

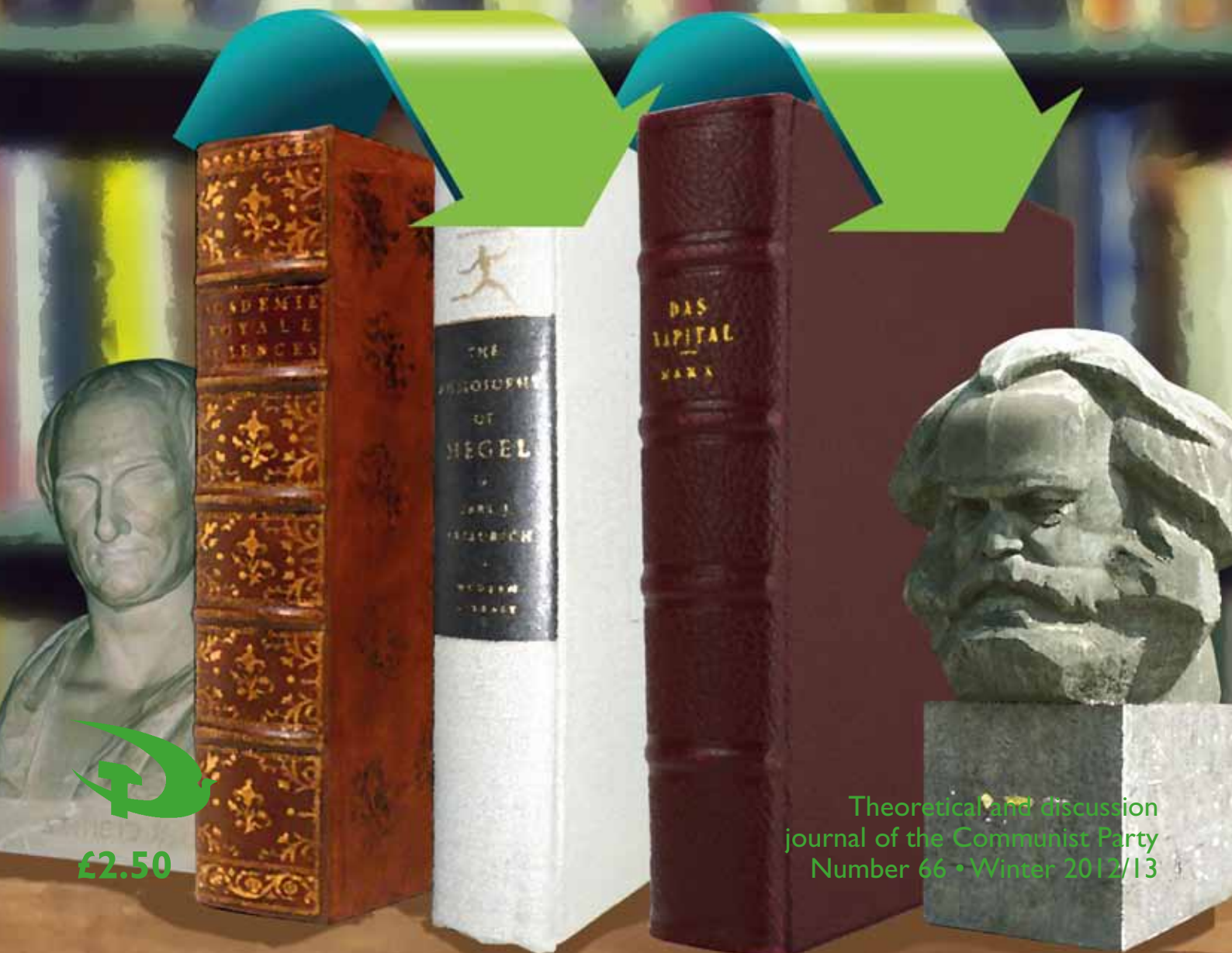


COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Hans Heinz Holz** From Leibniz via Hegel to Marx
- **Ken Fuller** Dickens: the masses, race and empire, part 2
- **Siobhan Lennon-Patience** Measuring a Nation's 'Well-Being'
- **Azar Sepehr** Iranian Women's Movement
- Plus discussion, book reviews and Soul Food



From Leibniz via Hegel to Marx



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FROM LEIBNIZ VIA HEGEL TO MARX

by Hans Heinz Holz page 2

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-
- 1 **Editorial** by Martin Levy
-
- 8 **Charles Dickens: the masses, race and empire**
by Ken Fuller
-
- 12 **Measuring a Nation's 'Well-Being': A Psycho-Cultural Investigation** by Siobhan Lennon-Patience
-
- 17 **Iranian Women: A Movement for Progress, Equality and Socialism** by Azar Sepehr
-
- 21 **Letter to the Editor**
-
- 22 **The Western Welfare State: Its Rise and the Demise of the Soviet Bloc** by James Petras
-
- 26 **Eric Hobsbawm: Foremost Historian in the Marxist Tradition** by Mary Davis and John Foster
-
- 28 **Discussion: What the Dickens ...?** by Doug McLeod
-
- Reviews:**
-
- 30 **The CPGB: A Unique Political Culture** review
by Nick Wright
-
- 32 **Raising Questions which Socialists need to Confront** review by John Foster
-
- 34 **Soul Food** by Mike Quille
-

editorial



By Martin Levy

STRANGE THINGS are happening at the TUC. It has organised two massive demonstrations within an 18-month period. In Frances O'Grady, it has elected its first ever woman general secretary. And at Brighton in September, the 'g-word' was used seriously for the first time in many years.

By 'g-word' I don't mean the Urban Dictionary definitions of 'cool', 'ginger', 'gay', 'God' or even 'garlic'.¹ Nor the environmental 'green',² laudable as that might be – but 'g' for 'general', as in *general strike*.

OK, so the TUC only voted to investigate the possibility of a g-strike, which means that not a lot is likely to happen this side of its 2013 Annual Congress, but the decision itself was a reflection of the grim determination of delegates, faced with the ConDem onslaught against all the hard-won gains of the working class.

Such an onslaught demands resistance, in fact use of the g-strike weapon, but clearly we are a long way from that, behind workers in Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy who not only demonstrate against austerity in tens and hundreds of thousands but take strike action along with it.

True, the Thatcher-era anti-union laws have rendered it difficult to mount effective legal strike action in Britain. That situation may however no longer apply to *political* strike action and demonstrations, as a recent publication³ from the Institute of Employment Rights indicates. But much needs to be done in any case to rebuild the morale of union members, many of whom have accepted the line that government spending cuts are necessary or that nothing can be done about them except to protest.

The raft of alternative economic and social policies decided by the TUC, including reaffirmation of the principles of the People's Charter and the Charter for Women, provides an opportunity for changing that mood. Embedding these Charters into workplace and community campaigns will help convince people that a comprehensive alternative is both necessary and possible, one in which

the power of monopoly capital can be challenged and the 's-word' – socialism – put on the agenda.

Realisation of the possible was at the heart of the thinking of philosopher, mathematician, engineer, lawyer and statesman Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). He was lampooned by Voltaire, in his novel *Candide*, for writing that ours was "the best of all possible worlds"; but, as Hans Heinz Holz contends in our leading article, Leibniz was saying is that this world is so because it is not static – we have the possibility of changing it for the better. This point is vital, because the whole thrust of bourgeois ideology is that capitalism is the natural social order, and so cannot be changed.

Leibniz, as Holz shows, was a forerunner of Hegel's dialectics, and in turn Marx situated Hegel's system in material reality. In the process Marx demonstrated that the contradictions of capitalist society can only be negated constructively – what Hegel called the *determinate negation* – by the exact opposite of private ownership, *ie* social ownership of the means of production. It is a pity that philosophy is not more widely studied in the British labour movement as it would help build an understanding that only genuine socialism can resolve the contradictions of modern-day state-monopoly capitalism. Hans Heinz's 3-volume *Transcendence and Realisation of Philosophy*, from which the current article is taken, should when completely translated and published be an incentive for such engagement. Additional volunteer translators would be welcome.

From the general we move to the particular, with Siobhan Lennon-Patience's *Measuring a Nation's Well-Being*. She shows that, while the media trivially identify 'well-being' with 'happiness', the Cameron government is using the concept to develop a social cost-benefit analysis where a monetary value is placed on public goods. The language of self-help therapy, with individualism as the dominant

norm, is being used to justify massive cutbacks in welfare state provision.

Those cutbacks certainly started well before the banking crisis of 2008. The article by James Petras demonstrates clearly that the Western welfare state arose directly out of competition between Soviet and Eastern European "collectivist welfarism" and capitalism, and that it went into reverse as soon as the Soviet bloc collapsed. He castigates "Western trade unions and the 'anti-Stalinist' left" for doing "yeoman service in not only ending the collectivist system ... but in ending the welfare state for scores of millions of workers, pensioners and their families." While we find much to agree with in his analysis, there is a tendency to exaggeration and his criticism of social democracy seems rather too sweeping – not *all* of Britain's trade union hierarchy was *always* against *all* class struggle. Discussion contributions here would be welcome.

The going may be tough here but it is often much more difficult elsewhere in the world. Azar Sepehr's article brings us down to earth, revealing the extraordinary courage of the Iranian women's movement in the face of savage repression. Women, she shows, are at the forefront of the struggle not only for gender equality but for peace, independence, freedom and social justice.

This issue also carries part 2 of Ken Fuller's *Charles Dickens: the masses, race and empire*, and a discussion contribution on part 1 from Doug McLeod; while Mike Quille's *Soul Food* is in part something of a critique of Yuri Emelianov's recent 3-part article on '*Stalin's Purges*' of 1937-8. We round up with two book reviews, a letter to the editor and an obituary of Eric Hobsbawm, "foremost historian in the Marxist tradition".

Notes and References

1 <http://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=g-word>.

2 <http://planetgreen.discovery.com/tv/g-word/>.

3 K D Ewing and J Henty QC, *Days of Action: The legality of protest strikes against government cuts*, Institute of Employment Rights, 2012.

From Leibniz via Hegel to Marx¹



By Hans Heinz Holz

Marx and Leibniz

In the 1870s, I believe it was 1876, Marx wrote a letter to Engels,² in which he reported that Kugelmann had sent him from Hanover two pieces of carpet from Leibniz's study, which he had picked up from the debris of the demolition of Leibniz's house. Marx then made fun of the stupid Hanoverians: if, instead of throwing these antiques on the rubbish dump, they had taken them to London, they would have been able to make a lot of money. Both pieces of carpet picked up by Kugelmann had mythological contents, one showing Neptune, the other Cupid and Psyche. Marx had them framed, hung them in his own study, wrote to Engels and ended this short story with the words "You know my admiration for Leibniz."

For the moment this appears to be a very unusual word, since Leibniz actually occurs seldom in the works of Marx and Engels – in Engels' case in connection with *Dialectics of Nature*,³ but with Marx only in the beginning. It is rather astonishing still to find this homage to Leibniz by Marx in those late years. However, we should perhaps recall that the young Marx had, during his time as a student, made up a whole book of excerpts from Leibniz's philosophy,

from the then still widespread Dutens edition, although at that time, around 1840, the Erdmann edition had already appeared in Berlin, where Marx was studying. Feuerbach had based his great book on Leibniz's philosophy on the Dutens edition and had selected citations from it. I accept that on this basis Marx, because he had been led to Leibniz through Feuerbach, still studied the older edition; and it is very interesting that, out of numberless possibilities for excerpting Leibniz, from an enormous *oeuvre*,⁴ he particularly excerpted Leibniz's metaphysical writings rather than those on state reform, philosophy of law and so on, which, we might assume, would concern the young, politically interested Marx. Why and what this signifies, we shall soon return to.

Leibniz the Polymath

Next however we must recall that Leibniz was indeed not only a metaphysicist and philosopher, but also a polymath who became active as a diplomat and legal advisor, not only to the Hanoverian dukes but also to the Russian Tsar Peter the Great. He had carried out diplomatic commissions for the Archbishop of Mainz, when the latter was Imperial Chancellor. He was one of

the greatest engineers of his time, working on inventions for draining the then flooded mines in the Harz mountains. He was one of the greatest mathematicians in history, developing the infinitesimal calculus. Apart from this, he designed a new statute book, and gave state expert advice over the reorganisation of the imperial order, which at that time consisted of a few hundred petty states, connected only very loosely in a federal system. Leibniz generated ideas about how this empire could be better connected and united for economic development, because even in the years before 1700 he saw that without the development of manufacture, as it was called at the time, popular prosperity would not be reached.

I do not need to discuss Leibniz's whole encyclopaedic creative breadth in order to say that we are dealing with a mind which was not only receptive to all areas of knowledge which were recognised as being developed at that time, but rather also was actively productive. If we visualise the variety of Leibniz's scientific activity we might ask, "What was the integrative viewpoint, which unified all these different things in his thought — how did that grow out from a root and a centre?"

Whenever we ask such a question, we come up against our philosophical principles – principles which for the moment consist essentially of the conception that we have to be able to develop, of our theoretical picture of the world, a model in which the variety of phenomena of this world, *ie* what we call the 'plurality of the world', is capable of being conceptualised together with the idea that it is *one* world, that it is an *ordered* world.

Unity of thought was a central idea of the metaphysics of the 17th century. We think here of Spinoza, the greatest proponent of the idea of unity as a principle. But for him unity was conditional on multiplicity being regarded only as an appearance, as a phenomenon, as something not real but rather as a form of expression of this unity. Leibniz insisted on the reality, on the objectivity of the variety, on the objectivity of the many. He saw the existence of the innumerable distinctions in this world as a challenge towards its contemplation as a unitary totality. To this extent, I would say, he was the first modern metaphysicist, who – in contrast to the metaphysicists of his time and before him – developed this unitary model not as a

theory of true being. Rather he said: ‘With our finite understanding it is impossible for us to portray this infinite world adequately. We can only represent it within a determined perspective and in a determined relationship to the part in ourselves. If, therefore, we make a world model, we can only advance it as a hypothesis, which must however be in a form which allows the majority of phenomena to be well explained. The more efficient the hypothesis is for explaining the phenomena, the more plausible it is as a model – not a portrayal, but rather a model – of this objective world.’ That naturally includes the point that such a hypothesis, in contrast to a closed system – which for instance Spinoza’s system is – remains always adjustable. Newly arriving knowledge must be built in, must be able to engender a modification of the hypothesis and thereby keep the process of an integrating knowledge of the total in motion.

Universal Interconnection

It might be said, so to say in anticipation of the results of these meditations, that this is exactly the concept which Friedrich Engels developed in *Dialectics of Nature* under the heading “Dialectics is the Theory of Universal Interconnection”.⁵ Here Engels expresses “of *Universal Interconnection*” by the German genitive “*des Gesamtzusammenhangs*” rather than the dative “*vom Gesamtzusammenhang*”; and since Engels was an exceptional expert in the German language, we must make clear to ourselves what he distinguished with these two forms of the same expression. We cannot have “*eine Wissenschaft vom Gesamtzusammenhang*” (a science of universal interconnection), because as finitely thinking beings we cannot reflect the endless

totality of the world, rather only just a finite section. A science of universal interconnection, which is a *genitivus objectivus*,⁶ will be no more possible in the future – according to the criticisms of all classical metaphysics, as they prevailed in the 19th century following Hegel’s criticism of the ‘former metaphysics’, that is no longer possible. However, we do always have the possibility of developing hypotheses which can sketch the construction of the total, the methods, in the way that a totality is to be constructed under the conditions of a given variety.

And such a theory arising out of universal interconnection (Theorie des Gesamtzusammenhangs) – that is then a *genitivus subjectivus*⁷ – the universal interconnection is what produces the theory – that is dialectics. That is what Engels says. That is however exactly the concept of Leibniz’s presentation of this shaping of a metaphysical theory as a hypothesis which must be efficient for the explanation of the variety of the world.

What then is one of the decisive criteria? At this point I do not want to develop Leibniz’s whole system, and certainly not the relationship among all three⁸ in detail, rather I can only give keywords.

The Best of All Possible Worlds

What stands, *inter alia*, at the centre of the efficiency of such a hypothesis? The hypothesis must be such that it can describe, explain and possibly also normalise the mutual agreement of the elements of this world – the individuals which exist in this world. This conception, that the variety of the many discrete things, entities, people etc, coexisting in this world, stand in an interlocking functional context, is the methodical central idea which stands behind Leibniz’s postulate that this is the best of all possible



worlds, as he writes in his *Theodicy*⁹ and *Monadology*.¹⁰ At that time the terrible Lisbon earthquake had just taken place, killing thousands of people, and Voltaire poured out his acerbic sarcasm on Leibniz's description of this miserable world – in which everything, from natural events to the malice of people who wage wars, leads to negations – as “the best of all possible”. I consider that Voltaire was the victim of a misunderstanding, which applies also to most ongoing interpretations of Leibniz.

Leibniz does not by a long chalk maintain that this world is a good one. On the contrary: throughout his whole life he made incessant proposals for improvement, for doing things better in this world, not only in the regulation of natural circumstances but above all in his many proposals for the improvement of society and the political system. A person who dedicates his whole life to the task of making improvements can scarcely think that this world is a good one or indeed the best world. However, Leibniz did not in fact say that it is the best world – rather that it is the best of all possible worlds. If, within the conditions of building a hypothesis, as I have suggested, we visualise a model of the world, then the best model is the one which allows an optimising of the world, thus modeling a process in which this world is itself capable of change in the direction towards its possible perfecting.

Not, therefore, a world which is the way it is and remains so; not a static world, which is prescribed by the law of identity with itself. Such a world cannot be the best of all possible since all those imperfections remain which we perceive and get from experience. Rather the best of all possible worlds is that which is inherently not just a world of truths, but one of truth and possibility.

This ‘possibility’ is not something which is thought up in our heads, but something which continually arises anew in connection with the endless variety of many entities interacting with each other in the world. And, in the context of all these interaction complexes, every realised possibility gives rise to a new possibility so that that world must be described as the best of possible, in which an endless progress, an endless advance towards perfecting is conceivable.

There is a small manuscript by Leibniz – I included it in the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft Leibniz edition which I prepared¹¹ – which has the title *An mundus perfectione crescat*: ‘whether the perfection of this world increases’. And Leibniz says: “If this world is capable of development, if possibilities are present in it to develop further, then we always have the possibility of reverse development, but it always goes a fraction further.” Therefore the reverse development will also be a development, but one which does not occur at the same level at which it began, rather presenting itself initially at a higher level in time. Goethe later interpreted this notion of progress by the picture of a spiral: we go outwards in the form of a spiral, which means that time and again we also turn back to a point of negation, but at a temporally and evolutionarily richer higher level. Richer, because in between successive development levels, new development possibilities are reached, so that something like an advance takes place in the course of the overall development of the world. That is, as it were, applied under the condition that this is a world born out of realities and possibilities and that it moves in time, therefore is openly forward and progressing.

The motion of the world, the changeability of the world,

the composition of the world from the already real and the as-yet possible, what in our time Ernst Bloch described in his philosophy as the ‘really possible’, makes up the basic pattern of this world model of Leibniz, of which he can say that this world is the best of all possible.

Whatever is to be realised in this world must however be realised by human subjects, since they are the active elements – the ‘power points’, as Leibniz would say; this way forward demands the application of human subjectivity, of human activity and also of human morality.

Classical Natural Justice

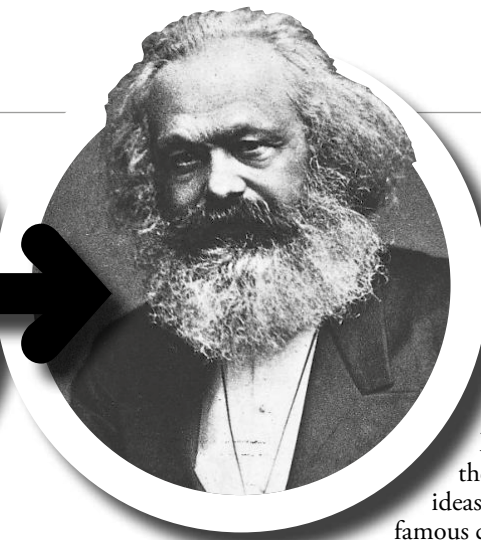
Leibniz was indeed, *inter alia*, also a lawyer and that was actually his principal occupation. He had studied jurisprudence and had initially entered political service as a legal advisor. In this respect he digested the conception of classical natural law and over and again brought it into systematic form. He placed the three principles of this classical natural justice, which were taken over from Roman justice, in the centre of his judicial- and state-philosophical reasoning. These three principles are: *suum cuique tribuere* (to each his own); *neminem laedere* (hurt no-one); and that general stipulation which in Roman natural justice and with the Stoics is, so to say, the final one, *honeste vivere* (live an honest life) – which he immediately clarified by pointing out that ‘honest’ means following the laws of one’s reason.

Now, however – and most Leibniz interpreters have not paid attention to this – there are variants which Leibniz posed to this trinity of natural justice principles. In various state-judicial plans of his he stated more precisely that



honeste vivere – which is a quite vague general stipulation – means not only ‘to live according to reason’ but rather that we all must support each other – *omnes adiuvere*. That is a very important innovation in the framework of the natural justice concept, and an innovation which he also enforced in polemical writings against the concept of the newly emerging bourgeois-individualist society.

At that time Thomas Hobbes had just coined the formula, that without civil society people would be in a state of waging war of all against all (*bellum omnia contra omnes*), that a person would be a wolf to another person (*homo homini lupus*). Leibniz called into question these formulae of Hobbesian state understanding, built up on the individual competition of people, hence on the developed structure of bourgeois society, and said: that is self-destructive for society. The competition of people against one other, the principle of absolute individualism, hence all those principles which lead into modern social theory and social practice – all these are indubitably impractical, if we want an orderly, good and peaceful world. He therefore substituted, for the principle of competition (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), that of solidarity, the principle that people ought to support each other. This *omnes adiuvere* as a complement to *suum cuique tribuere* and *neminem laedere* demands helping and supporting each other and building a community of



mutual assistance. With Leibniz this concept stands in the background, which he then connects to the general good with an idea likewise coming from classical Roman law, the *commune bonum* (common good). All his plans for the regulation, for the organisation of the state, which he drew up from his youth until shortly before his death, are directed towards this general good. The *commune bonum* is, in a manner of speaking, the focus, the nucleus to which Leibniz's political, social, juridical and also technical, inventive practice relates.

It was possible for that to be realised in many individual areas, for example in the plans he made for the regulation of public health in Prussia, when he became president of the Academy of Sciences, which he inspired and founded (that Academy of Sciences which has now been liquidated, in violation of the unification treaty, after the conquest of the GDR). It was reflected in his designs for the development of Hanoverian mining, his plans for developing manufacturing and similarly. I refer the reader to my short monograph,¹² in order not to neglect any of the many things which he did.

In a sketch which appeared under the title *Society and Economy*, Leibniz wrote that, in the first place comprehensive economic planning, a reduction of private profit, would have to proceed from a state or social centre, from a socially organising institution,

involving a central stockpiling – which at that time was naturally of great importance, given the conditions of repeatedly emerging famines – a stabilisation of the level of prices, market guarantees for agriculture, balanced level of employment in handicrafts, public contract management and control of production, equal living conditions for the people as well as abolition of private profit.

One might think that Leibniz was one of the early socialists. Well, there are several plans of this type, which originate in the greater part from the early period of his theoretical production, from the years between 1669 and the end of the 1670s.

Later, when he was active as court advisor in Hanover, under the real conditions of a petty principality, but also in Prussia, where he secured all his advancement through the queen – despite clashing with resistance above all from the almost illiterate king – Leibniz in practice increasingly curtailed this utopian, early socialist programme. In a manner of speaking he attuned himself to the possible reality, but in all his plans he still held to this horizon, only he no longer expressed it with such radicality. That can especially be said of his designs for the foundation of the Prussian Academy of Sciences, which according to his plan was actually supposed to become such a central organising centre for state functions.

When for the first time he had the possibility of being able to propose such things

in large measure to a potentate who did not rule over a middle-European petty state, but rather had a huge empire behind him – namely Peter the Great – all these ideas came up again. The famous conversation which he held with Peter during the latter's journey into the West includes a range of such conceptions, which Leibniz again picked up, thinking that they would be easier to realise in a country like Russia than under the petty-state competitive conditions of the many German principalities.

I also consider that, of this concept of how society was to be contemplated, Leibniz certainly does not belong to the prehistory of globalised capitalism, rather to the prehistory of a utopian conception of the social order, in which the *omnes adiuvare*, the solidarity of all with each other, should additionally gain an organisational form, not just a moral claim. Behind that naturally stood – and this must be made clear – a life experience. Leibniz was born in the penultimate year of the 30 Years' War. As a child he grew up under the conditions of a country destroyed by war. Germany had suffered massive economic losses, losses of people and so on.

Peace and Compossibility

Peace, the maintenance of peace, was one of the central elements of Leibniz's thought. Among other things he thereby devoted a large part of his activity to reconciliation of the faiths with each other, since wars had at that time also been fought as religious wars. He attempted to keep the Spanish War of Succession out of middle Europe, in that he gave other goals to the French king's need for expansion and offered the possible objective of colonisation of Africa as a way

out: the “most-Christian king” (as Louis XIV called himself) would thereby not have to fall upon his own Christian neighbours.

This idea of peace remains again central to the metaphysical conception of which I have spoken, that the mass of opposing independent individuals in this world must be jointly situated in a mutually self-expressing and intercoordinated order – a peaceful order. That means that the principle of realisation of the possible would be, as Leibniz says, the Principle of *Compossibility* (today we would perhaps say “coexistence”). Everything possible is pushing towards it becoming real: *omne possibile exigit existere*.¹³ But only that can become real in an order which is a peaceful order, which is jointly compossible, which is jointly possible together in a harmonious relationship.

This conception of *harmonia universalis* is one of the the central conceptions of Leibniz's metaphysics – not as a descriptive conception, that the world is already thus, but rather as a normative conception, that it must develop to an always greater state of *harmonia universalis*, if it wants to exist, if it wants to continue to exist.

It would be boring to trace the detailed structural relationships which Leibniz developed in his metaphysical model, in order to exemplify and explain this vision of *harmonia universalis*, a world in which everything is intercoordinated, as an outcome of the perpetual interaction process of the individual entities. I can only say that in the Principle of Compossibility we have the first approach in the more recent history of philosophy towards systematically considering the contradictions which arise in the world, that they are overcome in a social order in which they do not mutually annihilate or negate each other.



Hegel and Annihilation of Contradictions

However, thereby we are – and now I make a big jump right over the 18th century – at Hegel's thought. Hegel, who in many ways is more explicit and clearer than Leibniz, considers the world in the first place as one world, which exists under conditions of evolving existing contradictions. However, both Hegel and Leibniz are clear that – and this is a logical law – the contradictions are mutually annihilated and that contradictions, which are logically annihilated, in this world as real contradictions – what Kant called the real repugnancy¹⁴ of the thing – can only lead to a mutual destruction of the contradictory elements if they are in competition, if consequently the Hobbesian war of all against all is taking place.

Under these conditions contradiction would be self-destructive for human society, for humanity. And in the description of bourgeois society, which Hegel gives in paragraphs 80ff of the *Philosophy of Law*, he speaks about the fact that this society falls into self-negation, that it gives rise to destitution and depravity. These passages are impressive to read, because they sound as if they were from one of Lenin's pamphlets and not from the Hegelian philosophy of law: here the capacity for non-existence or self-negation of bourgeois society is stated.

But, contrary to a misunderstanding, which there is over and again in the interpretation of Hegel, he did not in fact consider contradictions as simply continuously existing contradictions. Rather he considered the historical process, so that the clashing contradictions cancel themselves in the process of confrontation in a three-fold way: that they just override each other, in so far as these contradictions annihilate each other, if they mutually negate each other; secondly, however, that in this process (and now

we are again in a spiral) they raise themselves to a higher level; and thirdly, in that they raise themselves to a higher level, that they also remain on the other hand preserved – the German word *aufheben*¹⁵ in the sense of saving. Thus at the same time to negate, to preserve and to raise to a higher level: those are the three sense elements which are expressly spoken of by Hegel in the word *aufheben* and which first together account for the dialectical process.¹⁶ The dialectical process is not simply composed of negativity, of negation. That is an error which Adorno propagated in his *Negative Dialectics*.¹⁷ However it is not the actual Hegelian conception.

The Hegelian conception is that the negation of an existing situation leads on to that process in which the contradictions adjust; and adjustment here is not a compromise, but rather is the *aufheben* exactly to the higher levels. Thereby Hegel, although he never says so in words, links up with Leibniz's concept of *compossibility*, since whatever can be raised up to the higher level – which in this state of self-development and of adjustment of contradictions is viable and remains – is precisely that which is mutually compossible. And in the framework of this compossibility each of the compossibles, which push towards realisation, produces in the moment of realisation new possibilities, and with new possibilities new contradictions; and thus the process of the history of humanity, and also natural history, remains in an endless progress, which proceeds according to the selection principle in compossibility, which thus makes possible the adjustment between the negations.

Determinate Negation

Hegel's system was connected with the events of human history and developed as a historical philosophy. With respect to Leibniz,

this historical-philosophical concept of Hegel undergoes a broadening through additional components. It is not just any negations, any contradictions, which struggle against each other and are cancelled. Where a situation develops internally and wherein it cancels itself – that is what Hegel calls *determinate* negation. The conception leads back originally to Aristotelian philosophy – I want to leave this out of consideration just now, since it would lead too far into philosophical-historical anchorage – and has the consequence that the process of history does not have to be considered arbitrarily: it is not by chance this or that contradiction, since these or those opposites, which interact in a contradictory way, do not emerge by chance.

Now those factors which fall within the concept of determinate negation can much more be called driving factors of history – thus a negation which may be determined in relation to what it negates, in a clear way, which is not just any other but rather a certain other.

What is then the determinate negation or the certain other?

Hegel starts from a narrowing of the basic shape of formal logic and says that the determinate other is the exact opposite of what is being negated. That means that the determinate negation is not just something else (everything not-A, compared with A) but rather the exact opposite of what is being negated. From there Hegel gains a workable principle, enabling him to say in the historical process that these or those phenomena, which emerge in contradiction, are either subsidiary – Mao Zedong called them “secondary contradictions”¹⁸ – or that they are the fundamental, principal contradiction.

And the fundamental contradiction is the one which is the determinate,

exact opposite of that which is present in a given real situation.

A methodical instrument was thereby prepared, which, under the conditions of making concrete this concern with the historical-political situation of a respective present day, allows itself to be applied to determinate political-economic relations.

Marxism and Hegel

This is what Marx did, who said, “Hegel everywhere makes the idea the subject”.¹⁹ As dialectics of the idea, the negative concept is the exact opposite of the positive concept. This allows itself to be translated into reality, since concepts are concepts of a reality: indeed they do not exist in an empty space as concepts *in themselves*, rather they are concepts *of something*. And if I take these concepts of something as indications, representations, presentation of a real, not conceptual, but rather material, inner-worldly reality – *representation* is Leibniz's expression, probably the best – then I have indeed obtained the Hegelian method in its methodical structure. I have however, as Marx said, turned it from its head onto its feet: that means, fetched it back from the world of concepts into the world of real material reality. That is why Marx could write, in the famous *Afterword* to the second German edition of *Capital*, that his method had been compared with Hegel's, and that he had, in places “coquetted with the modes of expression peculiar to him”; but that “My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian but its the exact opposite.”²⁰ To be precise, the dialectics of contradiction develops not in the head as dialectics of concepts, as exemplified over and again from Parmenides – who influenced Plato – right up to Hegel, but in that it is based on economic-political facts.

Now we live, says Marx – and he describes it very

emphatically in the first volume of *Capital* – under the conditions of capitalist society, of bourgeois society, whose constitutive element is private ownership of the means of production. Marx did not make that up, rather he read it in the theories of English political economy and the writings of the French economists, and from there he transferred the references into *Capital*. If the main characteristic of bourgeois, capitalist society is private ownership of the means of production, then the determinate negation is the exact opposite of this social structure, the exact opposite of private ownership of the means of production – *ie* social ownership of the means of production.

Marx does not come to his alternative model of society in the same way as does Leibniz – who in his model still expresses his opinion, from accustomed practice, against the increase in private capitalism. That is only the one side, that of social need, which Friedrich Engels describes in his book, *The Situation of the Working Class in England in 1844* and which was for Marx and Engels one of the decisive experiences: actually seeing the poverty which was produced in the capitalist society of the 1840s.

No, Marx comes to a structural law which, independently of the description of the poverty factor which this society creates, presents itself as a necessary, dialectical-logical law of historical development.

If thus I advance from the tradition of philosophy – Leibniz’s compossibility, Hegel’s determinate negation – then I come via the application, the concretisation, of this metaphysical concept to the historical-political concept: private ownership of the means of production will, in the course of a development in which it has created its specific contradictions, be transcended by social

ownership – that is the determinate negation, that is the exact opposite.

With Marx the moral and political impulse of the movement to change society gains a theoretical basis, which formulates a social, historical regularity independently of emotions. And to this extent Marx stands in a direct descending relationship to those classical dialectical philosophies which were developing from the late 17th and the 18th centuries in the framework of bourgeois thought in Europe.

Though many details remain to be underpinned and shown – and it would be a particular area of research to demonstrate that concretely – we can thus find, in the history of German philosophy from Leibniz to Hegel, the anchoring of the philosophical principles on which the political-economic theory of Marxism has originated.

It is no accident that the classic authors of Marxism draw from three sources, as Lenin²¹ excellently summarised

and presented: French utopian socialism, which essentially starts out from moral indignation over injustice in the world and an attempt to pose a just social form against the situation of misery and oppression; English political economy, which researched into the conditions within which bourgeois society exists economically and is capable of existence, and formulated these findings in laws – principally Adam Smith and David Ricardo; and thirdly the German *idealist* philosophy from Leibniz via Kant to Hegel.

These three elements – the moral-utopian impulse, the empirical scientific impulse of political economy and the design of a general theoretical methodical and world model – that model which Leibniz called a *hypothesis* – have become unified into what Marxism is as a theory, and what as a theory it is capable of providing for the explanation of *our* world. It is not only a slogan in the political struggle, but rather is truly capable of analysing relations. I consider

that we only see that when we reassure ourselves of the theoretical prehistory, the heritage, which entered into the theory of Marxism.

These are only aphorisms about such a massively wide and extended field. But I hope that they are aphorisms which give fresh impetus to contemplation and further research, since the hypothesis of Marxism has not been exhausted through the theoretical writings of Marx, Engels, Lenin and perhaps also Mao. Rather the hypothesis of Marxism is only fulfilled through being *open* for that wider development – *ie* it retains its capacity by permitting current developments, new possibilities, to be taken up in itself and made compossible.

■ *This article forms the Prelude to Vol 1 of Hans Heinz Holz’s Transcendence and Realisation of Philosophy Aurora-Verlag, Berlin, 2010. Translated, with additional notes, by Martin Levy.*

Notes and References

- 1 The text is based on a lecture given in Hanover on 18 January 2001. It had a concrete cause: at the student council elections in 2001 there was a group of students’ association members standing in the name of ‘Leibniz List’, which the Association of Marxist Law Students did not want to put up with. Out of this controversy arose the question of which line of transition Leibniz belonged to – HHH.
- 2 Actually 10 May 1870 –Ed. See K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 43, p 512.
- 3 HHH writes “already somewhat earlier” but in fact this was *later*: Engels started on *Dialectics of Nature* in 1873 –Ed.
- 4 The Dutens edition was at that time 6 thick volumes strong, and since then Leibniz’s collected works have grown to approximately 40 volumes and are still not completely published –HHH.
- 5 The English translation of *Dialectics of Nature* gives “Dialectics as the *science* of universal interconnection” –Ed.
- 6 *genitive of the object*: denotes a person or object that is the object of the action, eg “love of the father” =

- “they love their father” –Ed.
- 7 denotes a person or object to whom/which something belongs; it may be transformed into a sentence where the genitive is made a subject, eg “the song of the birds” becomes “the birds are singing” –Ed.
- 8 Presumably a reference to Leibniz, Hegel and Marx/Engels –Ed.
- 9 See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Best_of_all_possible_worlds –Ed.
- 10 The *Monadology* (*La Monadologie*, 1714) is one of Leibniz’s best known works representing his later philosophy. It is a short text which sketches a metaphysics of simple substances, or *monads* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Monadology>) –Ed.
- 11 G W Leibniz, *Kleine Schriften zur Metaphysik/Opusculum metaphysiques*, H H Holz Ed and Transl, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt, 1965.
- 12 H H Holz, *Leibniz – eine Monographie (Leibniz: a Monograph)*, Stuttgart, 1958 (extended reprinting Leipzig, 1983); also H H Holz, *Leibniz, Einführung (Leibniz: Introduction)*, Frankfurt am Main and New York, 1992.
- 13 “Everything possible demands to exist” –Ed.
- 14 I Kant, *The Only Possible Argument in Support of a Demonstration of the Existence of God* (1763); in I Kant, *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p 130.
- 15 *Aufheben* = raise up, keep, save, cancel, remove, sublimate, transcend –Ed.
- 16 See *A Hegel Dictionary*, M Inwood, Ed, Wiley-Blackwell, 1992, for the 3 senses of *aufheben* = *sublation* in Hegel; online at http://www.blackwellreference.com/public/tocnode?id=g9780631175339_chunk_g978063117533923_ss1-9 –Ed.
- 17 T W Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, Continuum, New York, 2003.
- 18 Mao Zedong, *On Contradiction*, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol 1, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1955, p 322.
- 19 K Marx, *Afterword* to the second German edition of *Capital*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 35, p 19.
- 20 *Ibid.*
- 21 V I Lenin, *The Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 19, pp 23-28.

CHARLES DICKENS

the masses, race and empire



By Ken Fuller

Part 2: Dickens, Race and Empire



I. INTRODUCTION: CLASS AND RACE

The first part of this article, in the previous issue of *CR*,¹ took issue with T A Jackson's 1937 contention that Charles Dickens was, as his work became darker and more pessimistic, moving beyond sympathy for the masses and approaching an acceptance that a revolutionary solution to the problems of bourgeois society was necessary. Instead, I demonstrated that, while Dickens' sympathy was readily extended to the poor as victims, he was decidedly less supportive when they sought to act collectively to resolve their problems, whether as trade unionists or as 'the mob' (or, historically, as Levellers or Agitators).

This second part takes the argument further by examining Dickens' stand on race and empire, seeking to show that it paralleled his attitude to the masses in that, while a 'domesticated' Native American or an exploited Indian would elicit his concern (no doubt genuinely felt) and sympathy, any attempt by subject peoples to challenge their

oppressors by violent means would be met with Dickens' stiff opposition – and blatant racism. Needless to say, this aspect of Dickens' outlook has attracted little attention in the 2012 celebrations of the bicentenary of his birth; perhaps more surprisingly, Claire Tomalin's recent *Charles Dickens: A Life* also chooses to ignore Dickens' views on these matters, thereby throwing doubt on her subtitle.

Apart from a brief mention of the Governor Eyre episode (see below), Jackson also has nothing to say about Dickens' views on race and empire, a consideration of which hardly assists his thesis. Orwell, on the other hand, is simply incorrect in his belief that Dickens never indulged "in the typical English boasting, the 'island race', the 'bulldog breed,' 'right little, tight little island' style of talk" or that he "has no imperialist feeling, no discernible views on foreign politics."²

It might be a mistake to read too much into Dickens' frequent use, throughout his life, of the word 'savages' to describe non-white peoples, as at the time this was commonly used (by Darwin and Marx, for example) to

imply a particular level of development. Besides, Dickens sometimes applied it to the Scots and the Irish – and on one occasion (the 1835 by-election in Kettering, where armed horsemen led by magistrates and clergymen charged at a defenceless crowd) to Tories.³ Evidence of his racism is, however, so strong that it cannot be denied.

II. DICKENS, RACE AND REBELLION

Morant Bay, *The Noble Savage*

In 1861, Jamaica passed the Encumbered Estates Act, by which plantations were sold off to enable the planters to satisfy their debtors in England. Some of these estates had already been sold, however, in small lots to black freeholders. These were now evicted from the homes they had built and the land they had paid for. By the end of the century, the government would have stolen a quarter of a million acres of land from the people, converting thousands of free farmers into tenants.

It was against this background that the Morant Bay Rebellion of 1865

occurred. This was a local affair and the rebels did not even see the colonial system as their enemy, their original tactic having been to appeal to the Governor and Queen Victoria – an approach of which Dickens would presumably have approved. Being localised and largely unorganised, the rebellion failed, drowned in blood by Governor Edward Eyre. After Paul Bogle, a black deacon, led his followers from Stony Gut to Morant Bay, turning to violence when all else had failed, Eyre declared martial law and called out the Maroons,⁴ and the rebellion was put down with greater ferocity than had been used to contain some slave revolts. Among those executed were Bogle and George William Gordon, a mulatto merchant-planter who championed the ‘coloured’ members of the colonial Assembly.

Eric Williams⁵ records that the British government’s commission of enquiry, “notwithstanding some double-talk, found that the punishments inflicted were excessive: the death penalty, invoked on 354 occasions by the courts-martial, was too frequently imposed, the floggings were reckless and even barbarous, the burning of houses was wanton and cruel.”⁶ Moreover, there was no evidence that Gordon had been involved in the rebellion.

Had Dickens genuinely championed the oppressed, was there not sufficient drama here for a novel, the action set against an exposure of Jamaican social conditions? Was not Edward Eyre, whom Williams describes as owing “his position solely to Colonial Office patronage” and equipped “neither by intellect nor by temperament to deal with a prickly situation...”,⁷ exactly the kind of blustering incompetent that Dickens loved to satirise?⁸ If not a novel, Dickens would surely raise his voice against the excesses of Governor Eyre, wouldn’t he? No, he would not. Instead, he joined Eyre’s defence committee.

After Thomas Hughes, Charles Buxton and John Stuart Mill established a Jamaica Committee (Darwin was a member) with the aim of seeing Eyre prosecuted, a rival Eyre Defence Committee was formed with Thomas Carlyle, Dickens and Alfred Tennyson as its most high-profile members. Jackson concedes that this was “the worst political mistake of his life,” but argues that Carlyle was “the means of dragging both Dickens and Ruskin into that ‘piratical galley,’ and both became heartily ashamed of themselves when they fully realised what they had done. All three were actuated by one motive – hatred of

ranting-canting-evangelical humbug....”⁹

Maybe they were, but Dickens’ friends were not exactly enlightened on racial matters. Thomas Carlyle was the author of *Occasional Discourse on the Nigger Question*. Argued Tennyson: “We are too tender to savages; we are more tender to a black man than to ourselves. Niggers are tigers, niggers are tigers.”¹⁰ Peter Blake says that Dickens’ friend and contributor to *Household Words* George Augustus Sala was possibly responsible for writing a *Daily Telegraph* leader column in which “the black population is portrayed as a mass of child-like savages threatening the lives and honour of English men and women.”¹¹

No, Dickens’ support for Eyre was part of a pattern: sympathy for the oppressed, but condemnation when they rebelled against their oppressors, for by this time Dickens had a track record in such matters.

In 1853, the same year that Carlyle’s above-mentioned piece was issued as a pamphlet, Dickens struck a blatantly racist note when he shared his thoughts on *The Noble Savage* with the reading public. “I call him a savage,” he wrote, “and I call a savage a something highly desirable to be civilised off the face of the earth.”¹²

In her 2004 work, *Dickens and Empire*, Grace Moore attempts to dilute accusations of racism by arguing that the piece was a riposte to an article by Lord Denman in which Dickens adopted the voice Denman falsely ascribed to him. Dickens, she claims, was attempting to demonstrate the ridiculous nature of the charge. At this point in the piece, Dickens was discussing Native Americans; and Moore suggests that his real target was the display a decade earlier by painter and impresario George Caitlin, where his American ‘Indians’ were found to be hoaxes recruited in London’s East End.¹³ But just listen to Dickens’ language: “he is a savage – cruel, false, thievish, murderous; addicted more or less to grease, entrails, and beastly customs; a wild animal with the questionable gift of boasting; a conceited, tiresome, bloodthirsty, monotonous humbug.”¹⁴ He then turns his attention to the “Zulu Kaffir”, of whom he says:

“All the noble savage’s wars with his fellow-savages (and he takes no pleasure in anything else) are wars of extermination – which is the best thing I know of him, and the most comfortable to my mind when I look at him. He has no moral feelings of any kind, sort,

or description; and his ‘mission’ may be summed up as simply diabolical.”¹⁵

Moore’s apologia is entirely unconvincing: *The Noble Savage* is a racist diatribe, pure and simple.

But how do we explain this “transitional work, in which Dickens’ worldview is seen to alter significantly”¹⁶ in view of the fact that, according to Tomalin, during Dickens’ first US tour he was “moved by the plight” of the Wyandot, the last native tribe in Ohio, and thought them “a fine people, but degraded and broken down?”¹⁷ In fact, in the 1840s the Wyandot were ‘resettled’ in Kansas, where they lived peacefully, their leaders being pro-slavery.¹⁸ Thus, the Wyandot were domesticated. Such was not yet the case with all Native American nations.

The term ‘Indian Wars’ is usually applied to the conflicts west of the Mississippi following the influx of white settlers from the early 19th century. In the 1840s, the borders of the USA were expanding. At the conclusion of the war with Mexico in 1847, the USA took over “a vast expanse of territory reaching from Texas to California. All of it was west of the ‘permanent Indian frontier.’”¹⁹ Then, after the discovery of gold in California the following year, a stream of whites began crossing the Indian Territory. In 1850, although none of the Native American residents was asked for their opinion, California was admitted as the 31st state of the Union. Resistance, particularly in the Southwest, would ensue.

Meanwhile, in the Pacific Northwest, amid suspicions of land-grabbing, a Nez Percé mission was attacked by tribesmen on the brink of starvation in the hard winter of 1847; eleven white men were killed and the women and children were taken captive.²⁰

If Dickens knew of such developments, it may have explained his changed view of Native Americans. It may be significant that, in his speech to the New York press in 1868, he would say that one of the developments which ushered in his more positive view of the USA was “the amount of land subdued and peopled,”²¹ as if the previous occupants did not count as “people.”

Slave Rebellions, the ‘Indian Mutiny’

Dickens had expressed his abhorrence of slavery during his US tour in 1842, and there had, of course, been significant slave rebellions before this date: most recently,



the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, the Black Seminole rebellion of 1835-1838,²² the Amistad seizure of 1839 and, in the year of Dickens' visit, the slave revolt in the Cherokee Nation (yes, ironically some Cherokees held slaves).

Dickens would have found such revolts, in that they were by definition directed largely against whites, unsettling. Peter Blake²³ places the "shift in middle-class allegiance from outright abolitionism to a more pro-Southern and pro-slavery position during the late 1850s and early 1860s" in the context of Britain's reliance on the cotton industry, much of the raw material for which was, of course, produced by slaves in the USA. As the abolitionist cause gathered pace, even before the prospect of civil war, it was obvious that there could be significant economic consequences for England's northern cities. Blake says that *The Noble Savage* and similar pieces by "eminent men of letters" paved the way for this shift of allegiance.

Moreover, even though Dickens "would maintain his emancipationist and anti-slavery principles he would increasingly discredit the notion that African-Americans could become involved in the democratic process of self-government."²³ Even Jackson apologetically notes that, at the beginning of the American Civil War, Dickens "had wavered as did so many – misled by propaganda which concealed the real issue of the Civil War under a pretence that the 'chivalrous and liberty-loving South' was merely fighting to escape from coercion by the sordid, dollar-greedy North."²⁴

Dickens became increasingly interested in India, and by the 1850s, Grace Moore tells us, he was "critical of any institution responsible for spreading misery anywhere; whether it was the appalling sanitary conditions of London or the rack-renting of the East Indian peasantry," and his journal *Household Words* regularly exposed "the brutalities committed in the name of the [East India] Company."²⁵

Then in 1857 came the event variously referred to as the Indian Mutiny, the Sepoy Rebellion or, as Marx termed it, India's First War of Independence. Despite his previous exposures Dickens (unlike Disraeli, who argued that the signs had been there for all to see) was caught totally unawares. "The subcontinent," explains Moore, "was envisaged as a vast text to be interpreted by the Western gaze, and the uprising gave the lie to previous attempts to construct an exotic, passive India, easily conquered by English trading concerns."²⁶

The "exotic, passive India" was, of course, a typical subject for Dickens' sympathy, but when the Indian people (not an exaggeration, as the uprising saw a remarkable degree of unity across religions and classes) stood up to the British Empire, that sympathy was immediately transformed into racial hatred.

In particular, Dickens was outraged by the killing of 200 British women and children in Cawnpore, and even Moore is forced to talk of his "unpleasant and bloodthirsty calls for vengeance." In October 1857, Dickens wrote to his friend Angela Burdett-Coutts (the richest woman in the country, with whom he had established a home for "fallen women" in Shepherds Bush):

"I wish I were the Commander in Chief of India. The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement ... should be to proclaim to them in their language, that I considered my Holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested; and that I begged them to do me the favour to observe that I was there for that purpose and no other, and was now proceeding, with all convenient dispatch and merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the earth."²⁷

Dickens' Christmas story for 1857 was *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, an allegory of the Cawnpore massacre set in the Caribbean of 1744 in which a previously trusted "Sambo" betrays his English masters to pirates, leading to the death of men, women and children. The protagonist, Gill Davis, a member of the Royal Marines, confesses to being "a man of no learning, and, if I entertain prejudices, I hope allowance may be made. I will now confess to one. It may be a right one or it may be a wrong one; but, I never did like Natives, except in the form of oysters."²⁸

Moore claims that these racist outbursts were "restricted to a six-month period. When it became apparent – largely through the reports of his friend, the famous Crimean War reporter William Howard Russell – that the ghastly actions of the sepoys were matched by equally repugnant behaviour on the part of the British, Dickens' outbursts ceased abruptly."²⁹ Gideon Polya puts the "late cruelties" in context, noting that while

2,000 Britons were killed during the so-called 'mutiny,' it is reckoned that in the following decade some ten million Indians died in the reprisals.³⁰

Quite possibly Dickens was horrified by the British response and regretted his earlier extremism. Moore may go too far when she says that Dickens "revised his attitude towards the sepoy soldiers and the rebels who joined them, by sympathetically aligning them with both the French third estate of 1789, and the English working classes"³¹ in *A Tale of Two Cities*; although when, in one of the London scenes, he has the blow-hard lawyer Stryver talking to a refugee French aristocrat of his "devices for blowing the people up and exterminating them from the face of the earth..."³² (that phrase again!), he may have been caricaturing himself as a mild form of penance.

III. CONCLUSION: FRIEND OF THE OPPRESSED, FOE OF THE REBEL

Edward Said draws our attention to the opening of *Dombey and Son*:

"The earth was made for Dombey and Son to trade in, and the sun and moon were made to give them light. Rivers and seas were formed to float their ships; rainbows gave them promise of fair weather; winds blew for or against their enterprises; stars and planets circled in their orbits, to preserve inviolate a system of which they were the centre."³³

Said says that we must ask ourselves "how *could* Dombey think that the universe, and the whole of time, was his to trade in?" Although "Dombey is neither Dickens himself nor the whole of English literature ... the way in which Dickens expresses Dombey's egoism recalls, mocks, yet ultimately depends on the tried and true discourses of imperial free trade, the British mercantile ethos, its sense of all but unlimited opportunities for commercial advancement abroad."³⁴

The same writer further argues that "all the major English novelists of the mid-nineteenth century accepted a globalised world-view and indeed could not (in most cases did not) ignore the vast overseas reach of British power."³⁵ Moreover, such writers did not, for all their occasional anger, actually challenge that status quo:

"In the main ... the nineteenth-century European novel is a

cultural form consolidating but also refining and articulating the authority of the status quo. However much Dickens, for example, stirs up his readers against the legal system, provincial schools, or the bureaucracy, his novels finally enact what one critic has called a ‘fiction of resolution.’”³⁶

Neither should we assume that Dickens was merely a passive recipient of the dominant ideology of the age, for there is evidence to suggest otherwise. In *A Child's History of England*, he tells his young audience that under Alfred the Great

“all the best points of the Anglo-Saxon character were first encouraged, and in him first shown. It has been the greatest character among the nations of the earth. Wherever the descendants of the Saxon race have gone, have sailed, or otherwise made their way, even to the remotest regions of the world, they have been patient, persevering, never to be broken in spirit, never to

be turned aside from enterprises on which they have resolved. In Europe, Asia, Africa, America, the whole world over; in the desert, in the forest, on the sea; scorched by a burning sun, or frozen by ice that never melts; the Saxon blood remains unchanged. Wheresoever that race goes, there, law, and industry, and safety for life and property, and all the great results of steady perseverance, are certain to arise.”³⁷

This was written shortly before *The Noble Savage*. Dickens was, therefore, a defender of Britain's imperial project and a proselytiser of notions of racial superiority. Much of Dickens may be read with profit and pleasure, but there is no basis for exaggerated claims regarding his social views.

One historian notes that sympathy for Governor Eyre was “linked into the growing fears amongst the middle-class of working-class activity around the issue of reform,”³⁸ and here we see the confluence of the two spectres to which Dickens was opposed: an organised British working class and rebellious colonials.

Charles Dickens was all of a piece.

He challenged neither British colonialism (indeed, he unsuccessfully sought Lord John Russell's help in finding his son Frank a post at the Foreign Office) nor the capitalist system at home; but in seeking to soften their harsher aspects he hoped to forestall challenges to their existence. Whether in London, the Americas or India, his sympathy with the oppressed tended to end when the oppressed organised and struck back. Sympathy for the passive oppressed, opposition to the freedom fighter.

■ CORRECTION

An unfortunate editorial error crept into Part 1 of Ken Fuller's article. On p 4, column 2 of CR65, the last sentence of the second paragraph should have read “Most memorable is the association which, having hitherto supported an apostle of Irish freedom, drops *that person* immediately when it is realised he also advocates emancipation of the slaves.” [corrected text in italics] We apologise unreservedly to Ken Fuller for this mistake.

Notes and References

- 1 K Fuller, *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 2-8.
- 2 G Orwell, *Charles Dickens*, in *My Country Right or Left*, Folio Society, London, 1998, pp 96, 97.
- 3 C Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, Viking, London, 2011, p 39.
- 4 From the Spanish *cimarrones*, an early generation of rebels who had first fled to the mountains, then agreed to assist in putting down slave revolts and post-slavery rebellions in return for a form of autonomy.
- 5 E Williams, *From Columbus to Castro: The History of the Caribbean, 1492-1969*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1970, p 401.
- 6 See, however, P Blake, *George Augustus Sala and the English Middle Class View of America, Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Birkbeck College, London, 2009), No 9, p 24, who states that 439 were executed, 600 people were flogged and 1,000 houses were burned down.
- 7 Williams, *op cit*, p 400.
- 8 Leaving aside H G de Lisser's now-forgotten *Revenge* of 1919, such a novel would not appear until 1949 when Vic Reid, a Jamaican, published his *New Day*.
- 9 T A Jackson, *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical*, International Publishers, New York, 1987, pp 153, 154.
- 10 A Roberts, *Victorian Culture and Society*, Arnold, London, 2003, p 182.
- 11 Blake, *op cit*, p 25. Sala, having defended the poor in *Household Words*, became pro-slavery and a supporter of the South, on a visit to the USA during the Civil War. Although he later renounced these positions, like Dickens he still considered black Americans “as unfit to participate in the democratic institutions of the country.” –*Ibid*, p 2.

- 12 C Dickens, *The Noble Savage*, in *Complete Works: Reprinted Pieces*, Heron Books, Centennial Edition, London, p 158. Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Dickens are taken from this edition. The young Dickens had used a similar phrase in March 1844 when, writing to Forster, he had said that “society” was “approaching the period when being incapable of reforming itself it will have to submit to being reformed by others off the face of the earth.” All too eagerly Jackson, *op cit*, p 32, suggests a comparison with Engels' *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*, failing to note that Dickens' real interest is in reform, and apparently seeing little significance in the fact that the passage commences with “Heaven help us, too, from explosions nearer home.”
- 13 G Moore, *Dickens and Empire: Discourses of Class, Race and Colonialism in the Works of Charles Dickens*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2004, p 67.
- 14 Dickens, *op cit*, p 120.
- 15 *Ibid*, p 121.
- 16 Moore, *op cit*, p 69.
- 17 Tomalin, *op cit*, p 136.
- 18 *Affairs in Kansas*, in *New York Times*, October 2, 1855.
- 19 D Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 2001, p 8.
- 20 A Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States*, The Folio Society, London, 2003, p 151.
- 21 Dickens, *Postscript*, in *Complete Works: American Notes*, p 303.
- 22 This is regarded as the USA's “forgotten slave rebellion”, possibly because the revolt was instigated by hundreds of semi-autonomous free ‘maroons’, but they were joined by almost 400 plantation slaves and Seminole allies. During the revolt, no less than 21 Florida sugar plantations were destroyed.

- See J B Bird, *The Largest Slave Rebellion in US History*, <http://www.johnhorse.com/highlights/essays/largest.htm>.
- 23 Blake, *op cit*, p 1.
 - 24 Jackson, *op cit*, p 141.
 - 25 Moore, *op cit*, pp 105, 108.
 - 26 *Ibid*, p 113.
 - 27 Dickens, *Letters of Charles Dickens to the Baroness Burdett-Coutts*, C C Osbourne, Ed, J Murray, London, 1931, pp 188-9. A slightly different version of this diatribe, used by Dickens on a separate occasion, can be found in G Polya, *UK BBC Holocaust Denial*, at <http://www.countercurrents.org/polya/240509.htm>.
 - 28 Dickens, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, in *Collected Works: Christmas Stories I*, p 202. Although this story was co-authored with Wilkie Collins, the passages quoted are from the chapters written by Dickens.
 - 29 Moore, *op cit*, p 5.
 - 30 Polya, *op cit*.
 - 31 Moore, *op cit*, p 5.
 - 32 Dickens, *Collected Works: A Tale of Two Cities*, p 275.
 - 33 Dickens, *Collected Works: Dombey and Son*, p 2.
 - 34 E W Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1993, p 14.
 - 35 *Ibid*, p 90.
 - 36 *Ibid*, p 91. Said refers here to Deidre David, *Fictions of Resolution in Three Victorian Novels*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1981.
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Measuring a Nation's 'Well-Being'

A Psycho-Cultural Investigation



by **Siobhan
Lennon-Patience**

The self proclaimed 'positive psychologist' Martin Seligman and his colleagues claim that the discipline of psychology has become too focused on the negative aspects of human experience.¹ He suggests that there is a need for a branch of psychology that should dedicate itself to the scientific study of positive emotions, well-being and human potential. Positive psychology's proposal that positive emotional states can be scientifically studied has impressed the Con-Dem coalition government. In November 2010, Prime Minister David Cameron initiated a £2 million plan to measure well-being in Britain.²

This is being implemented by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), asking people to rate their own well-being, the intention being to publish the first official well-being index in 2012.³

A psychology that can influence government policy is clearly one that needs to be engaged with and evaluated. This article looks in more detail at how the term 'well-being' has been interpreted by the mainstream media in terms of firmly equating it with the notion of happiness. I shall also discuss how the narrative of well-being has been played out in the political arena and

in the results of the public consultation on measuring the nation's well-being. I contend that the narrative used by Cameron is emblematic of a version of self-help therapy culture that has an underlying way of thinking which articulates neoliberal pro-market values. The measurement of well-being, as discussed here, is a version of governance as outlined by Wendy Brown⁴ in 2005, in which human life is reduced to rational transactions, with the invasion of the market into all institutions and social actions. What results is an unlinking of individuals from their social contexts.⁵



'Well-Being' in the Popular Media

The language of therapy has permeated our family, social, business and political lives to the extent that it is difficult to isolate it from other dominant cultural codes, such as economic liberalism, which organise selfhood.⁶ Multiple terms are mobilised to define well-being, ranging from 'positive emotions', 'positive feelings' and 'positive effects' to 'life satisfaction' and 'happiness', but it is the equation of well-being with happiness that has particularly influenced current political debate and policy making.⁷ I want to look at the ways in which the political concept of well-being has been encoded through communications of various kinds, and thus to explore how this idea of well-being has then been assimilated into a neoliberal world-view.

The ONS has been tasked with developing measures of national well-being and progress. Although Jil Matheson, National Statistician, points out that 'happiness' is only one aspect of well-being,⁸ I have found that the two terms were largely equated in the popular media after Cameron's announcement. I examined reports and articles, as they emerged in both broadsheet and tabloid media, as well as in reports and discussions on television programmes.

The overall sentiment that arose from the reports was one of scepticism around the potential benefits that the measurement of well-being could have. To cite just a few examples:

■ An article in *The Times*⁹ stated that Cameron had "ordered ministers to ensure that what they do puts a bigger smile on people's faces". It noted that ministers are required to test policies for economic, social and environmental impacts and that this

is to be joined by a test for whether a policy will "increase the sum total of human happiness" – a test that will be incorporated into the Treasury's Green Book, the guide on how government should appraise what it does.

■ The *Daily Mail* was pleased to note that happy people live longer and invited "family expert" and author Jill Kirby to comment:

"The whole idea that individual contentment can be measured is at best foolish and at worst intrusive. The government should be concentrating on practical things affecting our lives rather than what they think we feel."¹⁰

■ The *Daily Star* called the government's plans to survey happiness a "fiasco", and drew comment from the Taxpayers' Alliance, who oppose what they call "big government" and task themselves with criticising "all examples of wasteful and unnecessary spending"; their research director, John O'Connell, described the survey as "a complete waste of time and money".¹¹ There was further outrage in the paper's editorial section where readers were reminded of the economic constraints on the country, the editorial asserting that "you do not need an expensive survey to tell you how you are feeling, do you? ... Especially when idiot ministers waste scarce public funds on stupid studies like this."¹²

The days preceding the first release of data from the ONS on the well-being index were preceded by two significant events. On 29 November 2011 the Chancellor of the Exchequer,

George Osborne, presented his Autumn Statement to the House of Commons, where he had to admit that the period of austerity would be longer than first predicted – perhaps even as long as 7 years – as the figures for growth had been lower than expected. The following day saw what has been described as the biggest public sector strike in a generation.

The ONS data revealed that the average happiness rating in their survey was 7.4. Mark Easton on *BBC News 24* suggested that this figure indicated a reasonably high level of overall well-being; and he wondered if this figure signified a 'keep calm and carry on' attitude of the British public. He speculated that the data about the nation's happiness would now be applied to find what "buttons to press for the feel-good factor".¹³ The rating of 7.4 for the measurement of well-being of a nation at a time of severe economic constraint may at first seem encouraging. However, as Eagleton has noted, we have a right to be sceptical: "when the colonialists assure us that the natives are thriving, we would do well to be cautious".¹⁴

Measuring Well-Being – An Example of Political Cross-Dressing

Before the last general election, Cameron had demonstrated his advocacy of well-being measurement. He made his reasons clear in a TED talk¹⁵ in February 2010 where he declared that "we have run out of money"; and he wanted to know how it would be possible to make things better but without spending any more. He argued that we are now living in a "post-bureaucratic" age where there has been a shift in power from the local to the central and finally to the people; and that what people want is "transparency, choice and accountability", with choice being the underpinning

conservative philosophy because it "puts people in the driving seat". In his view the only way to succeed is to "go with the grain of human nature"; and that is where he sees the new developments in 'positive psychology' and 'behavioural economics' as having a part to play, as they will enable governments to "treat people as they are rather than as you would like them to be". Cameron suggests that the developments in these two sciences will enable new modes of measuring a nation's progress in terms other than those of GDP, stating that "If you think everything is valued in money you are going to have a very miserable time".

Once in government, Cameron was able to implement his ideas. In his speech announcing the proposals to measure the nation's well-being, he recounted his excitement at being able to apply something that he had talked about in opposition and that people had speculated he might never achieve once in office. Measuring well-being, he suggested, "is important to our goal of trying to create a family-friendly country". He was explicit about what he saw as the basic tenet of his proposals, that the Conservatives have an "instinct that people who feel in control of their own destiny feel more fulfilled". He considered that central to the debate would be social mobility and the extent to which people feel "they are authors of their own destiny".² He highlighted the key areas where he saw the coalition government having a positive impact on the nation's well-being: "real choice" for parents over schools and for patients over medical treatment; the understanding that having the "purpose of a job is as important to the soul as it is to the bank balance"; and the concept of the "Big Society", because "people have a yearning to belong to something bigger than themselves".²



Before he became Tory leader, Cameron had presented his case for “modern compassionate Conservatism”, which he defined as: sharing the benefits of growth between tax cuts and public services, so that tax cuts are not seen as “tax breaks for the rich”; giving power back to local organisations; and a “small state” which must be the servant, not the master, of the people.

“But when we roll back the state, we don’t leave the poor, weak and vulnerable behind, we help them by unleashing the voluntary sector That’s what I mean by modern compassionate Conservatism. Modern, because we think our best days lie ahead. Compassionate, because we care about those who can get left behind. But Conservative, because it’s those insights, principles and values that we share that will make this country even stronger.”¹⁶

In his book *The Meaning of David Cameron*, Richard Seymour suggests that “Cameron is of little interest, except as a cipher, a sort of non-entity who channels the prevailing Geist.”¹⁷ Seymour argues that, in order to present themselves for re-election, the Tories felt the need to soften their image and to distance the party from Thatcher, giving the impression that they were now positioned in the centre ground of politics. “Cameronism”, if there is such as thing, is merely an electoral formula

“that speaks to the need for Tories to reach out well beyond their own class base – that being capital and a section of the middle

class. They have donned a ‘progressive’ and ‘centrist’ outfit, borrowing extensively from the New Labour wardrobe, out of electoral necessity.”¹⁸

Francis Elliott and James Hanning noted that former Prime Minister Tony Blair had described the political right’s appropriation of the left’s language as “political cross-dressing”. However, they went on to point out, Cameron was “careful to include tweed, twinset and pearls in the wardrobe”.¹⁹

The proposition that well-being could be measured is an example of this “cross-dressing” of political thought. The Labour government under Blair was instrumental in incorporating the notion of well-being into policy initiatives. In 2008 it published the *Foresight Review on Mental Capital and Wellbeing*, which called for the development of a well-being index.²⁰ These proposals were never to make it to fruition during Labour’s time in office. However, well-being remained firmly embedded in the rhetoric of New Labour, being present in the implementation of the report *Improving Access to Psychological Therapies*²¹ from economist and government advisor Lord Layard. This report initiated the recruitment of 3,500 cognitive behavioural therapists with the specific remit to suggest ways in which the people they saw could become more upbeat and optimistic.²²

A Diversionary Tactic?

New Labour’s proposition that well-being could be measured appeared at the time to be a ruse, to divert the public’s attention away from pro-market policies, and it seems that Cameron is inclined to persevere with this project. Given the Con-Dem government’s willingness to implement the

well-being ‘measurement’ at a time of acute economical and societal distress, it has perhaps found another way of providing a calculus for declaring success.

The first project for the ONS, in their task of measuring the nation’s well-being, was the call for a formal national consultation entitled *What Matters To You?* Early findings from this, published in July 2011, indicated that what mattered most to people were: health; good connections with friends and family; good connections with a spouse or partner; job satisfaction and economic security; and present and future conditions of the environment. The ONS also found that a consistent theme running through many of the responses was that well-being would be significantly improved if there were a greater sense of fairness and equality. What seemed to be missing were the notions of ‘choice’ and ‘destiny’ favoured by Cameron, just as ‘equality’ was conspicuous by its absence in his political rhetoric. Another theme running through the findings was the need for people to have politicians whom they felt they could trust. I would suggest that there is a discrepancy between people’s understanding of well-being and that advocated by the current government.

One could argue that the notion that the nation’s well-being can be measured is merely a deflection away from more negative news, particularly as the country finds itself under increasing economic pressure. With a lack of economic growth it is perhaps unsurprising that a government would seek, in desperation, a measure to indicate that they must be doing something right, and so a degree of cynicism may be appropriate. However, the proposals in Cameron’s speeches will have real policy implications.

Monetising Policy Decisions

A system for measuring social cost-benefit analysis has been developed by the Treasury department, with the statement that “The government is committed to improving the way that well-being and social impacts are incorporated into policy decisions”.²³ This system includes two techniques for the valuation of non-market impacts: the Stated Preference method, which makes use of questionnaires to estimate “people’s willingness to pay for, or willingness to accept”; and the Revealed Preference approach, which “observes people’s behaviour in related markets”. The idea behind this is that economic methods can be used to estimate the life-satisfaction provided by non-market goods (*ie* goods or services not traded on the market, including public goods, health, employment and marriage). The estimation of life satisfaction is then converted into a monetary figure, that is, economists seek to monetise the impact of a policy by looking at the impact it has on ‘utility’.²⁴ It would seem that under the guise of “compassionate Conservatism” we find evidence for the pervasiveness of the market. The public sector is just one component of the national ‘business plan’ where health and welfare ‘commodities’ are valued as much for their export and earning potentials as they are for their potential to benefit the population.²⁵

Placing a market value on public goods is an indication of the extent to which marketisation of social life has achieved the status of ‘common sense’. Pre-dating the 2008 banking crash and subsequent economic impacts, and also the government’s policy on well-being, the political scientist Wendy Brown⁴ had argued that, in the economic thinking of neoliberalism, we see the reduction of

all human life to rational transactions; neoliberal political rationality emerges as a mode of governance which encompasses, though is not limited to, the state. This form of governance, when deployed, “reaches from the soul of the citizen subject to education practice to practice of empire” and involves the extension and dissemination of market values to all institutions and social actions.²⁶ In these terms, Brown asserts, the human being is configured as *homo economicus*, and all dimensions of human life are viewed in terms of market rationality.

According to Brown, not only does neoliberalism assume that all aspects of social, cultural and political life can be reduced to a calculus, but it actively develops institutional practices for its implementation. Despite the state providing the apparatus for this calculus, the market remains the organising and regulative principle of both state and society, and the individual is seen as an entrepreneurial actor in every sphere of life. Just as, in Cameron’s vision, individuals become “authors of their own destiny”, so under the neoliberal construct citizens are morally obligated to manage their own lives with a rational deliberation of costs, benefits and consequences. As Brown argues, a ‘mismanaged life’ for neoliberals is one in which the individual has failed to navigate the impediments to prosperity.⁴

Appropriation of the Language of Therapy

The historian Edward Luttwak has suggested²⁷ that we live in an age of “turbo charged capitalism” in which we see contradictions at play – on the one hand the drive to perpetuate free-market

dynamic capitalism, and on the other a call for a return to family and community values. This dualism is made explicit in the figure of Cameron and his policies, as he seems able simultaneously to describe Britain as being “broken” – because in his view government has become too big and has undermined responsibility – and to see a place for the state to measure the well-being of the people. On the one hand he wants to roll back the state, yet he also wants the state to understand, even infiltrate, our very interiors and explore our feelings. The well-being of the nation, in Cameron’s view, will be increased with the application of Conservative values of choice, family values and being in control of one’s own destiny.

As Stuart Hall has noted, under the “chimera of compassionate Conservatism” the coalition government has used the banking crisis as an alibi while it “seized the opportunity to launch the most radical, far-reaching and irreversible social revolution since the war”.²⁸ I suggest that a language of therapy, that focuses on self-fulfilment, has been appropriated into this ideological plan as a servant to neoliberal values.

There has been an ongoing debate among cultural analysts about the absorption of the language of therapy into everyday life, and the contemporaneous

preoccupation with the self. I suggest that it is possible to position Cameron’s proposal to measure well-being within this debate:

it is emblematic of a version of self-help therapy culture that comes to us in the bite-sized chunks of daily affirmations, positive thinking

manuals and cognitive behavioural therapy, which is more akin to the consumer culture of late capitalism with notions of self-development and fulfilment.

The rhetoric of well-being has been appropriated from the language of therapy to justify huge spending cuts and the dismantling of the welfare state. In 2010, as a precursor to the public sector cuts imposed by the coalition government, then Shadow Chancellor Osborne wrote an article for the *Guardian* in which he unveiled the Tories’ “manifesto for public sector workers”.²⁹ Insisting that, despite “decades of pay rises”, 40% of public sector workers report low morale – compared with only 16% of workers in the private sector – he concluded that it is not money that matters to public sector workers but their state of well-being. Thus, he said, the Tories would seek to promote well-being, claiming that “The Conservatives are on the side of Britain’s public servants”. Once elected, the Con-Dem government committed itself to cutting public sector pay, slashing spending and capping public sector pensions.

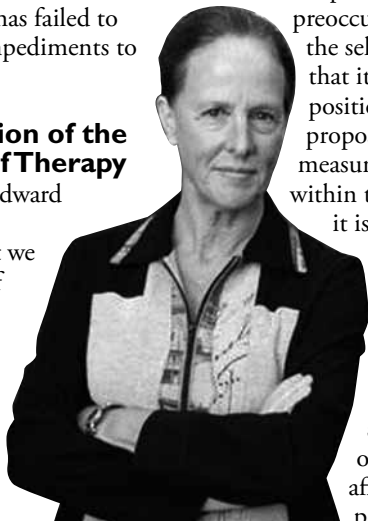
The proposal to measure the nation’s well-being, in conjunction with the policy to calculate the value of non-market goods, is an example of the neoliberal desire to configure individuals as *homo economicus*. At the heart of neoliberal economics we find what Beck and Beck-Gernsheim³⁰ define as the “autarkic human self”, *ie* the notion that the individual alone is the master of his or her life. The ethics of the marketplace have invaded economic and political thinking, with the key maxims of public life being competition, cost-effectiveness and the creation of wealth; the individual is isolated, yet supposedly self-sufficient, there to serve the demands and purposes of Western capitalism. According to Andrew Cooper,³¹ as the state

retreats from direct service provision, it still retains an inclination to govern, but this takes the form of “governance” or “governing yet not governing” as it establishes ways to audit, to measure and to define standards. Contemporary social policy, Cooper says, “is distinctive for the manner in which it aims to penetrate to the heart of how individuals function in a search for reconstruction of our civic identities”.³²

The model promoted by Cameron is intrinsically linked to a version of well-being as happiness, propounded by neoliberal ideals predominant in the USA and Britain. If this is not challenged, the prevailing view will be underpinned by a perception that it is up to the individual to choose and design his or her own well-being. That construction will only be acceptable if it is compatible with the systematic requirements of Western capitalism.³³ Under such constraints there is a tendency for uncritical acceptance of certain ‘givens’, such as ‘freedom of choice’, to form a key constituent of well-being, the notion of ‘choice’ being concomitant with an economic account that is about maximising one’s utility.³⁴

The usefulness of exploring such concepts as well-being is that they capture and reproduce important social norms, notably in a consumer society, where well-being emerges as a normative obligation and well-being practices are frequently consumerist in character.³⁵ The individual is able to ‘consume’ well-being from a range of options, from self-help books to life coaches. In an individualised consumerist society, failures to achieve well-being are perceived as personal negligence.

The question arises: is a consumer-based ideal of well-being characteristic of an individualistic psychology, a psychology which stands accused of creating the very



Political scientist Wendy Brown



ills that is sets out to heal?⁶ Indeed, materialism and individualism have been shown to be detrimental to health with increased levels of anxiety, anger, isolation and alienation.³⁶ Significantly, these ailments are “contagious” and “few denizens of the liquid modern society of consumers are fully immune”.³⁷

According to David Harvey, neoliberalism as an economic theory proposes that well-being is best achieved through the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms. Individual liberty and freedom are seen as sacrosanct, and the social good is to be increased through the maximisation of the reach and frequency of market transactions. As a consequence, however, “we are obliged to live as appendages of the market”.³⁸ Despite the recent crisis in the banking sector and the

economic fall-out that has followed, neoliberal ideology has an amazing capacity to adapt; and, far from the crisis heralding its end, we can expect to see a third wave of neoliberalism.³⁹

Individualism as a Dominant Norm

The projection of social problems back onto the individual, as seen in the current rhetoric of well-being measurement, is symptomatic, I would suggest, of what the psychoanalyst Lynn Layton describes as the dominant norm of liberal individualist ideology.⁴⁰ That norm, as defined by Layton, is the unlinking of individuals from their social contexts. She argues that there has been a subordination of “sensuous human existence and morality” to the ‘facts’ of the marketplace, this technical rationality severing individuals

from their social and natural world and also from each other. The split between the public and the private realms, Layton suggests, produces hostile and submissive versions of dependency on one hand and hostile and omnipotent versions of agency in the other.

The acceptance of our dependence on others “cannot be endured by the neoliberal mind” or by the “psychologist connoisseurs of happiness”.⁴¹ The result of this denial of dependency is the need to expunge the world of reminders of the reality of dependency, as exemplified by welfare recipients or the NHS. As Tim Dartington argues,⁴² we find ourselves in a post-dependent society, in which individual self-interest has become a sufficient explanation of socio-economic theory.

I have argued that the current exposition of well-being measurement,

as deployed by David Cameron, is underpinned by a culturally powerful language comprised of a version of self-help therapy culture that has an undercurrent of neoliberal pro-market values. This discourse has been strategically applied by the current government as a means of situating the locus of responsibility for personal well-being firmly on the individual. I hope that this article, which forms just one element of my current research, contributes to the very necessary challenge to the prevailing interpretation of ‘well-being’.

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Iranian Women

A Movement for Progress, Equality and Socialism

By Azar Sepehr



It is impossible to separate the achievements or setbacks of any women's movement from the state of the popular movement for progress and social justice. One question that has concerned activists in the struggle for women's rights has been whether the struggle for socialism has primacy. The events in Iran since the 1979 revolution suggest that at least a reverse principle may be demonstrated: that attacks on women's rights and freedoms are accompanied, if not followed, by attacks on and curtailment of the rights of the whole population – entailing regression in human rights.

One outcome of globalisation has been the relative porosity of borders and boundaries in relation to the dissemination and accessibility of information. This in itself has had an effect on events and related information.

Given the fact that Iran still has remnants of a pre-capitalist mode of production and means of production, it is not surprising that the struggle of Iranian women has been not so much towards socialism, as it has been a democratic struggle for progress and human rights, alongside equal rights and opportunities for women. In many senses this has been

a struggle for freedom from traditionalist values and social relations – a struggle for progress.

If anything, in the last 30 years the contradictions facing Iranian women have multiplied. The condition of working class women or generally the poor is worsening along with that of their male counterparts. Many regressive laws, however, have not discriminated along the lines of class but gender. Family, employment and inheritance laws, and segregation in health and education and in many public places, have worsened women's lives in the last three decades.



Origins of the Women's Movement

The presence of Iranian women in the social, economic, political and cultural arena probably goes back to the time that any of these movements came into being. A review of the contemporary history of Iran reveals that what we may call a modern women's movement came into being during the early part of the twentieth century. With the rise of the Marxist-Leninist and revolutionary struggle in Europe and particularly Russia, and its influence on workers travelling from parts of Russia to Iran, the struggle for constitutional reforms developed rapidly in Iran. Alongside this, the struggle for recognition of women's rights came into being and grew in time.

Accounts of the events that led to the Constitutional Revolution of 1905 and the 11-month siege of the North-Western city of Tabriz portray a picture of brave women committed to the cause of revolutionary change. Beside the familiar reports of women supporting the cause through fund-raising, there are accounts of women bearing arms and giving their lives in battle. It is reported that, in the battlefield of the campaign by Sattar Khan (one of the leaders of the Constitutional Revolution) to free Tabriz, the corpses of 20 women fighters were found.

Progressive women (and men) of Iran founded many organisations in order to better the lives of girls and women. There are accounts of girls' schools and women's papers founded around 1907-1910. In 1912, Morgan Shuster¹ wrote:

"The Persian women since 1907 [have] become almost at a bound the most progressive, not to say radical, in the world. That this statement upsets the ideas of centuries makes no difference [I]n their struggle for liberty and its modern expressions, they broke through some of the most sacred customs which for centuries past have bound their sex in the land of Iran [H]aving themselves suffered from a double form of oppression, political and social, they were the more eager to foment the great Nationalist movement for the adoption of constitutional reforms of government."²

Despite women's brave efforts to gain equal rights, the strong influence of the clergy on the electoral law of

September 1906 meant that they were barred from the political process. Objections by a group of women from affluent families met with the reply that women's education and training should be restricted to home economics, raising children and preserving the honour of the family.

The women's struggle continued in difficult conditions, and in 1920 a Marxist women's group, Jam'iat-e-Peyk-e Nesvan (Association of the Message of Women), was formed in the north of Iran. They had a significant impact in developing the struggle for emancipation, leading the publication of one of the first women's magazines in the region, *Peyke Saadat* (*Message of Prosperity*) and the campaign against illiteracy amongst women – a significant development in the country. It was this organisation that also organised the first celebration of International Women's Day in Iran, on 8 March 1923.

The suppression of the communist movement by the Reza Shah dictatorship (1921-1940), and the arrest of communist leaders, was accompanied by attacks on women's organisations. It was not until the fall of the regime in 1941 that women's struggle found the opportunity to develop again.

Mass Movements and Repression

In 1942, the National Women's Society was established, and in 1944 the newly founded Council of Iranian Women strongly criticised polygamy. The women of the Tudeh Party of Iran founded its women's league in 1942,

said to have been the best organised in this period with a reported membership of 2,500 women. In 1944 Homa Houshmandar published *Our Awakening* and in 1949 the women's league was changed to the Organisation of Democratic Women and branches were opened in all the major cities.³ Zahra and Taj Eskandari, Iran Arani, Maryam Firouz, Dr Khadijeh Keshavarz, Dr Ahktar Kambakhsh, Badri Alavi and Aliyeh Sharmini were amongst the best known activists of the Tudeh Party of Iran. The society's name was later changed to the

Organisation of Progressive Women.

The period between 1941 and 1953 was one of tremendous socio-economic and cultural development in Iran. The strength of the left, namely the Tudeh Party of Iran, the formation of trade unions with hundreds of thousands of workers organised in their ranks, the emergence of the youth and women's organisations as well as a thriving and progressive cultural scene with thousands of progressive publications, completely changed the society and pushed women's rights including their demand for voting rights to the top of the political agenda. The mass movement against colonialism and imperialism and for nationalisation of Iran's oil industries saw the active participation of women.

In 1953, the regime installed by the CIA-MI6 coup d'état unleashed a savage suppression of the left, particularly the Tudeh Party of Iran, with the aim of destroying the people's progressive movement for change.

Despite savage suppression, Iranian women continued their struggle and in February 1962 gained the right to vote and to be elected. However, traditionalists were quick to oppose these new gains. Fatwas by known figures including Ayatollah Khomeini declared the move heretical and backed demonstrations against them.

Revolution and Reaction

By 1978, women's participation in Iran's social life and the movement for equality had developed significantly.

In Iran women are denied basic rights in economic, social, civic, and cultural life by the theocratic regime.



Support women's rights in Iran!

In Iran women imprisoned for equality a 30 women's movement and activist political



Free women political

33% of university students were female, and 2 million women were in the workforce. 190,000 were professionals with university degrees. Iranian women played a significant role in the overthrow of the Shah's despotic regime and the victory of the Iranian revolution in 1979.

With this success there were hopes for significant moves towards more socio-economic freedoms for women and for the development of women's independent struggle. However, it is interesting and important to note that women's rights were amongst the first significant issues attacked by the reactionary forces as a starting signal to attack the ideals of the revolution and to impose a medieval patriarchal dictatorship masked by religious fundamentalism.

In March 1979 the Family Protection Law was abolished by a declaration from Imam Khomeini's office and women were barred from becoming judges. Women working in government offices were ordered to observe the Islamic dress code. In April 1979 the marriage age for girls was reduced to 13 and married women were barred from attending regular schools. By this time many independent women's organisations had been formed and a number of political organisations formed their own women's leagues. The Democratic Organisation of Iranian Women (DOIW), which had resumed its activities, soon grew to be one of the largest women's movements in the country.

The Iran-Iraq war, started in 1981, became a catalyst for further reactionary

measures in the country; and in 1983 the regime cracked down on all progressive organisations, including the DOIW, forcing secular women activists underground. The DOIW magazine *Women's World*, which had reached mass circulation, was closed. Thousands of female political activists were arrested, and hundreds were executed in prison, along with men. Simin Fardin and Fatemeh Modaresi were two of the scores of DOIW women who lost their lives in this period.

By the mid-1980s the crackdown on political organisations had gained ground, and reports of pre-execution rapes by prison guards became rife.

A number of publications came into existence and made varying degrees of impact. The magazine *Zanan*, published from 1992, systematically criticised the legal code. It argued that gender equality was Islamic but that religious literature was being misread and misappropriated by misogynist interest-oriented males. Secular activists Mehrangiz-i Kar, Shahla Lahiji and Shahla Sherkat, the Muslim editor of *Zanan*, were amongst those debating women's rights there.

Zanan magazine played an important role in the 1997 presidential elections, which saw Seyyed Mohammad Khatami elected. However, although the percentage of the women's vote in favour of Khatami was in the high 80s, few changes occurred in the women's situation. Unsurprisingly, the women's support for Khatami in the 2001 election was much lower. The reformist parliament passed some important laws

for women's rights in divorce cases, but these were vetoed as un-Islamic by the Guardian Council.

Although the Islamic Republic's laws curtailed the social activities of women through segregation and other regulations, female students overtook male applicants in undergraduate university admissions via the National University Entrance Examinations. Women played a significant role in the students' movement that in turn participated actively in the pro-

democracy rallies during 1998 and 1999.

There are many unsung heroines in the struggle for the rights of women in Iran. Only a very few are acknowledged or become nationally or internationally known. It was partly in recognition of Iranian women's struggle for equality that Shirin Ebadi, a lawyer and long-time women's rights activist, became the Nobel laureate for Peace in 2003.

The protest movement that emerged after the rigged presidential elections of 2009 drew much of its energy from the presence of women. The death of Neda Agha-Soltan became the well-known image of the period, but part of its significance is in the fact that she was one of thousands of women who have demonstrated over the years that they will show courage in the face of repression to demand their human and civil rights.

The Current Situation in Iran

The women's movement in Iran has also been affected by the debate about feminism and class struggle. At what point does one aim render the other secondary, if at all? In order to have a clearer understanding of the potential for change and progress, it is important to understand the class composition of the society, in this case, Iran. Iranian society is in the national-democratic stage of development.

The Tudeh Party of Iran has given a detailed class analysis of the situation, some of which is drawn on below. According to figures from the Centre for Statistics in June 2011, more than 10 million people (out of a population of 75 million) live below the absolute poverty line and more than 30 million live below the relative poverty line. The principal causes for this are the current unemployment and inflation levels.

As in the developed capitalist countries, the general trend has been a move away from industrial and agricultural production towards services and non-productive activities. Out of a total oil income of \$800bn, less than \$23bn has been invested in industry. Economic indicators from the central bank in 2009 reveal an 8.2% drop in investment in domestic production. The general tendency of investment has been towards real estate and building.⁴

Iran's economy, based on the demands of the IMF and World Bank, as well as other powerful institutions of capitalism, is characterised by the growth of consumerism without growth in production, reliance on oil revenues and the predominance of parasitic trading. This has led to the emergence of parasitic

are arrested and
campaigning for
and justice.
ovement leaders
s are held as
prisoners.

In Iran millions of women are mobilised in the Change for Equality Campaign, demanding repeal of all discriminatory laws and articles of the constitution.



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strata that play an influential role in the political and economic life of the country. New bureaucratic capitalism has grown as the military oligarchy that is the Revolutionary Guards Corps has become increasingly strong.

The economic activities of the Revolutionary Guard Corps as the dominant stratum are significant in Iran's bureaucratic capitalism and its government – represented by Ahmadinejad's government. This military oligarchy rose to its current level of power through the incongruous development of capitalism in Iran and the economic adjustment programmes. Mercantile and bureaucratic capitalism are the principal components of the economic relations, and their political representatives sit at the top of the hierarchy of power and influence.

Given the economic model that is being implemented, the working class is numerically small. Statistics released by the Ministry of Industries in 2008 indicate that 90% of industrial production is carried out by small production units. Employment in these units accounts for 63% of the total.

During the last thirty years or so the agricultural capacity of the country has decreased. State support for the big landowners, and the destructive actions of parasitic bodies, coupled with extensive migration to the cities, mean that the peasantry is in a weak position. The number of villages and hamlets has dropped from 68,000 in 1996 to 55,000 in recent years. Yet the drop in the agricultural workforce has not been translated into an increase in the industrial labour force. The only growth has been in the service industry, supported by the injection of oil income.

Two sections of the petty bourgeoisie may be described as traditional and modern/new. The former have been losing

their position due to the changes in the means of production and distribution, and large sections of them have faced bankruptcy. The modern/new section of the petty bourgeoisie consists of those related to workshops and repair shops that deal with the production of support components for machinery and the like.

The capitalist class has also seen major qualitative changes. The big mercantile bourgeoisie in Iran is closely linked with the higher echelons of the clergy. The new bureaucratic capitalism has shared major gains in the three decades of the Islamic Republic of Iran. These two strata enjoy enormous financial and political power and influence and amount to the main reactionary forces that oppose any progressive movement. The Revolutionary Guards (the military oligarchy) has the dominant role in the new bureaucratic capitalism and played a key role in maintaining Ahmadinejad in power in the bloody electoral coup d'état of 2009.

In opposition to those above are the owners of small and medium industrial capital whose objective interests are aligned with growth in national production, and who suffer as a result of the flood of legal and black market imports, and extensive corruption.

Among those whose interests and rights are suppressed are workers, students and quantitatively greatest by far: women.

Women's Struggle Today

The struggle for women's rights involves women (and men) from all walks of life. Generally, it might be said that activists follow two different methods: the protest movement and the process of chipping away at existing obstacles as opportunities arise. In an article published in the annual periodical *Feminist School*, leading women's activist Noushin Khorasani writes of

the difficulties faced by the women's movement, not only because of the obstacles placed by the regime, but also because of the suspicions of radicals who distrusted organisations that "tried to work within the current possibilities".

During the last decade women activists have been instrumental in developing the socio-political struggle against the reactionary forces. The rise of many independent women's organisations, the progressive social and cultural activities aimed at improving literacy amongst deprived women, the fight against the regime's attempts to impose a reactionary anti-women culture on society and finally the significant role of women in the political struggle alongside other social forces has proved once and for all that the women's movement in Iran is an integral part the people's movement against dictatorship and for democracy, independence and social justice. The very successful One Million Signatures Campaign against reactionary laws is just one example of how the struggle of Iranian women has developed over the past three decades.

The progressive forces in Iran and our women's movement, while struggling against medieval laws, for our rights and for equality, also believe that we have a strong and urgent duty to fight against war, against any form of foreign intervention in our country and to work closely with the progressive forces in our country to develop our mass movement for freedom, independence and social justice.

We have a long way to go, but on our way one of the pressing tasks is the articulation of the rights and aspirations of women for a society free of exploitation.

■ Based on a talk given by the author at an International Women's Day seminar organised by the Coordinating Committee of Communist Parties in Britain, at the Marx Memorial Library, London, on 10 March 2012.

Notes and References

- 1 William Morgan Shuster (1877-1960) was a US lawyer and civil servant who was appointed treasurer-general of Persia (Iran) in 1911.
- 2 W M Shuster, *The Strangling of Persia – Story of the European Diplomacy and Oriental Intrigue that Resulted in the Denationalization of Twelve Million Mohammedans, A Personal Narrative*, The Century Co, New York, 1912, pp 191-2.
- 3 Cited in S Vakil, *Women and Politics in the Islamic Republic of Iran: Action and Reaction*, Continuum International, London, 2011, p 34.
- 4 *Capital*, 17 Shahrivar, 2009

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

A little bit of history ... of *Communist Review*

From Ivor Pearce

I was looking through accumulated pamphlets and books the other day and came across the December 1953 issue of ... *Communist Review*.

This was the CP's theoretical magazine of the day (other comrades may be able to give chapter and verse of this particular publication). It was priced at ninepence and was a small format, blue-covered magazine of about 30 pages.

Contents of this 1953 issue included articles by

- Emile Burns on *Vigilance to Win Peace*
 - H Fagan on *Social Services and Elections*
 - I Malyshev on *National Income of the USSR*
- plus book reviews and several other articles.

One article that interested me, as an ex-forestry worker, was a report of the World Conference of the Trade Union International of Agricultural and Forestry Workers – trade department of the World Federation of Trade Unions (pew – *IP*), held in Vienna in October 1953. The article began by reporting mass strikes of agricultural workers in Cuba, Nigeria and Indonesia. Towards the end, the author, M Carroue, laid out the guidelines for organising countryside and peasant workers, and continued:

“The training of militant trade unionists who come from the agricultural workers is a considerable problem because of the widespread illiteracy. But the desire of the colonial workers to learn is such that they can make great and rapid progress. One proof of this is the fact that at Dolise in the Middle Congo the militant trade unionists themselves organised evening classes to learn to read and write, combining to pay the expenses of the teacher and the oil.”¹

Book reviews at the back of the magazine included

- *Harry Pollitt: Selected Articles and Speeches*
- *Your Children's Future* by Max Morris

An ‘organisational notice’ on the back cover announced the arrival of the *Marxist Quarterly* from January 1954, the forerunner, not many years later, of *Marxism Today*, of which publication, no doubt, much could be written – not least of which is that there existed the organisational and political talent to get such a magazine out on a regular basis!

I have several copies of the original *Communist Review* from the late Bert Pearce's library,² including January 1948, most of 1952, and a few other odd copies. I also have 95 assorted copies of *Marxism Today*, between 1958 and 1987. Anyone wishing to beg, borrow or steal (or buy) these copies can contact me at 139 Beamont Road, Birmingham B30 1NT. I can post them out at cost of postage.

Notes and References

- 1 Presumably for lamps –*Ed*
- 2 It's one of those words, isn't it? ... LIBRARY! –*IP*

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The Western Welfare State

Its Rise and Demise and the Soviet Bloc



By James Petras

Introduction

One of the most striking socioeconomic features of the past two decades is the reversal of the previous half-century of welfare legislation in Europe and North America. Unprecedented cuts in social services, severance pay, public employment, pensions, health programmes, educational stipends, vacation time, and job security are matched by increases in tuition fees, regressive taxation, and the age of retirement as well as increased inequalities, job insecurity and workplace speed-up.

The demise of the 'welfare state' demolishes the idea put forth by orthodox economists, who argued that the 'maturation' of capitalism, its 'advanced state', high technology and sophisticated services, would be accompanied by greater welfare and higher income/standard of living. While it is true that 'services and technology' have multiplied, the economic sector has become even more polarised, between low paid retail clerks and super-rich stockbrokers and financiers. The computerisation of the economy has led to electronic book-keeping, cost controls and the rapid movements of speculative funds in search of maximum profit while at the same time ushering in brutal budgetary reductions for social programmes.

The 'Great Reversal' appears to be a long-term, large-scale process centred in the dominant capitalist countries of Western Europe and North America and in the former Communist states of Eastern Europe. It behoves us to examine the systemic causes that transcend the particular idiosyncrasies of each nation.

The Origins of the Great Reversal

There are two lines of enquiry which need to be elucidated in order to come to terms with the demise of the welfare state and the massive decline of living standards. One line of analysis examines the profound change in the international environment: we have moved from a competitive bi-polar system, based on a rivalry between the collectivist-welfare states of the Eastern bloc and the capitalist states of Europe and North America to an international system monopolised by competing capitalist states.

A second line of enquiry directs us to examine the changes in the internal social relations of the capitalist states: namely the shift from intense class struggles to long-term class collaboration, as the organising principle in the relation between labour and capital.

The main proposition informing this essay is that the emergence of the welfare

state was a historical outcome of a period when there were high levels of competition between collectivist welfarism and capitalism and when class-struggle oriented trade unions and social movements had ascendancy over class-collaborationist organisations.

Clearly the two processes are inter-related: as the collectivist states implemented greater welfare provisions for their citizens, trade unions and social movements in the West had social incentives and positive examples to motivate their members and challenge capitalists to match the welfare legislation in the collectivist bloc.

The Origins and Development of the Western Welfare State

Immediately following the defeat of fascist-capitalist regimes with the defeat of Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union and its political allies in Eastern Europe embarked on a massive programme of reconstruction, recovery, economic growth and the consolidation of power, based on far-reaching socioeconomic welfare reforms. The great fear among Western capitalist regimes was that the working class in the West would 'follow' the Soviet example or, at a minimum, support parties and actions which would undermine capitalist recovery. Given the political discredit

of many Western capitalists because of their collaboration with the Nazis or their belated, weak opposition to the fascist version of capitalism, they could not resort to the highly repressive methods of the past. Instead, the Western capitalist classes applied a two-fold strategy to counter the Soviet collectivist-welfare reforms: selective repression of the domestic Communist and radical left, and welfare concessions to secure the loyalty of the Social- and Christian-Democratic trade unions and parties.

With economic recovery and post-war growth, the political, ideological and economic competition intensified. The Soviet bloc introduced wide-ranging reforms, including full employment, guaranteed job security, universal health care, free higher education, one-month paid vacation leave, full-pay pensions, free summer camps and vacation resorts for worker families and prolonged paid maternity leave. They emphasised the importance of social welfare over individual consumption. The capitalist West was under pressure to approximate the welfare offerings from the East, while expanding individual consumption based on cheap credit and instalment payments, made possible by their more advanced economies. From the mid-

1940s to the mid-1970s the West competed with the Soviet bloc with two goals in mind: to retain workers' loyalties in the West while isolating the militant sectors of the trade unions; and to entice the workers of the East with promises of comparable welfare programmes and greater individual consumption.

Despite the advances in social welfare programmes, East and West, there were major worker protests in Eastern Europe: these focused on national independence, authoritarian paternalistic tutelage of trade unions and insufficient access to private consumer goods. In the West, there were major worker-student upheavals in France and Italy demanding an end of capitalist dominance in the workplace and social life. Popular opposition was widespread to imperialist wars (Indo-China, Algeria, etc), the authoritarian features of the capitalist state (racism) and the concentration of wealth.

In other words, the new struggles in the East and West were premised on the consolidation of the welfare state and the expansion of popular political and social power over the state and the productive process.

The continuing competition between collectivist and capitalist welfare systems ensured that there would be no roll-back of the reforms thus far achieved. However, the defeats of the popular rebellions of the sixties and seventies ensured that no further advances in social welfare would take place. More importantly, a social 'deadlock' developed between the ruling classes and the workers in both blocs, leading to stagnation of the economies, bureaucratisation of the trade unions and demands by the capitalist classes for a dynamic new leadership, capable of challenging the collectivist bloc and systematically dismantling the welfare state.

The Process of Reversal: From Reagan-Thatcher to Gorbachev

The great illusion, which gripped the masses of the collectivist-welfare bloc, was the notion that the Western promise of mass consumerism could be combined with the advanced welfare programmes that they had long taken for granted. The political signals from the West however were moving in the opposite direction. With the ascendancy of President Ronald Reagan in the US and Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in Great Britain, the capitalists regained full control over the social agenda, dealing mortal blows to what remained of trade union militancy and launching a full scale arms race with the Soviet Union in order to bankrupt its economy. In addition, 'welfarism' in the East was thoroughly undermined by an emerging class of upwardly mobile educated elites who teamed up with kleptocrats, neoliberals, budding gangsters and anyone else who professed 'Western values'. They received political and material support from Western foundations, Western intelligence agencies, the Vatican (especially in Poland), European Social-Democratic parties and the US AFL-CIO while, on the fringes, an ideological veneer was provided by the self-described 'anti-Stalinist' leftists in the West.

The entire Soviet bloc welfare programme had been built from the top down and, as a result, did not have a class-conscious, politicised, independent and militant class organisation to defend it from the full-scale assault launched by the gangster-kleptocratic-clerical-neo-liberal-'anti-Stalinist' bloc. Likewise, in the West, the entire social welfare programme was tied to European Social-Democratic parties, the US Democratic Party and a trade union hierarchy lacking both class consciousness and any interest in class struggle. Their main concern, as union bureaucrats,

was reduced to collecting members' dues, maintaining internal organisational power over their fiefdoms and their own personal enrichment.

The collapse of the Soviet bloc was precipitated by the Gorbachev regime's unprecedented handover of the allied states of the Warsaw Pact to the NATO powers. The local communist officials were quickly recycled as neoliberal proxies and pro-Western surrogates. They quickly proceeded to launch a full-scale assault on public ownership of property and to dismantle the basic protective labour legislation and job security, which had been an inherent part of collectivist management-labour relations.

With a few noteworthy exceptions, the entire formal framework of collectivist-welfarism was crushed. Soon after came mass disillusion among the Eastern bloc workers as their 'anti-Stalinist' Western-oriented trade unions presented them with massive lay-offs. The vast majority of the militant Gdansk shipyard workers, affiliated to Poland's 'Solidarity' movement were fired and reduced to chasing odd jobs, while their wildly fêted 'leaders', long-time recipients of material support from Western intelligence agencies and trade unions, moved on to become prosperous politicians, editors and businesspeople.

The Western trade unions and the 'anti-Stalinist' left (social-democrats, Trotskyists and every sect and intellectual current in between), did yeoman service in not only ending the collectivist system (under the slogan, 'Anything is better than Stalinism') but in ending the welfare state for scores of millions of workers, pensioners and their families.

Once the collectivist-welfare state was destroyed, the Western capitalist class no longer needed to compete in matching social welfare concessions. The Great Roll-back moved into full gear.

For the next two decades,

Western regimes – Liberal, Conservative and Social-Democratic, each in their turn – sliced off welfare legislation. Pensions were cut and the retirement age was extended as they instituted the doctrine of 'work till you drop'. Job security disappeared, workplace protections were eliminated, severance pay was cut and the firing of workers was simplified, while capital mobility flourished.

Neoliberal globalisation exploited the vast reservoirs of qualified low-paid labour from the former collectivist countries. The 'anti-Stalinist' workers inherited the worst of all worlds: they lost the social welfare net of the East and failed to secure the individual consumption levels and prosperity of the West. German capital exploited cheaper Polish and Czech labour, while Czech politicians privatised highly sophisticated state industries and social services, increasing the costs and restricting access to what services remained.

In the name of 'competitiveness' Western capital deindustrialised and relocated vast industries successfully, with virtually no resistance from the bureaucratised 'anti-Stalinist' trade unions. No longer competing with the collectivists over who had the better welfare system, Western capitalists now competed among themselves over who had the lowest labour costs and social expenditures, the most lax environmental and workplace protection and the easiest and cheapest laws for firing employees and hiring contingent workers.

The entire army of impotent 'anti-Stalinist' leftists, comfortably established in the universities, brayed till they were hoarse against the 'neoliberal offensive' and the 'need for an anti-capitalist strategy', without the tiniest reflection over how they had contributed to undermining the very welfare state that had educated, fed and employed the workers.



Labour Militancy: North and South

Welfare programmes in Western Europe and North America were especially hit by the loss of a competing social system in the East, by the influx and impact of cheap labour from the East and because their own trade unions had become adjuncts of the neoliberal Socialist, Labour and Democratic Parties.

In contrast, in the South, in particular in Latin America and, to a lesser degree, in Asia, anti-welfare neoliberalism lasted only for a decade. In Latin America neoliberalism soon came under intensive pressure, as a new wave of class militancy erupted and regained some of the lost ground. By the end of the first decade of the new century, labour in Latin America was increasing its share of national income, social expenditures were increasing and the welfare state was in the process of regaining momentum in direct contrast to what was occurring in Western Europe and North America.

Social revolts and powerful popular movements led to left and centre-left regimes and policies in Latin America. A powerful series of national struggles overthrew neoliberal regimes. A growing wave of worker and peasant protests in China led to 10% to 30% wage increases in the industrial belts and moves to restore the health and public educational system. Facing a new grassroots, worker-based socio-cultural revolt, the Chinese state and business elite hastily promoted social welfare legislation at a time when southern European nations like Greece, Spain, Portugal and Italy were in the process of firing workers and slashing salaries, reducing minimum wages, increasing the retirement age and cutting social expenditures.

The capitalist regimes of the West no longer faced competition from the rival welfare systems of the Eastern

bloc since all have embraced the ethos of 'the less the better': lower social expenditures meant bigger subsidies for business, greater budgets to launch imperialist wars and to establish the massive 'homeland security' police state apparatus. Lower taxes on capital led to greater profits.

Western left and liberal intellectuals played a vital role in obfuscating the important positive role which Soviet welfarism had in pressuring the capitalist regimes of the West to follow their lead. Instead, during the decades following the death of Stalin and as Soviet society evolved toward a hybrid system of authoritarian welfarism, these intellectuals continued to refer to these regimes as 'Stalinist', obscuring the principal source of legitimacy among their citizens – their advanced welfare system. The same intellectuals would claim that the 'Stalinist system' was an obstacle to socialism and turn the workers against its positive aspects as a welfare state, by their exclusive focus on the past 'gulag'. They argued that the 'demise of Stalinism' would provide a great opening for 'democratic revolutionary socialism'. In reality, the fall of collectivist-welfarism led to the catastrophic destruction of the welfare state in both the East and West and the ascendancy of the most virulent forms of primitive neoliberal capitalism. This, in turn, led to the further shrinking of the trade union movement and spurred the 'right-turn' of the Social-Democratic and Labour Parties via the 'New Labour' and 'Third Way' ideologies.

The 'anti-Stalinist' left intellectuals have never engaged in any serious reflection regarding their own role in bringing down the collective welfare state nor have they assumed any responsibility for the devastating socioeconomic consequences in both the East and West. Furthermore the same intellectuals have had no

reservations in this 'post-Soviet era' in supporting ('critically' of course) the British Labour Party, the French Socialist Party, the Clinton-Obama Democratic Party and other 'lesser evils' which practice neoliberalism. They supported the utter destruction of Yugoslavia and US-led colonial wars in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Not a few 'anti-Stalinist' intellectuals in England and France will have clinked champagne glasses with the generals, bankers and oil elites over NATO's bloody invasion and devastation of Libya – Africa's only welfare state.

The 'anti-Stalinist' left intellectuals, now well-ensconced in privileged university positions in London, Paris, New York and Los Angeles, have not been personally affected by the roll-back of the Western welfare programmes. They adamantly refuse to recognise the constructive role that the competing Soviet welfare programmes played in forcing the West to 'keep up' in a kind of 'social welfare race' by providing benefits for its working class. Instead, they argue (in their academic forums) that greater 'workers' militancy' (hardly possible with a bureaucratized and shrinking trade union membership) and bigger and more frequent 'socialist scholars' forums' (where they can present their own radical analyses ... to each other) will eventually restore the welfare system. In fact, historic levels of regression, insofar as welfare legislation is concerned, continue unabated. There is an inverse (and perverse) relation between the academic prominence of the 'anti-Stalinist' left and the demise of welfare state policies. And still the 'anti-Stalinist' intellectuals wonder about the shift to far-right demagogic populism among the hard-pressed working class!

If we examine and compare the relative influence of the 'anti-Stalinist' intellectuals in the making of

the welfare state to the impact of the competing collectivist welfare system of the Eastern bloc, the evidence is overwhelmingly clear: Western welfare systems were far more influenced by their systemic competitors than by the pious critiques of the marginal 'anti-Stalinist' academics. 'Anti-Stalinist' metaphysics has blinded a whole generation of intellectuals to the complex interplay and advantages of a competitive international system where rivals bid up welfare measures to legitimate their own rule and undermine their adversaries. The reality of world power politics led the 'anti-Stalinist' left to become a pawn in the struggle of Western capitalists to contain welfare costs and establish the launch pad for a neoliberal counter-revolution. The deep structures of capitalism were the primary beneficiaries of anti-Stalinism.

The demise of the legal order of the collectivist states has led to the most egregious forms of predator-gangster capitalism in the former USSR and Warsaw Pact nations. Contrary to the delusions of the 'anti-Stalinist' left, no 'post-Stalinist' socialist democracy has emerged anywhere. The key operatives in overthrowing the collectivist-welfare state and benefiting from the power vacuum have been the billionaire oligarchs who pillaged Russia and the East, and the multi-billion dollar drug and white slave cartel kingpins, who turned hundreds of thousands of jobless factory workers and their children, in the Ukraine, Moldova, Poland, Hungary, Kosovo, Romania and elsewhere, into alcoholics, prostitutes and drug addicts.

Demographically, the biggest losers from the overthrow of the collectivist-welfare system have been women workers: they lost their jobs, their maternity leave, their childcare and legal protections. They suffered from an epidemic of domestic

violence under the fists of their unemployed and drunken spouses. The rates of maternal and infant deaths soared from a faltering public health system. The working-class women of the East suffered an unprecedented loss of material status and legal rights. This has led to the greatest demographic decline in post-war history – plummeting birth rates, soaring death rates and generalised hopelessness. In the West, the feminist ‘anti-Stalinists’ have ignored their own complicity in the enslavement and degradation of their ‘sisters’ in the East. (They were too busy fêting the likes of Vaclav Havel).

Of course, the ‘anti-Stalinist’ intellectuals will claim that the outcomes that they had envisaged are a far cry from what evolved and they will refuse to assume any responsibility for the real consequences of their actions, complicity and the illusions they created. Their outrageous claim ‘that anything is better than Stalinism’ rings hollow in the great chasm containing a lost generation of Eastern bloc workers and families. They need to start counting up the multi-million strong army of unemployed throughout the East, the millions of TB- and HIV-ravaged victims in Russia and Eastern Europe (where neither TB nor HIV posed a threat before the ‘break-up’), the mangled lives of millions

of young women trapped in the brothels of Tel Aviv, Pristina, Bucharest, Hamburg, Barcelona, Amman, Tangiers, and Brooklyn

Conclusion

The single biggest blow to the welfare programmes as we knew them, which were developed during the four decades from 1940s to the 1980s, was the end of the rivalry between the Soviet bloc and Western Europe and North America. Despite the authoritarian nature of the Eastern bloc and the imperialist character of the West, both sought legitimacy and political advantage by securing the loyalty of the mass of workers via tangible socioeconomic concessions.

Today, in the face of the neoliberal ‘roll-back’, the major labour struggles revolve around defending the remnants of the welfare state, the skeletal remains of an earlier period. At present there are very few prospects of any return to competing international welfare systems, unless one were to look at a few progressive countries, like Venezuela, which have instituted a series of health, educational and labour reforms financed by their nationalised petroleum sector.

One of the paradoxes of the history of welfarism in Eastern Europe can be found in the fact that the major ongoing labour struggles in the Czech

Republic, Poland, Hungary and other countries, which had overthrown their collectivist regimes, involve a defence of the pension, retirement, public health, employment, educational and other welfare policies – the ‘Stalinist’ leftovers. In other words, while Western intellectuals still boast of their triumphs over Stalinism, the real existing workers in the East are engaged in day-to-day militant struggles to retain and regain the positive welfare features of those maligned states. Nowhere is this more evident than in China and Russia, where privatisations have meant a loss of employment and, in the case of China, the brutal loss of public health benefits. Today workers’ families with serious illnesses are ruined by the costs of privatised medical care.

In the current world, ‘anti-Stalinism’ is a metaphor for a failed generation on the margins of mass politics. They have been overtaken by a virulent neoliberalism, which borrowed their pejorative language (Blair and Bush also were ‘anti-Stalinists’) in the course of demolishing the welfare state. Today the mass impetus for the reconstruction of a welfare state is found in those countries which have lost or are in the process of losing their entire social safety net – like Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy – and in those Latin American countries,

where popular upheavals, based on class struggles linked to national liberation movements, are on the rise.

The new mass struggles for welfarism make few direct references to the earlier collectivist experiences and even less to the empty discourse of the ‘anti-Stalinist’ left. The latter are stuck in a stale and irrelevant time-warp. What is abundantly clear, however, is that the welfare, labour and social programmes which were gained, and lost in the aftermath of the demise of the Soviet bloc, have returned as strategic objectives motivating present and future workers’ struggles.

What needs to be further explored is the relation between the rise of the vast police state apparatuses in the West and the decline and dismantling of their respective welfare states. The growth of ‘homeland security’ and the ‘war on terror’ parallels the decline of social security, public health programmes and the great drop in living standards for hundreds of millions.

■ *This article was first published online on 4 July 2012 by Global Research at <http://www.globalresearch.ca/the-western-welfare-state-its-rise-and-demise-and-the-soviet-bloc/31753>, and is republished here by kind permission of the author.*

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OBITUARY

Eric Hobsbawm Foremost Historian in the Marxist Tradition

By Mary Davis and John Foster

ERIC HOBSBAWM, who died on 1 October aged 95, stood unchallenged as the foremost historian in the Marxist tradition not just in Britain but internationally. He was also an active communist for most of his life and closely involved in the key debates which defined the history of the left in Britain during the 20th century.

Born in Alexandria to Jewish parents of British-Austrian nationality in 1917, he was orphaned as a child and then brought up by an uncle in Berlin. There he witnessed the Nazi rise to power at first hand and participated in resistance activities as a member of a communist youth organisation.

Moving to school in Britain in 1934, he secured a scholarship to King's College, Cambridge, in 1935 and quickly became involved in the wider intellectual and organisational activities of the University's branch of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). He served during the Second World War in the Engineers and Army Educational Corps.

After the war he lectured at Birkbeck College in London from 1947 until his retirement in 1982 and held a fellowship at King's College, Cambridge, between 1949 and 1955. He held visiting chairs in the United States from the 1960s and became president of Birkbeck College in 2002.

As a historian Hobsbawm was a central figure among those who transformed British history writing in the 1940s and 1950s and for at least three decades broke the dominance of those who had hitherto made history speak for the existing order. Along with Christopher Hill, Donna Torr,

George Thomson, Rodney Hilton, Victor Kiernan, E P Thompson and other members of the CPGB Historians Group, Hobsbawm laid out a new agenda. This was interdisciplinary, insisted that society had to be analysed as a whole and drew on the approach of French historians of the Annales school, Georges Lefebvre and Marc Bloch, both deeply influenced by Marx.

In 1952 Hobsbawm with other members of the Historians Group founded the journal *Past and Present* and a little later the Society for the Study of Labour History. The sophistication of their analysis forced mainstream historical journals to engage on fields of battle defined in Marxist terms. Hobsbawm himself did so particularly in three areas:

- He redefined the European crisis of the 17th century in economic, demographic and political terms as a clash between feudalism and capitalism.
- He provided statistical support for Marx's view that the initial phase of industrial growth was at the expense of working-class living standards, and hence challenged the dominant academic orthodoxy which insisted that industrialisation improved living standards.
- He also produced detailed studies which vindicated Lenin's explanation of the reformism of Britain's labour movement in terms of a labour aristocracy sustained on the profits of empire.

Regis professors were lured out of their ivory towers into debate – often

returning battered and discredited.

These debates took Marxist assumptions on the class-driven character of social change to the heart of history teaching in schools and universities. Hobsbawm followed this up in the 1960s and 1970s with brilliantly accessible histories of Britain, Europe and the world over the past three centuries that defined the historical understanding of a generation. It is rare for a scholar of Hobsbawm's stature to be so accessible in their writing and teaching. Many of us will remember this for many years to come.

At the same time Hobsbawm was closely involved in the politics of the Communist Party. Along with E P Thompson and John Saville, he was among those who demanded changes in inner-party democracy and a departure from democratic centralism in the wake of the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party and its denunciation of Stalin. He did not, however, leave the CPGB.

In the 1960s and 1970s he developed links with those in the Italian Communist Party who saw themselves as developing a strategy for socialism that was quite distinct from – and to a large extent posed against – that of the Soviet Union. In 1977 he published *The Italian Road to Socialism* based on a long interview with Giorgio Napolitano, then international secretary of the Italian Communist Party and today president of Italy.

In 1978 he gave a lecture at Marx House in London that was subsequently published in the CPGB monthly *Marxism Today* as *The Forward March of Labour Halted*. Writing at the

time when the trade union movement was at the peak of its strength – and the left highly influential within it – Hobsbawm argued that the manual working class was in numerical decline and that the character of its politics was inherently economic, trapped within the bounds of self-interested wage bargaining, and that consequently the left had to look in future to broader alliances and social movements.

This lecture became an iconic text for that wing within the CPGB that sought to steer it away from class politics and to challenge key elements of Marxism. While Hobsbawm never fully endorsed this endeavour, he actively supported the transformation of *Marxism Today* into its flagship journal and was a very frequent contributor. He continued to be so until 1991, by which time the CPGB under the control of this wing had expelled virtually all opponents and then voted itself out of existence.

The same tendency subsequently provided important ideological support for those within the Labour Party calling for a realignment away from the trade union movement and the creation of New Labour. Although Hobsbawm supported Neil Kinnock's remoulding of the Labour Party and was honoured by Tony Blair, he subsequently spoke out against New Labour, its alignment with US policies and, very firmly, against the invasion of Iraq.

In his final years Hobsbawm continued his role – to use his own phrase – as a “public intellectual”. He refused all invitations unilaterally to condemn the Soviet Union and instead asserted its historic role in the defeat of fascism. He indicated his concern at the manipulation of ‘identity politics’ and in particular the divisive use of nationalism and national mythology. He showed his exasperation at the abandonment by most contemporary historians of any attempt to understand overall processes of social change.

Internationally, his writings have become an intellectual beacon for those seeking an understanding of human development in Marxist terms, particularly in Latin America and the Indian subcontinent. While in Britain his death marks the end of that generation of communist historians who transformed history writing, his continuing influence as a humanist and historian is assured.

■ First published in the Morning Star on Friday 5 October 2012.



Discussion: What the Dickens ...?

By Doug McLeod

IT IS HARD to understand where Ken Fuller is leading us:¹ he hardly intends the demolition of a national treasure.

Most of us, excepting the chronically reticent and tongue-tied, make statements that do not bear too much close examination. We all say things that are contradictory, that later with the benefit of hindsight, or more reflection, we retract, reject or modify: usually we were simply wrong. Generally it does not matter too much, because no-one notices, or they immediately forgive us, perhaps because they like us and know at heart we mean well. So it should be with Charles Dickens, flawed like the rest of humanity, but by any measure a good, well-intentioned man who has enriched us by his life and work.

Very different rules apply to those engaged in the trade of ideas: theoreticians, historians, philosophers, ideologues, even critics. They expect the work produced in the course of their professional lives to be subjected to the same processes of scrutiny and analysis to which they subject others. But not the creative artist and story-teller! We are irritated when a captivating raconteur is halted in full

flow by someone who interrupts on a point of detail. We have all winced at the interventions of characters who insist on explaining – and killing – a joke.

We should cherish Dickens above all for his humanity, the warmth and affection that pervades his work, and for his skill as artist and entertainer. The enormous body of his work – looking at the bookshelf, I count sixteen substantial volumes of small, close print – is the product of a prolific imagination and phenomenal creative energy, working upon the raw material provided by a long, full, colourful life lived during a period of rapid and far-reaching social change. Our first genuinely popular novelist, his readership included Queen Victoria and Karl Marx. His readers were unacquainted with the conventions of the modern novel. Typically they possessed a sharp appetite for melodrama and sentiment, and expected to be moved and amused. The multitude of inaccuracies, contradictions, absurdities and improbable coincidences, contained in the works, is probably inevitable in the creation of hundreds of fictional characters in a huge variety of contrived situations. These characteristics



were seemingly much less disconcerting to the first Dickens readers than to us.

An essential precondition for collective political action and organisation is a degree of self-awareness, a sense of personal worth and an intolerance of injustice, which – extended to others – is the foundation of social morality. These qualities are, arguably, a necessary first stage in the evolution of class consciousness. Movements of the left do not flourish without a sense of unity and comradeship. The illiterate poor who paid their ha'pennies to attend readings of Dickens'

works became immersed in a world with which they were familiar; lives that reflected and illuminated their own, in which they could recognise themselves and others known to them. Dickens remorselessly exposed to scrutiny and ridicule the host of authority figures: beadies, constables, turnkeys and the like, minor functionaries, of petty rank but with power to torment the poor and helpless and to make their lives a misery. These petty tyrants were the indispensable functionaries of an oppressive society.

At a time when working-class children,

including the huge numbers destined for domestic service, the factories and agriculture, were exhorted and drilled by a rudimentary school system and the established church to 'know their place', Dickens was provocative and subversive. He showed a particular respect and admiration for the defiant heroes and heroines of lowly rank and status who found within themselves the courage to challenge authority:

- Susan Nipper, the pert, plucky maid; her own girl, always one senses, on the brink of rebellion, a sharp witty observer of the idiosyncrasies of her 'superiors', audaciously corners and berates the autocratic, austere tyrannical Dombey, for his coldness, lack of humanity and refusal to respond to the affection of his adoring daughter.
- Oliver, the pitiful orphaned mite, discharged from the workhouse as a 'prentice for having the effrontery in asking for more gruel – not just for himself but as a spokesman for his fellow victims – and who when bullied by the obnoxious Noah Claypole, turns on and thrashes his tormentor.
- Wackford Squeers, the appalling Yorkshire schoolmaster, has his cane turned upon him by Nicholas Nickleby, the pupil teacher, outraged by the treatment of the captive pupils and the physical and psychological destruction of the pitiable Smike.
- The despairing lament of Edith, an unemployable gentlewoman, like others of her class without the means to

earn a living – other than joining her sisters on the streets – who, forced into a loveless marriage to a man she despises to save her mother and herself from poverty, mourns her lost childhood and the artificiality of her life: "I was a woman – artful, designing, mercenary, laying snares for men before I knew or even understood the base and wretched aim of every new display I learnt ... you gave birth to a woman."²

Schools, prisons, commerce, law, bourgeois marriage: there is hardly an aspect of contemporary life that does not come under Dickens' scrutiny. The criticism that he neglected to write about work is unfair; he could only write of what he knew. His was an age of trade, commerce and litigation, when every document required drafting and copying, by hand, an immense tedious labour for armies of clerks who toiled in grim, unhealthy conditions. The 'Bob Cratchits' quill-pushing for a living, by the light of tallow dips, perched on high stools – a disincentive to falling asleep on the job – are a supporting cast in much of Dickens' work, as are the members of the 'below stairs' domestic servant class who play an important role in much of his work and whose personal qualities frequently outshine those of their employers.

Arnold Kettle, in his paper *Dickens and the Popular Tradition*,³ suggests a crucial distinction between the artist and the scientist that we should recognise in the way in which we evaluate their work:

"because he is dealing with human material of an

exceptional degree of complexity, it is particularly possible for the artist to have very valuable specific insights without being able to transform them into general or theoretical ones."

Dickens can hardly be held to account for a failure in this respect. The theoretical insights that inform us were still in the process of gestation and had yet to enter the wider public consciousness.

Dickens shared the revulsion to slavery that was prevalent in Britain. A century earlier, a Law Lord had ruled that a slave setting foot on British soil automatically became a free man. Societies formed to support the abolition of slavery had a huge popular following. Textile workers in Lancashire endured poverty rather than process cotton imported from slave states during the American Civil War. Dickens' chapter devoted to slavery, an addendum to his *American Notes*, contains a harrowing catalogue of mutilations, branding and maiming inflicted upon runaway slaves that still has the power to shock. This reportage represents Dickens at his most serious and forceful, the more so for the absence of the usual leaven of wit and humour. Dickens went much further, linking the casual cruelty of slavery to the general coarsening, corruption and brutalisation of civil life in the Southern states. There a mother would quieten an unruly child by promising him a "little whip to beat the niggers with". Human life was cheapened to the point where it was a commonplace for minor differences between boys and men to be elevated



to "matters of honour" to be settled with the gun or the knife.

Dickens' second visit to America in contrast was to the modern state that emerged from the Civil War, victorious, prosperous and with the blight of slavery removed. Racial equality – though still denied to Native Americans – existed in at least a formal legal sense. The resistance of reactionary forces in the defeated South that was to crush for a century the aspirations of generations of black Americans had yet to gather momentum. Dickens' account reflects the enormous positive changes in American society.

Dickens is still widely read – though millions are familiar with his work via the media of film and television. Intended for serial publication, episodic, with strong powerful characters, his works have lent themselves to interpretation without losing any of their power to entertain and transport us. Dickens' works – rich, subtle complex, atmospheric, moral – happily do not lend themselves to the vulgarisation and dumbing down of Disneyfication.

Notes and References

- 1 K Fuller, *Charles Dickens: The Masses, Race and Empire, Part 1*, in *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 2-8.
- 2 Dickens, *Dombey and Son*.
- 3 A Kettle, *Dickens and the Popular Tradition*, in *Marxists on Literature: An Anthology*, D Craig, Ed, Penguin, London, 1977, pp 214-44.

BOOK REVIEW

The CPGB: A Unique Political Culture

Review by Nick Wright

THE BBC marked the press launch of *After the Party: Reflections on Life since the CPGB* with a piece that asked, but really failed to answer, the question, “What happened to the CPGB’s millions?” It neglected thoroughly to carry through on the Watergate injunction to ‘follow the money’. Apparently some of the British Bolsheviks’ hard-earned millions still exist, embodied in office buildings in North London, with a revenue stream that variously subsidises a clutch of low-impact liberal enterprises and the Unions 21 social partnership lobby group. The rest has vanished in a series of opaque manoeuvres that mirror the dissolution of collective property in the former socialist countries – with less to launder but a similar measure of chicanery and deceit.

The dissolution of the CPGB almost ended a unique political culture which nurtured a significant cadre of working class militants – autodidacts often – with a reading habit that as often set them apart from their workmates. In the fifties, sixties and seventies you knew a communist household by the number of books. Was it the Italian communist leader Togliatti who remarked of the CPGB, “Yes, the small party with many magazines”?

Born into a Liverpool communist family, Dave Cope recalls the weekly visit by the Party branch literature secretary, which sparked a lifelong obsession with left-wing literature. After a career working in the Party’s book distribution system he now runs the excellent Left on

the Shelf website that is an essential stop for nostalgics and academics alike.

Mark Perryman, the self-acknowledged “bossy self-publicist” who fronts the remarkable Philosophy Football tee-shirt enterprise, makes the telling point that the left needs to break with the “privileging of the written word”. In this he pays tribute to the political practice of the Comintern and its superb propaganda apparatus run by Willi Münzenberg.

Now active in Respect, he says that George Galloway’s East End election victory matched that of Phil Piratin when he won the same constituency as a Communist in the 1945 general election. “This had been the Communist Party’s electoral high point. But Phil Piratin’s victory had been backed by an organisation with tens of thousands of members, a network of full time activists, a Party press, and an internal culture with roots in working-class communities the like of which we have never seen experienced since,” he writes.

It is a measure of fluidity of the present moment that his comment that Galloway’s victory was always unlikely to be repeated is already proven wrong.

Alistair Findlay mobilises Jacques Derrida’s idea that, with the dissolution of the machine of Marxist ideological apparatuses (states, parties, cells, unions, and other places of doctrinal production), there is “no future without Marx”. He does this to account for his four decades of engagement with the German’s ideology; and there is an apologetic air to the telling

of his personal response to the dissolution of the CPGB, which entailed a closer engagement with cultural questions, specifically the distinctive cultural politics of his native Scotland. But in my opinion this was a deeply rational act in the circumstances – indeed a necessary one given the poverty of prospects on the left.

He makes the point tellingly: “By articulating the case for modernising socialism through the 1980s and then vacating the field in the 1990s, it strikes me that the CPGB opened the way for New Labour, not to bring forward popular socialism, the CPGB’s goal, but for something deeply unreconstructed in Labour’s right-wing psyche since the time of Gaitskill and Crosland in the 1950s: the desire to ditch the Labour Party’s links with the trade union movement, without which socialism in this country is pretty much unthinkable, not to say, unachievable.”

Post-1968, the Communist Party strategy, devised as early as 1965, set out to forge an alliance between the labour and student movements, with the students mobilised on the basis of their problems as students and the changing class position they would occupy in production. The strategy of alliances that thus arose was remarkably successful in disposing of the old Cold War student leadership and replacing it with a left, and communist-led, one.

Andy Pearmain (and by his account David Aaronovitch) inherited this responsibility and oversaw its loss.



After The Party: Reflections on Life since the CPGB

Collected essays, edited by ANDY CROFT (Lawrence & Wishart, 2012, 224 pp, pbk, £15.99. ISBN 978-1-90710-347-6.)

One can see how. He titles his chapter *Towards a Marxist Theory of Love; or the Personal is Post-political*. The second part, at least, is accurate.

There is a telling line in his story. Leaving the Party early in 1985, citing objections to the use of “Stalinist methods to deal with the Stalinists”, he recounts distinctly remembering “the relief of not having to have an opinion about everything – the luxury of indifference.”

Kate Hudson’s account details decades in the heart of the peace and anti-war movement but her trajectory illustrates the importance of family and tradition in shaping socialist values. Of course, a working-class pedigree and a progressive family tradition is no guarantee of fealty to socialist politics – the total of turncoats and traitors in the trade union movement and the Labour Party (including at least one whose apologetics and evasions can be found in this book) is dispiriting enough.

Lorna Reith, who chaired the appeals panel that confirmed the expulsion of a whole tranche of CPGB members, can at least be acquitted of the charge of inconsistency. Her trajectory – from self-proclaimed member of the “Eurocommunist wing of the party”, through the fast-dissolving Democratic Left and into a career as a Labour politician – produced little in the way of dialectical leaps or much reflection on the nature of capitalist crisis. But even

for her, to this day, “the party” means the Communist Party.

In contrast, Kate Hudson’s account is shot through with insights gained in the ideologically complex period since the dismantling of working-class power in the Soviet Union and Europe. She argues for a practical regroupment of the left and draws on her overwhelmingly positive experiences of working in the anti-war movement with a constellation of diverse forces. “One of the remarkable features of the anti-war movement had been its continued unity of purpose – ten years on it had not been divided, in spite of the different traditions from which its components hail”, she argues.

Her generally positive attitude to the formation of what she calls “this new mainstream of the European left” draws on this experience; and if it evades a clear confrontation with the political and ideological divergences thrown up by the recent sharpening of the economic crisis, this may be explained by the period that has elapsed since she wrote this account – as a member of the Communist Party – and her more recent brief role as a Respect prospective candidate for the Manchester Central by-election.

Although I am a big admirer of Andy Croft’s work and writing, I do not know him personally. But, given my background and generation as a communist, I know how he feels about the lost world of the CPGB. His account

of the endless and endlessly satisfying round of political and organisational activity in what was a large and overwhelmingly working-class Party branch serves as a valuable description of the best of the CPGB in its final decades.

Of the Party’s dissolution he tellingly recounts: “I suppose my position would have been described as a ‘centrist’. My overwhelming loyalty was to the party and its activities, not to any of the competing factions or tendencies. I supported the leadership of Gordon McLennan and Nina Temple, but if the ‘opposition’ had won control I would probably have remained in the party.”

There is little virtue in quibbling over the political contradictions in the positions taken by Andy Croft. A greatly admired poetry editor of the *Morning Star*, he disagrees with the paper’s hostility to the EU yet writes of the “current European-wide assault on the welfare infrastructure”. His transparent honesty and unceasing work in preserving and republishing the progressive literary heritage of the communist movement is protection enough from critical assault.

But in the midst of a crisis that threatens barbarism if the socialist alternative cannot be made viable, he wants the CPGB back because it was “a congenial and habitable space that offered a way of participating in and belonging to the world.”

It recalls Manuilsky’s stark 1929 criticism of the British party as a “society of great friends”.

BOOK REVIEW

Raising Questions which Socialists need to

Review by John Foster

THIS BOOK IS ABOUT capitalism's historical development and what happens during the transition to socialism. Its key argument is that the transition to socialism should only take place when capitalism is fully mature or "rotten ripe". The authors define this stage as when capitalism is no longer capable of further developing the forces of production and, most critically, when the *socialisation* of the forces of production has progressed as far as possible within the constraints of capitalist ownership. They see the transition itself as encompassing and, most important of all, carrying forward the material content of this socialisation of production. Not to do so, to seek a premature transition and to impose 'ideal' forms, is to be "stuck in the mire of utopian socialism".

Is this book, therefore, simply a repeat of the arguments of Bernstein's revisionism so berated by Lenin – that socialists wait for capitalism's maturity and meanwhile work within those aspects of its state apparatus that are 'democratic' while seeking to build the trade union movement?

The answer is possibly yes. But, even if this is so, the book still raises questions which socialists today need to confront.

Let us start with the case against the book. Its analysis is well researched and up to date. Its examination of trends in capitalist economics encompasses a critique of Stiglitz, Krugman and Sachs. It draws fully on current academic literature on industrial relations, social welfare and income distribution. Its statistical analysis of social and economic trends is taken into the first decade of this century. Yet its understanding of the dynamics of working class struggle is weak. It makes no concrete analysis of revolutionary or pre-revolutionary situations. Its main Marxist references are to the economic works of Marx, *Capital* and the *Preface to the Critique of Political Economy*, but not to his very full analyses of revolutionary processes. There are only very limited reference to Lenin and these are purely to what he had to say on

economics. There is virtually no reference to communist commentaries on twentieth century struggles and consequent changes in the balance of class forces.

In consequence the authors' approach to the issue of social consciousness tends to be descriptive. In dealing with the myriad different identities and attitudes among working people in periods of capitalist stability, they refer to changing production processes and new techniques by management to segment the workforce. But no reference is made to Marx's theory of alienation which provides an explanation for the strength of such segmentation – and also, in particular political circumstances, for the speed with which it can be opened to rapid change.

Maybe this is to be expected in an analysis rooted in a tradition of Chinese Marxism and of a Chinese revolutionary practice, in which the working class did not fully exercise a leading role. However, it would also be wrong to say that the book allocates the working class a purely passive role.

In analysing the contradictions that drive capitalism forward to an ever greater socialisation of production, the book identifies two "forms" or forces. One form is "negative" and operates *within* the system. This is the technological drive to processes involving an ever more complex mixing of different components, skills and scientific knowledge – all increasingly dependent on social or state provision. The other form is "active", "the struggle between wage labour and capital", which ultimately operates against the system.

Where one could find fault is in the book's lack of concrete analysis of this latter process and the fact that it attributes very little of the change *within* capitalism to it. The achievement of formal democracy in many countries in the early twentieth century is hardly discussed and the shift to Keynesian-style management after 1945 is presented as a response to the system's economic contradictions. And if there is little reference to working class struggle

in forcing modifications to forms of capitalist rule, there is none at all to its role in transitions to socialism. There is no recognition of the central role of the working class movement in generating the counter-ideology and practice essential to the replacement of market individualism: that of working class collectivism.

There are therefore definite weaknesses in the book. But there are also strengths.

Its analysis of capitalist development, particularly of its recent phases, is sharp and realistic. It examines the current contradictions of state-monopoly capitalism and notes that, while the ownership of enterprises has been internationalised, the ownership of the shares has not; and that their owners rely on 'their' national state to defend their interests in securing 'their' share of surplus value. It sees the current 'globalised' capitalist system as one where there is a hierarchy of states: a "minority of developed countries dominate" and all other states have a combined interest in rejecting free market dominance and asserting their own rights to control capital. It dismisses current Western literature that claims that capitalism has overcome its contradictions.

Moreover, its stress on the dynamic and progressive character of capitalism's transformation of the forces of production is correct and too often forgotten. So also is its analysis of the consequences: the increasingly social and socialised character of production and the resulting dependence of capital on the state for the extraction of surplus value.

Where it poses a problem, and one which it does not resolve, is how this "social character" is to be carried over into socialism – and when.

The authors do not see existing state-sector production as serving this process. Nationalised industries as established after 1945 in Europe and America simply represented a device whereby surplus value was extracted by the state on behalf of "the capitalist class as a whole" with a "profound class bias". Nor do they see

Confront

cooperatives, whether as producer- or consumer-based, as developing the social ownership of the means of production as envisaged by Marx – though they note their increasing prevalence. In the concluding chapter it is asserted that: “Modern capitalism is experiencing a profound historical reform. If it can make more splendid achievements in the 21st century compared with the 20th century, it will inevitably drive the socialisation of productive forces to a new stage”

So where does “waiting for full socialisation” end? At least in the most advanced capitalist countries, it could be argued that the financialisation of capital has reached a point where the productive base is now being eroded and weakened rather than strengthened. It could also be argued that the destructive potential of imperialism (a word which scarcely appears in the book) negates any remaining progressive potential within capitalism and demands its replacement.

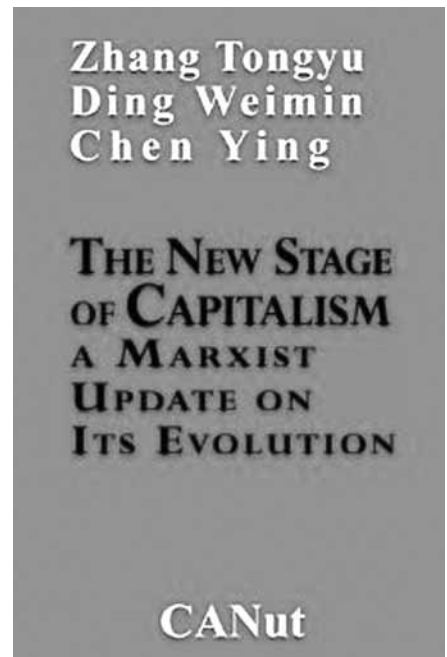
For the left in Britain this leaves us with a question that demands deeper consideration. Granted that advanced socialised technology would be physically ‘there’ during a political transition and could be simply released from the constraints of monopoly ownership, how is the wider process of socialisation to be linked actively to the struggle

The New Stage of Capitalism: a Marxist Update on its Evolution

By ZHANG TONGYU, DING WEIMIN AND CHEN YING,
(CANut International Publishers, Berlin, 2010 (first published in China in 2004), 440 pp, pbk, £26.
ISBN: 978-3-942575-04-1.
Obtainable through Central Books,
www.centralbooks.co.uk)

for socialism? Currently, for instance, a key part of the Left programme is the demand for social ownership and opposition to privatisation. How is this to be made, in its implementation, a *progressive* demand – unlike, to an extent, the nationalisations of the post-1945 period? How is it to contribute to changing the balance of class forces against monopoly capital and be part of a continuing process of transition? The immense pressures being exerted currently across Europe against state ownership would seem to indicate the increasing incompatibility of state ownership with monopoly capital. Equally with the more general assault on the socialised basis of the reproduction of labour power. In the EU and in the United States the weight of monopoly capitalist power seems set against significant aspects of socialisation: health care, education, housing and all the infrastructures essential for developing an effective interface between humanity and advanced technology.

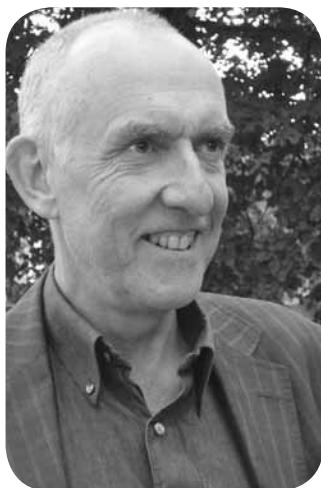
By forcing us to try to answer this



question, of how the socialisation of production is to be made politically part of the struggle for socialism, the book justifies its existence – even though in itself it requires considerable perseverance. It is unevenly translated, poorly edited (English names are frequently mangled: Sax for Sachs, Frank Gudrun for Gunter Frank, Fiennes for Fine, Roch Dell for Rochdale) and misleadingly titled. The introductory note itself states: “our title seems too radical and we agree that capitalism has not entered into a brand new stage recently though it has gained many new features”. The actual content is serious and makes perseverance worthwhile.

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip





SOURCEBOOK

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

Yes, I Can

“Only in Russia do they really respect poetry – they kill because of it.”

– Osip Mandelstam

“I have known faces slump,
Terror peep under eyelids ...,
The shiver of fear in a dry laugh.”

– Anna Akhmatova

“In the terrible years of the Yezhov terror, I spent seventeen months in the prison lines of Leningrad. Once, someone ‘recognised’ me. Then a woman with bluish lips standing behind me, who, of course, had never heard me called by name before, woke up from the stupor to which everyone had succumbed and whispered in my ear (everyone spoke in whispers there):

‘Can you describe this?’
And I answered: ‘Yes, I can.’
Then something that looked like a smile passed over what had once been her face.

– from *Requiem, 1935-1940*, by Anna Akhmatova¹

Recent issues of *CR* have carried articles by Yuri Emelianov offering a new account of the ‘Yezhov terror’, the Purges of 1937-8.² Reading them, I was reminded of the following poem, written by Akhmatova in 1962.

*To the Defenders of Stalin*³

There are those who shouted:
“Release
Barabbas for us on this feast”,
Those who ordered Socrates to
drink poison
In the bare, narrow prison.

They are the ones who should
pour this drink
Into their own innocently
slandering mouths,
These sweet lovers of torture,
Experts in the manufacture of
orphans.

The interpretation offered by Emelianov makes Stalin far less responsible for what happened than any other historical account of the period that I came across when researching this article, whether written from a conservative, liberal or Marxist point of view.⁴ There are also weaknesses in the argument, for example how to explain or excuse Stalin’s failure to stop the Purges; and the fact that Stalin’s political skills surely included the ability to get other people like Yezhov to do what he wanted (to be rid of all real, potential or imagined opponents) with the minimum necessary personal involvement, so that they could be blamed (as was Yezhov) after it was all over.

However, although Emelianov’s interpretation needs to be treated with

caution, like the Editor I hope the articles will stimulate further discussion about Stalin and his legacy. Not only because of their intrinsic historical interest, but because what happened, and our interpretation of what happened, is of such importance in our thinking about Britain’s road to socialism, what that socialism will look like exactly, and how we work with other groups on the left to achieve it.

Communist Cultural Strategy

Part of that discussion needs to be about art and culture. Again, as the Editor noted in *CR65*, there is a need to look at our cultural heritage critically. We need to understand art and culture in terms of the ‘battle of ideas’ which, together with basic economic and political struggles, must form part of our struggle for socialism. In recognition of that, the Communist Party has recently decided to establish a Cultural Commission, which will be about updating our cultural strategy, and which I have agreed to co-ordinate. And it is surely impossible to develop such a strategy without considering the approach to art and culture in the Soviet Union, the first country to attempt to achieve socialism.

So I thought it might be helpful both to the discussion about Stalinism, and to the discussion about a communist cultural strategy, to present some political poems from or about the Stalin era, and use them to explore some issues which are relevant to both discussions.

Epigram to Stalin

John Ellison, also writing in *CR65*,⁵ notes that novelists and poets were at risk of arrest and imprisonment by the secret police. (He might also have added that many theatre directors, actors, film makers, painters, sculptors and musicians were also terrorised.) He cites the case of Osip Mandelstam and his *Epigram to Stalin* and so I'm going to start with presenting this poem, probably one of the most important political poems of the twentieth century. My commentary won't be restricted to purely literary issues, because it is important to look at this poem in its full context. Here it is, as composed in November 1933:

We live but can't feel the land
under our feet,
you can't hear what we say from
ten steps away,

but when anyone half-starts a
conversation
they mention the mountain man
of the Kremlin.

His thick greasy fingers are like
slugs,
his words slam down like heavy
weights.

His cockroach moustache
searches and snickers,
and the tops of his military
boots glisten.

He's surrounded by scrawny
necked henchmen,
and he toys with these non-
entities.

One hisses, one mews and one
whimpers,
he alone points and thunders.

Decree after decree are forged
like horseshoes,
and hurled at the forehead, the
eye and the groin.

The broad-breasted boss from
the Caucasus
savours each execution like a
delightful sweet.⁶

As can readily be appreciated, the poem is in the 'insult poem' genre originating with the Latin poet Martial, who wrote witty, scurrilous epigrams about public figures.

"We live but can't feel ..." to "... the mountain man of the Kremlin."

In these lines Mandelstam is expressing the suffering, uncertainty and fear felt by the Russian people, which originates in Tsarist times, but which is becoming more and more commonly experienced in social and political life since Stalin and his associates manoeuvred their way to power in the Twenties and early Thirties.

Many Russian poets since Pushkin and Lermontov had written subversive lyrics, expressing their fear and dislike of an autocratic political culture. In some ways, this kind of "structure of feeling" as the Marxist critic Raymond Williams calls it,⁷ is similar to the English Romantic poets: Shelley, Wordsworth, Clare and particularly Blake, who all wrote anguished, emotional and barbed political poems, expressing the alienation of the political subject and of the artist from an oppressive state.

The first line in particular can be read as a classic (if unconscious) expression of the alienation of a metropolitan, middle-class poet in a society committed to proletarianisation, and led by a "mountain man" from the Caucasus. And "you can't hear what we say" is taken up by Akhmatova in her lines about "everyone whispering", in fear of denunciation, in the quote at the beginning of this column.

This stifling fear was what led Mandelstam to keep this poem in his head, only reciting it to what he thought were trusted friends, several of whom repaid this trust by reporting him to the secret police. In Russia in the Thirties, witnessing the performance of such a poem could itself lead to arrest and imprisonment: Pasternak, when it was recited to him, told Mandelstam that he did not say it and he, Pasternak, had not heard it.

We also know, from secret police archives opened in 1991,⁸ that there was an earlier version which added "murderer and peasant-slayer" (a reference to Stalin's role in the forced collectivisation of the peasants) to this verse.

"His thick greasy fingers ..." to "... like heavy weights."

Apart from the personal insult, these lines evoke the repulsion and horror of the poet at the crude, bureaucratic attempts to direct art and culture which had been gathering pace in Russian literary life in the late Twenties and early Thirties. In the early years of the Revolution, a wide and diverse set of movements in poetry and the other literary arts had developed, as well as in the theatre, ballet and cinema. There

was plenty of scope, and indeed some encouragement, for highly imaginative, innovative and creative writing, although there were also groups of writers railing against what they saw as the politically reactionary styles of Modernism, especially James Joyce,⁹ and in favour of a Gorki-style realism which focused on the lives of ordinary working people.

Socialist Realism

However, as the regime tightened the economic and political reins, it also tightened up its cultural strategy. The concept of realism acquired a teleological dimension through the doctrine of *socialist realism*, which demanded not only that the artist presented a truthful and historically specific depiction of reality in its revolutionary development, but that the art must be linked to the ideological task of remoulding and educating the workers. Thus depiction of the lives of ordinary workers living ordinary lives mutated into the invention of heroic workers happily performing heroic feats. In some cases (for example, Soviet poster art¹⁰) the doctrine stimulated marvellously inspiring, vibrant works of art, that were both artistically and politically progressive. But in literature, it led to the production of large numbers of conformist, artificial, propagandistic and (ironically) totally unrealistic works of art.¹¹

The doctrine of socialist realism was enforced organisationally through the establishment of the Union of Soviet Writers, which every writer had to join, and which monitored, rewarded and punished writers. Again, there were certain advantages to these arrangements: for example, a large increase in the numbers and skills of writers, and a sense of a common and progressive, energetic and optimistic literary enterprise. Moreover, to keep a sense of proportion, it is vitally important to bear in mind two other points.

Firstly, the other elements of the Soviet cultural strategy – to increase literacy, improve cultural education, and widen public access to the arts generally, which had been Lenin's prime concerns – were hugely successful. And secondly, the alternative, capitalist strategy, of letting 'the market' decide what the public gets, is no better, and arguably significantly worse in the peculiar mix of elitist, inaccessible and mediocre art on the one hand, and dumbed-down, commercialised, commodified art on the other, which it generates.

Partinost

However, it seems clear that two questionable choices were made, which are worth looking at in some detail because of their importance in any discussion of what a modern communist cultural strategy should look like.

The first was rooted in a misinterpretation of the idea of *partinost*, Party spirit, that Lenin had articulated in 1905, in *Party Organisation and Party Literature*.¹² In this document, written to guide the development of all kinds of literature at a time when legal publication had only just been allowed by the Tsarist government, Lenin had called for writers and artists to defend and advance the interests of the masses, to struggle in a disciplined way for socialist and communist ideals. But this was interpreted in the Thirties to mean the subordination of writers to Party officials, directly contrary to Lenin's warnings that

"It is self-evident that literary work is least of all amenable to mechanical uniformity, to levelling, to the rule of the majority over the minority ... it is absolutely necessary to guarantee great scope to individual initiative, to individual propensities, scope for thought and fantasy, form and content"

and

"Every artist has a right to create freely according to his ideals, independent of anything."

It was also contrary to the June 1925 resolution of the Central Committee stating that literary matters must be handled with

"great caution, tact and patience, banishing the tone of literary command The Party must utterly extirpate attempts at crude, incompetent administrative interference in literary matters."¹³

The second mistake ran a bit deeper, and stemmed from a crude version of Marxism which interpreted the 'superstructure' of culture to be a merely reflective, unimportant add-on to the 'base' of economic life. This view held that thought and consciousness were merely reflections of the material world and of material circumstances. As Stalin put it:

"Further, if nature, being, the material world, is primary, and mind, thought, is secondary, derivative; if the material world represents objective reality existing independently of the mind of men, while the mind is a reflection of this objective reality, it follows that the material life of society, its being, is also primary, and its spiritual life secondary, derivative, and that the material life of society is an objective reality existing independently of the will of men, while the spiritual life of society is a reflection of this object reality, a reflection of being."¹⁴

Stalin, of course, did not deny a degree of reciprocity between ideas and the material conditions of social life but it was pretty clear that the emphasis lay with the priority and primacy of material and economic conditions.

This approach, and its manner of enforcement, is what Mandelstam is protesting about, and we need to bear this in mind when developing a cultural strategy from the insights and ideas in *Britain's Road to Socialism*.

"His cockroach moustache ... like a delightful sweet"

These lines are almost cinematic in their visual power. The image of decrees being mechanically thrown out like horseshoes and hitting bodies in painful close-up (the head, the eyes, the groin) is like an Eisenstein film. It is also hard to read these lines and not see them as prophetically accurate, given what we know about the Purges, the abuse of political and legal processes and how defendants in trials in 1937/8 behaved: "one hisses, one mewls, and one whimpers".

Following the inevitable denunciations by 'friends' after reciting the poem, Mandelstam was arrested and interrogated, and a confession extracted of "writing a poem of a counter-revolutionary nature".¹⁵ To avoid execution, a direct appeal to Stalin by friends and colleagues would have been normal, but curiously it was Stalin himself who contacted Pasternak to say that he was interceding on Mandelstam's behalf and indeed to reproach Pasternak for not being a good enough friend to do that job himself. He also asked Pasternak whether Mandelstam was a genius: clearly Stalin, who had written poetry himself, was not unaware of the power of poetry, and there is evidence that Stalin wished

for a rather more favourable poetic treatment.

All this might explain why Mandelstam was exiled, a comparatively lenient sentence in the circumstances, and why he seemed to oblige his tormentor with these lines, written in 1937:

*Ode to Stalin (extract)*¹⁶

If I were to employ charcoal for highest praise –
For the unalloyed gladness of a picture –
I'd cut up the thin air with the most subtle rays,
Feeling of care and of alarm a mixture.
So that the features might reflect the Real,
In art that would be bordering on daring
I'd speak of him who shifted the world's wheel,
While for the customs of a hundred peoples caring.
Look how Prometheus has got his charcoal lit –
Look, Aeschylus, at how I'm drawing and crying!

I'd make a handful of resounding lines
To capture his millennium's early springtime,
And I would tie his courage in a smile
And then untie it in the gentle sunshine;
And in the wise eyes' friendship for the twin,
Who shall remain unnamed, I'll find the right expression,
Approaching which, you'll recognise the father – him –
And lose your breath, feeling the world's compression.
And I would like to thank the very hills
Which bred his hand and bone and gave them feeling:
Born in the mountains, he knew too the prison's ills.
I want to call him – no, not Stalin –
– Dzhughashvili!

This ode seems to express the opposite sentiment to the *Epigram to Stalin*. It seems to be straightforward praise of a heroic man doing heroic things, isn't it? Isn't it a fine example of socialist realism? But ask yourself: is the poet's heart in it? Note the tortured (no pun intended) syntax and paradoxical expression in lines like:

“feeling of care and alarm a mixture”
 “Look, Aeschylus, at how I’m drawing
 and crying!”
 “And I would tie his courage in a smile”
 “And lose your breath, feeling the
 world’s compression.”
 “Born in the mountains, he knew too
 the prison’s ills.”

There is surely not a little irony in this poem, from a poet who knows well ‘prison’s ills’, and knows well the person who put him there.

Poems

I would like to conclude with two more poems which I think are relevant to the aims I set out in the introduction. You’ve had enough explication and literary criticism already, so in true Leninist spirit I will offer no comment on these marvellous works of imagination, ideas and artistic skill.

Osip Mandelstam¹⁷

by Seamus Deane

‘The people need poetry.’ That
 voice
 That was last heard asking for
 warm
 Clothes and money, also knew
 the hunger
 We all have for the gold light
 The goldfinch carries into the air
 Like a tang of crushed almonds.

‘The Kremlin mountaineer’ scaled
 The peak of atrocity, seeking
 The cold, final barbiturate
 Tablet from the Winter God
 That would melt in the mouths
 He chose to feed. Bukharin,

Our poet’s protector, was shot
 Along with Yagoda, Rykov and
 others
 Nine months before heart-failure
 Silenced the silk-sharp whistle
 That haunted the steppes as
 though
 A small shrapnel of birds
 scattered.

A kerosene flash of music
 Leaps from the black earth
 Where the anchored dead of the
 War
 Pale into flammable spirit.
 The escheated ground refuses
 To fall back in the monster’s arms

Because its sons are dead.
 Son of Petropolis, tell us how
 to turn

Into the flash, to lie in the lice-red
 shirt
 On the bank of the Styx and wait
 For the Gossamer of Paradise

To spider in our dirt-filled eyes.

Poetry is Being Alive¹⁸

by Yunna Moritz

Poetry is being alive, lovingly,
 freely;
 Being alive is hard labour, prison,
 exile
 And the slaughter-house where
 people are counted as cattle,
 And the few are swallowed by
 the majority.

But shelters are everywhere,
 secret places, asylum:
 There’s a crack in the wall, a light
 in the stranger’s window.
 Poems hide themselves in a
 snowdrift, a boot or a mouth,
 In the mind or the wash-tub,
 haystack or rotting tree-stump.

Wretched Adam, ex-military
 instructor,
 Is questioned by his young
 grandson: “Where were you
 When Ruslan guarded
 Mandelstam’s broken mind?”
 “I was with the majority. He was
 with the few.”

Poems are hidden by the
 minority will
 In pipes and geometry-sets, on
 the devil’s horns,
 So when there’s a rumour
 poetry’s still alive
 Or sudden news of a great
 minority, torn

And devoured by that blood-
 bespattered humanophobe
 With his smallpox scars and
 moustache, that Lilliput
 With his pack of slaves willing to
 lick his coffin,
 The majority has a clear
 conscience after all.

Poetry’s soul doesn’t shrink
 from misfortune.
 The freedom of poetry won’t be
 stopped by the dead
 Nor the living. Poets are few, but
 they let us breathe,
 They give us breath after breath
 – Even through a straw, to the
 sea-bed.

Notes and References

- 1 In A Akhmatova, *Complete Poems*, Zephyr Press, 1990, p. 95.
- 2 Y Emelianov, ‘Stalin’s Purges of 1937-8: What Really Happened?’, Part 1, *CR63*, Spring 2012, pp 2-9; Part 2, *CR64*, Summer 2012, pp 18-23; Part 3, *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 9-16.
- 3 Akhmatova, *op. cit.*, p. 737.
- 4 Books consulted for this article (apart from those referenced in separate Notes) include G Gill, *Stalinism*, Macmillan, 1990; R Service, *The Penguin, History of Modern Russia*, Penguin 1997; S Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism*, OUP, 1999; R Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, Alfred A Knopf, 1971; O Figes, *Natasha’s Dance*, Penguin, 2002; F Westerman, *Engineers of the Soul: in the Footsteps of Stalin’s Writers*, Harvill Secker, 2010; and R Hingley, *Nightingale Fever: Russian Poets in Revolution*, Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1982.
- 5 J Ellison, *The Social and Political Background to the Terror of 1937-8 in the Soviet Union*, in *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 26-8.
- 6 Translations of this poem are surprisingly varied. This one is mainly based on the version in O Mandelstam, *The Moscow Notebooks*, Bloodaxe, 1991, but other translations (eg O Mandelstam, *Poems*, chosen and translated by J Greene, Granada Publishing, 1980) have been consulted and used as well.
- 7 R Williams, first used in *A Preface to Film* (with M Orom), Film Drama, London, 1954; developed in *The Long Revolution*, Chatto & Windus, London, 1961; extended and elaborated throughout his work, in particular *Marxism and Literature*, OUP, 1977.
- 8 See V Shentalinsky, *The KGB’s Literary Archive*, Harvill Press 1995, pp 168-196. Shentalinsky provides a fascinating account of Mandelstam’s interrogations, as well as material from the NKVD files on Isaac Babel and Maxim Gorki.
- 9 It is worth noting that although Joyce’s novel *Ulysses* is probably the apogee of literary Modernism, it is a profoundly democratic and politically progressive text, being the first novel to use a ‘stream of consciousness’ technique to illuminate the thinking of an ordinary working man.
- 10 See, for example, J Callow, G Pooke and J Powell, *The Art of Revolution*, GMB and Evans Mitchell Books, 2011. This is a highly recommended recent collection of Soviet poster art, from the collection of the Marx Memorial Library.
- 11 See R Hare, *Russian Literature*, Methuen, 1947, and *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, C A Moser, Ed, Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- 12 V I Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 10, pp 44-9.
- 13 Medvedev, *op cit*, p 527.
- 14 J V Stalin, *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, 1938, at <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/stalin/works/1938/09.html>
- 15 Shentalinsky, *op cit*, p. 173.
- 16 See <http://calquezone.blogspot.co.uk/2009/03/osip-mandelstam-ode-to-stalin.html>.
- 17 *The Faber Book of Political Verse*, T Paulin, Ed, Faber 1986, p 460.
- 18 From *The Poetry of Perestroika*, Iron Press, 1991. Ruslan is the name of the prison-camp guard-dog in Georgy Vladimov’s novel *Faithful Ruslan*.



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