



COMMUNIST REVIEW

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- **Andy Croft** How the Spartans Stole the Bones of Orestes the Poetry of Yannis Ritsos in the Twenty-first Century
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Antonio Gramsci REVISITED

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Front cover: the headstone of
Antonio Gramsci's grave at the
Protestant Cemetery in Rome

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editorial



By Martin Levy

EVERY GENERATION has to learn class struggle for itself. At times, that may be at a low level – but such a situation is ever only temporary. To borrow an analogy from *God Bless the Grass*, by US songwriter Malvina Reynolds, class struggle is like

“... the grass that grows through the crack
They roll the concrete over it to try to keep it back
The concrete gets tired of what is has to do
It breaks and it buckles and the grass grows through”

In 1952, a strike of apprentices on Clydeside – led by, among others, young communists Jimmy Reid and Eric Park – spread across Britain, bringing an estimated 40,000 out for better wages. After three and a half weeks the strike was successful in its demands. But the lessons for the young workers went much deeper: unity, militancy and the nature of class. They recognised that employers, government ministers and the press were all part of the opposing side, the ruling class – an understanding which spread to many older workers too.

Today, there are few apprenticeships, but we still have masses of ‘workers in training’, who are rapidly learning class struggle – as shown by the demonstrations and occupations by university, college and school students, protesting at the rise in fees and the abolition of the Education Maintenance Allowance. All the repressive powers of the state are being brought into play against them. Their courage and vitality is inspiring resistance from public service workers under attack from the Con-Dem government. It is vital that the trade union movement builds the links with them.

Unity in struggle, and developing an understanding of class, are essential first steps in the current struggles. But success ultimately demands the adoption of an alternative perspective and strategy. That cannot simply be a wish-list of

policies, which would be the road to compromise and failure. It has to be based on a concrete analysis of existing conditions, a sober evaluation of the strengths of class forces in society, a clear identification of how the underlying contradictions can be resolved, and the projection of a line of march. In short, it requires application of creative Marxism and revolutionary leadership. This is the approach which the Communist Party is adopting, once more, in the new draft of its programme, *Britain’s Road to Socialism*, introduced by Gawain Little in this issue of *CR*. The Left-Wing Programme which the *BRS* projects is not a shopping list of policies but a comprehensive strategy. The People’s Charter, adopted by a number of trade unions, can be a bridge towards building support for such a programme.

One of the points which Gawain makes is that the monopoly capitalist class rules not only by coercion but by consent – that is, through exercising its ideological hegemony. The analysis of that hegemony, and how to challenge it, was one of the major contributions made to Marxism in the twentieth century by the Italian communist leader Antonio Gramsci. In this 120th anniversary year of his birth, it is fitting to rescue Gramsci’s heritage from false claims of reformism and of being the father of Eurocommunism, and to make him the subject of our cover feature and lead article. Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks* are gradually being published in full in English, and he has much to offer us today. Hans Heinz Holz gives a clear exposition of Gramsci’s Leninism, and of the central place of the Communist Party in his writings.

A particular focus of Gramsci is on the necessity of absorbing the cultural heritage of society, and of carrying it forward in ways which help the new, proletarian, world-view to gain national commitment. A specific example of such an approach is given by the work of Greek communist and acclaimed poet Yannis Ritsos, to whom Andy Croft pays tribute in this issue of *CR*. Ritsos drew on Greece’s national cultural traditions to strike a chord with its people engaged in bitter struggle, and his heritage lives on. Poetry, says Andy, is still “a place of refusal and dissent, of public testimony and personal affirmation.” It is a theme with which this journal wholeheartedly agrees, as shown by our regular *Soul Food* column.

A nation’s cultural heritage of course has many dimensions, and an important one is the place of science. As Roger Fletcher points out in Part 1 of his *Twentieth Century Vision*, science is now increasingly inhibited by capitalism. Furthermore “attacks by institutionalised ignorance on rational thought are having some effect on all of us”, and are part of the *pernicious osmosis* fostered by the ruling class to hold back progressive development. An essential part of the cultural struggle is therefore the defence of science and rational thought. Roger opens his perspective by looking at the work of “three guys named Charles” from the nineteenth century. We look forward to Parts 2 and 3 of his article in forthcoming issues of *CR*.

Finally, this issue is completed by 3 book reviews and several discussion contributions. *Soul Food* has another uplifting selection of poems and is again asking for readers to send their own efforts.

APOLOGIES to Jimmy Jancovich for mis-spelling his surname in CR58.

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



Antonio Gramsci's Theory of the Party

By Hans Heinz Holz



The name of Antonio Gramsci (22.01.1891 – 27.04.1937) is more often connected with a legend, rather than with historically based knowledge. And, as with all legends, the less one knows the facts, the more luxuriantly the tendrils of fantasy grow. German social democrats reclaim Gramsci as a reformist of Bernstein's colour; others saw in him the father of Eurocommunism and suggested that he laid the theoretical foundations for the increasing internal distancing of communist parties from Soviet Union, from the 1960s onwards. German philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug¹ wishes to lay claim to him for a "refounding" of Marxism,² which would jettison the heritage of the Third International.

The origin of such a breadth of interpretation lies in the limited access to sources. Until Wolfgang Fritz Haug brought to life the German edition of the complete *Prison Notebooks*, in 10 volumes, from 1991 – a most meritorious large-scale

undertaking of scholarly publishing activity – there was only a minimal selection in German, published by Fischer in 1967, miserably translated; and a 400-page anthology of short essays, brought out in 1980 by Röderberg Verlag together with Reclam Verlag of the GDR. [The English language situation in 1980 was not dissimilar, although it had improved by 1991, see *Bibliography –Ed.*]

That was the state of knowledge about one of the leaders of the international proletariat, of whom I wrote in 1980: "Gramsci is the classic Italian communist. He is a classic of the world communist movement: he theoretically analysed the conditions of the proletarian class struggle in Italy and the strategy of the vanguard party of the working class, and from that drew practical conclusions. Furthermore, he took up these theoretical analyses and drew practical consequences within the framework of the philosophy and methods of scientific socialism, within the framework of the Communist

International, to which he truly and in a disciplined way belonged."³

The concept of civil society

During his imprisonment, Gramsci made studies of Italian literature and history, above all of the *Risorgimento* – the bourgeois period of unification of the country out of independent principalities between 1815 and 1870 – but he particularly occupied himself with questions of cultural and philosophical aspects of the class struggle and their theoretical grounding, as well as with the central role of the Communist Party, whose function he defined in relation to *The Prince* of Machiavelli.⁴ The significance which he ascribed to the ways in which production relations are institutionally and ideologically expressed led him to a new definition of the connection between the economic base and the institutional and cultural superstructure, which he grasped as a functional unity and described with the term *historic bloc*. The expression

does not mean, as was sometimes erroneously supposed, the programme of *historic compromise*, with which the Italian Communist Party (PCI) under Enrico Berlinguer⁵ later envisaged the necessity of alliances with the Catholic popular masses and their organisations in Italy. *Historic bloc* signifies much more that the concrete social situation must not be divided into two isolated components, of which one, the superstructure, has only a dependent subordinate function.

In Gramsci's perspective, class rule realises itself as *hegemony* via the superstructure, whose institutions (school, church, legal system etc) and ideologies (religion, ethics, living customs etc) are intended to reconcile and veil class contradictions, while proletarian class consciousness creates its own ideological forms of expression (eg the rationality of its philosophy, the morality of the working class, critical and mobilising art and literature with their particular forms). If the



central aim of the class struggle is to change the ownership of the means of production, then that struggle – if it is to succeed in moving the masses – cannot afford to disregard the changing of consciousness in the philosophical superstructure, the changing of ‘everyman philosophy’.⁶ In this respect, cultural debate and the political strategy of the Party – focusing on the formation of a *historic bloc* – gains a relatively independent significance alongside the economic struggle.

In this connection misunderstandings about the concept of *civil society* must be cleared up. By *political society* Gramsci understands all those structures in which the state leadership (government) directly exercises, through its functionaries, its socially organising and rule-strengthening activity: administration, police, the military, the exchequer etc. He calls *civil society* those structures in which social processes develop according to the interest-led activities of groups and individuals – hence economic associations (and principally the ‘market’), employers and their organisations, trade unions, churches, clubs etc. The concept of civil society includes as much the liberal conception of self-regulation, through supply and demand, as the planning strategy of citizen initiatives; as much the competition of capitals as the activity of cooperatives.

The way that civil society appears depends on the particular concrete form of society, and thus on the relations of production. Civil society is therefore not a concept in opposition to *power relationships*, but rather a generic concept for the area of society not controlled by the power of the government. The self-regulation of social processes by citizens in civil society can only be democratic if the citizens are educated to a level which makes them

capable of competent judgements. This, he says, “can only be ‘democratic’ in societies in which the historic unity of civil society and political society is understood dialectically and the state is contrastingly comprehended as that of the ‘regulated’ society:⁷ in this society the ruling party does not become organically blurred with the government, rather it is the instrument for transition from the civil-political society to the ‘regulated society’, insofar as it takes up both in itself, in order to supersede them.”⁸

The state altogether is the unity of the self-producing hegemony in civil society and institutionally exercised force. The Italian terms *società civile* and *società politica* reproduce Hegel’s distinction between “civil society”, in which “individuals ... are private persons whose end is their own interest”,⁹ and “public authority”, which “is an external system and organisation”.¹⁰ Civil society is not a concept of struggle which can be introduced into a socialist programme, but rather a descriptive category for the sociological constitution of power relations. It describes the field on which the hegemony of a class is produced and maintained.

The development of working-class consciousness

The fact that the October Revolution did not result in worldwide overthrow of the bourgeoisie, or even in rapid victories in other countries, led Gramsci to a new definition of the forms of struggle. In contrast to the *war of manœuvre*, leading to quick successes, he posed the protracted *war of position*, in which the presence of a powerful socialist country, the Soviet Union, decisively influenced the international conditions of struggle. Conducting this war of position requires the step-by-step penetration and conquest

of the ruling apparatus, and therefore of the educational and judicial systems, and the administration. That, however, only becomes possible if one successfully formulates and defends the interests of the masses against the exploiting system, gains their sympathy, develops their consciousness and orients them towards a new society. As long as the ruling class binds the subaltern class to itself through religion, morality, customs and institutions, as long as it is able to direct the consciousness of the oppressed, it cannot be unseated. Domination is achieved not only through power, but rather and in a lasting way through hegemony, *ie* through the fact that the ruling class can create an ideological consensus of the subaltern class with the existing system. “But in order to oppress a class, certain conditions must be assured to it under which it can, at least, continue its slavish existence”, wrote Karl Marx and Frederick Engels in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*.¹¹ The point is to destroy the appearance which leads the exploited to accept their exploitation as the condition of survival.

Revolutionary changes require therefore the building of a new consciousness, which is not only directed promptly to the removal of the various oppressing circumstances, but rather affects the whole life of the masses. This consciousness must connect with the culture of the preceding epochs, incorporate its progressive elements into itself, and continue to develop it. There is no hegemony of a new class if it does not acquire the history of the nation and appear as its heir.

For this reason the national question moves into the centre of the historical- and cultural-philosophical aspects of political strategy. Gramsci picked up this thread: with reference to an article by

Stalin,¹² he emphasised that “the international situation should be considered in its national aspect”, since a realistic political content can only be given to the internationalism of the world communist movement by knotting together those urgent needs that are national in character. “In reality, the internal relations of any nation are the result of a combination which is ‘original’ and (in a certain sense) unique: these relations must be understood and conceived in their originality and uniqueness, if one wishes to dominate them and direct them.”¹³ Achieving hegemony in the state signifies appropriating the total cultural tradition in its distinctiveness as a factor of the actual experiences of the class – *ie* every cultural tradition which is definitive for the forms of behaviour, conceptions and experiences of the masses, of the whole nation. The policies of the Communist Party would therefore have to assimilate and work up the elements of the national culture, if the Party wants here and now to find resonance and succeed with the international perspective of the proletariat.

Every present-time is generated by and mixed with the workings of history which leads to it. Thus the working class, which has itself arisen within this history, can only become the ruling class if it consciously absorbs the sediments of history, *ie* the ‘cultural heritage’, and carries this on, making it into fertile soil from which the new world-view grows and gains commitment from the whole nation, becoming the orientation system of the new society. Gramsci sketches here, with reference to Marx, Engels, Lenin and at that time the most recent observations of Stalin on the national question, the theoretical line for the concept which was endorsed by the 7th World Congress of the Comintern in 1935.

The party as total intellectual

Because such a function of intervening to develop political intentions falls within the province of cultural forms of life (in the widest sense), the role of intellectuals is of particular significance. They are the authorities through which the hegemony gains acceptance. Gramsci maintains that every person is an intellectual, since he/she must always think – there are only gradual differences of intelligence. In a society with a division of labour, certain functionaries (teachers, judges, civil servants, journalists, clergymen, writers, artists) traditionally take the role of the intellectuals.

Organic intellectuals, on the other hand, are all those who give expression to, and help form, the consciousness of a class, eg party and trade union leaders, shop stewards, in fact everyone who participates in discussion with people about their problems. In the class struggle in bourgeois society the Communist Party, relying upon a dynamically developing theory, is the *total intellectual*¹⁴ of the proletariat. And every communist is a part of this cultural universality, which the Party realises and imparts through its organs, above all through its press and publications. Thus cultural theory again leads back to the theory of the Party.

Gramsci's concept of a historic bloc and of its hegemony, his cultural theory and his political strategy turn out to be elements of a systematic development of historical materialism as well as of the theoretical framework of practical politics. As Palmiro Togliatti¹⁵ pointed out in his essay *Leninism in the Thought and Action of Antonio Gramsci*,¹⁶ the constitutive principle of this systematic unity is the Party. On that basis Gramsci defined the "status of a philosophy, which as Marxist

theory is not to be limited to the traditional tasks of the bourgeois academic discipline, with which it scarcely shares more than the name."¹⁷ Since historical truth becomes bound to a real-universal political bearer and to its activity, the difference between philosophical theory and political practice is abolished; and this is precisely the essence of the 'party of a new type', which is generically different from all parties which represent particular interests in a system of bourgeois democracy. This key position which the theory of the party occupies in Gramsci's work thus proves his Leninism.

Concept of the vanguard party

Gramsci's theory of hegemony and culture is by no means an idealistic conception of politics seeking to overturn the social relations through changing consciousness. It takes aim at the material relations as a unity of culture and the institutional superstructure with the economic base, out of which the interests of the people grow. Working-class politics are for Gramsci neither economic automatism nor subjective spontaneity. In common with Marx and Engels, he knows that people make their own history, but under given conditions. Like Lenin, he is also clear that the struggle can only be led by a vanguard party which formulates the problems of the masses, builds their consciousness and is rooted in them; and that the party cannot succeed if it does not analyse the current conditions at the highest theoretical level, works over the past and outlines the future. The focal point of Gramsci's theoretical estimations is thus the theory of the party.

In this connection philosophical theory also gains a new character. It goes over into political practice; the philosopher steps out of the

ivory tower and becomes a politician, but politics at the same time becomes philosophical, in that it is conceived from the field of view of a historical process and according to historical-philosophical insights. Marxist politics never follow the viewpoints of short-term opportunity: where pragmatism gets in under the guard of the fundamentals, politics becomes social-democratic. Only theoretically grounded politics can be equal to the demands of the war of position. Gramsci's writings provide no justification for day-to-day political considerations and adjustments.

The field of view of history is here and now – and in practical terms – the cultural network in which we live, since its entire origin is written large into this culture. For that reason also political struggle and socialist construction differ from country to country, to the extent that national cultures have produced differing modes of life. Cultural theory is therefore a direct part of the fundamental determination of contents, forms and direction of political struggle. Gramsci's *national-popular culture* is the field on which the struggle around class consciousness takes place; therefore every new class consciousness presents a new cultural level in the history of the nation. *National-popular culture* was and is the common ground on which the anti-fascist and anti-capitalist alliance of the working class with other strata of the population became possible and can again become possible.

Politics of the united movement

The road to revolutionary removal of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat leads via the winning of the broad masses – that means also of those strata of the population whose political orientation is still determined by the ethical and

cultural norms of the bourgeois state. According to Gramsci, the Communist Party has to fulfil its revolutionary mission in alliance with these strata – and in Italy, before the Second World War, that meant in alliance with those petty-bourgeois strata (especially in the North) who had not yet been proletarianised by the industrialisation process, and with the peasants and farm labourers (especially in the South) who still lived in half-feudal conditions. In that Gramsci insisted on the unity and continuity of the national culture, including the gradation within it from clericalism to bourgeois liberalism (which corresponded to the gradient from South to North in development of production relations), he laid the theoretical basis for a politics which was to lead the communists out from – as Togliatti said – their "corporatist opportunism"¹⁸ towards the united movement of the masses.

After the failure – in the wake of the October Revolution – of the revolutionary upheavals in the western capitalist countries, the programme for achieving socialism had to take a different form. Only in the Soviet Union had the old social order been overthrown, only there could the construction of socialism be begun, under the condition that state power lay in the hands of the working class and the Communist Party. In the other countries capitalism had been able to stabilise itself and maintain the institutional forms of bourgeois society. Here the struggle for socialism had to be initiated as a long-term penetration into those institutions, and as a change of attitude to life, standards of behaviour, and expectations of the broad masses, as a gradual removal of the hegemony of the bourgeoisie by the proletariat.

As we have seen above,



Gramsci conceived this as the strategy of the *war of position* in contrast to the direct conquest of state power in the *war of manoeuvre*, as had occurred in Russia. His thinking in the *Prison Notebooks* centres around the central problem of how, after the shift from war of manoeuvre to war of position in the class struggle, the domination by the working class is to be realised. “The transition from the war of manoeuvre (frontal attack) to war of position – in the political field as well,” he noted. “This seems to me to be the most important question of political theory that the post-war period has posed, and the most difficult to solve correctly.”¹⁹

The war of position is characterised by a massive intensification of the hegemonial functions which the ruling class still has at its disposal to maintain the existing conditions, to defend the fronts against incursions – *ie* the directly repressive activity of the state; the control of consciousness via the education system, mass media and the entertainment industry; and the use of demagogic sloganising for

political purposes (*eg* anti-communism, racism, colonialism etc). For the ruling class, this moulding of the conduct of the ruled – not only against their own interest, but rather also against the consciousness of these interests – has to be carried out by a mixture of repression and deceit. That is to say, coercing and conning the masses to consent to the existing relations of power, contrary to their spontaneous discontent and partially better knowledge.

On account of this, the superseding of the ruling class by the subaltern class must take place step by step, while the former’s hegemonial positions are, one after the other, embrittled and brought to collapse. In this situation, the rule of the working class cannot be secured in a frontal assault as *dictatorship of the proletariat*, with the leading role of the working class being developed afterwards. According to Gramsci, it is much more a matter of building up a new culture of the working class while the bourgeoisie still exercises state power, so that this new culture permeates the whole nation and gradually brings about the

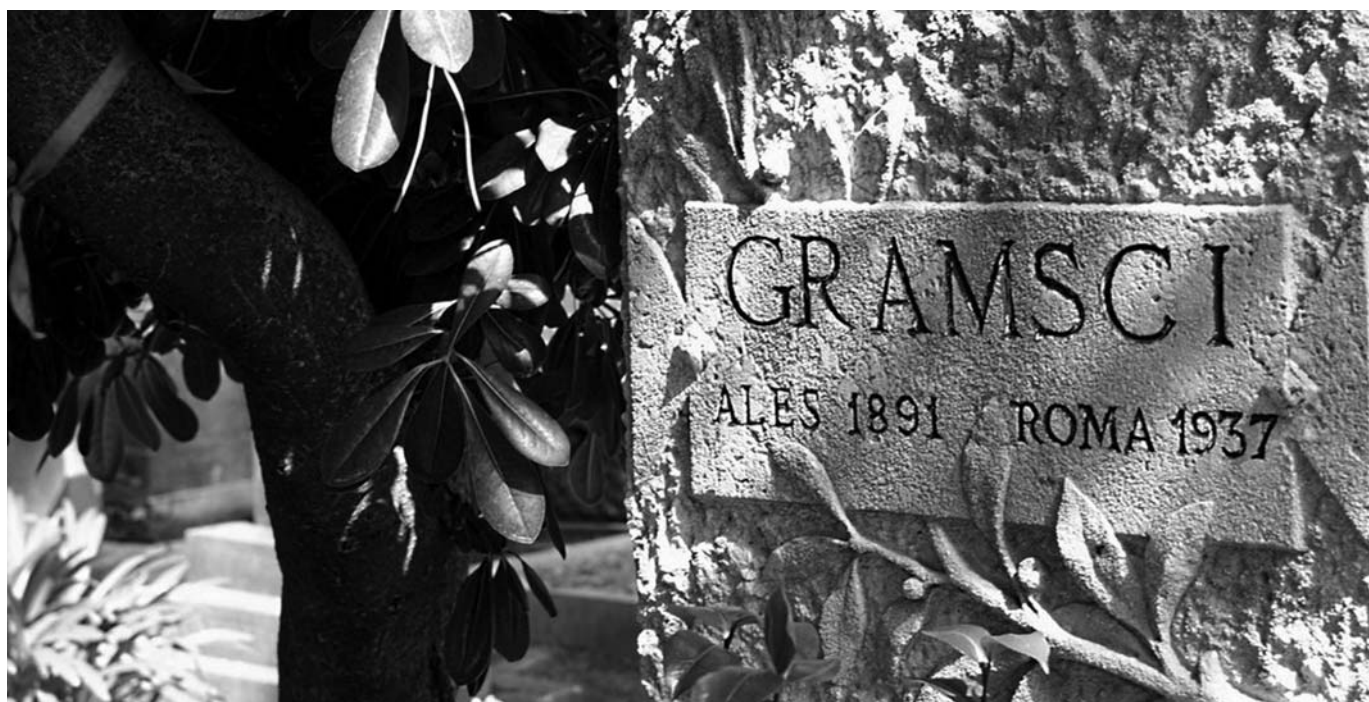
reformation of political conduct and political will. For the working class to achieve hegemony, it must supplant with its own achievements the atrophying and disintegrating creative cultural energy of the bourgeoisie’s defensive situation, and at the same time it must adopt the national traditions, in order to integrate the whole nation to itself. The war of position is carried forward on the territory of national particularities. Here it is not only a matter of the diversity of ways in which the international working class movement is expressed, but rather also of the specification of strategies.

Transition period to socialism

The connection with the policies of the PCI is obvious. If, from 1944, the Party was working tenaciously for a great alliance with the non-communist – and that means, in Italy, Catholic – masses, then it drew that conclusion from the particular hegemonial structure of bourgeois class rule in Italy. This depended on the institutionalised power of

religion and the church, on the dominant Catholic element in the cultural tradition, on the high proportion of non-industrialised, half-feudal, impoverished agrarian regions in the total social make-up, and on the consequent educational differential, which in turn was a prerequisite for the survival of the church’s influence. In Togliatti’s understanding, the *historic compromise* was not a programme of class compromise, but rather a strategy, born out of the particular conditions of Italy and derived from Gramsci’s cultural theory, for establishing the unity of the masses in the war of position of the class struggle.

Such a strategy must be conceived out of the particular starting conditions of a country and carried through in a continuing theoretical and organisational-practical reflection of this particularity. If the transition from capitalism to socialism cannot be institutionally effected in a short critical revolutionary phase, and rather extends over a long period of the war of position, then this has consequences for the concrete



programme of the Communist Party. It must, in the daily battles, capture ideological and institutional positions, from which the process of transition can be driven further. As Togliatti said at the 1957 Conference of Communist and Workers' Parties in Moscow, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the October Revolution:

“In the past we were always of the view that solutions of a transitional character could only be applied in periods of acute revolutionary crisis. Today we have quite a different approach. We have reached the conclusion that, in the current transition period from capitalism to socialism, and especially where the mass movement has progressed a long way upon the road of democratic achievements and where it possesses great strength, as at the present time, one can use solutions of a transitional character, in both economic and political content. ... We have proceeded from these considerations, while we were developing the part of our policies which we describe as the struggle for structural reform. One of these reforms is the agrarian reform. In the political sphere this structural reform includes the introduction of regional autonomy, the abolition of prefects etc. Also, in the realm of the economy, of industrial organisation, of the economic activity of the state, of taxation etc, we are able to put forward our demands and fight for them, by which the main battle is directed

against big monopoly capital. We take pains to mobilise more or less numerous groups from the intermediate layers of society – artisans, small farmers and also small entrepreneurs – and in this way we aim to isolate the most reactionary and parasitic groups. The party of the working class thus demonstrates that it is pursuing a great objective, socialism, but that it also possesses a programme for leadership of society in the interest of the broad masses, that this programme can be realised today and that through its realisation a new road for the advance to socialism is opened up. We shall not achieve socialism immediately, but rather through a complex process of economic and political development, in the course of which there will be transition phases, which are determined by the overall situation in the world and in the country. We have the duty to proceed with proper political solutions and with a corresponding activity among the masses, so that this process is expedited.”²⁰

The transition period is the period in which the hegemony of the working class is to be achieved. For that reason penetration into the institutions of bourgeois society is just as important as changes of behaviour, value judgements, world-view. This struggle is conducted in all areas of the unity of base and superstructure – which Gramsci called the *historic bloc*. Its first phase is that of the struggle for an anti-monopoly democracy, for the conquest of positions in the



(left) Palmiro Togliatti and (right) Georgi Dimitrov

state despite its altogether still-capitalist formation, for the assertion of the direct interests of the masses, as partial as this is may be. This protracted struggle over “ditches” and “earthworks”, as Gramsci said,¹⁹ constitutes the particular nature of the war of position, which “requires exceptional patience and inventiveness.”²¹

National and international

Togliatti made clear, in his obituary to Georgi Dimitrov in 1949, that differentiations in the strategies of communist parties were the consequence of the relative stabilisation of capitalism after the October Revolution. He wrote, looking back to the 1930s but at the same time taking aim at the situation after the Second World War:

“The united front and the people’s front – for the destruction of fascism; the unity of national forces – for saving the peoples from ruin; and consequently the search for new forms of our strategy and tactics as well as the search for a new way to pose and solve the problem of the achievement of working class power under new conditions – those were the concrete forms of expression of a major political line which the Communists under Dimitrov’s leadership

put into action and carried through. ... The break with the old schemata, and the continual search for the correct understanding of the real conditions to which the struggle must always correspond, inevitably included the necessity of bringing our policies into accordance with national conditions and traditions. That meant no departure from internationalism; rather it is the only means of making internationalism into a living thing, into an entity which arises and consolidates itself in the necessary diversity.”²²

Since the 7th World Congress of the Communist International the task has stood before the working class movement of determining the specific national aims and roads at various fronts of the international class struggle under different starting conditions, without thereby distancing oneself from internationalism. “The problem which is brought to light,” wrote Togliatti in a 1960 essay on Lenin,²³ “is therefore, once again, that of the different conditions which existed from country to country and from one situation to another. To be educated meant to be able to grasp these diversities, take account of them, and make



corrections when one was wrong.” In this essay Togliatti refers to “the clarity of the request to look at the particularity of every country”,²⁴ which Lenin made at the 3rd Congress of the Communist International:

“Fundamental revolutionary principles must be adapted to the specific conditions in the various countries. The revolution in Italy will run a different course from that in Russia. It will start in a different way. How? Neither you nor we know.”²⁵

And Togliatti continues:

“To agree that it is necessary to take account of the particularity of each country is relatively simple. But to know these particularities, and to draw the proper conclusions from them is more difficult. ... That was the basis of the creative activity of Antonio Gramsci, and our party has advanced to the extent that, in the framework of the great historic and political perspective which is common to the whole of the workers’, socialist and communist movement, and through the changes and shifts in the international situation, it has been increasingly able, with its strategy, its policy and with its struggles, to adapt itself to the concrete national situation.”²⁴

Comprehending and developing the world today

The arc of Gramsci’s cultural theory has reached full circle. Here I do not mean culture as a rich educational treasure of the upper strata, but rather as

the context of the determinants of activity of the people, as the ‘workaday philosophy’ or ‘everyman philosophy’, which provides the guidance mechanisms for decisions. When, therefore, it is a question of mobilising the masses, the complex of material conditions and their representation in people’s consciousnesses must be correctly understood and influenced. That means that the whole content of national tradition is to be taken up, it must be accepted as an inheritance, which at the same time is assimilated, criticised and further developed. As Gramsci wrote:

“How and why is the present-day world a criticism of the past, and furthermore how is it the ‘overcoming’ of that? We must have an exact consciousness of this real criticism and give to it not only a theoretical, but rather a political, expression. That means: we must be so much the more strongly connected with the present-day world, to the extent that we ourselves have contributed to creating it, in that we have a consciousness of the past and its ongoing continuity.”²⁶

Gramsci specifies the principle of this continuity:

“Ideas are great, insofar as they are updatable, *ie* insofar as they clarify a genuine relationship which is immanent in the situation; and they clarify insofar as they point out concretely the process of activities, through which an organised collective will directly bring this relation into the light of day.”²⁶

What such updating

means, Togliatti defined more precisely for the situation after the Second World War: namely the assimilation of bourgeois humanism, of bourgeois democracy, as a unifying factor of anti-fascism, of which the communists were the leading force in the resistance movement:

“The most serious difficulty for the Italian Communists consisted in the fact that the advent of the fascist dictatorship demanded that the problem of democracy had to be confronted and posed as the basis of our policy. Of all the particularities of which we had to take account, this became the most important. Was it or was it not possible, in the historic period in which Socialist revolution is on the order of the day, to conduct a struggle for the restoration of those democratic liberties which were contained in the bourgeois revolution and which fascism had completely annulled? ... We sought and found the solution in a deeper knowledge of the work of Lenin. It was not sufficient to assert that the working class can no longer limit its struggles to the purely economic sphere, which is indispensable to it, in order to guarantee its economic improvements and to advance towards Socialism, to the conquest of ever wider democratic liberties, and the struggle for democracy.

“The question which had to be posed was the development of the revolution itself and of its contents. ... We called upon to

fight, and organised to overthrow fascism, in the first place the working class, but also alongside it the peasant masses, the people of the South and of the islands, the working middle strata and the vanguard intellectuals, according to the Leninist strategic orientation which had been worked out under the guidance of Antonio Gramsci. There was thus brought about, in struggle, the hegemony of the proletariat without which a march towards socialism is not possible. When fascism began to totter and then collapse, the working class and its vanguard party were at the head of the great liberation movement. It was this which determined the character of that movement.”²⁷

The assimilation of Antonio Gramsci’s writings is of central significance for rebuilding a strategic conception on the Left.

■ Originally published in German in two parts in *Junge Welt*, 2/3 May 2007. Translated and edited by Martin Levy



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Notes

- 1 Wolfgang Fritz Haug (b 1936), philosopher and editor of the *Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus (Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism)*, 1994-present; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wolfgang_Fritz_Haug –Ed.
- 2 W F Haug, *Gramsci's 'Philosophy of Praxis': Camouflage or Refoundation of Marxist Thought?* (1994), in *Socialism and Democracy*, Vol 14, No 1 (Spring-Summer 2000), pp 1-19; online at <http://www.wolfgangfritzhau.inkrit.de/documents/Gramsci-PhilPraxis.pdf> –Ed.
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- 6 A Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Q Hoare and G Nowell Smith, Eds, Lawrence & Wishart, 1971, p 323.
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- 9 G W F Hegel, *Philosophy of Right (Law)*, Part 3, § 187; see <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prcivils.htm> –Ed.
- 10 *Ibid.*, § 249.
- 11 K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 6, p 495.
- 12 Comrade Holz appears to be referring to J Stalin, *Interview with the First American Labour Delegation*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 10, pp 97-153; however, Hoare and Nowell Smith, *op cit*, p 240, consider this attribution a common misconception, and argue that the correct article is a June 1925 speech, *Questions and Answers*, see J Stalin, *Collected Works*, Vol 7, pp 158-214 –Ed.
- 13 Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, p 240.
- 14 Gramsci's term is *intellettuale totalitario*: Hoare and Nowell Smith, *op cit*, p 335, suggest that this can be translated as "unified and all-absorbing intelligentsia" –Ed.
- 15 Palmiro Togliatti (1893-1964), close associate of Gramsci and, like him, a founder member of the PCI. He became the Party's general secretary after Gramsci was arrested, continuing in that role till his death. From 1926 to 1944 he operated in exile and was a member of the Secretariat of the Comintern under the name Ercoli.
- 16 P Togliatti, preparatory paper submitted for the Conference on Gramscian Studies held in Rome, 11-13 January 1958; in P Togliatti, *On Gramsci and Other Writings*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1979, pp 161-181.
- 17 Here comrade Holz states that the quotation is documented in Holz and Sandkühler, *op cit*, pp 140-163, but the page numbers are wrong for the German translation of Togliatti, *op cit* (actually pp 71-93). In fact, the citation has not been found anywhere in Holz and Sandkühler, nor indeed in *On Gramsci and Other Writings*, although the assessment is certainly correct –Ed.
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Twenty-First C



Part I: Three Guys Named Charles

By Roger
Fletcher

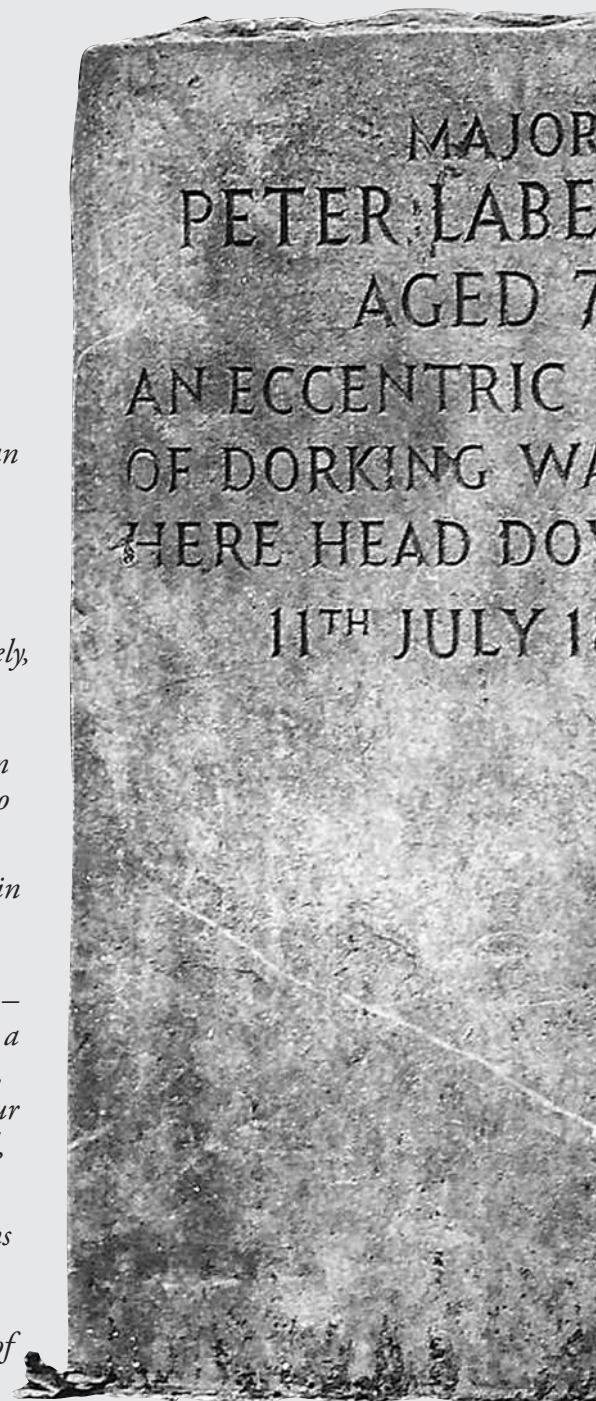
Introduction

Despite obvious developments on both sides of the equation, there is a basic enigma between capitalism and science. For although capitalism has needed the sciences in order to develop, the disciplines of science are now increasingly inhibited by capitalism. This inhibition is far more an ideological matter than one of mere funding.

Part I begins with some less-evident aspects of three scientists who followed what we now, perhaps a little quaintly, refer to as 'the Enlightenment'. Initially we concentrate on Darwin, Marx and Dodgson from the 19th century whose separate researches into, respectively, evolution, revolution and mirror images may be seen from our vantage point to coincide more comfortably than their first names suggest. We then look briefly at a few others from the 20th century who worked from that sound – but hard-won – foundation, and some who continue to do so today.

Part II takes a detailed look at our sense of sight, partly because its origin gave the first of our three scientists some misgivings as to how the eye could have evolved. Mainly however, for homo sapiens, it is our dominant sense – consuming about half of our brain's processing power – and our major conduit to the external world. Consequently it remains a focus for obscurantists and fashion-conscious ideologists today who deny, or ignore, scientifically established facts. Ironically the eye, as part of our visual system, turns out to be a principal proof of evolutionary law and, simultaneously, a dialectical system par excellence.

Part III takes the concepts of parts I and II and relates them to problems of the present and recent past. It is only by our efforts, armed with a coherent system of facts, that we can counter the biased and illogical assertions of the ruling class, and thus facilitate change in the interests of the whole of humanity.



Century Vision



Headstone on Box Hill, Surrey, England. The major was convinced that the world was upside down, and he wanted to be the right way up when it righted itself. Chronologically he can have known nothing of Darwin or Marx, or even Alfred (Lord) Tennyson's realisation that 'the old order changeth, yielding place to new' (*La Morte d'Arthur*); hence the major's confusion.

"THINGS ARE NOT WHAT THEY SEEM", wrote the 19th century US poet Longfellow, in his *Psalm of Life*.¹ Evidently three of his contemporaries found implicit agreement with him, for Charles Darwin (1809-82), 'Charles' - obviously Karl - Marx (1818-83), and Charles Dodgson (1832-98) all questioned, in their different ways, our accepted images of a superficially familiar world. The last of this trio, Dodgson, may be better known to many as Lewis Carroll.

We'll begin with Darwin: he was born earlier than our other two scientists and put together, in *On the Origin of*

Species,² a coherent explanation of how our biosphere evolved. This major work arose from ideas that had been around since the early 19th century. Subsequent work in the following century has proved conclusively that unicellular life has led to multicellular organisms in a continuous, though far from smooth, upward but branching spiral of increasing complexity, culminating in a creature that is aware of itself.

This concept was, even in Darwin's day, the exact opposite of the predominantly religious idea, of a supreme being who had handed down a ready-made, and infinitely complex but

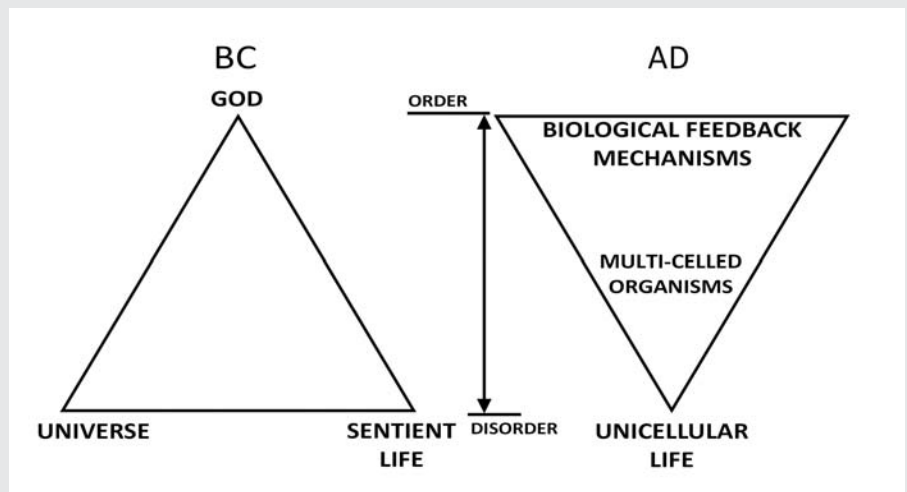


Fig 1. Changed perception of the world. BC here may be taken to suggest 'Before the three Charleses', with AD being 'After Darwin and his two contemporaries'. AD certainly has an unstable appearance, but a wealth of developing evidence for support. Despite its apparent stability, and 20 centuries of repetition and ramification, BC still has only assertion and conjecture for its support.



perfect, world for us to despoil. Conflict over these ideas has raged ever since, and continues today in some parts of the world and in corners of our current society. Fig 1 depicts this changed perception in the diagrammatic form of inverted triangles, but it is a slow inversion that has taken much of the 20th century and remains incomplete to this day.



Portrait of Charles Darwin by George Richmond late 1830's. Photo from wikipedia

The Younger Darwin

Darwin's early years were spent in the company of industrialists, bankers, influential scientists and engineers, and Charles was able to lead the life of a young country gentleman, destined to take holy orders. But the chance offer of a self-financed berth, as a naturalist, on the Admiralty survey ship HMS Beagle for a five-year long circumnavigation, radically altered his views on 'Creation', and formed the basis for a further 40 productive years of research. Throughout that voyage, heated discussions about a wide range of discoveries, between Darwin and the Beagle's fundamentalist Christian captain Robert FitzRoy, helped to consolidate Darwin's developing theory.

From his early background, it seemed natural for the mature Darwin to gain a substantial income from trading stocks and shares on the Stock Exchange in the then-developing railway system, a highly relevant fact that Richard Lewontin has pointed to in *It Ain't Necessarily So*.³ Lewontin proceeds to question whether Darwin's idea of differential survival in the biological world sprang from "a true epistemological break", or rather from his personal share fluctuations – a sort of

"share marketism" is how Lewontin puts it. Regarding Darwin's Stock Exchange dealings, it is noteworthy that at his death he had accumulated a personal fortune, in today's figures, of £13 million.⁴

Tangentially, we might briefly speculate on what Darwin would have made of our own times, when survival of inefficient, incompetent, or simply unlucky, private companies in the 'market place' is ensured with socially accumulated funds, the very opposite of natural selection!

Although far beyond the scope of this present article, Darwin's conclusions remain the focus of active research and increasingly complex debate.^{5,6} In *Darwin's Blind Spot*, medical scientist Frank Ryan points out that "Darwinism was in perfect harmony with imperialism (of the Victorian era, not in Lenin's meaning –RF), which was seen as the national expression of the evolutionary paradigm, the fittest nation dominating all others through the quality of its culture and the struggle of its armed forces."⁵

We also need to note here that, had Darwin had available to him the wealth of detailed knowledge that has become available in the 20th century, he might have had more difficulty in developing his main thesis. But, to the chagrin of creationists and 'intelligent designers' (*sic*), this serious later work is adding detail to, strengthening, and broadening the Darwinian concept. Almost by definition, no scientific law is immutable, and Darwin's law of competition is now being modified by new laws of cooperation.^{7,8}

Today, a residual anti-Darwinism takes both ideological and financial sustenance from the rich and controlling – and candidly ignorant – strata of modern society; religion is merely the obscurantist cloak behind which this opposition hides. Nowhere is that more clearly expressed, in our present context, than in the words of one 'creationist' who wrote that "the words of Unification Church leader Sun Myung-Moon, as well as my own studies and prayers, convinced me that I should devote my life to destroying Darwinism, just as many of my fellow Unificationists had already devoted their lives to destroying Marxism."⁹

Such a claim might well bring to mind Mark Twain's pithy comment, "The report of my death was an exaggeration", but at the same time does us a favour by linking the researches of both Darwin ...

... and Marx ...

... who, with his co-workers, also laid a secure basis for inverting, and thus correcting, the still-extant fantasy induced by the ruling-class of 'their' world. This is the currently dominant belief that the whole of our socio-economic life was built due to their foresight and intellect, as intermediaries for some supreme being.

In the most accessible form of their writings, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,¹⁰ Marx and Engels showed how our society, like Darwin's organisms, has developed from simplicity to complexity through struggle. And, as with Darwin's pioneering work, evidence for Marx continues to accumulate.

Others have drawn attention¹¹ to the complementary nature of Darwin's and Marx's conclusions, and both relied heavily on earlier researchers. Marx in particular was meticulous in *Capital* in citing previous research work, to the extent that sometimes this evidence, culled from other labour movement sources, is quoted as Marx's own writing. Coincidentally, both men produced inversions of the received, but now demonstrably false, ideas about the natural and the artificial world.

Reiterating Marx

As the current phase of the ongoing and systemic crisis began, it was reported that sales of Marx's major work, *Capital*, had peaked; no mention was made of the more accessible *Communist Manifesto*, written jointly with Engels. It has been said elsewhere that Marx has only been proved wrong in detail, but never, so far, in principle, and that becomes more obvious with re-reading the *Manifesto*. For the 'person in the street', reading *Capital* in full does need some commitment, but the pamphlet-sized *Manifesto* is as concise and easily-digestible a synopsis of both crisis and solution as one can hope to find. Almost certainly that is why it is not mentioned by capitalist sources but, conversely, is the reason why Cuba's Armando Hart re-introduces it, together with essays by Luxemburg and Guevara, in the 2005 publication *Manifesto*.¹²

It is more usual, within our late-capitalist culture, to counterpose evolution to revolution, but this reductionism is both superficial and false. Evolution and revolution are just part of the process, and are universal. As Jalee points out in his brief but excellent *How Capitalism Works*¹³ "this (is an) upward course that is continuous and infinite". Change, development and decay are essential and

interactive parts of our universe that occur on different time-scales, from the longest, geological, through biological to the shortest, social evolution.

The first of these processes is covered by almost any text-book on geology and the second, biological evolution, by most biology text-books – with those by Dawkins, Coyne *et al* being readily available. But it is the third process, social evolution, that is – for quite obvious reasons – almost totally obscured or grossly distorted within current literature. One excellent treatment is given in *The Education Revolution: Cuba's Alternative to Neoliberalism*,¹⁴ comprehensively described by Bill Greenshields in *CR*57.

A More Revealing 'Look in the Mirror'

So far, we've looked briefly at two scientists whose ideas are helping us to set our world the right way up. Now we must look at one who analysed some more of our confusions. The nature of mirror images may seem a superficial problem in the context of Darwinism, or even Marxism, but how we actually perceive our world is, of course, vitally important, and full of assumptions. Evolution has not equipped us to deal with mirror images because, until the invention of flat silvered (and now aluminised) glass, the only readily-available such images were in the horizontal plane, as on the surface of pooled water.

Readers may find this inclusion of Charles Dodgson, better known as an author of children's stories and nonsense rhymes, a trifle odd in the company of two of history's giants, so some explanatory points are necessary. In his *Through the Looking-Glass*,¹⁵ Dodgson showed us a reversed world, although laterally this time, that is at once both familiar and subtly different. But in so doing he also created an opportunity for us to look at our world in another way, to see things from 'the other side', and thus to gain a broader and deeper view of what we know as 'reality'.

The Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a lecturer in mathematics at Christ Church College, Oxford. Martin Gardner, likewise a mathematician and, until fairly recently, a columnist for *Scientific American*, describes Dodgson's lectures as "humourless and boring", the man having a facial asymmetry "that may have contributed to his interest in mirror images".¹⁶ What is certain is that if Alice's *Adventures in Wonderland* has inspired a recent doctoral thesis,¹⁷ a book on

popular science by a well-known physicist, and another on mathematical logic by a professor of pure mathematics, then we can still learn something from *Through the Looking-Glass*.

Thus the choice of our 'third man' is not from some simple coincidence of first names, but arises from concepts that we are only now beginning to appreciate. Martin Gardner¹⁸ has pointed out that "Alice's speculation about looking-glass milk has a significance greater than Carroll (Dodgson) suspected", presaging more recent discoveries in stereochemistry and, in 1957, a Nobel Prize for the discovery of asymmetry in some elementary particles.

These reflections are only mentioned to show that Dodgson, as Lawrence Krauss suggests in his recent book *Hiding in the Mirror*,¹⁹ was far from an intellectual lightweight, a judgement that is supported by Robin Wilson's more recent book, *Lewis Carroll in Numberland*.²⁰ We may certainly say that Dodgson deserves his place in this present article at least. It is also a characteristic of capitalist society, in which he lived a comfortable and cloistered existence, that it has carefully ignored the significance of Dodgson's constructs. Viewed correctly – *ie* via a truly dialectical methodology – the implications of his work place him in good company with our other two Charleses, as illustrated in Fig 2.

The figure is better visualised in three dimensions, say as a photographer's tripod, with the feet representing the researches of our three scientists. However, this highly stable form needs to be seen as a generalisation; there are no

hard and fast lines, angles or connections, and no solid boundaries for the three sets of ideas. It is thus consistent with emergent ideas of fuzzy logic.

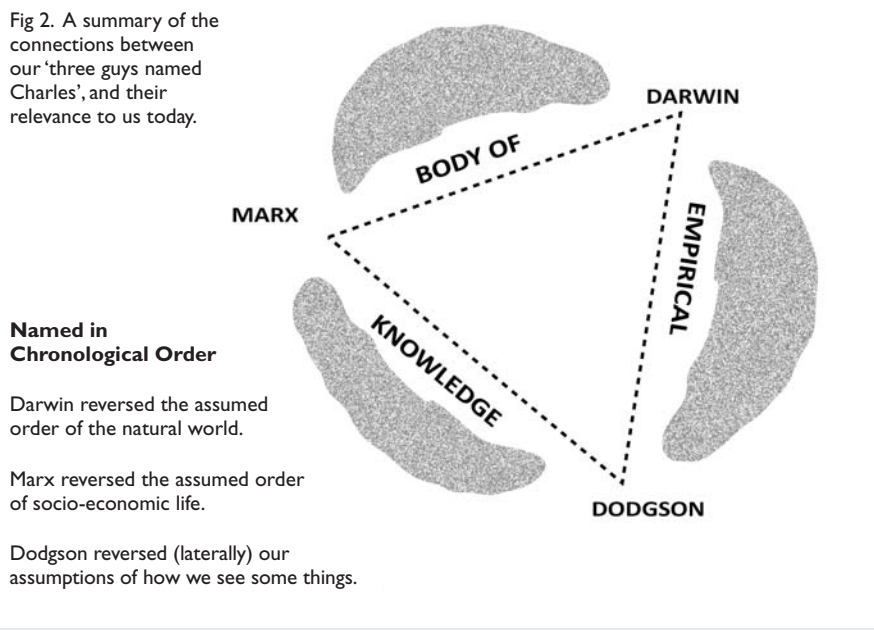
Furthermore the whole pyramidal shape is surrounded by a diffuse envelope of thought, ideas, and cultures, the noosphere of Teilhard de Chardin that complements his own conception of geosphere and biosphere.²¹ (NB For any *CR* reader who finds reference to this Jesuit philosopher incongruous in an essentially materialist journal, a look at a discursive work by Croose Parry²² could be helpful.)

Current Implications

There are several good reasons for coupling together our superficially disparate individuals:

1. Despite the year 2009 celebrating a century and a half since publication of *On the Origin of Species*, Darwin's progressive ideas remain under attack from social strata of the most ignorant persuasions. And, despite recent excellent studies, most popular works give us a reduced, almost two-dimensional, image of the real scientist. Although some writers²³ depict a deeply humane and anti-racist campaigner against slavery, another prominent scientist characterises most of what we 'know' about Darwin as "an entire parody of the truth".²⁴
2. Following the implosion of the world's first state that was ostensibly based on a Marxist concept of scientific socialism, both theory and practice of such ideas remain under comprehensive attack today; this from a broadly similar

Fig 2. A summary of the connections between our 'three guys named Charles', and their relevance to us today.



social stratum or class that seeks, *and indeed needs*, to limit – and preferably neutralise – Darwin’s pioneering scientific work. Thus we may reasonably conclude that evolution and revolution are complementary – Engels implied as much in his graveside eulogy to Marx²⁵ – and subject to opprobrium from the same quarters. But a subtext of this present article is (a) that both science and socialism have become essentials for the continuity of rational human existence, and (b) that the most recent researches, even by scientists who remain steeped in capitalist society and ideology, nudge us gently to such a conclusion.

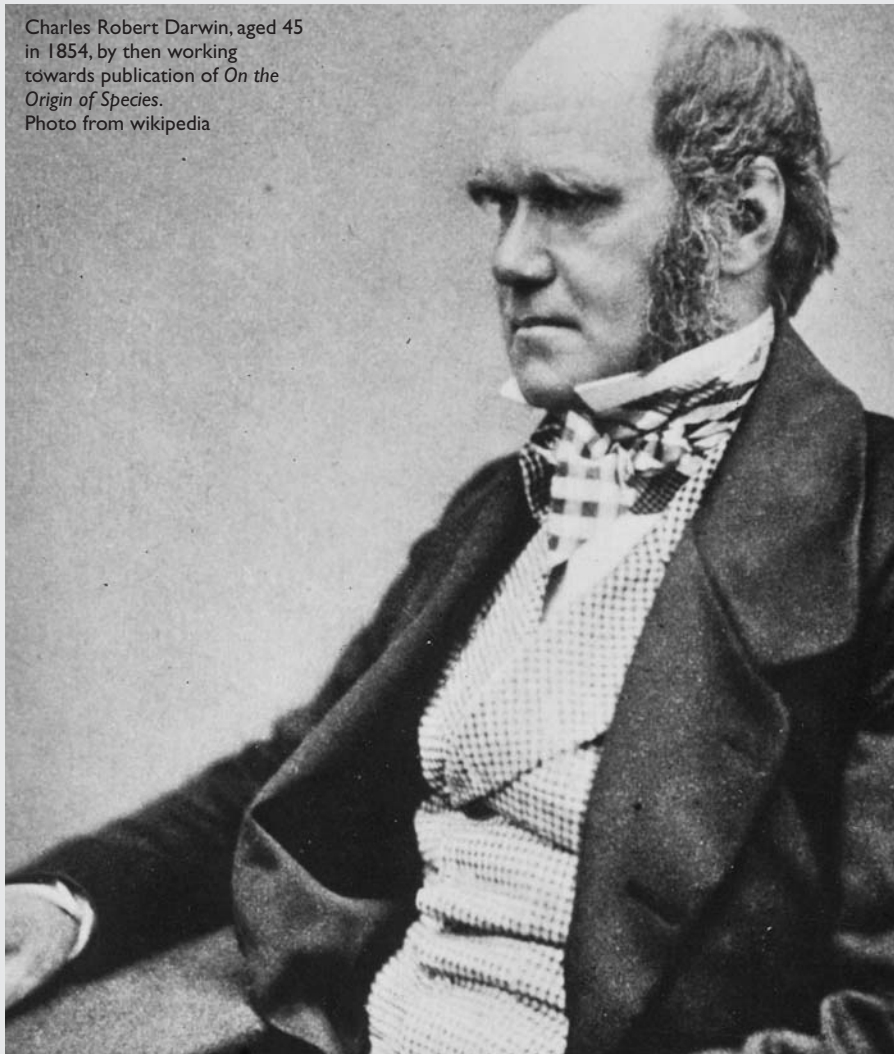
3. Lastly, but of over-riding importance we must recognise, if we value either dialectics or elementary physics, that the attacks by institutionalised ignorance on rational thought are having some effect on all of us. Massive physical assaults on the working class are part of our history and present times; after all, that’s why our flag remains red! Mass slaughter in the Americas, Africa, Asia and India, to say nothing of two major wars in Europe, is now a deliberately-disguised part of European empire-building, as is Royal Air Force gassing of Kurdish villagers in Mesopotamia (now Iraq!) in the 1920s, and the more recent sustained attacks on northern Korea and Vietnam. Surely every reader of this journal can add to that list *ad nauseam*; it is being supplemented even as this is being written.

But as World War Two metamorphosed into the Cold War, so the physicality of these assaults was extended into the psychological arena, so that every means of communication is at the service of one narrow ideology. Now we are subjected – globally – to bombardment not only from airplanes, but from airwaves, and even digitally along fibre optic cables! We may fairly describe this process as *pernicious osmosis*.

Intimate Pollutions

Because we live and breathe within this distorted society, albeit one in which serious stresses are beginning to show, it is vitally important to look at some of the instances where a pernicious osmosis is both induced, and encouraged; this by a class that *instinctively and consciously* reacts both to progressive developments, and any attempts by working people to defend ourselves. We will discuss this in more detail later, but for now we merely note that it would be simplistic to characterise what, for most of us appeared to be ‘our century’, as a struggle for the ideas of the trio of Darwin, Marx

Charles Robert Darwin, aged 45 in 1854, by then working towards publication of *On the Origin of Species*.
Photo from wikipedia



and Dodgson. In our own times ‘we have a problem’ but, unlike the Apollo astronauts, our problem extends from Houston to Euston, and multi-dimensionally right around the globe. It cannot be fixed by technical means, by changing the value of some currency or other, or even by ‘regime change’, and certainly not by some bizarre ‘war on terror’. It is, in the candid words of one British prime minister, “the unacceptable face of capitalism”,²⁶ although we must take that phrase to cover far more than the peccadillos from which it originated.

In short, the problem is systemic. It arose with class-divided society, and it developed in step with the progress from feudalism into capitalism and thence into imperialism, as the Marx/Engels *Manifesto* so effectively shows. At a recent conference on National Health Service problems, one anonymous medical specialist pointed out that “Every system is perfectly designed to produce the results that it does”.²⁷ Banal as that may sound initially, it leaves us with one effective conclusion, and that is to change the system!

The Problem Summarised

Some major elements of our problem are:

- a socio-economic system that has matured in the 20th century, and now shows signs of increasing stress, due to its intrinsic contradictions;
- an ideologically-driven break-up of large manufacturing units into small, and often antagonistic ones, in order to break up organised workers’ trades unions;
- simultaneously, the encouraged accretion of transnational finance-capital groupings, wherein employees are generally declassed and resistant or hostile to unionisation – such organisations facilitating the super-exploitation of workers, and outwitting the will of governments (NB both this and the preceding point flow logically from Lenin’s ‘five elements of imperialism’²⁸);
- the artificial maintenance of a casino economy that rewards mere chance, and increasingly jeopardises industry, health, education and culture;
- a strident insistence on the presently-

dominant socio-economic model to which 'there is no alternative' ... in Margaret Thatcher's infamous phrase (Notably, former US president Clinton helped perpetuate this canard when he told an unemployed steel-worker "It's the economy, stupid"). A simple transposition of the last two words would have come closer to the truth, and a more precise version, 'It's the *political* economy, stupid', was the heading for a session at the 2010 Communist University of Britain);

● the calculated occlusion of objective knowledge from the general populace, with substitution of pseudo-science and idle speculation.

One essay from 1937 fluently captures an early phase of these points:

"the increase of organisation in the factories; on the other hand the increase of competition for private profit On the one hand an unparalleled development of productive forces; on the other hand a system of economy continually generating crises which result in a restriction of production On the one hand an efflorescence of the sciences and the arts in a new universe of technique; ... [but] ... their separation into spheres whose disintegration reduces knowledge to chaos, and men to spiritual despair".²⁹

Today, we need only add "and women" to that final phrase, to fit it to our present conditions.

That passage, from Caudwell, shows that our 'problem' has been with us for a long time, has in fact been developing in parallel with the much-vaunted system of capitalism, and therefore is one that the reader of *CR* should find unexceptional. I have set out here to look at that problem from a rather different viewpoint from those that are more familiar to us. Hence my choice of the 'three guys named Charles'. What caused most discomfort to the oppositionists at the publication of *On the Origin* was the fact that Darwin had presented solid and coherent *evidence* for his thesis, and the same may be said in respect of Marx, Dodgson and any who work from such bases. Evidence is something that, from our vantage point, we can see that traditionalists and reactionaries fear, much as werewolves were once said to fear the silver bullet!

Continuing Delusions...

It is therefore with the final point, regarding objective knowledge and pseudo-science, from the list above which summarised the overall problem, that we have concerned ourselves here, because it has already been with us for too long. The Bush era in the US became notorious for such suppression, causing one *Scientific American* Editorial, in May, 2004 to write of "Bush-League Lysenkoism",³⁰ but those times were only the most blatant, so far, in the continuing conflict between objective knowledge and politico-religious assertion (see also Note 9).

For those who may be unfamiliar with the high-profile scientific/political controversy and scandal around the name of Lysenko, an invaluable scientific analysis appeared in 1976,³¹ and was reproduced in 1985.³²

...and a Consequent Fatality

One anecdote from the time of Darwin which certainly has resonances for us today, comes in two parts, and will serve to round off this part of *21st Century Vision*.

Charles Dodgson was ordained a deacon of Christ Church by Bishop Wilberforce, better known then as 'Soapy

Sam'. This was the same prelate who had directed the infamous, and ill-judged, question at eminent biologist T H Huxley, as to whether he was descended from the apes through his grandmother or his grandfather. That meeting, the British Association for the Advancement of Science's debate on Darwin's great work, was more amused by Huxley's reply. Having muttered under his breath "The Lord hath delivered him into my hands", Huxley responded that he "would certainly prefer to be descended from an ape, rather than from a cultivated man who prostituted the gifts of culture and eloquence to the service of prejudice and falsehood".³³

That same year, the Bishop fell heavily from his horse and struck a large boulder with his head, killing himself outright. On hearing of this, Huxley commented that the Bishop's brain had "for once come into contact with reality, and the result was fatal!"³⁴

There are several ongoing conflicts with reality that are not so readily solved and we shall examine a major one, *with which we are all afflicted*, in Part II.

Notes

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HOW THE SPARTANS STOLE THE BONES OF ORESTES

**THE POETRY OF YANNIS RITSOS
IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**



By Andy Croft



Last year, on the eve of a 24-hour general strike protesting against the €30bn public expenditure cuts by the PASOK government, young Greek Communist Party (KKE) activists hung two enormous banners from the Acropolis rock, bearing the slogan in Greek and in English, “Peoples of Europe Rise Up”.¹ It was an extraordinary image, combining the ancient and the contemporary, defying the EU and IMF in the birthplace of democracy and inviting Europe to remember the shared revolutionary histories of 1798, 1848, 1917, 1968 and 1989.

But of course the peoples of Europe didn't rise up. This is not going to be another revolutionary ‘Springtime of the Nations’.² Anyway, it is clear that the Greek protests do not constitute a ‘revolution’. You cannot have a revolution until you have been allocated a flower – Rose (Georgia), Tulip (Kyrgyzstan), Cedar (Lebanon) – or a colour – Orange (Ukraine), Green (Iran), Saffron (Burma). Instead, the British press has been full of praise for the ‘boldness’ of the Papandreou government’s package of cuts. TV and newspaper coverage focused on images of stone-throwing youths in gas masks (not forgetting ‘Kanellos the protest dog’), an implication that there is something feral about the Greek protests that recalls Henry Kissinger’s defence of the military junta in the 1960s on the grounds that ‘Greece is not yet ready for democracy’.

75 years ago the response of the authorities to a strike by tobacco workers in Thessaloniki left 30 demonstrators dead and 300 wounded. It was a brutal event, even by the standards of Greek history. The next day, the KKE newspaper *Rizospastis* published a front-page photograph of a mother weeping over the body of her dead son. The image prompted the poet Yannis Ritsos to write his first long poem, *Epitaphios*. The poem draws on lamentations in Greek drama like Hecuba’s lament for Polymestor, as well as on the Good

Friday liturgy of the Greek Orthodox Church. It is a secular *pietà* in which Mary’s lament over the body of Christ becomes the voice of a weeping mother on a Greek street:

Son, my flesh and blood, marrow of my bones, heart of my own heart, sparrow of my tiny courtyard, flower of my loneliness.

Where did my boy fly away? Where’s he gone? Where’s he leaving me? The bird-cage is empty now, not a drop of water in the font.

What ever made your dear eyes close and you are blind to my tears? How are you frozen in your tracks and deaf to my bitter words?

The first edition of the poem went on sale within days of the massacre, dedicated to the workers of Thessaloniki. Ritsos became a household name. A few weeks later General Metaxas seized power. One of the regime’s first public acts was to burn all the unsold copies of the poem at the foot of the Acropolis. The poem was not available again in Greece until the 1950s.

Ritsos was, by any standard, a great poet and a genuinely heroic figure. He was imprisoned for four years after the Civil War, and then again between 1967 and 1971 by the military junta. Several of his works were famously set to music by Mikis Theodorakis (notably *Epitaphios*, *Romiossini*, *The Lady of the Vineyards* and *18 Little Songs of the Bitter Homeland*). Ritsos translated Nazim Hikmet and Paul Éluard into Greek. He won the Lenin Peace Prize and was nominated on nine separate occasions for the Nobel Prize for Literature. Picasso drew his portrait. Aragon called him “the greatest poet of our age”. The Greek Government declared 2009 – the centenary of his birth – as ‘The Year of Yannis Ritsos’. These days Yannis Ritsos is a national hero.

Heroes and heroism, both mythical and real, were subjects to which Ritsos

returned repeatedly in his writings:

After their death, the heroes went through a number of transformations – natural and strange – in the minds of those who survived: sometimes vine keepers as in the case of Protesilaos or hunters as in the case of Hippolytus, sometimes simple warriors (which in fact they were) with their beautiful helmets, their sandals, somebody (we can’t remember his name) with a flower between his teeth, and others

in the shape of animals or reptiles – more commonly, snakes. Oh really, they offered the Greeks a lot, both before and after their death, even in this form – that is to say, as snakes or lions.

Now, the heroes are in decline, they’ve gone out of fashion.

Nobody invokes them any more or commemorates them.

Everybody wants antiheroes. Still today, when we went out – it was a sunny March day

(even the earth had dried out after the rains; between the rocks on the hill,

the daffodils were celebrating in full bloom: asphodels, as the ancients used to call them) – today,

here, behind the rusty barbed wire, we are waiting uncertainly for the fisherman from Eretria to pass by again along the small stretch of shore

carrying in his nets the huge shoulder blade of Pelops.

(*Metamorphoses*)

This was written in prison, during the Dictatorship. It addresses – like most of the poems in *Repetitions* – the experience of what must have seemed like another terrible defeat. Ritsos knew that the world seems to want ‘antiheroes’ but



the poem ends with Pelops, whose cult developed into the founding myth of the Olympic Games, a symbol of unity first for the Peloponnesus, later for all Greece. In other words, even here, behind “the rusty barbed wire”, Ritsos asserts his belief that the heroic can still be found among us.

Today Ritsos has himself been transformed – from political prisoner to a national hero. But the world has also changed. The ideas and values which informed his life and work – Ritsos was a member of the KKE from 1931 to his death in 1990 – are in retreat everywhere. Communist Parties and their successors are everywhere divided and isolated from the societies which they inhabit. These days even right-wing social-democratic parties struggle to win elections. Internationalism, modernisation and reform – banners beneath which the Left once marched – are now watchwords of capital. Culture, which used to be an ideological battlefield between Left and Right, is now merely a site of private pleasure, public consumption and personal identity. Poetry – at least in the UK – is increasingly an arm of show-business and commercial interests.

And yet no other ideology inspired and informed the lives and work of so many twentieth-century poets as socialism – more specifically communism – once did. A number of twentieth-century revolutionary leaders - including Mao Tse-Tung, Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara – even wrote poetry. This was a major intellectual tradition, to which few significant twentieth-century poets did not, at some time, give their allegiance. To name just the most famous, we might mention Rafael Alberti, Louis Aragon, Kaifi Azmi, Olga Berggolts, Bertolt Brecht, Aimé Césaire, Martin Carter, Roque Dalton, Mahmoud Darwish, Paul Éluard, Faiz, Nicolás Guillén, Miguel Hernandez, Nazim Hikmet, Langston Hughes, Iqbal, Victor Jara, Attila József, Tom McGrath, Andras Mezei, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Geo Milev, Pablo Neruda, Ladislav Novomestky, Pasolini, Cesare Pavese, Yannis Ritsos, Tristan Tzara, César Vallejo, Nikola Vaptsarov, Andrei Voznosensky, Yevgeny Yevtushenko

It is a remarkable list. No other political or intellectual tradition can claim to have enjoyed the support of so many distinguished poets. In fact we may say that artistic culture – especially poetry – was one of the outstanding achievements of the twentieth-century communist movement. You cannot write a serious history of twentieth-century

poetry without including the works of these writers.

The generation of Ritsos, Aragon, Neruda, Hikmet, Vaptsarov and Brecht lived in a period of rapid social and political change. They grew up in the newly-literate, urbanising societies of the early twentieth-century, characterised by new mass media, mass politics and mass participation in civil society. Their writings were shaped first by their involvement in the early Modernist movements, and then by their rejection of Modernism, articulating more democratic ways of responding to the challenges of Modernity. Between them they lived through war, revolution, economic depression, fascism, civil war, illegality, prison and exile.

These were the circumstances out of which they created the most extraordinary body of work. While they may seem unlikely ingredients in the creation of great poetry, we can see now that it was these terrible conditions that made them the great poets they became, because the times urgently required a new relationship between the intelligentsia and society, between writers and readers, between poetry and politics.

These poets made poetry out of politics and took politics into the worlds of poetry. They were able to write about the private and the public, the lyrical and the satirical, the utopian and the historical, combining documentary record, formal experimental and traditional forms. They were all (with the possible exception of Brecht) great love poets. They each celebrated the poetry of everyday life, of everyday objects – as Ritsos called it, “the celestial side by side / with the everyday”. And they insisted on the poetry of ordinary language, demotic, colloquial speech. Above all, they found ways of synthesising the struggles for personal, political and national liberation as a single narrative – consider the poetry which Hikmet wrote in Istanbul and Bursa prisons, Brecht’s ‘*Svendborg Poems*’, Neruda’s *Canto General*, Aragon’s *Le Crève-Coeur*, Vaptsarov’s *Motor Songs*, or Ritsos’s *Romiosini*, written in praise of the partisan armies of EAM-ELAS:

They pushed on straight into dawn
with the disdain of hungry men,
a star had thickened in their
motionless eyes,
they carried the stricken summer on
their shoulders.

The armies passed through here with
banners clinging to their bodies,

with stubbornness clenched between
their teeth like an acrid pear,
with the moon’s sand in their heavy
army boots,
with the coal-dust of night sticking in
their ears and their nostrils.

Tree by tree, stone by stone, they
passed through the world,
passed through sleep with thorns for
pillow.
They brought life like a river cupped
in their parched hands.

At every step they won a league of sky
– to give it away.
At their outposts they turned to stone
like scorched trees,
and when they danced in the village
squares the ceilings in the houses
shook
and the glassware clattered on the
shelves.

Ah, what songs shook the mountain
summits!
They held the earthen platter of
the moon between their knees
and ate,
and squashed an Ah in the depths of
their hearts
as they would squash a louse between
their hard thumbnails.

Who will now bring you a warm loaf
of bread in the night that you
may feed your dreams?
Who will stand in the shade of an olive
tree to keep the cicada company lest
the cicada fall silent,
now that the whitewash of noon
paints all around the low stone
wall of the horizon,
obliterating their great and virile
names?

This earth that smelled so fragrantly
at daybreak,
the earth that was theirs and ours –
their blood – how fragrant that
earth –
and now how is it that our vineyards
have locked their doors,
how has the light thinned out on
roofs and trees,
who would have said that now half
would be found under the earth
and the other half in chains?

Though the sun waves you good
morning with so many leaves
and the sky glitters with so many
banners,
these are in chains and those lie
under the ground.

Be silent, the bells will ring out at any moment.
 This earth is theirs, and this earth is ours.
 Under the earth, in their crossed hands
 they hold the bell rope, waiting for the hour, they don't sleep, they never die,
 waiting to ring in the resurrection.
 This earth
 is theirs and ours – no one can take it from us.

It is hard not to feel about this generation of poets as Ritsos did about the *Lost Land of the Hyperboreans*,³ always “constantly moving further away”; or to hope, as he did in *After the Defeat*, for a “new Kimon”⁴ to dig up the bones of Theseus⁵ and redeem the world. The “heroes are in decline, they’ve gone out of fashion.” Today there is not much room left for internationalism between the ugly nationalisms of the present century, the brutal supra-nationalism of the EU and the violent internationalism of globalisation. Poetry and politics are now expected to occupy separate, if not antagonistic worlds, like notions of the private and the public. Demotic language is now the poetry of advertising. Western societies are inoculated against the music of poetry just as much as they are against socialist ideas. And, as the international celebrations to mark the 20th anniversary of the dismantling of the Berlin Wall showed, there is absolutely no toleration of any alternative narrative to the triumphal history of the victors. The mood of Ritsos’s late poems sometimes seems about right. In the poems he wrote shortly before his death, news of the defeat of Soviet Communism did nothing to lessen the growing sense of his own mortality:

The old man sits in his doorway. It’s night-time,
 He’s alone. In his hand, an apple.
 The others
 Left their lives to the stars’
 jurisdiction.
 What can he tell them? Night is night.
 We don’t even know what comes next. The moon
 Amuses itself half-heartedly, endlessly
 Shimmering on the sea. But in the heart
 Of all that brightness, there is no mistaking
 The black boat with its shadowy oarsman
 Slowly drawing away from the shore.
 (*The Black Boat*)

Unfortunately, the work of Yannis Ritsos is almost completely unknown in Britain. This may be not entirely unconnected with our general amnesia concerning Greek history, first regarding the British role in the Civil War, and then regarding British support for the Dictatorship. Everything we know about Greece – apart from holiday beaches and the surprise success of their national football team at Euro 2008 – we have learned from *Captain Corelli’s Mandolin* and *Mamma Mia*. In the 1970s Penguin published a small selection of Ritsos’s most recent short poems. In the 1980s Anvil published a selection of the poems he wrote during the Dictatorship. But these books are long out of print. *The Fourth Dimension* (Anvil Press, 1993) and *Repetitions, Testimonies, Parentheses* (Princeton University Press, 1991) are the only volumes of his work in English translation currently available.

Ritsos’s reputation may not need undermining in the UK. But elsewhere there is a sustained effort taking place to undermine the achievements of this extraordinary group of poets. The US translator of Ritsos’s last poems warns readers in his introduction that they may feel a “curious inversion” that such despairing poems could have been written “at a time when most of us felt jubilant” at the end of Communism. Brecht is routinely accused of exploiting the work of his (mostly female) collaborators. Aragon is charged with the crime of sexual hypocrisy. Neruda (like Picasso) is revealed to be a philanderer and a lover of luxury. Yevtushenko and Christa Wolf are damned as careerists. Hikmet is called a ‘Romantic Communist’.⁶ And of course they all stand accused, all of the time, of being ‘Stalinists’ – that is, knaves who benefited from Soviet and Party patronage, or fools manipulated by cynics.

In an unheroic age, we need to protect our dead, our writers, our heroes. Not, as Ritsos said, with “grand monuments”, “gaudy decorations” and “votive offerings”, but “inside us”, in our imaginations. There is a new spirit of resistance and rebellion abroad, a new generation mobilised by the anti-globalisation and anti-war movements. It is not yet socialist perhaps, but it contains the potential for a revival of the Left, in spirit and in imagination. Poetry is still a way of saying things that cannot be said in other ways; a place of refusal and dissent, of public testimony and personal affirmation, of generous vision and imagination. And it is one way of honouring and protecting the dead. As



Ritsos wrote in *The Tombs of Our Ancestors*:

We ought to protect our dead and their power in case some day our adversaries disinter them and carry them off. Then, without their protection, our danger would double. How could we go on living without our houses, our furniture, our fields, especially without the tombs of our ancestral warriors and wise men? Let’s not forget how the Spartans stole the bones of Orestes from Tegea. Our enemies should never know where we’ve buried our dead.⁷

Notes

- 1 See front cover of *CR58 –Ed.*
- 2 A description given to the year of revolutions, 1848.
- 3 In Greek mythology, a people who lived far to the north of Thrace.
- 4 An Athenian military-political leader during the classical period of Greece, who led many victories in the Persian wars and was widely regarded as a beautifier of the arid countryside around Athens.
- 5 The mythical founder-king of Athens.
- 6 The title of a (sympathetic) biography of Hikmet by Saime Goksu and Edward Timms.
- 7 In Greek mythology, Orestes was the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. According to the historian Herodotus, the Oracle of Delphi told the Spartans that they could not defeat the Tegeans unless they moved the bones of Orestes to Sparta.

New Draft of *Britain's*

By Gawain Little



Following the 50th Congress of the Communist Party of Britain (CPB) in 2008, the incoming Executive Committee appointed a commission to redraft, in line with current policy, the Party's programme, *Britain's Road to Socialism* – commonly called 'the BRS'. The commission produced a written draft in July 2010 which was launched at the Communist University of Britain, marking the 90th anniversary of the foundation of the Party. This draft¹ is now the subject of debate both within the Party and in the broader movement, and the 51st congress has authorised the incoming Executive Committee to produce a final version on the basis of this discussion.

The following article is an introduction to that debate. It is not an attempt to cover all, or even most, of the essential points of the programme. Instead, I have focused on three underlying themes, in the hope that these will prove a useful contribution to discussion. Similarly, the draft programme should be seen as the beginning of a process, the outcome of which will be a document reflecting the input of the entire Party and around which the entire Party can mobilise. Several areas for improvement of the draft have already been highlighted in discussion, including:

reassessing the role of the Soviet Union in a more positive light; and developing more coherence across the policies of the alternative economic and political strategy. However, it is still the view of the commission that this draft represents a step forward in the Party's analysis and is a suitable basis for discussion.

The first issue I want to look at is the concept of class on which the draft BRS is based. In the opening lines of the first chapter of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Marx and Engels famously state:

"The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."²

They go on to describe how, under capitalism, class antagonisms are not done away with, indeed "new classes, new conditions of oppression, new forms of struggle [are established] in place of the old ones". They then identify one distinctive feature of capitalism – a simplification of class antagonisms:

"Society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other: Bourgeoisie and Proletariat."

This is the starting point for our analysis of class. However, before we go any further, we need a clear definition of what we mean by class. The most concise is that given by Lenin which defines classes by "the place they occupy in social production and, consequently, the relation in which they stand to the means of production."³

The bourgeoisie, or capitalist class, is defined by its ownership and control of the means of production. Members of the capitalist class generate their income through the exploitation of the working class, by the appropriation of the surplus value they create. This class, then, is made up of the major shareholders and owners of capitalist companies, many of them also company directors, along with the permanent staff at the top of different sections of the state apparatus, who constitute the "executive arm of the ruling class"⁴. However, no class is homogeneous and it is important to recognise divisions within the capitalist class. These occur on a variety of issues, between industrial and finance capital, between capital oriented primarily to the EU, US or other markets, to give two examples, but the greatest division is between monopoly capital and the rest of the capitalist class – between big business and small and medium-sized businesses.

Since the end of the 19th century, capital has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands, through a process of mergers, take-overs, financial crises. This has led to a situation where a small number of capitalist companies control whole sectors of the global economy. These monopolies are able to use their size to squeeze out smaller competitors and to force down wages and production costs.

At the same time, monopoly capital, though transnational in its operation, has become more and more dependent on the state for its operation. This is true both in terms of the political and military support provided to the monopolies by their 'home' state and also the direct economic support provided through subsidies (directly and indirectly) and mass privatisation, enabling monopolies to make above-average profits at the expense of the public sector and, ultimately, the working class. This has led to the fusion of the economic power of the monopolies with the political, military and economic power they exercise through the state to form state-monopoly capitalism.

In contrast, the owners of medium and particularly small businesses, whilst they constitute a section of the capitalist class and live off the surplus value created by

Road to Socialism

workers, increasingly find their interests counterposed to those of monopoly capital. Their profits are increasingly squeezed by the far greater productive and purchasing power of big business, and every crisis threatens to bankrupt them and throw them back into the ranks of the working class. At the same time, they share an interest in reducing wages and worsening the terms and conditions of workers in order to increase profits.

Recognising the contradictory position of this section of the capitalist class is an important part of the strategy outlined in the draft *BRS*.

The other key class under capitalism is the working class. This is a term much misused and abused both in academia and common usage so it is worth stating clearly what we mean when we say working class. The working class comprises all those who derive their living solely or predominately from selling their labour power and who are exploited by the appropriation of the surplus value they create. This includes manual and non-manual workers, skilled and unskilled workers, public and private sector workers, 'professional' and non-'professional' workers. The key relationship here is that of exploitation. Regardless of the nature, status, or skill-level of their work, what all members of the working class have in

common is that they are exploited by the capitalist class.

This may be direct exploitation by an individual capitalist or capitalist combine, as in the case of a factory worker, or exploitation by the capitalist class as a whole in the reproduction of skilled labour, as in the case of the teacher. In either case, though the form of the relationship differs, its content remains the same. This objective definition of the working class, based on the fact of their exploitation by capital, can be counterposed to subjective, sociological definitions which see class as constituted in practices, attitudes or outlooks. Such views of class, following on from Weber, tend to separate 'professional', and sometimes all white-collar, workers out from the working class, arguing that they form a 'professional and managerial' class or a 'middle class' with interests opposed to those of the workers.

These views of class can be particularly dangerous. They work to divide the working class, pitting worker against worker, based on the nature of their work. This persuades sections of the working class that capitalism, the status quo, is in their interests because they are relatively better off in comparison with other sections. It can also lead them to believe that any improvement for other groups



WHEN ADAM DELVED AND EVE SPAN,
WHO WAS THEN THE GENTLEMAN?

of workers can only come at their expense. In addition, such theories tend either to align the ruling class with those workers they term 'middle class' or to ignore the capitalist class entirely. This takes the focus away from the actual roots of capitalist exploitation. These ideas are hugely prevalent within society as a whole and the working class in particular and it is the role of communists to combat them ideologically and in practice.

Although the trend of capitalist development is towards two main classes, there are still those who cannot be classified either as members of the capitalist class or the working class. Historically, the categorisation of these groups has proved one

of the most controversial aspects of Marxist class theory. Much of this can be explained by the tendency to exclude certain groups of exploited workers from the definition of the working class. This has been compounded by the serious confusion generated by the popular perception, referred to above, of the 'middle class'.

However, the case remains that some people do not fit clearly into the working (exploited) class or capitalist (exploiting) class. The first and most obvious group here are the genuinely self-employed: those workers who own their own means of production and work for themselves. It is important to be careful here as there are many workers who are classed

as self-employed in order to allow employers to escape their responsibilities, but they own no means of production and are no less exploited than any other worker. However, there are also those who are genuinely self-employed and, whilst they live by selling the products of their labour, are not exploited by a capitalist employer.

A similar argument can be applied to those who run small businesses which employ little or no labour, such as members of a family-run business and small farmers. They are living predominantly off the value of their own labour, not through exploiting the labour of others, and yet are not exploited themselves.

The third group whose position in social production and relationship to the means of production make it difficult to classify then as members of the capitalist or working class are those senior and middle managers in big businesses who exercise a large amount of control over the means of production. They may own shares in the business for which they work and receive large bonuses paid from a portion of the profits made, yet they still derive a substantial portion of their income from the sale of their labour power. The same argument can be applied to some senior administrators within the public sector. It must be emphasised this only applies to those managers and administrators whose relation to the means of production and sources of income are as described above. The majority of managers under capitalism, who exercise no such control and have no such additional sources of income, are clearly members of the working class.

There are no hard-and-fast rules which neatly assign people as members or not of the working class, particularly as limited share ownership is often used to encourage members of the working class to identify as 'stakeholders' in the capitalist system, and as

'bonuses' and performance-related pay can be a means of depriving the working class of a portion of its income, rather than increasing it. Neither of these criteria is sufficient to place someone outside the working class and yet, in practice, the difference between a supermarket store manager (clearly working class) and the director of European operation for a major transnational corporation should be obvious.

The groups described above cannot be classified either as part of the working class or as part of the capitalist class. The draft *BRS* refers to them as the "middle strata"⁵ between the two. The use of the term "strata" is intentional. Firstly, it differentiates between this concept and the everyday usage of the term "middle class" criticised above. Secondly, and more fundamentally, it reflects the fact that these groups do not constitute a class in the proper sense of the word. Indeed, they have no coherent class interests; and the only group within the immediate strata which could be considered as a distinct class, albeit a fast dwindling one, is that of self-employed (or 'own account') workers. However, these constitute the main groups who find themselves outside the two main classes under capitalism and there will be some similar themes and issues across members of the middle strata.

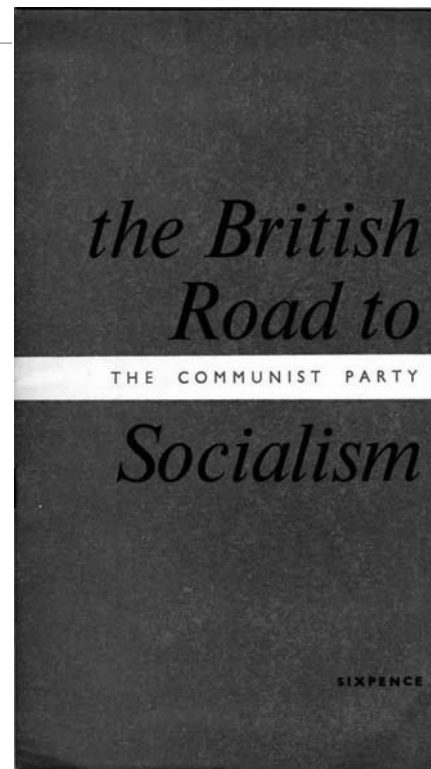
Having outlined the main classes under capitalism, the draft *BRS* goes on to describe a strategy based on building an alliance of all those sections who can be won to oppose the interests of monopoly capital. This "popular anti-monopoly alliance"⁶ would be built around an alternative economic and political strategy – the Left-Wing Programme.⁷ The labour movement or organised working class, comprising the trades unions, co-operative movement, the Labour Party

and the Communist Party, form the core of this alliance. Around it, we seek to unite a range of progressive movements opposed to specific aspects of state-monopoly capitalism as well as those sections of the small capitalist and middle strata who see their interests as more closely aligned with the working class than with monopoly capital.

Similar formulations have appeared in the editions of the *BRS* going back to 1951, and have historically been among the areas most open to a variety of interpretations. So, what do we mean by *progressive movements*?

The programme refers to a variety of movements including those against oppression, those representing young people and pensioners, the peace and environmental movements and others. Such a conception can be interpreted as presenting an image of the working class surrounded by a variety of distinct forces. Nothing could be further from the truth. A cursory analysis of any of those movements will show that in fact they intersect with the working class in two ways. Firstly, there is obviously an overlap in terms of membership: the majority of those involved in the peace movement, for example, are clearly working class and this can be applied to the various progressive movements described, simply as a function of the composition of society. Secondly, and more importantly, they intersect and interact politically. The fact is that monopoly capital impacts on people's lives in a variety of ways and many members of the working class will come to class politics through other movements and vice versa.

This may seem an obvious point but it is essential in terms of the way we characterise the labour movement and the broader alliance we seek to unite around it. Seen in this context, the anti-monopoly



alliance is more about uniting the working class than it is about forging class alliances, though these may also play a role.

As well as considering the composition of the alliance, it is well worth considering its characterisation as a "popular anti-monopoly alliance" as this is a change from previous versions of the *BRS*. In common with recent editions (since 1989), the draft calls for the formation of an *anti-monopoly alliance*. This expresses the basis of the alliance as uniting all those sections of the population who can be won to oppose the interests of state monopoly capital. It is envisaged that this alliance may involve sections of the capitalist class who find their interests in conflict with those of big business, as well as sections of the middle strata, but the bulk of the alliance will be made up from the working class with the organised labour movement at its core.

The 1951 and 1952 editions of the *BRS* called for the formation of a "broad popular alliance" to "end the arbitrary power of the rich over the future of Britain".^{8,9} This formulation, which disappears in the 1958 edition (which simply refers to an alliance between the working

Caption



class and other sections of the population),¹⁰ reappears in the 1968 edition.¹¹ Then, for the first time in 1978, it is replaced by the formulation “broad democratic alliance”.¹² This reflected the emphasis of the 1978 *BRS* on democracy as the “common thread running through the various struggles”¹² of different groups and “the basis on which the broad democratic alliance can be built”.¹² Democracy occupies a key position throughout the strategy outlined in the 1978 *BRS* and at times seems to be seen as more fundamental than class. And yet there is no real discussion of socialist democracy as distinct from bourgeois democracy. Rather, it is simply seen as “extension” of bourgeois democracy¹³.

This perspective fails to understand the dialectical nature of democratic gains under capitalism which are at one and the same time victories won in the teeth of ruling class oppression and part of the process by which the consent of the working class is gained for this very oppression (Gramsci). It is in this context that Lenin could argue that we must “take advantage of bourgeois democracy which, compared with feudalism, represents a great historic advance, but not

for one minute must [we] forget the bourgeois character of this ‘democracy’, its historically conditional and limited character. [We must] never forget that the state even in the most democratic republic, and not only in a monarchy, is simply a machine for the suppression of one class by another”.¹⁴ The task, therefore, is to “emancipate humanity ... from the lies, falsehood and hypocrisy of bourgeois democracy – democracy *for the rich* – and establish democracy *for the poor*, that is, make the blessings of democracy *really* accessible to the workers.”¹⁵

In order to recognise and highlight this dual nature of democracy under capitalism, we must counterpose to it our own vision of democracy, and it is here that the concept of *popular sovereignty* is crucial. The draft *BRS* describes this as “the sovereignty of the people and their elected representatives in parliaments, governments and mass movements”.¹⁶ By referring to a popular anti-monopoly alliance as opposed to a democratic anti-monopoly alliance, we are both retuning to the pre-1978 formulation, and linking the alliance we seek to build to this concept of popular sovereignty, making it clear the basis of the democracy we wish to establish.

The draft *BRS* then goes on to argue that, in the course of the struggle for the Left-Wing Programme, the popular anti-monopoly alliance will realise the necessity of taking state power and moving forward to socialism. This necessitates a clear understanding of the nature of the state.

The draft *BRS* is based on a Leninist understanding of the state as “an instrument for the exploitation of the oppressed class.”¹⁷ The state has to be understood both as an instrument of the ruling class but also as a product of class-divided society and, specifically, of capitalism.

However, these two perspectives must be seen as overlapping, as simultaneously true. Whilst, the state is clearly a product of the fundamental economic basis of society and has developed alongside the social and economic system (capitalism) and the ruling class (the capitalist class), it is no less an instrument of this class because of this. In fact, it is precisely the state’s nature as an integral part of the fabric of capitalist society and its intersecting and overlapping relationship with the ruling class that enable it to be used as a special instrument of repression.

It is the means by which the economically dominant class becomes politically dominant through the use of coercion or force. But Lenin also understood consent to be implicit in the coercive operation of the state. Indeed, a key aspect of the state is its ability to represent itself as the general will of society whilst acting in the interests of the ruling class and retaining an essentially class content. John Hoffman in his Marxist days usefully characterised this as “coercion which commands consent”.¹⁸

Gramsci’s prison notebooks¹⁹ and Althusser’s essay on *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses*²⁰ both explore and expand on the consensual aspects of the state’s rule and are well worth reading in this context. However both authors, Althusser in particular, allow an organic separation between coercion and consent to creep into their work in their attempt to analyse and understand the distinctive aspects of the state’s operation. The point, of course, is to understand the coercion/consent dialectic in its essential unity, to recognise the way in which the coercive aspects of the state command and rest on the consent and the way in which coercion is implicit even in seemingly consensual state action. It is this which gives the state its

distinctive quality as a special instrument for the oppression of one class by another.

Recognising the consensual operation of the state opens up another aspect for the analysis which is the role of the state as a site of class struggle. In order to retain the consensual side of its operation, at times when the balance of class forces has shifted in favour of the working class, the ruling class has had to offer concessions within the mechanisms of the state, such as universal suffrage. These are real gains won by the working class in the face of serious opposition from the ruling class but, at the same time, they are necessary concessions in order to maintain the consensual side of capitalist state rule.

In spite of (or perhaps because of) our parliamentary system, democracy in capitalist Britain is limited, distorted and precarious. Limited – because the sovereignty of parliament is contradicted in reality by the power of government, the state apparatus, the mass media, the EU, IMF, WTO and, of course, by monopoly capital itself. Distorted – because of the enormous power and wealth of the capitalist class and the fact that political democracy does not extend into the economic sphere, leaving us a ‘democratic’ shell animated by the power of the market. And precarious – because most, if not all, of our democratic rights can be suspended at a moment’s notice if the long-term profitability of monopoly capital is seriously threatened. The concept of parliamentary sovereignty is the reality of sovereignty *over* the people not *of* the people.

This understanding of the relationship between parliamentary democracy and state power has direct implications for our strategy for revolution.

Parliamentary democracy, under conditions of universal suffrage, as a concession won

from the ruling class in the process of class struggle, is a tool we must use in the fight for socialism. It is inconceivable that a mass movement in Britain fighting for a progressive programme which brings it into direct conflict with the interests of monopoly capital, could fail to have an expression in the electoral arena. Similarly, it is almost inconceivable that such a movement could come close to realising its aims without decisive victories in the electoral arena. However, it does not follow that the election of a Left government is the end point of such a struggle. In reality, it can only be a marker along the way.

This is critical because, if we accept our own analysis of the state, the election of a Left parliamentary majority, and even the formation of a Left government, is by no means the same thing as the transfer of state power to the working class. It is not the election of a Left government, as undeniably important as this is, which is decisive, it is the process which leads up to this point and, crucially, the process which follows it. For this reason, the draft *BRS* differentiates clearly between assuming government office and taking state power; and revolution is seen as a process in which the election of a Left government is but one step.

There is also a recognition that, alongside Parliament, other democratic institutions will have arisen, some from within the working class and progressive movement itself. Work within and support of these “new forms of embryonic power”²¹ will be crucial.

The election of a Left government committed to a Left-Wing Programme would mark the transition of the revolutionary process to a new, higher stage. By this point, the state apparatus itself will have become a central arena of heightened class struggle. It seems clear that the outcome of this struggle will be determined primarily by the

strength of the movement whose expression the Left government is – not by parliamentary forces.

This recognition of the primacy of the movement and description of a Left government as its expression has practical implications for earlier phases of the struggle also. In particular, we must be careful to avoid the danger of putting electoral considerations before building the movement and elevating electoral decisions to a strategic, rather than tactical level.

If we recognise the state as a site of struggle, we must do this not only in terms of the legislative apparatus of the state but also in terms of the executive apparatus. This is an integral part of the broader struggle and cannot be postponed until after the election of a Left government. Indeed, electoral victory may well be dependent on winning over or neutralising other organs of state power.

This means consideration of the police, army, education system, etc as sites of struggle. These areas (particularly the police and army because of their repressive functions) may be critical and it should be borne in mind that they draw the bulk of their personnel from the working class. In this sense, the struggle to develop/discover working class identity amongst these ‘workers in uniform’ is crucial. This is something to which greater attention must be paid by the Party. Some initial steps would include:

- Firstly, the struggle for the right to unionisation in all areas of the state (including army, police, etc).
- Secondly, an exploration of the coercive and, primarily, consensual ways in which ruling class hegemony is achieved and perpetuated over workers in the state apparatus. Only through understanding the mechanisms for this can we effectively challenge it and build working class unity

between workers in those areas of the state apparatus concerned with coercive and consensual control and other workers.

● Thirdly, we need to recognise the way in which the state, as a facet of its consensual aspect, carries out social functions. At times these social functions may seem easy to distinguish from the repressive and oppressive functions of the state. At other times, they may seem purely illusory. In reality, like democracy in the legislative state apparatus, they are neither and both. We must look at the ways in which the social functions of the state are distorted by bourgeois rule and in which the image of the state as carrying out these purely social functions is created. Campaigning focused on realising the reality of these social functions may unite workers in the state apparatus and also lead them to an understanding that this realisation can only happen on the basis of working class, not bourgeois, state rule.

The success of the strategy discussed in this article and outlined in the draft *BRS* will depend on the active participation and leadership of

a Marxist-Leninist Party with a clear understanding of the tasks ahead. This makes it our immediate task not only to swell the ranks of the Communist Party but also to conduct a serious programme of Marxist-Leninist education within the Party and the broader movement. Our Party must be the natural home of every class-conscious worker and it is only through collective political education and discussion that we will develop a cohesive and coherent political strategy. This is not a choice but a necessity if we are to achieve the goals we set ourselves.

I hope that these perspectives, whilst limited and addressing only certain aspects of the draft programme, are useful in terms of stimulating a debate at all levels within the Party, the outcome of which will give us a greater understanding of capitalism and arm us better in the struggle for a socialist Britain.

■ *Contributions to the discussion should be sent to the Editor. Since space is limited, short, highly focused articles will have a greater chance of being published than those close to the normal word limit –Ed.*

Notes

- 1 *Britain's Road to Socialism*, draft new edn, CPB, Croydon, 2010.
- 2 K. Marx and F Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, CPB, 2005, p 15.
- 3 V I Lenin, *Vulgar Socialism and Narodism as Resurrected by the Socialist-Revolutionaries*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 6, pp 263-270; see also www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1902/nov/01.htm.
- 4 R Griffiths, *Ruling Class Offensive: The Challenge to the Left and Labour Movement*, CPB, London, 2009, p 5.
- 5 *BRS*, draft new edition, p 24.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 31.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 27.
- 8 *BRS*, 1st edn, Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), London, 1951, p 16; see also www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/brs/1951/51.htm.
- 9 *BRS*, 2nd edn, CPGB, London, 1952, p 13.
- 10 *BRS*, 3rd edn, CPGB, London, 1958, p 17.
- 11 *BRS*, 4th edn, CPGB, London, 1968, p 28.
- 12 *BRS*, 5th edn, CPGB, London, 1978, p 17.
- 13 *Ibid*, pp 40-3.
- 14 V I Lenin, ‘Democracy’ and Dictatorship, in *On the Dictatorship of the Proletariat*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976, p 156.
- 15 *Ibid*, p 157.
- 16 *BRS*, draft new edn, p 37.
- 17 V I Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1965, p 13.
- 18 J Hoffman, *The Gramscian Challenge: Coercion and Consent in Marxist Political Theory*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984, p 76.
- 19 A Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1971.
- 20 L Althusser, *Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses*, in *On Ideology*, Verso, London, 2008.
- 21 *BRS*, draft new edn, p 34.

BOOK REVIEW

An 'ordinary' woman with the heart of a lioness

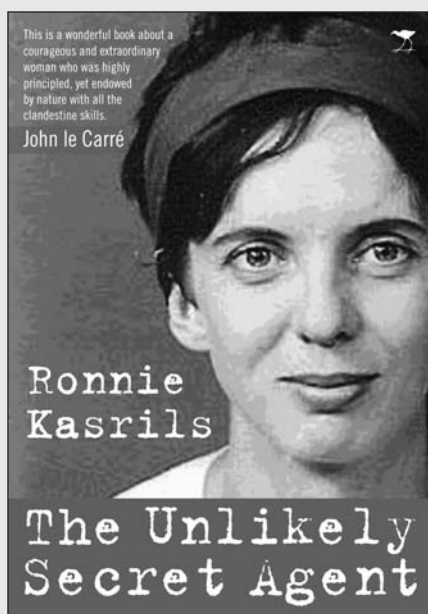
Review by Ken Keable

THIS BOOK was written as an act of love and mourning. When Eleanor Kasrils died suddenly in Cape Town on 8 November 2009 her husband Ronnie began a very active process of mourning: planning an appropriate funeral, preparing his eulogy for the memorial ceremonies in Cape Town and London, visiting her birthplace in Scotland with one of his sons, and then writing this book. It is a romance, a thriller, an escape story and a personal and political history.

The author, Ronnie Kasrils, is now retired. He told his own story of his service in Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation, known as MK), the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party in his best-selling book *Armed and Dangerous: My Undercover Struggle Against Apartheid*.

He comments, "When I was appointed Minister for Intelligence Services in 2004, and Eleanor and I met the staff, I introduced her as 'a far more successful secret agent than I had ever been because she was so discreet and understated – a perfect operative in the Le Carré mould.'" Endorsing the book, John le Carré himself says, "This is a wonderful book about a courageous and extraordinary woman who was highly principled, yet endowed by nature with all the clandestine skills."

Former President of South Africa Thabo Mbeki writes, "This 'little' book about an 'ordinary' woman with the heart of a lioness confirms the truth that our freedom was not free. From its pages rings out another truth, that among the outstanding heroines and heroes of the South African struggle were those who did not set out to perform heroic deeds. These are the heroic combatants for freedom like the *Unlikely Secret Agent*, Eleanor Kasrils, the subject of this engrossing 'little book',



who did the equally 'little' things without which victory over the apartheid regime would have been impossible ... Eleanor's story also poses a question about the future – what are the 'little things' each of us should do to win the new struggle for the further entrenchment of democracy and the defeat of poverty and underdevelopment, acting as our own liberators."

The main part of the book tells the story of four years, 1960-63. Eleanor met Ronnie in Durban, became a communist and a member of MK, the armed wing of the ANC. She was arrested and brutally interrogated by the apartheid regime's 'Security Branch'. They threatened to "break her or hang her" but failed in their objective of persuading her to lead them to her lover, 'Red' Ronnie. Astutely, she convinced the police that she was on the verge of a nervous breakdown and, still a prisoner, she was sent to a mental hospital for assessment. From there she plotted her successful escape, which amazed her ANC comrades as much as it did the police. Together she and Ronnie went into exile, got married in Dar es Salaam, and brought up their family in North London as part of the ANC exile

The Unlikely Secret Agent

By RONNIE KASRILS
(Jacana Publishers, 2010, 192 pp, pbk, £14.95. ISBN: 978-1-77009-890-9)

community there. The appendix to the book is an extended version of the eulogy that appeared in *CR57* (Summer 2010).

In London Eleanor, in addition to holding down a full-time job and bringing up a family, with her husband away on active service for long periods, played a vital role as a support base for operations going on in South Africa and the front-line states.

There is one story that has not appeared in this book, though I had hoped to see it there. It was told by MK officer Bill Anderson at the packed memorial meeting for Eleanor in South Africa House. In the Kasrils family maisonette, above a row of shops in Golders Green, London, there was a well-equipped ANC operations room with maps, directories and other information about southern Africa. It was accessed only through a cupboard designed to conceal the existence of the room – rather like the wardrobe in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. It was dubbed "the magic cupboard" by the select few who used it.

This is a wonderful book about a unique and courageous woman of Scottish birth who gave up the easy life that was available to any white woman in South Africa to become a communist and a lifelong fighter for the oppressed of her country. She was one of the first women to be recruited into the ANC's military wing where she served with courage and distinction. Her life should inspire us all.

● *The Unlikely Secret Agent* is available through good bookshops or directly from the Africa Book Centre Ltd, Preston Park Business Centre, 36 Robertson Rd, Preston Park, Brighton BN1 5NL, www.africabookcentre.com

BOOK REVIEW

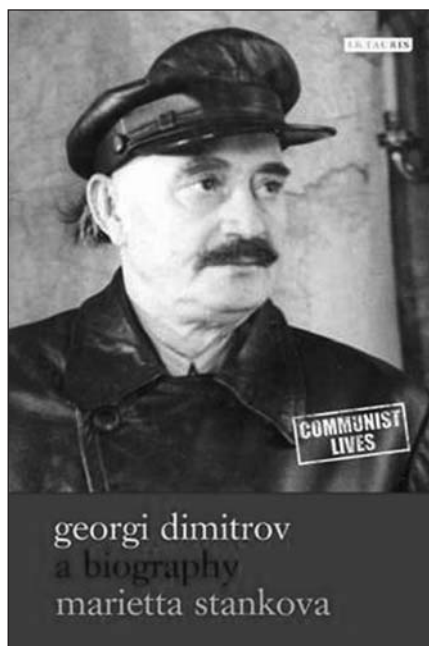
New material on Georgi Dimitrov's career

Review by John Foster

FOR COMMUNISTS Georgi Dimitrov is identified with two things: his defiance of the Nazis in the 1933 Reichstag fire trial and his development of the Popular Front strategy while leader of the Communist International in 1935. Today, as the capitalist world enters a new period of crisis, his life and writings still have much to teach us.

Unfortunately Dr Stankova's biography is not a particularly good starting point. It has the advantage of using the archival research of post-Cold War scholars to uncover the detailed operations of the Communist International and the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. In doing so, it does throw new light on the history of Bulgarian Communists, on the Communist International and on Dimitrov himself. But, as an introduction to Dimitrov, it is unsatisfactory. It fails to outline the wider politico-economic context. It is sometimes tendentious. And, because the author is not a Marxist, she does not seek to evaluate Dimitrov's theoretical contribution within the wider development of Marxist thought.

The book does, however, provide new material on Dimitrov's remarkable career which began at just the time when Bulgaria's still very small working class was starting to become organised. Apprenticed as a printer in 1894 at age of 12, Dimitrov was within a year the representative of apprentices on the Sofia printers' strike committee and by his mid-twenties secretary of the country's main trade union federation. Over the same period he also became a leading member of the 'Left' section of the divided Bulgarian Social Democratic Party which rejected the then dominant ideas of the German revisionist Eduard



Bernstein on progress through constitutional change. By 1913 Dimitrov was secretary of the party's central committee and one of the twelve strong group of Left Socialist MPs in the Bulgarian parliament.

A good record by any measure. But Dimitrov's party had its weaknesses. Despite opposing the war as imperialist and welcoming the October revolution, Bulgaria's Left Socialists were in no way the equivalent of Russia's Bolsheviks and their sectarianism and inflexibility was exposed at the end of the war in 1918.

Military defeat had brought the collapse of Bulgaria's weak and ill-founded monarchical-bourgeois state. In the elections the Socialist Party, soon to be renamed the Bulgarian Communist Party, secured over 20 per cent of the vote and became the country's second biggest party. But when the winners, the radical Agrarian peasant party, sought its support in an alliance against the monarchists, they were refused on the grounds that they were a 'non-working class' party. Later, in 1923, the bourgeoisie staged a military coup against the populist Agrarian government – aided by the remnants of Wrangel's

Georgi Dimitrov: A Life

By MARIETTA STANKOVA
(I B Tauris, 2010, 288 pp, hbk, £51.50.
ISBN: 184511728X)

White Russian forces which had been shipped across the Black Sea by the British. The Communists again refused to join with the Agrarians in armed resistance. The result was the establishment of one of Europe's first and most repressive fascist regimes which soon turned on the Communists. In autumn 1923 the Communists attempted their own military resistance and were quickly defeated – with many killed or imprisoned and thousands, including Dimitrov, forced into exile.

This was the experience that Dimitrov brought with him to the Communist International: thirty years' work as a practical trade union organiser and political propagandist, ten years' experience as a parliamentary leader and five years immersion in politics at the edge of revolution – including hard lessons on alliances, the national question and the nature of fascism.

Through the later 1920s Dimitrov continued as an external leader of the now underground Bulgarian party as well as taking on wider responsibilities for the Communist International. When he was arrested by the Nazis in 1933, he was head of the Western European Bureau. His bravery in challenging the Nazis in court brought him international fame and in 1934 a position of great influence as leader of the Communist International.

It was, however, his Report to the Seventh Congress of the Communist International in 1935 that has had the most lasting impact on working class politics. This set out a new strategy for working class mobilisation and for building formal alliances between the Communists and Social Democrats to halt fascism. Stankova's research shows that the new strategy emerged slowly and

almost tentatively as a collective project, pushed forward by Dimitrov after long discussions at the CI executive during which Stalin had stressed the ineffectiveness of previous policy. The new policy also underwent a preliminary attempt to test it in practice prior to the announcement of any wider change. This was in France after joint mobilisations by the Communists and Socialists had defeated an attempted fascist coup in Paris in 1934 and when the French Communist Party was allowed to enter into formal agreements with the French Socialists.

Such formal agreements would have been impossible under the previous strategy of United Front 'from below', a product of the bitter struggles of the 1920s when capitalist state power was in unprecedented crisis and right-wing social democrats played a key role in defending it. As a result communists had concluded that alliances to secure unity among working people both for socialism and against fascism had to be built solely and only 'from below', through active struggle, and without any formal understandings with social democratic leaderships, often described as 'social fascist' because of their use of capitalist state power, including military force, against workers.

By 1934 it was clear that this policy was of limited effectiveness in resisting the advance of fascism. Capitalist Europe's dominant country, Germany, had joined the existing fascist states of Italy, Finland, Hungary, Portugal and Bulgaria. Despite communist mobilisation, many workers remained wedded to a social democratic position. Worse still, many had been won over by fascist propaganda.

The new strategy had four key elements. First, it set out new conditions for 'united front' action with social democrats within the working class movement. Second, it stressed the importance of winning anti-fascist allies outside the working class among the petty bourgeoisie and peasantry, a Popular Front. Third, it outlined the conditions in which communists could support anti-fascist or Popular Front governments that did not have the immediate object of socialist state power. Fourth, it analysed the nature of fascism and stressed above all the need for communists to take an ideological initiative in two areas: the national question and the nature of democracy.

Stankova's book is much less useful on this front because it rarely, if ever, quotes Dimitrov at any length and is

virtually silent on the Report's key comments on the national question and democracy. For this readers need to go to the Report itself, as recently republished by the Communist Party with an introduction by Robert Griffiths.¹

It is also important to stress that the new policy was not a simple rejection of the position of the twenties. The core remained. The new line continued to stress the central role of communists in mobilising workers 'from below' in struggle on immediate issues and doing so to win a mass understanding of the nature of capitalism and its state power. There also remained the insistence that the kind of democracy necessary to end monopoly capitalist state power had to be based on active, participatory mobilisation through the direct democracy of workers' councils.

Yet there were also crucial new emphases. Communists had to respond to growing left-right differences *among* social democrats in face of mass struggle and form appropriate alliances. Communists had also to show their awareness of the two-sided character of 'democracy' as it existed under capitalism. 'Bourgeois democracy' as constrained by parliamentary constitutionalism had to be exposed as a key weapon of the ruling class. Yet democracy itself, understood as a series of rights won by working people, had to be defended at all costs and used in practice to advance the cause of working people against the inherently anti-democratic character of monopoly capital.

This was matched with an insistence that anti-fascist, Popular Front governments, while not themselves based on working class state power, had nonetheless to be seen as part of the process towards it. They had actively to dismantle key elements of the repressive bourgeois state. In particular they had to avoid being captured within the bourgeois state and hence governing on terms set by monopoly capital. To do so would demobilise and disarm the working class and its allies in face of fascism. Communist participation was specifically to ensure that this did not happen.

Finally, communists had to become champions of the nation – though in a new way. Fascists had demonstrated the power of national identity to mobilise workers for chauvinist and racist slogans that betrayed and divided their class. Communists could not ignore this. They had to return to the understanding of Marx and Lenin that nations emerged historically moulded by the struggle of



Joseph Stalin and Georgi Dimitrov 1936

contending classes and that national cultures and identities reflected this. A nation's culture therefore always contained quite distinct trends, reactionary and progressive, imperialist and democratic. Communists had to study a nation's history, understand it in class terms, and identify those aspects of its culture which represented the achievements of working people, which expressed struggles against exploitation and oppression, and thereby actively reclaim the nation on progressive terms from the fascists.

Dimitrov's 1935 Report was therefore indeed a turning point. Its analysis helped create the broader alliances by which Popular Front governments in France and Spain held fascism at bay in the 1930s and which eventually saw the defeat of fascism in the 1940s. It inspired a generation of writers, poets and historians to provide a deeper and more profound understanding of democratic and working class struggle and the relationship of such struggles to national cultures. It remains an inspiration for us today and, while Stankova's biography does provide some previously unknown information on Dimitrov's life, it is his writings that we need to read.

Notes

1 Classics of Communism No.4: Georgi Dimitrov, *For the Unity of the Working Class Against Fascism*, CPB, £2.

BOOK REVIEW

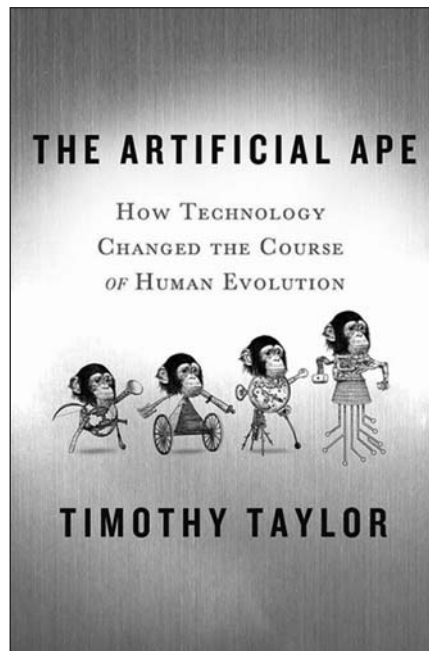
Human evolution: did Darwin get it wrong?

Review by Martin Levy

“Human beings should not exist”, says Timothy Taylor, arguing that we represent “survival of the weakest” rather than of the ‘fittest’ (a term Charles Darwin resisted). “Having developed upright walking, with all the consequent biomechanical demands on the pelvis, the very last thing, evolutionarily speaking, that should have happened was that the creature should have begun to expand its head size,” making birth difficult. That expansion therefore largely took place outside the womb, with infants needing several years of adult support. Furthermore, humans cannot survive at all in the world without artificial aid. “How did we not remain stupid?” he asks.

Taylor’s contention is that what is most distinctly human about us is our relationship with artefacts. “Darwin was wrong,” he says: “Rather than humans evolving to become intelligent enough to invent tools and weapons, shelters, monuments, art and writing, the objects, in the most critical instances, came first.” This he ascribes to our ancestors having adapted to walking upright, which “meant that hands became free, with amazing new potential. All that was then needed was an intelligence powerful enough to direct the hands to make things.”

The upright posture had other consequences: the position of the lungs and diaphragm were altered, potentially enabling the breath control for complex vocal communication; but the digestive system was dramatically compromised. Given the latter, and the massive energy input needed for the larger brain, Taylor approvingly cites the work of Richard Wrangham, who has concluded that control of fire, regular supplies of cooked food, and the development of social



relations around cooking were what “allowed us to stop being chimps.” Despite our nutritional disadvantage, or in fact because of it, says Taylor, “we have developed a technology of cooking and hunting that allows us ... to inhabit almost every environment on the planet.”

For Marxists, such ideas are not entirely new. 135 years ago Frederick Engels wrote, in *The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man*¹ (first published in English 1934) that, with the adoption of an erect gait “the decisive step had been taken, *the hand had become free* Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man’s horizon at every new advance. ... [T]he development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society together ... men in the making arrived at the point

The Artificial Ape: How Technology Changed the Course of Human Evolution

By TIMOTHY TAYLOR
(Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2010,
256 pp, hbk, £17.99. ISBN 978-0230-
61763-6)

where *they had something to say* to each other.” Engels goes on to point out that “labour in the proper sense of the word ... begins with the making of tools”, and that the most ancient ones we find are hunting and fishing implements. “The meat diet ... had its greatest effect on the brain” and “led to two new advances of decisive importance – the harnessing of fire and the domestication of animals. ... Just as man learned to consume everything edible, he learned to live in any climate.”

Despite ignoring Engels, Taylor has arrived at substantial elements of materialist dialectics. However, while he recognises that human evolution “is both biological and cultural”, it seems to me that he overemphasises the role of artefacts. Engels is more correct: rather than things ruling us, it is the societal

context in which they originate and/or are employed which is important. Engels notably remarks that labour, speech and then *the development of society* were the main impulses towards the development of the human brain and its senses.

Where Taylor takes us forward is in his summary and interpretation of recent advances in paleoanthropology. Despite a tendency to generalise from personal experience, he makes a telling point that our judgement is coloured by the stone tools which have survived, in contrast to natural organic materials which may have been used. “The most critical thing that our upright walking ancestors had to do ... was manage to keep their infants with them”, he says, citing the work of Lori Hager and others, concluding that carrying devices, such as slings for infants, must have been among the first tools developed. Rather than, as Darwin assumed, females being attracted to the more intelligent males, the males might have wanted to choose the smartest females, as they were likely to have been the earliest inventors!

Taylor debunks notions (including those held by Darwin – and even Engels!) of some isolated human groups having degenerated, pointing out that they still relied on technology, albeit a set of artefacts stripped to the minimum degree of “entailment”, because local conditions determined it. He also takes issue with Richard Dawkins’s concept of *memes* as definite units of human culture with a life of their own: “My meme is not Dawkins’s meme To me it is a flawed idea, not always wholly wrong but often incoherent and unnecessary.” He is particularly good on the origin of religious belief in “the idea of some creator god, who made humans, just as humans made puppets” and of religious ritual in the rote learning required to make the earliest tools and artefacts: “Rituals channel rote learning and provide a prop when things go wrong.”

Taylor correctly disposes of ideas that technology will take over from humanity or that there is any possibility of getting “back to nature” – because we have never

lived in nature. At the same time he recognises that our technology is “dangerously entailed”, so that “by the time we perceive our potential maladaptation to the environment, it is too late.” Furthermore, “because new technologies create wealth and power, they are not politically neutral; vested interests become attached to them, and this then stifles further innovation.” However, his attitude to global warming is that “it may be a good thing”, preventing the return of Ice Ages; and he has nothing to say about the threat of global annihilation from the level and dangerous entailment of nuclear weapons technology. Such flaws arise from the overemphasis on technology rather than its social context, but nonetheless this is a valuable book for Marxists to read.

Notes

- 1 F Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*; in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 25, p 452 ff.

Letter to the Editor

From John Merrett Bloom

MARTIN LEVY’S editorial commentary in *CR58* regarding the result of last September’s election for Leadership of the Labour Party fittingly drew attention to trade union activities, all too often, being constrained to the workplace.

At the same time, politics are too readily reckoned to be the exclusive purview of professional politicians, overwhelmingly Labour parliamentarians.

Against such a background, we cannot be surprised to find the contest for the Labour Party Leadership attracted such meagre interest on the part of rank-and-file trade unionists.

This situation embraced the three largest affiliates – Unite, GMB and Unison – with a total of 2,028,346 levy-paying members and whose executives had recommended first preference

votes being given to Ed Miliband.

Though ballots were distributed to 1,055,074 members of Unite, only 95,334 cast votes (9.0%), including 47,439 for Ed Miliband. The scenario was no better in the GMB and Unison where their respective memberships submitted 36,754 (6.6%) and 23,711 (5.7%) valid votes.

Altogether, some 2,727,378 ballot papers were distributed to members of twelve affiliated trade unions. Ed Miliband secured 84,731 first preference votes, well ahead of David, his brother, holding 55,298. The other candidates – Diane Abbott, Ed Balls and Andy Burnham – aggregated 63,350 votes.

In other words, a total of just 203,379 valid votes (7.5%) were recorded. Astonishingly, another 35,239 votes, representing 14.8% of those sending back their ballot papers, were declared void.

By way of comparison, members of other affiliated organisations (including the Fabian Society) received 19,652 ballot papers and returned 7,855 valid votes (40.0%).

As might be anticipated, individual Labour Party members received 177,559 ballots and cast 126,874 valid votes (71.5%).

The dismal level of trade union participation in the recent Leadership ballot must surely ring alarms across the length and breadth of the labour movement.

Without any doubt, the Conservative-led coalition government’s accelerated class warfare tactics demand that trade unions with political funds, particularly those affiliated to the Labour Party, begin to engage far more vigorously in every aspect of the political process than has been observed in recent times.

Discussion: Machismo, not Marxism a Second Look at Che

By Ken Fuller

There would appear to be an impression in some quarters that, apart from expressing admiration for the odd individual, Che Guevara may have been staunchly anti-Trotskyist. For example, according to a piece in the *Morning Star* (which really should have known better) last September, “only once did Che praise a leader of Trotsky’s Fourth International. Daggers were drawn between two sides of the fallout among the Soviet leaders of the 1930s and to praise a Trotskyist was heresy for followers of the Cuban revolution.”¹

Not only is this historically inaccurate, but it obscures the fact that Che’s own politics were ultra-leftist.

Che Guevara was far from hostile to Trotskyism. On the 30th anniversary of his death, the Scottish magazine *Frontline*² published an interview with Ricardo Napuri, a Peruvian who participated with Che in some of his early attempts to export revolution to the rest of Latin America. Shortly after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, Napuri had visited Havana to see Che who, he says, asked him to “find a book where Trotsky presented his thoughts.” Having read the old edition of *Permanent Revolution* that Napuri managed to find in Havana, Che – then president of the Bank of Cuba – told him that

“Trotsky was consistent and he was right in many things, but that it was ‘too late’ to change the orientation of the revolutionary process in Cuba.” Napuri also says that when Hugo Blanco (the Trotskyist subject of the *Morning Star* feature referred to above) commenced his uprising in Peru in 1963, “Cuba ordered us to get in touch” with him.

Then again, the website of the Committee for a Workers’ International³ carries a 2007 article on the 40th anniversary of his death entitled *A revolutionary fighter – what is Che’s relevance today?* According to this, Che carried one of Trotsky’s books with him in Bolivia. This is confirmed by Jon Lee Anderson in his *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*.⁴ Celia Hart, daughter of the July 26th Movement’s Amando Hart, says she was first persuaded to read Trotsky by Che.

While Che’s courage, commitment and contribution to the Cuban Revolution cannot be doubted, and while it is wholly understandable that he should have been granted iconic status in Cuba, a sober, balanced view of the man is advisable.

Was he a Trotskyist? Yes and no, probably. In earlier years, he had admired Stalin. Later, he would write of what he saw as the disappointing reality of the Soviet Union, seeing Lenin as



Che Guevara in Bolivia
Nancahuazú Camp



the “culprit” for having introduced the New Economic Policy.⁵ He also exhibited a broad Maoist streak in his insistence that revolution in the Third World must come via guerrilla warfare waged in the countryside, and he thought that the austerity of China in Mao’s time was more likely to produce the ‘new man’ than the Soviet Union, where there was an increasing demand for consumer goods.

In fact, Che’s politics seemed to arise from an eclectic mix of various influences, underlying which was the voluntarism – the idealist belief that reality can be transformed by an act of will, regardless of the material circumstances – common to most forms of ultra-leftism. Added to this was his machismo (take his widow’s word for it) and a disturbing obsession with, or at least an apparent indifference to, death. This combination gave rise to a number of attitudes and actions which can only be described as reckless, irresponsible and counter-productive.

At the conclusion of the Cuban missile crisis, Che’s view was that if the weapons had been under Cuban rather than Soviet control they would have been used, leading Sam Russell, correspondent of the *Daily Worker*, as the *Morning Star* was called at the time, to remark that “I thought he

was crackers from the way he went on about the missiles.”⁶ Derek Wall, the author of the *Morning Star* piece, has Che quoting Fidel who, at a time when it was possible that all those landing in Cuba to commence the revolution would be killed, indicated that this would be of little moment. “What is more important than all of us is the example we set.” Defeats on such a scale, however, more often result in demoralisation.

According to Anderson,⁷ on one occasion Che taunted Bolivian communist leader Mario Monje by suggesting that it was fear that prevented him from launching a guerrilla war. This is machismo, not Marxism. But Monje shot back: “No, it’s that you have a machine gun stuck in your brain, and you can’t imagine any other way to develop an anti-imperialist struggle.” Unlike Monje, Che could not see – or refused to acknowledge – that the revolution in Cuba had succeeded due to the specific circumstances of the time, and that Washington, which had already cooled towards its creature Batista while Fidel and Che were in the mountains, was hardly likely to sit back while the Cuban rebels, having not only achieved power but proclaimed their adherence to socialism, sought to foment revolution elsewhere.⁸



Che seems to have grown more irresponsible with age. In February 1964, very publicly at the second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity in Algiers, he attacked trade arrangements between socialist countries and progressive developing countries. With regard to exchanges made at world market prices, he had this to say: "If we establish that type of relationship between the two groups of nations, we must agree that the socialist countries are, to a certain extent, accomplices to imperialist exploitation." And yet in the 1960s, Cuba relied heavily on Soviet aid, of which it received generous amounts, partly in the form of purchases of Cuban sugar at above the world market price. On page 592 of Anderson's book there is a photograph which speaks volumes, taken as Che returned from this trip: unable to meet Fidel's glare, he has ducked his head, like a mischievous little boy.

The following year, Che led a guerrilla force in the Congo, despite misgivings about the Congolese rebel leaders and his lack of knowledge of the country. Before this adventure, Egyptian leader Gamel Abdel Nasser had warned him that "if he thought he could be like 'Tarzan, a white man among blacks, leading and protecting them,' he was

wrong."⁹ Nasser was correct, and the enterprise soon collapsed.

Similarly, all of Che's attempts to establish 'foco guerrillaism' in Latin America, including the one in which he participated, came to grief. In practically every case, these attempts were opposed by the local communist parties, and this is one reason why Che so often found himself relying on Trotskyists and people who had been expelled from those parties. While ultra-leftists might charge that the opposition of the mainstream communist parties was due to their 'degeneration' or 'revisionism', there is an alternative explanation: they knew more about their own countries than did Che.

Notes

- 1 D Wall, *Left voice worthy of our respect*, in the *Morning Star*, September 3, 2010. The subject of this piece was Peruvian Fourth International luminary Hugo Blanco.
- 2 www.redflag.org.uk.
- 3 www.socialistworld.net/eng/2007/09/27che.html.
- 4 J L Anderson, *Che Guevara: A Revolutionary Life*, Grove Press, New York, 2010 (revised edition), p 689.
- 5 *Ibid*, p 663.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 519.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 530.
- 8 In this, Che was rather like those leaders of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas in 1950 who, having seen the Chinese revolution succeed without US interference the previous year, mistakenly gambled that the Philippines' former colonial ruler would do little to assist the government in Manila.
- 9 Anderson, *op cit*, p 589.

Discussion: A Further Note on the State and on Surplus Labour in Jerry Jones's Recent Articles

By David Grove

Jerry Jones (CR56) is right that there is much that he and I agree about. But some remaining differences have both theoretical and practical significance. Indeed, further debate may help to illustrate the unity of theory and practice. I'd like to comment briefly on two issues: the state, and surplus labour. Our differences over land and town planning need more extensive treatment at a later date.

The State

At the outset of his article in CR56 Jerry says he fully concurs with the class analysis of the state. But is this view consistently reflected in what follows? He writes that he brought Adam Smith into his original article on the crisis (CR52) because "Smith argued most strongly that governments need to be able to stand aloof from the various vested interests if they are going to manage an economy efficiently and for the benefit of society as a whole. This applies to any economic system. The extent to which governments today are virtually in the pockets of big business was a significant factor leading to the current crisis."

Smith wrote in the middle of the eighteenth century when Britain was ruled by the Whig oligarchy of landlords and merchant

capitalists. The state was already capitalist but growing numbers of industrialists were excluded from a role in government. Smith's words were directed especially at them. At that juncture they needed a state that would defend the rights of property and the free market against all combinations, whether of capital or labour. As, at that time, the further advance of capitalism offered the only path of economic and social progress, Smith's approach can be said to have corresponded to the interests of society as a whole.

But when, a century later, the modern capitalist state had been established, governments were no longer managing the economy for the benefit of society as a whole – though they had to pretend to be doing so in order to secure consent for their rule. Governments were in reality operating in the interests of the ruling capitalist class.

A capitalist state can challenge the interests of particular groups of capitalists, as when it nationalises essential services and failing industries, or regulates banking. But it does so not for the benefit of society as a whole but for the benefit of the dominant owners of capital. Other sections of



society may also benefit – but that is secondary.

With the growth of monopoly and imperialism, capitalist power has become concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. And, with the onset of the general crisis of capitalism, and the rise of the labour movement, the association between capitalists and governments has become ever closer.¹ The state is subordinated to the interests of one section of the capitalist class: finance capital. As Jerry says, "governments today are virtually in the pockets of big business". And so they will remain until state monopoly capitalism is challenged and transformed.

A Left government attempting to implement a people-friendly economic strategy will seek to manage the economy in the interests of the working class. Since the latter constitutes the vast majority of the population, it could be said that such a government will be seeking to act for "the benefit of society as a whole". But it will come up against the resistance of the capitalist state, which it will have to challenge and replace in order to advance towards a socialist economy. As Jerry says, the class struggle "might even lead to workers and their supporters taking over the state and establishing a new mode of production."

The term "vested interests" can be dangerously misleading. For when mainstream commentators refer to vested interests they always include (indeed, often single out) the trade unions. I know this was not Jerry's intention. But the emphasis on "vested interests" may obscure the need for a Left government positively to favour those groups that represent the interests of working people.

A state building socialism

will be a new type of class state, acting for the working class against any remaining vestiges of capitalist power. When these have been removed, and the economy can at last be managed for the benefit of society as a whole, the state will already have begun to wither away.

I'm sure Jerry agrees with most of this. What concerns me is his insistence that the need to manage an economy for the benefit of society as a whole applies to any economic system. Adam Smith's approach is not consistent with a class analysis of the state. It ignores the need for feudalism, capitalism and socialism to establish their own distinctive forms of state power, serving and sustained by the ruling class in each different socio-economic formation. Failure to recognise this leads to a reformist rather than a revolutionary perspective for social change.

Surplus Labour

Again, Jerry begins by asserting his belief in a fundamental Marxist principle – the labour theory of value – but the more he writes, the more the principle seems to slip away.

The concept of surplus labour may be useful for understanding some aspects of any economic system, but it does not – as Jerry points out – provide a more rigorous basis than the concept of surplus value for analysing the capitalist mode of production. Jerry defines it as "labour performed over and above that which is used to satisfy immediate consumption needs." But not all the labour performed before surplus labour begins (equivalent to wages) is necessarily used for immediate consumption. Workers have to reproduce as well as survive, so part of their wages may be saved for later consumption.

This issue may be trivial, but it points up Jerry's complete omission of the concept of the value of labour power. Capitalism differs from other economic systems in that almost all production is of commodities, *ie* of goods and services for the market. And labour power itself (the ability to work) becomes a commodity that workers (who own nothing else of productive significance) have to sell to capitalists (who enjoy a monopoly of the necessary means of production).

If labour power is a commodity, it has to have an exchange value. And this, like the value of any other commodity, is equal to the amount of labour embodied in it: the socially necessary labour time required to produce the goods and services needed to sustain workers and enable them to reproduce their kind.

It is because the value of their labour power is less than the value of the commodities which their labour produces that workers generate surplus value. Of course the work done after the time during which the workers produce the value of their wages can correctly be called surplus labour. But that statement is more descriptive than analytical. Unless the value of labour power is brought into the reckoning, the concept of surplus labour does not reveal the process of exploitation; it simply states it as a fact.

If, as Jerry says, social labour is equivalent to atoms and molecules, I suggest that the law of value is analogous to the laws of chemical combination.

Jerry often writes as though the level of wages is determined solely by the relative bargaining power of workers and capitalists. This is not so. Wages will always tend to correspond to the

value of labour power. This is of course socially determined and has risen above subsistence level as technology and education have become more demanding, and workers' collective power has grown. Collective action can also raise the price of labour power (wages) above its value for a time but it will always tend to be pushed back.

Ignoring the value of labour power and shifting the emphasis to wage bargaining moves the seat of exploitation from the sphere of production (where surplus value is generated) to the sphere of circulation, of exchange. This, like a failure to grasp the role of the state, can lead to a reformist rather than a revolutionary stance. It is because exploitation is located in the relations of production that it can't be ended by trade union action alone but requires a change in the ownership of the means of production.

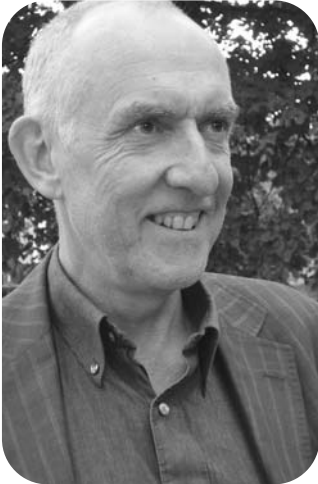
Focusing on the sphere of circulation rather than that of production can also lead to seeing capitalist crises as the result of under-consumption rather than over-production. This too can have policy implications, pointing to regulation, and to bargaining for higher wages, rather than struggle against the wages system.

There have always been economists of the Left who have sought to keep the superstructure of Marxism without its foundation in the law of value. In the twentieth century G D H Cole was probably the most eminent.² I hope Jerry isn't trying to emulate him.

Notes

1 See John Foster, *The Politics of Britain's Economic Crisis*, Economic Committee of the Communist Party of Britain, February 2009.

2 G D H Cole, *What Marx Really Meant*, Gollancz, 1934.



SOULSPOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

The red blood of thy bravest sons
Is shed in foreign wars,
To put down rising liberty
And aid the tyrants' cause.

Where'er we turn, where'er we
gaze,
Oppression still is plain,
The Afghan and Canadian
Curse England's galling chain.

Where do these lines come from? A recent anti-Afghan war anthology? The monthly poetry column of the *Morning Star*? No, they do not. These verses appeared in the *Northern Star*, the newspaper of the Chartist movement, in June 1842.

In my next column I am going to present some Chartist poems. Not only because they are fine poems, but because they arise from *and are part of* that great political struggle. Political poetry and indeed all kinds of poetry were very important to the Chartists. The *Northern Star*, just like our *Morning Star*, contained a poetry column which not only published poems by Shelley, Byron, Milton, Burns and other great anti-establishment poets, but also by its own working class readership.

It is not often that poetic and political activity are fused together in this way, in English poetry. There are examples from the twenties and thirties,

and there was a tremendous burst of radical poetry at the time of the 1984 miners' strike. Both periods deserve detailed consideration in future columns, but in this column I want to present some contemporary, indeed bang-up-to-the-minute examples of political poetry, from two sources. One is the late John Rety's recent *Well-Versed* collection of poems from the *Morning Star*,¹ and the other is a recent e-book called *Emergency Verse*.² They are all, in a sense, modern equivalents of Chartist poetry.

Here are five poems from *Well-Versed*. To echo the opening extract from the 1842 poem, let's start with two poems about war:

The Doorbell by Adrian Mitchell

I was in bed, the silvery light
of dawn
blessing our quiet suburban street,
when the window darkened,
and the doorbell rang.

Pushed my face deep in the pillow.
But the doorbell kept ringing
and there was another sound,
like the crying of a siren,
so I slopped downstairs
unbolted, unlocked, unchained
and opened the front door.

There, on the doorstep, stood
the War.
It filled my front garden,
filled the entire street
and blotted out the sky.
It was human and monstrous,
shapeless, enormous,
with torn and poisoned skin
which bled
streams of yellow, red and black.

The War had many millions of
heads
both dead and half-alive,
some moaning, some screaming,
some whispering,
in every language known on earth,
goodbye, my love.

The War had many millions
of eyes
and all wept tears of molten steel.
Then the War spoke to me
in a voice of bombs and gunfire:
I am your War.
Can I come in?

A Family Matter by Jacques Prevert

The mother does her knitting
The son makes war
The mother finds this
quite natural



And the father, what does the
father do?
He does business
His wife does her knitting
His son makes war
He does business
The father finds that quite natural
And the son and the son
What does the son think?
He thinks absolutely nothing
His mother does knitting his
father business and he goes to
war
When he has finished the war
He will do business with his
father
War goes on the mother goes on
knitting
The father goes on doing
business
The son is killed he no longer
goes on
The father and mother go to the
graveyard
The father and mother find that
natural
Life continues – life with knitting
war business
Business war knitting war
Business business and business
Life with the graveyard

Is anyone else reminded by this poem
of the recent Haneke film, *The White
Ribbon*?

And from the surreal horrors of war,
to appreciative praise for trade union
officials (not something you often come
across!):

Union Man

by Alan Brownjohn

His liquid lunches will not have
unhoned
This lean man, upright at the bar
With the minutes of the last
executive
In a thick buff wallet, listening
precisely
And working through strategies.
His brow
Is furrowed with niceties, his craft
Is the unravelment and
intertwining
Of clauses in tense agreements.
He gives
A week-end course in grievance
and recompense,
And Monday, drives via home to
all his high
Cabinets of cases, when the
telephone
Clangs to the carpet as he
stretches out far to a file

On a distant shelf, and listening
precisely.
In a city where minds are slabbed
with gold,
He builds a sheltering-wall of
brick; and how
The commonwealth does need
such justices.

Aren't those last three lines great?
"Minds that are slabbed with gold"
sounds like a superb description of our
banker class.

Here's a poem to remind us of
the recent demonstrations by students,
and perhaps (hopefully) prefiguring
the TUC action planned for
March 2011:

Days Like This

by Anna Robinson

We're running, heads thrown
back so we can see
how fast we are, faster than the
clouds
(today's windy) and faster than
the police
whose cordon we broke through
at Waterloo.

There's so many of us and the sun
is hanging
so low above York Road and is
bouncing itself
off so many windows it has made
a long
gold tunnel that none of us could
resist.

I have the megaphone. This is not
normal.
I'm usually the one with the
banner,
wind-surfing to rallies with
someone smaller
than me, but not today – today I
can see

my long voice spreading out in
front
shimmering like a heat haze
towards
the bridge where it blends with
others
and we look like one, we believe
we can fly.

We're heading for Westminster
bridge and later,
after the stand-off and riot (which
will begin
when some drift home and the
crowd gets smaller

and we're stuck and night's wet
blanket takes
the shine off our skins, just before
that woman
from Tottenham – Maria, I think –
has her leg
broken by a police horse) will it
prove
worth it? We won't get to win
this one,

but we ran, heads back, down that
road and now
on days like this, in a certain light,
I'm weightless.

... and finally something much more
indeterminate, but very evocative ...

The Nest

by Eddie S Linden

The echo of the burn as it runs
yellow
And dark blue slag on the pit
surface
Reminded him of his past.
The wheel of life sounded its
Message of time.
The blast of death
Rang its bells in the hearts of the
homes.
The grim face in the mirror
Faded with time into the slag heaps
From where he came.
The moon revealed its ugly village
casa.
A dog howled its death-like sound,
A baby cried from the cold of the
night,



A father knelt in
The bowels of the earth, waiting
for light
In darkest hell, where he never saw.
Only winter remained.
And nothing returned to the nest
In the tree, but the snow that
covered
The world of his past.

And now let's turn to the recent e-book, *Emergency Verse*. In its own words, this is

"a literary campaign in defence of the Welfare State and the National Health Service and against the coalition Government's 'emergency' Budget, which it perceives as a return to the draconian politics of Thatcherism. Emergency Verse is as well a petition of 112 poets calling on this government to comprehensively amend its 'emergency' Budget to lift the burden of paying back the deficit off the narrowest shoulders and onto the broadest."

Let's read some of these petitioning poems.

The Real Read

by John G Hall

We write flags to rally around, but
the battles are the real read,
yeah we are the rattle of sabres
demanding new steel,
but the youth are the real read
the real bleeding to be free
and our poems our comfort and
courage and love made
thinkable
and the roar of our hearts pulling
on their chains.



£82
by Tom Jayston

The electronic voice says I simply
must wait
I simply must wait, for a human
response.
A human response is what I require,
Not dismissal, like flesh on a
funeral pyre.

They question me over and over
again.
Over and over, I have nothing to
hide.
Nothing to hide, I am staying alive.
I am staying alive. But only just.

£82 which does just one thing.
It does just one thing. It keeps

me alive.
It keeps me alive to jump through
the hoops.
To jump through the hoops which
keep me alive.

Economics
by Nigel Mellor

Imagine the impact
On the dismal science of
economics
If, in standard text books,
Wherever we saw the word
"markets"
We substituted the admittedly
rather cumbersome phrase
"A small collection of extremely
highly-paid men."

SAMPLE VERSION

Emergency Verse

Poetry in Defence of the Welfare State

108 Poets including
Michael Horovitz
Michael Rosen
Bill Greenwell
Barry Tebb
Alexis Lykiard
Prakash Kona

Ken Worpole
Mario Petrucci
Sebastian Barker
Brenda Williams
Andy Croft
Judith Kazantzis
Debjani Chatterjee MBE

*from the cradle
to the grave
1945 — 2010?*

Jim Bennett
Sally Richards
John O'Donoghue
Peter Street
Tom Kelly
Keith Armstrong
Victoria Field

Steven O'Brien
Sam Smith
Alan Dent
N.S. Thompson
David Kessel
Alan Corkish
Dr Robert Ilson

Selected and edited
with Foreword and Afterword
by Alan Morrison

featuring a dialectic
by Norman Jope

and an endorsement by patron
Caroline Lucas MP

in association with
the *Recusant*
and Caparison



Dives and Lazarus

by Andy Croft

As it fell out upon a day
 Rich Dives he held a feast,
 And he invited all his friends
 And gentry of the best.

They made themselves a
 national plan
 To better the nation's health,
 And help themselves to the public
 purse
 To better their private wealth.

Then Lazarus laid him down and
 down
 And down at Dives' door,
 "Some meat, some drink, brother
 Dives,
 Bestow upon the poor!"

But Dives was a busy man,
 And Dives locked his door,
 For England is a friendless land
 If you are old and poor.

Then Dives sent his tabloid dogs
 To bite him as he lay,
 And print their teeth marks on his
 flesh
 And hound him on his way.

And Dives sent his merry men
 To spin *The World at One*,
 And lick his weeping sores until
 It seemed his sores
 were gone.

And Lazarus he was hungry,
 And Lazarus he was old,
 And Lazarus wasn't in BUPA
 So Lazarus he went cold.

And so it fell out upon a day
 Poor Lazarus sicken'd and died,
 And Dives threw his corpse away
 Before his blood had dried.

And Lazarus he went straight
 to hell
 To burn for ever more,
 For there is always the Devil to pay
 If you are sick and poor.

And it fell out upon a day
 That Dives sicken'd and died
 And Dives he went straight to heaven
 (Which now's been PFI'd).

For Dives was a rich man
 And rich men know what's theirs,
 And when they've taken that they
 want
 To take the poor man's shares,

The rich will always feast and dine
 While others want for more;
 Unless the poor throw off the rich
 The rich will keep them poor.

And public medicine will not thrive
 While there is private health,
 And there'll be no cure for
 England's ills
 While there is private
 wealth.

As mentioned at the start, the next column will focus on nineteenth century Chartist poetry. But I would like once again to invite contributions from you, only this time not Brechtian poems, but on the theme of the contemporary People's Charter – although of course feel free to write a poem on the Charter in a Brechtian style!

To remind you, the Charter headings are as follows:

1. A fair economy for a fairer Britain.
2. More and better jobs.
3. Decent homes for all.
4. Protect and improve our public services – no cuts.
5. Fairness and Justice.
6. Build a secure and sustainable future for all.

You can interpret the brief as widely as you like: there are all sorts of poetic possibilities in terms of imagining or illustrating the subject matter, tone, message etc. The best ones will be published, along with some 'late arrivals at the ball' of Brechtian poetry that you've been sending in. Send your poetic gems to artseditor@communistreview.org.uk

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements and thanks are due to all the poets published in this column, also to Alan Morrison for permission to use a few poems from *Emergency Verse*. Buy it! It's cheap, it's good and you don't have to go to a shop!

Notes

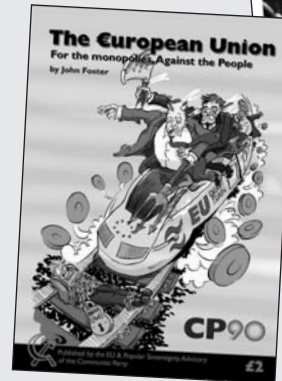
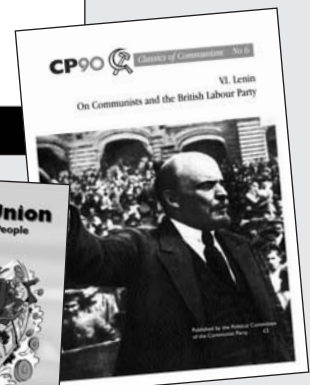
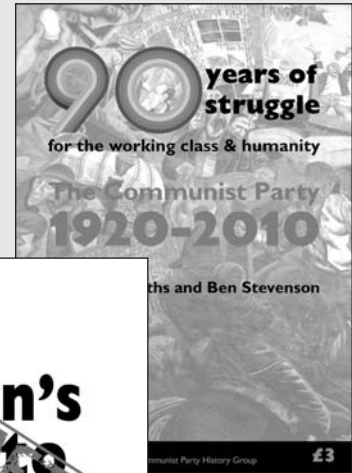
- 1 *Well Versed*, J Rety Ed, Hearing Eye 2009.
- 2 *Emergency Verse: Poetry in Defence of the Welfare State*, A Morrison Ed, Caparison; can be downloaded for £2.99 at www.therecusant.org.uk

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip



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