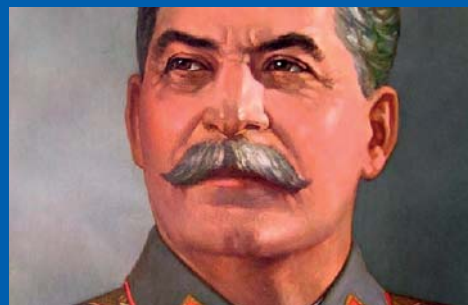




COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **John Foster** The EU Single Market and Employment Rights
- **Kenny Coyle** The Asiatic Mode of Production, Part 2
- **Yuri Emelianov** 'Stalin's Purges': Real and False Enemies
- **Lars Ulrik Thomsen Niels Bohr**: An Odyssey in Time and Space



The EU Single Market and Employment Rights



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editorial



By Martin Levy

THE ANCIENT GREEKS had a word for it: *hypokrisis*. Not *hyperkrisis* – which was not known to them and which could almost have been coined as a description of monopoly capitalism – but *hypokrisis*. Originally neutral, meaning “play acting”, it took on over time the negative sense of assuming a counterfeit persona – *ie* hypocrisy – and that is what describes the response of many European Union politicians to the outcome of the Greek elections in May.

The people of Greece have delivered a massive vote of no confidence in the austerity policies of the main parties, PASOK and New Democracy. But they have not yet lost all their illusions about the EU and the role of the single currency. Even SYRIZA, the main ‘left-wing’ beneficiary in the elections, has been selling the line that Greece does not need to leave the euro – a complete fraud since the euro is at the heart of the free movement of capital and dividends, the very policy which led to the hyper-crisis facing Greece. But the most blatant hypocrisy comes from those EU politicians who warn Greece about the dangers of defaulting, of leaving the single currency and so on.

These people have the temerity to lecture Greece about the measures of ‘solidarity’ allegedly put in place to ‘help’ their country overcome its ‘sovereign debt’ problem. What they are really concerned about is solidarity with the French and German banks that own billions of euros in Greek government bonds. Their ‘solidarity’ does not extend to providing jobs for the rising tally of Greek unemployed, nor public services for the people who need them. It’s not solidarity, it’s hypocrisy. The Communist Party of Greece, the KKE, which has been leading much of the anti-austerity struggle, is correct to point out that Greece cannot solve its problems within the euro, the EU and the imperialist military alliance NATO.

In this time of crisis, in Greece, Britain and across Europe, it is vital that

the real nature of the EU is exposed. John Foster, in his article here on *The EU Single Market and Employment Rights*, lucidly reveals the hypocrisy around the term ‘European Social Model’ – an expression which was used by former European Commission president Jacques Delors to win the British TUC to a pro-EU position, on the basis that collective bargaining rights were recognised at a national level. But the reality has been the very opposite – the undermining of those rights not only by decisions of the EU Court of Justice but also by the Posted Workers’ Directive, the Services Directive, and the straitjacket of austerity to which every EU national government has committed. While the ConDems do not need the EU mantle to pursue their austerity policies, even a social-democratic government here would be able to do little for working people as long as Britain remained within the EU.

Moving from *The EU Single Market* to part 2 of Kenny Coyle’s *The Asiatic Mode of Production* represents something of a jump, not only geographically but also in terms of Marxist theory. However, lest *CR* should be considered eclectic, let me point to the universality of historical materialism and the need for Marxism to be thoroughly grounded. In reviewing the debates among Marxists over whether an “Asiatic mode” ever truly existed, Kenny points to the necessity of avoiding dogmatism – *or*, as Lenin put it, the need to make “a concrete analysis of a concrete situation”.¹ Such a perspective might also impinge on modern Chinese development. Is China going backward (or even forward) to consumer capitalism, or is something else involved? Those questions cannot be answered within the terms of rigid stages of social development.

Rigid attitudes about the stage reached by society can lead to strategic errors, revisionism and reformism. Such attitudes were at the heart of the Mensheviks’ contention, before the 1917 Russian Revolution, that Russia was too backward for socialist transformation;

and rigidity was also partly responsible for the downfall of socialism in Eastern Europe and the USSR, since, in regarding the existence of the socialist camp as an *essentially determining factor* in the general crisis of capitalism, theoreticians there made too optimistic an estimate of the strength of socialism.²

It has also been a dogma, ever since Khrushchev’s ‘secret speech’ at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party, that all the crimes and distortions of socialism should be laid at Stalin’s door. In *CR63*, Yuri Emelianov started the process of laying that myth, in part 1 of his article ‘*Stalin’s Purges of 1937-8: What Really Happened?*’. As he made clear, the situation was much more complex; and in this issue of *CR* he develops his analysis, exposing on the one hand the very real threats to socialism at the time and on the other the role of regional Party functionaries in pursuing repressions to save their own positions.

From Soviet history we move to Denmark, with Lars Ulrik Thomsen’s *Niels Bohr: An Odyssey in Time and Space*, which examines the deep philosophical question of the theory of knowledge. We also carry a discussion contribution on *Women, Class and the Commodification of Sex*, and two book reviews, one the first in a new series on Marxist works from China, translated and published by Canut International in Berlin. And, of course, we have our regular *Soul Food* feature, which this time includes several poems submitted by readers.

With the final part of Yuri Emelianov’s article, other articles submitted, discussion contributions held over and book reviews in the pipeline, our next issue is almost ready to go to press!

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THE CHANGING ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL BACKGROUND TO EU LABOUR LAW

The EU Single Market and Employment Rights: From a Dysfunctional to an Abusive Relationship?

By John Foster



The recent Foreign Policy Centre publication *Single Market, Equal Rights?* highlights the disquiet now felt by those in the trade union movement who previously gave largely uncritical support to the European Union. The report's editors, Adam Hug and Owen Tudor, admit the seriousness of the attacks on welfare, employment rights and collective bargaining, but conclude by once more urging support for the EU and the 'European Social Model'.¹

This article draws contrary conclusions. It argues that there was always a contradiction between the economic assumptions of the Single Market and those of the European Social Model. It will seek to demonstrate that since the late 1990s the European Social Model has itself been transformed to match the neoliberal assumptions of the Single Market and that the two, combined together, played a

significant part in precipitating the current financial crisis within the EU. This crisis has in turn led to still more fundamental attacks on employment and social rights.

I. A DYSFUNCTIONAL RELATIONSHIP

The economic assumptions underlying the EU's Single Market and Single Currency were flawed not just because they were neoliberal but because they assumed a quite different type of society to what actually existed at the time. As Aidan Regan has recently pointed out, both the Single Market and the Single Currency were "premised on the non-existence of organised labour" and shared "the neo-classical assumption that labour markets can and do operate in perfect competition."²

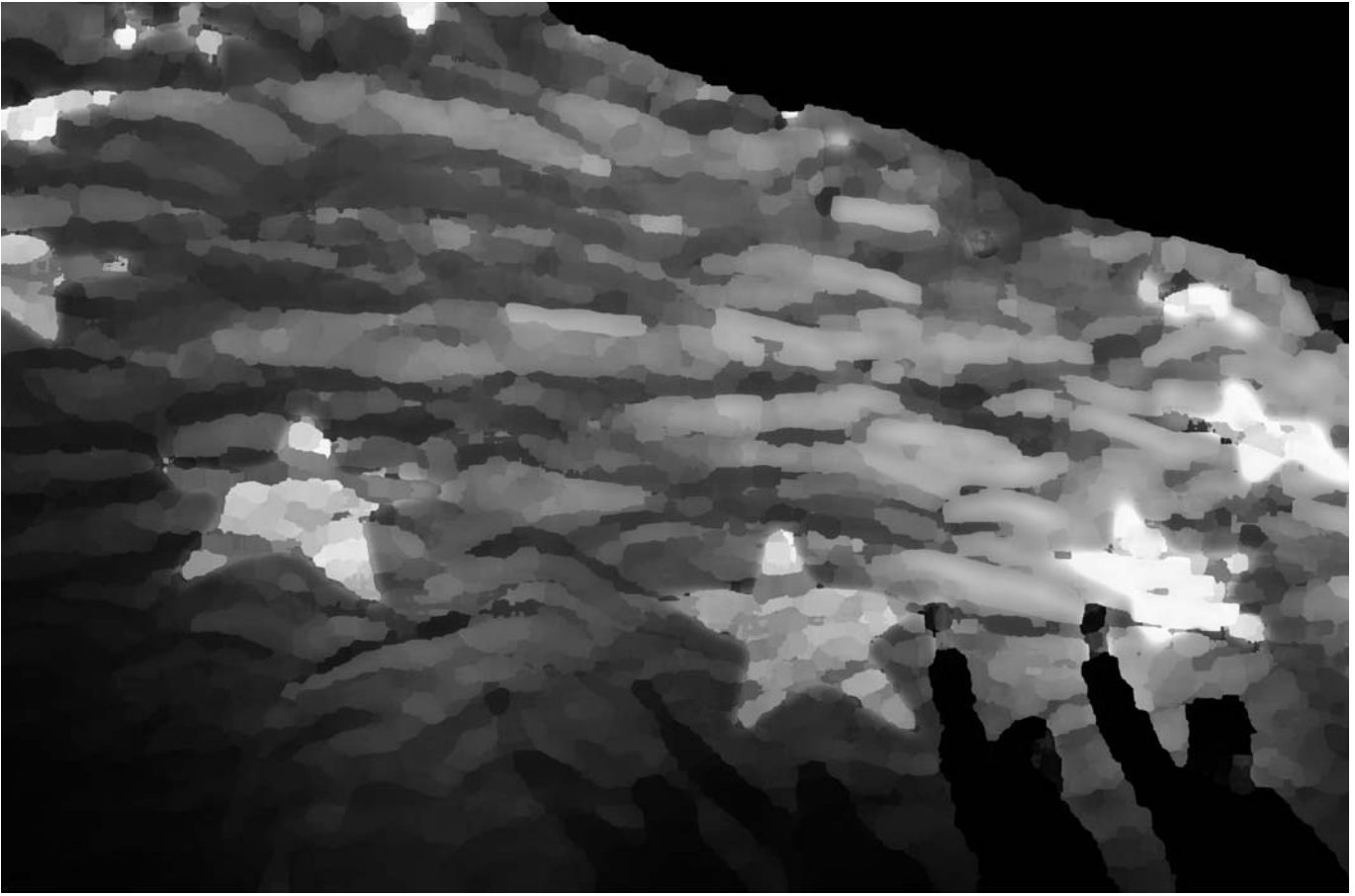
Manifestly this was not the case in Western Europe in the 1990s. Labour markets were among the most densely

organised in the world, and employment rights were strongly entrenched within national legislation. Equally entrenched at national level were social rights to relatively generous pensions and access to healthcare and free education. Together they comprised what was described at the time as the 'European Social Model' – in fairly explicit contrast to the much harsher assumptions of the 'Anglo-Saxon Model'.

Nonetheless, the architects of the Single Market and the Single Currency did assume perfect competition. The 1988 Cecchini Report,³ which outlined the theoretical assumptions of the Single Market, spoke of a "supply-side shock" to the Community economy, "restructuring entire sectors" involving "shifts in employment, new demands on labour mobility and training". The Report argued that the ending of protected markets in both the public

and private sectors would drive down prices, release over 200 billion ecus/euros in savings and in doing so create demands for new jobs and services. At the same time the new mobility of capital and labour across the community would progressively eliminate existing unevenness in development. The Report also noted that the deregulation of capital movements demanded the introduction of a "stronger European monetary system".

Such a European monetary system was indeed initiated by the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. Its assumptions were, however, equally incompatible with the existing balance of power between capital and labour. The Treaty's Protocol on Excessive Deficit Procedure⁴ limited annual government borrowing deficits to no more than 3% of gross domestic product (GDP) and overall government debt to no more than 60% of GDP. The Protocol on the Convergence



Criteria⁵ laid down that inflation in any member state must be no more than 1.5% higher than the average of the three member states with the lowest rates of inflation.

Taken together, these two criteria sought to make unemployment the key market regulator and did so by ruling out the type of state intervention to resolve cyclical economic crises that had operated since the war. Fiscal stimulus was effectively outlawed and instead the market was to do the job. As unemployment increased, wages would fall, profits rise and investment resume.

Yet these neoliberal assumptions, dependent on perfect competition in labour markets, were also contradicted by the EU's own social objectives. Over exactly the same period Jacques Delors, as President of the European Commission, launched his Social Charter, itself incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty as the

Charter of Fundamental Rights. This recognised labour law and collective bargaining rights at national level and resulted in a series of directives that laid further obligations on business. Delors's 1985 Val Duchesse declaration had earlier reaffirmed the importance of partnership between organised labour and business.

Some commentators have argued that this was little more than lip service to legitimise institutional structures that were indeed neoliberal and hostile to organised labour.⁶ In terms of the EU Council, this may well be so. Certainly most of the subsequent directives were phrased in terms of the contractual rights of individual workers rather than strengthening the powers of workers to secure collectively bargained agreements. Nonetheless the Charter did not challenge existing collective bargaining rights at national level and did little

directly to undermine them.

At this stage, therefore, the relationship between the EU's economic institutions and those embodying its 'social model' might be correctly described as dysfunctional. The aims set out for both the Single Market and the Single Currency, in terms of the EU economy, remained out of reach. Perfect competition, or even anything approximating it, did not obtain. Economic development across the EU was not 'evened up' by a new mobility of labour and capital, as envisaged in the Cechinni Report. In fact regional disparities worsened. Nor did the cyclical declines in business activity correct themselves automatically. Instead the 1990s saw rising levels of unemployment – levels which did indeed weaken the bargaining power of labour but not sufficiently to achieve the objectives of the architects of either the Single Market or the Single Currency.

2. TRANSFORMING THE EU SOCIAL MODEL

It was this issue of unemployment that was then seized upon by those who wished to transform the EU social agenda to bring it into line with the Single Market's neoliberal economic assumptions. It was, they argued, the strength of existing collective bargaining agreements that was now directly causing the higher levels of unemployment. In particular it was the employment security of the best organised workers that was blocking the achievement of another major part of the EU's social agenda – to enhance social inclusion and social equality among marginalised workers. As a result, increasingly large sections of the potential workforce – particularly young people, ethnic minorities and women – were excluded from appropriate employment. The main spokesperson for



this social neoliberalism was the British prime minister, Tony Blair. This is how he put it in his address to the EU Parliament in 2005:

“What type of social model is it that has 20 million unemployed in Europe; productivity rates falling behind the USA; that is allowing more science graduates to be produced by India? The purpose of our social model should be to enhance our ability to compete, to help our people to cope with globalisation. Of course, we need a Social Europe but it must be a Social Europe that works.”⁷

Blair, along with the Italian prime minister of the day, D'Alema, had led the production of the 1999-2000 report⁸ which set out the theoretical basis for the Lisbon Programme adopted at the summit of 2000. This programme, renewed in the Updated Lisbon Programme of 2005 and still later in Europe 2020,⁹ provided the basis for a progressively more invasive intervention in the social programmes of national governments. Initially it was targeted at “unsustainable” social benefits that were accused of putting uncompetitive pressures on either EU national budgets or on employers – particularly through provision for pensions. It then moved on to retirement ages (the need to end “early exit” from employment) and unemployment benefits (reducing “disincentives to work”). By the end of the decade the language of the EU's Social Model had moved very close to that of the ‘activation’ agenda of US social policy. Poverty was to be eliminated by incentivising the unemployed to re-engage with the world of work. Barriers to employment were to be

overcome by weakening the contracts of those in work.

And in step with this revision of the Social Model came a more direct attack on collective bargaining rights themselves. The 2007 EU Green Paper on Modernising Labour Law set out the assumptions.¹⁰ These were that collectively bargained employment rights, particularly those providing long-term security of employment, were prejudicial both to economic growth and social equality. It was argued that in the era of globalisation these objectives could best be served by new individual contracts that provided the basic security of minimum benefits while ending permanent contracts of employment in interests of economic growth – “flexicurity”.

At the same time, the EU Court of Justice issued its landmark judgements restricting collective bargaining rights – with its decisions now given legal primacy by the final ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. Its four judgements, spanning the final months of 2007 and early 2008, definitively placed the rights of ‘establishment’, that is of business to operate without impediment, over those of organised labour to defend its conditions of employment. In specific situations arising from the Posted Workers Directive and the Services Directive, industrial action by workers became illegal where employers from other member states sought to employ workers on worse wages and conditions than those already collectively bargained or laid down in national law. These two directives were themselves key instruments for realising the competitive mobility for capital and labour originally set out in the Single European Act of 1986.

So by 2008 the European Social Model still existed. But it was now different. It was, as Tony Blair put it,

one that ‘worked’. Assessing the European Social Model as it operated just prior to the financial crisis, Jens Albert concluded that in key respects there had been a convergence between the social models of the US and the EU. Overall levels of expenditure were not dissimilar (in some respects social spending in the US was now higher) and there had been significant moves in the EU to shift provision for both pensions and health into the private sector. Both the EU and the US saw the answer to unemployment in terms of activating the unemployed to get back into work – in part by weakening the employment security of those already in work and in part by reducing welfare benefits.¹¹

3. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL NEOLIBERALISM AND THE EU'S FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS

However, none of this secured the objectives, held out by the architects of the Single Market, of faster growth and enhanced competitiveness. Quite the contrary. There is very good evidence to suggest that the Single Market and the Single Currency played a major part in precipitating the financial and economic crisis that beset the EU from 2008 – and did so because the assumptions on which they were based were fundamentally flawed.

They ignored three things. First, that there was no free, competitive market. EU markets were dominated by a few big producers who used the Single Market to increase their control. Second, they ignored, as all neoliberals do, the fact that the countervailing power of labour was needed to sustain mass demand. And third, while restricting public borrowing, they ignored the potentially destabilising role of unregulated credit in the private financial sector. Together these formed a poisonous combination.

At the end of the 1990s business investment across the EU was dominated by the old core nations. With only 79% of the EU labour force, they employed 86% of the research workers, made 95% of the business investment and produced 99% of the patents. Research by Archibugi and Fillipatti¹² found that the new member states in eastern Europe, often inheriting highly educated labour forces, made some relative advance in the period 2000-2007, as companies based in France, Sweden and particularly Germany moved production of components eastward. However, the differentials with member states in southern Europe – Greece, Spain, Italy and Portugal – increased sharply. After 2007 these disparities in southern Europe intensified and the advances in eastern Europe were reversed. As Archibugi and Fillipatti write, “the negative effects of the crisis are remarkable” with a virtual cessation of industrial investment in both south and east Europe.

These disparities are reflected in the trade statistics. Taking Germany alone (Table 1), the decade to 2008 saw its exports to countries in the east and even more the south massively expanding. Imports from these countries did not increase at anything like the same rate and in some cases actually declined.

At the same time as relative differences in development across the EU increased, so also the balance between capital and labour moved in favour of capital. One reflection of this was the increased casualisation of employment. As Countouris and Horton¹⁴ note, this trend was now directly reflected in EU law:

“[T]o the extent that, as reported in the 10th Recital of the Directive [on Temporary Agency Work –/F], flexicurity seeks to ‘strike a balance between

Table 1: Percentage increase in German imports and exports 1998-2008¹³
based on euros at current value (selected countries)

Country	Increase (%) in German exports to	Increase (%) in German imports from
Bulgaria	393	170
Estonia	240	124
Greece	126	19
Ireland	120	15
Latvia	323	74
Lithuania	16	-9
Romania	324	292
Portugal	53	-2
Spain	123	56

Table 2: Wage share as a percentage of national gross domestic product (GDP)¹⁶

Country	% Wage Share 1991-2000	% Wage Share 2001-2010
Netherlands	67.5	65.9
France	67.2	65.9
Austria	71.4	65.3
Italy	64.6	62.5
Spain	66.8	62.2
Greece	62.5	60.7
Ireland	62.4	55.7
Portugal	70.2	71.3
Denmark	66.4	63.9
UK	71.9	70.9

flexibility and security in the labour market and help both workers and employers to seize the opportunities offered by globalization', we would suggest that, overall, the Directive represents a departure, in everything but rhetoric, from the regulatory concepts commonly associated with job, and labour market, security, in favour of deregulation, precarisation of work and further labour market segmentation."

However, far from increasing the international competitiveness of the EU as a whole, the new century saw the productivity gap with the US grow. Enrique Palazuelos¹⁵ finds that, up to

2000, productivity in the EU was catching up with that of the US. Thereafter it has worsened. He attributes this to a new reliance on cheap, temporary labour and a decline in industrial investment in face of "flagging demand".

This issue of flagging demand is a critical one and relates to the second misconception of the neoliberals. In heavily monopolised economies, demand will not automatically keep pace with production. This will particularly be so if the bargaining power of labour decreases, and this is precisely what happened in the decade after 2000. The income share going to labour decreased almost everywhere (Table 2).

In addition to the impact of higher levels of unemployment, Aidan Regan¹⁶

argues that this decrease was associated with the operation of national level 'social pacts'. He notes that these pacts, which laid down mandatory levels of wage increases, limited the ability of organised labour to use its bargaining strength to secure a proportionate share of productivity gains.

In parallel to this shift in income distribution against labour, redistributive action by governments weakened. Taxes on corporate profits fell while indirect taxes on consumption rose. Recent research concludes that "EU Market integration has fuelled tax competition and caused corporate tax rates to fall more quickly in the EU than in the rest of the world."¹⁷

Correspondingly, poverty increased. While poverty across the EU was reduced in the 1990s, this progress has now halted and is in some cases being reversed.¹⁸

In these circumstances demand, especially in deficit countries, could only be sustained by credit – and credit of a particularly dangerous and speculative character. Government borrowing was now strictly limited – as was any direct state investment in the productive economy.

What was not controlled or regulated was banking credit. On the contrary, the redesign of the Social Model under the Lisbon Programme gave a much more direct role to private finance and placed a premium on shifting social expenditure into the private sector – particularly pensions, health insurance and housing. Massive banking credits flowed from Germany, France and the Benelux countries to central, eastern and southern Europe – and Ireland. British-based banks specialised in the lucrative underwriting of these credits. Table 3 shows the situation as it was in 2008-9.

By 2010, according to Bank of England figures, German banks held by far the biggest share of claims on

Table 3: External debt of selected EU countries, 2009¹⁹

Country	Net external debt as % of GDP
Portugal	96
Hungary	96
Spain	75
Greece	73
Ireland	54
Poland	46
Italy	23
Germany	-22†

†ie There is a net external credit owed to Germany.

external EU countries (at 3,300% of German bank equity and exceeding internal bank claims on German debt), with the major elements of this external debt being in Spain, Italy, the Balkans, Ireland and Greece. German bank lending to other EU members is followed by Belgium (biggest segment to ex-CIS countries), Austria (biggest elements to Eastern Europe) and France (biggest elements to Italy, Spain and Portugal).²⁰

4. USING THE EU'S FINANCIAL CRISIS TO CONSOLIDATE AN ABUSIVE RELATIONSHIP?

Once the US property bubble had burst, European financial institutions no longer had easy access to cheap credit, and the debt-laden banks of the EU's deficit countries faced bankruptcy.

There were however two key differences in the way the crisis then proceeded within the Eurozone from responses elsewhere. First, the European Central Bank placed massive pressure on the governments in the debtor countries to take direct responsibility for the external debts of the private sector – thus creating a 'sovereign' debt crisis. Second, unlike the US or Britain, these governments had no access to the monetary levers of currency supply or public



sector credit creation. They could not devalue. They were prohibited from borrowing. Instead, they were compelled to introduce draconian cuts which drastically reduced economic activity – thus still further increasing the proportionate size of their sovereign debt. By the end of 2011 the Eurozone economy had effectively stalled in face of this escalating crisis.

The policy response has been to intensify neoliberal policies and to use the crisis to eliminate the remaining legal and contractual protections for labour. This process has gone through two phases. First, it was applied to the deficit countries themselves through specific programmes negotiated with the European Central Bank (ECB), the EU Commission and the International Monetary Fund. In Portugal, Ireland, Greece, Spain and later Italy this involved interventions to reduce minimum wages, end wage indexation, cut pension entitlements, enforce the privatisation of remaining public sector utilities and the dismissal, in the case of Greece, of up to a quarter of public sector employees. Somewhat similar interventions have also taken place in deficit countries outside the Eurozone – Hungary, the Baltic states, Bulgaria and Romania.

The second phase of the response has been to generalise these interventions through legislation applying to all Eurozone countries and most

other EU countries. The Euro Plus Pact of March 2011 applied to the Eurozone ‘plus’ Poland, Denmark, Bulgaria, Romania, Latvia and Lithuania. This commits their governments to eliminate labour contracts that restrict flexicurity and to reduce welfare benefits that might be considered to act as disincentives to employment. The new Treaty for Stability, Coordination and Governance signed in March 2012 enforces even stricter limits on public sector borrowing (reduced from a net balance of 3% annually to 0.5%) and, even worse, long-term cuts in public spending. Where national debts exceed 60%, these must be reduced at an annual rate equal to at least 5% – in most cases committing governments to annual cuts equivalent to up to 2 or 3% of GDP. At the same time the Treaty gives the ECB and the EU Commission powers to compel deficit countries to reduce wage levels and change contractual terms of employment.

Eurostat figures show starkly diverging patterns for both GDP growth projections and unemployment levels across the EU (see Table 4).

The objective of all these legislative interventions is to achieve in reality what was incorrectly assumed in 1986: achieving as near perfect competition in labour markets as possible. Mario Draghi, President of the ECB, put this very clearly in an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in February 2012:²³

Table 4: Eurozone growth projections and unemployment rates

Country	Projected GDP growth (%) for 2012 ²¹	Unemployment rate (%), 4th quarter 2011 ²²	
		Overall	Youth
Greece	-4.4	19.2	47.2
Portugal	-3.3	13.6	30.8
Italy	-1.3	8.9	31.0
Spain	-1.0	22.9	48.7
Ireland	0.5	14.5	29.0
Germany	0.6	5.5	7.8
Austria	0.7	4.1	8.2



WSJ: Which do you think are the most important structural reforms?

Draghi: In Europe first is the product and services markets reform.

And the second is the labour market reform In these countries there is a dual labour market: highly inflexible for the protected part of the population where salaries follow seniority rather than productivity. ... [O]ne has to make labour markets more flexible.

WSJ: Do you think Europe will become less of the social model that has defined it?

Draghi: The European Social Model has already gone These reforms are necessary to increase employment, especially youth employment, and therefore expenditure and consumption.

5. THE POLITICS OF 'NO ALTERNATIVE'

One final point needs to be made about a more general aspect of the changing political background to EU labour law. When ascribing political intent to the 'EU', it is important to remember that we are principally talking about EU heads of state gathered in the European Council – a body that has become increasingly dominant in EU policy-making and within which, since the financial crisis, the voices of the major creditor nations have become decisive. The conflicts that became so apparent during this crisis should remind us that these heads of state represent the competing interests of finance capital in their own countries. The EU Council of Ministers can and does unite against the interests of labour. But it also reflects the competing interests of big business as politically organised in each member state.

However, when it comes to the political representation of labour, it is equally important to note the reverse impact of the EU on national politics. As argued by Manow, Schafer and Zorn,²⁴ the institutionalised neoliberalism of the EU has profoundly altered the electoral politics of member states. The centre of gravity has shifted sharply rightward over the past two decades and a key part of this process has been the political realignment of the previously dominant social-democratic parties. Without exception they altered their policies to what was constitutionally possible within the neoliberal regulations of the EU. They abandoned public ownership and endorsed market optimality. In doing so, they removed the option of asserting the direct democratic control of capital from the political agenda.

This in turn has had a significant impact on the politics of their affiliated trade union federations and more broadly therefore on the countervailing power previously exercised by organised labour against the political dominance of large-scale capital. The recent publication by Owen Tudor and Alan Hug provides a clear example. After acknowledging the massive erosion of Social Europe, they nonetheless declare that to call for alternatives to the European Union is "absurd" and that any thought of "socialism in one country" is impossible.²⁵

In doing so, they should remember that the disastrous neoliberal framework for EU economics was in large part the work of Mrs Thatcher's ministers. The slogan 'No alternative' was a poor starting point for rational decision-making then. It remains so now.

■ This paper was originally written for the Institute of Employment Rights conference on Developments in European Labour Law, 21 March 2012.

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The Asiatic Mode of Production

Controversies within Historical Materialism

Part 2: Debates by Communist Scholars



By Kenny Coyle

In first part of this article,¹ I argued that the Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP), mentioned several times by Marx, cannot be accepted as a finished concept; but that it includes valuable insights into both the development of non-European societies up to the modern era as well as the birth of the very first class societies. As well as these insights, Marx's writings on the AMP included many false trails. For a couple of decades during the Stalin era, the AMP concept was largely shunned within the communist movement due both to these perceived weaknesses as well as to a false linkage to what were regarded as dangerous deviations over contemporary political strategy.

In this second part, I want to look at why and how the discussion around the AMP resurfaced and the new impetus this gave to debates on historical materialism.



III: THE AMP REVIVED

If it is simplistic to blame Stalin alone for the ejection of the AMP from official communist thinking, it is also too easy to explain the revival of the discussion on it solely as the result of the process of de-Stalinisation after 1956.

First, important sections of Marx's *Grundrisse* dealing with pre-capitalist societies had been translated into Japanese, Chinese, Russian and English by the early 1960s and were being studied by a wider audience.

Second, during the 1950s a number of former colonies in Asia and Africa were establishing themselves as

independent states. Weak forms of indigenous capitalism co-existed with various forms of pre-capitalist social relations. The potential for these countries to follow a 'non-capitalist path of development' revived the question of skipping historical stages.

Third, there was renewed interest in the societies of East Asia, especially China and Vietnam. This time the exchanges on the AMP took place in the context of the Chinese Communists' victory, not the aftermath of their defeat.

Fourth, archaeological excavations and the gradual decipherment of ancient records added substantially to knowledge of early human civilisations in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Asia.

A final factor, mentioned by Jean Chesneaux, at the time a French Communist Party member and a historian, was the need to combat the anti-communist interpretations of the AMP driven by the 1957 publication of *Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power* by Karl Wittfogel.²

Wittfogel had been a member of the German Communist Party in the 1920s and had written extensively for party publications on China.³ However, in the 1930s he broke sharply from Marxism, and when he rose to prominence in US academic circles in the 1950s it was as a Cold Warrior. His book drew parallels between the "total power" societies of the ancient east with modern "totalitarian" regimes, in which he bracketed Nazism as well as communism.

Wittfogel argued that ancient eastern civilisations were "hydraulic empires" defined by state-directed forced labour used to build and maintain irrigation networks. Western anti-communists were energetically portraying efforts at socialist construction in Eastern Europe and China as gulag economies run by faceless despotic bureaucracies. Wittfogel's book and especially the pseudo-Marxist language it employed were therefore highly useful.

By the time the discussion about the

AMP reopened in full force in the early 1960s, the inadequacies of its classical presentation were widely acknowledged. But a new wave of Marxists was sifting through Marx's insights and separating the "dead sections from the living ideas" as one of them put it,⁴ recovering what seemed relevant, disposing of the outdated and the plain wrong.

French Communists and the AMP

In post-war France, the French Communist Party (PCF) commanded the loyalty of many of the country's intellectuals, and Marxism seeped into all areas of academic life. The period was one of crisis for French imperialism as anti-colonial struggles sharpened from Algeria to Vietnam.

Communist intellectuals brought knowledge of Marxism to their specialist fields along with perspectives quite different from previous generations of French academics. One important figure was Jean Suret-Canale. A veteran of the French Communist Youth during the Resistance, his post-war political activities in Senegal led to his expulsion by the French colonial authorities. A specialist in West African culture and history, he later became a PCF central committee member with special responsibility for the party's work among intellectuals and for a time directed the party's Centre d'Études et de Recherches Marxistes (Centre for Marxist Studies and Research, CERM).

As a result of his African experiences, Suret-Canale asked himself serious questions about the applicability of the five-stage formula to non-European societies.

"How, using a Marxist perspective (*ie* in a spirit of genuine scientific synthesis), should one characterise the societies of pre-colonial black Africa? This question was presented to us in 1946, and it provided the subject of numerous writings and discussions among a





left to right: Jean Suret-Canale, Maurice Godelier and Robert Browning

group of Marxists who, under the direction of the central committee of the French Communist Party, were interested in African problems. Like the communist study groups which operated in Africa between 1944 and 1951, our group included militants of both French and African origin.

When in 1956, I was obliged to take up the question in the course of my own work, many aspects of it remained obscure

Certainly the idea of the sequence: 'primitive communism, slavery, feudalism', although widespread in Marxist literature, did not help us in our research. This conception had been vulgarised and imposed in a particularly dogmatic manner by Stalin in his work *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, which stated the sequence without any justification on either logical or historical grounds. All the same, one must not exaggerate its influence. I for my part have always been convinced – and the most superficial examination of traditional African societies lends evidence to support it – that this schema is not applicable to tropical Africa. This view was shared by Raymond Barbé, who was responsible at that time for the work of the French Communist Party in this field, and by all the comrades who worked on those questions. At the same time, we felt incapable of advancing an alternative explanation."⁵

Suret-Canale suggested that many African societies displayed some of the

features of the AMP with a number of variations.

"I continue to believe that the fundamental structure of the Asiatic mode of production is a system of production based on the rural community, which owns the land collectively to the exclusion of any form of private property, co-existing with human exploitation – exploitation which can be varied in forms, but which always operates through the community. Thus defined, the notion of 'Asiatic mode of production' – a form of words clearly in need of revision – takes on a universal value applicable to a stage of development through which the majority of human societies have passed, and of which pre-colonial Africa offers us examples spread over much of its territory."⁶

Another key participant in the PCF debates was the anthropologist Maurice Godelier. He was interested in the AMP's "primitivist" aspect.

"Marx, without having been completely aware of it, described a form of social organisation specific to the transition from classless to class society. ... Because of this relation between the situation and structure it is possible to explain the geographical and historical universality of the form of social organisation which emerges when the conditions for the transition to class society develop."⁷

These contributions showed two

recurring strands of thought on the AMP: those for whom the concept was useful in explaining the specific trajectory of non-European societies up to the modern period of capitalism; and those who viewed the AMP as a key to unlocking a universal process by which the earliest forms of class society, exploitation and the state emerged.

In this latter 'primitivist' camp there was also a distinction between those who interpreted the AMP as a transitional society, marking a point between the dissolution of primitive communism and the consolidation of a class society, and others who interpreted the AMP as a fully fledged form of early class society, a distinct mode or production, as Marx had appeared to suggest.

During the 1960s and 1970s, PCF-linked intellectuals carried on long-running exchanges on the AMP. CERM produced special editions of its journal on the topic; the PCF publishing house Éditions Sociales produced anthologies on the issue; and other magazines associated with the PCF, such as *La Pensée* and *Recherches Internationales*, carried international contributions on the debate.

Mention should also be made of a separate debate among PCF intellectuals, initiated by Louis Althusser and Étienne Balibar, on the 'articulation' of modes of production. Essentially this dealt with two or more modes of production existing simultaneously within a single social formation. This had obvious repercussions on the notion of neat, distinct historical stages. It could be used to explain the interaction between apparently anomalous features in a single social formation, such as say slavery in 19th century capitalist America, or China's 'semi-colonial, semi-feudal' state before 1949.

Britain

The debate in the Communist Party of Great Britain was less intense. During his time in Moscow at the Marx-Engels Institute in the early 1930s, the Halifax communist Ralph Fox wrote an article for a Soviet journal on the writings of Marx and Engels on the AMP, although this does not appear to have been translated into English.⁸

Groundbreaking work into early human societies by the Australian-born archaeologist and pre-historian Vere Gordon Childe was certainly influenced by his Marxism – although not formally a CPGB member he did participate in CP History Group events – but there is no suggestion that he artificially fitted his research to conform to any ‘party line’. On the contrary, Childe critically reviewed CPGB classics expert George Thomson’s work on Ancient Greece in *Labour Monthly* in 1949⁹ and he was distinctly unfavourable to certain dominant trends within Soviet archaeology up to his death in the mid-1950s.

From the 1930s onward, the main focus of British communist historians had been feudalism and capitalism. Given that England had provided archetypes of these two modes of production, fertile fields of research for CPGB historians were English feudalism, the transition from feudalism to capitalism, the industrial revolution, the birth of the working class and labour movement, and so on. Even those who left the Party during 1956-57 generally continued their work along lines quite compatible with their previous experience in the CP History Group.

In what became an international debate sparked by the work of Maurice Dobb, the British Marxist historians were especially active in refining the definition of feudalism, a category that otherwise could simply be used as to pigeon-hole any pre-capitalist social formation that could not be classified as primitive communist or slavery.

However, Robert Browning, a British communist historian who specialised in pre-capitalist societies, particularly that of Byzantium, noted the negative effects of the five-stage formula on his own field, especially in relation to the slaveholding mode of production. Lenin and Stalin had both been understood to suggest that a specific stage of slavery was a universal phenomenon in human history. While researchers had found many instances of the use of slaves in pre-capitalist societies, there seemed to be few civilisations that were as economically dependent on them

as ancient Greece and Rome.

“In the thirties, historians in many countries began to make a serious study of Marxism, and some of them found in it the key to the central problems of their own field It is unfortunate that it was just at this period that there appeared the altogether too schematic and dogmatic treatment of slavery as a stage in the development of society in the *History of the CPSU (B)*, first published in 1938 ... the hypothesis that all societies pass through a stage in which the principal relation of production is that between master and slave was treated as an axiom. For reasons in part clear at the time and in part only now being illuminated, this book acquired an influence much greater than it merited. Indeed its formulations on slavery were still repeated in the Soviet text-book on political economy (1954) and to some extent in the *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism* (1961) long after they had begun to be tacitly abandoned by Soviet historians of the ancient world.”¹⁰

In the late 1961 to early 1962, the CPGB theoretical magazine *Marxism Today* carried a couple of articles on *Stages of Social Development*. The contribution of Joan Simon¹¹ in particular was referred to in later debates by Soviet writers.

An important selection from the *Grundrisse* was published in English in 1965 under the title *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, by the Communist Party-linked publishing house Lawrence & Wishart. The wide-ranging introduction by communist historian Eric Hobsbawm, which was translated and reprinted in the French discussion, showed how far the debate had moved from strict adherence to the five-stage formula:

“The general theory of historical materialism requires only that there should be a succession of modes of production, though not necessarily any particular modes, and perhaps not in any particular predetermined order.”¹²

There was another major British contribution on the AMP from outside the CPGB that is worth noting. Barry Hindess and Paul Hirst’s *Pre-Capitalist*

Modes of Production came much later (1975) and was heavily influenced by Althusser. Unlike the CP historians, who rooted their work in meticulous research, Hindess and Hirst were interested only in purified theory.

“The concept AMP can only be constructed if there is a space for it in the theory of modes of production, if it is a possible mode of production according to the concepts of that problematic. These are its conditions of existence as a concept. They are secured solely within the realms of knowledge, nothing which has happened or has existed, in Asia or elsewhere, can alter that.”¹³

IV: DEBATE IN THE SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

One Estonian historian stressed the gap between Stalin’s views in *print* – he had after all only highlighted “five *main* types” of modes of production – and the political inhibitions in *practice* that prevented Soviet historians from adding to this core list:

“Stalin himself *wrote* very cautiously The transformation of the ‘set of five terms’ into the norm took place in the process of interpreting that sentence under the conditions of those days, when extra-scientific arguments played a palpable role.”¹⁴

As Robert Browning noted, the post-1956 theoretical thaw in the European socialist countries was more advanced among specialist academics than in the official handbooks which lagged behind. Nonetheless, in the early 1960s the debate on the AMP came back into the open in the Soviet Union. This was partly the result of the factors already mentioned but also because a new generation of historians, collectively known as the ‘New Current’, were ready to question the five-stages theory.

In 1964, brief summaries of the French discussion from *La Pensée* were republished in the Soviet specialist journal *Narody Azia I Africa (Peoples of Asia and Africa)* along with a full-length critical reply by a veteran Soviet historian, V V Struve. The debate spilled over into other specialist journals, conferences and books and was by no means restricted to the Soviet Union. Scholars from Hungary, Poland,



Czechoslovakia, Romania, the GDR, China and Vietnam all published work on the topic during this time. Many were retranslated and published in other languages. While some champions of the AMP appeared, such as the China-specialist Ferenc Tokei in Hungary, there was reluctance as elsewhere to adopt the AMP wholesale.

USSR

Among some on the left, highly active anti-Soviet allergies led to an offhand dismissal of the value of academic research and discussion within the former Soviet Union. Nonetheless, even Western experts conceded that such discussions were more vibrant, wide-ranging and creative than widely supposed for a 'totalitarian state'.¹⁵

Especially in the post-Stalin era, Soviet historians were no longer limited by the need to assign pre-capitalist societies to the neat and distinct categories of slaveholding or feudal. The result was a greater sensitivity to the divergence between the classical European and non-European paths. There were occasional defences of the AMP by Soviet scholars but most seem to have rejected the concept as inadequate.

Some even simplified the issue of social stages by proposing that between primitive communism and the arrival of capitalism there had been only one stage of class society. Vasili Iliushechkin suggested calling this a "rental mode of production",¹⁶ Iurii Kobishchanov also proposed a single stage but he labelled this feudalism, with a wide variety of sub-types,¹⁶ while Leonid Vasiliev argued that the single stage was a state mode of production.¹⁷ Ivan Ivanov suggested that there were three macro-formations, primitive communism, private property and modern communism.¹⁸

Other Soviet thinkers went in the opposite direction by adding to the five stages; and at least one historian, L V Danilova, appeared to reject the idea of the necessity of successive stages.¹⁹

The field of ancient history, especially in relation to the class character of early Mesopotamian civilisations, such as Sumer and Babylon in the third and second millennia BCE, resulted in intense discussion among Soviet specialists over the forms of exploitation, labour processes, property ownership and the economic role of temple priesthood. Some researchers in the USSR continued to argue that these were slave societies in some form. However, there was a growing trend among Soviet historians to limit the slaveholding definition to those

ancient societies where the ruling classes lived overwhelmingly off the social surplus generated by permanently enslaved producers rather than every instance of a society with elements of slave exploitation, the criticism levelled by Robert Browning above.

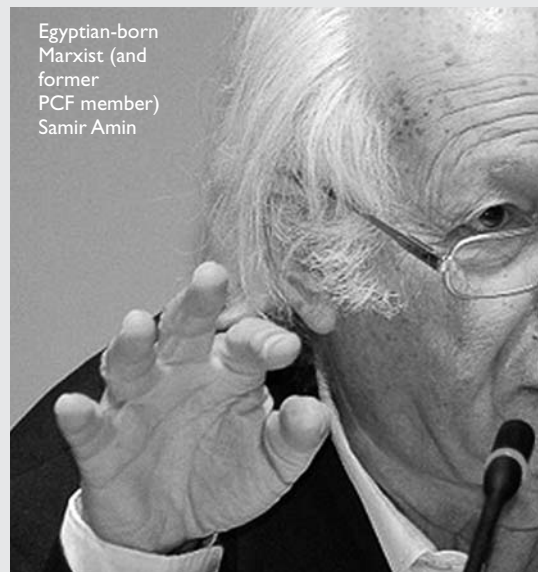
The Georgian academic G A Melikishvili proposed that the societies of Sumer and Babylon should be considered "proto-feudal" and suggestions were not limited to this category.²⁰ Although too little of the material is available in English,²¹ scholarly surveys of these debates show a tremendous variety of views among Soviet specialists about the number and classifications of social stages.²²

The discussion led the Soviet theorist Yuri Semenov²³ to propose that Marx's ill-defined AMP was in fact better understood as a mode of production based on debt-bondage, which he believed to be the first widespread form of class exploitation. Here poorer members of the community would temporarily work for their creditors to pay off their debts. This was not a permanent status like slavery or serfdom and there were various forms which this repayment could take. Semenov argued that these debt-bondsmen shared some characteristics of slave, serf, proletarian and free independent producers. He suggested that in the earliest class societies rudimentary forms of slave, feudal and wage-labour had existed. But as the productive forces of society were insufficiently mature these seeds of future modes of production had to wait until the productive levels reached a point where they could be germinated. Semenov noted

"the assumption that there have only been three antagonistic socio-economic formations – slaveholding, feudal and capitalist – of which the first immediately replaces the primitive-communal, the tribal, is not an inseparable and integral part of the materialist interpretation of history".

Semenov also took up the insights into socio-economic structures which Lenin had outlined in *The Tax in Kind*, and which were quoted in Part 1 of this article. Soviet Russia had been in a state of flux at the beginning of the New Economic Policy. Lenin wanted to correct many of his comrades who could only think of Russian society in black and white terms of a pure transition from capitalism to socialism. Lenin showed

Egyptian-born Marxist (and former PCF member) Samir Amin



that this was too abstract and that patriarchal and small commodity capitalist structures co-existed alongside capitalist and socialist ones.

According to Semenov, there were many variations of possible socio-economic structures but only a limited number had the potential to become fully dominant and form stable modes of production. The dominant formative structures were primitive communal, slaveholding, feudal, capitalist, and communist. Semenov argued that there were also "non-formative structures", such as patriarchal (subsistence economy) and petit bourgeois (small commodity-exchange economy) systems. These could exist alongside the dominant forms and even survive in a modified form the transition between dominant modes of production, but they could not consolidate themselves independently.

Semenov considered that in many of the developing countries of Africa and Asia, in the first couple of decades after World War 2, the chief characteristic was the absence of a dominant socio-economic structure. He argued that this was by no means unique and that there were several such transitional periods in human history, where no single mode of production predominated. Secondly, he believed that the succession of stages was only true from a world-historical perspective. It was not necessary, or even usual, for every society to pass through each stage in sequence.²⁴

Semenov's solution kept the broad outlines of the five-stage model but allowed far greater divergence from it. Taking these ideas further, Soviet social scientists used the concept of 'multi-structuredness' to refer to all societies where there was more than one socio-economic structure in a given society.



Initially this had been applied only to transitional periods, such as early Soviet Russia or the People's Democracies of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1940s and 50s, which both lasted only a few years, as well as the centuries-long gap between the collapse of Rome's slaveholding society and the consolidation of feudalism. However, an increasing number of Soviet writers in the 1960s and 70s began to argue that there were more examples of multi-structural societies especially among Asian and African countries where no single socio-economic structure yet predominated.

We can see that the continued rejection of the AMP as a finished theory by most Soviet scholars in the post-Stalin era had more to do with the widely perceived weakness and incompleteness of its concepts rather than a state-imposed "article of faith". The term was certainly no longer taboo. The five-stage formula persisted in the USSR as the most coherent and orthodox account. It could be defended on the grounds of its Leninist, not Stalinist, heritage and, for the ideologically conservative, it avoided adopting unfamiliar and still unproven concepts.

At least until glasnost, Soviet social theorists were prepared to go beyond the five main types and to question the previous tendency to compartmentalise modes of production; although there was still a reticence in venturing too far from the list of additional forms found in the writings of Lenin. Nonetheless it would be a fundamental error to belittle or ignore the very rich debates that occurred within the USSR, purely on the grounds of political antipathy toward the Soviet state – the very same intrusion of 'extra-scientific' prejudices that bedevilled the 1930s AMP debates.

China

As China embarked on economic reform in the late 1970s, there was a renewed debate regarding the AMP; a return to the questions we began with – why was pre-colonial China so backward and what distinguishes Chinese from European-type societies? Contributions reflected the same variety of interpretations as elsewhere but focused on the specific history of China. Again there was no consensus.²⁵

The formulations accepted currently are that China has passed through primitive-communal, patriarchal communal, slave, feudal, and semi-colonial semi-feudal forms before the revolution in 1949 began the transition to the 'primary stage of socialism'. The patriarchal-communal stage is considered to possess some of the features that others would attribute to the AMP, such as slave-ownership and lack of private landed property, but this is not regarded as a fully consolidated exploitative class society.²⁶

Vietnam

During the debates of the 1960s, the leading Vietnamese Marxist historian Le Than Khoi argued that many AMP features simply did not fit Vietnamese reality, especially the absence of landed property and the existence of a despotic state. He considered that the "concept of the AMP requires so many essential corrections that it would be better to abandon it and construct another". He argued that feudalism was also imprecise in describing Vietnam between the 10th and 19th centuries, *ie* before the French colonialists came.²⁷ Also in the 1960s, attempts to write a definitive history of the country were delayed as historians disputed the existence of a slave stage. One group argued that Vietnam had moved from primitive communism directly to feudalism when the territory was incorporated into imperial China and so feudalism had lasted around 2,000 years. Others argued that feudalism proper emerged only much later.²⁸

A recent text does describe Vietnam as feudal, resulting from invasion and occupation by Han Chinese dynasties, but leaves open the nature of pre-feudal Vietnam, noting that some Vietnamese historians see signs of slave society while others believe it was a primitive communal society in an advanced form of disintegration. The author Nguyen Khac Vien notes that neither case has yet been definitively proved.²⁹

V: TRIBUTARY MODE OF PRODUCTION

Some Marxists have argued that the concepts of feudalism and Asiatic Mode of Production are equally inadequate and that it is better to adopt a new category, referred to as the Tributary Mode of Production (TMP). This is particularly associated with the Egyptian-born Marxist (and former PCF member) Samir Amin³⁰ and British historians John Haldon³¹ and Chris Wickham,³² although it should be noted there are some important differences between them. In fact the origins go back further and again show communist roots. The Japanese communist historian Jiro Hayakawa appears to have developed this idea as long ago as 1934³³ and Ion Banu³⁴ and H H Stahl³⁵ both published on the tributary mode in Romania several decades ago.

Proponents of the TMP suggest that its chief characteristic is the common factor of tributary exploitation, achieved primarily through the use or threat of force or deeply entrenched social customs, where citizens offer tribute to the ruling class in various forms through tax, rent or labour. Capitalism on the contrary relies on economic compulsion, where the whip of market forces compels the sale of labour power.

The Tributary Mode of Production, it is argued, helpfully erases the secondary differences between European feudalism and the Asiatic Mode of Production. It can also be applied to diverse societies such as Ancient Egypt, the Ottoman empire, the pre-colonial civilisations of the Americas such as Incas and Aztecs, and so on. In some interpretations, the TMP covers what had been regarded as slaveholding societies too, encompassing the entire spectrum of pre-capitalist class societies.

A fuller outline of the TMP would take us too far from the original topic of this article but it is worth noting that the concept has won some adherents among left historians in this country, Blackledge and Davidson among them. Somewhat ironically, after arguing that 'Stalinists' overextended the concept of feudalism (see Part 1 of this article), Davidson comes out in favour of the TMP, which casts an even wider net. In fact Haldon's central argument is that feudal Europe and the Asiatic East were simply regional variations of the TMP. In the end, apart from terminology this is not very far from the position of the post-1931 Comintern, which saw the AMP as merely an Asian form of feudalism.

Davidson's objection, that a



promiscuous use of the term feudalism ignores the fact that “the differences between the societies involved are so vast that this position is impossible to maintain”,³⁶ can be applied with even greater force to an all-encompassing TM and this is not adequately solved by attempts to relegate Asiatic, Slaveholding or Feudalism to sub-types of the TMP.³⁷

Overall supporters of the TMP oversimplify the definition of a mode of production to a single criterion, the form of exploitation, relying on a remark by Marx:

“The specific economic form, in which unpaid surplus-labour is pumped out of direct producers, determines the relationship of rulers and ruled, as it grows directly out of production itself and, in turn, reacts upon it as a determining element. Upon this, however, is founded the entire formation of the economic community which grows up out of the production relations themselves, thereby simultaneously its specific political form.”³⁸

However, the rest of the passage continues:

“It is always the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production to the direct producers – *a relation always naturally corresponding to a definite stage in the development of the methods of labour and thereby its social productivity* – which reveals the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social structure and with it the political form of the relation of sovereignty and dependence, in short, the corresponding specific form of the state. This does not prevent the same economic basis – the same from the standpoint of its main conditions – due to innumerable different empirical circumstances, natural environment, racial relations, external historical influences, etc from showing infinite variations and gradations in appearance, which can be ascertained only by analysis of the empirically given circumstances.” [Emphasis added –KC]

Here Marx adds two other crucial factors – the method of labour and social

productivity. We cannot therefore dismiss the fundamental differences between the conditions of unfree slave labour, semi-free serfdom and independent tenant farmers, nor the yawning gap in social productivity between say Ancient Egypt and feudal Europe in the mid-1500s.

The TMP does not appear to represent the solution to the problems of identifying and categorising historical periods and societies but simply relegates them to issues of sub-categories.

SUMMARY

I'd like to suggest some tentative conclusions:

1 Scientific research into pre-history, with disciplines such as archaeology and anthropology, was in its infancy when Marx and Engels were writing and knowledge of non-European societies was patchy. Marx's attempts to construct an “Asiatic Mode of Production” from the fragmentary knowledge available in his time failed. Yet his insights left a rich legacy for later Marxists to use in their own explorations.

2 The simplifications of Engels, Lenin and *then* Stalin temporarily hardened into a dogma inside the communist movement but this was overcome and it was largely *within* the communist movement that more sophisticated discussions of historical materialism re-emerged more than half a century ago.

3 Undoubtedly debates on the number and classification of historical stages will continue to agitate Marxists as new historical evidence comes to light and existing evidence is re-interpreted. However, the idea that there is a ‘correct’ number revealed in one or other of the Marxist classics that all Marxists must automatically accept has more to do with scriptural devotion than scientific socialism.

4 Historians in the socialist countries certainly operated under constraints, especially where their fields of study were deemed to overlap with contentious contemporary political issues. At the same time, in the West the quality of historical research in the socialist countries was constantly, for nakedly ideological reasons, belittled – where it was not entirely ignored. As I have shown, there were many genuine clashes of opinion among historians and theoreticians; and it is unfortunate that a younger generation of left historians, albeit from a different standpoint, seem to share the blanket

dismissal of communist historians as ‘Stalinists’ or party hacks. They should be careful since dogmatism takes many forms.³⁹

5 As a result of the debates among communist historians, a number of useful concepts were developed, especially in relation to socio-economic structures and multi-structural societies. These remind Marxists of the need to understand societies not as simple reflections of monolithic modes of production but as complex social organisms.

6 The discussion on the emergence of early class societies and the dissolution of primitive communism could perhaps provide some interesting pointers for analysing the collapse of the former socialist countries, where socially owned economies and relatively egalitarian, though not classless, societies were overturned. It is in the death of the Soviet Union, not its growth as Wittfogel believed, that insights from the concept of the AMP may prove to be useful.

7 The spectacular growth of China and the debate on whether it is heading toward socialism or capitalism becomes more open if we see the country's ‘socialist market economy’ as a transitional multi-structured formation. What we have is not simply a head-to-head contest between socialism and capitalism; but rather a country where both these socio-economic structures are at play and seeking dominance, while the political leadership is attempting to ensure that, through a controlled interaction between them, the socialist structure continues to predominate and guide others while gaining in strength and vitality over a prolonged period. Whether this approach will ultimately be successful in consolidating socialism remains to be seen, but it has nonetheless closed the debate on the stagnant character of Asian society that first drew Marx to look at the East in the first place.

Certainly, one of the key lessons from the discussion on the Asiatic Mode of Production is that dogmatic constraints – of whatever kind – on historical debates are self-defeating. Perhaps the last word should be left to Suret-Canale, historian and communist militant:

“Marxism, as a scientific approach toward historical material, can do no more than shed light on one's research. It does not give sight to the blind.”⁴⁰

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‘Stalin’s Purges’ of 1937-8 What Really Happened?



By Yuri Emelianov

PART 2: REAL AND FALSE ENEMIES

In Part 1 of this article, I dealt with the social and political background to the Soviet purges of 1937-8. Citing recent Russian studies I disputed not only the scale and main targets of the reprisals but also the narrative – from Khrushchev onwards – that many abuses were made on Stalin’s orders and were due to his extreme suspiciousness and willfulness. I discussed the threat of war against the USSR and contradictions inside the Communist Party, in particular the bureaucratic coercive approach of many leading Party functionaries.

Plots Against Stalin’s Political Reforms

Not only Khrushchev, but also many other Party functionaries, did not want any changes which might jeopardise their position. Stalin encountered quiet but effective sabotage from the moment that he sent his constitutional reform proposals to Avel Yenukidze, secretary of the Presidium of the Soviet Central Executive Committee (*ie* the head of the civil service) so that he and his staff would transform them into a legal document. For months Yenukidze and his staff refused to work on Stalin’s proposals.¹

At that time Yenukidze, as well as many other Party functionaries, considered that all the innovations of Stalin and his supporters were tantamount to high treason of

revolutionary principles. In private conversations they blamed Stalin for building an alliance with former Entente nations and class enemies inside the USSR.² Yenukidze and his group of supporters wanted to prevent work on the Constitution before such a project became public. In order to do so they were planning to arrest Stalin and his closest supporters.³

The sentiments of Yenukidze and others were also shared by Henrich Yagoda who in the middle of 1934 was appointed head of the USSR People’s Commissariat for Domestic Affairs (the NKVD). Yagoda, who had become a figure of great importance due to his performance in organising mass arrests of kulaks and other ‘counter-revolutionaries’,

and sending them to GULAG camps, was most likely aware that discarding the policy of repression would limit his activities simply to catching thieves and other penal criminals.

At the 1938 trial of the “bloc of Rights and Trotskyites” Yagoda admitted to being one of the leaders of the “bloc”, to pursuing the aim of overthrowing the Soviet government by a ‘palace coup’ and to being complicit, through “grave violation of duty”, in the assassination of Sergei Kirov in Leningrad on 1 December 1934.⁴

This author considers it possible that Yagoda wanted to construct a situation similar to the ‘Red Terror’ declared after the attempt on Lenin’s life by Socialist Revolutionary Party member Fanny Kaplan

on 30 August 1918. From that time the importance of the political police – at first the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission (VChK or Cheka) headed by Felix Dzerzhinsky, later the NKVD – had grown tremendously.

The investigation of the circumstances surrounding Kirov’s assassination revealed that Leningrad NKVD employees displayed at least a lack of professional zeal in guarding Kirov’s safety. The earlier detention and release of Kirov’s murderer Nikolaev on October 15, the traffic accident on December 4 which resulted in the death of Kirov’s bodyguard Borisov, who was being transported under arrest to the place where he was to be interrogated, and the disappearance of witnesses to Kirov’s murder, make one

think that the later accusations that Leningrad NKVD employees were accomplices in the crime were not completely groundless.

Apart from Yenukidze, Yagoda and some of Yagoda's subordinates in the NKVD, a number of other important people took part in the plot for a 'palace coup', including Kremlin commandant Rudolf Peterson and Moscow military district commander August Kork. With the help of soldiers who were stationed in the Kremlin and Moscow they were preparing to arrest Stalin and other Politburo members. In his book *A Different Stalin: the Political Reform in the USSR in 1933-7*, Yuri Zhukov cites Yenukidze's evidence, given in Kiev on 11 February 1937, after his arrest, and Peterson's evidence, given in Kharkov 16 days later. Pointing out coincidences, Zhukov writes:

"It is difficult to imagine that both of them fabricated this evidence in advance as they were aware that the result of such evidence would be a death sentence. It is even more difficult to imagine that the prosecution in Kiev and in Kharkhov received instructions to make Yenukidze and Peterson repeat the same fabricated evidence.

... the four versions of the coup d'état, about which Yenukidze and Peterson spoke, dealt with the greatest secrets about the Kremlin, its buildings, passages inside them and the organisation of the Kremlin which are kept secret even today. Such secrets would not be passed on to any old investigators in Kiev and Kharkhov."⁵

The secrets were in fact revealed by Yenukidze and

Peterson in the process of the investigation.

At that time yet another plot was brewing. It was being organised by a number of Red Army commanders led by Marshal Tukhachevsky. Even before publication of the Russian books mentioned in Part 1, a number of authors in the West had presented evidence which proved beyond doubt that the Tukhachevsky conspiracy was not a result of Stalin's suspiciousness. The appropriate facts were narrated in the memoirs of German former intelligence chief Walter Schellenberg,⁶ and in *The Conspirators* by American historian Geoffrey Bailey.⁷ A brief account of how the Tukhachevsky plot was formed and developed was given in the book *Hitler Moves East, 1941-1943* by Hitler's former personal interpreter Paul Schmidt (literary name Paul Carell).⁸ The famous American historian William Shirer noted that the latter "seems to have managed to be present whenever and wherever the drama of the Third Reich reached a climax"⁹

We need to take into account the fact that Trotsky, as chairman of the Revolutionary Military Council of the Soviet Republic and as People's Commissar for Military Affairs from 1918, had appointed many of the leading figures in the Red Army during the Civil War. Sharing the political views of their chief, these officers tended to overrate military methods of administration and the role of the Red Army in the world revolutionary process. Many of them continued to occupy commanding posts in the Red Army after Trotsky was ousted in 1925.

Besides this, Marshal Tukhachevsky and other military figures joined the plot mostly because of their opposition to Stalin's attempts to build cooperation with France and Britain against Nazi Germany. From the

beginning of the secret cooperation between Germany and the USSR in the early 1920s, which allowed Germany to bypass Versailles treaty bans, Tukhachevsky and some other Soviet military leaders established good working relations with many influential German generals.

Hitler's coming to power, and the ending of Soviet-German military cooperation, did not break personal relations between some of the Soviet and German military figures. At that time German generals approved wholeheartedly of Hitler's armament programme. At the same time they were afraid that Hitler might plunge Germany into another war on two fronts, and they relied on their good relations with the Soviet military to prevent attack by the Red Army from the East. Their fear of war on two fronts was so great that they even prepared a coup d'état in 1938, when the threat of such a war emerged during the political crisis over the Sudetenland. Only the surrender of France and Britain at the Munich conference prevented the realisation of this plot.¹⁰

In turn Tukhachevsky and his supporters in the Red Army hoped that their cooperation with the German military would prevent the Soviet Union having to fight a war on two fronts, against Germany and Japan. At the same time Tukhachevsky's rivalry with Marshal Vorishilov, USSR People's Commissar for Defence and the third most influential person in the Politburo, made the former start planning his own coup d'état in order to establish military rule in the Soviet Union.

The murder of Kirov created a situation which favoured the resumption of the 'Red Terror' of 1918. The leadership thought that the assassination meant the beginning of a coup d'état. Just as Stalin was about to go to the railway station in

Moscow, in order to travel to Leningrad after he had learned about Kirov's murder, he got a phone call from Yenukidze. The conversation between Stalin and Yenukidze resulted in a decree submitted to the USSR Central Executive Committee which changed legal procedures in all cases connected with terrorist acts. According to the 'Law of December 1', such cases were to be considered within ten days. The defendants were forbidden to appeal to higher judicial authorities and were to be executed immediately after the sentence was passed. This draconian measure was the result of the sense of mortal danger for the Soviet government and was used for several trials involving dozens of people which took place at the beginning of 1935. Only gradually was this practice stopped.

Yagoda and other NKVD officers tried to prove that Nikolaev was connected with former White Guards. At the same time it was announced that Nikolaev had acted on the orders of an underground organization of Zinoviev supporters. Zinoviev and his long-time collaborator Kamenev were arrested.

Already in 1927 Zinoviev and Kamenev had been expelled from the Party, then repented. In 1932 they were caught in another case of breaking Party discipline and were expelled again. They repented a second time and were readmitted to the Party. By that time they were totally discredited and nobody believed them. In the atmosphere charged with hatred towards the murderers of Kirov the fact that some of Nikolaev's friends were former supporters of Zinoviev and Kamenev seemed sufficient proof of their involvement in the plot. Both of them were put on trial and received prison sentences.

The murder of Kirov and the loud demands for increasing vigilance and exposing the clandestine



activities of class enemies promoted arbitrary accusations and expulsions from the Party. In 1935 a Soviet film, *The Party Card*, showed a former kulak who became a worker and then a Party member but in fact served a foreign intelligence service. Thousands of communists were expelled from the Party for concealing

their true class origin or for 'losing vigilance'. In the Smolensk province alone 23% of communists were expelled from the Party.

It is clear that Stalin and other Politburo members condoned this campaign. Yet at the same time Stalin and Molotov became more active in promoting the new Constitution. Yenukidze tried

to limit the changes: although he agreed to establishing direct elections instead of the existing multi-stage procedure, and to discarding the inequality in representation of rural and urban dwellers, he resolutely opposed voting by secret ballot.¹¹ As the contradictions between him and Stalin developed Yenukidze was relieved of his duties as the Secretary of the USSR Central Executive Committee. Approximately at the same time Peterson was relieved from his post as the Kremlin commandant. The NKVD arrested a number of minor employees of Yenukidze's staff in the Kremlin, and in June 1935 he was accused of 'losing political vigilance'. At the same time Stalin's growing suspicions about Yagoda and the NKVD made him charge Yezhov, chairman of the Party Control Commission, with keeping the NKVD under strict control. The plans for a coup d'état were thwarted but Yenukidze, Peterson and others remained free. Meanwhile Tukhachevsky and others continued their separate preparations for a coup d'état, involving not only new military but also political figures.

Struggle Over the New Constitution

All through 1935 and the beginning of 1936 the work on the new USSR Constitution continued. Former opposition leaders Bukharin and Radek participated in this work. Stalin himself wrote and rewrote many articles of the Constitution. In the middle of 1936 the draft was published, and public discussion then took place at some 500,000 meetings. Over 2 million amendments to the draft were proposed during the course of the discussion.

Yet, as Yuri Zhukov points out, many important Party leaders avoided the central topic of general interest. At the peak of public discussion about the future Constitution, Moscow Party First Secretary

Nikita Khrushchev published articles devoted to the development of playgrounds for children; and, while Lavrentii Beria, First Secretary of the Transcaucasian Central Committee of the Party, mentioned the draft in an article of his, he warned that class enemies would try to use the new system of elections to get into the Soviets.

Answering this open or muted opposition to the new Constitution, Stalin resolutely rejected attempts to restore a clause which forbade the participation in elections of "non-working and exploiting elements". On November 25 1936, in his report to the Extraordinary 8th Congress of Soviets of the USSR, he said:

"It is said that this is dangerous, as elements hostile to the Soviet government, some of the former White Guards, kulaks, priests, etc, may worm their way into the supreme governing bodies of the country. But what is there to be afraid of? If you are afraid of wolves, keep out of the woods.

In the first place, not all the former kulaks, White Guards and priests are hostile to the Soviet government.

Secondly, if the people in some place or other do elect hostile persons, that will show that our propaganda work was very badly organised, and we shall fully deserve such a disgrace; if, however, our propaganda work is conducted in a Bolshevik way, the people will not let hostile persons slip into the supreme governing bodies. This means that we must work and not whine, we must work and not wait to have everything put before us ready-made by official order."¹²



Stalin 1902

Were Party functionaries so afraid of some former White Guards, kulaks or priests becoming Supreme Soviet deputies? It is difficult to believe it. Yet, under the pretext of preserving the purity of class consciousness, it was easier for them to defend the old practice which allowed themselves to be elected to the Soviets and thus demonstrate popular support. They had read Stalin's interview with Roy Howard, quoted in Part 1 of this article, and were not happy with it. They were not eager to let voters discuss their doings. They were accustomed to loud applause at the end of their bombastic speeches which they had learned from the time of the Civil War, and they were not ready for open and honest debates before an audience. They hated to think that the new election procedures might put an end to their ruling positions and all the good aspects of life to which they had become accustomed.

As Yuri Zhukov again points out, many peasants (and not only kulaks) remembered the excesses of collectivisation in 1929-30 and could vote against those who tried to overfulfil the plans at all costs. If such Party secretaries failed to get elected to the Soviets, their positions as Party leaders might be questioned as well.

The new Constitution, also known as the 'Stalin' Constitution, was adopted on 5 December 1936. Several months before this it had been announced that the practice of Party purges would be stopped. The country started preparations for the elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet.

The First Moscow 'Show Trials'

Yet there were other events which seemingly contradicted the tendency towards more political freedom and democracy. In August 1936 a new trial against Kamenev, Zinoviev and others took

place. All of them were accused of being members of a secret "Trotskyite-Zinovievist centre" which had planned murders of Politburo members and a coup d'état.

Though some of the accusations were plausible most of them now appear far-fetched. Yet it must be taken into consideration that Stalin as well as many Soviet people had long before this point ceased to trust Zinoviev and Kamenev and therefore could believe the prosecution's version of events. For a year and a half practically no-one in the Soviet Union had doubted the *indirect* responsibility of the two opposition leaders for Kirov's murder; so it was easy to believe that both of them, as well as their supporters, were *directly* involved in organising the murder not only of Kirov but of other Soviet leaders as well.

All of the defendants were sentenced to death. During the trial some other former opposition leaders were implicated and some of them were arrested. In September 1936 Yagoda was relieved of his post as head of the NKVD, and his replacement Yezhov prepared new trials.

The next Moscow 'show trial' took place in January 1937. This time Pyatak, Radek, Sokolnikov and other oppositionists were in the dock. They were accused of being members of a "parallel Trotskyite centre" and of organising terrorist activities, including transport wreckages, murders and other acts of sabotage. The noted German writer Lion Feuchtwanger, who was present at all the sessions of the trial, found the arguments of the prosecution and the self-accusations of the defendants convincing.¹³

Judging from the looks of the defendants, Feuchtwanger emphatically denied that they were subjected to any form of physical pressure. In his book Feuchtwanger also described a conversation with Stalin, showing vividly that Stalin

believed the accusation and expressed his sincere indignation at Radek's hypocrisy.¹⁴

Yet it was clear that at least some of the evidence presented was open to question. For example, while Pyatak stated that he went from Berlin to Oslo by air in order to meet Trotsky, the Norwegian authorities declared that no foreign plane landed in Oslo for weeks before or after the date that Pyatak alleged. This time not all of the defendants were sentenced to death: Radek, Sokolnikov and some others received imprisonment terms.

Stalin's Programme of Re-education of all Party Functionaries

In February/March 1937, soon after the trial of Pyatak and the others, a plenary Central Committee meeting was convened. At the 20th Congress Khrushchev asserted that at this meeting Stalin attempted to build a "theoretical justification for the mass terror policy".¹⁵ Nothing was further from the truth. Although the meeting most likely started with Yezhov's report on charges against Bukharin and Rykov, the main discussion (probably quite heated) seems to have been around Party democracy, introduced in the speech by Andrei Zhdanov.¹⁶

At the meeting many of the participants (Kosior, Eikhe, Postyshev, Sheboldaev, Vareikis, Gamarnik, Kaminsky, Lubchenko, Rudzutak, Khatayevich, Yakir and others) demanded urgent measures in order to expose clandestine enemies and to punish them without mercy. At the same time they demanded that Bukharin and Rykov be expelled from the Central Committee, arrested and shot.

While supporting the general appeal of the speakers to increase vigilance, Stalin in his two speeches at the plenary meeting drew quite different conclusions. Stating that

supporters of Trotsky had turned into "a gang without principle and without ideas, of wreckers, diversionists, intelligence service agents, murderers",¹⁷ Stalin nonetheless added that there was no need to exaggerate the strength and influence of the oppositionists. Besides, he pointed out, many of the former Trotskyites had discarded their views long before. Stalin also stressed that one should not punish "all those who at one time went along the same street with some Trotskyite or dined in a public dining-hall close to a Trotskyite."¹⁸ Yet, he said, many honest and good communists were expelled from the Party for their connections with Trotskyism. He spoke of a plant in Kolomna where there were 1400 communists at the time and 2000 former communists who had been expelled from the Party. He said that "the ruthless inhuman policy regarding common members of the Party, the indifference of many of our leaders to the destinies of separate Party members, their readiness to push out of the Party wonderful people who turned out to be excellent workers ... create the situation which allows the Rightists, Trotskyites, Zinovievists and all others to enlarge their alien reserves".¹⁹

Stalin cited other examples of the disregard by Party functionaries of common people. He reminded the plenum of the brutal measures which had been used in order to make peasants join collective farms. At the same time he spoke about those Party leaders who appointed their personal friends and relatives to important administrative posts. Such leaders, said Stalin, "wanted to create conditions which would give them a certain independence, both of the local people and of the Central Committee of the Party."²⁰

Stalin said that many Party functionaries had forgotten



Lenin's principle of not only teaching the masses but also learning from them. Citing the example of the Kiev Party organisation's disregard of complaints by rank-and-file member Nikolaenko, he warned that the Party might perish if it did not keep close contact with the working class. He reminded the plenum of the Greek myth about Antaeus, who lost his battle with Hercules as soon as he lost contact with the Earth, his mother.

In order to remedy this state of affairs Stalin presented a plan for the re-education of all Party functionaries. He proposed that the 100,000-150,000 Party cell secretaries should attend 4-month "Party courses", to be established in regional centres; the 30,000-40,000 district secretaries should attend 8-month "Lenin courses" in 10 of the most important centres; the city committee secretaries should be sent on 6-month "courses for the study of history and the Party's policy"; and the first secretaries of the divisional and provincial organisations and republican central committees should attend a 6-month "conference on questions of internal and international policy".

Stalin suggested that each Party functionary should present several candidates so that one of them would be chosen to perform his/her duties during the studies. Later these deputies should also be sent on the appropriate courses. Thus Stalin made it clear that all party functionaries were in need of education in order to improve their level of professional performance.

He considered that the participants in the 6-month "conference" might in future become the leading figures of the Party. He said:

"These comrades should provide not one but several relays, capable of replacing the leaders of the

Central Committee of our Party.²¹ ... We, members of the Politburo, are old people. Soon we shall go down. This is a law of nature. And we want to have several teams which will be able to replace us."²²

At the same time Stalin made it clear that many Party functionaries of that time might part with their jobs and be replaced by other people. He said:

"We have tens of thousands of capable and talented people. It is only necessary to know them and to promote them in time so that they should not remain in their old places too long and begin to rot".²⁰

Supporting Zhdanov's proposals, Stalin also demanded

"restoration of democratic centralism in our inner-party life. This is a form of control. The restoration on the basis of the Party charter which demands election of party bodies. Secret elections, the right to demand the ousting of all candidates without exceptions and the right to criticise candidates".²³

The programme of re-education, the restoration of democratic centralism in the Party and the approaching election, during which many of the Central Committee members might not be elected to the USSR Supreme Soviet, made Khrushchev and many other Party functionaries equate Stalin's plans with a programme of 'mass terror'. Many of them wanted to thwart the plans.²⁴

Tukhachevsky's Plot and its Débacle

In February 1937 Yenukidze, Peterson and several NKVD officers who served under Yagoda had been arrested. Yagoda himself was arrested on March 29. Some military officers who were involved in Tukhachevsky's plot were also taken into custody. All this made Tukhachevsky and others hurry on with their plot. In the previous year Tukhachevsky had conferred with his German colleagues. Paul Carell wrote:

"In the spring of 1936 Tukhachevsky went to London as the leader of the Soviet delegation attending the funeral of the King George V. Both his outward and homeward journeys led him through Berlin. He used the opportunity for talks with leading German generals. He wanted to make sure that Germany would not use any possible revolutionary unrest in the Soviet Union as a pretext for marching against the East. What mattered to him most was his idea of a German-Russian alliance after the overthrow of Stalin Tukhachevsky became increasingly convinced that the alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union was an inescapable commandment of history."²⁵

In his book *The Conspirators* Geoffrey Bailey quoted an attested remark by Tukhachevsky made at that time to the Rumanian Foreign Minister Titulescu. He said:

"You are wrong to tie the fate of your country to countries which are old and finished, such as

France and Britain. We ought to turn towards new Germany. For some time at least Germany will assume the leading position on the continent of Europe."²⁶

Meanwhile the pro-German statements made by Tukhachevsky in Western European countries during his trip to Britain became known in France and Czechoslovakia. The mutual assistance treaties of both countries with the USSR, concluded in 1935, united them in a joint anti-Nazi coalition. The information that such an important figure as Tukhachevsky took a pro-German stand caused grave concern in Paris and Prague. The two governments notified the Soviet Government about Tukhachevsky's statements.

As Tukhachevsky with other conspirators, using unrest among the Party functionaries, accelerated preparations for a coup d'état, he intended to ask the USSR People's Commissar for Defence K E Voroshilov to convene a conference on military problems in the Kremlin. Tukhachevsky planned to come to the conference with his supporters and to surround the Kremlin with troops loyal to him. Stalin and some of his Politburo colleagues were to be arrested and shot immediately.²⁷

Carell wrote:

"In March 1937 the race between Stalin and Tukhachevsky was becoming increasingly dramatic Why did the Marshal not act then? Why was he still hesitating? The answer is simple enough. The moves of General Staff officers and Army commanders, whose headquarters were often thousands of miles apart, were difficult to coordinate

especially as their strict surveillance by the secret police forced them to act with the utmost caution. The coup against Stalin was fixed for 1 May 1937, mainly because the May Day Parades would make it possible to move substantial troop contingents to Moscow without arousing suspicion.”²⁸

On 9 April 1937 the chief of the Red Army Intelligence Board Semyon Uritsky informed Stalin and Voroshilov that in Berlin there were rumours about opposition in the Soviet military to the Soviet leadership.²⁹

By that time the Gestapo had got wind of Tukhachevsky’s negotiations with the German military leaders. In order to get fuller information about relations between the military leaders of the two countries Gestapo agents penetrated the Wehrmacht archives and stole some documents pertaining to Soviet-German military contacts. The agents tried to conceal the theft by setting fire to the archives. After the stolen documents were analysed the Gestapo deputy chief Heydrich came to the conclusion that there was ample evidence of secret cooperation between the leaders of the Wehrmacht and the Red Army. The Gestapo informed Hitler.

Despite Tukhachevsky’s pro-German statements Hitler and others in the Nazi leadership were not happy about clandestine contacts between the military leaders of Germany and the USSR. The Nazi leaders considered that the establishment of a military dictatorship in Russia might stimulate similar developments in Germany. As military dictator of Russia, Tukhachevsky might help his German colleagues during a future coup. Hitler decided to thwart the joint conspiracy.

He ordered the stolen documents to be sent to Moscow, but with added fabrications to make the materials even more shocking. German intelligence chief Walter Schellenberg later wrote that the false additions constituted but a minor part of the whole collection, which was secretly sold to the Soviet Union.⁶ (Later in 1971 former premier Vyacheslav Molotov claimed that he, Stalin and other Politburo members knew about the Tukhachevsky conspiracy before they got the German documents.³⁰)

There are different versions about the subsequent events. On the one hand there is substantial evidence that the military coup scheduled for 1 May was frustrated at the last minute. Some people present in Red Square at the time remembered that immediately after the beginning of the parade rumours spread about an imminent terrorist act against Stalin and other Politburo members, who at that time occupied the tribune on the Lenin Mausoleum.³¹ Many years later, former NKVD officer Pavel Meshik claimed that he personally arrested a terrorist on the upper floor of a building adjacent to Red Square just when he was getting ready to shoot. Meshik said that he was awarded the Order of Lenin for this arrest.³²

On the other hand there is evidence that the coup was postponed. Just before May 1, it was announced in London that the coronation of George VI, who had become King after the abdication of Edward VIII, would take place on May 12. The Soviet Union was invited to send a delegation to the ceremony, and the government decided that Tukhachevsky would head it. According to Carell, Tukhachevsky “postponed the coup by three weeks. That was his fatal mistake.”²⁸

On May 3 Tukhachevsky’s documents were sent to the British Embassy in connection

with his visit to London. But the next day the papers were recalled and it was announced that Admiral Vladimir Orlov, naval commander-in-chief, would head of the delegation.

On May 10 it was announced that Tukhachevsky had been relieved of his duties as Deputy People’s Commissar for Defence and made commander of the Volga military district. On May 24 Stalin sent a circular letter to all the members and alternate members of the Party Central Committee, informing them about the conspiratorial activities of Tukhachevsky and others. Since Tukhachevsky was an alternate member of the Central Committee, other members and alternate members of this highest body of the Party were asked to vote for or against his expulsion from the Party and the transfer of his case to the NKVD. All supported the suggested measures.

On May 27, the leader of the conspiracy was arrested. Between May 19 and 31, his major collaborators were also arrested. But one of them, Deputy People’s Commissar for Defence Y B Gamarnik, committed suicide just before his arrest.

On the June 2 a session of the Military Council of the People’s Commissariat for Defence was convened. Although the investigation was not yet over, and it was probable that some of the participants in the plot were present, Stalin attended the session and addressed it.

He began his speech by saying, “Comrades, I think that now nobody has doubts about the existence of a military-political conspiracy against the Soviet power.” He added that “the core of the military-political conspiracy” consisted of 13 people: Trotsky, Rykov, Bukharin, Rudzutak, Karakhan, Yenukidze, Yagoda, Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Ubovich, Kork, Eideman and Gamarnik. At the same time he mentioned that some

300-400 people had been arrested. Explaining that the conspiracy had not been exposed earlier, due to euphoria in the Party and among the Soviet people, Stalin said:

“The general situation, the growth of our ranks, the achievements of the army and the country as a whole decreased our political vigilance, diminished the sharpness of our sight.”³³

Stalin spoke about the dependence of Tukhachevsky and the other arrested commanders on the German military, and suggested that the conspirators did not have any profound ideological platform:

“What was their weakness? They lacked contact with the people They relied on the German forces They were afraid of the people.”³³

Stalin suggested that some of the military officers got involved in the conspiracy out of sheer opportunism. At the same time he spoke about some of the plotters being intimidated by Tukhachevsky and the others into joining them. He proposed that such people should be forgiven if they came forward and honestly spoke about their participation in the plot.

Refuting concern expressed by some of the speakers at the session that the arrests among the military might weaken the Red Army, Stalin said:

“We have in our army unlimited reserves of talents One should not be afraid to move people upwards.”³³

On June 11 Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Ubovich, Kork, Eideman, Feldman, Putna and Primakov were brought before a court martial and after a brief trial were sentenced to death.



Stalin versus Most of the Central Committee

On 23 June 1937, less than two weeks after Tukhachevsky's execution, a plenary meeting of the Central Committee was convened. The first to speak was Nikolai Yezhov. He demanded emergency powers in order to continue exposing anti-Soviet conspiracies. At the same time he asked the Central Committee for permission to arrest Sheboldayev, Balitzky and 9 other members and 14 alternate members of the Central Committee, suspected of participation in the anti-Soviet conspiracy.

In his book *The Plot against Stalin*, Vladimir Pyatnitsky³⁴ describes this plenary meeting in detail. Though he attacks Stalin, he notes that a number of speeches were made, by Kaminsky, Khataevich, Lubchenko and others, against prolonging the extraordinary powers of Yezhov and the NKVD. An especially vehement protest was made by IA (Osip) Pyatnitsky (the author's father), chief of the political-administrative department of the Central Committee (with responsibility for the NKVD) and formerly a member of the political secretariat of the Comintern.

Stalin tried to come to terms with Pyatnitsky during the meeting. In the interval after the latter's speech Molotov, Voroshilov and Kaganovich talked to Pyatnitsky and said that Stalin believed in his personal honesty and values, his talent as a good organiser and administrator. They asked him to retract his statement, but Pyatnitsky was adamant.

Around the same time Moscow mayor Filatov, also a Central Committee member, reported to Stalin that the opposition of Pyatnitsky and others to the NKVD was a result of a decision reached at a secret meeting at Pyatnitsky's apartment. Filatov was the only participant of this meeting who informed Stalin

about it. Just a month earlier, Stalin had learned of the Tukhachevsky plot revealed by the NKVD; and now he heard of a secret meeting attended by dozens of Central Committee members who were trying to stop further NKVD investigations. He suspected that Kaminsky, Khataevich, Lubchenko, Pyatnitsky and other speakers as well as other participants of the secret meeting (who had so far abstained from speaking) were connected with the Tukhachevsky plot.

At the plenary meeting most of the speakers (Eikhe, Postyshev, Khrushchev, Vareikis, Bagirov, Gikalo and others) energetically attacked Kaminsky, Khataevich, Lubchenko, Pyatnitsky and others, and the majority voted for conferring emergency powers on Yezhov.

One may suppose that at that time Yezhov was not quite sure of his position. He knew that Stalin trusted Pyatnitsky, and that the latter would be able to remove him as head of the NKVD if he (Pyatnitsky) and his supporters prevailed. Therefore Yezhov joined with Pyatnitsky's opponents. Yuri Zhukov is quite right in supposing that "Yezhov easily came to terms with Eikhe and many first secretaries and agreed with the necessity as soon as possible of doing away with the those who were certain to vote against them."³⁵

The plenary meeting was not yet over when Robert Eikhe visited Stalin with a proposal which ran counter to the one supported by Pyatnitsky and Kaminsky. Eikhe stated that former kulaks and members of forbidden anti-Soviet parties were planning to use the election campaign in Western Siberia to get as many seats as possible in the USSR Supreme Soviet. Eikhe submitted a written proposal to permit the Western Siberian authorities to organise an emergency committee (a 'troika'), composed of the NKVD chief of Western Siberia, the attorney of Western Siberia and himself,

Eikhe. The 'troika' was to have emergency powers to make arrests and pass sentences, including death sentences, on members of underground anti-Soviet groups.

Within 3-4 days similar proposals were submitted to Stalin personally by the first secretaries of several provincial committees of the Party: Far Eastern province – I Vareikis; Saratov province – A Krinitzky; Azerbaijan republic – M Bagirov; Sverdlovsk province – A Stolar; Stalingrad province – B Semenov; Omsk province – D Bulatov, Northern province – D Kontorin; Kharkov province – N Gikalo; Kirgiz republic – M Amosov.

Soon they were joined by other Party secretaries. Yuri Zhukov established that by 11 July 43 out of the 71 first secretaries of the provinces and republics of the USSR had submitted proposals on the organisation of 'troikas'. At the same time the proposals included the numbers of people to be exiled and to be executed.

Zhukov named those who demanded especially big 'quotas' for repression:

"It turned out that there were 7 secretaries who set the number of their victims over 5000: A Ikramov (Uzbek republic) – 5441; K Sergeev (Stavropol province) – 6133; P Postyshev (Kuibishev province) – 6140; Y Kaganovich (Gorky province) – 6580; I Vareikis (Far Eastern province) – 6698; L Mirzoyan (Kazakh republic) – 6749; and K Ryndin (Chelyabinsk province) – 7953. There were 3 secretaries who considered that the number of victims of 'troikas' should exceed 10,000: A Stolar (Sverdlovsk province) – 12,000; V Sharangovich (Byelorussian republic) – 12,800; and

E Yevdokimov (Azov and Black Sea province) – 13,606. The most bloodthirsty turned to be R Eikhe, who expressed his wish to shoot 10,800 inhabitants of the West Siberian province (he had not yet determined a figure of those whom he wanted to exile); and N S Khrushchev, who suspiciously quickly managed to find and count in Moscow province 41,305 'former kulaks' and 'penal criminals' and then insisted on their expulsion and execution. ... The fact that the number of nameless victims reached a QUARTER OF A MILLION PEOPLE meant that the proposed action would result in unprecedented mass reprisals."³⁶

It is noteworthy that, in his 'secret speech' to the 20th Party Congress, Khrushchev said not a word about the Eikhe memorandum, nor about the requests for exiling and executions filed by Eikhe and himself. Instead Khrushchev praised Eikhe and depicted him as an innocent victim of Stalin's terror.

Though at that time there were those in the USSR who wanted to overthrow Soviet power, and who in the impending war would constitute a danger to the country, there were no legal grounds to set quotas for arrest and execution of people who were not found guilty of treason or sabotage. The reason was different: the leaders of the provinces and republics were afraid that they would lose the first general, direct, equal and secret elections with alternative candidates. By resorting to reprisals they wanted to create an atmosphere of Red Terror characteristic of the situation in Russia during the Civil War. In such an atmosphere it would

be impossible to conduct political debates between different candidates but it would be easy to make loud speeches against class enemies.

The provincial and republican secretaries had another and deeper motive for their plan. Constant feuds between different cliques inside regional committees in their struggle for power could now be ended, not in resignations and dismissals as before, but in imprisonments and executions. The ruling secretaries especially wanted to get rid of those who, after the February-March 1937 plenum, were designated to take their jobs during the re-education programme and then possibly forever. Unwittingly the Party secretaries were ready to resort to the principle of Father Brown, who said:

“Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the

forest. But what does he do if there is no forest? ... He grows a forest to hide it in And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in.”³⁷

The Party secretaries were planning to make vast fields of dead bodies in order to hide in them the bodies of their political opponents, accusing them of being ‘enemies of people’, together with those for whose executions they demanded special quotas.

Stalin was caught between two fires in the Central Committee. On the one hand there were those who were against the NKVD, as Yezhov was launching a campaign to uproot real or imagined supporters of conspirators. On the other hand the great

majority of the Central Committee wanted the NKVD to take more resolute measures to fight clandestine enemies. In fact both groups acted against Stalin’s policy: he could defend measures against undiscovered participants of Yenukidze’s plot, but it was next to impossible for him to defend former kulaks, members of forbidden anti-Soviet parties and penal criminals. In this situation Stalin and his staunch supporters in the Politburo decided to join the majority.

Yet Stalin and the rest of Politburo tried to lower the numbers of victims of the reprisals. Historian Leonid Naumov states that the quotas demanded by some secretaries were lowered by a factor of 7. The quotas of reprisals were lowered for Moscow province, the Byelorussian republic, Uzbekistan, the Far Eastern

province, the Western Siberian province, Stavropol province, Gorky province, Kuibishev province, Sverdlovsk province, Chelyabinsk province, the Mordovian republic, the republic of Mari-El and the Chechen-Ingush republic.³⁸

At the same time Stalin tried to accelerate preparation for the elections which might bring a political end to many of the provincial and republican bosses. But the provincial secretaries said that it was impossible to organise elections before the beginning of December.

Since permission for the start of repressions had been given, it was impossible to stop them.

■ *In the final part of this article, I shall deal with the impact of the repressions, Stalin’s counter-offensive and the lessons of 1937-8.*

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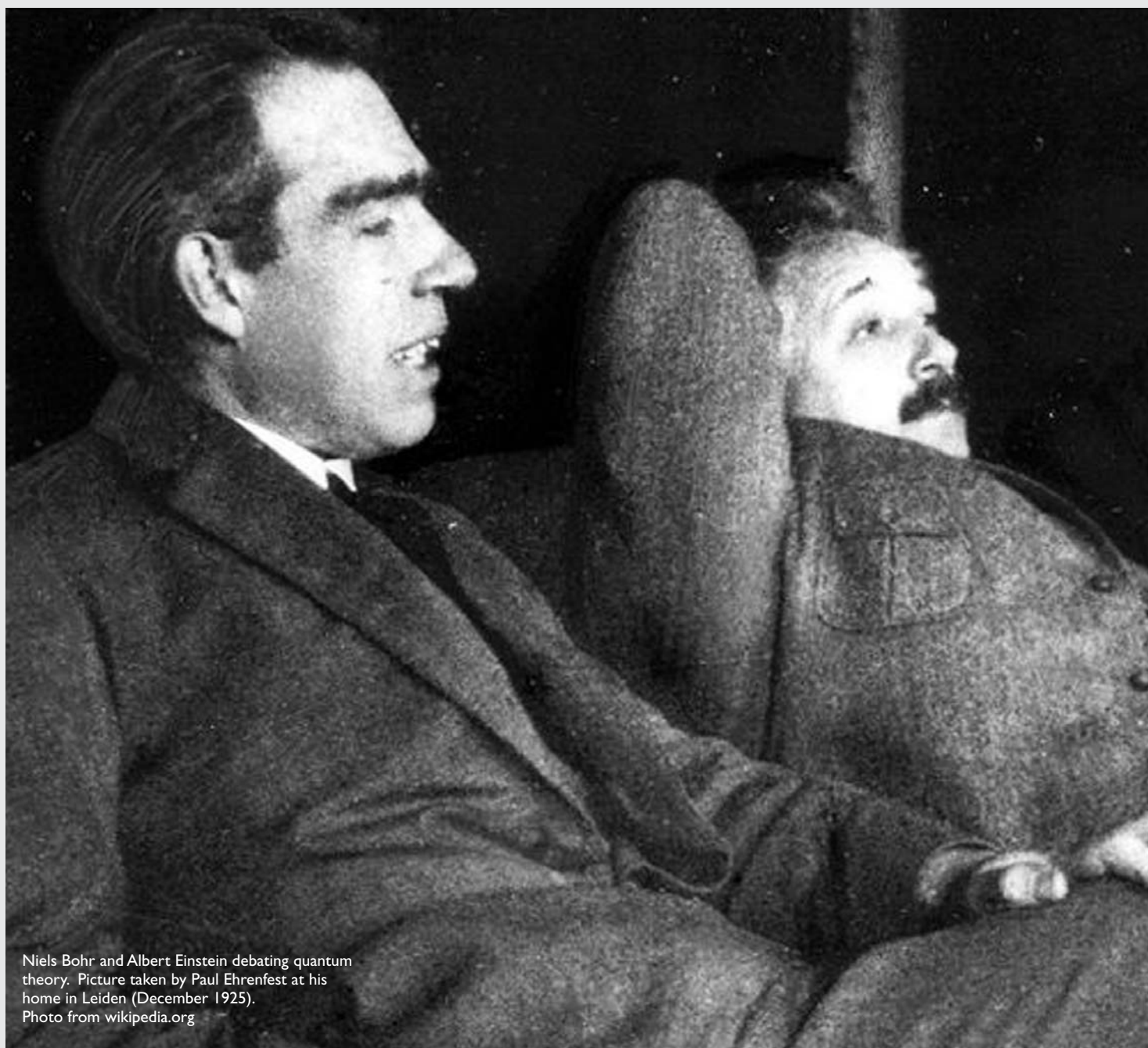
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Niels Bohr: An Odyssey

By Lars Ulrik Thomsen



Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein debating quantum theory. Picture taken by Paul Ehrenfest at his home in Leiden (December 1925).
Photo from wikipedia.org

in Time and Space



The names of Tycho Brahe,¹ Ole Rømer² and Niels Bohr are enrolled in the history of Danish science. Besides his pioneering contributions in quantum physics, Bohr was also interested in philosophy. This article will seek to explain his contribution to our cognition, and to reveal the sources of his epistemology, or theory of knowledge.

Niels Bohr (1885-1962) was one of those people who embodied all the contradictions of the 20th century. This applies both to the enormous development of productive forces, and the attempts to explain the results in science to human cognition. Bohr was interested in epistemological issues all his life, but especially during the period 1913-30. The dilemma that faced him was the difficulty of explaining, by means of the laws of classical mechanics, the new discoveries in the field of microphysics.

Bohr was the product of an eventful period in Denmark's history. After June 1849, with the adoption of the new Constitution, there had been a democratic upswing, especially among workers and peasants. Until then Danish cultural life had been more or less secluded; and these movements, which were basically echoes of the French revolutions of 1789 and 1848, represented a trend promoting a more international orientation. Furthermore, technical development meant that science was now transformed into an active part of the production process. This situation helped to pose new questions for society, and also impacted on the environment into which Niels Bohr was born – that of the Copenhagen bourgeoisie.³

All this ferment in society created a climate of openness and critical attitudes, which influenced Bohr's childhood and youth. Mainly based on science's

growing influence, people could now dare to contemplate ideas that no one else had previously considered. As an example of such sky-flying visions, Niels Bohr had a dream as a young student.⁴ He, as a Phoebus,⁵ sat on a sun of burning gas. The planets whirled past him at a furious pace. They were all connected by fine wires to the sun, around which they revolved. In a moment there was a qualitative leap, and the gas was turned into a solid mass – the sun and planets shrank and stiffened.⁴

In a flash Bohr had seen the contours of an atomic model, which would come to dominate his life. The sun was the fixed nucleus, around which the electrons circled. It was with the background of this dream that he worked his way to a scientific discovery which was to revolutionise not only physics, but many fields of science.

The Need for New Concepts

Much has been written about the great explorers of ancient times – of which Denmark, as one of the great maritime nations, was a part. The problems that theoretical physics faced in the early 20th century were no less momentous in terms of their implications for social development. The journey of discovery in which Niels Bohr participated was fully in line with the past and requested pioneering efforts in questions about the universe, its origin and development.

These were questions which might also involve cognition theory since, as Bohr could see, the methods of classical physics could no longer be used in the field of microphysics. This emerging realisation gained ground when he came home from Manchester in 1916, having spent the previous 4 years working with Ernest Rutherford.

Niels Bohr's work style and way of



life involved a critical approach to scientific work. He was not satisfied with the available answers, and instead continued to look deeper – behind the apparent and obvious. Yet he was not unique in this, as many others were trained in classical physics and epistemology. Therefore we must not neglect the process he had to undergo, before he was able to form a picture of the new discoveries.⁷

With continuing attempts at the Copenhagen Institute of Theoretical Physics (later changed to the Niels Bohr Institute), and the exchange of views with other physicists, Niels Bohr began to review the conceptual world of classical mechanics. At this time there were sharp international debates on these issues. More physicists were inclined to the view that the new and groundbreaking discoveries made the cognitive side of things redundant.⁸

Bohr did not share this view and became increasingly preoccupied with philosophical subjects. In this he was fortunate that his own childhood had been dominated by scientists and writers who often visited the family. One of Bohr's finest properties was his ability to approach the truth through dialogue. His multifaceted interests and pedagogical skills helped to break down the barriers which could easily arise in the international environment of the Institute.

Another interest also helped his understanding of epistemology. The work of Greek philosophers in antiquity played a key role in helping him understand his unique results. The insights of the contemporary philosophers were essentially the result of the conflict between materialism and idealism. As we shall see, this conflict also dominated Bohr's concepts.

The Danish philologist Otto Gelsted⁹ has brilliantly depicted the way these insights developed and how the issues that occupied ancient thinkers also preoccupy mankind today. This applies for example to Zeno's paradox that challenges our ability to distinguish between logic and reality. In the race between the quick-footed Achilles and the tortoise, we can see the conflict between a static and a dynamic conception of our universe.¹⁰

Bohr was inspired by the Greek form of dialogue, and by the depth and wisdom in Socrates' view of life. His *modus vivendi* was that one should not go to extremes and he expressed it in the form: "Neither Democritus nor

Aristotle, it is all about finding the golden mean."¹¹ This was a kind of play on words, as the philosophy of Aristotle, like that of Socrates, was to find the "golden mean", but Aristotle rejected as worthless Democritus's idea of atoms.

However reality demanded new experiments and investigations. With the breakthrough for quantum mechanics in the early 1920s, Bohr began to develop a more self-critical attitude, concentrating more and more effort on the conceptual interpretation of the outcome of his researches. Figuratively speaking, he escaped from fixed moorings and embarked on a perilous quest. In many ways his work can be compared with the journey on which Odysseus embarked after the 10-year-long siege of Troy. Niels Bohr's efforts to interpret microphysics show the same perseverance and vigour.¹²

Before we proceed to analyse the results that Niels Bohr obtained within epistemology, I want to give a brief explanation of my theory and method.

The Materialist View

Dialectical materialism has its roots in antiquity. When discussing Niels Bohr's atomic model and its importance, it is worth noting that some of the leading philosophers in antiquity, Democritus and Epicurus included, even then formulated some far-sighted theories about the formation and development of our universe. With brilliant intuition, these two philosophers postulated that the world consists of atoms of different shape and size. Niels Bohr looked on the Greek thinkers with admiration, because they mastered both epistemology and the specific research of their field. They were role models for Renaissance culture personalities and the scientists of the Enlightenment.

With the growth of science in the Enlightenment, materialism had a new revival through such figures as Hobbes, La Mettrie, Diderot and Holbach. The recognition that the universe was not created by some supernatural force also became the foundation for a more advanced version of materialism. This occurred, paradoxically, through the idealist philosopher G W F Hegel, who, in his lectures on history and dialectical logic, was the forerunner of dialectical materialism. The young Marx and Engels were originally followers of Hegel, but after intense studies inverted the idealistic content of Hegel's philosophy to a materialist form.

In this way they created a clear delineation from the idealist view that we

are creators of our world through our consciousness – conversely material circumstances determine our consciousness. The difference may not seem great, but in philosophy these are two irreconcilable views, which provide completely different conclusions in epistemology. Idealism is based on old traditions that are so ingrained in our beliefs and habits that it requires a significant effort to overcome them.

Dialectical materialism means that matter is in perpetual motion and evolves according to its own laws. The concept also stands as a common name in various sciences, for example historical materialism, science of knowledge and dialectical logic. The latter is also called "thinking about thinking", and this is where we develop the concepts used in the present analysis. The reason for explaining these questions is quite necessary, if we want to form a true picture of reality. It is a complex system where theory, method and practice must be able to work together – not as a direct reflection of matter, but through the method of abstraction.

Together theory, method and practice form a picture of the human metabolism with nature, as we see it in the labour process. The materialist view is based on the total realisation of the results that humanity has developed. It occurs in a continuous process of renewal, where outdated knowledge is negated and replaced by a more modern outlook.

Critique of Bohr's Epistemology

Niels Bohr was uncompromising when it came to examining the details of microphysics. Although his basic attitude was shaped by his education at the University of Copenhagen, one must describe his research method as 'spontaneously materialistic'. Bohr worked to realise his atomic model in 1913, still with an openness to adapt new discoveries in the process of his work. Step by step, combining laboratory experiments with scientific analysis, he managed to formulate some principles interpreting the fact that light can be both a particle and a wave motion. It was this discovery, and the results from studying these phenomena, that made Niels Bohr formulate the concept of *complementarity*, associated with what has become known as the 'Copenhagen interpretation' of quantum mechanics:

"[H]owever far the [quantum physical] phenomena transcend the scope of classical physical explanation,

the account of all evidence must be expressed in classical terms.

The argument is simply that by the word ‘experiment’ we refer to a situation where we can tell others what we have done and what we have learned and that, therefore, the account of the experimental arrangements and of the results of the observations must be expressed in unambiguous language with suitable application of the terminology of classical physics.

This crucial point ... implies the *impossibility of any sharp separation between the behaviour of atomic objects [ie, objects governed by quantum mechanics] and the interaction with the measuring instruments which serve to define the conditions under which the phenomena appear*

Consequently, evidence obtained under different experimental conditions cannot be comprehended within a single picture, but must be regarded as *complementary* in the sense that only the totality of the phenomena exhausts the possible information about the objects.”¹³

This view of microphysical processes was very controversial when Niels Bohr originally made it, and it still is unto this day. One must admire the honesty and thoroughness with which he elaborated his views, *eg* in his essays *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*.¹⁴

Bohr’s approach is like a Bach cello concerto, playing the main theme in different variations. He attempts to maintain non-contradiction in his epistemology, *ie* he employs statements that are derived from an analysis which excludes mutually contradictory concepts. In this way he maintains formal logic as the only possible framework for explaining phenomena in quantum physics. During a visit to the Soviet Union in 1962, he formulated his maxim in the sentence: “Opposites are not contradictory but complementary.”¹⁵ His view portrays a classical problem that has occupied philosophers and thinkers since antiquity.

The question is, do Bohr’s epistemological conclusions help to promote our understanding of matter? In the 1954 article *Science in Crisis*, Ib Nørlund¹⁶ gave a thorough analysis and critique of Bohr’s complementarity.¹⁷ Nørlund believed that Bohr’s concept opened the door wide to speculation that our limit of cognition has been

reached, and he came to the conclusion that it was based on agnostic assumptions. He concluded:

“In this connection it is important to keep in mind that Bohr’s entire logic is dependent on the demand that only concepts of classical physics must be applied, and that the particle must be considered as a small part of mass, only in the classical physical sense; and absolutely must be forced into this concept’s narrow – too narrow! – frame.

With the proclamation of ‘in-principle impossibility’ of the complete description of the particle, he has also suspended causality. It makes no sense to ask why, when it is basically impossible to gain insight into it.”¹⁸

Ib Nørlund’s criticism touches on the very foundation of complementarity and its use.

I now turn to placing Niels Bohr’s philosophical directions in a historical frame. Where can one find analogous positions to his? There are in fact a number of similarities between Bohr’s and Kant’s epistemologies. This becomes clear on comparing Bohr’s views with Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*.¹⁹

Kant did not believe that we could achieve full clarity about the objects or phenomena we study, because they contain “the thing in itself” – which is unknown. Hegel criticised this view in his *Science of Logic*, where he described how objective knowledge is possible, in a still closer approach to the truth. He suggested that, instead of limiting our discoveries, we solve the arising contradictions by means of the dialectical method.²⁰

Dialectic logic opens up new possibilities for explaining the laws of motion in matter, which can complement the familiar framework of formal logic. This is demonstrated in an exemplary fashion by E V Ilyenkov in his *Dialectical Logic*.²¹

Where in Bohr’s records can I find proof for my assertion about the Kantian roots of his epistemology? It is clear from an unpublished note of August 1932, on his friend and philosopher Harald Høffding, that there was a spiritual kinship between them. Bohr described how, from his youth, he had maintained close contacts with Høffding, and regularly discussed issues of common interest. He wrote of how, in their conversations, they sought to build bridges between their different fields of work:

“It appears, in all his writings and his form of psychology, (that) he constantly refers to physical laws, not only as a background for discussion of the situation of living beings, which in a certain sense is the background of psychology, but also as a mean(s) of developing and purifying philosophical views themselves.”²²

This description of the relationship between psychology and physics can be seen as an attempt to reconcile materialism with idealism. It is an attempt to transfer experience from one area to another, contrary to the fact that nuclear physics consists of natural phenomena, while the field of psychology is man-made, through our social and individual development. Therefore I feel justified in calling Bohr’s epistemological basis Kantian. But, besides the Kantian influence, there are other trends of idealistic philosophy, especially positivism which was modern among scientists in the early part of the 20th century.

As I have described earlier, Bohr refused to define himself in relation to a materialistic or idealistic direction in philosophy. But in fact his scientific work is a confirmation of the vitality of materialism as philosophy, because his discoveries transformed the hypotheses of Democritus and Epicurus into scientific facts some 2300 years after the event.

The Dialogue with Einstein

Dialogue with physicists from other countries was at the heart of Bohr’s activity. One of the most notable aspects was the long-standing debate with Einstein. The two men had fundamentally different approaches to microphysics: Bohr²³ regarded the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics as complete while Einstein was disturbed at what he regarded as a renunciation of realism at the quantum level. The decisive factor of this dialogue for Bohr, however, was the maturing and deepening of his own views. The two physicists came through their discussions to form different schools in atomic theory.

In his biography of Niels Bohr, Ulrich Röseberg has provided a vivid description of the debate.²⁴ It seemed that each time their views were approaching each other, new ideas jumped forward, just as Pallas Athena was born, fully formed and armed, from the forehead of Zeus. Through the years



the two men met at recurring symposia and conferences, and their lively and animated debates helped to fertilise the common quest for new knowledge.

Bohr described how these discussions strained his mental abilities to the extreme. Subtly, he expressed it like this: “Anyone who says that they can contemplate quantum mechanics without becoming dizzy has not understood the concept in the least.”²⁴ Literally speaking, these discussions were part of a pioneering work that went to the borders of the humanly possible.

It is one of Bohr’s paradoxes that he, who sought harmony in life, could not do without the often sharp exchanges in views with Einstein. This confirms one of the basic regularities in dialectics: that new knowledge is gained through mutual strife and identity.

Niels Bohr’s work stands as the epitome of this revolutionary period in science history, where the concepts of classical physics were expanded with new ones. It is our task to continue the philosophical discussions in the past and develop Bohr’s efforts in epistemology.

Today’s Demand – Democratic Solutions

I began my remarks by describing how Niels Bohr grew up in a time of great changes. The challenges that he faced at the beginning of the 20th century have not become smaller at the dawn of the 21st.

Bohr worked throughout his life to foster international cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. In his

view, this needed to be done by building on mutual trust and openness about research results, regardless of the political system to which one belonged.²⁵ Given the sharp confrontation between the superpowers after the Second World War, this was not an easy problem to solve. It was Bohr’s stubborn insistence on the principles of equal cooperation, together with the efforts of the international peace movement, that eventually led to results.

A highlight of this aspect of Bohr’s work was the invitation to him to contribute to a 1955 United Nations conference in Geneva, attended by 1400 prominent scientists from around the world.²⁶ This was a milestone in efforts to promote scientific and technical cooperation between all countries, and made an important contribution to the development of a thaw in the Cold War. The Helsinki Accords of 1975 were the final outcome of this process.

Niels Bohr’s work for peace and disarmament is also an inspiration for our times. We must, within a short space, solve a series of difficult tasks that require all the insight and capability of the international community. This applies to such areas as combating hunger, poverty and illiteracy, which affect a fifth of humankind.

We must find new ways to promote a more just society, where there is equal access to the material and spiritual benefits of humanity.

We must find new energy sources to replace fossil fuels that would otherwise threaten the natural balance, and may end in a serious climate catastrophe.

In all of these factors materialist

epistemology plays an essential part if we are to succeed in creating new advances.

We must replace the blind belief in progress with a more sober attitude. Decisions about introducing new technologies must be based on broad democratic debate, using the latest achievements in its realisation.

We need a new approach to the way we govern our society, where the anarchic system of capitalism is replaced by the planning of socialism.

Eventually more and more people will see that the alternatives are serious threats to humanity. This applies to both man-made and natural disasters – they require a new way of approaching science.

Ultimately our survival as humanity and perhaps our planet’s existence is at stake. We are faced with the unique opportunities that Bohr’s atomic model of 1913 opened. Either we create the right conditions for a new use of nuclear energy – or we face a common doom.

Homer’s epic *The Odyssey* stands as one of the highlights of ancient culture that was handed down by word of mouth, from generation to generation. We have the responsibility of achieving a similar epic, defining how we bring our planet safely through all the dangers which threaten it.

■ *With the author’s acknowledgements to the late Ib Nørlund. Originally published in Skub (Push), the quarterly magazine of the Communist Party of Denmark (DKP), 2011-4, and translated into English by the author.*

Notes and References

1 Tycho Brahe (1546-1601): Danish nobleman and prolific astronomer; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tycho_Brahe.

2 Ole Rømer (1644-1710): Danish astronomer who in 1676 made the first quantitative measurement of the speed of light; see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ole_R%C3%B8mer.

3 Henrik Pontoppidan, *Minder (Memories)*, Gyldendal, 1962, gives a vivid description of this epoch.

4 L Pauwels and J Bergier, *Aufbruch ins Dritte Jahrtausend* (published in English as *The Dawn of Magic* and also *The Morning of the Magicians*), Scherz, 1962, p 419 ff.

5 The Greek/Roman sun-god Apollo in his role as the god of light.

6 Laplace claimed in 1796 that the Earth and other planets had arisen by condensation of a rotating glowing primeval fog. A similar view had been

put forward by Kant in 1755.

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8 U Röseberg, *Niels Bohr – Leben und Wirken eines Atomphysikers (Niels Bohr – Life and Works of an Atomic Physicist)*, Spectrum, 1992, p 149.

9 Otto Gelsted (1888-1968), Danish poet and communist, translator of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* into Danish; see <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/Otto+Gelsted>.

10 O Gelsted, *Den Græske Tanke (Greek Thought)*, Trajan Publishing, 1967, p 24.

11 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Book II*, Cambridge University Press, 2000. The “golden mean” in ancient Greek philosophy, especially that of Socrates and Aristotle, is the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency, see

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_mean_%28philosophy%29.

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15 Röseberg, *op cit*, p 281.

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17 I Nørlund, *Videnskab i Krise (Science in Crisis)*, in *Dialog*, 1954, No 1.

18 *Ibid*, p 24.

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20 G W F Hegel, *Science of Logic*, George Allen & Unwin, 1969.

21 E V Ilyenkov, *Dialectical Logic: Essays on its History and Theory*, Progress Publishers, 1977.

22 N Bohr, *Hoffding on Physics and Psychology*, unpublished paper on Harold Hoffding, August 1932, Archives for the History of Quantum Physics, Bohr MSS, file no13, Niels Bohr Archive.

23 N Bohr, *Discussion with Einstein on Epistemological Problems in Atomic Physics*, in *Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge*, *op cit*, pp 45-82.

24 Röseberg, *op cit*, p 138.

25 A Pais, *Niels Bohr’s Times: In Physics, Philosophy and Politics*, Clarendon Press, 1991.

26 Röseberg, *op cit*, p 269.

Discussion: Women, Class and the Commodification of Sex

By Andrew Northall



COMRADE MARY DAVIS in her trenchant and powerfully argued article in *CR61* felt the need to state at the outset that her case was “**not** based on moral considerations” (emphasis in original), yet I fear this is one of the primary drivers for her argument.

Her key argument is that, as female sex workers “sell their bodies”, not their labour power, their activity cannot be regarded as “work”, or therefore legitimate, or an appropriate focus for trade union organisation.

On the contrary, I found the arguments and analysis of Gregor Gall, which Mary quotes, to be convincing in making clear that the female sex worker does deploy her labour power to provide (sexual) services for sale (mainly) for male clients. She no more hands over or ‘sells’ the entirety of her physical, mental and emotional body to her clients than someone in a workplace hands over their entire bodily existence for the period at work (and probably beyond) to their employer.

Part of our case against capitalism is that we argue that people’s ordinary, and what should be life-affirming, existence is almost completely subordinated to the interests of the employer in particular and capital in general. We still manage in our Marxist analysis to distinguish the sale of labour power from the sale (slavery) of our bodies. Why should we have such a blind spot when it comes to the sex industry and the sale and purchase of sex?

To claim the female sex worker sells the entirety of her body to the client, rather than her labour power to engage in sexual activity, is a mirror image of the equally false and equally anti-women ‘romantic’ notion of the ‘chaste’ woman ‘sacrificing’ her body and giving monogamous commitment to ‘her man’.

Most female sex workers regard it as precisely that, ‘work’, and manage to have no difficulty in maintaining their self-respect and dignity, to bring up families, have friends, relations and

relationships, to get by in life and to be perfectly normal and fulfilled human beings (as much as is possible for any of us under capitalism).

For some people, and maybe some comrades, sex belongs exclusively in the context of a long-term, committed relationship. For others, it is a recreational activity and/or a basic human need, and quite separate from such commitments. For many, it can be any mix of the above.

Successive editions of *Britain’s Road to Socialism* have argued that capitalism increasingly impinges on every aspect of our lives, and seeks, as Mary states in the title of her article, to commodify them. This is as true for sex as for many other aspects of our lives, so why should we single this out for special approbation? Why not call for the criminalising of gambling or alcohol, both major corrosive social and health problems?

What is the fundamental difference in principle between paying a sex worker for sexual activity, and paying someone to cut one’s hair, provide food and drink in a restaurant, to sort out a household plumbing disaster, or tend a garden?

There is no such difference, only one based on a puritanical, moral or romanticised view of sex. Mary in my view sets out a very good summary, in her analysis, of how contradictions and oppression associated with gender and race (there are many more that she could have brought in) intersect and interact with class – the ultimately shaping factor being class and exploitation. But equally, in my view, she fails to make her case that the “commodification of sex” is different from any other activity commodified under capitalism.

Mary claims her article “does not set out to oppose legalisation” (well, thank goodness for that, heaven forbid communists should become libertarians!), but then argues for the “criminalisation of men’s purchase of sex, rather than its sale”. I fail to see how this will materially help the position of women sex workers.

The industry will continue to operate in the twilight world between legality and illegality, with all the inherent consequences of the latter such as gangsterism, extortion, super-exploitation, violence etc.

The whole point of a sale-and-purchase transaction is that it is an interaction between two parties. Criminalising one, rather than the other, does not do anything except keep this service industry as a whole in the twilight and murky world of illegality.

I am not sure it is the role of communists and socialists to express moral outrage or opposition to the sale and purchase of sexual activity, as opposed to any other service industry. The fundamental issue of exploitation lies at the heart of any industry: manufacturing, service or sex.

If Mary and other comrades find sex-working to be a particularly immoral and unacceptable way for some women to earn a living, and argue that many are coerced into it, through trafficking and drug addiction, then surely the right way forward is to tackle these cases of super-exploitation, the drug addiction and shortage of income directly, rather than try and criminalise the whole of the industry.

The Factory Acts in the 19th Century were brought in by the capitalist class and generally supported by socialists on the basis they contained and limited the cases of absolute exploitation and abuse associated with the new wage-labour system.

Perhaps a similar approach to the sex industry would be appropriate: focusing the law and the power of the state on preventing and punishing violence, abuse and super-exploitation; providing treatment and care for those suffering alcohol and drug addiction; but applying the full protection and support of the law for those who want to engage in the purchase and sale of sexual activity.

BOOK REVIEW

The Complex Role of the Communist Party of China

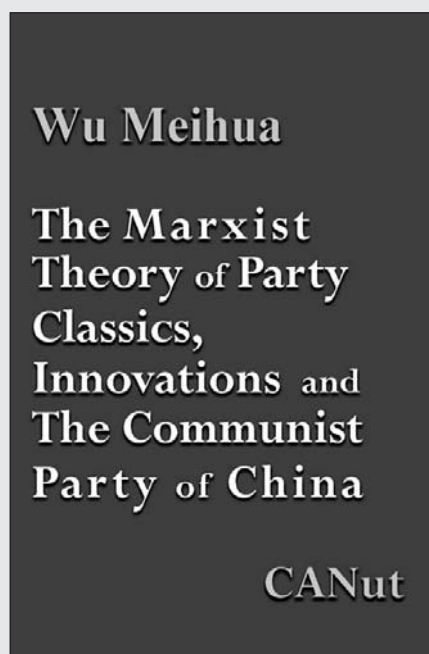
Review by Kenny Coyle

AT A TIME when the Communist Party of China (CPC) is preparing for a new generational leadership transition, and as scandalous allegations of corruption swirl around senior Party leaders, the role and function of the CPC must inevitably be subjected to renewed scrutiny.

The publication in English of *The Marxist Theory of Party: Classics, Innovations and the Communist Party of China* provides a useful insight into the day-to-day concerns as well as the strategic orientation of the Chinese party. The book is a translation of what is in essence a manual for party organisation published by Renmin University Press in Beijing and can be considered as fairly representative of thinking about the CPC's current orientation.

Despite its title, the book concentrates on the experience of the CPC; and there is an all-too-short discussion (four dedicated pages and some other scattered references) about Lenin's theoretical development of the party and little about Marxist practice before Lenin (again four dedicated pages and scattered references to the Communist League and the First and Second Internationals). This is a critical weakness since Lenin's own views underwent such an enormous transformation, from his early classic *What is to be Done?* to his later post-revolutionary insights into party tactics and strategy, such as *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, or the early documents of the Communist International. It might also have been relevant to have discussed in more detail the Marxist critics of Lenin, such as the reformist Karl Kautsky or the revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg, to put the debate into sharper relief.

There is also little discussion of the



extreme deformation of inner-party democracy within the CPSU and international communist movement during the Stalin period and after, and only a peremptory mention of Khrushchev's 20th congress speech in 1956. The virtual collapse of the CPC during the Cultural Revolution is also mentioned in passing but not analysed, suggesting a continuing reticence on this period preventing a more thorough critique.

The overwhelming bulk of the book takes Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and the once-disgraced Liu Shaoqi as the basis for 'classical' references. Certainly the rich history of the CPC provides plenty of food for thought but it is a pity there are not more comparisons of the CPC with other parties overseas. Nonetheless, given the paucity of

The Marxist Theory of Party: Classics, Innovations and the Communist Party of China

By WU MEIHUA (CANut International Publishers, Berlin, 2011, 374 pp, pbk, £14.95. ISBN: 978-3-942575-01-0. Obtainable through Central Books, <http://www.centralbooks.co.uk/html/>

information and objective analysis of the CPC itself, Wu Meihua gives a solid background for studying the CPC's ideological basis, organisational structure and style of work.

The book certainly doesn't shy away from the issue of corruption and the standards of behaviour required from cadres (See Chapter 7 part 5, 'Anti-Corruption and the Party'). This is good as far as it goes but readers will question how these criteria have been applied in practice in the current situation, where abuse of power, nepotism and the intertwining of political power and business interests present a potentially lethal danger to the socialist future for China.

Wu correctly mentions that one of the roots of corruption is the continuing remnant of feudal traditional thinking,

which promotes patriarchal and hierarchical practices. The second factor is “decadent bourgeois ideas and lifestyles” which have blossomed during the economic reform period. The third factor in Wu’s opinion is the institutional loopholes of the transition from a centrally planned economy to a socialist market economy, which allow corrupt officials to enrich themselves. A fourth element is the weak ideological outlook of cadres themselves and a fifth is the weak supervisory elements within the Party itself. The final factor is the insufficient severity of punishment.

Certainly, all these factors are important; but the very nature of a ‘socialist market economy’, with its fundamental motor being the interaction between the state and private sector, provides the objective conditions for the creation not simply of a few corrupt officials but of an entire corrupt stratum – or even the emergence of a bureaucratic bourgeoisie, the ‘crony capitalists’ prevalent in many developing Asian economies. This is surely the single most important factor since it will affect not only the efficiency of the Chinese economy or the credibility of its political leadership but the fundamental character of China’s socioeconomic and political nature.

There is clearly still a large gap between aspiration and reality here.

Wu shows that, despite profound political changes, there is a strong continuity in the political line of the CPC through the decades; and many of the ‘classical’ references come from the period of either the United Front, when the CPC allied with the bourgeois-led Guomindang against Japanese occupation, or the era of New Democracy, when the CPC reached out



beyond the working class and peasantry to form alliances with the middle strata and the national bourgeoisie. The clear suggestion is that the current strategic line of the party must also seek allies in these social forces, or their modern day equivalents, a point emphasised by former CPC leader Jiang Zemin’s so-called policy of the “Three Represents”.

The last three sections – Chapter 10: ‘The Program and Political Line of a Marxist Party and the CPC Practice’, Chapter 11: ‘Ideological Line of the Party’, and Chapter 12: ‘Ideological and Theoretical Development of the Marxist Party’, will go a long way to reassure sceptics that positive debates on Marxism and the socialist orientation of the CPC remain very much alive in China today. These are certainly the most important sections of Wu’s book

and they are thankfully well written and structured.

A large part of the book deals with the need of the CPC to be a governing party; again, some contrast with the failures of the Soviet and European CPs would have been illuminating, but Wu’s focus rarely strays from the Chinese experience.

Another major gripe is the lack of an index, but on the other hand the chapter and section headings are clear and well organised.

This book is by no means the last word on the role and function of communist parties in the modern world, nor is it a history of the Chinese Communist Party itself; but it is an invaluable help in making sense of the complex role of the CPC today and thereby of the possible future directions for China itself.

BOOK REVIEW

Public Services-Industrial Complex Revealed

Review by Kevan Nelson

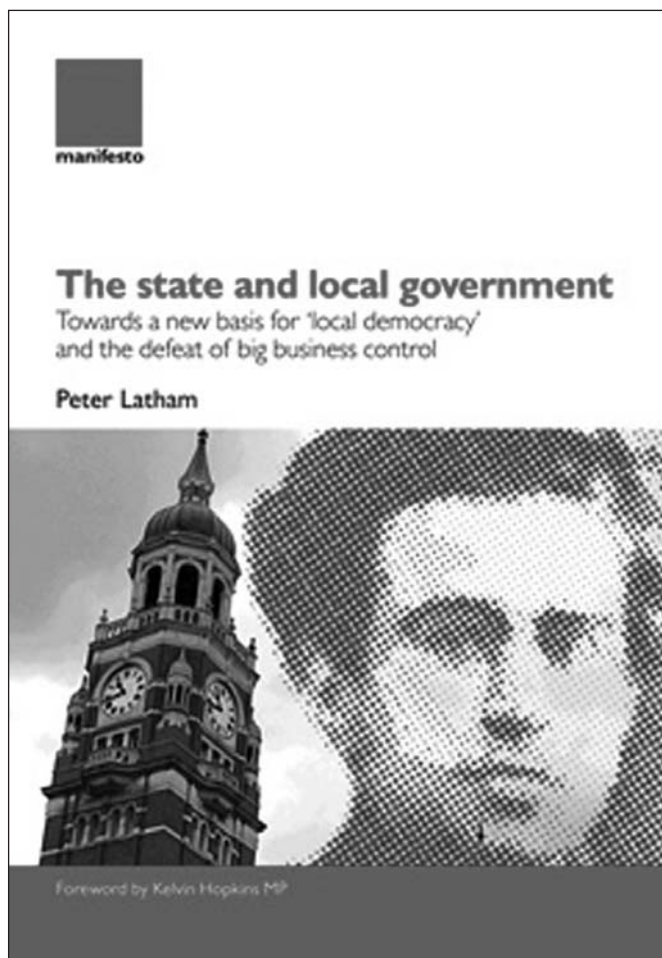
READERS OF *CR* will be familiar with the term ‘military-industrial complex’ – which is used to describe the symbiotic relationship which Western governments and their armed forces have with arms manufacturers. Peter Latham, in his extensive reference work *The State and Local Government*, details the emergence of a similar relationship in UK public services over the past 30 years, whereby private companies, through lobby groups such as the New Local Government Network and a judicious use of political donations, have shaped the public policy agenda and appropriated an ever increasing ‘market share’ of public service provision.

Latham reveals the seamless continuities between Conservative, Labour and latterly the ConDem coalition government’s policies for local government, in all cases increasing central control, eroding democratic accountability and minimising the scope for alternative radical agendas to address inequality and social disadvantage.

The bipartisan attempts to impose US-style directly elected mayors on England’s

larger cities and towns epitomises the common agenda of the political elite to undermine the collective power of elected councillors and impose what Latham repeatedly describes as “the optimal internal management arrangement for privatisation of local government services”. This model of governance, introduced in Labour’s Local Government Act of 2000, has persistently failed to attract public support, notably on 3 May 2012 when it was rejected in 9 out of 10 Government-imposed referenda – not a surprising outcome, given the ample evidence of endemic bribery and corruption in mayor-led municipal systems in Europe and the USA, impressively documented here by Latham.

The State and Local Government usefully locates a study of contemporary local government in the context of orthodox political theories of democracy and the state – ranging from classical to neoliberal – as well as providing an insight into the theory of state monopoly capitalism and alternative Marxist theories. There is a telling reference to an 1865 Commons speech by Liberal



MP Robert Lowe (who had described the working class as “impulsive, unreflecting, violent people” guilty of “venality, ignorance, drunkenness and intimidation”¹), calling for “safeguards against democracy” as popular pressure mounted for the Reform Act which in 1867 gave working men the right to vote for the first time.

Ruling class attitudes to working class political representation have changed little since Lowe’s time. Latham argues convincingly that the central controls

placed on local government, the constant structural reorganisations and more recently the demise of the committee system and the executive powers bestowed on individual mayors are merely variations on the same theme.

A 2006 study revealed that Burnley Council in North West England controlled only 7% of public spending in its area, as unelected ‘quangos’ and ‘local partnerships’ usurped its democratic remit. Today in Northumberland there is one council and 67 councillors yet in the same area in the 1970s there were

The State and Local Government: Towards a new basis for 'local democracy' and the defeat of big business control

By PETER LATHAM (Manifesto Press, London, 2011, 509 pp, pbk, £14.95. ISBN: 978-1-907464-05-8)

22 councils and 647 councillors.

Latham rightly identifies *The British State* by James Harvey and Katherine Hood as a seminal work on local government which, as long ago as 1958, identified “the serious decline in the independence of local authorities” as the UK state became increasingly subordinate to the giant monopolies.

Nicholas Ridley, the deceased strategist of the Tory right, achieved deserved notoriety for his plan to defeat the NUM after the 1974 coal strike brought down the Heath government. Less well known is his similar attack in 1986 on the local government unions as “the root cause of rotten local services” and his stated intention of compulsory competitive tendering being “to smash the grip” of the unions. What has followed is an orgy of privatisation leading to one third of all services being marketised but with 65% of personal social services and 63% of housing services being removed from public provision. Ridley’s ideal notion of an “enabling authority meeting once a year to exchange contracts” has become the public sector norm

well beyond local government.

Privatisation is now extending further into the public realm with a 42.5 acre swathe of Liverpool city centre owned by the Duke of Westminster’s Grosvenor property conglomerate, with its own private security force and no public right of way. This is a trend picked up by Marxist geographer David Harvey, who in his new book *Rebel Cities* frames recent uprisings in urban centres worldwide as an “assertion of public rights against the excesses of neoliberal capitalism – skyrocketing rents, austerity cuts to public services, foreclosure fraud.”²

Latham notes the incisive analysis by academic Christopher Stoney of the emasculation of local democracy by business interests and managerial elites – both familiar to all those working in the public sector. Also acknowledged is the pioneering work of Dexter Whitfield who has not only developed a sharp analysis of the “process by which market forces are imposed on public services” but has successfully advised many union branches on resisting privatisation.

The purpose of the book is

to offer “a new basis for local democracy and the defeat of big business control”, and Latham sets out a raft of policy proposals to that end. These include: restoring the right of all elected councillors to make policy; smaller councils and more councillors; a reduction in councillor allowances; direct provision of services; and the replacement of council tax by an annual land value tax and progressive taxation of income and wealth. Some of Latham’s ideas are already bearing fruit. For example, his call for an end to the Private Finance Initiative and Public Private Partnerships which are “wasting billions of pounds of public money boosting the profits of private contractors” was echoed in a recent (May 2012) report of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee which stated “the current model of PFI is unsustainable”.³

Latham draws on a vast international canvas when examining alternative models of local government. He provides detailed case studies of decentralised, effective and vibrant democracies in the Indian state of Kerala and in Porto Alegre in Brazil, as well as community-empowering

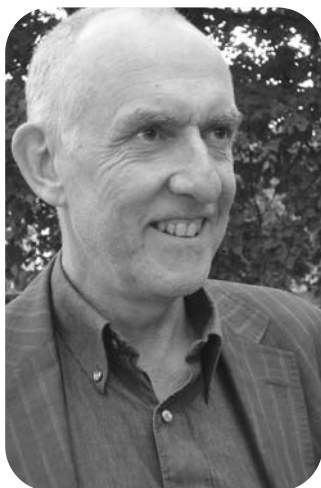
local political structures in China, Cuba and Venezuela.

Latham provides an invaluable critique of New Labour’s ‘governance project’ appropriating local democracy for private sector interests and his is a sobering read for anyone viewing the Labour Party’s welcome resurgence in local government through rose-tinted glasses. He concludes with a comprehensive analysis of the ruling class offensive and anticipates the double-dip recession as a likely consequence of Coalition Government economic policies.

This highly recommended book is an empirical study with meticulously sourced references and will lend itself to continuous updating as local government in Britain is subjected to the ravages of austerity.

Notes and References

- 1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_League.
- 2 http://www.bostonreview.net/BR37.3/david_harvey_rebel_cities_occupy_wall_street.php.
- 3 <http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-accounts-committee/news/pfi-equity1/>



SOULFOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

Poets' Parade

Is There a Reason?

by Sheree Mack

"Is there a reason for all this?"
they ask
and their question drifts
on the festering air of
discontent.

Ministers nudge each other,
snigger and snide
as the country slides into a
deeper pit of dishonour.

He continues to stand at the
box, eyes slitting,
hair-flicking as he thinks about
another pledge to stem the
tide.

"We were just wondering if
there is a reason for all this
or ...?"
Or is it just Tory privilege? It's
left unsaid.

This country is ill.
Its life source of jobs, the NHS
and society
are dripping from an open
wound.
The economy is a ruptured
spleen
caused by lethal butterfingers
budgets,
and estuary vowels feasting
around
dinner tables of cash.

The lighter shade of Reds stare
on at the open page,
or the wall, where a poster of
Tony Blair peels away.
The North wonders if they'll be
able to afford a pasty for lunch
while the South looks around an
extending Grammar School.

"We couldn't not ask", they
murmur
holding his gaze waiting
and waiting for his explanation
or
some kind of Saviour.

For this issue, *Soul Food* transforms
itself into a kind of May Day parade of
political poetry. The leading poem in the
procession is a sad and subtle poem
specially written for us by Sheree Mack,
deftly wielding her words like parade
sticks.

The march-past continues (and ends)
with some Brechtian and other poems by
readers. These have been kindly sent in
since the *'Do-It-Yourself Brecht Toolkit'*
column in *CR57*. The main body of the
parade consists of poems taken from the
new e-book, *The Robin Hood Book: Poets
in Support of the Robin Hood Tax* (details
in the Acknowledgements at the end).

As you will see, there are a range of
moods in the poems in this selection.
Some marchers are very vocal and angry,
others thoughtful and calm. But they are
all closely linked up. Apart from the
common desire to write radically, against

capitalism, and to write to make a
difference, you will also notice that many
writers are marching arm in arm, linked
by common themes.

Enjoy the parade ... and join the next
one!

Crossing the Severn Sea

by Gerry Rowe

A double stitch across the
Severn Sea,
Two changing views for
wondering drivers' eyes.
Elation mixed with
reservation

Thrown up by exploitation,
tinged with alienation.

Blue on green, silver on grey,
spread with mist

Suspended on fenland under
blue sky,

Carded wool to be combed out
by the sun

That flies towards its own salty
solution

To the western need for
destination

That drives you a handful of
times a week

This way and that for
accumulation

Of hours and scars and bytes
and gouged out gain.

On one side profit, the other a
list

Of priceless sights from nature's
non-artist.

Sleight of Hand

by Richard Tucker

Markets crashed:
We saw queues form
outside banks;
Banks failed:
We watched as they were
given our money;
Politicians stood aside:
Workers lost their jobs,
then homes.

The people asked, "What
can be done?"
But were told the fault lay
with them:
They had spent and presumed
for too much;
To expect dignity in old age
was *not* a right;
They were living too long
without being useful.

Any remedy for such
profligacy
Would, of course, have
to be bitter,
They would understand ...
in time ...

The well-learnt
conjuring trick
Is once more
accomplished –
Where insolent privilege
demands
That the poor pay
the price
For the wealthy's
blunders.

Capital

by Stuart M Snowden

The rich world
And the other half
Bow down together
To the golden calf.

In Africa
It buys bullets and bombs;
In America
Entertainment and fun.

An abstract symbol,
A token of exchange,
Has become a God
Terrible and strange

Who tramples down
With insatiable greed,
The pallid, thin figure
Of human need.

Economies

by Terry Jones

This autumn economy whispers
to itself,
secrets of gold, lost liquidities,
vexed branches visible in cold
sunlight
and nests stood naked to the
wind. Is it true still
the single value of a leaf is spent
where it lands?
I bring in Raymond Glasson, old
dyker,
fence-builder, countryman of
Burnrigg:
once, when he needed the pay,
he pushed his hand in the hedge
to be cut,
found it curled round a
sparrow's nest;
its warmth in his palm like the
tit of his first girl,
so he left it there in its quiet,
went unpaid.
I saw him down at his allotment
this evening,
the year's graph falling about
him where he worked
close to home. This is time for
mulch protection,
graftings, new plantings, dormant
perennials:
– those and a nest left alone.
Five eggs, I think he said,
speckled and tiny.

In the dark hours

by Tom Kelly

wind hollows skin
tight as a drum,
this is the time
when we hold on.

In the dark hours
watch figures climb,
fill fingernails,
scratch against doors
closed long ago.



Pit Closure as a Tarantino Short

by Helen Mort
(after Ian McMillan)

The Suit who pulled
the trigger
left a card between the
victim's fingers,
printed white and red, but
Business Closed
was all it said.
He wiped his bloodless hands
against his shirt for show,
as if someone still
watched him
as he made to go. And as
he turned,
he met the dead man's stare
and noticed how the
bullet hole
between those two dark eyes
made up a black ellipsis;
then he swore
he heard the dead man's voice
above the heartbeat of
the clock:
Nothing's finished, only given up.
Before he left, he checked
the lock.
(First published in the
Morning Star, 2011)

Kettled

by Steph Pike

the pigeons feel it first
fling themselves up,
disperse to grey puffs of smoke
against the taut violet sky –
we fall silent
senses strain
there ...
above the traffic's evening yawn
it comes:
the thick beat of aggression
the drum, drum, drum
of baton on shield

a tsunami of visors and riot
shields
roars "Move Forward!"
and we are netted
in an industrial trawl
that bags activists, protesters
and a few bewildered shoppers
dragged from the street
We are encircled, ensnared,
enraged; we swirl like eddies,
blow like snowglobe fakes
our chants bounce from mouth
to mouth
we catch each others' eyes for
warmth



try to break out, wait
try to break out, wait

minutes tick like bombs,
erupt in a riot of whinnies, failing
hooves –
crushed by a wall of damp
horsehair muscle
with nowhere to go – we
become a tangle
of elbows and twisted limbs –
are dispersed
to kerbs, into panes of glass,
bloodied grit

Much later they hand out
bottled water
but this is no benign embrace:
this is the blue circle of a
vindictive bruise,
a stranglehold, a tightening
noose –
but we will not be bullied,
broken, scared of –
our resolve is strengthened,
tightened;
students, workers, the dispossessed,
the links of common cause are
forged
our rising tide will lash and boil
in this crucible of repression

we will be back

Trot Punter
by Alan Morrison

The granny-glassed Trotskyite
who punctuated his
dialectic with “and so on and so
forth”, said
with nostalgic glints gilding his
spectacle rims:
“My image of true working-class
solidarity is

the after-shift beers shared by
two labourers
in brick-dusted donkey jackets
propped at a bar
shoulder to shoulder, passing a
fag between them
with the bashful intimacy of
clandestine lovers” –
then smiled with picturesque
triumph as he sipped
at his half Stella Artois in a
throbbing pub’s backstreet
sabbatical for doctoral lubrications,
bourgeoisie sipping
Belgian respite, Bolsheviks with
stool-cropped knees

I gazed at the bar and imagined
two labourers
elbow-propped there, burly as
clouds
in their authentic togs – cloth
caps encrusting
their scalps like old loaves that
puff then deflate
as tarred lungs, fail to rise into
radical action,
sag to shrunken balloons,
dishevelled red flags
subsumed in Jack bunting and
John Bull burps
collapse to a barrage of sighs,
militancy
sinking in pints and blurred eyes,
browned-off
old loaves by the dozen in an
oven left open
to cool off the dough till the
toughest crusts soften

Last Night of the ConDems
by Dermot Foster

Members of the ruling class
secreted in their private boxes

snigger as they mouth their
mantra,
We Are All In This Together.
Feet tapping, checking shares,
no worries, it’s all theirs.

In the stalls we workers stand,
shout out - we’re not in this at all!
Debate and formulate our Marx,
and
share out the instruments.
Feet pinching, lacking power,
we’re tuning up to take what’s
ours.

Listen, we have our chants,
our working songs and radical
raps.
We can rally round and start a
band.
Sing up: ConDems be damned!
It’s your last night, you’re all
played out,
tomorrow, the first day of our
Party.

Acknowledgements

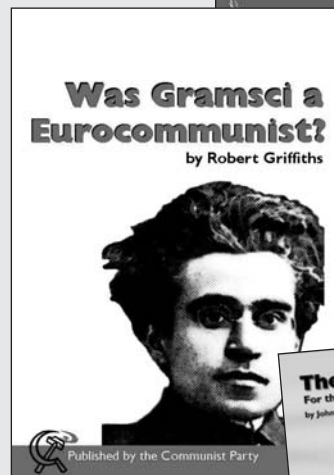
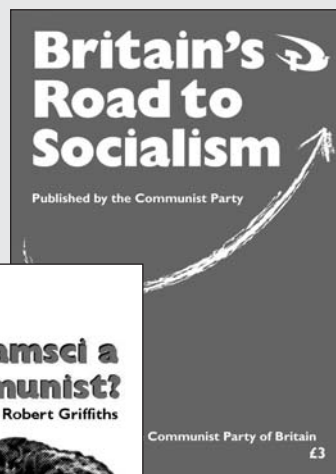
Thanks firstly to the people who sent poems in: Sheree Mack, Gerry Rowe, Richard Tucker, Stuart M Snowden, and Dermot Foster. The other poems are from *The Robin Hood Book: Poets in Support of the Robin Hood Tax*, selected and edited by Alan Morrison and Angela Topping: thanks to them for permission to publish a few of the poems. The e-book is available to download from Caparison Press for £2.99. It is the follow-up to 2011’s *Emergency Verse: Poems in Defence of the Welfare State*. With over 400 pages of poetry, and some sustained polemical writing to boot, it’s excellent value for money. Buy it, read it, write a poem yourself and send it to me at artseditor@communistreview.org.uk.

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip



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