only – in the hands of a single consul instead of two, when faced with military disaster.

Indeed, the question of the state is one of the oldest questions facing the left: how does the radical left, that wing of the socialist and labour movement that aims at *transforming* society and not just tinkering with it, deal with the state? Must we overthrow it, adapt to it – or,

as in the ex-Soviet Union's last, Brezhnevian, phase – become a tool of the state bureaucracy?

In the early years of the 20th century it was above all the social democrats who were the most statist and the communists who tended to favour a cooperative society – a 'cooperative commonwealth', in fact (using the word 'commonwealth' in its original republican sense, not its modern imperialist one).

One of the crucial differences within the labour and socialist movements and trends has always been their different attitudes to the state. Indeed, it often was the issue that divided the left from the right within the movement.

As far back as the 1860s, there were differences in Germany between Lassalle's and Marx's supporters, the former considering Bismarck's creation of a state railway network and some social security measures as first steps towards socialism. Marx, however, considered the first was just a service to capitalism (broadening and strengthening the internal market by improving the transport and circulation of goods and raw materials) and saw the second as a means of keeping the working class quiet and obedient.

In much the same way, the Fabians in Britain (Shaw, the Webbs, H G Wells and, later, Herbert Morrison) saw socialism as a bureaucratic network (part national, part municipal) rather than the 'cooperative commonwealth' envisaged by the more Marxist groups like the SDF, the ILP and Morris's Socialist League.¹

Indeed, until the 1930s, it was the *reformists* who were the avowed statist² and the communists who wanted workers' control and grass-roots democracy – which was just what made the 'soviets' (spontaneous grass roots assemblies of workers, peasants and soldiers) so different and original – at first The French communists – and certainly the CGT! – were even strongly tinged with anarcho-syndicalism in the 1920s³.

Indeed, this anarcho-syndicalist trend applies to many other communist parties in less industrialised countries.



(In Britain this phase was characteristic of the *early stages* of the Industrial Revolution – the Luddites, Rebecca's Daughters etc. It faded with the development of trade unionism and Chartism.)

It was also true of many Latin American countries. It was certainly true that in India, communism was at first identified more with 'social banditry' (dacoits) than the TU movement – at least until the Meerut Conspiracy trial. Indeed, in the form of Maoism, it is still an important trend in a number of Indian states.

It was also true of the first US communists. Until the 1930s and the rise of the CIO, the main militant trade union movement there was the International Workers of the World, the IWW. It should be remembered that most of the USA, until the 1930s, had an underdeveloped rural economy, with small family farms carrying out a form of subsistence agriculture similar to that of the European peasantry – Steinbeck's

The Grapes of Wrath is set against just this background. Industrial capitalism was still very localised in the USA until the Second World War – which, in a way, was a major factor in the nationwide industrialisation of the USA.

It was the success of the first Soviet 5-Year Plan, at a time when the advanced capitalist countries were suffering from mass unemployment and rising fascism, that brought many of the communist parties to adopt (and, indeed, embrace) statist attitudes.

Today, faced with the neoliberal slogan of ‘less state’ (but not less policing, nor less repression, nor less armed foreign aggression! *ie* the most typical and negative aspects of the state) many Marxists seem to have forgotten this and tend to be arguing for ‘more state’.

This is a lame return to the statist attitudes of the early social reformists – ironically enough, just as the latter are now becoming increasingly neoliberal! – albeit repressive and militarist neo-liberals

Indeed, one of the problems in most ‘advanced’ capitalist countries is the fact that social attitudes are regressing to those of the 19th Century – even slavery,

in a number of forms, both domestic and industrial, is making a comeback!

It is most important that the radical left, in its fight against ultraliberal economics, should not fall into the social democratic trap of appearing to support or advocate the kind of bureaucracy that wrecked both social democracy and the Soviet Union.

Notes

1 It is no accident that the Webbs, the epitomes of Fabian reformism, should have become enthusiastic admirers of the Soviet Union *just at the moment* when the state was becoming a bureaucratic administrative machine and the original grass-roots democracy of the soviets was being replaced by a parliamentary bureaucracy under the 1936 Constitution.

2 In UK the most typical example is the virulently anti-communist Herbert Morrison.

3 The industrial revolution reached France very late. Even the Paris Commune was an uprising of independent workers and artisans, not industrial workers. In 1914 France was still mainly rural and the French economy essentially agricultural. This remained largely true until the 1960s.

Discussion: A Response to Andrew Northall

By Kenny Coyle



COMRADE ANDREW Northall (CR56, p 33), in reply to my comments on an article by Hans Heinz Holz (CR55, p 30), claims that I quote “Stalin out of context to claim that ‘his idea’ of the state remaining in the period of full communism is ‘in complete contradiction of Lenin’s understanding.’”

He asks rhetorically if I hold “the view that the Soviet Union could not have reached the position of full communism whilst remaining encircled by capitalism? This would be similar to the ultra-left argument against ‘socialism in one country’”, Andrew says.

My argument would be similar to the ultra-leftists if socialism and full communism were in fact the same thing, but since they are not, it isn’t.

Socialism, the lower phase of communism, can be built in one country and specific embryonic forms of it were indeed built in the Soviet Union and a number of other states. But my underlying argument is that this was far from being an advanced form of socialism – it was a socialism of a very basic type.

I do not say this to disparage the Herculean efforts of the Soviet and other peoples but simply to underline that socialism involves more than simply bringing the commanding heights of the economy into social ownership, more than central planning, more than eliminating capital and profit as the driving force of society, more

than eliminating exploiting classes.

The path to socialism involves drastically raising the productivity of labour, narrowing the gap between intellectual and manual labour in all their forms, continually broadening the active involvement of working people in the administration of their own state and raising the cultural level of the mass of people to greater and greater levels.

Andrew suggests that I believe that “the vast human, material, industrial and agricultural resources of the USSR were incapable of being utilised and organised in a socialist (sic) manner to satisfy the comprehensive and essential needs of the people of the Soviet Union, without recourse to external trade”.

Andrew is right, I do believe that. This is because an economy organised in a “socialist manner” does not satisfy citizens according to their “needs” – that is after all the role of full communism outlined by Marx in his *Critique of the Gotha Programme* – but that it should reward citizens according to their work, the “individual quantum of labour”, as Marx put it.

Second, I doubt very much that any country can achieve the ‘abundance’ required for full communism simply by using its own resources.

In the 1920s and 30s, relatively common things such as iron and coal were the key components for economic advance. Today rare earth elements (REEs) such as neodymium,

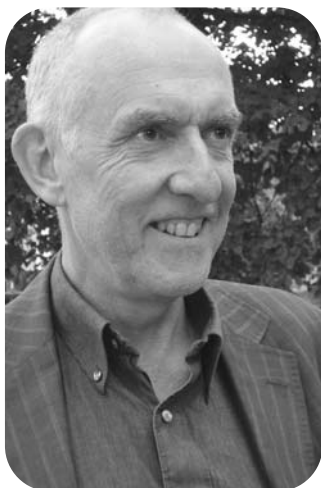
lanthanum, terbium and cerium are essential for a whole range of products from computers to catalytic converters, car batteries and wind turbines.

The geological territory of the former USSR did not possess substantial reserves of these elements, although ironically People’s China does. Can we set a static benchmark for communism that does not take into account the dynamic, changing needs of scientific advance? Could a predominantly coal-powered ‘communist’ Soviet Union have permanently kept at bay a nuclear-powered US or a solar-powered or fusion-powered imperialist state of the future?

In short, should the ‘communism’ imagined in the 1930s be our target today?

The extent of the scientific and technological revolution since the death of Marx, Lenin, Stalin or Brezhnev, for that matter, poses exciting new challenges about how we should organise a socialist economy, yet it also provides the material basis for solving precisely the problems of labour productivity and the division of labour that bedevilled previous thinking about the transitions to socialism and communism.

Better to embrace and develop these new perspectives than to engage in what is little more than a nostalgic defence of archaic speculation.



SOULFOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille



La Fête de l'Humanité

- What is communism?
 - Communism is the earth turned into a giant lawn full of wild flowers for a country feast, a festival of humanity free and peaceful; where all the peoples of the world will be invited to freely share the happiness of their specialities

with bread, wine music and poems, if they like.

This poem is by a contemporary French poet called Francis Combes, and in this article I am going to share some more of his work with you. As you will see, his poetry, like that of so many other modern poets, has been influenced by Bertolt Brecht, the subject of the last

Soul Food column. But first, a couple of thank-yous, and then let us read a few poems sent in by readers.

Thanks to all the people who attended the workshop on Brecht at the recent Communist University. It was great to meet readers of *Soul Food*, and get the opportunity to discuss Brecht, and what you might call 'communist poetics', with comrades. It is a lonely old life being a writer, you know: bashing out revolutionary poems in a freezing garret, with only 20 Gitanes and a bottle of absinthe for breakfast again. So it was great to meet you – it has given me a much better sense of who my readers are: intelligent, sensitive, thoughtful, kind and absolutely immune to flattery of course.

Thanks also to all those who responded to the *Do-It-Yourself Brecht Poetry Toolkit* in the last column, either by sending in poems which followed the toolkit, or more general political poems. I hope you enjoyed writing the poems as much as I enjoyed reading them!

I received quite a lot of poems, half poems, ideas for poems, and even a whole book of poems from one reader. There isn't room to print all of them, and some are too long for this column, so I am going to hold some back in reserve for future columns. For now, I am just going to share with you a few of the poems I have received.

To start with, some poems which are fairly directly modelled on the Brecht poems in the toolkit. First, one from a reader in Durham, an employee of Sainsbury's (CEO: Mr Justin King), who understandably prefers to remain anonymous



Prophet

Justin, King of Kings at
Sainsbury's!
His face, smiling and fresh,
is seen everywhere in Durham.
Where is he now,
as we stock the shelves and slice
the ham?
Is he parking trolleys,
or answering queries with Bill
and Mary?
Maybe fetching carrots or
weighing haddock
with Jean and Michael?
He'll be taking out rubbish with
Sam,
or mopping spills with Ivan.
As he said to Mr Humphreys
at 8.13
he will be increasing profits.
From the notice boards in Durham
he smiles encouragement, and
drives us to make his profit.

Here's a poem from Michael Woofen
in York, modelled on Brecht's poem
The Price of Milk:

The Ownership of the Media

The media reveals to us crimes
of war, global warming, breaking
news and broadcasts
left, right and centre views
with balance and impartiality.
The corporations that own
the media and fuel, cars and food
must always, always seek to
further
the profit of the shareholder.

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the media and fuel, cars and food
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the profit of the shareholder.
The media reveals to us crimes
of war, global warming, breaking
news and broadcasts
left, right and centre views
with balance and impartiality.

Here's one from Tony Manville in
Derby, a lovely little lyric on the
'domestic mode of production', modelled
on Brecht's poem *Sister*.

Mother

Fold the darned and ironed
clothes
Beside the tidied tableware.
Lean for a moment on the linen
press.
Release the morning's labour in a
gentle sigh
And start again.

And here's a looser, more metaphorical
response to Brecht's poetry, sent in by
Bob Gallagher from North London:

Measurement

Ever noticed that everyday event?
If not, don't worry
Once I didn't, and now I'm telling
you
Ever noticed something
concerning a tape measure
The metal sort? The heavy sort
requiring a committed hand?
One day
Engaged on a task
Useful to yourself but others too
You pull the sharp-edged ribbon
free-running from the
mysterious case
And for a reason not now or
ever under your control
Back
At a speed too quick to measure
Back
At the whim of the sealed
unrevealing holder
The indifferent unapologetic
source
Back the tape is snatched
It's a shiver, isn't it?
An epic flick of inevitability
All we others should not ignore
In all humanity.

This one is a more general political
poem, from Connie Fraser in Brighton:

Today in South Africa

It was so long ago,
I cannot remember
what it was like to be born,
yet I think perhaps today
is like that day.

Today for the first time
in all the years of my life,
I am given a choice
of who is to be my boss.

I will go to the polls
and consider the name
and the face,
then I will make my mark
or my cross,
and I will go home
having done this thing,
this great and simple thing
for the first time.

So I think I know now
what it is like to be born,
to open my mouth
for my first big lungful of air
and then to expel it, yelling
and making them hear.



Francis Combes

Oh, today they will all have to
listen
to me and to you and to us,
and today they will have to see
the sounds of our voices on paper
and to count each one of our
choices,
for what we decide today
will be
will be.

... and the last poem in this brief
selection is from a collection called
For The Inquiry, by Nigel Mellor from
Newcastle. It is available as a free
download on www.nmellor.com or as a
book from Amazon at £8.99.

Might

They are tough now
And so sure of themselves
That we even begin to accept it
Because they don't try to hide
And they don't care who sees.
They are so confident
And that's what makes us weak
But when the change comes
(and it will)
The truth will shift
Because they are wrong
It just happens that
For a time
They have the power.

Thanks again to all those who
responded. I will be sharing some more
readers' poems in future columns, but
meanwhile please continue to respond to
what you read, by contacting the editor
or myself at mquille@btinternet.com.

Common Cause

In this column, over the last few issues, I have tried to share with you many different kinds of example of what might be called 'communist poetics': poetry which is saying something, expressing something, *about* something which is relevant and helpful and part of the struggle, the work, maybe even sometimes the joyful pleasure, of trying to establish communism on this planet.

There is no better contemporary example of this kind of approach than the poems of the French writer Francis Combes. In a recently published collection, *Common Cause* (translated by Alan Dent, Smokestack Books, £12.95, ISBN 978-0-9560341-8-2), containing over 300 poems, Combes ranges over a variety of themes linked to the communist project, including historical figures, situations, ideas and specific events.

To read the poems is to hear the voices and ideas of a whole variety of people who have taught or acted out communist thinking, including Socrates, Spartacus, Jesus, Thomas More, Blanqui, Marx, Lenin, Trotsky, Picasso, Brecht and many more. The poems have a variety and suppleness of tone, ranging from conversational to meditative, lyrical to didactic, angry, accepting, humble, proud. Above all, perhaps, the poems are *hopeful*. They express a kind of bruised but resilient optimism which flows from a realistic, compassionate, committed engagement with the world. And the clarifying strength of Marxist concepts shines through the poems, appearing now and again like half-submerged rocks in mountain rivers.

Here are a few examples from the collection. I have tried to present them in a kind of thematically linked sequence, but the wonderful variety of subject matter, approach and tone in Combes' poems will always overpower any rigid, overdetermined editing, just as the idea of communism has survived the imperfect twentieth century attempts to realise it in practice.

From *Account of Thomas More's Earthly Journey*

Realist thinker, astute adviser,
lawyer accustomed to settling
practical questions,
he wrote *Utopia* because the
most fundamental problems
of his society
couldn't be solved under the
system of property.
Many of the ideas of his book

were put into practice
Under capitalism For
example, colonies whose
usefulness he'd imagined.
But also in the countries of actual
and scientific socialism
(which all the same set no store
by the dreams of the utopians).
Such it was, for example, in the
case of sending young people
to the countryside,
to perfect their education and
help in the fields,
or the general austerity of habits
and forced labour for the anti-
social.

(A very liberal idea in a country
where theft and vagabondage
was punished by death.)
But many of his suggestions
(and some of the most beautiful)
are still to be realised.

The Old Beast Utopia

– For those of us who claim to
believe in scientific socialism
the old hope of Utopia
has kept us blind a long time.
(We know full well, however,
that what went on there
was no Dream.
But hope was always strongest.
The light of the future flooded
the sky
like the Northern Lights.
The entire landscape was
transformed
The factories, the fields, the
chimneys,
the muddy holes of the great
building sites

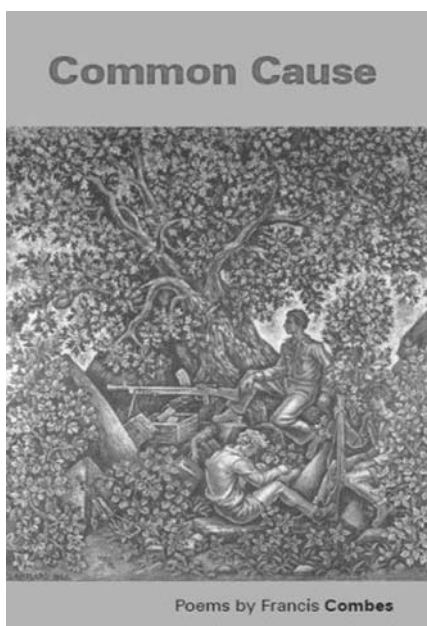
and even the mud,
everything took on, thanks to our
vision
the look of dawn.)
– We have to have done with
Utopia;
send the old bag of bones to the
knacker's yard!
– But if you kill the winged beast
of the dream
man ceases to march
towards a little more light.
(The dream is necessary;
it simply has to be kept on a
leash.)

Report on the Progress of Freedom

When slavery was invented
it was undoubtedly progress
(because rather than making
them work
the custom previously
was to eat captives).
When serfdom appeared
it was also an advance
(because slaves
over whom they had the right of
life or death
were often half-hearted in their
work
and productivity suffered).
In the same way, when serfdom
was replaced by taxation
and little by little wage labour
was established
it was a great step forward.
Free at last
to sell to any bidder
their arms, their hands, their
brains
on the open labour market
men, women and children
could more easily be exploited
by factory owners
and, by their free will, be
enchained
in the hulks of industry.
We still have to decide
by what new advance
of freedom
we are going to replace wage
labour.

The Emblem

They took to Lenin in his office in
Smolny
(a boarding school for girls turned
into the Bolsheviks' HQ)
a sketch book, full of designs for
emblems
for the very young Soviet
republic.
To symbolise the union of
workers and peasants



continued from p 35

the artist comrade had drawn
a hammer crossed with a sickle.
And standing erect between them,
a sword was meant to represent
the determination to defend
– in the spirit of the dictatorship
of the proletariat –
the new state of workers,
peasants and soldiers.
Lenin,
who was no choirboy
had the sword removed.
(Ends mustn't be confused
with means).

On Means and Ends

If you can't respond to force by
the power of ideas
respond with force.
If you can't respond to non-
violence with non-violence
respond with violence.
If you can't respond to lies by
telling the truth
respond with a lie.
But if you do
(which is easy to avoid by sticking
to principles)
take care that force, violence
and lies
don't end up winning the day.

The Opening

When they opened the door
and then the windows
the house collapsed.
Who's to blame?
The architect?
The building materials?
The workers?
Or whoever opened the
windows?

Berlin '89

In the middle of Berlin, near the
Town Hall

a cockstride from the former
Reichstag,
just after the fall of the Wall,
on the plinth of the monument
to Marx and Engels
(where you see Marx sitting,
looking profound, solid
and sombre
and Engels, standing
faithfully behind)
an anonymous hand has written
these words:
"We'll do better next time."

From *The Fifth International*

This is an old idea,
and no longer in fashion
All the same
The nineteenth century marches
on our heels.
London is a golden cuff-link
huge and brash
sticking out of a crumpled
smoking jacket.
Everywhere in the streets
– as in all streets
in very modern and democratic
capitalist capitals –
men and women are sleeping
under cardboard.
Fallen
from the pockets of smoking
jackets on the tarmac
of towns
like pinches of tobacco,
as worthless
as dandruff
you brush off your shoulders.

In Praise of Friendship

To rediscover those we
haven't lost
who we didn't miss
and who didn't miss us
but to rediscover them

and find how precious that is.

To exchange words that don't
mean much
or to set the world to rights.
To get together under a wild
vine trellis
in a precise place on the planet
to drink a glass of claret together
to swim naked under the stars.

Simply, to be there when it
matters
(everybody can do that).

To listen to one another to
understand one another to
talk to one another not to
contradict each other
nor to confirm
but to weave a stronger net
and to go fishing in the world's
troubled waters to catch the
silver fish of happiness
everybody needs.

Friendship isn't enough to change
the world;
but can the struggle to make the
world more friendly
do without friendship?

As ever, responses in the form of
letters, emails and above all real, live,
newly born *poems* are very welcome
– in Brecht's style, Combes' style
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Acknowledgements

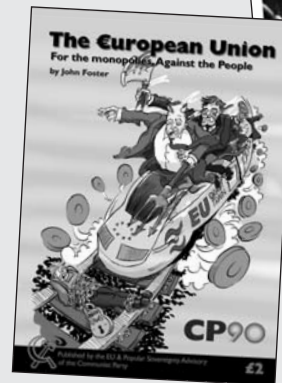
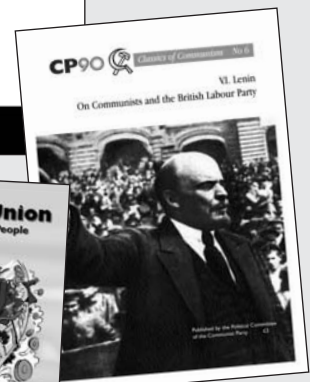
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