



COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Ken Fuller** Charles Dickens the masses, race and empire
- **Yuri Emelianov** 'Stalin's Purges' of 1937-8 part 3
- **Joe Clark** Economics and the State
- Plus discussion, book reviews and Soul Food



Charles Dickens the masses, race and empire



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CHARLES DICKENS: The Masses, Race and Empire, part 1

by Ken Fuller page 2

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editorial



By Martin Levy

THE LAST ISSUE of *CR* featured the EU Single Market on the cover, the previous one had an image of Stalin, and now *CR65* has Charles Dickens. Isn't that a bit eclectic for the theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party? And, in any case, is Dickens – even in the bicentenary of his birth – really that important, when Britain's working class is facing a savage onslaught from the ConDem coalition, and the TUC is gearing up for a massive demonstration, 'A Future that Works', on October 20?

As it happens, ConDem policies are a very good reason for us to put Dickens on the cover, since those policies are driving this country back to the sort of poverty and selfish bourgeois ethos of Victorian Britain which Dickens was at pains to criticise. And furthermore, as we noted in *CR62*, Dickens's works are part of the British cultural heritage, which is threatened by corporate domination of the mass media, the commodification of education and the reduced access of working class people to literature, theatre and the arts.

But that doesn't mean that we on the Left should accept our cultural heritage uncritically. Dickens was certainly a great writer, "wonderful at describing appearance", as Ken Fuller notes, in part 1 of his two-part article. On the other hand, "Dickens hardly ever describes work". His sympathy for the poor, Ken argues, was an extension of self-pity: he sentimentalises poverty and romanticises 'respectable' working class life. Here, and throughout his article, Ken crosses swords with the great 20th century British Marxist T A Jackson, accusing him of almost "trying to recruit Dickens as a posthumous member of the United Front."

This is by no means an esoteric matter. Literature, like all culture, presents a model of society. Jackson recognised that Dickens did not "show any confidence in the proletariat as pioneers of a newer and brighter future", and that his earlier work was characterised by the "Cheeryble illusion" that society's ills would be solved if employers

were simply kinder to their workforces. Ken argues here that this illusion permeates the whole of Dickens's work.

It is an illusion which, tragically, permeates much of the British labour movement too. When Ed Miliband talks about "responsible capitalism", is he not selling the Cheeryble principle? This is a moral argument which completely ignores the profit motive which underpins capitalism. But the same might also be said about the TUC's 'A Future that Works' pamphlet,¹ which argues for many worthy measures but fails to address the need for public ownership of banking and other essential industries – an issue very much at the heart of the People's Charter for Change.

Another illusion affecting our labour movement is the nature of the state. In his article here – which could be taken as an extension of the discussion around the new edition of the Communist Party's programme, *Britain's Road to Socialism* – Joe Clark demonstrates that the monopoly capitalist state is not neutral, that real democracy is subverted, not only by the power of the press but by the myriad ways in which the ruling class solves its differences outside the public domain, and that – as in Chile in 1973 – "capitalism will do what it can to prevent any socialist experiment succeeding." But, in answer to the question "Is socialism impossible?" he observes that it is only so if we believe it to be; capitalism has many vulnerabilities, and "Our introverted national despondency must be countered by a renewed internationalism."

The illusions promoted by our ruling class represent a common thread running through many recent issues of this journal. John Foster in *CR64* exposed the reality of employment rights in the EU Single Market, and the hypocrisy of the 'European Social Model'; while Yuri Emelianov, in the first two parts of his article on 'Stalin's Purges' of 1937-8, laid the myth that Stalin was principally responsible for the crimes which took place, revealing a more complex scenario, a theme which he continues in his final part. However, his conclusions still make

uncomfortable reading for communists. The purges not only "revealed the worst features of human nature", but "would not have developed to such an extent, had [they] not been supported throughout all layers of Soviet society. ... The transformation of social status, political thinking and cultural values of the majority of the Soviet people developed within too short a time-period. ... The discarding of traditional moral values of prerevolutionary life did not always result in the establishment of new more advanced moral norms. ... [T]he quality of Party leadership at all levels left much to be desired. ... Millions of Soviet people were ready to explain complicated problems of everyday existence by the evil work of secret enemies."

A correct assessment of communist history is essential if the mistakes of the past are to be avoided. We need to examine developments in their historical context, to apply a dialectical materialist approach. Yuri's articles have already generated some discussion responses, from Roger Fletcher and John Ellison, which we publish in this issue. Though disagreeing in their main argument, it is interesting that both pick up the impact that bitter revolutionary struggles can have on attitudes to human rights. May the discussion continue!

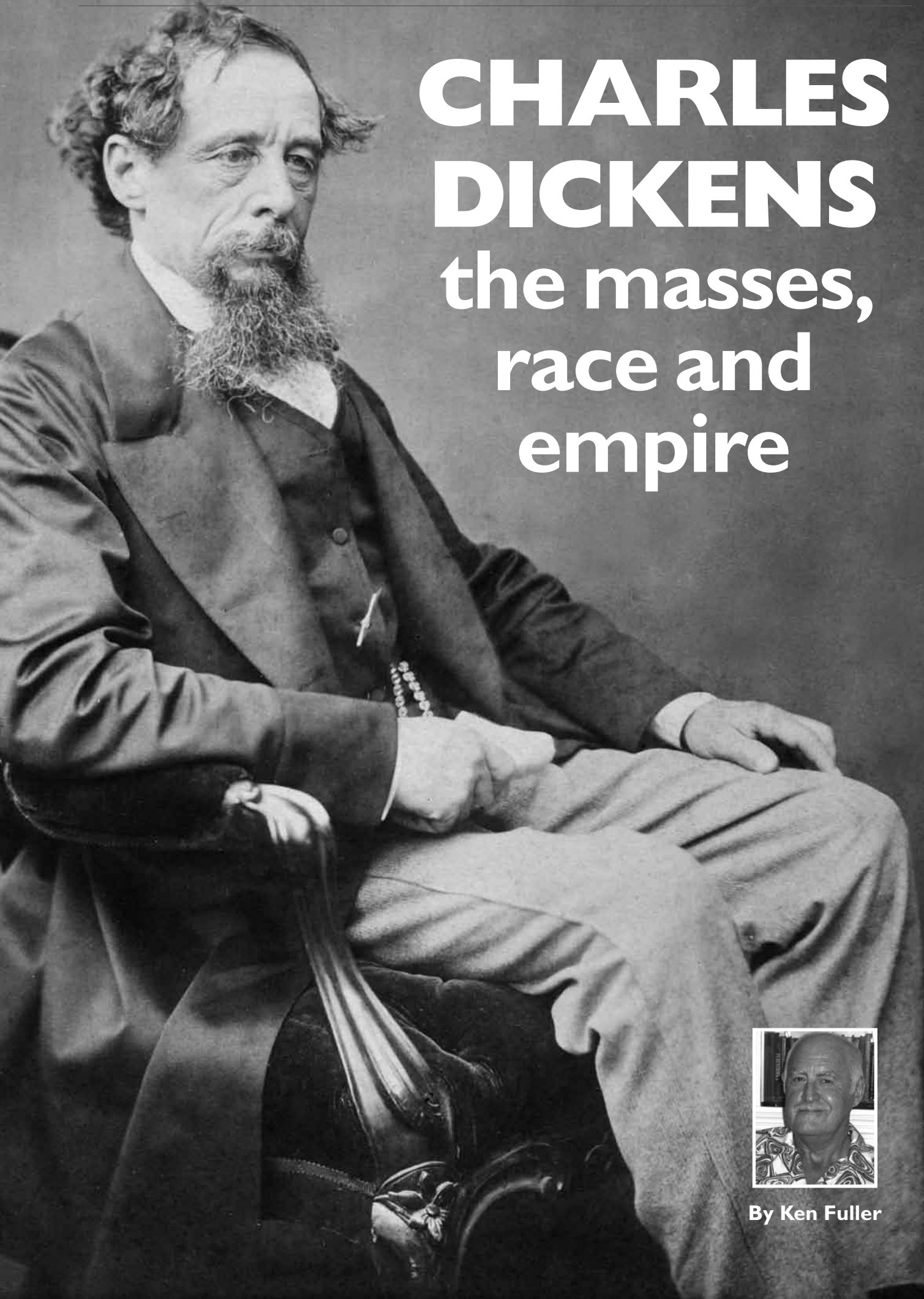
In this issue we also include three book reviews – two more of theoretical works from China, published by CANut, and one of Ken Keable's *London Recruits*, a book which should inspire that "renewed internationalism" of which Joe writes. The topic of Chile in 1973 returns in *Soul Food*, which on this occasion is devoted entirely to singer and songwriter Victor Jara, murdered by the military after Pinochet's coup d'état. Now there was an artist who did show "confidence in the proletariat as pioneers of a newer and brighter future".

Notes and References

1 *Austerity is Failing. We Need a Future that Works*, Trades Union Congress, July 2012.

CHARLES DICKENS

the masses,
race and
empire



By Ken Fuller

Part 1: Dickens and the Masses

I. INTRODUCTION: BRITISH MARXISM (AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY) AND DICKENS

CHARLES DICKENS, whose bicentenary is being celebrated this year, was praised in 1854 by Karl Marx as having, along with Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë and Mrs. Gaskell, painted every section of the middle class (*ie* the middle and petty bourgeoisie) as being

“full of presumption, affectation, petty tyranny and ignorance; and the civilised world have confirmed their verdict with the damning epigram that it has fixed to this class that ‘they are servile to those above, and tyrannical to those beneath them.’”¹

But if these writers were unflatteringly honest in their observations of the bourgeoisie, they were also subject to certain limitations when casting their eyes on bourgeois society as a whole. Writing in 1936, just months before he died in the Spanish Civil War, Ralph Fox (one of the Communist Party of Great Britain’s outstanding intellectuals) argued that it was impossible for the 19th-century novelist “to see his people truly,” because although there was another world outside his own “sheltered gentility,” it “must never, never be recognized”.² Writers like Dickens and Scott

“could not see through the surface respectability of their society to the progressive degradation of man going on

beneath The Victorians were well enough aware of the shallowness of the standards of the triumphant middle class, and they could flay that shallowness as well as the next man, but they could not see the deeper processes of spiritual disintegration at work. They could not see the *baseness* of capitalist society.”³

But even if they could see rather more than Fox allows, they were constrained from actually portraying it in their writings, having made a “compromise with romanticism, that Victorian whore with the mock-modestly averted glance.” While realists of the 18th century like Fielding had written frankly, they “had written mainly for a very small and highly educated public, which considered it one of their class privileges to indulge the luxury of an enlightened and ‘philosophical’ view of the realities of human existence.” A century later, the novelist had to consider his “public,” for there “are things you cannot say to the masses if you are a decent middle-class man.”⁴

In a sense, even Dickens’s *A Child’s History of England*, serialised between 1851 and 1853, might be cited as a case in point. In this romp through English history, one sacred cow after another is led to slaughter. Dickens has little time for any of our former rulers, with the exception of Alfred the Great and Oliver Cromwell, the vast majority having been either villains, wastrels or both. But the book comes to an abrupt halt with the so-called ‘Glorious Revolution’ of 1688 which, after the far more significant revolution of the 1640s,

sealed the fate of feudalism and left the way free for the development of the capitalist system. Although claiming to be a republican, Dickens ends the book with: “GOD SAVE THE QUEEN!”

In his novels, of course, Dickens was compelled to deal with the capitalist era. How to do this without telling the whole truth? According to Fox, “English conditions made it inevitable” that Dickens would solve his problem “by the compromise of sentimental romanticism.”⁵ By “English conditions”, Fox means the absence of violent conflicts such as existed in France, which compelled honest writers there at least to create characters who were recognisably actors in the historical process then unfolding.

Enter T A Jackson

A few months after Fox’s essay, T A Jackson, another of the CPGB’s leading intellectuals, produced a Marxist assessment of Dickens in which he related each of the major novels to the time it was written, tracing the novelist’s development from an initial optimistic phase, which saw the production of *Pickwick*, *Oliver Twist*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge* and *American Notes* (1836-42), through a transitional phase covering the years 1842-1848 (the Christmas books, *American Notes*, *Pictures from Italy*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *Dombey and Son* and *David Copperfield*), and the final period, 1849-65, in which he wrote *Bleak House*, *Hard Times*, *Little Dorritt*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend*.

Jackson argues that while the first period, coinciding with the rise of Chartism, is characterised by exuberance and spontaneity, this

optimistic outlook received a shock during Dickens’s first visit to the USA, leading to a growing pessimism in the middle phase which, with the “definitive triumph of European reaction in 1850”,⁶ deepened perceptibly in the final period. There is little doubt that Dickens’s works grew darker as time progressed, and it is quite possible that his pessimism was linked to the growth of social ills he had previously thought curable, and of bourgeois ‘humbug’ and hypocrisy he had hoped would fade.

Jackson, however, goes much further than this, arguing that by 1859 Dickens was “more ready to appreciate the need for a mass uprising and more ready to tolerate the use of armed force”,⁷ and that he increasingly sensed “that the only possible remedy for so vast an evil [as bourgeois society itself]” was “that of complete social revolution”,⁸ albeit one that was at that time unattainable. Jackson’s thesis is not supported by the evidence, and it is difficult to disagree with George Orwell, writing three years later, when he says that the former is attempting to “steal” Dickens for Marxism (as did, just as improbably, Chesterton for Catholicism).⁹ It is almost as if Jackson is trying to recruit Dickens as a posthumous member of the United Front.

Jackson is not blind to Dickens’s limitations, citing his “inability to distinguish the proletariat as a distinct social formation”, and noting that in *Hard Times* he “does not yet show any confidence in the proletariat as pioneers of a newer and brighter future.” Dickens was, he says, “ever and always, the petit-bourgeois in revolt.”¹⁰ It is therefore astonishing that



Jackson attempts to shoe-horn the Victorian novelist into the cause of revolution, compromising his Marxist approach to Dickens's work by on some occasions ignoring or overlooking evidence not conducive to his case and on others misinterpreting Dickens's intentions.

Ironically, the social-democrat Orwell is far more accurate, saying that Dickens's outlook was limited by his belonging mentally to the small urban bourgeoisie.

"He sees the world as a middle-class world, and everything outside those limits is either laughable or slightly wicked. On the one hand, he has no contact with industry or the soil; on the other, no contact with the governing classes. ... He is vaguely on the side of the working class ... but he does not in reality know much about them."¹¹

Hardly surprising, then, that Dickens hardly ever describes work; wonderful at describing appearance, he almost never tries his hand at process. "Everything is seen from the consumer-angle." Dickens's attacks on society were of a *moral* nature, "always pointing to a change of spirit rather than a change of structure," and therefore he "seems to have succeeded in attacking everybody and antagonizing nobody."¹²

In this first part of the article, we shall attempt to take an objective view of Dickens's stance with regard to the masses (in so doing crossing swords with Jackson on several occasions), while the second part, in the next issue of *CR*, will examine his views on race and empire – a subject largely ignored during this year's celebrations and in the recent biography by Claire Tomalin, but also by Jackson, who therefore misses the insights these provide.

II. DICKENS: REFORMER OR REVOLUTIONARY?

The First American Tour and its Aftermath

In embarking upon his first tour of the USA in 1842, Charles Dickens had anticipated making the acquaintance of "the Republic of my imagination",¹³ but the trip proved a disappointment, and in his record of the tour, published as *American Notes*, he paints an unflattering picture of America and Americans.

He gives further vent to his scorn in the American episodes of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which he commenced almost immediately and published in full two years later. In this, Dickens unmercifully satirises Americans who, usually bearing military titles, praise their own country with their eyes closed and criticise Britain from a position of ignorance. Most memorable is the association which, having hitherto supported an apostle of Irish freedom, drops Martin immediately when it is realised he also advocates emancipation of the slaves.

On the voyage home, Martin's companion Mark Tapley describes how he would like to depict the American eagle:

"I should want to draw it like a Bat, for its short-sightedness; like a Bantam, for its bragging; like a Magpie, for its honesty; like a Peacock, for its vanity; like a Ostrich, for its putting its head in the mud, and thinking nobody sees it –"¹⁴

Jackson would have it that Dickens's reaction to his American experience amounts to

"a confirmation of his radicalism, plus a reinforcement. We get, that is to say,

reason to believe that Dickens was much more profoundly Radical – much more near to *revolutionary Republicanism* – nearer to the very fringe of Communism – than in his earlier works he allowed himself to appear."¹⁵

This was far from the case. It is surely significant that Dickens has Martin respond to Mark Tapley's outburst thus:

"And like a Phoenix, for its power of springing from the ashes of its faults and vices, and soaring up anew into the sky!"¹⁴

This anticipates Dickens's own reconciliation with the USA during his second tour in 1868, when he would tell a dinner laid on for him by press representatives that he was astonished by the remarkable changes that had swept the country in the intervening 25 years, and that to atone for his previous harsh judgment he would have these conciliatory remarks appended to each edition of *Notes* and *Chuzzlewit* while they remained in copyright.¹⁶ And, of course, the USA was decidedly more, not less, of a bourgeois society in 1868 than it had been in 1842.

Just as the "ostentation of vulgar self-seeking" in the USA led Dickens to write *Chuzzlewit*, says Jackson, "so his return to England seems to have brought him a further shock to his recognition that the *Pride* prevalent in Britain – being, basically, *purse-pride* – was an even more obnoxious vice."¹⁷

Again, Jackson overstates his case. Dickens contrasts the US experience, as illustrated by Mark Tapley's delineation of the American eagle, by, a page later, describing the voyagers' return to England:

"Bright as the scene was; fresh, and full of motion; airy, free,



T. A. Jackson

and sparkling; it was nothing to the life and exultation in the breasts of the two travelers, at sight of the old churches, roofs, and darkened chimney stacks of Home."¹⁸

Here, Dickens was almost as guilty as the Americans in *Chuzzlewit*, for if his eyes were open to the imperfections of his homeland, his mind – and his work – was closed to any suggestion that they might be righted by collective action. The Tolpuddle Martyrs had been sentenced to transportation in 1834. The People's Charter had been launched in 1838. The following year had seen the Newport Rising. In 1842, the very year that Dickens commenced *Chuzzlewit*, the Chartists' latest petition gained over three million signatures; a wave of strikes



occurred during the depression of 1841-42, many of them led by Chartists; there were 1,500 arrests arising from this unrest, and 50 people were sentenced to transportation.

But not a mention of this will you encounter in *Chuzzlewit*. Similarly, Tomalin notes that, as Dickens finished *Dombey and Son* a few years later, “a huge gathering of Chartists, for whom he had considerable sympathy, was in London delivering a petition to parliament for extending the vote, but there is no hint of such contemporary issues in its pages.”¹⁹ In fact, Tomalin provides no evidence for Dickens’s Chartist sympathies, and several writers (even Jackson) accept that Dickens had used *Barnaby Rudge*, published in 1841 but set at the time of the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, to demonstrate his horror of mob violence in an oblique

reference to “physical-force Chartism”.²⁰ And Dickens’s utter contempt for Parliament was hardly a sound basis for supporting a movement devoted to a widening of the franchise.

How do we explain the failure of Dickens, of all Victorian novelists the one most noted for his sympathetic portrayal of the poor, either to investigate the root causes of poverty or to open his writings to a supportive portrayal of those organising to combat its effects? Writing of a later era, Fox argues that although the novelist should not “abdicate his function to the psychologist”, he/she must take into account “the deeper, subconscious elements in man”.²¹ The same advice applies to a study of Dickens, for the novelist was led to his sympathy by the scars on his psyche.

Sympathy, but not Solidarity

In *The Haunted Man*, one of Dickens’s ‘Christmas books’, the protagonist finds that, if all memory of personal sorrow and regret is erased, compassion disappears also. In order to sympathise with the suffering of others, Dickens is saying, you must have suffered yourself. There is little doubt that this highly debatable proposition derives from Dickens’s own experience as a boy, for his father’s irresponsible inability to live within his means probably inflicted more misery on the son than on the parent. While John Dickens was in Marshalsea debtors’ prison Charles, then aged 12, was sent to work in a riverside blacking factory, and this experience, mentioned only briefly by Jackson, marked him for life. At a personal level, he felt betrayed by parents who, while putting him to work, provided his sister with a musical education. More than any other, it was probably this experience,

fictionalised in *David Copperfield*, which served as the basis for his sympathy for the poor.

John Forster, Dickens’s friend and biographer, also traced the novelist’s bitterness and anger to his childhood experiences, but Jackson dismisses this explanation as “worse than worthless,” before appearing to contradict himself by saying that Dickens’s childhood suffering “gave him a reason why no child ought ever to have such sufferings to endure”.²² Jackson is only partly right here, for Dickens’s sympathy – and he never advanced beyond this – was an extension of self-pity.

Orwell in fact argues that Dickens “is right in saying that a gifted child ought not to work ten hours a day pasting labels on bottles, but what he does not say is that no child ought to be condemned to such a fate, and there is no reason for inferring that he thinks it.”²³ What, after all, was Dickens’s attitude to his fellow-sufferers at the blacking factory? Orwell quotes Dickens’s own words as they appear, not in the fictionalisation of the episode in *Copperfield*, but in Forster’s biography:

“No words can express the secret agony of my soul as I sunk into this companionship; compared these everyday associates with those of happier childhood But I held some station at the blacking warehouse too I soon became at least as expeditious and as skilful with my hands as either of the other boys. Though perfectly familiar with them, my conduct and manners were different enough from theirs to place a space between us. They, and the men, always spoke of me as ‘the young gentleman’.”²⁴

Dingle Foot also points out that in *Copperfield* Dickens exhibits no sympathy for David’s companions at the blacking factory:

“It never seems to have crossed his mind that they were also unfortunates, or that someone should be indignant on their behalf. His only feeling was one of acute self-pity at having been obliged to associate with them. This does not mean, of course, that he had no sympathy for the working classes. But he did not expect to live with them. And he hated the mob.”²⁵

This places Dickens’s portrayal of sympathetic working-class characters in context. It is true, as Jackson is anxious to point out, that in his novels Dickens treats many of his poor characters far more warmly, granting them nobility and generosity, than he does their supposed ‘betters’. But the poverty we see in Dickens is, as Fox says, sentimentalised, his treatment of ‘respectable’ working-class life romanticised.

“If he had been able to see the life of Seven Dials as it really was, he would have found the picture overwhelmingly horrible, his name would have become a battle-ground, he might even have found the task too great for him and turned away in loathing and disgust from the city he loved. He chose the easier method of sentimentalizing reality.”²⁶

Forced to lead such a life for even a day, Dickens would have been appalled not just by its physical discomforts and horrors but by its very narrowness.



The Mob, and Trade Unions

Dickens's hatred of 'the mob', or of anything which might have led to its assembly, is evident in his treatment of the English Revolution (which, of course, is never referred to as such) in *A Child's History* – written in what Jackson calls his "third period." Dickens complains of the Long Parliament:

"In some of their proceedings, this famous Parliament passed the bounds of previous law and custom, yielded to and favoured riotous assemblages of the people, and acted tyrannically in imprisoning some who differed from the popular leaders."²⁷

In a passing reference to the Agitators in Cromwell's New Model Army, he tells us that the soldiers "were as much opposed to the Bishops as to the Pope himself: and the very privates, drummers, and trumpeters, had such an inconvenient habit of starting up and preaching long-winded discourse, that I would not have belonged to that army on any account." The Levellers are not called such but merely referred to as "mutineers", the capture and execution of a number of them at Burford serving only as an illustration of the fact that "Oliver was not a man to be trifled with."²⁸ Is it not possible that, had he lived longer, this man who despised Parliament and admired Alfred the Great and Cromwell would have sought not revolution as Jackson argues but, as is often the case with "the petit-bourgeois in revolt", the emergence of a 'Strong Man'?

Dickens was comfortable with the poor as victims, less so when they began to organise. Sympathy for working people never developed into solidarity, for that would have placed

Dickens *alongside* the poor, which is somewhere he had no wish to be. Instead, he intended to put as much distance between the sordid circumstances of his childhood and himself as he possibly could, and his writing – and, in later life, his lucrative reading tours – allowed him to do that.

The 1854 novel *Hard Times* provided Dickens with the opportunity to write about the concerns of the organised working class, but he chose not to take it. Even though he undertook a research trip to Preston during a strike, the life of organised labour is virtually ignored, as are its concerns. Instead, Dickens, whose intention in writing the serialised novel was merely to boost the flagging sales of his journal *Household Words*, takes a powerful swing at utilitarianism but gives us a conventional plot in which the wrongly accused Stephen Blackpool just happens to have refused to join a union.

Even Jackson concedes that the portrayal of trade unionism is "the one (almost the only) outstanding instance of faulty observation in all Dickens", but he passes up the opportunity to discuss what this says about Dickens. Although he may be justified in claiming that certain descriptive passages in the novel have a "parallelism with Marx and Engels",²⁹ this refers merely to the *surface* appearance of capitalist society, and Jackson almost satirises himself with his claim that the "hardness and bitterness" of the novel

"arose in Dickens from his acute intuition that something more was at issue than any mere betrayal of the forward movement. Another revolution is needed – as drastic and far-reaching as the great French Revolution – and Dickens' harshness arises basically from his intense disappointment

and baffled rage at finding no such revolution anywhere in sight."³⁰

Foot justifiably objects that Dickens's treatment of trade unionism is "unreal":

"It is far more likely that a man of Stephen Blackpool's character would himself have been a prominent member of the union. In real life he would probably have been dismissed by his employer for his trade union activities. If this had happened in *Hard Times*, it would not have interfered with the plot in the slightest degree. But the story is

not written in this way because of Dickens's patent hostility to trade union organizers. In *Hard Times* it is assumed almost as a matter of course that any such must be brazen-tongued demagogues engaged in activities which are wholly discreditable."³¹

Dickens's portrait of Slackbridge, the union "delegate", as he addresses a mass meeting is little short of ridiculous (although some of his readers were doubtless reassured by it):

"Judging him by Nature's evidence, he was above the mass in very little but the stage



Levellers meeting during the English Civil war in 1645

on which he stood. In many great respects he was essentially below them. He was not so honest, he was not so manly, he was not so good-humoured; he substituted cunning for their simplicity, and passion for their safe solid sense. An ill-made, high-shouldered man, with lowering brows, and his features crushed into an habitually sour expression, he contrasted most unfavourably, even in his mongrel dress, with the great body of his hearers in their plain working clothes.”³²

Some of us may have encountered trade union officials, lay and full-time, who fit this description, but such individuals do not command a mass following, as Slackbridge obviously does. Furthermore, at no time during his account of this mass meeting does Dickens so much as hint at the issues which have brought the workers together. How to explain this, unless by means of Dickens’s belief that demagoguery and deception are all that is required to motivate workers to act collectively?

Foot wonders, if trade unions are discounted, how the problems of the working class might be addressed:

“The answer, when it comes, is simple in the extreme. It appears that employers must learn to treat their workers with kindness and patience and ‘cheery ways’. They must, it seems, constantly bear in mind that working people also have loves and memories and inclinations and human feelings.”³³

Foot concludes that, according to Dickens, the

“sum total of human happiness can only, it seems, be maintained by an unflinching supply of benevolent old gentlemen with ample means. How these fairy godfathers obtained their wealth is never disclosed save in the most general and ambiguous terms.”³⁴

Here, Foot has paraphrased a discussion between Stephen Blackpool and his employer Mr Bounderby. Asked at one point in this discussion how industrial relations problems (which he terms “the muddle”) might be approached, Blackpool tells Bounderby:

“Sir, I canna, wi’ my little learning an’ my common way, tell the genelman what will better aw this – though some working men o’ this town could, above my powers – but I can tell him what I know will never do’t. The strong hand will never do’t. Vict’ry and triumph will never do’t. Agreeing fur to make one side unnat’rally awlus and for ever right, and toother side unnat’rally and for ever wrong, will never, never do’t.”³⁵

This is Dickens reassuring his more anxiety-prone readers: fear not, for while honest working men may dread their employers’ ‘triumph’ over them, they do not desire it for themselves. Minutes earlier, when Bounderby has invited him to explain what “you people, in a general way, complain of”, Blackpool obliges in part by saying:

“Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi’ yor deputations to Secretaries o’ State

’bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had’n no reason in us sin ever we were born.”³⁶

Well, that’s not much of a grievance, but for being so unreasonable as to actually *have* one, he is dismissed by Bounderby. So how does Dickens now ensure that Blackpool receives justice for this outrageous treatment? Quite simply, he doesn’t. What is a working-class character in a Dickens novel to do when his employer refuses to adopt ‘cheery ways’ or be transformed into a fairy godfather? Dickens has no answer to this.

Cheerybles, Revolution

Jackson does not deny the existence of what he calls the “Cheeryble illusion” (after the kindly old employer in *Nickleby*), but argues that its employment was largely confined to Dickens’s first period and that by the end of his literary life he had “completely shed all trace” of it and “had, for all practical purposes reached the very brink of the conviction that ‘the emancipation of the working classes must be *conquered* by the working classes themselves.”³⁷ But Jackson’s determined pursuit of this thesis is betrayed by the evidence: we have seen that the “illusion” is still alive in *Hard Times*, well into the “third period”; and, as Orwell points out, this “usual *deus ex machina*” makes a return in the figure of Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend*, the very last of Dickens’s completed novels.³⁸

Jackson describes *Little Dorritt* (1855-57) as a “thinly-veiled attack upon bourgeois society in general under the image of the Marshalsea (the Debtors’ Prison) and upon its governing class under the image of the Circumlocution Office.”³⁹ Again, this is true only insofar as it concerns the *surface* of bourgeois society.

It is well worth remembering that Dickens’s outrage at the Circumlocution Office (a fact unmentioned by Jackson) was inspired by government incompetence during the Crimean War, which he supported.⁴⁰ And at the end of the novel investors are ruined by the collapse of the Merdle financial empire not because Merdle is a capitalist but because he is a forger and swindler.

Sometimes, so anxious is he to insist on the revolutionary potential of Dickens’s “third period”, that Jackson misses the point entirely. *Our Mutual Friend*, the last completed novel, concludes with a dinner at which members of ‘good society’ discuss the marriage of Eugene Wrayburn, a ‘gentleman’, and the poor Lizzie Hexam, who has saved his life. To the pompous Podsnap, such a marriage is completely unacceptable, arguing that a “gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage.” He is contradicted by the usually reticent Twemlow, who retorts that

“if such feelings on the part of this gentleman, induced the gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say that, when I use the word gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion.”⁴¹

Jackson finds it “impossible not to see here a deliberate and studied manifestation of contempt for all the essentials of bourgeois society.”⁴² Well, an attack on bourgeois class prejudice



it might be, but a display of contempt for “all the essentials of bourgeois society” it is clearly not. In fact, uppermost in the Dickens’s mind would have been his long-running affair with the actress Nelly Ternan!

Jackson claims that Dickens’s portrayal of the French Revolution in *A Tale of Two Cities* indicates that, as noted above, the novelist was

“more ready to appreciate the need for a mass uprising and more ready to tolerate the use of armed force ... [It] demonstrates sympathy with the people in revolt, with their revolt itself and with, too, within limits, even their infuriated infliction of vengeance upon their oppressors. This was a far bolder, and a far more significant thing to do, in 1859, than might seem possible today.”⁴³

It would have been – had it been true. There is nothing in the novel to support Jackson’s interpretation, and plenty to contradict it. For example, Charles Darnay, the French aristocrat who has renounced his heritage, feels that in his native land

“bad aims were being worked out ... by bad instruments, and that he who could not fail to know that he was better than they, was not there, trying to do something to stay bloodshed, and assert the claims of mercy and humanity.”⁴⁴

Dickens, in line with his moralistic approach, views the excesses of the *ancien regime* and the Revolution as equally evil. As Sydney Carton awaits his turn at the guillotine, he foresees that the jacquerie who have put so many to death will in their turn also fall victim to

that instrument. Dickens has him muse:

“I see a beautiful city and a brilliant people rising from this abyss, and, in their struggles to be truly free, in their triumphs and defeats, through long long years to come, I see the evil of this time and of the previous time of which this is the natural birth, gradually making expiation for itself and wearing out.”⁴⁵

The strange thing is, Jackson at times seems quite aware of Dickens’s true motive, quoting passages that contradict his thesis.

“Crush humanity out of shape once more under similar hammers and it will twist itself into the same tortured

forms. Sow the same seed of rapacious licence and oppression over again, and it will surely yield the same fruit according to its kind.”⁴⁶

Jackson even concedes that to Dickens’s sympathy for the common people, this novel

“adds, more plainly than any of its predecessors, a warning of an Avenging Fate, from fear of which all the privileged, and all those set in authority, would do well to reconsider their ways.”⁴⁷

Precisely! This is a call for the activation of the ‘Cheeryble’ principle! Throughout the novel, Dickens makes the point that, given the inhumanity of the *ancien regime*, the French

Revolution was foreseeable and inevitable, *but he was warning his British audience that oppression sown at home might also give rise to a similarly terrible harvest – something he was anxious to avoid.* Why, if Jackson’s interpretation were correct, would Dickens have dedicated the book to Lord John Russell, prime minister from 1848 to 1852?

Dickens had sympathy for the common people; but should they take matters into their own hands, having become impatient with the repentance process whereby tyrannical rulers and employers were supposedly transformed into ‘Cheerybles’, then his displeasure would be incurred. And if non-white colonial subjects were so misguided as to make the same mistake, Dickens’s displeasure would, as we shall see in the second part of this article, boil over into outpourings of racism.

Notes and References

- 1 K Marx and F Engels, *Marx and Engels on Literature and Art*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1976. To be fair, Henry Fielding had come close to performing this service a full century earlier when he remarked that, while in the country it was unknown for the injunction “Kiss my arse” to be complied with, “in the town nothing can be more common than for the finest gentlemen to perform this ceremony every day to their superiors, without having that favour once requested of them.” *The History of Tom Jones, a Foundling*, Wordsworth Editions, Ware, 1992, p 224.
- 2 R Fox, *The Novel and the People*, Corgi Press, London, 1948, p 66.
- 3 *Ibid*, p 68.
- 4 *Ibid*, p 69.
- 5 *Ibid*, p 83.
- 6 T A Jackson, *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical*, International Publishers, New York, 1987, p 6.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 15.
- 8 *Ibid*, p 150.
- 9 G Orwell, *Charles Dickens, in My Country Right or Left*, Folio Society, London, 1998, p 74
- 10 Jackson, *op cit*, pp 7, 86, 14.
- 11 Orwell, *op cit*, pp 91-2. [NB In a piece entitled *Orwellian Mischief* in *CR55*, Graham Stevenson critically reviews Philip Bounds’s *Orwell and Marxism*, in which Bounds says that Orwell’s approach to Jackson’s book is to “shamelessly distort” it “whilst using one of its main arguments as the basis for a new hypothesis about the nature of Dickens’ radicalism.” While the latter part of this assertion may be justified, the first is somewhat exaggerated, for Orwell makes only brief mention of Jackson’s book.]
- 12 *Ibid*, pp 108, 90, 75.
- 13 C Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, Viking, London, 2011, p 127.
- 14 C Dickens, *Complete Works: Martin Chuzzlewit*, Heron Books, Centennial Edition, London, p 158. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Dickens are taken from this edition.
- 15 Jackson, *op cit*, pp 31-2.
- 16 See Dickens, *Postscript*, in *Complete Works: American Notes*, pp 303-5.
- 17 Jackson, *op cit*, pp 67-8.
- 18 Dickens, *Chuzzlewit*, p 159.
- 19 Tomalin, *op cit*, p 197.
- 20 See Jackson, *op cit*, p 15, and Orwell, *op cit*, p 81. Dickens delights, says Orwell, “in describing scenes in which the ‘dregs’ of the population behave with atrocious bestiality.”
- 21 Fox, *op cit*, p 103.
- 22 Jackson, *op cit*, p 149.
- 23 Orwell, *op cit*, p 80.
- 24 Quoted in Orwell, *op cit*, pp 99-100.
- 25 D Foot, *Introduction to Dickens, Complete Works: Hard Times*, p ix.
- 26 Fox, *op cit*, p 71.
- 27 Dickens, *Complete Works: A Child’s History of England*, p 397.
- 28 *Ibid*, pp 401-2, 412.
- 29 Jackson, *op cit*, pp 21-22, 25.
- 30 *Ibid*, p 88.
- 31 Foot, *op cit*, p xi.
- 32 Dickens, *Complete Works: Hard Times*, p 154.
- 33 Foot, *op cit*, p xii.
- 34 *Ibid*, p xiii.
- 35 Dickens, *Complete Works: Hard Times*, pp 167-8.
- 36 *Ibid*, p 166.
- 37 Jackson, *op cit*, p 163, quoting from the *Rules and Administrative Regulations of the International Workingmen’s Association (1867)*; see K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 20, p 441.
- 38 Orwell, *op cit*, p 79.
- 39 Jackson, *op cit*, p 20.
- 40 Dickens rehearsed his attack on the Circumlocution Office (the personification of bureaucracy and red tape) in two short pieces for *Household Words*, namely *A Poor Man’s Tale of a Patent* and *Prince Bull: A Fairy Tale*, both of which later appeared in *Reprinted Pieces*.
- 41 Dickens, *Complete Works: Our Mutual Friend, II*, pp 499, 500.
- 42 Jackson, *op cit*, p 140.
- 43 *Ibid*, pp 15, 102.
- 44 Dickens, *Complete Works: A Tale of Two Cities*, p 280.
- 45 *Ibid*, p 436.
- 46 *Ibid*, p 431, quoted in Jackson, *op cit*, p 104.
- 47 Jackson, *op cit*, p 112.

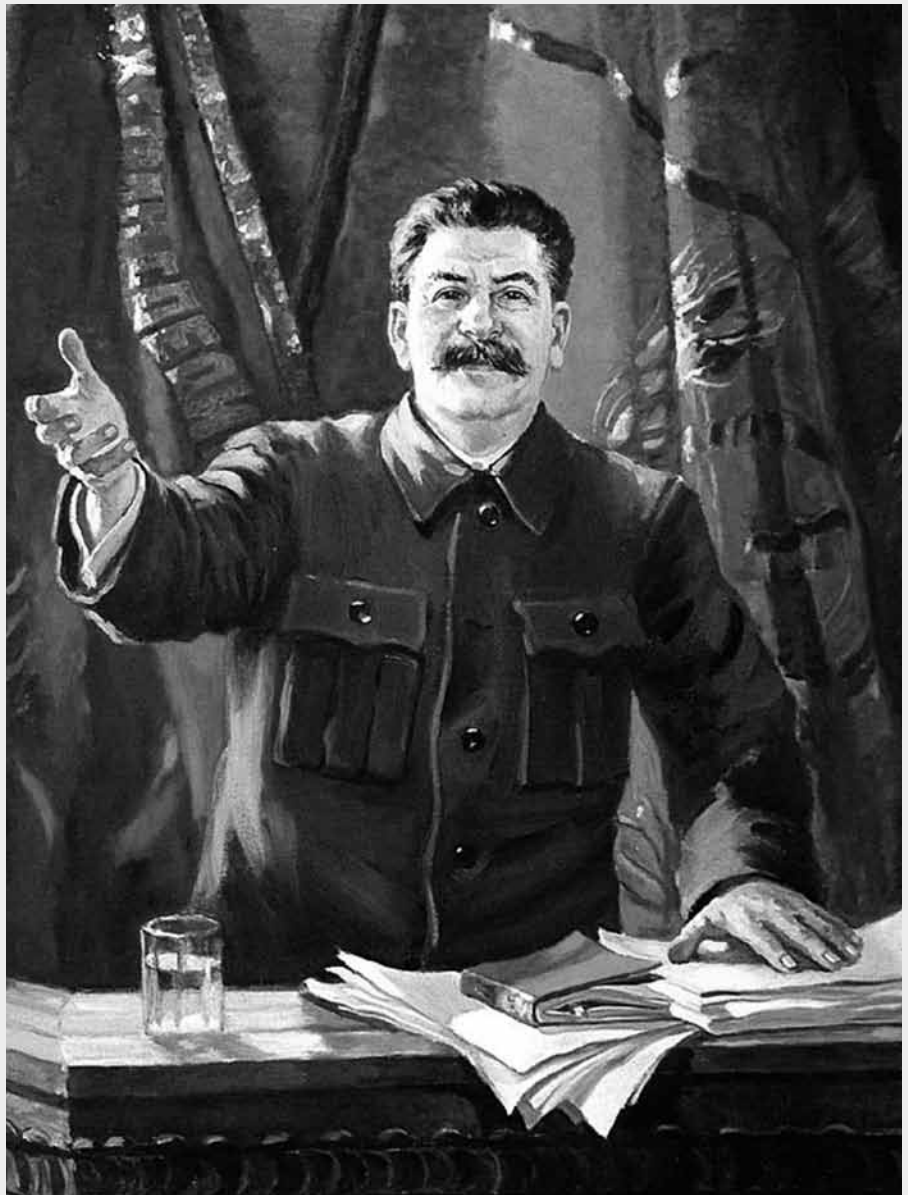
'Stalin's Purges' of 1937-8 What Really Happened?



By Yuri Emelianov

PART 3: THE MASS PURGES AND THEIR AFTERMATH

In the first two parts of this article (CR63, p 2 and CR64, p 16), I dealt with the social and political background to the Soviet purges of 1937-38, the struggle by Party functionaries against the new Constitution proposed by Stalin, the plots against Soviet power, and Stalin's programme for the re-education of all Party officials. I showed how the provincial and republican secretaries took advantage of the discovery of the 'military-political conspiracy' to push through demands for mass reprisals, in the course of which they could eliminate those who might challenge their jobs and power. In this final part I shall deal with the scale of the resulting repression, Stalin's counter-offensive to halt it and the lessons which can be drawn from this tragic period.



Yezhovshina Begins

Nikolai Yezhov, head of the People's Commissariat for State Security (NKVD) from January 1937, had supported Stalin in his opposition to mass reprisals at the February-March 1937 meeting of the Central Committee.¹ But, on the basis of a Politburo decision taken in early July 1937, he signed a secret decree, stating that "The organs of state security are faced with the task – in the most merciless fashion – of destroying this band of anti-Soviet elements ... once and for all, to put an end to their foul subversive work against the foundations of the Soviet state."² Explaining Yezhov's swift evolution, Yuri Zhukov wrote that mass reprisals became

"beneficial to the NKVD since it was a punitive organisation by origin. After the 'exposure' and arrest of real or alleged supporters of Trotsky, Zinoviev and Bukharin had been completed, the very existence of the NKVD became useless. Therefore it is quite possible that Yezhov, a Party functionary by origin, who had been secretary of the Mari-El republican committee and of the Semipalatinsk province of Kazakhstan, did not lose his feeling of solidarity with other Party secretaries."³

This helped Yezhov to reach an understanding with Eikhe and other first secretaries, and he was ready to help them to get rid of those who would vote against them and for alternative deputies in the forthcoming elections.

Mass reprisals were also beneficial for Yezhov for the same reason as for Yagoda. Yezhov did away with those NKVD employees who opposed arbitrary accusations and wholesale reprisals. When, at an NKVD conference in July 1937, Edouard Salyn, NKVD chief for Omsk province, stated "there was no such number of enemies" as followed from the quota requested by the provincial secretary, Yezhov announced that Salyn was an enemy himself and that he should be arrested. Salyn was indeed immediately arrested, and later shot. No participant at the conference protested against the arrest.⁴

Under the pretext of exposing agents of Yagoda, Yezhov dismissed many veterans of the service and replaced them with people of his own choice.⁵ With all their drawbacks, many of the veterans had acquired some professional experience over a 20-year period.

Yezhov's people, who were taken from the ranks of young Communists or Komsomol members, knew next to nothing about legal procedures and lacked an elementary understanding of police work. Yezhov led them to believe that the USSR was filled with foreign spies, and that their noble mission was to expose them and to bring them to severe punishment. He not only repressed those who resisted his policies; he also generously rewarded those who managed to 'uncover' more enemies.

Yezhov's signed decree instructed NKVD organs "to begin in all republics, regions and provinces for the repression of former kulaks, active anti-Soviet elements and criminals on August 5, 1937."² This campaign, later unofficially called 'Yezhovshina', had started.

'Exposing' kulaks and penal criminals was not very difficult. Internal passports, and the registration of all people by their residence in local militia stations, allowed the NKVD to find out the whereabouts of practically all former kulaks and penal criminals. Hence about 75% of those who were subjected to reprisals were easily caught.

The category of 'active anti-Soviet elements' was much looser by far. Apart from well-known former members of anti-Soviet parties, White Guards and priests, people who were labelled 'active anti-Soviet elements' belonged to different social groups. But in tracking down these 'elements' the NKVD relied on the help of many voluntary assistants, with the country caught up with a real epidemic of witch-hunting.⁶

As has happened many times in world history, a nation faced with real danger tends to exaggerate the scale of treason and espionage. This happened in France during the religious wars of the 16th century and during the revolution of 1789-94. The same things happened in the USA during the Civil War of 1861-65.

Mass paranoiac scare about hidden spies spread in the countries of Western Europe after the start of German offensive on May 10, 1940. Frightened people in the Netherlands, Belgium and France 'exposed' 'secret Gestapo agents'. Thousands of innocent people were caught by angry mobs who claimed that their victims were German paratroopers in disguise. Many people were lynched on the way to police stations. A widescale operation against 'subversive elements' was launched in Britain at the same time. Tens of thousands were arrested and transported to Canada. Some of the transport ships

were torpedoed by German U-boats.⁷

After the Pearl Harbour attack many 'vigilant' Americans demanded the arrest of all people of Japanese descent in the United States. Submitting to these moods, the US administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt ordered the incarceration of 120,000 Japanese Americans in 'detention camps' in the northern part of the USA, where they were kept for three years. Only later was it revealed that almost all of them were innocent and that the accusations which had been made against them were false.⁸

Though the USSR was not at war in 1937-8, a foreign military attack was expected to come any day. The Soviet Union was surrounded by fiercely authoritarian, militaristic, anti-communist and anti-Soviet regimes. In October 1936 Finland had fired across the Soviet frontier. That same month Hitler and Mussolini formed the 'Berlin-Rome Axis', extended with Japan the following month to create the 'Anti-Comintern Pact'.⁹ The memory of the First World War and the Civil War – with the division of the country between the Whites and the Reds – was still vivid in the minds of millions of people. In both wars scares about secret enemies had led to mass arrests and executions. During the Civil War accusations of treason and spying were rampant on both sides. Yet there were other factors in Soviet life which promoted mass hysteria.

Yezhovshina would not have developed to such an extent, had it not been supported throughout all layers of Soviet society. The profound changes that had happened during industrialisation and collectivisation had tremendously enhanced the effect of the transformation brought about by the October Revolution. These deep changes opened great opportunities for social growth and the realisation of the so-far hidden talents and capacities of millions of people. However, as has happened in any revolution, these changes also had negative side-effects.

The transformation of social status, political thinking and cultural values of the majority of the Soviet people developed within too short a time-period. The swift rise from a low social and cultural level caused an effect similar to the aero-embolism experienced by divers when they rise to the sea surface too quickly. The opening up of new cultural frontiers was accompanied by the intrusion into people's consciousness of primitive ideas, rumours, prejudices, superstitions and distorted impressions about the world at large. The discarding

of traditional moral values of pre-revolutionary life did not always result in the establishment of new more advanced moral norms. Many people lost sight of what was good and what was bad, what was permissible and what was not. Crude egoism came out under the guise of 'revolutionary morality'.

As previously stated, the quality of the Party leadership at all levels left much to be desired and was inadequate for the international and domestic situation faced by the country. Apart from the predominantly low level of general education and lack of knowledge of Marxist theory, many of the functionaries used communist phraseology to conceal their egoistic motives, and were prepared to go to any lengths in order to remain in the posts they had occupied for nearly two decades or to move upwards in the Party hierarchy. Preoccupied with their own interests, they resorted to outmoded bureaucratic methods of management which ruined many good plans and intentions. It is not by chance that one of Stalin's favourite films was *Volga-Volga*, a satire of a typical provincial bureaucrat of that time.¹⁰

Millions of Soviet people were ready to explain complicated problems of everyday existence by the evil work of secret enemies. False accusations were made by those who considered that the revolution would not finish uprooting its enemies until all former representatives of the old exploiting classes had been physically annihilated.

At the same time there were a lot of people who had suffered catastrophic losses after the revolution. They wanted revenge and Yezhovshina gave them such a chance. Under the guise of helping authorities to wipe out 'anti-Soviet elements', they discredited loyal communists.¹¹

As the scope of reprisals increased, the number of false accusations grew. Yezhovshina revealed the worst features in human nature. Like the Party functionaries, many people wanted to get rid of their rivals real or alleged. Describing the situation in the aeroplane industry, the famous Soviet pilot Mikhail Gromov recalled: "Arrests happened because aeroplane constructors accused each other of sabotage, espionage and subversive activities."¹² The same sort of thing was going on in other industries, agricultural enterprises, and urban and rural communities.

"We defeated Stalin"

The main organisers of the reprisals were particularly active. An NKVD

employee later recalled that Khrushchev, as Moscow Party first secretary, daily phoned the Moscow NKVD office to demand "more active work", saying: "It is not good that Moscow lags behind Kaluga and Ryazan in the number of arrests. After all, Moscow is the USSR capital!"¹³

At the same time Khrushchev liquidated those in whom he saw potential competitors. During these reprisals of 1937-38, only 3 people remained free out of the 38 top Party functionaries in the Moscow city and provincial committees. 136 of the 146 Party secretaries of the other cities, towns and districts of Moscow province were subjected to repression. 45 of the 63 members of the Moscow city committee disappeared, along with 46 of the 64 members of the Moscow provincial committee.¹⁴

Many other provincial and republican secretaries acted in a similar way, getting rid of possible pretenders for their jobs. In most cases the Party secretaries accused their colleagues of counter-revolutionary ideas and of collaboration with foreign intelligence services. Thus in June 1937 the first secretary of the Uzbek central committee, Akmal Ikramov demanded the dismissal of Faizulla Khodjaev, chairman of the Uzbekistan Council of People's Commissars, accusing him of connections with nationalist counter-revolutionary elements. Khodjaev not only was dismissed from his job but also was arrested.¹⁵

But some of those who not long before had demanded an increase in the quotas of arrests and executions became victims themselves in turn. In September 1937 Khodjaev's friends accused Ikramov of being a counter-revolutionary nationalist and he was arrested.

In March 1938 both Khodjaev and Ikramov became defendants in the trial of the 'bloc of Rights and Trotskyites'.¹⁶

Nonetheless, Stalin went on with his plan for conducting the elections. At the end of August 1937 he submitted to the Politburo a sample ballot paper drawn up by Yakov Yakovlev, who was responsible for the election preparations. The sample had the format given in Fig 1¹⁷ and was accepted unanimously.

Provisions were also made for a second round of voting if no candidate received an overall majority. Having considered a draft protocol, the Politburo adopted the following statement to be published by district election committees:

"According to the voting results, the district election committee has established that none of the candidates for deputy has received an absolute majority of the votes. On the basis of article 107 of the Decree on the Elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet, the district election committee announces that a new election will be held between the following two candidates, who received the highest numbers of votes"¹⁸

This new election was to be held within two weeks of the first round. Again this proposal was approved unanimously, and Yakovlev was instructed to prepare for printing both the approved ballot paper, and the protocol, for all election districts.¹⁹

On 10 October 1937 a new plenary meeting of the Central Committee was due to open, to discuss the final arrangements for the coming elections. The events which followed showed that Stalin was unable to stop the resistance

Fig 1. Draft ballot paper for the elections under the 1936 USSR Constitution

BALLOT PAPER		
for the elections to the USSR Supreme Soviet 31 August 1937		
Dnepropetrovsk district for the elections to the Council of Nationalities from the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic		
Leave on the ballot paper the surname of ONE candidate, for whom you vote, and strike out all the rest.		
	Surname, name, patronymic	Supported as candidate by:
1	PETROV Ivan Semenovich	the general assembly of workers and office employees of plant N22
2	SEMENOV Pyotr Ivanovich	the general meeting of members of the Lenin collective farm
3	SIVAKOV Semyon Petrovich	the Muravliino district committee of the Communist Party and the Muravliino district committee of the Young Communist League



to his political reforms. The Central Committee meeting was delayed while a long discussion ensued in the Politburo.

There many of Politburo members spoke against the principle of alternative candidates, which had been approved unanimously six weeks before. Only Stalin, Molotov, Andreev, Kalinin and Zhdanov still supported it. Even such Stalinist stalwarts as Voroshilov and Kaganovich changed sides.²⁰ Anatoly Lukyanov, chairman of the Supreme Soviet in 1989-91, recalled the words of Politburo veteran Anastas Mikoyan about this meeting: "We defeated Stalin."²¹

When the Central Committee finally assembled on October 11, most of its members spoke out for taking new measures against 'counterrevolutionary elements' who were allegedly about to use the elections to the Supreme Soviet in order to seize power. Many of them demanded enlarged quotas for exile and execution (Pavel Postyshev of Kuibishev province, Edward Pramnek of Donetsk province, N V Margolin of Dnepropetrovsk province, Dmitry Kontorin of the Northern province, Y Kaganovich of the Gorky province etc). Sometimes Stalin and Molotov interrupted the speakers with caustic remarks but in vain.²²

The only one who protested against the reprisals was the first secretary of the Kursk province, G S Peskarov. In his speech he mentioned that Stalin and Molotov personally helped him to curb the witch-hunting in Kursk province.²³

During the course of the meeting it became known that Yakov Yakovlev had been arrested, an action Yuri Zhukov connects with the continued offensive against those who opposed mass purges.²⁴ At the June 1937 plenum, according to Grover Furr,

"Yakovlev and Molotov [had] criticized the failure of Party leaders to organise for independent Soviet elections" and "Yakovlev exposed and criticized the failure of First Secretaries to hold secret elections for Party posts, relying instead on appointment ('cooptation'). He emphasized that Party members who were elected delegates to the Soviets were not to be placed under the discipline of Party groups outside the Soviets and told how to vote. They were not to be told how to vote by their Party superiors, such as the First Secretaries. They were to be independent of them.

And Yakovlev referred in the strongest terms to the need to 'recruit from the very rich reserve of new cadre to replace those who had become rotten or bureaucratized.' All these statements constituted an explicit attack on the First Secretaries."²⁵

By October 15-18, *ie* only a few days after his arrest, Yakovlev had confessed to working for the Trotskyist underground from the time of Lenin's death, and to cooperating with Trotsky through a German spy.²⁶ Most likely he was innocent, and was tortured by Yezhov's henchmen into confessing. Furr points out that Stalin was clearly taken by surprise at the confession, given the annotation and follow-up note that he made.²⁷ This episode again demonstrates the limitations of Stalin's power.

Yet the Central Committee members did not dare to vote against the ballot paper and the district election committee protocol previously approved by Stalin and other members of Politburo, despite the fact that their substance implied elections with a number of candidates. This ballot paper format remained in use for all elections in the USSR up to its demise in 1991. The wording, "Leave on the ballot paper the surname of ONE candidate, for whom you vote, and strike out all the rest", remained unchanged despite the fact that until 1989 there was always only ONE candidate on the ballot paper.

Stalin Strikes Back

Numerous accounts of the elections, which took place on December 12 1937, confirm an atmosphere without fear or intimidation. This can be understood as follows:

- Throughout the first 20 years of Soviet life, voters had grown accustomed to SINGLE-candidate-elections.
- Despite the enormous scope of the reprisals, the vast majority of Soviet people were not even aware of them. The fact that the great majority of arrests took place among former kulaks, White Guards, members of anti-Soviet parties and penal criminals meant that these people were small minorities of the population.
- The end of 1937 coincided with the end of the Second Five-Year Plan, which had brought great improvement in the lives of most of the people.

- Soviet propaganda turned election day into a great festivity with a lot of music and singing and dancing.

People who came to voting stations liked the fact that they were asked to proceed to closed booths where they were invited to read the ballot paper. There was a pencil for those who wished to strike out the name of the only candidate. Although voters had a choice of striking out, or not striking out, that name, many of them considered the election to be sort of a referendum for Soviet power or against it. The outcome, with over 99% voting for candidates of the 'Bloc of communists and non-Party people', indicates that there was widespread support for the Soviet order, for the Communist Party led by Stalin.

Yet there was one significant minority where the negative effect of the reprisals became greater and greater as the number of arrests grew. This minority, which constituted slightly more than 1% of the population, was composed of communists. As stated in Part 1 of this article,²⁸ the proportion of communists among the arrests was 8.5%. So it meant that communists had about 8.5 times the chance of being arrested than did most of the non-Party population.

At the same time, for every arrested communist, there were 9 or 10 communists who were expelled from the Party. In line with age-old practice, every applicant for Party membership had to be sponsored by three existing members. When a member was arrested all three of the sponsors were automatically expelled from the Party. Often the secretary of the Party organisation and the members of its leading committee also had to leave, for 'losing political vigilance'.²⁹ In many cases the relatives of the arrested communist were also expelled. The mother of the author of this article was expelled from the Party because her brother and her sister who lived in different cities were arrested. (Later her membership was restored.)

The reduction of the Party ranks from 2,800,000 to 1,588,852 over the period 1934-39 allowed Vadim Kozhinov to claim that 1,220,932 communists had been executed.³⁰ In fact most of them were alive but they were far from being happy and well. The purge meant that 43.6% of communists had been expelled from the Party. At a time when the USSR was on the threshold of war the number of members of the ruling party had decreased by a factor of almost two, and those who had been turned out of

the Party now had strong grudges against the authorities.

In Part 2 of this article, I noted that in March 1937 Stalin had spoken about a Kolomna plant where there were 1400 communists but 2000 former members who had been expelled. At that time Stalin had censured “the ruthless inhuman policy regarding common members of the Party” and said that summary expulsions served the interests of the enemies of socialism.³¹ But what had happened at a single plant in a small town now occurred throughout the whole big country.

Stalin was unable to defend former kulaks and priests because he himself would be accused of lenience towards the class enemies. But, as the leader of the Communist Party, he wanted to defend members who were being maltreated. For him, those who were responsible for such maltreatment were mortal enemies of the Communist Party.

Yet Stalin was extremely cautious in preparing his counter-offensive. The report to the plenary meeting of the Central Committee which was convened in January 1938 was made, not by a member of the Politburo and not even by a member of the Central Committee, but by Georgy Malenkov, chairman of one of the departments of the Central Committee apparatus. The position of the speaker suggested that the report would deal with trivial matters. This impression was strengthened by a lengthy and clumsy title for the report, which was reminiscent of an ancient novel: *‘On the errors of Party organisations in expelling communists from the Party, and on formal and bureaucratic attitudes towards the appeals of those expelled from the Party, and on measures to eliminate these shortcomings.’*

But suddenly Malenkov in his report bitterly attacked wholesale expulsions of communists from the Party on the basis of arbitrary accusations. Both his report, and the resolution which followed it, had numerous examples of ruthless treatment of communists. In many local Party organisations more than half the members had been expelled. The resolution described those responsible for this as

“certain careerist communists, who are striving to become prominent and to be promoted by recommending expulsions from the Party, through the repression of Party members”

and further stated that

“numerous instances are known of disguised enemies of the people, wreckers and double dealers, organising, for provocational ends, the submission of slanderous depositions against party members and, under the semblance of ‘heightening vigilance’, seeking to expel from the Party ranks honest and devoted communists, in this way diverting the blow from themselves and retaining their own positions in the Party’s ranks (They) try through measures of repression to beat up our Bolshevik cadres and to sow excess suspicion in our ranks.”³²

This meant that the tide of repression was now being turned. The weapon of reprisal had backfired and was starting to destroy those who less than a year before had called for quotas of arrests and executions.

Pavel Postyshev, Politburo alternate member and first secretary of Kuibishev province, was blamed for condoning reprisals, and removed from the Politburo, at the January 1938 plenum; and soon after he was expelled from the Party and arrested.³³ This signified that from now on those leading Party figures who had demanded the establishment of troikas and quotas for arrests and executions were no longer immune from punishment. Soon accusations were levelled against Eikhe and others – ostensibly of involvement in espionage and a rightist conspiracy, although the real reasons were the unleashing of mass repressions. And they got the same treatment.³⁴ Yet no word of criticism was made regarding Yezhov and the NKVD.

In March 1938 the Moscow trial of the ‘Anti-Soviet Bloc of Rights and Trotskyites’ took place. Bukharin, Rykov, Krestinsky, Yagoda and almost all other defendants were sentenced to death. All over the USSR there were meetings at which the participants glorified the NKVD and Yezhov. The name of Yezhov followed that of Stalin in final cheers of speeches, though Yezhov was just an alternate Politburo member. Many NKVD employees even thought of Yezhov as a possible successor to Stalin.³⁵

At that time some people in Yezhov’s entourage warned him that soon the Politburo might start to investigate the role of the NKVD in the arrests and executions. But Yezhov would not heed the warnings. He was eager to ‘expose’ those political leaders who still stood between him and Stalin and presented

obstacles on his way to the top.

The loss of realism in Yezhov was amplified by his growing alcoholism.³⁶ Later Stalin would complain that it was difficult to find him: “In the NKVD they answered that he had gone to the Central Committee. In the Central Committee they did not meet him. At last he was found at his home but he was dead drunk.”³⁷

Drunkenness did not stop Yezhov from ambitious plans and he prepared ‘cases’ against Postyshev, Kosior, Khatevich, Eikhe and many other provincial and republican secretaries who were arrested in 1938.

As many of Yezhov’s assistants became restless, some of them started to prepare a coup d’état.³⁸ It is not known for sure whether Yezhov participated in these plans or not,³⁹ but when he was arrested in his personal study documents were found which could have been used for fabricating cases against Malenkov and some other Party leaders including Stalin.⁴⁰

At the same time some important NKVD leaders wanted to escape from possible punishment. In June 1938, Genrikh Liushkov, who was NKVD chief for the Far East, crossed the Manchurian border and went to the Japanese military; he was shot by the Japanese in August 1945, when the Red Army was liberating Manchuria.⁴¹ In November 1938, A I Uspensky, head of the NKVD in the Ukraine, feigned suicide by drowning and tried to hide, but he was found and arrested the following April.⁴² Khrushchev had become Ukraine Party first secretary in January 1938, and it has been argued that he must have been guilty of the same crimes as Uspensky since they were both in the same ‘troika’.⁴³

On 17 November 1938 the USSR Council of the People’s Commissars and the Central Committee of the Communist Party issued a joint *Decree about Arrests, Prosecutor Supervision and Course of Investigation*, signed by Molotov and Stalin. It spoke about the “greatest mistakes and distortions in the work of the NKVD” during “mass operations”, and asserted that “enemies of the people and foreign secret service spies penetrated the NKVD ... [and] consciously deformed Soviet laws, conducted massive and unjustified arrests ...”⁴⁴ The decree liquidated the ‘troikas’ and forbade any new mass arrests.

On 9 December 1938 Yezhov was dismissed as head of the NKVD and replaced by Lavrentii Beria. Yet Yezhov remained Commissar of Water Transportation and an alternate



member of the Politburo for several months.

Soon the liberation of prisoners of Yezhovshina began. Approximately 25% of those who had been in prison camps were freed. But, among the military, a higher proportion was released: out of the 25,000 army officers who had been arrested in 1937-38, 13,000 were liberated. Among them were future marshal Rokossovky and other military leaders who played important roles in the Second World War. However 8,000 officers remained in prison camps and about 4,000 had already been executed.

At the 18th Party Congress, which convened in March 1939, nothing was said about Yezhovshina. Yet in his report to the congress Andrei Zhdanov spoke at length about slanderers who were busy discrediting communists.⁴⁵

The events of the previous years had resulted in significant changes in the ranks of Congress delegates. Though the proportion of delegates who had joined the Party before 1920 was, at 19.4%, still high and more than double the tally of veterans among all Party members (8.3%), it had decreased by a factor of 4 compared with the 17th Congress (80%). This meant that many of the Party veterans no longer belonged to its élite. Furthermore, as credentials committee chairman Georgy Malenkov reported, the proportion of delegates with a university education had increased to 26.5% compared with only 10% at the 17th Congress; while the proportion with secondary education had increased from 31% to 46%. The Party élite had become younger and its level of education was increased. This is what Stalin had wanted to achieve for a long time, though he did not intend it to be achieved through repressions.

Lessons of 1937-38

Apart from the tragedies of many people who became victims of mass reprisals there was another negative and longstanding aspect of these events: lessons which should have been drawn from them were belated, partial, grossly insufficient and in many respects absolutely wrong. All this resulted in even greater damage to the USSR and world socialism than the repressions themselves.

The initial damage occurred in the years that followed immediately after 1938:

- Firstly, though Yezhov, Eikhe, Postyshev and many others were dismissed and arrested, some of

those who were active in organising reprisals (like Khrushchev) continued to occupy high posts.

- Secondly, the people guilty of mass repression were also accused of other crimes which they did not commit (belonging to counter-revolutionary organisations and cooperation with foreign intelligence services). Using falsehood against those who resorted to falsehood made it difficult to understand the true mainsprings of the repression.
- Thirdly, despite the partial liberation of prisoners immediately after the end of Yezhovshina no attempt was made to reassess all the verdicts of 1937-38. Besides, many of the cases were not made public.

At that time silence surrounded these tragic events. While the trials of Zinoviev, Kamenev, Pyatakov, Radek, Bukharin and Rykov were widely reported by the mass media there was not a word said about those of Postyshev, Eikhe, Vareikis, Yezhov and many others. Nothing was said about the number of arrests and executions of 1937-38.

To a great extent this silence might be explained by the difficulties faced by the country. At the brink of imminent war the leaders of the USSR could not afford to reveal the country's weak points, especially in the sphere of defence. Perhaps this was especially true with regard to the details of trials of Tukhachevsky and others, Yenukudze and Peterson. And still the total silence which surrounded all the trials prevented a certain determination of whether the defendants were guilty or not, and of what their real guilt was if the prosecutions were correct.

As a result of all these circumstances the main issues which led to the reprisals – the resistance of influential Soviet leaders to the new Constitution, especially to general, secret voting with alternative candidates; the quotas for arrests and capital punishments demanded by Party secretaries – remained secret for many decades.

This protracted silence led to extremely negative consequences. The information about executions and political prisoners could not be hidden completely and it penetrated in the forms of frightening rumours. They became a breeding ground for a vast literature about tortures, executions and labour camps which was published outside the USSR.

The release of political prisoners and their rehabilitation was a much

belated step in bringing justice (contrary to the current versions, begun not at Khrushchev's initiative and not after his report to the 20th Congress, but in 1953). Moreover, these releases and rehabilitations should have been supplemented by honest and true explanations for why the reprisals happened. Such explanations would have needed to take into account the many factors which were at work at the time and the contradictions within the socialist society, the Communist Party, its leaders and ordinary Soviet people. A profound study of these factors could lead to a better understanding of the moral, political, ideological, cultural and moral processes inside Soviet society.

Instead of the historic truth about these events Khrushchev in February 1956 presented a garbled story, the main goal of which was to conceal his own misdeeds. Khrushchev's primitive version, which put all the blame on Stalin, was accepted first and foremost because the real truth was not known by most of the people.

Khrushchev concealed not only his own negative role but also that of his colleagues in organising the reprisals. Depicting Eikhe and other Party secretaries with martyrs' halos, he concealed their inadequacies as leaders, their devotion to personal interests at the expense of ideological principles and national and international interests, their brutal disregard for human lives and their cruelty.⁴⁶

Despite the efforts of many foreign scholars to find explanations for these events, the Soviet Union was the only country which could reveal the truth about them, as the real documents were kept in the Soviet archives. Yet in Khrushchev's time these archives were kept closed and there existed only one version of the repressions of 1937-38 – that narrated by Khrushchev himself.

In Brezhnev's time the Khrushchev version, according to which Stalin was the main culprit, was not widely used. Virulent attacks on Stalin were stopped and a number of reminiscences about his time were published. Yet both Stalin's life and the story of 1937-38 were still taboo. Silence continued to cover these tragic events.

The loud 'revelations' of the last years of Gorbachev's perestroika contributed little to the study of the truth about these events. The primitive explanations presented by Khrushchev were replaced by even more primitive explanations, which were used exclusively for propaganda aimed at destroying socialism and restoring capitalism.

The wholesale rehabilitation, at the rate of two thousand cases per day by one committee, made people believe that all the conspiracies against the Soviet state were products of Stalin's paranoiac fantasies. The Soviet people were told every day that 'honest communist leaders' could not betray their country, that it was impossible for them to work for the restoration of capitalism. As a result the Soviet people became immune to any real evidence of treachery of national interests and ideological principles. This explains why they were so slow to recognise the treason of Gorbachev, Alexander Yakovlev and the rest. It explains why they failed to see the advance of capitalist restoration and the invasion of transnational companies.

Khrushchev's and later versions of the events of 1937-38 did not say a word about the responsibility of ordinary people in making false accusations. Trying to please the broad public these versions failed to mention numerous evidences of human envy and human evil which contributed substantially to the developments of 1937-38. These versions ignored the profound contradictions of human consciousness. The primitive descriptions of complex social phenomena served to demobilise the self-critical capacities of people and to make them easier prey for manipulation.

The last twenty years have perpetuated these anti-Soviet and anti-communist versions which are being served up for daily brainwashing of the Russian population. This propaganda seeks

not only to wipe out, from the people's historic memory, the 'good points' of Soviet life. Concentrating attention on the most tragic and sordid pages of Soviet history, these bourgeois interpretations ignore all the complexities and contradictions of Soviet life. People are fed with horror stories about mass hunger, poverty and terror which ostensibly constituted the lot of almost every Soviet person. The role of the Devil in this fictional Hell belongs to Stalin.

Yet there is another factor at work which makes it difficult to arrive at a true and balanced assessment of Stalin and his role in the events of the 1930s. The disgust for the present capitalist regime, with its extreme social inequality and corruption at all levels of government, makes politically naïve and not well-informed people yearn for a strong man who would punish the exploiters severely. Many people see in Stalin a figure in the past who was able to perform such deeds. These people do not want to hear that Stalin was not responsible for most of the arrests and executions. They tend to believe that almost all the victims of the 1930s were as guilty of the charges against them as members of the present ruling class of Russia are guilty now of plundering the nation.

Since most of the authors of the books mentioned in Part 1 relied on real historical documents, they attempted to draw a true and balanced picture of Stalin and the events of 1937-38. Most of these authors do not conceal the fact that Stalin was also responsible for the

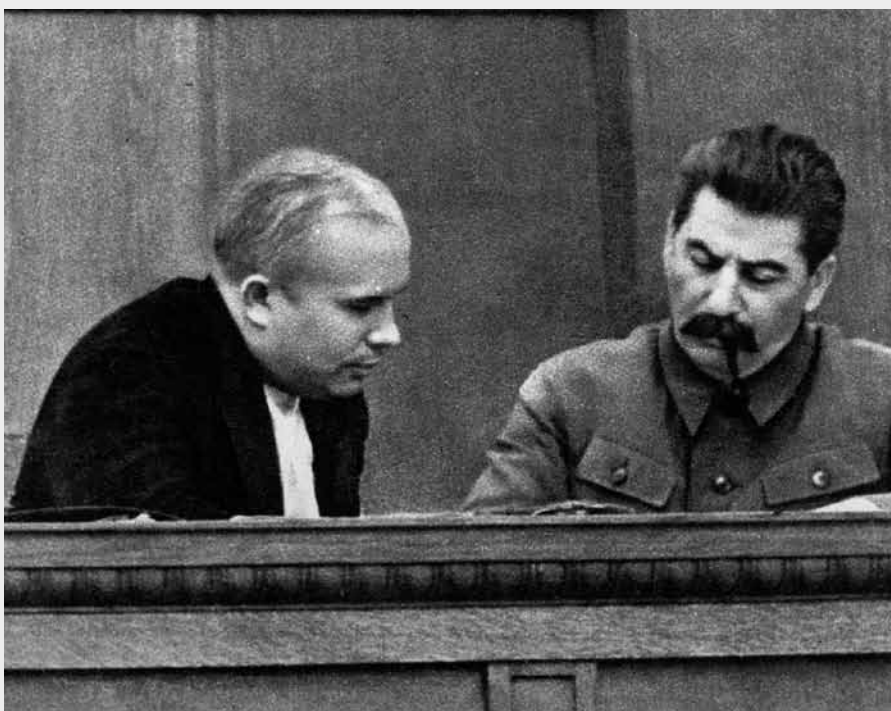
reprisals. He was too slow in halting the activities of Yenukidze, Yagoda and others who tried to recreate the atmosphere of the 'Red Terror', and unleashed purges in the Party in 1935. Relying on his own antipathy towards the former opposition leaders, and trying to turn their punishments into examples for those opposed to the new Constitution, Stalin did not bother to check many of the dubious accusations made at the Moscow trials.

Stalin also yielded too quickly to the demands by Central Committee members for quotas of arrests and executions. Though he was correct in dismissing those who were responsible for unleashing the mass repressions of 1937-38, he did not try to expose their guilt but condoned false accusations against Eikhe, Postyshev and others. Though he favoured partial liberation of the victims of the reprisals, and many times personally intervened to get people out of prison, Stalin failed to start mass reassessment of the verdicts of 1937-38 and mass rehabilitation of innocent victims.

One of Stalin's most important mistakes was that he abstained from making a profound analysis of these tragic events. In doing so he could have made a critical assessment of the Party bureaucracy and come to understand the dangers that this layer presented to communist principles, to the very existence of the Soviet state and even to himself personally. Though he actively promoted a new generation of Party members who had a good education, experience of work at modern enterprises and were not yet spoilt by excessive power and privilege, Stalin was too slow in getting rid of Khrushchev, Beria and others. These were the people who later prevented medical assistance being brought to him on 1 March 1953 after he was found lying unconscious on a floor of his country house.⁴⁷

A further grave mistake of Stalin was his slowness in finishing the political reform of the USSR which he had initiated in the 1930s. His attempts at promoting theoretical reassessment of the Soviet experience and practical steps towards continuation of the political reform in the 1950s came too late. His heirs did all their best to stop these efforts and to reinstate the position of the Party bureaucracy. In the long run this led to capitalist restoration.

The authors of the books mentioned in Part 1 tried to show that the real Stalin differed from both the demonic character drawn by bourgeois propaganda and



Nikita Khrushchev with Stalin, January 1936. Photo <http://en.wikipedia.org>



the idealised figure of a leader who was incapable of mistakes. That is why Yuri Zhukov called his main book on the events of the 1930s *A Different Stalin*.

It is obvious that Stalin was a man of his age. His age was a time when most of the world's people lived under either the colonial yoke or dictatorial régimes. The bourgeois democracies of the West appeared to be fragile, as fascist or militarist dictatorships were established in a number of European countries and as most of the remaining so-called 'democratic countries' were occupied by Nazi Germany and its allies. The democratisation of the Soviet political system in the 1930s presented a marked contrast to a world

which was about to be turned into a big extermination camp. These attempts of Stalin went along with his other successful efforts directed at saving the USSR and the whole world from the greatest enemy of humanity – Nazi Germany.

Despite the constant efforts of the capitalist class of Russia to distort Soviet history by limiting it to stories about the inhabitants of the GULAG camps, there are indications that people are starting to rebuff bourgeois brainwashing. Over the last 2-3 years, in numerous Russian TV and radio programmes, the vast majorities of the audiences have supported those who were attacking the official versions of the Soviet past.

From 75% to 90% of these audiences voted in favour of collectivisation and industrialisation, approved the Soviet government's efforts to build up the armed forces before the War and condemned Tukhachevsky for his Bonapartist plot. It is clear that people are starting to reject the falsification of the Soviet past.

The active protests against the fraud by Russia's rulers during the Duma elections show that people are waking up from the perpetual lies. Liberation from bourgeois propaganda requires full knowledge about the Soviet past and the drawing of profound lessons from its experience.

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Economics and the State

By Joe Clark

The rich, it is said, are different from us, they have money. They also have power and they use it.

“When I asked former Labour leader Neil Kinnock if the Conservatives were the class warriors of British politics, he shook his head gravely. ‘No, because they’ve never had to engage in class war,’ he said. ‘Largely because we signed the peace treaty without realising that they hadn’t.’”¹

“There’s class warfare, all right, but it’s my class, the rich class, that’s making war, and we’re winning.” (Warren Buffett, multibillionaire US investor)²

Democracy and Finance Capital

The ruling class, by which I mean the owners of finance capital (which may or may not include brokers, financial whizz kids, mega-rich celebs etc), are integrated through interlocking investments, family, school/university old boy networks, membership of exclusive private members clubs, etc, with large landowners, higher ranks of the judiciary, the military and the Church. They resolve their differences outside the public domain, *ie* non-democratically.

They licence ‘attack dogs’ such as Rupert Murdoch to hand down these policies. Murdoch and, before him,

Robert Maxwell and Lord Conrad Black – all serial violators of the law – have maintained control of the bulk of the press in the UK. Although the ‘free press’ is claimed to be the hallmark of a democratic society, their depredations against democracy have been protected by successive governments. Why? Because they demonise dissent, and because they caricature activists, instil fatalism and incite racism. These are valuable weapons in the state’s campaign against the people.

The state’s representatives in Parliament, whether Blair, Brown or Cameron, neither challenge, nor question,

that state of affairs. Debates in Parliament on strategic questions are therefore a charade, because, with a handful of exceptions, the great and the good ensure their own succession, which is aided by intellectual corruption – highly paid phoney-baloney lecture tours to the USA, bogus consultancies, freebies from PR outfits promoting vested interests, prospects of board jobs after Parliament – and facilitated by media subversion of democracy which makes honest politicians unelectable – eg terms like ‘looney-left councillors’, ‘communist fellow-travelling trade unionists’, ‘wild-cat strikers’,

‘health and safety-mad shop stewards’, etc.

Debate, nevertheless, exists – but in shadowy chambers. So when a change comes, it comes suddenly – but meantime a rigid ruling class ‘democratic centralism’ applies within those caucuses, where democracy must not be permitted to intrude.

Outside those chambers there are the likes of Joseph Stiglitz, former Chief Economist of the World Bank, who is reported only in the liberal broadsheet press, but with whom the powers-that-be never publicly debate. People like him are treated as a curiosity, damned with faint praise.



Beyond that there are occasional 'safety valve' releases – an interesting one being in the online *Daily Mail*, where a recent article³ exposed the degree to which the free-fall neoliberalism has wiped out not only British industry, but also British ownership of 'British' companies.

These processes which in the aggregate lead to a received opinion as to what is best for 'the country' sound very much like a conspiracy. Nothing so crude! As Lord Salisbury said – as recently as the 1960s, when he and his coterie had to yield to the concept that future Conservative leaders should be elected – decisions were arrived at 'by a customary process of consultation',⁴ which in fact excluded Tory MPs, the Tory Party membership, and everyone who wasn't customarily consulted. Such processes are the culmination of 300 years of gentlemanly collaborations, to ensure that 'the interests of the country' are determined and fed down for implementation by the supposedly democratic structures, which supposedly do the policy making. It is a process whereby representatives of the mega-rich old-money class interpret the national interest in their favour, and in which they control the democratic process to exclude both the interests of the people and their involvement.

We cannot enter those portals of the state, nor can our elected representatives. But we can build up such a mass movement that the political consequences of the ruling class's continued ignoring of the people threatens its hegemony, and exposes the absence of democracy in any of its deliberations.

These considerations are important because the media and politicians of all three main parties claim that there is no alternative. The ruling class always has alternatives at the ready. Until 2008,

who in Britain had ever heard of QE, 'quantitative easing'? And again, during the containerisation dispute of 1972, when the Tories were desperate to get the imprisoned dockers freed before a general strike could politicise the working class further, hey presto, they unearthed a hitherto never-heard-of function for the Official Solicitor – to free them. There was no talk then of the impartiality of the judiciary, or that 'the law must take its course' – the security of Tory rule suddenly became paramount, and a fig-leaf had to be found! But the ruling class never lets these alternatives feature in the open political domain – until its leading figures themselves have decided they are ready to swap horses.

The biggest obstacle to our building a mass movement is the attachment of the people to a Labour Party whose national leadership are so Blairised that they are merely a Tory Party Mk II, in case people become disillusioned with the Tories Mk I. Nevertheless, a mass movement must be built up; and in so doing we must transform the Labour Party by restoring its inner-party democracy. The venal press, which the right wing shelters behind, must be challenged and controlled, so that it facilitates genuine democracy instead of subverting it. Incidentally, Ed Miliband has shown a courage which no previous Labour leader has: he called for a public inquiry into the press (a 'risky strategy' according to the *Guardian's* front page sub-headline), unfortunately on the issue of hacking, rather than on the press's concerted denigration of democratic leaders – Scargill, Benn, Crow, Serwotka, Galloway, Livingstone etc.

The Role of the State

For their own purposes, politicians and the media portray what is happening

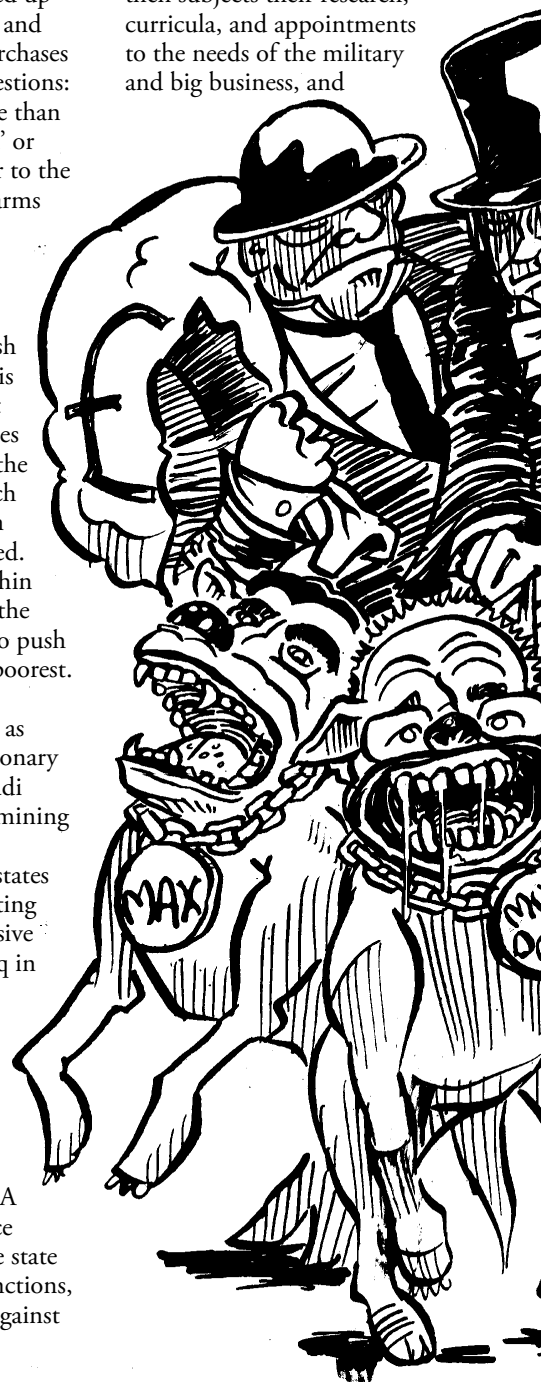
in the economic crisis as chaos, with the 'bank of last resort', the people's living standards, being raided to keep the economy steady. Furthermore, they portray the rich countries as cooperating to bail out profligate poor countries – despite a report in the *Guardian* which tells us "Speculation is rife that international aid was dependant on Greece following through on agreements to buy military hardware from Germany and France."⁵ If true, this means that the aid only secured the votes of France and Germany, provided Greece signed up to massive, unneeded and unaffordable arms purchases – which raises the questions: who is more profligate than whom? and is the 'aid' or 'bail-out' to Greece or to the French and German arms manufacturers?

The real situation is that there is intense competition internationally, to push the burden of the crisis any which way except towards those countries which caused it. So the weaker economies such as Greece, Spain, even Italy are being crucified. At the same time, within each of the countries the ruling class is trying to push the burden onto the poorest.

So where does the state fit in? The same as always: backing reactionary regimes (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Israel); undermining reactionary but anti-imperialist sovereign states (Libya, Syria); fomenting coups against progressive regimes (Dr Mossadeq in Iran in 1953, Allende in Chile in 1973).

It promotes deregulation to allow the rich to get richer, and to facilitate the financial economies of Britain and the USA achieving a dominance over world trade. The state browbeats, applies sanctions, intervenes militarily against

nations which are opposed to, or which are lukewarm towards, the neoliberal policies which are being foisted on them. It 'commercialises' local and national government, so that democracy is subverted into choosing which private provider is to be paid for a former public service, and the ethos of the public service is removed from democratic control. It bails out the banks. It hog-ties opposition (anti-trade union laws, 'kettling' of demonstrators). It emasculates the universities, driving them to seek and to rely on private funding, which then subjects their research, curricula, and appointments to the needs of the military and big business, and



against the science we need – science for humanity, objective enquiries into social phenomena, and long term research into climate change and energy policy etc.

And these are the forces who demand *less state* – what they mean, of course, is more state to promote their interests, but less state to protect ours.

The state is a key player. Its objectives are clear: to utilise the crisis, and the labour movement's demoralisation in the face of it, to accelerate the drive to privatisation across the board; to make hay while the sun shines; to exploit our theoretical

weakness in comprehending the nature of class war; to wage class war against us; to keep us on the back foot while our welfare state is destroyed before our eyes.

What the state most certainly is not, is a neutral, above the fray, impartial protector of the common good. We are most definitely, not all in this together!

The failure of the labour movement to understand this has tragic consequences. All too often our responses are limited to opposing symptoms, rather than causes, and result in half-heartedness – something which our class enemies could never be accused of.

Austerity – Unavoidable or an Active Policy Objective?

Economic or financial crises are portrayed as chaos, or as doldrums; that the nation's response is reactive, to achieve calm in a troubled world. Inflation is portrayed as an unfortunate by-product of the chaos, or of greedy trade unionists, again, as reactive.

The reality is that government policy is active: in fact inflation is the mechanism governments use to recover from crises. Why? Because inflation devalues savings. Who has savings? Those on low or modest incomes. The rich don't have savings, they have investments. These can go up and down, but the rich don't rely on this year's dividends to live on. They own property, not just their own abode, but lots of it. They can afford to buy up other people's degraded assets at depressed prices. Come the upturn and the rich have consolidated their position.

The destruction of productive assets in a recession is the mechanism whereby overcapacity is removed from

the economy. In this process, competitiveness is restored to the market, and, we are told, 'we all benefit' – except the redundant workers, except the youth whose employment opportunities have vanished, except the broken societies where the low-paid and the unemployed live. The rich also lose their assets, but they own the newly strengthened competitors too. They have enough not to put all their eggs in one basket – unlike the small scale artisan/manufacturer, who loses everything.

Unlike the 1930s, when British shipbuilders ganged together to destroy Jarrow, to the benefit of the shipbuilders of Newcastle, Glasgow, Belfast, and of Jarrow itself, the destruction of productive capacity today can wipe out the real economies of whole countries. Britain in particular was singled out by Thatcher for a swingeing reversal from manufacture to financial services – a swerve of such severity that even the *Daily Mail* protested.

Why Privatisation?

In the old days, a manufacturing plant, like the English Steel Corporation where I commenced my working life, might have had many thousands of employees. In Marxist terms, each received as wages a sum broadly equivalent to the labour content in the production of the worker. On selling the products, the owners received sums broadly equivalent to the labour content of the products sold, the latter content being greater than the former – a difference defined by Marx as surplus value. The source of surplus value is the fact that labour power is the only commodity which can produce more value in a working life than the sum of values the worker must consume to be able to reproduce the worker of the next generation. The aggregate of the surplus values of these thousands of workers

in the plant, the tens or hundreds of thousands in the city or industry, the millions involved across all industries, provided the profits – apportioned according to the size of the stake of each owner, and which accounted for the disproportion received by the super-rich.

Now, with automation, not yet complete but quite extensive, those products are generated by greatly reduced workforces. Whilst the surplus value produced by each worker has increased considerably, the size of the workforce has diminished to a greater extent. The rate of change of technology, coupled with the increasing cost in terms of accrued labour, both physical and intellectual, embodied in each new generation of machines has resulted in a massively increased cost of providing a worker with equipment to work with. The rate of profit has fallen. Finance capital must look elsewhere. It has found two solutions, one parasitic, the other anti-democratic.

The parasitic is of course the resort to hedge funds, derivatives, financial instruments, 'sub-prime' mortgages. Each of these has a certain validity in oiling the multiplicity of transactions from the immediate to the long-term investment, covering uncertainty in projected agricultural yields or in explorations for new resources, ensuring efficient flows locally, nationally and internationally, etc. But in the aggregate, given that these are capitalist solutions to problems which capitalism necessarily creates – eg in relation to sub-prime mortgages, homelessness – the end result is a degeneration into an unedifying scrabble to concentrate the main body of the profits pool in the hands of the super-rich, and to the detriment of the population at large.

The anti-democratic 'solution' is the destruction



of public service and its replacement by private ownership – laughably misnamed. The origins of private ownership, in collective bidding, management buy-outs etc, could seem almost democratic in their localism, but they rapidly become concentrated into mega-corporations with monopolistic powers, in relation to the thousands of private individuals ‘served’ by them.

Privatisation should then be recognised as the response by finance capital, aiming to restore its profitability by ensuring for itself a dependable income stream out of taxation, providing services formerly provided by the community. All talk of greater efficiency of private over public, and of local government sluggishness, every allegation that health and safety legislation, planning regulations and ‘Big Brother’ interference by elected bodies in the supervision and democratic control are holding back private initiative – is eyewash. What could be more ‘Big Brother’ than privatised hospitals where all critical information is ‘commercially sensitive’ and out of bounds to users and public funders alike? What goes for privatised hospitals, goes for privatised schools, prisons, transport, care homes, and for every other privatised facility.

Again, this is a deliberate policy designed to reconsolidate wealth into the hands of the super-rich, at the expense of the population at large.

Threats to Democracy

The threats to democracy come not only from the covert decision-making discussed above. There is the incremental encroachment of private interest into the public domain. These supposedly economic or efficiency changes cannot be implemented without an assault on our democratic rights – rights which we need, in order to determine



Salvador Allende Gossens; 29th President of Chile, known as the first Marxist to become president of a Latin American country through open elections

the policies we want society to pursue, and to provide democratic recourse, should implementations leave cause for concern. The evisceration of the trade union movement by anti-trade union legislation, especially with regard to workplace representatives and shop stewards, is directed at preventing effective challenge to these policies. These laws have turned trade union officials into policemen over their workplace activists to ensure compliance, and that is exactly what was intended, to constrain members’ responses into ineffectiveness.

The broader question is, if finance capital is to be all-powerful, and the scope for democratic involvement is to be squeezed down to providing only a veneer of public involvement, what happens to democracy?

Consider Greece. A succession of Greece’s post-WWII crises was at one point ‘solved’ for the rich by recourse to ‘the colonels’, *ie* fascism. Thereafter the accident of a prolonged boom enabled the expansion of the European Community to be marketed as a beacon of democracy, whose robust institutions could grant membership, conditional on the lifting of the more public examples of repressive policies. It resulted in the extension of democratic procedures, even

while the arena for democratic involvement shrank. With the new crisis, and consequent new pressures on Greece from the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank, and from particular countries like Germany, France and the UK, how was democratic assent to be gained for the savage austerity demanded? Easy, democracy was by-passed. Not the colonels, this time – yet – but the imposition by the international ‘community’, *ie* vested interest, before the recent elections, of a financial gaudier, and with no brief to represent the Greek people, but whose brief was to secure the creditors of the Greek rich.

How will the dissent of the disenfranchised Greek people be crushed?

And what goes for Greece, goes for Spain, Portugal, Italy and it will not stop there – we see the genesis of this process here too.

The Role of Popular Struggle

The Labour right-wing is correct: if socialism is impossible, then we must make capitalism work as best we can. If any social-democratic leader were to respond to popular demand, and perhaps disprove this convenient belief, like Salvador Allende did in Chile,

then there is always 9/11 – in Chile’s case the US-backed and instigated coup of 11 September 1973 by Pinochet and the military, to slaughter not just thousands of Chilean patriots, trade unionists and socialists, but also to slaughter the hopes of peoples around the world that another way was possible.

Even Chile’s experience does not prove that socialism is impossible. It proves that capitalism will do what it can to prevent any socialist experiment succeeding.

As the 50-year economic blockade of Cuba shows; as the successive waves of attacks on the nascent Soviet Union by a raft of capitalist countries from 1919 onwards showed (as if they hadn’t had their fill of war) – including Britain’s attempt to annexe the Baku oil fields; as Hitler’s devastation of the Soviet lands and peoples on behalf of German capitalism showed; as the economic stranglehold imposed by the US-led arms race and nuclear blackmail, right up to the eventual collapse of the Soviet Union showed – the lesson is clear: socialism must be “strangled in its cradle” (to quote Churchill’s bleat, regretting the failure of the Baku campaign).⁶

Or must it? Are the Blairites right? Is socialism impossible?

Partly the answer lies in objective circumstances which are irrespective of any hopes we might entertain. Partly it lies in the subjectivism of defeat – socialism is impossible if we believe it to be.

It is true that with the level of surveillance we suffer, the success of assassinations, drone strikes, ‘shock and awe’ strategies, and the overwhelming preponderance of weaponry in the hands of the imperialist powers, another Cuba or Chile seems unlikely. The hopes of Africa seem lost in neocolonialism. In India, capitalism has proved successful, in the form of ostentatious profligacy in the midst of dashed hopes of the poor.

With the murder of Allende, the ‘historic compromise’ of the Italian Communist Party striving to work with the Christian Democrats to build a social advance while keeping the fascists at bay, lay still-born. With globalisation, significant sections of the British working population have been seduced into thinking that they are on a roll which will deliver endless consumerism. And we face the fact that there is no countervailing power capable of constraining the US, British and French military adventures. Nor should we forget that lessons can be learned by both sides – few social-democratic leaders relish their turn of having to defend their Moneda Palace while being strafed and bombed by British Harriers, as Allende was in Chile!

And yet ... capitalism triumphant? With climate change accelerating and zilch intellectual leadership from the new victors; with 20-50% youth unemployment in the major advanced economies; with pensions, health, education, social services, housing, employment, democracy itself, being driven into crisis; with war, resource depletion, and hopelessness feeding millions into migration; with all

this, capitalism has many vulnerabilities.

It may be that the ability of one country, the Soviet Union, to break out of the imperialist orbit and survive for a time owed much to its immense size, natural resources and, it must be acknowledged, the faith of its people in resisting the Nazi invasion. In an age of global information and accelerated technical development, it may be unlikely for a similarly unique combination of circumstances to arise, which can prevent such an achievement being drowned in blood again. Yet also, in an age of globalisation, it is unlikely that the crises in one country will coexist with the absence of crises elsewhere.

Our introverted national dependency must be countered by a renewed internationalism. If the crises are international phenomena, then the struggle against them must become international. If finance capital is bankrupt of all ideas of sustainability, social justice, equity between nations and peace, then these must become the ethos of a united challenge. It won't make us invulnerable to their weapons. It will make their ability to secure the compliance of the mass of the people more problematic. The crisis will advance from being a financial/economic one to a crisis of legitimacy where people will be looking for a lead – and not finding it from the ‘movers and shakers’ and the ‘wealth creators’, who mask their avarice in an aura, but only an aura, of moral leadership.

In such a world-wide crisis the persistence of Cuba's heroic example, coupled with the tentative steps by Venezuela, Bolivia and even Argentina and Brazil may augur an era of indecision by the imperialists which we may exploit.

In such a world-wide crisis, instead of the working class, with insufficient allies, facing a ruling class which is able to

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secure for itself a substantial bloc of support from among those who are deluded into the hope that the crisis will not hit them, there could be the reverse: where it is the ruling class which is desperately trying to retain its following, when life's experiences have taught these waverers that the only real escape from the crisis is to join the fight-back.

Some Lessons from History

The 1930s were a period of acute crisis. This led to World War II because capitalism has no answer to its problems save for ruthless expansionism – and, when the available world had been carved up into colonies, that expansionism could only be achieved by war.

People had been told that:

- the crisis was outwith the power of any human agency to relieve it;
- mass unemployment was necessary to force wages down sufficiently to reinvigorate the trade cycle;
- planning for human need would not work;
- the destruction of food stocks which people could not afford, in the midst of widespread hunger, was necessary;
- children with rickets, houses infested with cockroaches, rampant TB and other diseases of poverty, were acts of God;
- the stunting of the physical and educational development of working-class children, and their much lower life expectancy, compared with that of the children of the rich, was due to failings of the poor themselves.

But, come the crunch, when the ruling class had to put fighting men into the field, and to fill the factories with women who could replace them, what happened?

Economic planning was implemented, and with great success. Working-class people were found to be educable –

and fast – to respond to the needs of the hour. Nutrition was found not only to be possible, but necessary, if the war was to be won. The people's health could be, and was, improved. Full employment was possible. And people had to be motivated: in Germany, where all democratic leadership had been terrorised into submission, this was achieved by a phoney patriotism coupled with the prospects of spoils from the occupied territories; in Britain, where struggle had developed against unemployment, against British *de facto* support for Franco in Spain, etc, the population could be, and was, united on an anti-fascist platform from which an explosion of ideas and pressure emerged as to what kind of society was to be built out of the ruins of the old.

That society included:

- the National Health Service;
- comprehensive education and the abolition of the 11+;
- massive expansion of slum clearance and, in its place, construction of (now abandoned) Parker-Morris-standard council housing;
- pensions and social security;
- democracy in the workplace;
- local councils which could respond to the needs of the people;
- full employment;
- arts for the people, new libraries and sport for all.

All of these were achieved – but in a qualified manner. The rich never give up. The facilities were never fully funded, workplace democracy was never fully empowered except in the best organised workplaces. Every gain held only while the people were prepared to fight for it. And the Achilles heel of them all – the British state, outside of Parliament – embarked on the anti-Soviet nuclear arms

race. The forlorn attempt to drown the national liberation struggles in Malaya, Korea, Kenya, Iraq, Palestine, Southern Africa, Ireland in blood went on.

Our victory was a victory, but a partial and incomplete one. Yet it demonstrates that change can be forced on finance capital.

The lesson is not that we need a war – we have had more than enough of them. It is that crises can get resolved, unless chronic. If chronic then the base structure of the society in crisis has to experience a radical shift in culture, property relations, democracy, class consciousness and combativeness, if the crisis is to be solved. And that can be achieved. It was achieved, within the memory of our older citizens. It will happen again – but not of itself. It will happen again when the people's struggles reach a crescendo of such intensity that none of the powers of our adversaries can control them. It will happen, in the words of Lenin, when the people will no longer submit to being ruled in the old way, and the ruling class can no longer succeed in ruling in the old way.⁷

This will not occur spontaneously. Revolt may erupt spontaneously, but true social advance will come only from a leadership with a clear perspective based upon analysis of all hitherto major class struggles. And that requires removing the blinkers from our eyes, for the anti-capitalist movement to recognise that success cannot be achieved by convincing the ruling class of the errors of their ways. The ruling class must be supplanted from all the levers of power, and their ideological hangers-on in our movement must be defeated.

How to achieve that, the dialectics of the interplay of life experience, understanding, confidence, solidarity, combativeness, is another story

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Discussion: Stalin and Khrushchev: Some Parallel Thoughts

By Roger Fletcher

With both the Editorial and its following article, CR63 has begun a proper consideration of two formative periods in Soviet history. From the point of view of imperialist history, both those periods were unequivocally wrong. Stalin was utterly 'evil' and Khrushchev was a 'buffoon', if we recall only the latter's 'shoe' incident at the UN and his 'dog-shit' judgement on western art.

But, from the facts and established chronology, it is a reasonable conjecture that World War II just might have been avoided, or at least reduced in its intensity ... if the leading capitalist countries had cooperated with the very young Soviet Union to confront Hitlerite Germany.

This aspect has been treated most recently in an earlier article in these pages,¹ but must remain mere speculation. As it was, the dominant countries spared no effort to destroy the first-ever socialist experiment, and that in an enormous territory and in conditions of appalling backwardness. But, if we are to situate the absolutely crucial period of Stalin's predominance within that of world history, and of his detractor Khrushchev, we should consider a further hypothesis. This is that the ebullient adventurism of Stalin's successor, in October 1962, most probably averted World War III. Such an event would have negated any and all discussion, so some parallel consideration of both those turbulent periods remains highly apposite.

Whilst we need to be aware of the dubious 'role of the individual in history', we should also note that the 'brutish' Stalin of imperialist bestiary was himself a product of that bestial society. We now know, from recent research,² that systematic abuse of the developing human child permanently and anatomically deforms the human brain. In the case of the pre-frontal

cortex,³ evolutionarily the most recent addition to the human brain, this development – and deformation – extends to the end of the teenage years. In view of the known mistreatment of so many (including most Bolsheviks) by the tsarist empire, it is surprising that some turned out to be so nearly normal.

Emerging ...

With a quote from Shakespeare's *King Lear*,

"How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child",⁴

WWII British Naval Intelligence officer Ian Grey began his sympathetic 1979 study⁵ of *Stalin, Man of History*. The placing of Grey's quote refers to Svetlana Alliluyeva's condemnatory 'study' of her father entitled *Only One Year*; but with sharper hindsight it may be argued that Shakespeare's words indict, to varying degrees, all of us – non-communist as well as communist – in this post-WWII period.

Now, with the harsh realities of a post-Soviet world upon us, and hazarded by the ideological and physical menace of the 'American' – actually US – Empire, a more objective reappraisal of the early years of the first socialist state is urgently necessary.

... (via a short digression) ...

As human beings we have, in the space between our ears, the most highly developed piece of organised matter in the known universe. Each human brain has around 100 billion cells (or neurons), and each neuron has roughly 10,000 interconnections (or synapses) with other neurons.⁶ That marvel must be compared with the relatively few 'and/or' gates that make up the modern computer. But no computer, so far made, contains any 'maybe' gates. That is just to say that



the computer must always give the same mechanically-correct answer to the same set of parameters. The brain can give different answers, dependent on our emotional state, our health, the weather and, more relevantly today, our level of education and the programme with which the brain works.

This complex organ, similar to (but emphatically not the same as) a computer, requires certain programmes to allow it to work. We call these human cerebral programmes 'numeracy', 'literacy', etc, but overall we also have the equivalent of 'operating systems' like DOS and Windows. One such operating system for our brains is *reductionism*, closely enmeshed with the present ruling model of capitalism. To use a vogueish word, reductionism is a paradigm of that socio-economic model; it assumes that to deconstruct any functioning thing is to understand it – whether that thing be a fundamental atomic particle, an insect, a watch, a radio set – or a trade union, society or the universe.

Significantly, as the need for a new, socialist, society arose from the old decrepit compromised capitalism and the homunculus of tsarism, so too a *dialectical materialist* (DM) mode of thinking began to develop, utterly opposed to the reductionist pattern, and more consistent with the flexibility and complex interactions of real life. For a time this DM, well before the 'digital age' arrived, carried Soviet society and its leaders forward. It stood them in good stead in analysing how the capitalist world would react and behave; and it was tested by Stalin when he forecast the all-out war that capitalism (in the persona of Nazi Germany) was to unleash against the Soviet Union, precisely ten years beforehand, as Yuri Emelianov⁷ reminds us.



... to socialism ...

Prior to the digression above, I have mentioned an 'indictment' of all of us – non-communist as well as communist – which may sound harsh. The post-WWII *capitalist* part of the world benefitted enormously from the material and philosophical set-backs of the emergent 'socialist' states, and of the anti-colonial struggle; and I further suggest that this contrast was reinforced by ideological failings of many communists in western Europe and the USA. I mention only three large problems – eurocommunism, dealing with the legacy of McCarthyism, and the fission of many communist parties within the imperialist environment – which have compromised the best of our efforts.

But those negative processes have a common thread, attributable to a neglect of dialectical analysis, even though we pay lip-service to it. Reductionism has been referred to above and is an integral part of the psychological war against socialism; it is also unfortunately – due to the 'pernicious osmosis' which I mentioned in a previous article⁹ – present in many analyses that we make of our Soviet and other comrades. So what I am implying here is that, by dissecting the 'crimes of Stalin', we are falling into the reductionist trap of looking at 'Stalinism' outside of a global – or dialectical – context.

In other words, what was the world of imperialism up to whilst all this was going on?

Modern capitalism is justifiably proud of its development of the 'computer revolution', and the subsequent digital revolution nestles very comfortably within the overall system. In a timely introduction, communist teacher Andy Dyer updates us to this fact, and opposes the digital reductions of capitalism to the analogue system of DM,⁹ and of socialism. In so doing, Dyer exposes the limitations of a method that too many, infected with the hubris of having a very powerful tool at their disposal, assume to be the answer to all problems, even the route to 'artificial intelligence'.

In analysing what 'Stalin' did before and after WWII, 'we' seldom, if ever, mention the total confrontation by imperialism, including brutal wars of both the physical and mental kind. It is barely sufficient here to mention



Fifty years ago, Cuba defeated a US-backed invading force at the Bay of Pigs. It marked the 'first defeat of imperialism in America', and for the Cuban people, the beginning of half a century of heroic defence of their revolution.

that the 1975 Helsinki Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe,¹⁰ at which the imperialist powers struck a self-righteous pose, had followed the most brutal 100 years of Anglo-French-US imperialist wars against Vietnam. This 'Helsinki' document became known to us in the 'West' as 'the human rights document', despite the fact that only 8% of the document dealt specifically with human rights.

So before we move on to consider a major struggle on the opposite side of the world, a brief reflection is useful on the story so far. There are very many areas of world history that are totally ignored or obscured by the strident outpourings of the mass media in capitalist countries. We, scientific socialists, communists and progressives urgently need to adopt a method that in computer technology is known as parallel processing.

That is to say that in analysing the many mistakes made in the struggle for a socialist society, we need to keep note of the catalogue of crimes against humanity that are the everyday currency of the capitalist/imperialist system.

As clinical pathologist-cum-poet Miroslav Holub, from 'socialist' Czechoslovakia, wrote in 1968:¹¹

"Some mistakes are now mistakes,
Others are still virtues."

Those lines have a much wider significance than perhaps even Holub realised. As Shakespeare might well have said in those later times, "And you, Brutus".¹²

... and the continuing struggle to build it

Mention of the 'West' moves us naturally to another 'west', geographically almost as far west as we can go but still, in capitalist ideology, not part of the western (*sic*) world. At its most simple, Cuba had had enough of the Yankee model, and threw out a US surrogate in 1959. The 26th July Movement was not 'communist', but became declaredly socialist under the arrogant pressure from US imperialism. Perhaps we should note here that by the date of their Revolution, Cuba had been involved in an anti-imperialist struggle for far longer than was the case with the Bolsheviks.¹³ Although regular readers may rightly object that the struggle in European Russia was different in both theory and practice from that in Latin America,¹⁴ the



essential similarities also need some long-neglected attention from us in Europe.¹⁵

The USA renounced agreed sugar and oil trades with the 'new' Cuba within a year, threatening Cuba's survival. Emergency trade agreements with the Soviet Union were soon patched together, followed by the 1961 US mercenary invasion at the Bay of Pigs. Following the defeat of US-backed forces, it was clear to most realists that the US would try again with a more coherent plan.

At the time that the US discovered newly-installed Soviet missiles in Cuba, the Soviet 'bloc' had been surrounded with US missiles for some years; the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, and its southern counterpart, had also been created with the expressed intention of 'dealing with' socialist developments. Despite regular Soviet condemnations of these offensive developments, the US ignored them. The Soviet Union then warned that they would put the USA in an analogous position, and the policy of the 'thirteen colonies' on Cuba – traceable to years before the actual Declaration of Independence – combined with Soviet foreign policy, enabled the partial fulfilment of that

intent. US reaction to this dramatic change was understandable, but illogical. As Lance-Corporal Jones in the WWII TV comedy *Dad's Army* says, "They don't like it up 'em", a common reaction of imperialism even today.

The period of October 1962 and consequent developments has been, and still is being, examined and sifted intensively, but much of this is ill-informed and grossly-biased. Long ago, Fidel pointed out that Cuba had "solved in 30 years what you (ie capitalism) have not solved in 300."¹⁶

Any summation, if we adopt a rigorously scientific stance, can only be tentative, but we need to consider the reductionist cul-de-sac where capitalism now resides. From a global (or internationalist) view of the 20th century, and with our partial knowledge of the 'Stalin' and 'Khrushchev' periods, we can begin from a non-imperialist viewpoint to perceive a genuinely historical materialist panorama.

Therefore, to the question "Was Stalin (or Khrushchev) good or bad?", the only honest answer must be a dialectical "Yes and no". In the 'Stalin' period, bourgeois 'democracies' were saved from fascism (temporarily as we can now see) by the titanic struggle of the Soviet Union, within an alliance of most other freedom-loving peoples. Those who can recall the immediate aftermath of WWII – and are not compromised by the ubiquitous capitalist-funded induced-amnesia machine – may remember that only 3 years separated the times of 1940-45, of 'Uncle Joe' and 'our glorious Russian (sic) allies', from Winston Churchill's notorious 'Iron Curtain' speech of 1948 at Atlantic College, Fulton, Missouri. Such a *volte face* puts almost all others in the shade!

Subsequently the first 'socialist' state succumbed to internal problems and external pressures which in general – though not exclusively – were the gratuity from world imperialism. The implosion of the 'socialist' system, together with revelations of distortions of democracy within that system, casts a long shadow over those of us who struggle for a more just society.

But, if I may briefly dip into poetic language, the Soviet Union, almost in its death-throes, defended the young child of socialism being born in the Caribbean. Recall if only the fact that Cuba's 1959 Revolution was the

culmination of nearly 500 years of anti-colonial struggle. That child is now a healthy young adult, having chafed – like most normal children do – at some of the strictures of its one-time guardian. Today other neighbours of Cuba are learning from the 'first free territory of the Americas', as well as negative lessons from the first abortive 'socialist' experiments. 21st century Cuba is unequivocally and legitimately the child of both Martí and Marx.

Was it really the Soviet Union under Khrushchev's premiership that risked thermonuclear war ... or was it the rapacious imperialism of the US under Kennedy? Remaining in the 'poetic' arena for a moment, Holub suggests a relevant and productive dialectic in his poem *Truth*:¹¹

"Have you ever been right?
one of us asked.
I haven't."

Today that is a question that capitalism/imperialism, with its own systemic crises in economics, sociology, culture and physics, dares not even formulate!

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Discussion: The Social and Political Background to the Terror of 1937-8 in the Soviet Union



By John Ellison

This contribution is written in response to the CR63 article by Yuri Emelianov (Spring 2012). It questions some of his statements. He rightly states that the arrests and executions in the Soviet Union during 1937-1938 (arrested 1,372,392; executed 681,692) during the Stalin leadership era constitute "a major blemish" on the Soviet Union's reputation. He sets out to answer the question: why did it happen? Perhaps no question about the Soviet Union in the 1930s can be more important.

Emelianov begins his answer by putting in the witness box Stalin's accuser in his 'secret speech' at the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956, general secretary Nikita Khrushchev. Khrushchev then accused Stalin, who had died three years previously, of personal responsibility for this "major blemish", of having (with the aid of his personality cult) corrupted the Soviet system. The main victims, Khrushchev asserted, were Communist Party leaders. Emelianov tells us that modern Russian school text books repeat much the same story, but that, on the other hand, extensive research into the opened Soviet archives has demonstrated that the truth about events in 1937-8 "was by far more complex and contradictory". He goes on to question "the absolute innocence" of all who were declared guilty at the time, and who have since had their reputations, if not their lives, rehabilitated.

I have had no contact with Soviet archive sources or to any literature on the subject not published in English, but place some reliance on Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge*, published in the USA in 1971 (in Britain in 1972) and again, in expanded and revised form in 1989. The index in each case does not mention Khrushchev, who died in September 1971. The first publication

of this book even in the West was a highly sensitive matter for the Soviet authorities, demonstrated notably by information from Medvedev's brother Zhores that in October 1971 Soviet security police raided Medvedev's apartment and confiscated all his research materials on Stalin.

This dangerously pioneering work was by a man who acknowledged in his 1971 foreword that he was not a professional historian, but sought to investigate the origins and crimes of Stalinism on the basis of much private research and published material, and without access to archival materials (or indeed help from official agencies despite many letters). Medvedev referred to the post-Stalin re-examination by the Soviet authorities of the materials concerning "the political trials" of 1935-8, "proving that most of the accusations were false". "I have no desire to paint (the Stalin era) only in dark colours", wrote Medvedev in his foreword. "It was a time of great accomplishments both at home and abroad." I have consulted Medvedev's *On Stalin and Stalinism* (1979), his *Khrushchev* (1982), Volkogonov's books, on respectively, *Stalin* and *Trotsky* and Mike Haynes's book, *Russia* (2002). I rely on these sources as worthy until someone justifiably casts them out as otherwise.

For two 'starter' reasons it cannot be a productive approach to set the scene by treating the investigation into the terrible events of 1937-8 as a simple contest between the reputation of Stalin and Khrushchev's 1956 charges. The first reason is that Khrushchev's own objectivity can hardly be relied upon, as he had indisputably played a part in the repressions of 1937-8. The second is that Khrushchev, when he made his speech, had, so to speak, at

least one hand tied behind his back. He was not in a position to include Stalin's closest associates (including Molotov, Kaganovich and Voroshilov) as co-defendants (whatever his preference). These men were still in the Party leadership, and his proposal that two or three rehabilitated victims should be allowed to speak in the Congress debates was rejected by the Presidium of the Party's Central Committee. "You are proposing that ex-convicts pass judgment on us", said Kaganovich.¹ An analysis of how the Stalin cult had arisen and how the mass terror had been made possible, and the role of Stalin's closest associates, was definitely off-limits for Khrushchev at that moment. The 1956 speech could at best tell only part of the story. A more realistic debate was opened up by Roy Medvedev in his book fifteen years later.

Emelianov goes on to argue that "orthodox versions" (and he includes the version given by Roy Medvedev) "insist" that in the years before the terror, Stalin met with increasing opposition to which he responded with repression. Medvedev certainly gave prime responsibility to Stalin for "serious mistakes" in collectivisation and industrialisation which gave rise to shortages, strict rationing and discontent.² This caused Stalin, he argued, to find scapegoats, which he did in the shape of technical specialists, and to ensure their arrest, trial and punishment. There were already precedents for scapegoating. In the well-publicised Shakhty trial of 1928, 49 engineers were convicted of sabotage (invented or grossly exaggerated said Medvedev), most given prison sentences, and five executed. Investigators, Medvedev states, used the 'conveyor' method of

seeking confessions (uninterrupted interrogation), allowing no sleep, plus solitary confinement with cells with hot or cold floors.³ Further trials were those of the 'Industrial Party', the 'Peasant Party' and the 'Union Bureau', all with frame-up elements. More sentences and executions followed. Medvedev produced deposition evidence from a survivor of the last-named case that extensive use was made of beatings, deprivation of sleep, heat and cold.⁴

A chain reaction of repression developed, says Medvedev,⁵ and the net spread wider; to include, in due course, actual or alleged dissident communists. Thousands of Trotskyite communists were subjected to internal exile for some years, but by May 1938 they were virtually wiped out, many by shooting. From the mid-1920s there was no non-communist press in the Soviet Union. From the late 1920s, novelists and poets were at risk from the interventions of the secret police. One, Osip Mandelstam, a poet of stature, was to die in a camp, after periods of exile from 1934 onwards. The crime sufficient to justify his exile was a poem whose subject and target was Stalin. The security police, in whose expansion and development Stalin played a vital role, were sufficiently large in numbers to allocate spies to dissident writers, and were given considerable administrative powers to sentence those arrested to imprisonment.

Medvedev accepts that "a certain estrangement did emerge in the early thirties between Stalin and a significant part of the old Bolsheviks ... not former leaders of the opposition; they belonged to the basic nucleus of Party leadership ..."⁶ Emelianov identifies two groups of communists who in 1932 were engaged in underground activity against the Stalin leadership – and suppressed. The issue of whether or not these groups might, in pursuing a change of leadership, have been responding with some reason to a dangerous escalation of the misuse of power during the Five Year Plan and collectivisation years, is not addressed.

Emelianov makes a valuable point about the state of mind of Communist Party members from soon after the 1917 revolution. "The new communists were not accustomed to debates with people of other political views and they treated them as mortal enemies of the Soviet Republic."

Almost Emelianov's only reference to Medvedev is to his *On Stalin and Stalin's Crimes*, in which Medvedev says he refers to the 17th Party Congress in 1934. Emelianov quotes Medvedev as saying that during the election of the Central Committee, 270 delegates voted against Stalin, and that the least number of negative votes was received by (soon to be assassinated) Sergei Kirov. Emelianov goes on to say that Medvedev's statement was proved false, that a protocol signed by the chairman of the election committee confirmed that Stalin had received only 3 adverse votes. Medvedev's *Let History Judge* (both versions) reproduces information from the deputy chairman of the 1934 elections commission, to the effect that the chairman had, embarrassed by the anti-Stalin vote, called in Stalin's close ally, Kaganovich, responsible generally for Congress organisation, who then ordered the destruction of anti-Stalin votes and faked the reported result.⁷ Incidentally, the chairman, according to Medvedev, was himself caught up later in the terror and killed.⁸ This episode is, in fact, not in the work to which Emelianov refers.

What is odd, whether or not Medvedev's source of information was reliable, is that Emelianov simply treats the official record as a complete answer to an allegation of ballot fraud. If fraud in which the chairman of the elections commission was complicit took place, it seems unlikely he would have owned up to this in a signed protocol. Fraud can outflank signed protocols, and the question of truthfulness of any piece of archive documentation needs sceptical consideration in a world where a state-orchestrated pandemic of arrests, torture, confessions and executions amounted to an enormous crime against humanity.

Troubling too is that Medvedev, who had explored in great detail what happened under Stalin, relying especially on the evidence of many living witnesses, and who later examined Khrushchev's role in the 20th Congress revelations (and during the terror years), is largely ignored. Medvedev is surely to be considered a bravely independent investigator; however much recent official archive-based research may call for factual corrections and revisions of his judgments.

I also have concern that Emelianov has overlooked crucial historical factors

in considering the context in which Stalin's leadership emerged and was sustained. Having thrown up the vital point that post-Revolution Soviet communists had a mindset of regarding those who disagreed politically as "mortal enemies", he leaves unsaid the sister fact that those communists and their leaders, had no conception, or so it seems, of the importance of human rights for the establishment of a socialist future. In the civil war of 1918 onwards, there was brutality on both sides, as in all wars. But in recorded communications from Stalin and Trotsky at that time there is open encouragement for ruthless action, both against the enemy and against the possibility of treason from comrades and allies in the struggle. According to *Let History Judge*⁹ Stalin wrote in May 1918 to a Caucasus leader: "A number of their villages should be set on fire and burned to the ground, to teach them not to make raids on trains." In June that year Trotsky accused the commander of the Baltic Fleet of supporting a counter-revolutionary coup through a speech to be made to a naval congress, an accusation which led speedily to a death sentence for that commander. Suspicious behaviour was enough.¹⁰ Lenin was not human rights-compliant in respect of enemies either, having a narrow-gauge concept of 'communist morality' and writing to Trotsky: "I'm confident that the crushing of the Kazan Czechs and White Guards, as well as the kulak bloodsuckers who are supporting them, will be carried out with exemplary lack of mercy ..."¹¹

There is a linkage between the requirement, as it was seen, for ruthless extermination of civil war enemies, with that for those insiders suspected of betrayal of the revolution. It was a linkage, which seems from the literature not to have gone away after the end of the Civil War and during the decades which followed. It may be a natural consequence, if you are in the habit of treating enemies as automatically deserving death, that you may extend the definition of enemy when you look round doubtfully at your friends.

The political environment in which Stalin emerged as leader of the Soviet Communist Party and government in the late 1920s was harsh. Lenin's secret testament, which was to become no more secret than Khrushchev's 1956 speech (though foolish in the extreme to mention in the 1930s), and which



proposed the removal of Stalin from the general secretary's post because of his defects in personal qualities and propensity to abuse power; could be cited as neatly identifying the negative features of the general secretary and the case for his removal. In hindsight, some might regard Lenin's criticism, on the basis of Stalin's biography as then known, to be unduly mild.

The leadership, after Lenin's death, agreed to a massive expansion of the party. The result was to create a huge base of more pliable members.¹² This was just one of the factors which facilitated movement towards an unaccountable leadership. The removal of Trotsky in 1927 both from offices of state and from membership of the Soviet Communist Party and his expulsion from the Soviet Union (and internal exile for his followers) symbolised the unacceptability of views different from those of the Stalin group and strengthened its base. The insistence within the Party on confession of fault by those opposed to the leading line at the moment, whatever it was, and on good behaviour for the future, was, however well-intentioned, to lend support to a future repressive structure. The hero-worship of leading Bolshevik figures, eventually reaching extraordinary proportions in the case of Stalin, added to the likelihood of despotic abuse. Medvedev does not blame everything on Stalin. He says: "The tragedy of the Party was not only that a man like Stalin led the Central Committee in the twenties but also that the opposition was led by men such as Trotsky, Zinoviev, and Bukharin, who could not offer an acceptable alternative to Stalin's leadership."¹³

That the Soviet Communist Party was on a dangerous path was graphically symbolised by a clash between Lenin's widow and Stalin as early as the 14th Congress in December 1925. Krupskaya spoke then¹⁴ against suppression of intraparty democracy, against the removal of opposition members from important party posts, against the demand that opposition members not only carry out the majority decision but also immediately and publicly renounce their own views. It was not a demand, she said, that Lenin made of his opponents. Stalin responded to Krupskaya's report by calling it

"utter rubbish". He said also: "For us Bolsheviks, formal democracy is an empty vessel, and the real interests of the party are everything."¹⁵

I am not sure how far Emelianov takes the view that consciousness of external threats to the Soviet Union led to or encouraged internal repression. I accept that in a general way the Soviet Union, after the failed foreign interventions of the earlier years, was always in danger; but doubt that there was a realistic immediate risk of external attack before the late 1930s. From 1931, when Japan was encroaching upon Chinese territory, it is true the risk became visible, but Japan, stretched in China, was not in a position to include territory of the Soviet Union in its immediate aims until at least much later in the decade. Nor was Nazi Germany. I have the impression that it may have been tempting to Soviet leaders to exaggerate the danger to justify internal repression.

Another point open to question is Emelianov's apparent assumption that the large percentage of former rich peasants and ordinary criminals, exiled during collectivisation and returned to their villages before being subject to the 1937-8 terror may not have been "innocent". Perhaps. But how easy was it to be innocent, for example, of theft, if you were outlawed and hungry, and how little did you have to do to earn the penalties of the law of 7 August 1932? This decreed execution or ten years in a camp for any theft of public property, which might be a handful of grain or a half a loaf of bread. By the beginning of 1933 more than 50,000 people, many of them starving, according to Volkogonov, had been sentenced.¹⁶ In the spring of 1935 another decree extended the death penalty for theft to children as young as twelve.

In 1932 a decree was announced making it a crime of treason "to escape over the border" and punishing this crime by "shooting and confiscation of all property". Further, if it was a soldier who escaped, the grown members of his family who knew of his intention and did not notify the police, were to endure five to ten years in prison with confiscation of property. And those who did not know of it but lived with or were supported by him at the time of contemplated act, could be deprived of citizenship

and exiled for five years to a remote region of Siberia. These were terrifying laws and even more terrifying in a society with such ubiquitous security police. Add in for good measure the emergency decrees initiated by Stalin after Kirov's assassination in December 1934. However unproven is the assertion that Stalin was complicit in that event, he was directly responsible for the decree immediately after the event: this barred appeals against death sentences in terrorist offences, required that sentences be carried out immediately, and curtailed severely defence rights prior and during trial.

We reach the events of 1935-6, which constitute a dress rehearsal of the great terror which followed in 1937-8; but already it seems evident that the guilt of Stalin and his immediate associates in the erosion of liberty of thought and expression, in the character of penal laws, in frame-up trials and a developing programme of mass arrests and murder; cannot be disguised or minimised. One question, as Emelianov implies, is whether or not, on balance, the Soviet socialist experiment carried more positives than negatives. Another is the hypothetical issue of whether the human rights crimes of the 1930s could have been, with different strategies, different leaders, avoided. There can be no re-run of what happened; but what happened offers up a learning experience of the grimmest kind for all socialists.

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BOOK REVIEW

A Radical Departure from any Form of Marxism as We Know It

Review by
Luke Beesley

Marx's Practical Materialism: The Horizon of Post-Subjectivity Philosophy

By WANG NANSHI and XIE YONGKANG (CANut International Publishers, Berlin, 2011, 444 pp, pbk, £25.00. ISBN: 978-3-942575-05-8. Obtainable through Central Books, <http://www.centralbooks.co.uk>)

A BOOK ON the relationship between Marxism and post-Hegelian continental philosophy coming out of a country with a ruling Communist Party is a pretty exciting event for Marxist philosophers in the West. The great theorists of both discourses have, at times, expressed only a passing knowledge of each other, and often mischaracterised each other in incredibly unhelpful ways.

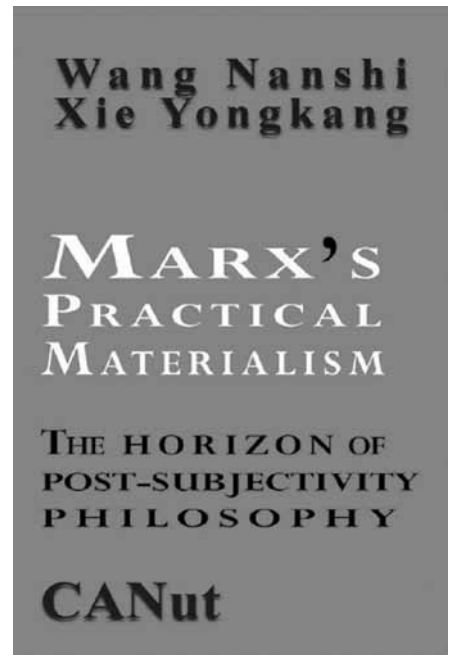
One thinks, first and foremost, of Heidegger's clumsy and vague statements about dialectical materialism in *What is Metaphysics?* and Gedö's abrupt rejection, in the 1970s, of phenomenology, post-structuralism and Bergsonism, as simply representations of bourgeois decay. Occasionally, a thinker – Althusser and Marcuse being the most obvious – seems genuinely to understand both discourses and is able critically to engage in the theoretical space that they both occupy, shedding light on how they show up each other's strengths and weaknesses.

These thinkers, however, are deeply rooted in theoretical and political problems that are no longer relevant or pressing on Marxist philosophy today. As much as we can take from *Eros and Civilisation* or *Lenin and Philosophy*, we have to accept that the philosophical battles that those thinkers fought on the terrain of structuralism, positivism and psycho-analysis are not ones that we could, or should, try to fight today. New battles are emerging for us in theory

as well as in political practice – battles surrounding the problematic of desire, power and ideology that had not even been formulated properly at the time of those works. We have our own terrain to map as 21st century Marxist-Leninists, the philosophers amongst us most especially. And mapping of these battlefields from the standpoint of Marxism-Leninism is desperately needed.

Marx's Practical Materialism, sadly, does not help to orient us very much at all. This is not entirely the fault of the authors. The editing and translation of the book leave an awful lot to be desired. Confusion of tenses and an almost total disregard for definite articles make reading this English translation fairly uncomfortable at best. Sometimes it actually obscures the point that the authors are trying to make.

To take but one example: on p 29 the authors claim that "ancient Greek had 'self-consciousness' in a sense, but not ... in the sense of early modern philosophy". It is ambiguous here whether they are referring to Greek philosophers, the Greek language or just the average Greek citizen. As such, I do not actually know whether Wang Nanshi and Xie Yongkang are making a point about the development of philosophical concepts, or the way citizens comported themselves towards production and civil society, or both. Given repeated ambiguities of this sort, we are forced to question whether or not the authors'



philosophical arguments are rendered clearly and faithfully.

The argument of the book is split into six parts and seeks to give a history of philosophical conceptions of 'theory' and 'practice' and show how Marx's materialist project negates the conceptual incompatibility of the two and points a way forward to a new form of conceptualising the immanent unity of philosophical and scientific theory and political practice. This is an aim shared, I think, by every Marxist philosopher; but the problem with this text is that it is very difficult to find Marxist theory in large parts of the argument.

For example, the characterisation of ancient philosophy as a form of 'gazing', and ancient practice as a form of 'grasping', owes its genesis to Heidegger's writing on Parmenides, not to Marx's doctoral dissertation on ancient atomism. More problematically, Marx's own materialism is explained in similarly Heideggerian and Husserlian terms. Husserl's concept *Lebenswelt* – 'life-world' – is invoked



BOOK REVIEW (continued)

to explain what constitutes the horizon of Marx's practical philosophy (pp 271-2). Such a term, however, is nowhere to be found in Marx's own work. In fact, the Husserlian emphasis on the life-world being a way of suspending judgments about what determines phenomena and returning to the mere appearances of things is in direct opposition to Marx and Engels' own theory of the way in which our relations to the means of production dictate what the phenomenological structure of a world is for us (cf the *German Ideology* Pt 1, *Grundrisse* preface). Similarly, Marx's and Engels' texts on what they mean by 'dialectics' are completely ignored by this exegesis.

Our authors do not hold that Marxist dialectics are the Hegelian method 'stood on its head', as a theory of immanence divorced from all idealism until "it regards every existing historical form as fluid, breaking up, transient" (Marx's 'Afterword' to the second German edition of *Capital*). Nor, indeed, is Althusser's characterisation of dialectical materialism as the totality of material determinations in motion invoked or discussed. Instead, Wang Nanshi and Xie Yongkang hold that dialectics are the "substitution of an absolute theoretical standpoint for other visual standpoints" (p 246), or a "tolerant principle" (p 247) which allows every form of theoretical discourse and position to have a say on what the 'truth' of a matter is. This is all very admirable and high-minded, but Marxism is a science. If we are to accept it as such then we have to set down what its logic is. By making this logic dependent on forces outside of Marxism itself, Wang and Xie have radically departed from any form of Marxism as we know it.

Lukacs, in *History and Class Consciousness*, fully articulated the problem of being a Marxist in a world that is constantly changing its modes of production to forms that Marx and Engels could never have prophesied from their historical position. He argued that being an 'orthodox Marxist' was about applying the method of historical and dialectical materialism to events as they emerge, rather than taking as *a priori* that every thesis of Marx or Engels is always and forever true. In Wang and Xie's book, the method of Marx and Engels is subverted to meet the method of transcendental European philosophy, and their theses are shoehorned into a framework alien to them. The word 'revisionism' is not fashionable anymore, but it is difficult to think of a better one for this text.

BOOK REVIEW

A Surprisingly Benign Approach to Globalisation

Review by Jerry Jones

THIS BOOK IS the report of a sub-group involved with a research project on the subject of 'International Political Economy and China's Diplomatic Strategies in the Era of Globalization' begun in 2003, under the auspices of Renmin University of China. Originally published in Chinese, in 2006, it is clearly orientated towards a Chinese readership. The main interest from a foreign perspective is the extent to which the book might provide an insight into the current thinking among Marxist intellectuals in China.

One problem, especially in the first few chapters, is that the analysis, such as it is, tends to be somewhat superficial. For instance, globalisation, it seems, simply happened. There is no concept of the extent to which transnational corporations and the big financial institutions have co-opted governments and international organisations, such as the WTO, into tailoring economic policies to suit their global interests at the expense of everyone else.

Similarly, the demise

of socialism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe is described, but there is no attempt to look for the underlying causes within the economic system. As stated in Chapter 2, 'Globalization and Capitalism in the Post-Cold War Era', capitalism simply "won without fighting" (p 67).

It would have been useful if in this chapter the authors had analysed the path followed by other East Asian countries, such as Japan and South Korea, when they were at an equivalent stage of development as China, when it embarked on its new industrialisation strategy in the 1980s. In particular, they could have looked at the way these countries used Western technologies to develop their own home-grown firms (which was also what the Soviet Union did), rather than allow transnational corporations to invest in their countries directly, which was the strategy followed by China. In the latter case, the transnational corporations, even if part of joint ventures, can siphon profits out of the

Global Revival of Left and Socialism Versus Globalization and China's Share

By PU GUOLIANG and XIONG GUANGQING
 (China Renmin University Press, 2006;
 English translation, CANut International Publishers, Berlin, 2011, 280pp,
 pbk, £12.50. ISBN: 978-3-942575-00-3.
 Obtainable through Central Books,
www.centralbooks.co.uk)



country through transfer pricing and the like, whereas in the former, once the firms are established, the profits remain in the country and are available for further investment.

A deeper analysis of those three issues might have moved the authors to examine more critically what they describe in Chapter 3, 'Globalization and Socialism in the Post-Cold War Era' – in which they review trends in socialist movements around the world – as “the correct path to build socialism with Chinese characteristics” (p 103). This refers to the ‘opening up’ policy that was launched by the Communist Party of China in the early 1980s under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping – which, they say, “need not be changed ... for at least [a] hundred years” (p 221).

Thus, they adopt a surprisingly benign approach to globalisation. In Chapter 4, 'A Review of Socialist Movements and Thoughts in the Age of Globalization', they claim that the situation today

is different from the “Cold War period”, during which “socialism and capitalism aimed to defeat each other in competition”. Now, “the links between socialist and capitalist countries [are] getting closer”, shifting from “the pattern of ‘zero sum’ to ‘win-win’ or ‘multiple win’” (p 174). And they say “socialism and capitalism will co-exist for further generations”, such that “it is inevitable for the two systems to learn and absorb each other’s achievements and favourable elements in the process of both conflict and cooperation” (p 178), from which China should take full advantage in order to acquire the productive forces it needs.

However, in Chapter 5, 'The Re-Positioning of the Contemporary Socialism in China', the authors worry that not all might be well. They quote one Holmes, “former Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs”, who stated “in the long run, defeating the communist road lies in infiltration of our ideas into communist countries” (p 212). They use the term

(along with Deng Xiaoping) “peaceful evolution” to describe this process, which has political, economic and cultural aspects, and which elsewhere in the book they blame, at least in part, for the demise of socialism in the former USSR and Eastern Europe. They quote Jiang Zemin, former General Secretary of the Communist Party of China, and President of the People’s Republic of China from 1993 to 2003 (p 212):

“China is now the biggest socialist country in the world, with growing strength. The Western hostile forces have stepped up their political strategy of ‘Westernisation’ and ‘split apart’ in China through various means and ways. They intend to overthrow the leadership of the Communist Party of China and socialist system in China. Their political intention never changes.”

In the final Chapter 6, 'China's Foreign Strategy and Prospects on the Relations of Two Systems in the Age of Globalization', the authors describe “the opportunities brought to the development of China by globalization”, which they assert is an “irreversible and unavoidable reality”, enabling the utilisation of foreign capitals to overcome what they mistakenly believe is a shortage of capital in China; but then they worry about excessive foreign trade dependence. Thus the trade value of exports in relation to Gross National Product (GNP) increased from 30% in 1990 to 70% in 2004 (p 232); while the trade value of imports of crude oil, iron ore and alumina in 2003 reached between 36% and 48% of GNP, “with a high monopoly risk”, an “international shipment risk”, and “an international political risk” (p 234).

They also worry about China opening up its financial sector – which was a condition for the country’s entry into the WTO – that



BOOK REVIEW (continued)

“[i]nternational liquid capital may flood into China and stir up troubles”, and cause “sharp fluctuation in the stock exchange, increase volatility of prices, inflation or deflation, which in turn causes financial crisis” (p 235). Finally, they complain that many transnational corporations and “global consortiums” that have invested in China have an “astonishingly high degree of monopoly” (p 238).

Following the global financial meltdown, which came to a head soon after the book was published in China, and which, among other things, led to a decrease in Chinese export orders, the authors would have even more reason to be worried. With hindsight, would they have given more prominence towards redirecting the Chinese economy away from export dependence and towards expanding its huge

potential domestic market? The dilemma here, of course, is that this would require the substantial raising of wages and agricultural prices, which would undermine China’s “comparative advantage” of cheap labour, making exports less competitive.

The authors might also have taken a stronger view against the opening up of China’s financial sector. Any delay here, of course, would put China at loggerheads with the WTO – not before time, some would say. In fact, already, China’s financial sector is somewhat out of control, with much bank lending ending up in property speculation – which has caused property prices and land values to escalate – and speculation on the stock exchange. Not much different from here! Is this the “peaceful evolution” that the authors fear could undermine or kill off socialism in China? ■

Ken Fuller’s History of the Philippines Communist Movement

In CR63 (Spring 2012) we stated that we were investigating bulk shipping of the first two volumes of Ken Fuller’s trilogy on the history of communism in the Philippines. Ken now advises us that paper copies of volume 1,

Forcing the Pace, can be found at www.foyles.co.uk (£20.48), www.powells.com (\$37.25) and www.amazon.com (\$24.75); while the Kindle edition is still available from www.amazon.co.uk at £2.49. Volume 2, *A Movement Divided*, will be launched on Amazon on September 30 (£28.80 and \$34.20).

BOOK REVIEW

Quiet Heroism & Modesty in the Cause of Liberation

Review by Nick Wright

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to this book, Ronnie Kasrils, anti-apartheid’s impresario of subversion, characteristically reflects on the motivation of his ‘London Recruits’ – the dozens of white volunteers who slipped into apartheid-era South Africa in the service of liberation.

He summarises, “the testing of one’s own principles and beliefs with perhaps a healthy dose of adventure and romanticism is integral; but certainly the nobility of international solidarity is paramount in the minds of the politically aware” And he draws on the examples of Byron and Bolivar, the International Brigaders and Che Guevara.

It was in London, heart of the second most powerful imperial power, that an African National Congress/South African Communist Party task group planned a stimulus to the clandestine propaganda

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip



London Recruits: The Secret War Against Apartheid

Compiled and edited by KEN KEABLE
(Merlin Press, Pontypool, 2012,
364 pp, pbk, £15.95.
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and underground resistance movement in South Africa.

Ken Keable has cajoled and corralled dozens of volunteers to tell their stories. It makes inspiring reading. The clandestine method was simple and rested for its effectiveness on the ideological blind spot of the repressive apartheid state apparatus and the limited imaginations of the people who staffed it. A white skin functioned as a *laissez passer* in the apartheid-era South Africa.

Recruited by Ronnie Kasrils, dozens of young communist workers, some students – socialists of various kinds including Trotskyists – from Britain, Ireland, the US and the Netherlands entered South Africa ostensibly as tourists or seeking work. With suitcases packed with ANC materials they were trained to create propaganda by action with bucket bombs that scattered ANC leaflets at locations where African workers congregated, unfurled ANC banners and broadcast delayed action tape recordings of speeches by liberation leaders.

The importance of the actions lies in the stimulus they provided to the reviving underground movement. Ronnie Kasrils recounts that by 1976 the movement had regained much of its former capacity, despite numerous deaths and casualties.

Ken Keable remembers his first impressions: “On arrival at the airport, and everywhere I went, the racism and injustice of that society were obvious, not only in the segregation but in the faces of the people, in their body language and ways of addressing each other.

All the menial jobs were done by black people. I could see how easy it was to be a white person in that country. No one questioned anything I did and there was always a black person to help me, often without my having to ask.”

The training and preparation for this early troop of volunteers was an improvised affair, and the consequences for them of capture were daunting. In fact several were betrayed or caught and served jail sentences. Sean Hosey and Alex Moumbaris went back for a second mission and were arrested, tortured and jailed.

The key organisers were trained in the Soviet Union, and their recruitment and preparation of the anti-apartheid volunteers was on a strictly political basis in the tried and tested traditions of clandestine work. The volunteers, of necessity, worked with a smaller sufficiency of training and tradecraft – which makes their quiet heroism as striking as their modesty.

When the initial propaganda offensive was complete the clandestine movement began to operate on a bigger scale with more complex operations involving the infiltration of cadres, combatants, arms and communications equipment, the operation of safe houses, the training of specialists, intelligence gathering and logistics.

The human essence of this book lies in the repeated accounts by the London recruits of their selection, training and despatch to South Africa, the accidents that befell them and the personal and political conclusions they draw from



their experiences.

Some stories are scary, others side-splittingly funny. They offer a window into a vanished world when the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic provided critical training, finance and support to the national liberation movement and when the progressive movement in Britain drew on a reservoir of unquestioning solidarity.

In a Foreword to the book, former ANC minister of arts and culture Pallo Jordan provides an authoritative account of the four-pronged ANC strategy, the role of the multi-faceted solidarity movement.

One eyewitness – a retired policeman from the then Rhodesia – reported seeing excited crowds of Africans dancing in elation to a tape-recorded message and rushing to pick up leaflets. And Ronnie Kasrils recounts how the young guerrilla combatants who joined Umkhonto weSizwe, the armed wing of the ANC, first encountered the ANC message through these propaganda coups.

Ken Keable has brought to book the story of a generation of mostly young people who, long before the world understood the inevitability of an ANC triumph – and when establishment politicians as exemplified by Thatcher characterised Mandela and the ANC as terrorists – were prepared to risk their lives and liberty in the liberation cause.



SOULFOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

Victor Jara: *iPresente!*

AS YOU ARE reading this, it will be about the time of the anniversaries of both the birth of the Chilean singer, songwriter and guitarist, Victor Jara, and his death.

Victor was born on 28 September 1932 in the rural locality of Lonquen, later moving into the poorer areas of Santiago. His writing and music, and the theatrical direction which was his living, were all rooted in the struggles of the rural peasants and the urban workers.

He was a true activist musician, a member of the Chilean Communist Party, whose politics were central to the form and content of his songwriting. He toured the country in support of the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, which was undermined and eventually brought down by a military coup supported by the United States. And he was himself a victim of that coup, tortured and murdered by the military on 16 September 1973.

This *Soul Food* column is in memory of Victor Jara, whose life and work was a great example of the fusion of poetry, music and politics which as communists we seek to promote and encourage and practise, in art and culture.

We start with a poem about him; and then move to a selection of his lyrics. You do not need to know the tunes to appreciate these lyrics, although if you want to hear them set to music, there are lots of his songs on Youtube, in the original Spanish as well as in translation.

But these poems have their own inner music, which you will hear as soon as you start reading them, especially if you read them aloud. Perhaps at your next branch meeting? Or your *Morning Star* Readers and Supporters Group?

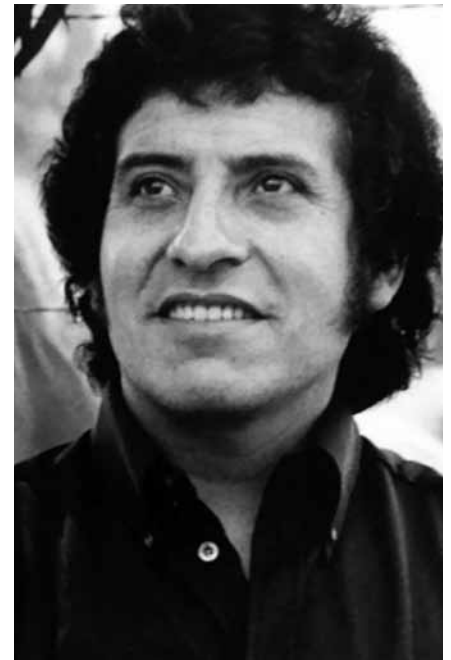
Victor Jara of Chile by Adrian Mitchell

Victor Jara of Chile
Lived like a shooting star
He fought for the people of Chile
With his songs and his guitar
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

Victor Jara was a peasant
He worked from a few years old
He sat upon his father's plough
And watched the earth unfold
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

Now when the neighbours had
a wedding
Or one of their children died
His mother sang all night for them
With Victor by her side
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

He grew up to be a fighter
Against the people's wrongs
He listened to their grief and joy
And turned them into songs
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.



He sang about the copper miners
And those who worked the land
He sang about the factory
workers
And they knew he was their man
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

He campaigned for Allende
Working night and day
He sang: Take hold of your
brother's hand
You know the future begins today
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

The bloody generals seized Chile
They arrested Victor then
They caged him in a stadium
With five-thousand
frightened men

And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

Victor stood in the stadium
His voice was brave and strong
And he sang for his fellow
prisoners
Till the guards cut short his
song
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

They broke the bones in both
his hands
They beat his lovely head
They tore him with electric
shocks
After two long days of torture
they shot him dead
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

And now the generals rule Chile
And the British have their thanks
For they rule with Hawker
Hunters
And they rule with Chieftain
tanks
And his hands were gentle
His hands were strong.

Victor Jara of Chile
Lived like a shooting star
He fought for the people of
Chile
With his songs and his guitar
And his hands were gentle,
His hands were strong.

Miner's Song

Coming, going, crawling,
all for what?
Nothing is for me.
A miner I am,
to the mine I go,
a miner I am.

Digging, dragging, sweating,
bleeding,
all for the Boss
nothing for my pain.
A miner I am,
to the mine I go,
to death I go,
a miner I am.

Watch, listen, reason, shout,
nothing could be worse,
anything is better.
A miner I am,
to the mine I go,
to death I go,
a miner I am.

Apparition for Che Guevara

He finds paths among the
mountains,
leaves his footprint on the wind,
the eagle gives him flight
and the silence shelters him.

he never complains of cold,
never complains of fatigue,
the poor hear his passing
and blindly follow him.

Fly, fly, hide,
here, there, everywhere,
fly, fly, hide,
fly, because they will kill you,
fly, fly, hide.

The vultures with golden claws
have put their price upon his head,
the fury of the powerful
will crucify him.
Son of the revolution,
followed by twenty and twenty,
because his life is dedicated
they want to murder him.

Fly, fly, hide,
here, there, everywhere,
fly, fly, hide,
fly, because they will kill you,
fly, fly, hide.

Prayer to a Labourer

Stand up, look at the mountain,
source
of the wind, the sun, the water.
You who change
the course of rivers,
who with the seed sows

the flight of your soul.

Stand up
look at your hands,
take your brother's hand
so you can grow,
we'll go together,
united by blood,
the future
can begin today.

Deliver us from the master who
keeps us
in misery,
thy will be done, at last,
on Earth.

Blow like the wind blows
the wild flower of the mountain
pass,
clean the barrel of my gun
like fire.

Thy will be done, at last,
on Earth,
give us the strength and courage
to struggle.

Blow like the wind blows
the wild flower of the mountain
pass,
clean the barrel of my gun
like fire.

Stand up
look at your hands,
take your brother's hand
so you can grow,
we'll go together,
united by blood,
now and in the hour
of our death. Amen.
Amen.
Amen.



The Miner, by Mexican artist
Francisco Mora, 1945



For Luis Emilio Recabarren

I place in your open hands
my singer's guitar,
the miner's hammer,
the peasant's plough.
Recabarren
Luis Emilio Recabarren,
I say, simply,
thank you for your light.
On the wind,
on the wind of the Pampas,
your voice is carried
to the centre and to the south.

Tree of so much hope,
born in the sunlight,
your fruit will ripen and sing
until we are free.

Recabarren,
Luis Emilio Recabarren,
I say, simply,
thank you for your light.
On the wind,
on the wind of the Pampas,
your voice is carried
to the centre and to the south.

Free Song

My verse is a dove
looking for a place to nest,
exploding, spreading its wings
to fly and fly and fly.

My song is a free song,
it wants to give itself
to anyone who holds out a hand,
to anyone who wants to soar.

My song is a chain
without beginning or end,
and in every link you'll find
the song of all the people.

Let's go out singing together
to everyone on earth.
Sing, that song is a dove
flying, reaching out,
exploding, spreading its wings
to fly and fly and fly.

My song is a free song.



Protesting workers, still from *The Battle of Chile*, Patricio Guzmán, 1975-6.

Manifesto

I don't sing for love of singing
or to show off my voice,
but for the statements
made by my honest guitar.

For its heart is of the earth
and like the dove it goes flying,
tenderly as holy water,
blessing the brave and the dying.

So my song has a purpose,
as Violeta Parra would say,
yes, my guitar is a worker,
shining and smelling of spring.

My guitar is not for killers
greedy for money and power,
but for the people who labour
so that the future might flower.

For a song takes on meaning
when its own heart beat is strong
sung by a man who will die singing
truthfully singing his song.

I don't sing for adulation
or so that strangers might weep
I sing for a far strip of country
narrow but endlessly deep.

In the earth in which we begin,
in the earth in which we end,
brave songs will give birth
to a song which will always be
new,
to a song which will
always be new.

Notes and Acknowledgements

Victor Jara of Chile: This poem by Adrian Mitchell has been set to music: you can hear it at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IYVJHvbHtAE>, sung by Brian Hibbard, late of the Flying Pickets.

Miner's Song: This song is translated by Joan Jara, Victor's widow.

Apparition: This song was written for Che Guevara shortly before he was killed in the Bolivian jungle. Translated by Joan Jara.

Prayer to a Labourer: Translated by Adrian Mitchell.

For Luis Emilio Recabarren: Recabarren was a founder member of the Chilean Communist Party, and a great believer in the power of theatre, poetry and song as part of the cultural struggle for communism. Translated by Eduardo Embry and John Green.

Free Song: Translated by Joan Jara.

Manifesto: Violeta Parra was a Chilean songwriter, folklorist, member of the Chilean Communist Party, and a friend of Victor's. Translated by Adrian Mitchell.

The poems and songs are all taken from '*His Hands Were Gentle: Selected Lyrics of Victor Jara*', Smokestack Books, 2012, 84 pp, pbk, £8.95, ISBN: 978-0-9568144-1-8. Thanks to Andy Croft at Smokestack Books for permission to reprint the poems.



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