



COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Cheng Enfu** 7 Currents of Social Thought in China
- **Shiraz Durrani** Mau Mau, the Revolutionary Force Part 3
- **John Partington** Clara Zetkin and Britain
- **Ken Fuller** Dickens – a Reply
- Plus discussion, book reviews and Soul Food



# Seven Currents of Social Thought and their Development in Contemporary China — with a Focus on Innovative Marxism



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# editorial



By Martin Levy

WHILE *CR* DOES aim to be topical, Jimmy Jancovich's feature article in our last issue, *The Egyptian Revolution and the National Bourgeoisie*, turned out to be particularly timely. That country's uprising of 2011 was essentially a revolt against the comprador bourgeoisie represented by Hosni Mubarak's regime. The uprising was initiated, not by legal parties or bourgeois organisations, but by frustrated unemployed and underemployed youth. They drew in even the most backward sections of the petty bourgeoisie, forcing conservative forces like the Moslem Brotherhood to participate. This year's mass mobilisation in Egypt was an attempt to take back the revolution from the Brotherhood, who in office had been exercising the same dictatorial powers as did the overthrown regime.

It is, however, too early to say whether the army's removal of President Morsi amounts to a coup. Before that point, the opposition to Morsi had already collected over 22 million signatures calling for withdrawal of confidence in him, and for early elections. More than 27 million people demonstrated, demanding that he go. Of course the army intervened partly to protect its own interests. Furthermore, it is difficult to see anything positive in the massacres of Morsi's supporters, even if the Brotherhood did, as claimed, start the violence. But the army will not be able to do the same with Morsi's opponents, if they are mobilised. The army's political base has been weakened, and it will have to come to some accommodation with the forces for democracy. Of course it will still try to maintain its position. But the progressive forces have the opportunity to mobilise in order to ensure an end to military rule, the defence of living standards and the holding of early elections.

One problem that Morsi's overthrow has caused for the imperialist governments is the loss of Egypt's strong backing for the armed rebels in Syria. The rebels – the most active and brutal

of whom are Al-Qaeda affiliates – were already losing the war on the ground, and Morsi's removal was a further severe setback. The poison gas attack, allegedly by the Syrian government, and apparently involving sarin, therefore came at a very convenient time for the imperialists, providing arguments for military intervention. But, as the Russian government has said, the gas attack had all the hallmarks of a provocation. There were in fact reports earlier this year that Syrian rebels had some sarin,<sup>1</sup> and that the US had backed a plan to launch a chemical weapons attack in Syria, and blame it on the regime.<sup>2</sup> There have been enough incidents in recent history – from the 'Gulf of Tonkin' incident in the Vietnam War to the 'dodgy dossier' over Iraq, for us to urge the exercising of extreme caution.

It is to the credit of a majority of British MPs that they did defeat Cameron and Clegg on this issue – a testimony to the strength of the anti-war movement here. However, at the time of writing, peace in the Middle East hangs in the balance. The American people don't want war, but their leaders seem determined to go ahead with aggression on Syria. The most massive world-wide mobilisation against war will be required. That was done over Vietnam and it can be done again.

This current issue of *CR* was planned some months ago and therefore is unlikely to be as topical as *CR68*. Nonetheless there is much here to stimulate the intellect. Our feature article is on *Currents of Social Thought in Contemporary China*, by leading Chinese Marxist Cheng Enfu. It makes clear the nature of economic and social debates in China at the moment, and the degree to which capitalism has penetrated, both economically and ideologically. China is at a crossroads, and the direction it will take depends very much on the ability of 'innovative' Marxists in China to win the debate.

We also carry Part 3 of Shiraz

Durrani's *Mau Mau, the Revolutionary Force from Kenya*. This final section deals with the Mau Mau movement's ideology and strategy, in particular its approach to neo-colonialism. We then move to John Partington's article on *Clara Zetkin's British Connections*, a fascinating insight into the links that this outstanding woman socialist and communist had with the British labour, progressive and women's movements. The article also includes the English translation of a hitherto unknown letter from Clara to (at that time) expelled British communist Florence Baldwin.

*CR* does welcome discussion contributions, and this time we have four: one from Ken Fuller, responding to criticisms of his *Dickens: The Masses, Race and Empire*; and then three pieces from various viewpoints arising out of Yuri Emelianov's *Stalin's Purges of 1937-8*. We also have two book reviews, by Lars Ulrik Thomsen and Mary Davis, and the usual *Soul Food* poetry column from Mike Quille. In this issue Mike has included a very powerful piece sent in by reader Sam Watts, just right for Remembrance Day in November; but the bulk of the column is given over to some significant extracts of poems by Alan Morrison, editor of *The Recusant*. These latter make reference to the intellectual ferment of the 1930s, when political engagement was very much on the agenda for artists and writers on the Left.<sup>3</sup> Is that time coming back?

## Notes and References

1 See <http://www.globalresearch.ca/israeli-intelligence-news-acknowledges-that-syria-rebels-possess-chemical-weapons-us-nato-delivering-heavy-weapons-to-the-terrorists/5340033>

2 <http://truthnewsinternational.wordpress.com/2013/06/14/deleted-mail-online-article-us-backed-plan-for-chemical-weapon-attack-in-syria-to-be-blamed-on-assad/>

3 See, for example, N Wright, *Arguments about Socialist Realism in Britain*, in *CR51*, Spring 2009, pp 34-7.

# Seven Currents of Social Thought and their Development in Contemporary China, with a Focus on Innovative Marxism



By Cheng Enfu

NOWADAYS political and economic development in socialist China cannot be separated from ideological and theoretical development, and is reflected by or contained in the following seven currents of social theories: neoliberalism; democratic socialism; new-leftism; revivalism; eclectic Marxism; 'traditional' Marxism; and innovative Marxism. 'Social currents' here is a neutral term, of which Marxism is one type.

## 1. Neoliberalism

Chinese neoliberalism has three policy suggestions:

■ First, it insists on deregulating and liberalising the economy, including finance, trade, and investment, which means that private monopolies and oligarchs have freedom to control the economy, media, education and politics, both at home and abroad. If possible, public actions should be replaced with private ones without government interference. Neoliberalists also suggest that the government should be small and

weak in order to prevent its interference. While agreeing with the notion of small government, I argue here that such a government should be strong on governing functions, with support from a strong People's Congress. For instance, as I have argued for two decades, the high number of government and Party ministries should be merged into several larger ministries. The neoliberalists maintain that government should have a small number of staff, a simple structure, and little role, in order to have the monopolies play a greater part.

■ Secondly, neoliberalism insists on privatisation. It calls for privatising reform of the existing public sectors on the basis that privatisation is the foundation for good functioning of the market system and that private enterprises are the most efficient ones. The representative of this notion, Professor Zhang Weiyang, former dean

of Guanghai School of Administration at Beijing University, argues that land, enterprises, schools, postal services, mines, public facilities and transportation should all be privatised.

■ Thirdly, the neoliberalists insist on individualisation of the welfare system, opposing the establishment of the welfare state and the increase of people's welfare. This is a common feature of neoliberalism both at home and abroad, but has not been clearly summarised by academics in both contexts. In China, neoliberalism is also against such laws as the minimum wage and employment contracts. Those who subscribe to neoliberalism and the Washington consensus are few in number, but are gaining more and more influence.

## 2. Democratic Socialism

'Democratic socialism' in China contains the following assertions:

■ First, it denies Marxism as

the only guiding theory, supporting a diversity of world views and guiding theories, *ie* the diversity of socialism in terms of its constitution and theoretical sources.

It regards Bernstein's revisionism and Keynes's economics as its sources and components. Numerous currents and ideas are combined into one in the name of diversification and democracy of thinking, which in fact only constitutes a kind of ratatouille.

■ Secondly, in terms of the political system, it defends multi-party competition and government rotation. It claims that, as an interest group, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has its own special interests and is unable to avoid corruption as the only possible party in power.

■ Thirdly, in terms of the economic system, 'democratic socialism' argues that socialism can be realised without transforming capitalist

private ownership of the means of production because the ownership structure of the means of production is not the measurement of social essence. It suggests a mixed economic system combining state-owned, private and other enterprises, and a distribution system based on capital within the framework of private ownership. In terms of the ultimate goal, it considers communism as utopian. In China, the representatives of 'democratic socialism' include Professor Xin Ziling and Professor Xie Tao, with *Yanhuang Chunqiu* (*China Digital Times*) as their journal.

### 3. New-Leftism

'New-leftism' is composed of a loose group of intellectuals who have attracted public attention through publishing articles in journals or on websites so as to influence the Chinese political process. Most of them have the experience of studying abroad. Some of them still live overseas. *Wuyouzhixiang* ([www.wyzxsx.com](http://www.wyzxsx.com)) is their major theoretical platform. Its founder Han Deqiang holds a PhD in Marxism, but he is not a Marxist, for he is opposed to the labour theory of value and historical materialism, even though he supports public ownership and criticises neoliberalism.

In contrast with neoliberalism, new-leftism has the following three characteristics:

- First, it calls for a powerful government which dominates during market reforms. This idea was reflected in the *Report of Chinese State Power* written by Wang Shaoguang and Hu Angang in 1993. The report triggered the tax reform of January 1994 which separated local taxes from state taxes. The reform has had a far-

reaching influence over Chinese society since then. In this respect, neoliberals argue that the state must release its power in order to promote the market economy.

- Secondly, new-leftists criticise capitalist globalisation, and argue that it has resulted in the spreading wide of capitalism in China. Social problems in China have their root outside China, *ie* globalisation, international capital and the market economy. Neoliberalists would insist on the internal cause in this respect, and that the solution to the social problems should be further marketisation, especially neoliberalist reforms in both political and economic terms.

- Thirdly, new-leftism argues that marketisation reforms have resulted in the widening gap between rich and poor. It emphasises economic equality, not economic growth at any cost. It considers the total rejection of the Marxist and communist idea of redistribution as ruthless and immoral. In the view of neoliberals, income inequality does not result from markets, but from corruption and trade-offs between power and money – fundamentally it is the result of a dictatorship.

Although new-leftists try their best to stand on the side of the workers, their criticisms and policy suggestions cannot be realised in reality. However, some of their discussions have had a positive influence in Chinese society. For instance, Professor Cui Zhiyuan, who received his PhD in political science in the USA, has employed game theory and the mathematical method of economics to demonstrate, through a case study of Nanjie village, why collectively-owned enterprises are more efficient.

### 4. Revivalism

Revivalism, the current of antiquity worship, considers ancient kings and sages to be the paramount ideal of personality, and ancient society as the ideal one. It has penetrated almost every type of ideology in China and become a flourishing current. Revivalists worship political thoughts and philosophical ideas from ancient sages, commending – from Confucius – the idea of benevolent governing and prioritising the common people, and advocating the natural, unchained, and free spirit of Taoism. They also worship ancient ethics and think highly of benevolence, justice, rituals, wisdom, and the notion of serving the public. They suggest that perfectly scientific socialist ethics are the development of the essence of Confucianism, which is suitable for a socialist society, and is the crystallisation of the most progressive thoughts of mankind possibly developed in both the East and the West. The birth and applications of Confucianism, they say, not only guarantee the rapid and healthy advance of Chinese socialism, but also revolutionise Marxist theories, constituting the lighthouse that will usher the world into communist society.

The major representatives of revivalism are Deng Xiaojun and Jiang Qing. The former is the author of *The Logical Combination of Confucianism and Democratic Ideas*, published by Sichuan People's Publishing House in 1995, in which he concludes that Confucianism, in essence, is consistent with democratic ideas in its theoretical orientation and core logic; therefore, he considers, Confucianism and democratic ideas can and should be logically integrated. The latter, known as the most eloquent spokesman of Neo-Confucianism in mainland China, argues in his book *Political Confucianism*, published by SDX Joint

Publishing Company in 2003, that in addition to Confucianist theories about mind-nature there is a political tradition in Chinese Confucianism; and this political tradition is such a great resource that it can replace the Western political tradition and meet China's current political needs. This point is contextualised by Jiang Qing's refutation of Deng Xiaojun's theory. Jiang Qing believes that the question concerning the integration of Confucianism and democratic ideas is one of 'necessity' and 'possibility'. His answer is that there is neither 'necessity' nor 'possibility'.

Some revivalist businessmen have even raised the absurd idea that we should migrate hundreds of millions of people abroad, to take over international markets. In fact, Confucianism cannot and should not be revived at the political (or state) level, but only at the social and personal level. The study of a national legacy is to be appreciated, but revivalism certainly can hardly work.

### 5. Eclectic Marxism

'Eclectic' Marxism is the theory and method which interpolates the two sides of contradiction without priority, and mechanically mixes opposing ideas and theories with no consistent principle. The representative figures of eclectic Marxism are Wang Dongjing, Dong Degang and Wang Changjiang, all of whom are Central Party School professors criticised by the central leadership of the CPC.

In a lecture to provincial and ministerial leaders, Wang Dongjing, former director of the Economics Department of the Central Party School, praised the superiority of private ownership. He views selfishness as part of human nature, and agrees with the completely self-serving *homo economicus* postulate<sup>1</sup> and the idea that 'man dies for money as birds die for food'. He puts



emphasis on efficiency and completely ignores equity, while only recognising that human selfishness is what leads to increased social collaboration and public welfare.<sup>2</sup> He speaks fully on behalf of property owners without any consideration of the exploitation of the workers.

I wrote an article in the first issue of *Social Sciences in China* in 2007 to criticise Wang's argument and elaborated on the four theoretical hypotheses that an innovative modern Marxist political economy should have, namely: "the new hypothesis of value created by new living labour"; "the hypothesis of both egoistic and altruistic economic man"; "the hypothesis of dual constraints of resources and needs"; and "the hypothesis of the mutual reinforcement and proportional relationship between equity and efficiency".<sup>3</sup> In fact, there has been a growing literature in the West exploring altruistic economic hypotheses and theoretical models, which could have a positive effect on institutional arrangements, building integrity and the education of ethics, and could further lead to the increase of social collaboration and public welfare.

Wang Dongjing did not oppose Marxism when advocating that modern economics could guide the development of China's economic reform and opening up. He actually added in the concluding part of his article that he would hold high Deng Xiaoping Theory and the important thoughts of Jiang Zemin. Thus he could be classified as an eclectic Marxist.

In his article entitled *We Should Further Emancipate Our Minds Concerning the Question of Ownership*, Dong Degang, former deputy director of the Philosophy Department of the Central Party School, emphasised that the purpose of socialism,

and the adjustment and changes intended for achieving it, should be important guiding principles for building socialism. He stressed that we should not be overly concerned about the proportions of public ownership and the non-public economy, but should pay more attention to ensuring that the fruits of economic development are shared by the vast majority of the people, on the premise of the development of the productive forces. The concept of sharing by the vast majority of the people is equivalent to common prosperity, but it is an abstract notion of common prosperity without the dominant position of public ownership and distribution according to each person's labour.

Is it possible that the decreased proportion of public ownership will not really weaken the Party's ruling foundation? Frankly speaking, the proportion of the state economy in China's national economy has dropped to less than one-third while the private economy and foreign economies have risen to two-thirds. This situation is bound to make social wealth gradually concentrate in the hands of a small number of people. Deng Xiaoping warned us in his later years that "in China only socialism, rather than polarisation, could work".<sup>4</sup> The idea that the decreased proportion of public ownership is really unable to weaken the Party's ruling foundation is corrosive to the socialist economic base. It seems that many of Dong Degang's articles are seeking both to explain socialism with Chinese characteristics and to emancipate the mind. In essence, they entail the revisionism that Lenin mentioned, which could be described by a new term, *ie* eclectic Marxism. Under the name of emancipation of the mind, this distorts the development of Marxist theory in Chinese

circumstances.

Wang Changjiang, director of the Party Building Department of the Central Party School, published an article entitled *It is an Objective Reality that the Party has its Own Interests*, in issue No 534 of *Study Times* sponsored by the Central Party School. From his point of view, only when we practically and realistically recognise the existence of the Party's interests, can we objectively study the relationship between the various interests – especially the relationship between the interests of the people and those of the Party as their representative – and appropriately locate the interests of the Party.<sup>5</sup> His argument is clearly contrary to the *Communist Manifesto* and the CPC's constitution. According to the *Manifesto*, the Communist Party does not have any interests different from the interests of the proletariat as a whole; while, according to the CPC's constitution, the Party should insist on serving the people wholeheartedly. Apart from the interests of the working class and the overwhelming majority of the people, the CPC should not have any special interests.

In the process of economic and political development, eclectic Marxism is one of the main targets of our critique. It is important to criticise eclectic Marxist thought, in order to find out both what Marxism is and what constitutes real socialism with Chinese characteristics.

## 6. 'Traditional' Marxism

The representative medium of 'traditional' Marxist thought is *Mao's Flag*, a website with the declaration "Make Mao Zedong's flag rise high". It has many cadres from inside and outside the Party as its contributors, as well as old scholars. The major representatives of 'traditional' Marxism include Li Chengrui, former director of the

National Bureau of Statistics of China, Bai Yang and others.

*Defend Mao Zedong's Flag* by Bai Yang can be seen as the manifesto of 'traditional' Marxist thought. Its core ideas are:

- First, the guiding status of Mao Zedong Thought should be re-established. Its core is defending the Constitution and the Party's Constitution for the people. Among the Four Cardinal Principles of the Party, the most important one is adherence to Mao Zedong Thought, which is the foundation for the existence of the Chinese Communist Party and the People's Republic of China, the basis of governing and rejuvenating the country, and the source of innovation and development.

- Secondly, Mao Zedong's later years should be fairly evaluated. This, 'traditional' Marxists claim, was the most glorious period when a great Marxist dedicated all his life to serve the people and to fight for communism. The fundamental problem of a fair evaluation of Mao Zedong in his later years is thus to evaluate practically, realistically, objectively and impartially the Cultural Revolution initiated and led by Chairman Mao; and this is a major political task of our Party which cannot and should not be avoided. Due to various extremely complex reasons, the Cultural Revolution committed a serious error of 'overthrowing everything' and 'full-scale civil war'; but the general orientation, the principles and spirit of the Cultural Revolution are considered to be completely correct.

- Thirdly, Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought should be vigorously studied and advocated. Deng Xiaoping



particularly emphasised that there could be no new China without Chairman Mao, and Mao Zedong Thought has educated several generations. The 'traditional' Marxists consider that we must hold high the great flag of Mao Zedong Thought from generation to generation forever; since the 1990s, the publicity of Chairman Mao and Mao Zedong Thought has become weaker and weaker.

- Fourthly, the demonisation of Mao Zedong should be severely criticised. The people are the God in the mind of Chairman Mao, while Chairman Mao is the red sun in the hearts of the people. In the past 30 years, despite the complete denial of his later years in civil society, the people have spontaneously produced wave after wave of 'Mao fever', carrying out activities to commemorate Chairman Mao in various ways. However, some so-called elites have repeatedly fought against public opinion, and reacted with wave after wave of demonisation of Chairman Mao. Li Rui and Yuan Tengfei are representatives of such demonisation.<sup>6</sup>

The positive significance of

'traditional' Marxist thought is its fierce criticism of some erroneous ideas, especially neoliberalism, democratic socialism, and eclectic Marxism. However, some forms of criticism, particularly by those defending the Cultural Revolution, tend to go too far. They prefer mass criticism and name-calling as their basic approach. Furthermore, elderly scholars are not good at reviewing domestic and foreign literature, hence there has been an excess of criticism and inadequate innovation in their writing.

### 7. Innovative Marxism

The representative scholar in the field of innovative Marxism is the famous economist Liu Guoguang, who used to be the Vice President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and now serves as a CASS special adviser. I myself am also recognised as one of the major representative scholars in this field. Innovative Marxism conforms to the Central Committee of the CPC in terms of its fundamental direction and theory.

- First, in terms of guiding principle, innovative Marxism insists on the guiding position of Marxism in China. Of

course, the formulation of the guiding ideology varies across socialist countries, being Ho Chi Minh Thought in Vietnam, Jose Marti's writings in Cuba, and the Juche idea of Kim Il Sung in North Korea. In my opinion, the formulation of the guiding ideology of China should be unified into one sentence – the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and its localised theory in China, instead of some never ending list which is ridiculed by academics.

- Secondly, in terms of the political system, innovative Marxism adheres to the leadership of the political party of the working class in China. China must adhere to the Communist Party as the vanguard of the working class in nature, the principle of democratic centralism, and the leadership of the Communist Party in the socialist cause. The multi-party cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Communist Party at the current stage is a form of democratic centralism, which is the fundamental organisational principle and institution for the Communist Party and

the country under its governance, as well as the political criterion for correctly handling relationships inside and outside the Party.

- Thirdly, in terms of the economic system, innovative Marxism insists on the dominant position of public ownership of the means of production in China. The essential difference between socialism and capitalism with respect to the basic economic system lies in the social ownership structure of production. The dominance of public ownership with both qualitative and quantitative advantage, in the form of a strong state-owned economy, plays a pivotal role in building a strong country and socialism and in improving the people's living standards. Therefore, it is the economic base of a socialist nature for the superstructure of governance by the Communist Party.
- Fourthly, in terms of its ultimate goal, innovative Marxism believes that China must adhere to the socialist nature and principle, aiming at emancipating and developing productive forces, while eliminating exploitation and polarisation so as to achieve common prosperity, and ultimately realising communism based on socialism with immense progress in productive forces. This is a long process of historical evolution and system innovation.

*Studies on Marxism* and *Marxism Digests* are representative journals on innovative Marxism, especially the latter, which concentrates on publishing theoretical perspectives of innovative Marxism. The Marxism



Research Network website also reflects the theoretical dynamics of innovative Marxism in a timely manner.

In my opinion, theoretical innovation and research or policy-making in China should ultimately be based on the internal situation while taking into consideration the 'world circumstances'. The correct sequence of policy-making – whether executing the opening up and reform, or other major policies relating to China's development – would be as follows: first, understanding the domestic and world situations; then creating certain specifications; and finally testing or implementing the policy. If this order is reversed – for example, if the policy test is conducted only in the mind, or if officials undertake the so-called trials in an affirmative way, in accordance with their own will – then such policy-making without referring to the law and regulation will often leave a lot of drawbacks in its subsequent implementation. In short, innovation of Marxism in China should be a 'comprehensive innovation', which adheres to the fundamental principles of 'Marxism at the base, national legacy at the root, and Western thoughts as the tool', while taking into consideration the world situation and social reality, and prioritising the status of the CPC.

Now, to clarify further the view of innovative Marxism and the places where it can play an important role, we emphasise that the direction of socialism and its scientific development in the 21st century must focus on developing and perfecting 'the system of institutions':

■ First, in terms of building the economic system, socialism with Chinese characteristics means improving the basic system in a way that will keep public ownership in a dominant position and have

diverse forms of ownership at its side. To paraphrase Deng Xiaoping, the essential difference between socialism and capitalism, with respect to the basic economic system, lies in the social ownership structure of the means of production. The dominance of public ownership with both qualitative and quantitative advantage, in the form of a strong state-owned economy and an active collective and cooperative economy, plays a pivotal role in building a strong country and socialism and in improving people's living standards. Therefore, as Jiang Zemin suggested, public ownership constitutes the economic base of socialism for the rule of the CPC as superstructure.

Although China cannot achieve full public ownership of the means of production right now, due to the underdeveloped nature of the productive forces, it must adhere to the dominant position of public ownership while at the same time developing variety in the private economy. Only by adhering to the dominant position of public ownership under the conditions of a market economy, can the system of wealth and income distribution be truly improved in a way dominated by distribution according to one's labour, can common prosperity, equity and justice be achieved, and can the people-centred scientific concept of development be implemented – all of which will provide the economic basis for participatory democracy and for achieving sound and rapid economic and social development.

■ Secondly, in terms of the political system, socialism with Chinese

characteristics will improve a 'three-element and four-layer system'. That means insisting on the organic unification of the three elements, *ie*:

the leadership of the CPC;  
the people's position as the master; and  
the rule of law in handling state affairs.

It also means upholding and improving:  
the People's Congress system;  
multi-party cooperation and the political consultation system under the leadership of the CPC;  
the regional autonomy system for ethnic minorities and the policy of 'two systems within one country'; and  
autonomy at the grassroots level

so as to continue to promote self-improvement and development of the socialist political system, in order to consolidate the people's democratic dictatorship and the participatory democracy it embodies.

China must adhere to a Communist Party whose nature is the vanguard of the working class, to the principle of democratic centralism, and to the leadership of the Communist Party in the socialist cause. Faced with the new scientific and technological revolution, the working class is still the representative of the advanced productive forces and the embodiment of advanced relations of production, and remains that group of people whose historical mission is the overthrow of capitalism and the construction of socialism and communism. Under the new pattern of the emergence and coexistence of a variety of social classes and strata, the Communist

Party must still maintain its nature as the vanguard of the working class and rely on it wholeheartedly. The system of multi-party cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party at the current stage is a form of democratic centralism which is the fundamental organisational principle and institution for the Communist Party and the country under its governance, and the political criterion for correctly handling relationships inside and outside the Party.

■ Thirdly, in terms of the cultural system, socialism with Chinese characteristics will improve the system of socialist core values with Marxism as its soul, and enable it better to lead a variety of social thoughts and social practices, and promote cultural development and prosperity. As a scientific world outlook and methodology, Marxism is the theoretical basis of the socialist movement, which should serve as the guide in the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. To treat it as such a guide is to combine the universal principles of Marxism with China's reality at the current stage in order to study new situations, sum up new experience and solve new problems. Marxism is a scientific system which opens itself to other thoughts and moves forward with the development of science and practice, with strong and lasting academic vitality and practical guiding force.

■ Fourthly, in terms of building the social system, socialism with Chinese characteristics will improve the system of 'one structure, three interactions, and four



mechanisms'. First of all, building a socialist harmonious society requires the improvement of the social management structure, featuring leadership of Party committees, government responsibility, nongovernmental support and public participation.<sup>7</sup> Secondly, we must innovate the public administration system under the leadership of the Party, and actively promote the connection between government control and social coordination, and the complementary relationship between the government administration and social autonomy, in order to form scientific and effective mechanisms for the coordination of interests, expression of demands, conflict mediation, and protection of rights.

It should be pointed out that, since the socialist democratic system is not yet perfect, some people without an understanding of socialism would equate capitalism with democracy and socialism with autocracy. If we only criticise the hypocrisy of neoliberalism, social democracy and democratic socialism, without improving the system of socialist democracy, then it is impossible to eradicate the soil nurturing Western democracy. One of the means of surpassing the Western democracies is for socialist countries continually to make greater achievements than any other country in aspects of participatory democracy, social justice and economic development, and to give full play to the superiority of socialism over capitalism. Against the background of the adoption and implementation of the scientific concept of development, building a socialist harmonious society, and the sound and fast economic development of national economy, we are fully

capable of doing this. On the other hand, following in the footsteps of Gorbachev's 'democratic socialist' reform would be bound to bring misery to the country and the people. China must not make that same mistake.

It should be noted that the direction and destiny of socialism in China will be determined by whether the innovative school of Marxism can become the mainstream thought amongst Chinese academics and politicians.

■ *This article is reproduced with permission from the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M) journal), The Marxist, Vol XXVIII, No 4, 2012. It was presented on 12 December 2012 as a paper at the EMS Academy, Thiruvananthapuram, an educational institution established by the Kerala State Committee of (CPI(M)) in memory of veteran Indian communist leader E M S Namboothiripad. The present version has been edited for style and clarity.*

### Notes and References

- 1 *Homo economicus* = the concept of humans as rational and narrowly self-interested actors who have the ability to make judgments toward their subjectively defined ends; see [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo\\_economicus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homo_economicus) -Ed.
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# MAU MAU

## The Revolutionary Force from Kenya



By Shiraz Durrani

### PART 3: THE LEGACY OF MAU MAU

*In the first two parts of this article I situated the Mau Mau armed struggle for land and freedom within the context of the long tradition of resistance to British colonialism in Kenya, and went on to deal with the political, as well as military, structure of the Movement. In this final part, I shall cover Mau Mau's ideology and strategy, and its legacy, in particular its approach to neocolonialism.*

#### Anti-imperialist Ideology

Mau Mau was guided in its ideological stand by three aspects: anti-colonialism; anti-imperialism; and a proletarian world outlook in the struggle against capitalism. They represented the unity of workers and peasants and all those who were not allied to the colonialists.

It is true to say that different aspects of the above ideology became dominant at different times, and that the ideological response of the freedom fighters varied according to the particular needs of the day. Just as at the political level, different organisational structures were created in response to specific needs, so at the ideological level, different perspectives came to prominence in keeping with the specific contradictions and needs in the struggle at the specific times.

The ideological stand of the Kenya Defence Council and the Kenya Parliament has been discussed in Part 2 of this article. It is possible to see a shift in the struggle from an anti-colonial phase to one of anti-neocolonialism. This change in ideology

reflected a change in the imperialist strategy. Imperialism, the main force that Mau Mau fought, changed guise from colonialism in the period leading up to independence, to neocolonialism afterwards. In keeping with these changes, Mau Mau also changed its political and military priorities.

The class stand of Mau Mau was clear right from the beginning. The enemy was not seen in terms of skin colour, as the colonialist propaganda had insisted – and in effect had encouraged. In fact, black home guard collaborators with colonialism were a prime target of revolutionary wrath. Kimathi stated, in a letter he wrote from his headquarters in Nyandarwa in 1953, “the poor are the Mau Mau.” Poverty can be stopped, he explained, “but not by bombs and weapons from the imperialists. Only the revolutionary justice of the struggles of the poor could end poverty for Kenyans.”<sup>22</sup>

Mau Mau was aware of the dangers that face a society when a minority seeks privileges for itself at the expense of peasants and the working class people.

In a session in 1954, one high official in the Kenya Parliament warned of the dangers of such a situation:

“Some of us may seek privileges, but by the time we achieve our freedom you will have learnt to share a grain of maize or a bean amongst several people, feeling selfishness as an evil; and the hate of oppressing others would be so developed in you that you will not like to become another class of ‘Black’ Europeans ready to oppress and exploit others just like the system we are fighting against.”<sup>3</sup>

It is a reflection of the maturity of Mau Mau and of its deep understanding of imperialism and the latter’s grip on countries in the South that it was able to foresee the danger of imperialist control over newly independent countries in Africa even as it fought colonialism.

### The Mau Mau Strategy

Mau Mau saw the contradiction against imperialism as an antagonistic one which could not be resolved peacefully. It thus used the method of armed struggle, guerrilla warfare and people’s struggle against imperialism. But it made a distinction between the three aspects of the enemy. Against the colonial military forces, it used the method of guerrilla warfare, and military battles (both offensive and defensive) which included attacks on military targets, on prisons to free captured guerrilla fighters, and on arsenals to procure arms.

The other ‘face’ of the enemy was the European settlers, many of whom benefited from free or cheap land and had taken up arms against the people of Kenya. The Mau Mau movement used another method to deal with this threat. The settlers’ main concern was to protect ‘their’ property, on which their wealth depended. Indeed, their main aim in ‘settling’ in Kenya was to appropriate or acquire very cheaply peasant land and labour and use it to produce wealth for themselves. The freedom fighters attacked them where it hurt most: the property itself. This served not only to threaten the very economic base of the settlers; it also helped the guerrillas to procure food and rations they needed to continue their armed struggle, thus providing the material base for the armed Revolution.

Mau Mau used yet another method against the third face of the enemy, the African home guards and collaborators.

Considering that many had been forced, directly, or through economic reasons or ignorance, to become collaborators, Mau Mau gave advance warnings to many of those considered capable of reforming, to stop betraying the cause of national liberation. Only when these warnings were ignored was action taken, depending on the seriousness of the collaboration. In this way many who had initially sided actively or passively with the enemy were won over to the nationalist side, and some of them then made important contributions to the anti-imperialist struggle. Many whose economic base was tied too strongly to imperialism refused to reform and had to be dealt with more severely, in order that they did not pose a threat to the armed resistance forces.

Yet another tactic was used against the collaborators. This involved propaganda warfare such as the spreading in enemy-held territory of favourable news about guerrilla successes. This was often done by pinning large notices on trees and walls near schools, police stations and social halls. It was not only the message of these posters that put fear in the enemy, but the very fact that such notices could be placed in areas under colonial control. Despite the strict security measures taken by the colonial armed forces, Mau Mau activists managed to pin these posters in the very heart of the city, thus demonstrating their strength and demoralising enemy soldiers and civilians.

It would be wrong to deny that there were contradictions among the ranks of Mau Mau fighters and among the people. These became sharper under enemy attack. But these were not antagonistic ones, at least at the beginning, and were resolved by the use of non-violent means. In the main, democratic methods were used. One of the aims of Mau Mau was to form a democratic society where everyone would have equal rights and duties and an equal access to the wealth produced by their joint labour. They put their ideas into practice in the liberated areas even as they engaged the enemy in fierce battle.

The democratic method involved the use of meetings, conferences, and congresses where free discussions could be held and ideas could be expressed without fear of persecution. After long discussions, decisions would be taken on the basis of majority wish. Questions of leadership were settled through secret ballots, and elections were held at every level, insofar as war conditions allowed. An example of such a conference was

the Mwathe meeting mentioned in Part 2. Elections were held, for example, when Kimaathi was chosen as Prime Minister. These democratic discussions and elections helped to formulate new policies and to resolve many contradictions.

In addition, free exchange of ideas was encouraged to allow the people a chance to hear the views of their leaders and to give their own views to the leadership.

### Communications<sup>4</sup>

Mau Mau realised that any serious confrontation with a technically superior power necessitated good organisation and planning. A key requirement for this was the establishment of an efficient communications strategy. The organisational structures of the liberation forces had to be strong. These had to be created in secret and on a national scale. The task was made more difficult as the enemy they faced had the resources of its whole colonial empire.

As the number of people involved in the anti-colonial struggle was very large, and spread out over a vast area, the problems of communication had to be solved first. An organisation of this vast magnitude could not function unless its various components could communicate with each other: the leadership needed to get intelligence and other reports from the smallest units, and pass down instructions for action. At the same time, contacts with sympathetic masses of workers and peasants had to be maintained, together with links with nationalities from all parts of the country.

Different methods of communication were developed and used at different stages and in different areas of the country, depending on the level of struggle and on whether the area was liberated, semi-liberated or under British control. The Mau Mau High Command developed an information/communication strategy which was controlled at the centre and included the following aspects:

1. oral communications;
2. revolutionary publishing;
3. use of pamphlets and handbills;
4. establishment of a people’s press;
5. information gathering and dissemination.<sup>5</sup>

### The Battlefield

A fuller picture of the battles and their impact can perhaps emerge once all the recently released ‘lost’ files of the British Government are studied. Yet the picture is by no means unclear. John Newsinger



gives figures of casualties on both sides of the conflict:

“The official British figure for rebels killed in action was 11,503, but the real figure was much higher. Some estimates go as high as 50,000, and this is much closer to the truth. The casualties suffered by the security forces were considerably lower: only 12 European soldiers and 52 European police were killed, three Asians and 524 African soldiers and police. ... [A]s for settler casualties, only 32 were killed in the course of the emergency, less than died in traffic accidents in Nairobi in the same period. What was successfully portrayed by the British government as a pogrom against the white settlers was in fact a pogrom against the Kikuyu.”<sup>6</sup>

This excludes civilian suffering in Kenya. Again, Newsinger provides insight:

“As well as tens of thousands interned without trial (the best estimate is that over 160,000 people were interned during the course of the emergency), even more were imprisoned for emergency offences. Between 1952 and 1958 over 34,000 women were to be imprisoned for Mau Mau offences, and the

number of men imprisoned was probably ten times that figure. According to one historian, ‘at least one in four Kikuyu adult males was imprisoned or detained by the British colonial administration.’”<sup>7</sup>

This was not the end of the story, as Richard Dowden records:

“But the British also deployed an even more fatal if effective method, the one they had used against Afrikaner civilians in the Boer war, the concentration camp. Both Anderson and Elkins draw convincing parallels with Nazi concentration camps and Stalin’s gulags. More than 1m people were crammed into heavily guarded camps where starvation and disease killed thousands.

On the outside, the army used the same tactics that the Sudanese government has been using against the rebels in Darfur: they armed the local enemies of the rebellion and encouraged them to kill, rape and loot at will. When accounts of British atrocities leaked out, officials in Nairobi and London lied to deny them. When a few brave souls spoke out or even resigned, they were persuaded to keep quiet. When at last some of the truth came out the game was up.”<sup>8</sup>

This was not an unintended outcome of a dirty war, not ‘collateral damage’ of a larger war. It was fully intended as part of a well-planned strategy, as *Hunting the Mau Mau* records:

“Other measures included the setting up of controlled villages as a punitive measure against areas suspected of being solidly behind the Mau Mau. By early 1955 over a million Kikuyu had been settled in these villages.”<sup>9</sup>

### **Mau Mau Faces the Neocolonial Challenge**

The leadership and supporters of the first Mau Mau Kenya Government were not against individuals, or European people, but the system of exploitation. This system itself had undergone changes in response to the military attacks of Mau Mau. By about 1956-7, it became clear that colonialism was no longer sustainable in Kenya, and its departure was a matter of time. In just a few years of warfare, Mau Mau had changed the balance of power, although it had to pay a heavy price for this change, with many combatants injured, dead, in detention or maimed. Many others had lost their land, livestock and means of livelihood, their children having to grow up without adequate food, clothing, housing or education. They were cast aside by the new independent Government of Kenya even as the new power holders, who had played an insignificant or no part in the struggle for independence,



Mau Mau fighters

became the new rich class with power, wealth, land, jobs and education denied to Mau Mau activists. But Mau Mau militants had realised quite early the danger of colonialist tentacles returning to take control of the country in a new form. They clearly saw colonialists 'going from the door, only to return from the window' as neocolonialists.

From that initial realisation of the new threat to the young Kenya nation right up to and beyond the time of formal independence in 1963, all the energy of Mau Mau cadres was poured into making people aware of the new danger facing the Revolution. Ideological and military preparations had to be made for another struggle before final victory could be achieved.

These renewed Mau Mau preparations were admitted by the colonial regime in the last years of its existence. Thus the colonial minister of Internal Security and Defence (the ministry charged with fighting Mau Mau), Mr Swann, had to acknowledge that "for the last three months of 1962, operations have progressed to curb the activities of the Kenya Land and Freedom Army." He revealed that the colonial government was detaining more people "to avoid a second emergency in Kenya", and stated that the purpose of Mau Mau was to take over power in Kenya. "An emergency would be inevitable if we had not taken any action this year", he added.

Swann admitted that, in spite of the vast intervention of top military forces in Kenya since 1952 and even earlier, "he did not hope to stamp out the type of activity typified by Mau Mau and the Kenya Land and Freedom Army ... this activity will never stop." He made a number of observations in this period which show that Mau Mau continued its organisational and military activities in this new period of neocolonialism. Below are some of his comments, and reports from newspapers of the time:<sup>10</sup>

"It was hoped to secure the help of Jomo Kenyatta after his release. 'We have discussed the Kenya Land and Freedom Army with Kenyatta and he is certainly not in favour of it', Mr Swann said. 'I hope to enlist him as well as other leaders'."

"The reorganised Kenya Land and Freedom Army consisted of a Committee representing various parts of Kenya, and it [is] the Supreme Command .... It revived also among Mau Mau

detainees in Mbagathi prison in 1957. They started work on the organisation."

"The Kenya Land and Freedom Army was still organising, and had launched a recruiting campaign. Its cry was not for action now but in the future. It could be planned for the end of the year, for internal self-government, or for independence. The idea is to secure more members and more weapons now."

"The pattern of oathing was the same – to preserve secrecy, maintain unity, never cooperate with the [colonial] government ... steal arms and ammunition and money ... commit murder when ordered and to obtain land."

New organisations, new ideologies, new military tactics were being prepared by Mau Mau in the period before 1963. Perhaps the most important work in the early years was to warn the people against the new danger. The neocolonialist allies were constantly pouring forth lies and falsehoods through their mass media, with their message that independence was just round the corner. The goals of the independence struggle had been won, they said: Africanisation and multiracialism were here, so there was no longer any need to continue the struggle.

It thus became necessary to bring the ideological battle to the forefront, placing before the people a correct analysis of historical events, and emphasising the need to continue the struggle. This Mau Mau did in the form of a Policy Document which was widely circulated. It was also presented at the Conference of the Kenya African National Union held in Nairobi in December 1961, where contradictions were developing about the need to combat neocolonialism. This Policy Document was the clearest statement on the dangers. It reads:

### “THE STRUGGLE FOR KENYA'S FUTURE

The struggle for Kenya's future is being waged today on three distinct though interrelated levels – political, racial and economic. It seems to us that we Africans are being allowed to 'win' in the first two spheres as long as we don't contest the battle being waged on the third, all-important, economic level.

Since the end of the Second World War, Great Britain, knowing it could not contain the wave of nationalist revolutions spreading throughout the colonial world, has embarked on a course of 'guiding' these nationalist movements down a path most conducive to the perpetuation of British and multinational capitalist economic domination. The old colonialism involving direct political control is fast dying and a quick transition to the new colonialism is felt necessary to avert a *genuine* social revolution, which would result in economic as well as political independence and thus stop the flow of Kenya's surplus capital into the banks of the western capitalist world. The British master plan is thus quite simple in outline: 'Carefully relinquish political control to a properly indoctrinated group of the *right kind* of Africans, *ie* those whose interests are similar to and compatible with our own, so that we retain economic control.' In short, the British Government wants to leave in political form so that its capitalist sponsors might remain in economic *content*. Put into slogan form, this plan would be LEAVE IN ORDER TO STAY.

What are the techniques being employed by the British to facilitate our transition from colonial to neocolonial status? ... We shall mention here two of the most important. First is a technique which might be called *Racial Harmony: a Disguise for the Recruitment of African Stoooges and Front Men* ....

[These] are clear evidence of a calculated plan on the part of the economic elite to partially dissolve racial barriers in order to consolidate its position along class lines and to use Africans as front men and spokesmen for its interests ... 'Africanisation' is the term used for the process ....

Let us instead struggle against a 'stability' which is in fact stagnation; let us struggle to liberate that vast reservoir of creativity which now lies dormant amongst our people; let us, in short, create a new society which allows to each [person] the right to eat, the right to the products



of his/her labour, the right to clothe, house and educate [our] children, the right, in short, to live in dignity amongst equals. It is a socialist society we should be struggling to build, a system which, unlike capitalism, concerns itself with the welfare of the masses rather than with the profits and privileges of a few.

A second technique being utilised so that our rulers might 'Leave in order to stay' can be called *Nationalism: A Colonialist Substitute for Ideology*. Nationalism is essentially a negative philosophy ... It is no substitute for a positive ideology. The British have attempted to utilise this negative political slogan (which they themselves have popularised) to forestall or hinder the emergence of a revolutionary ideology, which they fear might mean the end of their economic domination.

Let us then fashion an ideology which will unify the vast majority of our people by articulating their needs and, by advancing a programme of socialist development in agriculture and industry which promises to eradicate poverty, disease and illiteracy, a programme which will draw out the creative talents and energies of our people, giving them that personal dignity and pride which comes from socially constructive and productive activity. Let us, in short, provide our people with the ideological and organisational tools necessary for the achievement of genuine independence and development. Let us not sell them cheaply down the glittering path of neocolonialism and social, economic and cultural stagnation. ♪<sup>11</sup>

The above document is of paramount importance in studying the classes and class contradictions in Kenya before and after independence. It makes it clear that, far from having been defeated, Mau Mau retained its dynamism and was still able to provide a correct analysis of the situation that Kenya faced. It is no accident that such Mau Mau documents have been hidden from the Kenyan and British public as a way of discrediting Mau Mau and the entire liberation struggle in Kenya.

Mau Mau could not have been successful in its struggles without a clear understanding of the important role played by organisation and ideology in a revolution. Donald Barnett examines this aspect of Mau Mau's work:

"Just as any revolution requires a certain minimum amount of organisation, so does a people in revolt require an ideology. Without a set of ideas and ideals, few people are willing to risk their lives in revolutionary action. In Kenya, it is unlikely that the revolution would have occurred but for the integrative ideology developed over a period of thirty-odd years by numerous political, educational and trade union associations which articulated and brought in focus various grievances and set forward certain political, economic and social objectives."<sup>12</sup>

Mau Mau fought on behalf of the Kenyan people. It was the organisational front of the people. It was the ideological front representing the interests of the working people in Kenya. In all this, Mau Mau and the people of Kenya did not fight alone. There were progressive forces in many parts of the world who supported their struggle. There was a great deal of support that the people of Kenya received from progressive people in Britain in the 1950s and 60s. Progressive MPs, trade unionists, press and ordinary people saw the reality behind the resistance and repression in Kenya and raised their voices to support justice for the Kenyan people. There was, for example, the Kenya Committee for Democratic Rights for Kenya Africans (UK) in the 1950s which, among other support, provided real news on what colonialism was doing in Kenya. The independent Kenya Parliament set up by Mau Mau was in regular contact with the Committee, which helped to publicise its cause.

## Conclusion

Mau Mau, the revolutionary force from Kenya, has had profound impact not only on Kenya but on the British Empire, on Britain and on people struggling for liberation around the world. Its full political contribution and its real history remain to be fully assessed and documented.

Mau Mau and the Kenyan people's struggle against colonialism and imperialism has been a long one, and in many ways is still going on today. There

were liberation movements in Kenya before the active stage of Mau Mau; there have been, and there still are, similar movements for the vision that Mau Mau represented after political independence. Donald Barnett sounded a warning as long ago as 1972:

"Political independence, without genuine decolonisation and socialism, yields continued misery and oppression for the peasant-worker masses. Karigo's prayer,<sup>13</sup> 'I only pray that after independence our children will not be forced to fight again' – as with those of other peasants and workers caught up in the web of neocolonial accommodation after long years of struggle – will not be answered. His and their children *will* be forced to fight again."<sup>14</sup>

It was Uganda's then Prime Minister Milton Obote who summed up the achievement of Mau Mau in a speech when Kenya achieved independence:

"Today is the day on which Kenya formally joins Algeria at the high rank of being the hero of colonial Africa. The struggle in Kenya was bitter. Many people lost their lives ... The past cannot be forgotten ... It cannot be forgotten because it is the past not only of Kenya but of world history."<sup>15</sup>

And it cannot be forgotten because the aims for which many lives were lost are as valid today as they were then. Nor can the example of the brave warriors be forgotten, warriors who, as one of the Mau Mau struggle songs records, declared that

"It is better to die on our feet  
Than to live on our knees."

That is exactly what Mau Mau did. And its message, "Never be silent" (*see box*),<sup>16</sup> remains the inspiration for all those still struggling for liberation, including the Mau Mau veterans who brought their claims for compensation to the British courts. Newsinger's judgement on Mau Mau sums up the essence of what the movement represents when he says, "it was without any doubt one of the most important revolutionary movements in the history of modern Africa and one of the most important revolutionary movements to confront the British Empire."<sup>17</sup>

We will never be silent  
On January 7<sup>th</sup> we were  
surrounded at Bahati  
by the colonial army.

We will never be silent  
until we get land to cultivate  
and freedom in this country of  
ours, Kenya.

Home Guards were the first to go  
and close the gates  
and Johnnies entered while the  
police surrounded the location.  
You, traitors! You dislike your  
children,  
caring only for your stomachs;  
You are the enemies of our people.

We will never be silent  
until we get land to cultivate  
and freedom in this country of  
ours, Kenya.

## Breaking the Conspiracy of Silence

Perhaps the greatest difficulty faced by Mau Mau veterans and those who even today support its aims is the lack of correct information among the public about the movement, its leadership, its vision and action. This is highlighted by a number of people who have in-depth knowledge about the movement. They say:

“Our plea to break the conspiracy of silence about the Kenya Land and Freedom Army struggle includes

also a plea for a more serious study of the history of Kenya since the Second World War and more particularly since 1952.”<sup>18</sup>

It is only in recent years that this conspiracy is being challenged as new material, interpretations and analyses of the movement become available. But biographies and other historical records by Kenyan historians and Mau Mau activists have existed over a long period – easily ignored by those seeking to suppress the reality of atrocities.

### The Final Question

The final question remains: how can the contribution of Mau Mau activists, their supporters and their sympathisers be given its due recognition? The ultimate recognition would be the full achievement of the vision that Mau Mau fought for. Pio Gama Pinto’s<sup>19</sup> suggestion now needs to be taken up seriously:

“The sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands of Kenya’s freedom fighters must be honoured by the effective implementation of the policy – a democratic, African, socialist state in which the people have the right to be free from economic exploitation and the right to social equality. Kenya’s *uhuru* [independence] must not be transformed into freedom to exploit, or freedom to be hungry and live in ignorance. *Uhuru* must be *uhuru* for the masses – *uhuru* from exploitation, from ignorance, disease and poverty.”<sup>20</sup>

A reaffirmation of the values that Mau Mau stood for also requires becoming activists for liberation. As a start, perhaps, those who support the ideals of Mau Mau can come together to set up some of the following mechanisms to make that ideal possible:

- Erect national monuments in all major towns in Kenya to honour the memory of freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for Kenya’s struggle for liberation.
- Set up a National Liberation Research, Museum and Archives Centre where the histories, publications and material culture of all national heroes can be collected and used as part of Kenya’s heritage and for teaching and learning purposes.
- Set up a Mau Mau International Award to honour those who make an outstanding contribution to the political, economic and social liberation of Africa.
- Set up a Mau Mau Research Centre at the University of Nairobi to encourage research on the Kenyan struggle for liberation.

*This now-completed series is a revised version of a talk given at a public meeting organised by the Mau Mau Justice Network (MMNJ) in June 2012 in London. It is based on the author’s book, Kimaathi, Mau Mau’s first Prime Minister of Kenya (Vita Books, London, 2009; first published 1986).*

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18 The plea is made by Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai, Joseph Murumbi and Achieng Oneko. See Barnett and Njama, *op cit*, Preface, p ii.  
19 N R Durrani, *Pio Gama Pinto, 1926-1965*, in *Alakmalak* (Nairobi), series on ‘Biographies of

Patriotic Asian Kenyans, December 1985, writes: “Pinto joined other brave patriots in the work of transporting weapons and other necessities to the Mau Mau freedom fighters in their hideouts. ... Pinto believed that for a country to get political independence was only the first step. After that, further action needed to be taken to improve the basic living conditions of the ordinary citizens. It would be necessary to remove the economic control of the foreign banks and multinational and commercial corporations over the country. Along with this, further steps would have to be taken to ensure that the country’s wealth did not fall or remain in the hands of the few but was distributed to all the people. ... It is inevitable that any Kenyan patriot holding such beliefs develops many deadly enemies. On 24 February 1965, those cowardly enemies shot and assassinated Pio Gama Pinto for being a brave and patriotic Kenyan. Pinto died on the spot and became a political martyr.” [Translation from the Gujarati by Naila Durrani]  
20 P Gama Pinto, *Glimpses of Kenya’s Nationalist Struggle in Pan Africa*, 12 December 1963, p 39.

# Clara Zetkin's British Connections: An Overview



By John S Partington

Clara Zetkin was a German socialist and women's leader who emerged in the socialist movement in 1881 just as socialist activities were being outlawed in Germany. After brief stints in Austria and Switzerland, from where she assisted in smuggling the illegal socialist newspaper, *Der Sozialdemokrat*, into Germany, she lived a self-imposed exile in Paris for nine years (1881-1890) with her common-law husband, Ossip Zetkin, and two children. Zetkin's first contacts with the British socialist movement began in Paris, initially by interacting with Britons passing through the French capital but also through her journalism. In 1889 an article by Zetkin analysing the division in the French socialist movement between the Marxist *Parti Ouvrier Français* and the reformist (or 'possibilist') *Fédération des Travailleurs Socialistes de France*,<sup>1</sup> caught the attention of Friedrich Engels and Eduard Bernstein, two exiles in London. Indeed, Engels and Bernstein used Zetkin's essay as a propaganda piece to try and persuade the British editor of *The Star*, Henry Massingham, to support the Marxists instead of the reformists.<sup>2</sup>

## The Second International and the Women's Suffrage Issue

In terms of wider publicity, Zetkin's major breakthrough in British leftist circles came with her role in organising the founding congress of the Second International in Paris in 1889, at which she was a German delegate (one of a handful of women with official party credentials), a translator and the speaker on the relationship of socialism to the emerging women's movement. In her speech, Zetkin argued for the inclusion of women in the main socialist parties and trade unions, acknowledging the need for women's sections within parties and unions in some circumstances (such as in Germany where it was illegal for women to join parties officially or, in some states, become members of trade unions), but rejecting the notion of separate women's organisations independent of the men's groups.<sup>3</sup> For Zetkin, then as throughout her life, class solidarity was privileged over gender issues, and she persistently argued against any collaboration between the proletarian ('socialist') women's movement and that of the bourgeois ('feminist')

women's movement.

With the foundation of the Second International, Zetkin attended and played a role in every one of its gatherings from 1889 to 1912, and her activities were reported in the British socialist, labour and – occasionally – mainstream press throughout the period. In 1896, with London hosting the 4th Congress of the Second International, Zetkin received wide coverage, initially because her prominence as a female leader of the German and international socialist movement was now being widely recognised,<sup>4</sup> but also because she was a leading member of the Education Commission at the congress under the chairmanship of Sidney Webb, the British Fabian socialist delegate.

Zetkin's role, although she stood shoulder to shoulder with Webb in the presentation of the Education Report, contributed to controversy. The Report advocated free primary and secondary education for all, and free university education for those with the ability to profit by it. Keir Hardie of the British Independent Labour Party (ILP) objected to the intelligence qualification

implicit in the Report's proposals, and argued for universal university education as a right, regardless of intellectual capacity. Zetkin felt this to be undesirable, as not only is university not an appropriate route for all, but she looked at the jingoistic blockheads which the universities were then producing and cast doubts on the value of university education as a civilising, enabling medium! Despite Zetkin's and Webb's arguments against, Hardie's amendment was carried and free university education on demand became official socialist policy.<sup>5</sup>

By the end of the London socialist congress, Zetkin was well acquainted with her fellow congress translator, Eleanor Marx-Aveling, the daughter of Karl Marx, and herself a British trade union organiser. Although Eleanor died tragically in 1898, her writings were important in promoting Zetkin among the British left during her incipient international career. Indeed, in 1896, Marx-Aveling and E Belfort Bax entered into controversy in the pages of *Justice* over a report which the former made of a Zetkin speech at Gotha, in which Zetkin quoted Engels'



statement that “in the family the man is the bourgeois, the woman represents the proletariat”.<sup>6</sup> Bax, that famous misogynist, countered this perspective, arguing that men were so encumbered by the law to provide for their wives and ensure the decent upbringing of their children that they – not the women – were the exploited parties in modern society!<sup>7</sup> Marx-Aveling published a reply to Bax, and he was also countered by a number of others.<sup>8,9</sup>

Although Zetkin continued to be reported in the British press after 1896 – not least in 1900 when she praised the Social Democratic Federation (SDF) for its anti-war stance against the Second Boer War in an article in which she promoted, for the first time, her famous cry of socialist “War against war”<sup>10</sup> – her next major appearance came in 1907 with the founding conference of the Socialist Women’s International (SWI), which Zetkin chaired throughout its existence. The 1907 conference was staged in Zetkin’s home town of Stuttgart shortly before the full congress of the Second International, and some of its deliberations were discussed at the congress.

The main achievement of the conference was a ruling on the suffrage campaign. Despite British efforts to encourage suffragism to take appropriate forms as the political climate dictated in the different countries of Europe and the USA, Zetkin succeeded – by some sharp footwork – in spurring delegates into accepting universal suffrage as the one and only goal of the international socialist movement; while the narrow movement for women’s suffrage on terms of equality with men was rejected as a bourgeois attempt to strengthen middle class power and further weaken the working class.



The British ILP delegates, notably Margaret McMillan and Margaret MacDonald, argued that, with its long liberal tradition, Britain was exceptional, and incremental changes to the suffrage laws were sure signs of the gradual move towards eventual universal suffrage. The ILP delegates, however, were silenced by Zetkin through her partisan recognition of Dora Montefiore as the British delegation’s spokeswoman.

Montefiore, an SDF delegate who had left the women’s suffrage movement following a dispute with its leadership, was an active adult suffragist, and despite being in a minority position among the British delegates, argued against the women’s suffrage position and for the resolution on universalism. A disgruntled ILP delegation, although unsuccessfully attempting to persuade Zetkin to give them speaking time, remained

silenced and the universal position was carried as official socialist women’s policy.<sup>11,12</sup>

On the back of her success in Stuttgart, Montefiore returned to Britain and formed the British Branch of the new Socialist Women’s Bureau, which was headed by Zetkin from Stuttgart, with the journal she edited (1891-1917), *Die Gleichheit*, acting as its official organ. Perhaps as a means of cementing her leadership



role of the British movement on the international scene, and hoping to heighten her position within the domestic movement, Montefiore arranged for an official visit by Zetkin to London in 1909. Zetkin's series of appointments was widely reported, and Montefiore not only promoted the trip heavily in advance, but hosted Zetkin in her home and organised a platform position for her on the Adult Suffrage Society stage at the May Day rally in Hyde Park. At an Adult Suffrage Society event in Holborn Town Hall, Zetkin was joined by H M Hyndman, the leader of the Social Democratic Party (SDP, as the SDF was now known) and Lady Warwick, the 'Red Countess', and she also brought to London the Russian women's leader, Alexandra Kollontai, who addressed audiences about the experiences of the socialist women's movement in her country.<sup>13,14</sup>

If Montefiore's hosting of Zetkin in London was designed to advance her leadership of the British socialist women's movement, it had no effect for, when the second SWI conference took place in Copenhagen in 1910, the ILP delegation, which was once again overlooked in favour of Montefiore, staged a walkout<sup>15</sup> and on their return to Britain formed the British Section of the Women's International Council of Socialist and Labour Organisations, which excluded the SDP and eliminated Montefiore from any position of significance in the socialist women's movement. Although the suffrage question re-emerged at the 1910 conference, the major achievement at that event was Zetkin and Louise Zeitz's resolution establishing International Women's Day (IWD). First staged in 1911, and although IWD never gained a prominent place in the calendar of British women socialists, its celebration throughout Europe was widely

reported in the British socialist press.

While Zetkin's prime outlet in Britain from 1893 to 1910 had been the Social Democratic journal, *Justice*, from 1911 she started publishing and being reported in the journals of the Women's Labour League (WLL), the *League Leaflet* and *Labour Woman*; and from this time until 1918 these journals become her primary media for publicity in Britain. The WLL was closely allied to the ILP and the Labour Party as well as a number of trade unions (and indeed would eventually transform into the Women's Section of the Labour Party in 1918), so although Zetkin's influence on the SDF receded to a degree, the shift which took place from 1910 gave Zetkin exposure to the vast bulk of the British labour movement, as the ILP was largest membership organisation of all working class political groups, and the Labour Party had become by that time the most successful electoral machine of the socialist and labour movements.

### The Campaign Against Imperialist War

With her influence increasing, Zetkin took a prominent role in the emerging peace movement of the second decade of the twentieth century. When a general European war seemed imminent with the outbreak of the Balkan Wars in 1912, Zetkin wrote on behalf of the Second International to invite delegates from Britain to the Extraordinary International Socialist Congress in Basel. As the congress was organised at short notice, Zetkin did not have time to arrange an SWI conference in advance, but she called on the socialist men of Britain to ensure that a representation of women would attend Basel.<sup>16,17</sup> The congress was widely reported in the British left-wing press and Montefiore re-emerged, acting as the official reporter

of the congress for the *Daily Herald*, the largest circulation labour newspaper in Britain.<sup>18</sup> Montefiore publicised Zetkin's role as the spokeswoman of the SWI and reported her own presence between Zetkin and Rosa Luxemburg in the march of the delegates towards Basel Minster.

Montefiore's articles for the *Daily Herald* were, however, controversial and her frankness resulted in her forced resignation from the British Socialist Party (BSP, as the SDP had been rechristened). She was displeased at the International Socialist Bureau's decision to end the delegates' peace march at the Minster, feeling that it breached socialist principles to gather in a Christian institution when Christianity was (in Marxian terms) an official organ of European capitalism and was complicit in the exploitation and oppression of the working class. More controversially, she was critical of the Bureau for deciding on the congress's resolutions without consultation with the delegates, expecting instead the delegates to simply rubber-stamp the resolutions without debate. On her return to Britain, Montefiore was hauled before the BSP leadership, given a dressing down and humiliated in such a way that she felt obliged to resign from the party.<sup>19</sup> If her leadership of the British socialist women's movement was ended in 1910, her credibility as a spokesperson for British socialism was ended in 1912 and she became a marginal figure in British politics until the 1920s and her re-emergence as a journalist in the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB).

If Zetkin's role in the 1912 peace congress was to raise the clarion call to delegates, during the Great War itself she became a focal point for socialist women's opposition to the conflict. Her activities in Germany and numerous pieces of her

journalism (when they could get past the German censors and reach Britain via neutral countries such as Switzerland and the Netherlands) were reported in Britain. Her rhetoric of socialist women's international solidarity across the battle fronts gave spirit to the socialist peace movement in Britain and encouraged socialists to argue that the war was not against the German people but against the ruling classes of all lands, who used war for national advantage in world trade and imperialism, and for dividing the international proletarian movement against itself, thus strengthening bourgeois hegemony. The pinnacle of Zetkin's peace efforts during the Great War came in 1915 when she organised the SWI peace conference in Bern, the first occasion when delegates from across the battle fronts came together to rally for peace, passing resolutions and publishing a joint declaration and a manifesto for international mass distribution. From Britain, Mary Longman, Marion Phillips, Ada Salter and Margaret Bondfield attended;<sup>20</sup> and the resolutions, joint declaration and manifesto were widely publicised.<sup>21</sup>

### Communism and the Comintern

Already during the Great War, Zetkin had written of the need for a Third International to replace the morally bankrupt Second International, which had crumbled as war was declared, many of its affiliate parties signing up to wartime coalitions and supporting their bourgeois governments. As early as 1915, Zetkin joined Luxemburg, Karl Liebknecht and others in forming the underground Spartacus League in Germany; and in 1917, following her purging from the editorship of *Die Gleichheit*, she left the Social Democratic Party of Germany and joined the Independent Social Democrats (USPD).

## LETTER FROM CLARA ZETKIN TO FLORENCE BALDWIN

Birkenwerder, near Berlin  
Bahnhofsallee 14  
27.9.1930

Dear Comrade Florence Baldwin  
I got your letter of the 10<sup>th</sup> inst on the 21<sup>st</sup>. Following that it was impossible to reply to you within the time that you were staying in Stuttgart. My apologies for that, and so I am writing in the hope that my letter will be forwarded to you. I was not in Stuttgart, and could not get there on account of my poor health, which prevents me from travelling, and particularly for meetings. Had I been in Stuttgart, I would have certainly tried to see you again. I am pleased at least to hear from you by letter, and to know that in your heart you are keeping faith with communism.

Concerning your differences with the CP in England (*sic*) I can make no judgement, because I don't know the exact particulars under which you feel driven to the breach of discipline by your conviction of wanting to serve the interests of the Party and the spreading [of its influence] among the working masses. Even less am I aware of the grounds on which the Party leadership has decided to proceed with sharpness against you and your [woman] friend. As for your appeal to the ECCI, it is presumably being dealt with in the secretariat for English-American countries. I am not in a position to give you any information [about that]. In Spring 1927 I was very ill with pneumonia [*literally*, 'lung inflammation' – Trans] and the flu, and ever since then I have not been able to regain my health. I was many a time away for a course of treatment in Moscow sanatoria. Admittedly I took on the work as much as possible, however I was not able to participate as earlier in all the consultations of the ECCI and its organs. For more than a year I have consequently been keeping to the advice of the splendid Moscow doctors towards treatment in Germany. As soon as I get back my strength I shall return to the work in Moscow. In the meantime, on account of my heart condition, my ability to work is very limited, particularly through the fact that I have gone almost blind and must have most [items] read to me. As things stand, I can also only support the election campaign through writings.

I would advise you, dear comrade Florence, to apply to the Party Executive with the request to be taken back into the Party – this with emphasis of your good intentions, which led to the breach of discipline, and with acknowledgement that you recognise the error of your actions. It seems to me that the selfless devotion to the communist ideal – which you have demonstrated, as far as I know – will make the acerbic, necessary formal step easier for you. Certainly there are good comrades in the Party who are familiar with your benevolent character, who know that, despite all differences, you are indissolubly linked with the cause of communism, and who will support your endeavours. I shall be pleased to hear of the success of this approach, and to learn that you are marching and fighting once again in the ranks and membership of the Party.

With very best wishes  
[Clara Zetkin]

■ *The typewritten German original of this letter is held in the German Federal Archive on Clara Zetkin, NY4005/70-7-8, a copy of which was obtained by John S Partington. The translation is by Martin Levy.*

It was as a USPD member that Zetkin won her first electoral contest, becoming a member of the Württemberg State Assembly in 1919. The following year, however, she had transferred her allegiance to the newly formed Communist Party of Germany and was the first of its members to be elected to the German National Assembly, remaining in the Reichstag until her death in June 1933.

As a communist and a confidante of Lenin, Zetkin quickly rose to the leadership of the International Communist Women's Movement and had a seat on the Communist International (the Comintern), often holding executive positions. In 1922 she was appointed one of three delegates from the Comintern during the failed efforts to merge the three socialist internationals (the Comintern, the Second International and the Vienna International). Her international influence was further extended through her presidency of the International Red Aid and her leadership of the Friends of Soviet Russia. Though weakened by ill-health from the mid-1920s onwards and out of favour in the Comintern following the rise of Joseph Stalin, Zetkin remained an important figure, being seen as representing the pure course of socialism from the Second International to the Communist International.

As the oldest member of the German National Assembly, she became its president-by-seniority following the 1932 national elections. Although her role was simply to chair the assembly until a President of the Reichstag could be elected from amongst its members, she used her position to deliver an hour-long, widely reported tirade against Nazism, ending her speech by hoping that the next time she spoke would be to welcome the formation of a Soviet Republic of Germany.

## Florence Baldwin

During her years as a communist, Zetkin never visited Britain and she forged no new personal relationships with British socialists. The wide publicity she continued to receive took the form of newspaper reports of her activities in Moscow and Berlin and the reprinting of her speeches and reports produced on behalf of the Comintern by the CPGB. Occasionally, however, Zetkin did receive requests for assistance from communists in Britain, though she was either not able or not willing to intervene directly on their behalf. A case in point is the letter printed alongside this article from Zetkin to Florence Baldwin.

Little is known about Baldwin beyond her membership of the Paddington Branch of the CPGB from 1920 to 1926 (and her expulsion) and her translations of German-language pamphlets for the CPGB and earlier for the SDP and the Socialist Labour Party. Examples of these include Karl Kautsky's *The Capitalist Class* (Twentieth Century Press, 1908) and *The Class Struggle* (Socialist Labour Press, 1918) and Karl Marx's *Wage-Labour and Capital* (CPGB, 1925). Judging from a letter Baldwin wrote to the *Socialist Standard* in January 1927 entitled *Materialism v Spiritism Again*, she appears to have held tolerant (or agnostic) views towards spiritualism, views which would have been unwelcome within the communist movement. In the letter she is curious about what research into spiritualism might produce, stating: "I understand modern thought is changing very much in its ideas regarding the nature of matter, etc, and the fullest, freest discussion ought to be permitted." She also expresses her concern at many socialists' blanket rejection of spiritualist phenomena, writing: "Certainly religious advocates dogmatise, as you



say, but is that any reason why Communists and Socialists should do the same?"<sup>22</sup>

Kevin Morgan, in his entry on Baldwin in the database of Communist lives, cites internal Party documents which show that Baldwin's expulsion from the CPGB was due to her indiscipline of making, with Isabel Kingsley, a "public appeal for 'a Study Group to propagate ideas in opposition to the theory of Historical Materialism as held by C[ommunist] I[nternational]'" and, although the study group did not appear, she published a pamphlet on the subject. In her appeal against expulsion on 19 April 1927, Baldwin stated that "We should never

have dreamed of going outside the Party to publish anything but for the determined suppression of free speech inside."<sup>23</sup> Needless to say, with a comment like this, her readmission to the Party was refused. Nonetheless, Baldwin continued her efforts to rejoin the CPGB and in Zetkin's letter to Baldwin of 27 September 1930,<sup>24</sup> it is clear the latter had appealed to Zetkin for assistance in gaining readmission. Unfortunately, it is unknown where Baldwin's papers reside (if, indeed, they still exist), so we do not have any letters from Baldwin to Zetkin which might furnish further details about her criticisms of and treatment by the CPGB

(no correspondence from Baldwin exists in the Zetkin papers at the Bundesarchiv, Berlin-Lichterfelde, or in the Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Amsterdam). Beyond Baldwin's letter to the *Socialist Standard*, Zetkin's letter to Baldwin, Baldwin's translations and the few citations Morgan refers to from the CPGB archives, little is known about Florence Baldwin's life and political activities. If any readers can assist with details about Baldwin, either from her own perspective, or through references by others, the author of this article would be very grateful to learn of them.

There has been little

research published on Zetkin in English, despite her significant position in the Second International, the SWI and the Comintern.<sup>25</sup> But the information contained in this overview shows there is clearly much to be gained from a serious consideration of Zetkin's life, work and thought. And mysteries such as that of the Baldwin letter suggest there are layers of research beyond that which I have touched on here.

■ Readers can respond to the author's appeal about Florence Baldwin, or indeed with any information about Clara Zetkin and the British scene, by e-mailing him at [J\\_S\\_Partington@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:J_S_Partington@hotmail.co.uk).

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3 *The International Congresses*, in *Reynolds's Newspaper*, 21 July 1889.

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6 F Engels quoted by E[leanor] M[arx] A[veling], *The Gotha Congress*, in *Justice*, 7 November 1896, p 8.

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15 M E MacDonald, *Women at the Copenhagen Congress*, in *Labour Leader*, 9 September 1910, p 571.

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17 M Macpherson, *International Notes*, in *League Leaflet*, 24 (December 1912), p 8.

18 D B Montefiore, *For World's Peace: Socialists Assemble at Basle: Striking Scene in the Cathedral*, in *Daily Herald*, 27 November 1912, p 3; *To Prevent War: Principles for Workers of the World: The Mad Rivalry in Armaments*, in *Daily Herald*, 28 November 1912, p 5; and *Congress Farce: Tactics of the Bureau; Delegates' Wasted Journey*, in *Daily Herald*, 27 November 1912, p 3.

19 D B Montefiore, note in *Justice*, 7 December 1912.

20 The British attendees were delegated by the following organisations: Women's Labour League (Longman); Women's International Council, British Section (Phillips); the ILP and Women's Trade Union League (Bondfield); and the ILP (Salter).

21 See *Women's War against War: Towards the New Socialist International*, in *The Labour Woman*, 2.12 (April 1915), pp 285-6; *Bravo, Our Women! International Conference Held*, in *Labour Leader*, 8 April 1915, p 7; *The Socialist Women's International: Inspiring Manifesto*, in *Labour Leader*, 22 April 1915, p 3; M Phillips, *The Women's International: A May Message to the Working Women of All Lands; Report of the Extraordinary Conference of Labour and Socialist Women held at Berne, Switzerland, on March 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>, 1915*, in *Labour Woman*, 3.1 (May 1915), pp 291-6; and *The International Conference of Socialist and Labour Women, Manifesto to the Working Women of Belligerent Countries from the International Conference of Socialist and Labour Women*, in *The Labour Woman*, 3.2 (June 1915), p 303.

22 F Baldwin, *Materialism v Spiritism Again*, letter to the editor, *Socialist Standard*, 269 (January 1927), online at <http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/socialist-standard/1920s/1927/no-269-january-1927/materialism-v-spiritism-again>.

23 Kevin Morgan's entry on Florence Baldwin in the database of Communist lives was sent to the author as an email attachment by Gidon Cohen, Senior Lecturer in Politics at the University of Durham, 10 April 2013, by request of Morgan himself.

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# Dickens: Not Quite An Ideological Agnostic A Reply To Discussion

By Ken Fuller

## Misunderstanding and Misinterpretation

The main purpose of my two-parter on Dickens<sup>1</sup> was to demonstrate that, sympathetic though he undoubtedly was to the plight of the downtrodden, Dickens was not supportive of attempts by British workers to better their lot by collective means and was vigorously opposed to armed revolt by the colonial masses, stooping to crude expressions of racism in the latter case. It therefore comes as a surprise to see it suggested that I was intent on “the demolition of a national treasure”<sup>2</sup> and that my article constituted an “attack”.<sup>3</sup>

This surprise is heightened by the fact that neither contributor actually challenges the thesis itself (Doug McLeod, of course, replied before the second part of the piece appeared), tending instead to take me to task for what I did *not* say.

Some of this may be due to no more than a misunderstanding. David Grove claims that “many Marxists will find [Fuller’s] conclusions inadequate” due to my failure to judge Dickens’s novels “in the light of their total impact on the reader.” They would be right to do so if my intention had been to write a full-scale evaluation of Dickens’s total *oeuvre*. It should be clear from the above, however, that my aim was rather more limited than this.

I have no problem with the proposition that Dickens was one of the most popular novelists of all time who created a host of memorable characters. Indeed, I have written as much myself.<sup>4</sup> Nor would I dispute the claim that Dickens’s work often challenged authority. What I *do* argue, however, is that this claim should not be extended beyond the bounds for which evidence exists, that such evidence should be examined carefully in order to avoid misinterpretation, and that Marxists must examine *all* the evidence, not merely that which confirms a previously-held view.

## A Vast National Audience

David Grove complains that most of my quotations are taken from Dickens’s non-fiction. Well, he might have a case regarding the second part of the article, but certainly not with the first, which deals with the writer’s approach to the British masses. In any case, the writer of the novels, the short stories, the journalism and the correspondence was the same Charles Dickens: he was all of a piece. As Gabriel Pearson says:

“Dickens’s life was not peripheral to his artistic career but one with it. In a complex variety of ways he managed, in his actual career, to embody nearly all the typical experiences of his age, and this despite the fact that he was personally very neurotic with a private case-history of mental trauma. Yet somehow he was able to make his private conflicts and compulsions public, to integrate them with a wide social vision and to stir the imaginative depths of a vast national audience.”<sup>5</sup>

Doug McLeod also refers to this audience, pointing out that it was so broad that it ran from Marx at one end of the spectrum to Queen Victoria at the other. Yes, and there are stories of errand-boys standing on the street with their noses in *Household Words*, eagerly consuming the latest instalment of the current novel. But the very breadth of this audience (Queen Victoria!) surely demonstrates that Dickens, while he mercilessly criticised various aspects of contemporary society, was hardly likely to challenge the whole system – and he didn’t.

Dickens’s second visit to the USA in 1867, when he apologised for earlier remarks about that country, was, writes Doug McLeod, “to the modern state that emerged from the Civil War, victorious, prosperous and with the

blight of slavery removed.” Yes, and this was precisely my point! A quarter of a century after his first visit, the bourgeois system had been consolidated in the USA – but this was the very order to which, some claim, Charles Dickens was opposed.

“An essential precondition for collective political action and organisation,” Doug says, “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.” He then gives a number of examples where Dickens’s characters challenge authority. In so doing, he really makes my point, because they do so *on an individual basis*. We can readily agree that Dickens “remorselessly exposed to scrutiny and ridicule the host of authority figures”, but while *we* may see these as “the indispensable functionaries of an oppressive society”, there is no evidence that Dickens did; equally, *we* may see that his criticisms of capitalist society “point to the need for revolution”<sup>3</sup>, but this is not the way Dickens saw it – quite the reverse, in fact, for he was anxious to *avoid* revolution.

McLeod claims that my criticism that Dickens failed to write about work is unfair because 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.” To a certain extent this is true, but quite frankly Doug seems to be painting a picture of the 18<sup>th</sup> rather than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1841 – early in Dickens’s career – workers in white collar and public administration posts accounted for just over 2 percent of Britain’s total occupied population, whereas almost three times as many worked in metal manufacture, engineering and allied industries; add those in mining, transport and building and the white-collar employees are outnumbered by



eight or nine to one.<sup>6</sup> Had this not been the case, Marx would have been unable to write *Capital*. If Dickens had wished to write about manual workers, he would have had plenty from which to choose. His one attempt to do so was, as we know, a failure.

### Red Nose Day

In the late 1980s, a union colleague and I were recruiting bus drivers employed by a private operator in East London when we were approached by a member of staff attired as a clown – it was Red Nose Day.

“So what union are you from?” enquired the clown.

“Transport & General Workers’ Union”, I replied.

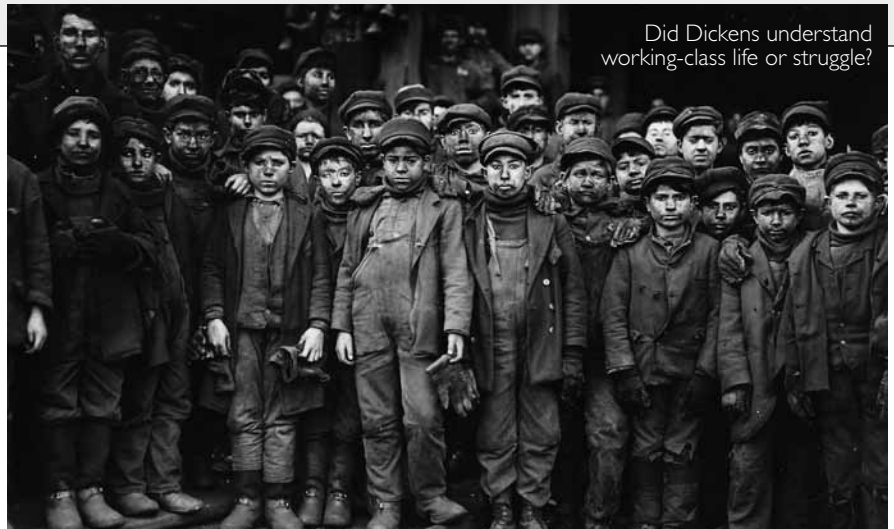
“Never heard of it”, said the clown.

“In which case,” deadpanned my colleague, “you’re wearing the right costume.”

I mention this because David Grove argues that although Dickens shows no understanding of working-class life or struggle in *Hard Times*, the “antithesis to Gradgrind’s capitalist outlook is not the worker nor the trade union official, both unconvincingly described, but the men and women of the circus. They are not proletarians but they are most definitely of the People.”

Having frowned at me for citing social-democrats like George Orwell and Dingle Foot, Grove himself cites the reactionary F R Leavis’s emphasis on the “positive humanist quality” of the book. It is worth remembering that the action takes place in Coketown (based on Preston, to which Dickens made a research trip), and that the entire labouring population of that town was available for the purposes of antithesis-selection. Healthily humane though their values may be, circus folk stand outside the class struggle and it is all too easy to see why Leavis (who, apart from any class position he may have adopted, was opposed to modern mass culture) approved.

Picture for a moment the author in Preston in January 1854 and ask why he is not drawn to the organised working class. The place is swarming with workers, and there is a strike on, and yet Dickens finds himself “thoroughly bored and depressed.”<sup>7</sup> According to his friend John Forster, the trip was specifically undertaken to “verify ... a strike in a



Did Dickens understand working-class life or struggle?

manufacturing town,” and Dickens was “somewhat disappointed,” complaining:

“I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here. Except the crowds at the street-corners reading the placards pro and con; and the cold absence of smoke from the mill-chimneys; there is very little in the streets to make the town remarkable. I am told that the people ‘sit at home and mope’. The delegates with the money from the neighbouring places come in to-day to report the amounts they bring; and to-morrow the people are paid. When I have seen both these ceremonies, I shall return.”<sup>8</sup>

The inference here is that Dickens went to Preston in search of spectacle and tumult and, finding none, cut short his trip. It does not seem to have occurred to him to interview the strikers or seek out their leaders. And, indeed, why should he have? Because David Grove is mistaken when he describes *Hard Times* as an “overtly anti-capitalist novel”. Dickens was seeking an antithesis not to capitalism itself but to *utilitarianism*, that arid, joyless approach to life, learning and labour proposed by Bentham. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that Dickens chose clowns and acrobats, with their emphasis on fun, enjoyment and leisure, as its antithesis.

Furthermore, it is surely not without significance that Dickens inscribed *Hard Times* to Carlyle.<sup>9</sup> Thomas Carlyle was a great influence on Dickens, who used his history of the French Revolution as the basis for *A Tale of Two Cities*. Carlyle was opposed to both the aristocracy and bourgeois democracy, which he thought tolerable only as the basis for selecting the “great man,” the “hero” - echoes

of which can be found in Dickens’s *A Child’s History of England*, where praise is reserved for Alfred the Great and Oliver Cromwell. In 1840, Carlyle had published a short book entitled *Chartism*, at the outset of which he declares:

“The melancholy fact remains, that this thing known at present by the name Chartism does exist; has existed; and, either ‘put down’, into secret treason, with rusty pistols, vitriol-bottle and match-box, or openly brandishing pike and torch (one knows not in which case more fatal-looking), is like to exist till quite other methods have been tried with it. What means this bitter discontent of the Working Classes? Whence comes it, whither goes it? Above all, at what price, on what terms, will it probably consent to depart from us and die into rest?”<sup>10</sup>

This precisely mirrors Dickens’s own attitude to mass movements. It is interesting to note, furthermore, that Carlyle concludes by recommending emigration as a means of reducing the danger of revolution, a view shared by Dickens, who campaigned for emigration schemes.

### A Popular Sensibility

David Grove cites Arnold Kettle’s suggestion that “Thackeray, Gaskell and Eliot, though highly critical of some aspects of capitalist society, had a middle-class sensibility, whereas Dickens’s is *popular*.” Grove goes on, however, to argue that it “would be unrealistic to expect a novelist of Dickens’s time to write with working class sensibility.” Maybe so, but I do not recall arguing otherwise. My point

was that Dickens failed to support mass struggles, whether in this country or in the colonial world – something that would not have been possible without the full development of a working-class outlook.

As David points out, I did not mention Dickens's Birmingham speech of 1869, and I am grateful to him for providing me with the opportunity to discuss it here, because – if considered in context – it throws valuable light on Dickens's 'popular sensibility'. The occasion was the inaugural address, on September 27, of the winter session of the Birmingham and Midland Institute, of which Dickens was president. In acknowledging the vote of thanks, Dickens responded to a remark therein by stating: "My faith in the people governing is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the People governed, is, on the whole, illimitable."

"This," comments Gabriel Pearson, "is a long way from Carlyle's contempt for the people; likewise, it is not a socialist opinion. It could best be described, bearing in mind the period, as lower middle-class common sense" (this being, in Pearson's view, Dickens's class position). Pearson says that it was commonly found that such a view was accompanied by anarchism, which had "much in common with that traditionally English working class scepticism displayed towards institutions and the men that 'work' them."

"Basically, on the psychological, as on the social level, it was the expression of a disappointed and ineffective idealism, which persisted through all the activity of an often startlingly successful mission to improve the lot of the common man. This Anarchism must have been a potent contribution to his popularity. It enabled him to reach the levels of revolt that were unformulated and hidden in the minds of a working class not always very politically conscious. It explains further why he so disastrously misunderstood political activity such as Trade Unionism. His portrait of industrial conflict in *Hard Times* is narrow and unconvincing. It is significant that in this novel his working class hero, Stephen Blackpool, is, for personal reasons, outlawed from both his own work-mates and the Capitalists.

The only comment he can find to contain his situation is, 'See how we die and no need one way and another – in a muddle – every day!' This [is] almost the despairing cry of the ideological agnostic of all ages."<sup>11</sup>

Whether, in identifying this streak of anarchism in the novelist, Pearson was aware of Dickens's sequel to the remark of September 1869, I have no idea. If not, then his analysis was certainly insightful. For, instead of leaving things at that, Dickens returned to the Birmingham and Midland Institute on January 6, 1870, just five months before his death, to award prizes and certificates to the top-notchers of the Institute's first year. In his comments following the ceremony, he explained the remark he had made the previous September (significantly, he refers to this as "a short confession of my political faith – or perhaps I should say want of faith"), and here that anarchism is expressed even more explicitly.

"Now I complain of nobody; but simply in order that there may be no mistake as to what I did mean, and as to what I do mean, I will restate my meaning, and I will do so in the words of a great thinker, a great writer, and a great scholar, whose death, unfortunately for mankind, cut short his *History of Civilization in England*: "They may talk as they will about reforms which Government has introduced and improvements to be expected from legislation, but whoever will take a wider and more commanding view of human affairs, will soon discover that such hopes are chimerical. They will learn that lawgivers are nearly always the obstructors of society instead of its helpers, and that in the extremely few cases where their measures have turned out well their success has been owing to the fact that, contrary to their usual custom, they have implicitly obeyed the spirit of their time, and have been – as they always should be – the mere servants of the people, to whose wishes they are bound to give a public and legal sanction."<sup>12</sup>

The author Dickens quotes so approvingly is Henry Thomas Buckle



(1821-62), the son of a wealthy London merchant and ship-owner who attempted to show (not entirely successfully) that the progress of European civilisation was due to environmental factors. Updated, the passage he quotes becomes the language of present-day American libertarianism.

Exaggeration? Not at all: log on to the Cato Institute's website [www.libertarianism.org](http://www.libertarianism.org) and you will see Buckle's *History of Civilization in England* described as "one of the most libertarian histories ever written."<sup>13</sup> Seen in this light, the brief creed of September 1869 confirms Dickens as the "petit-bourgeois in revolt",<sup>14</sup> but we also see that he was not quite an "ideological agnostic".

## Notes and References

- 1 K Fuller, *Charles Dickens: The Masses, Race and Empire, Part 1*, in *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 2-8, and *Part 2*, in *CR66*, Winter 2012/13, pp 8-11.
- 2 D McLeod, *What the Dickens ...?*, in *CR66*, Winter 2012/13, pp 28-9.
- 3 D Grove, *More on Dickens*, in *CR68*, Summer 2013, pp 28-9.
- 4 K Fuller, *The Dickens Bicentenary*, in *Daily Tribune*, 7 February 2012. However, as this appeared in a Manila newspaper, few British readers would have seen it.
- 5 G Pearson, *Dickens and his Readers*, in *Universities & Left Review*, Spring 1957, Vol 1, No 1, p 52. This journal was one of the forerunners of the *New Left Review*.
- 6 E J Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: An Economic History of Britain since 1750* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1968), Diagram 7.
- 7 D Foot, *Introduction to C Dickens, Hard Times* (Heron Books, London, no date), p vii.
- 8 J Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (Cecil Palmer, London, 1872-4), pp 514-5.
- 9 *Ibid*, p 514.
- 10 T Carlyle, *Chartism* (James Fraser, London, 1840), pp 2-3.
- 11 Pearson, *op cit*, pp 53-4.
- 12 C Dickens, *Speeches: Literary and Social* (Kessinger Publishing, Whitefish, Montana, 2004), p 124.
- 13 G H Smith, *Among My Favorites: 'History of Civilization in England', by H.T. Buckle, Part 1*, [www.libertarianism.org](http://www.libertarianism.org), 21 May 2013.
- 14 T A Jackson, *Charles Dickens: The Progress of a Radical* (International Publishers, New York, 1987), p 14. In this, at least, Jackson was on target.

# Discussion: The Tukhachevsky Trial of 1937

By John Ellison

THE THREE *Communist Review* articles by Yuri Emelianov<sup>1</sup> contain a wealth of information and viewpoint. In my own previous piece<sup>2</sup> I attempted to respond to the first of Emelianov's articles. I seek here only to consider the circumstances of the arrest and executions of 'the generals' in June 1937.

I rely here on the account of the accusations against Tukhachevsky and seven other generals, and of their interrogations and trial, supplied in Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge* (1989 edition)<sup>3</sup> and in Dmitri Volkogonov's *Stalin*<sup>4</sup> (which is consistent with Medvedev's), written in the early 1980s (see Author's Preface), and which first appeared in Russian in 1989, and in Britain in English in 1991. I draw brief supplementary material from Simon Sebag Montefiore's *Stalin: The Court of the Red Tsar*.<sup>5</sup>

Yuri Emelianov deals with the generals' trial in his second article. His approach is narrative/descriptive rather than analytical. Thus he assumes from the start a 'Tukhachevsky plot', and his chosen material is selective. Centrally, he chooses to avoid answering the well entrenched evidence that this trial was a sham, a frame-up. Indeed he walks past the long acknowledged evidence as if it did not exist. True, my professional credentials as a student in this field are feeble enough; but I rely here not on my own research, but on the inquiries and conclusions of the two weighty historians with whose work Emelianov prefers, in his three articles, not to engage directly through serious analysis.

I open with Volkogonov, who states that the trial of the eight generals before a military court of nine on 11 June 1937 "opened at nine in the morning and the sentence was passed soon after lunch." The eight generals were: Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Uborevich, Putna, Primakov, Kork, Eideman and Feldman. Five of them were Marshals of the Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> The trial was reported for the first

time in the Soviet press only that day.<sup>7</sup> In compliance with the law of 1 December 1934 the accused were denied defence counsel or the right of appeal. They were all shot not many hours after sentence.

Emelianov limits himself to a passing reference to the trial, which, he fairly describes as "brief".

A ninth general, and possible defendant, who did not appear at the trial was General Gamarnik, who had committed suicide on 31 May. According to Emelianov, he was to have been a defendant. According to the General's daughter, who gave written testimony about her father's final days many years later to Volkogonov,<sup>7</sup> the General had been asked by Marshal Blyukher to sit in judgment on his fellow generals, and felt unable to do so. He said: "But how can I? I know they're not enemies. Blyukher said if I don't, I could be arrested myself." These words, said his daughter, were uttered on May 30, the day before he shot himself.

Emelianov's designation of Gamarnik as a defendant is derived from a speech by Stalin on 2 June, two days after Gamarnik's suicide. Stalin was then addressing the Military Council of the People's Commissariat for Defence; and he listed 13 persons, who included some of the military defendants, and also NKVD former head of security Yagoda, Nikolai Bukharin and even the long-exiled Trotsky.<sup>8,9</sup> Whether Gamarnik was to be a defendant or a judge is not otherwise addressed.

A stepping stone towards this trial, according to Volkogonov, involved an instruction within the NKVD to uncover a Red Army plot, and he states that a commander named Medvedev was tortured to extract the necessary incriminations. The name of his interrogator, Radzivilovsky, whose evidence was provided two decades later to the rehabilitation commission established after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of 1956, is also given.<sup>10</sup>

"As has now been established",



states Volkogonov, all had been subjected to torture, and were told they could save their lives only by admitting their guilt.<sup>11</sup> The investigator in the case, who survived the Stalin era, made a written statement to the rehabilitation commission which sat after the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress. His deposition included the following:

"I ... came to the conclusion that Feldman ... was linked by friendship with Tukhachevsky, Yakir and a number of other leading generals. I summoned Feldman to my room, locked the door, and by the evening of 19 May he had signed a statement about a plot involving Tukhachevsky, Yakir, Eideman and the others. Then I was given Tukhachevsky to interrogate, and he confessed on the following day ...."<sup>12</sup>

Montefiore states<sup>13</sup> that Tukhachevsky's confession survives in the Soviet archives, decorated by a residue of blood found to have emanated from a body in motion.





A 1963 Soviet stamp featuring Tukhachevsky



1936. He is, by the way, inaccurate in asserting<sup>15</sup> that only the surrender of France and Britain at the Munich conference prevented the realisation of a plot by German generals to topple Hitler. While he gives William Shirer's history of the Third Reich as his source for this, Shirer actually states<sup>16</sup> that "whether (the German generals) would have finally acted had Chamberlain not agreed to come to Munich is a question that can never be answered with any degree of certainty ...."

A particularly chilling feature about the Tukhachevsky trial was its eventual sequel. The military tribunal consisted of a military lawyer, Ulrikh, and other generals, namely Budyenny, Blyukher, Shaposhnikov, Belov, Alksnis, Dybenko, Kasharin and Goryachev. All of these but Budyenny and Shaposhnikov were to be shot in due course, one of them being arrested almost immediately. "The massacre of the military cadres", writes Volkogonov, "was only the beginning."<sup>17</sup>

Emelianov ignores this sequel, passing on to another topic.

The well-known international aspect of the backdrop to the arrests is set out by both Medvedev<sup>18</sup> and Volkogonov.<sup>19</sup> The essence of it is that in early 1937 a Gestapo official, Naujocks, who may have been acting on a suggestion from a Russian émigré general who had links with both the Gestapo and the NKVD, forged Tukhachevsky's signature to a letter supposedly sent to Tukhachevsky's 'friends' in Germany. What made this transaction potentially plausible was the existence of an actual Tukhachevsky signature on a document of 1926 which concerned cooperation with a German firm about aviation technology. The forged letter announced Tukhachevsky's alleged wish, together with 'sympathisers', to carry out a military coup d'état in the Soviet Union.

Czech intelligence agents were then allowed, through a fire deliberately set in a German military building, to steal the letter. Information

about the 'plot' soon reached the Czech President Eduard Benes, who passed on the information to Moscow. Medvedev<sup>20</sup> states that the Gestapo forgeries were added to the statements against the accused only after their executions, and appear to have played no part in the trial.

Emelianov treats the forged letter as genuine without even a nod in the direction of the forgery evidence.

The pre-Hitler era military contacts between Soviet generals and the German military were open; and as Montefiore<sup>21</sup> points out, Tukhachevsky had been investigated by the OGPU in 1930 and been considered innocent of anything untoward.

The arrests, the torture to produce self-incrimination, the absence of adequate defence rights during questioning and in the 'trial', and the immediate executions, are not bright shining advertisements for socialism in the Soviet Union in 1937.

## Notes and References

- 1 Y Emelianov, 'Stalin's Purges' of 1937-8: *What Really Happened?*: Part 1, in *CR63*, Spring 2012, pp 2-9; Part 2, in *CR64*, Summer 2012, pp 16-23; Part 3, in *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 9-16.
- 2 J Ellison, *The Social and Political Background to the Terror of 1937-8 in the Soviet Union*, in *CR65*, Autumn 2012, pp 26-8.
- 3 R. Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, OUP, 1989.
- 4 D Volkogonov, *Stalin, Triumph and Tragedy*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995.
- 5 S S Montefiore, *Stalin – The Court of the Red Tsar*, Phoenix, 2004.
- 6 Volkogonov, *op cit*, p 320.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 321.
- 8 Emelianov, *op cit*, *CR64*, p 21.
- 9 Montefiore, *op cit*, p 228.
- 10 *Ibid*, pp 318-9.
- 11 Volkogonov, *op cit*, p 322.
- 12 *Ibid*, p 323.
- 13 Montefiore, *op cit*, p 227.
- 14 Medvedev, *op cit*, p 539.
- 15 Emelianov, *op cit*, *CR64*, p 17.
- 16 W Shirer *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, Simon & Shuster/Arrow Books, p 504.
- 17 Volkogonov, *op cit*, p 324.
- 18 Medvedev, *op cit*, p 536.
- 19 Volkogonov, *op cit*, p 318.
- 20 Medvedev, *op cit*, p 537.
- 21 Montefiore, *op cit*, pp 60-1.

Emelianov makes no mention of the incrimination of Tukhachevsky by false evidence provided under torture, or of the physical 'pressure' inflicted on Tukhachevsky and his co-defendants.

In the light of the investigator's admissions to the rehabilitation commission, it would seem difficult to place an iota of trust on the various confessions. As Medvedev states: "Any serious investigation would have exposed the Nazi forgery ... but Stalin did not order an expert investigation."<sup>14</sup> Confession through torture, indeed, dodged the need for investigation, and the non-assignment of ordinary civil rights to the accused during questioning was a standard given.

Emelianov appears to assume the defendants were guilty as charged. Indeed, instead of directing himself to the circumstances of 'investigation' and the 'trial', he prefers to begin his account by gathering up evidence of a 'Chinese whispers' nature of supposedly out-of-order communications by Tukhachevsky with German generals and the Rumanian Foreign Minister in the spring of

# Discussion: More on Stalin and Khrushchev

By Roger Fletcher

## Backward Glances ...

By all means let us examine, and assert, the real, as distinct from the bourgeois, image of Stalin and those times. Perhaps we should also keep in mind the realities of our 21<sup>st</sup> century world, and the possibilities that Andrew Northall suggests in the concluding paragraph of his discussion contribution in CR67.<sup>1</sup>

It is hardly surprising that the subject of 'Stalinism' should feature so large, in both our history and our consciousness; imperialist propaganda has seen to that. Nor should it surprise us that we tend to personalise a highly complex period, which has been – and remains – one of the focuses of a world-wide, intense and multi-dimensional struggle. So, while I am highly sympathetic to Andrew's spirited defence of Stalin he seems to be tempted towards the ideological trap of 'great men of history'.

Stalin, the 'steel man', was an exceptional leader, amongst many exceptional people but, in common with all individuals, certainly not infallible. For instance in his first quote from Stalin's speeches, Andrew selects, *inter alia*, the statement "We are bound by no laws."<sup>2</sup> That is hyperbole that our home-grown scientist Isaac Newton would have quickly demolished. But, despite that sort of slip, Stalin certainly falls into the Newtonian category, of 'seeing further by standing on the shoulders of giants', and Stalin quite evidently stood on the shoulders of Marx, Lenin and a broad swathe of progressive humanity. Perhaps we should note here in passing that, according to recent histories, Newton also was not a particularly 'nice man', despite his world-expanding achievements.<sup>3</sup>

So, in appraising the realities of the phenomenon that is commonly – by bourgeois ideologists at least – named 'Stalinism', I suggest that we should be very sparing with the defensive posture that we've been coerced into

by the temporary successes of our opponents. After all, the period that the phenomenon covered was one of substantial advances in science, technology, culture, economics – and even philosophy – and a fair proportion of those changes are attributable to the struggle for socialism. But it is important to keep in mind one overriding general principle: **the only thing that would have rendered Stalin – and all other comrades before and since – acceptable to the capitalist world was that they should abandon the class struggle.**

Almost all of the factors that saw the rise, and conditional triumph, of Bolshevism over the tsarist empire, are studiously ignored by capitalist ideology, and perhaps too-often forgotten by us in our continuing confrontation with that same paradigm. Therefore, not necessarily in any strict order, let us briefly remind ourselves that the Bolshevik revolution occurred in a world in which:

- 'niggers' – and I deliberately use this most offensive racist term to emphasise the crudity of those times – were publicly lynched in 'God's own country'. (Personally I have childhood memories of such 'human rights' abuses from laconic newspaper reports, replete with photos, at the end of WWII, –RF).
- The British Empire, built by war and slavery and maintained by terror (see, for example, the article on Mau Mau in that same CR67<sup>4</sup>) spanned the world.
- Most European countries had hereditary crowned heads, and that whole feudal ideology was barely challenged in theory, and hardly ever in practice.
- The Russian Empire was the most backward, economically and industrially, amongst the capitalist nations. In Article One of the Fundamental Laws of Imperial Russia, we read that "To the

Emperor of All the Russias belongs the supreme and unlimited power. Not only fear, but also conscience commanded by God Himself, is the basis of obedience to this power."<sup>5</sup>

- Tsarist minister Count Stolypin had given his name to the 'Stolypin necktie' (the hangman's noose) as a way of dealing with insurrectionary protest against tsarism.
- Despite such draconian measures, there had been many revolutionary attempts against tsarism prior to October 1917. Indeed, the world-wide struggle and sporadic revolts against a fundamentally unjust system amounts to the continuum with which the Marx-Engels *Communist Manifesto* famously begins.
- Blatant corruption within the tsarist administration was legendary. Think – just for a split-second – of Rasputin ...
- ... or recall Nekrassov's lengthy narrative poem *Who Can be Happy and Free in Russia?*<sup>6</sup>

We might note that the above examples are from the period that gave rise to 'Stalinism', and that comparable points can be made about our own times. Think for instance, of the perversion of religious – and the wider secular – life that covers up systemic child abuse even as this is being written, or of the financial corruptions of Enron, of hedge funds, and the monstrosities revealed by the recent film *Inside Job*.<sup>7</sup> We should also counter the induced amnesia generated by a worldview that 'justifies' the French colonial war in Indo-China that morphed into the US war on Vietnam, together with so many other neocolonial wars on Guatemala, Malaya, Cuba, North Korea, etc, etc.

Bringing us closer to our present era, Andrew rises to the defence of Stalin's successor, Nikita Khrushchev. Nikita was certainly not the buffoon depicted by the sophisticates of capitalist newspapers, and was more likely the exceptional character that

Andrew suggests. However it cannot be claimed that his outbursts at the United Nations – and at an art gallery – enhanced the reputation of the socialist cause, nor did his over-enthusiastic claim that the Soviet Union was ‘beginning the construction of communism’.

Where I must take issue with Andrew, though, is his expressed confidence in the “true democratisation” of the pronouncements contained in the 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> CPSU Congresses, and in the 1961 Party Programme. From what we on the outside now know, the ‘rot of ages’ had already deeply infiltrated the Soviet body politic. Andrei Sakharov had got his ahistorical nonsense, *Questions of Ideology and Peaceful Coexistence*, published in the USA; and several of the parasites that now infest the capitalist financial – and sporting – world, must at that time have been gestating nicely within the Soviet educational and commercial spheres. See, if only, an article in the *Guardian* last year on such matters.<sup>8</sup>

In the times that Sakharov and his wife were becoming *causes célèbres* in capitalist countries, it was not evident to many of us just why Sakharov was not confronted in public debate with any leading communist, for his many utterances do not bear even cursory challenge.

It is now unfortunately clear that even by those times (1961/62) the internal rot had gone too far. In retrospect, perhaps the greatest service the Soviet Union could perform on the international scene at that time was its courageous – and essential – defence of Cuba in 1962, in the period now known casually as the October Missile Crisis (that is a point of view that I advanced in a Discussion contribution in CR65<sup>9</sup>).

### To Sum Up

The legacy of ‘Stalinism’ presents us socialists and communists with some difficulties of both a theoretical and a practical nature. But surely now, after all the bitter experiences of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, we can at this point:

- date the start of the Cold War to 1916/17, when the overthrow of an iniquitous (but world-enveloping) imperialist system began in earnest, rather than to the more-common attribution of 1946 and Churchill’s

infamous ‘iron curtain’ speech in Fulton, Missouri;

- be clear – as the on-going barrage of lies and sabotage against the new democracies of Latin America easily attests – that the Cold War did not end with the implosion of the Soviet Union;
- note that since the “ten days that shook the world”,<sup>10</sup> we have been to some extent ‘on the back foot’ relative to the still-prevailing – and therefore dominant – socioeconomic capitalist system; and hence
- note also that this subordinate position of socialism has been – and is – far more to do with the distorting and parasitising power of the opposition, than to any economic/moral superiority of capitalism.

One English revolutionary, Oliver Cromwell, famously demanded that his own portrait should include ‘warts and all’. As Marxists today we should require no less of the early attempts at building socialism – or even of the ‘character faults’ of one prominent communist.

There were magnificent achievements of Soviet power, and of individuals working within that system. The illusionists and hypocrites of capitalism claim that ‘we’ British (and the USA in a subordinate role!) won World War II against fascism. They now, with a similar lack of logic, deny that anything good came out of the one country, and people, who played the major role in that victory, *ie* the Soviet Union.

Daily developments – from the treatment of prisoners at Guantanamo Bay and Abu Ghraib to the British police’s ‘fitting up’ of complainants/innocent parties in criminal trials (eg the family of murdered Stephen Lawrence) – all point to an embryo fascism in its earliest phases. Desperate US measures to draw a veil over a two-faced foreign policy, by persecuting people like Julian Assange, Bradley/Chelsea Manning and Edward Snowden, only add to a growing public disquiet at what is, to us, the capitalist/imperialist system operating normally, but being forced into the open.

The struggle for socialism has made some serious mistakes, but they remain just that! In its own eyes, capitalism



has never made any mistakes. The slave trade, the creation of empires (British and now US) and the current and on-going pauperisation of less-developed countries and the international working class do not count.

It is true that some ‘realists’ in the USA now refer to the Vietnam War as ‘a mistake’. What they mean however is not clear. The actual record – Eisenhower’s claim at the Seattle ‘Governor’s Conference’ in 1953 that, “If Indochina goes ... the Malay Peninsula ... would be scarcely defensible. The tin and tungsten that we so greatly value from that area would cease coming”,<sup>11</sup> and the Gulf of Tonkin incident in August 1964 – shows that the US was determined to restore colonial rule to the whole of Indochina. **That** was the US’s mistake! – and it is one that is being repeated daily around the rest of the world. By comparison, Stalin and ‘Stalinism’ appear almost saintly!

If we indulge in a critique of communists’ efforts, **merely within ‘territory’ staked out by our class opponents**, then we are on the first steps of surrender.

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- 3 D H Clark and P H Clark, *Newton’s Tyranny*, W H Freeman & Co, New York, 2001.
- 4 S Durrani, *Mau Mau: the Revolutionary Force from Kenya*, Part 1, in CR67, Spring 2013, pp 2-8.
- 5 quoted in E Crankshaw, *The Shadow of the Winter Palace*, Penguin Books, 1976.
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- 7 2010 documentary film about the recent financial crisis, directed by Charles H Ferguson.
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# Discussion: Stalin and the Khrushchevite Revisionist Traitor Group

By Joseph Finn

Previous editions of Communist Review had filled me with great pleasure, in no small part down to the work of Yuri Emelianov<sup>1</sup> on Stalin. However, some following discussion pieces dismissing Emelianov's work have had quite the opposite effect. Both the contributions by Andrew Northall (Spring 2013) and John Ellison (Autumn 2012) indulge in unfettered revisionism and a disregard of modern academia.

John Ellison's piece can be put to rest quite simply. In his article he relies almost entirely on the work of the notorious propagandist Roy Medvedev whom he refers to as a "bravely independent investigator".<sup>2</sup> Medvedev is treated as a credible and authoritative source. This is despite Ellison's own admission that the archives call for a revision of Medvedev's account. But really they call for no revision of Medvedev, they simply discredit him. Indeed if Marxists are to adhere to the historical account of the bourgeois Medvedev then we may as well treat Hayek as an authority on economics. That Medvedev called himself a Marxist is irrelevant. Although every Tory claims to be a

patriot and a democrat, their actions tell us that is nonsense; so too of Medvedev's Marxist credentials.

But let us take Medvedev's word for a moment. In his much quoted *Let History Judge*, he himself lets slip that "My collaboration with the people I have mentioned was based exclusively on personal initiative and trust. I did not make use of or have access to any closed archives, special collections, or any other limited-access depositories and I am not familiar with any."<sup>3</sup>

Here Medvedev reveals his ineptitude as a historian by basing accounts on trust. Real historians approach subjects with scepticism, and search for bias, lies and contradictions. They would certainly note the notoriously unreliable nature of oral history and anecdotal evidence. But more than that, Medvedev openly declares that no archives were used.

He then continues that "In the nature of things there could not be a published source for much of the information in this book; it was passed on by the victims of repression or their friends or relatives."<sup>4</sup>

Here he fatally exposes himself. He assumes the

validity of the claims of so-called victims. Even worse, he accepts hearsay. Not only is he accepting the word of the claimants themselves, but takes at face value the word of friends and relatives. This is the academic equivalent of playing what the Americans call Telephone (in order to avoid our racist naming). Anyone who played the game as a child will be all too aware that the message almost always becomes distorted, even completely unrecognisable.

This is sham history akin to the phenomenon of creationism being put under the umbrella of science. Perhaps next we will elevate Conquest and Solzhenitsyn. John Ellison says he will continue to rely on such sources "until someone justifiably casts them out as otherwise". With that done let us turn to the case of Andrew Northall.

In his article he compares Emelianov's work to science fiction. It seems peculiar at the very least to suggest that the account based on the archives is fiction, and instead to accept the anecdotal evidence of Khrushchev.

Let us be clear. The work of Emelianov, like that of academics such as Grover Furr,<sup>5</sup> uses

archived records to analyse the claims of the likes of Khrushchev, Medvedev and Conquest. In order to refute their position one would have to show that the archives are incorrect, have been misinterpreted or provide specific counters contradicting Emelianov's analysis of Stalin and Khrushchev. This is not done.

Rather than counter Emelianov's arguments, Andrew simply reaffirms the position of Khrushchev. This is the very same position which Emelianov has shown to be a falsehood. This is not the art of argument – it is listening to an argument and immediately dismissing it as it does not reflect your own opinions. By coming to the table under the assumption that Khrushchev told the truth, he is guilty of begging the question. His first premise simply implies his conclusion. This is quite clear when he says that "something of a coup d'état was carried out by the Stalin leadership over the Communist Party",<sup>6</sup> while basing this wholly on the word of Khrushchev's so-called revelations.

Such faith in the word of Khrushchev is a critical error. Again let us be clear: faith is the

operative word, as to take Khrushchev's word is to surrender all reason to hope. If Emelianov has produced a piece of science fiction, Northall's work unfortunately reads like a religious text. For we cannot help but see his reasoning akin to that of a 'young Earth' creationist. Like the 'young Earth' myth, Khrushchev's so-called revelations were long-held accepted truth. But today science, reason and evidence have smashed this myth. Like the creationist who yells that the Earth is young and created by God because the Bible says so, despite all evidence to the contrary, Northall confidently tells us that Khrushchev's account is truth simply because Khrushchev said so. This is nowhere more evident than the baseless accusation that the Secret Speech "clarified what many knew and understood but, until that point, had not dared to say".<sup>6</sup> We are told this despite the fact that Khrushchev's account contradicted all evidence rather than supplemented it. Therefore, we can only assume that Khrushchev's word is its own verification.

Despite the wild assertions made at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU, latched onto by the Medvedevs and Conquests, and capitalised upon by all anti-communist elements, modern historians bring real clarity based on archives, as opposed to the tittle-tattle peddled by career politicians at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress. Take the example of Grover Furr who excellently displays that "There is not one single example, during Stalin's whole life, of him 'removing' someone 'from the collective leadership' because that person disagreed with Stalin."<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, "Khrushchev and the rest not only could have opposed Stalin, but did in fact oppose him." In one such case they opposed new tax increases on the peasantry proposed by Stalin in February 1953. They were not executed, they were not arrested, they did not go missing; they carried on their lives as normal. Added to this is the fact that on 4 separate occasions Stalin offered his resignation.<sup>7</sup> This alone disproves much of Khrushchev's claims.

In contrast to Stalin, Khrushchev did remove opponents from the collective leadership: the so called 'Anti-Party Group' including the old Bolshevik Molotov, Malenkov, Kaganovich and Shepilov. This occurred after the Presidium had voted 7-4 in favour of replacing Khrushchev with Bulganin.<sup>8</sup> Indeed all throughout Furr's *Khrushchev Lied* such a mass of contrary evidence is presented in case after case as to make every accusation made by Khrushchev at the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress entirely collapse.<sup>9</sup> That certain archives remain closed today also points further to Stalin's innocence. Stalin has provided a useful crutch for Khrushchev and Gorbachev to Putin, the myth created being a useful bogeyman on which to pass the blame for all their failures. While such regimes keep certain archives secret, we have to ask ourselves why. That they do not like what would be revealed is the most sensible and plausible explanation.

It is Andrew's opinion that the implementation of more Khrushchevite reform would have prevented "the 'stagnation' of the 1970s and 80s, or the eventual, consequential collapse of the 1990s".<sup>6</sup> This is an incredible claim,

detached from reality and all evidence. Firstly, we must roundly criticise the peddling of the language of the bourgeoisie. The Soviet Union did not "collapse", it was destroyed from above. Collapse implies it was structurally unsound. This is entirely erroneous and bears no relation to the statistical reality of prolonged economic growth surpassing most of the capitalist bloc.

The most important factor is the lack of awareness of the fact that Khrushchev's reforms were the ideological inspiration, foundations and precursor to Gorbachev's reforms, the very reforms which did destroy the Soviet Union. In simplest terms Khrushchev's thaw became *glasnost*, his economic decentralisation, *perestroika*. If we want to look at what caused the destruction of the USSR we must always start with Khrushchev, as not only was Gorbachev born out of Khrushchevism, but it was he who started the economic slowdown. In prescribing more Khrushchev to save the Soviet Union, we may as well prescribe cigarettes to cure lung cancer.

"In May 1957, Khrushchev abolished thirty plus central planning ministries and replaced them with over a hundred local economic councils. The result was predictable. Co-ordination of production and supplies became even more difficult than it was before, and local interests superseded national goals."<sup>10</sup>

Under his leadership new layers of bureaucracy

emerged, multiplying the complexities of economic planning. This was added to superfluous grand and costly adventures like the disastrous Virgin Lands project and the introduction of market incentives. In contrast to the period under Stalin, when primacy was given to the means of production, the economy was consumerised.

"In Khrushchev's first year as General Secretary investment in heavy industry exceeded that in consumer goods by only 20 percent, compared to 70 percent before the war."<sup>11</sup>

This awful decision was taken despite Stalin's accurate warning that

"What would be the effect of ceasing to give primacy to the means of production? The effect would be to destroy the possibility of the continuous expansion of our national economy, because the national economy cannot be continuously expanded without giving primacy to the production of the means of production."<sup>12</sup>

History has shown just how correct Stalin was, and consequently just how wrong Khrushchev was. And in his failure to catch up with and surpass the West, Khrushchev failed on his own terms. Yet under Stalin the Soviet economy experienced the fastest growth of any in history. The official figures show us that national income grew from 29 billion rubles in



1929 to 50 billion rubles in 1933.<sup>13</sup> This of course coincides with the Great Depression when capitalist economies crumbled. If we extend the scope of analysis from 1928 to 1940 the results are even more impressive; with national income making a five-fold expansion.

With all of this understood, it is apparent that Northall is so wildly wrong when claiming that “The Soviet Union of the 1950s, looking to the 1960s and anticipating the forthcoming scientific and technological revolution, had to move decisively beyond the methods of the 1930s.”<sup>16</sup> Firstly, the Soviet Union did not move on, it regressed in the direction of capitalism. It ignored heavy industry and as a consequence, technologically lagged as warned by Stalin. Again comrade Northall inverts problem and solution. Secondly, the methods of the 1930s and 40s were the very methods of anticipating the forthcoming scientific and technological revolution as Stalin clearly understood, and displayed above.

Finally Northall insists that more Khrushchevite

reform could have meant the survival of a democratic Soviet Union.<sup>6</sup> Yet so democratic was Khrushchev that he acted against the Presidium in using the Stalin bogeyman to isolate the Leninist old guard of Molotov and co. This was to close the door to democracy. A successful attack was launched on Stalin’s democratising attempts: to pass more power from the Party to the Soviets. Following Stalin’s death, the Council of Ministers continued with his democratising agenda and voted to reduce officials’ bonuses and pay, in May 1953. Yet Khrushchev somehow managed to overturn this decision and in August was appointed First Secretary.<sup>14</sup> The nomenklatura got their man.

So far from the reality of Khrushchev’s rule is Northall’s conclusion. He calls for a scientific materialist outlook on Khrushchev, yet unfortunately produces conclusions abstracted from the material reality of the situation. And it is the very same scientific materialist analysis of Stalin that he is so quick to dismiss as science fiction.

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- 3 R Medvedev, *Let History Judge*, Columbia Press, New York, 1989, p xviii.
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- 9 Strictly, according to Grover Furr, 60 out of 61 of Khrushchev’s ‘revelations’ are “provably false”, the outstanding case being one which he says, “I can neither prove nor disprove”; but he also makes clear that “exposing a lie is not the same as establishing the truth” –Ed.
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## Letter to the Editor

From Nick Matthews

I have enjoyed the discussion in *CR* about Charles Dickens, who in my opinion is somewhat overrated. It is always interesting how the mainstream media only have room for one or two of anything culturally. Like Shakespeare, Dickens was one amongst many, and the competition and co-operation which produced his output made it better. One would think that Dickens’s London *was* London, given the way the media talk about him.

Dickens’s novels are very visual and have been made into memorable films and television. However they are somewhat cartoon-like in their construction; and furthermore, whilst he was a popular writer he was no friend of the working class. A writer more worthy of discussion, I would argue, is George W M Reynolds, now probably best known as the founder of *Reynolds’ News*. But in his lifetime he outsold Dickens and was a republican and a Chartist. He was incredibly prolific and in many ways, whilst sensationalist, offered his readers a more accurate portrait of London than Dickens did.

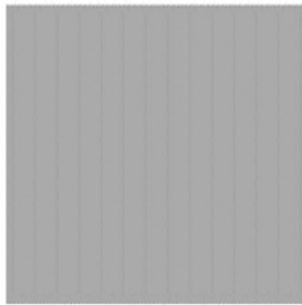
There was a deep mutual dislike between Reynolds and Dickens, summed up in this quote from Dickens when Reynolds chaired an open-air Chartist meeting in 1848:

“If ‘Mr G W Reynolds’ be the Mr Reynolds who is the author of the *Mysteries of London*, and who took the chair for a mob in Trafalgar Square before they set forth on a window-breaking expedition”, wrote Dickens to W C Macready in 1849, “I hold his to be a name with which no lady’s, and no gentleman’s, should be associated.”<sup>1</sup>

No lady or gentleman perhaps but I for one stand shoulder to shoulder with Reynolds.

## Reference

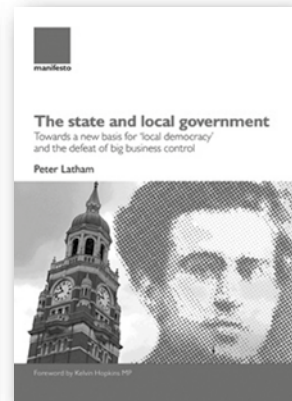
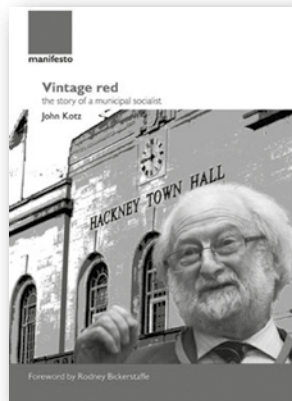
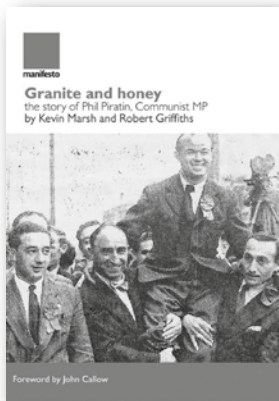
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## BOOK REVIEW

# The Rebellion in Wisconsin

Review by Lars Ulrik Thomsen

When the media in 2011 reported on events in Madison, the capital of the American state of Wisconsin, it was something of an eye-opener. From many parts of the United States, we have been used to hearing of privatisation, deregulation, bankruptcy and mass firings. Now there was something quite new – the American people made their voice heard in a way never seen before. This is what the inspiring book; *It Started in Wisconsin* is all about. It gives a first-hand impression of the pioneering events after governor Scott Walker pronounced his break with the most elementary labour rules developed over more than a century.

The book is in five parts. In every classical music concert the *overture* is very important – how will *it* be? John Nichols combines both present and past in his opening piece. We are not standing on the pavement, but we are walking side by side with our comrades in a huge demonstration!

I remember one of Earl Robinson's songs, *The House I Live In*:

*The house I live in, the friends that I have found,*

*The folks beyond the railroad and the people all around,*

*The worker and the farmer, the sailor on the sea,*

*The men who built this country, that's America to me.*<sup>1</sup>

The same spirit grows out of John Nichols' introduction – also giving references to the famous Robert M La Follette, who was governor of Wisconsin at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He represented a seldom-seen breed of honest politicians, who felt responsible for the wealth of the people.

Mari Jo Buhle gives a profound view of the development of the teachers' organisation, and the important role it played during the protests in spring 2011. The tradition of collective bargaining helped the teachers to make a forceful counter-attack, organising the teachers all over the state.

In the second part Mari Botari gives the background to the choice of Wisconsin for this attack on working people. There is a close connection between the governor and the big corporations, not just in Wisconsin, but also in other parts of the USA. They had been preparing this attack on the people of Wisconsin for many years in the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC).

In the third part of the book Ben Manski of Wisconsin Wave gives an impression of how this grassroots organisation particularly succeeded in mobilising many young people. This gave a new impulse, through the way they communicated and organised the protests.

Dave Poklinkowski has a very interesting contribution from the viewpoint of the American labour movement. He makes a comparison with John Reed's book *Ten Days That Shook the World*, the first-hand account of the October Revolution by the famous American journalist. In a sparkling flash Poklinkowski shows the wider perspective of the common fight against oppression and exploitation.

In part 4, the union point of view is followed up by Paul Buhle's and Frank Empak's account of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees. Here we also see the importance of the historical traditions of democratic principles and collective bargaining. Roger

Bybee analyses the role of the big corporations and their total influence on the deindustrialisation of many parts of Wisconsin; instead of developing new industries they present the bill to the people in the shape of austerity policies. The economic interests of the corporations are the key to understanding the motives of Scott Walker's political campaign.

In the fifth and last part, Ashok Kumar and Simon Hardy discuss the national and international dimensions of the protests in Wisconsin. They see many trends and experiences that are equal in both Madison and Cairo. The vital question is that the youth movements have to be in alliance with the labour movement to achieve their common goals.

What are the lessons of the public rebellion in Wisconsin? The demonstrations and other activities show that the patience of the Wisconsinites had come to an end, and that a broad and solid alliance between all the different groups of wage-earners can become a determinative force in society.

One of the book's great qualities is its method of presenting contemporary events in a historical context – for example, that of the progressive administration of La Follette. Such parallels show that we don't start from nothing, but have a long and rich tradition in the labour movements to build on.

The book gives a multifaceted picture of the different groups and classes involved in the Wisconsin uprising. From a Marxist point of view, it also raises the classical questions in any popular movement or revolution:

- What is the strength of power between the classes, and how can it be changed in favour of the people?



## It Started in Wisconsin: Dispatches from the Front Lines of the New Labor Protest

Edited by MARI JO BUHLE and PAUL BUHLE, with an introduction by JOHN NICHOLS and a foreword by MICHAEL MOORE (Verso Books, London and New York, 2011, 192 pp, pbk, £9.99. ISBN 978-1844678881)

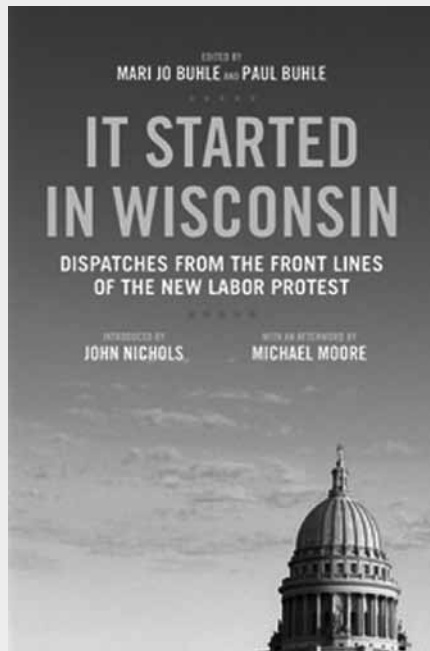
- What are the political goals and how are they going to be achieved?
- Who is going to have the leadership of the movement, given the many classes and layers involved?

These questions however remain unanswered and, although there are good signs of organisation in some of the protesting groups, there is still a lot of work to be done before the people of Wisconsin will be able to prevail.

The question of international solidarity is a basic element in the labour movement. From the very beginning, when Marx and Engels founded International Working Men's Association, this was a major goal of their aspirations. Imperialism at its present stage is ready for a new world order, very different from the present. We are dealing with the highly sophisticated power of capital, with thousands of links to local and central administrations. The big corporations have unlimited funds and resources at their disposal. If the people's rebellions in Wisconsin and other places are to overcome such strong opponents, solidarity across borders – both interstate and international – will be essential.

As the famous American labour leader William D ('Big Bill') Haywood put it, in evidence and under cross-examination, at the US District Court in Chicago in 1918.:

"These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organisation formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all."<sup>2</sup>



This is part of the proud traditions from the Industrial Workers of the World, going back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and still with vital relevance. In this way history becomes a crucial reference that can strengthen the progressive and democratic forces in society.

The lesson of the Wisconsin rebellion in 2011 is that such events are not a local state affair or a national affair, but a matter of great significance for all progressive people, whether you live in Madison, Athens, Bombay, Paris, London or Johannesburg. Only by spreading the news from Wisconsin, will it be possible for people of all nations to gain new momentum for progressive results. *It Started in Wisconsin* is a powerful testimony to the possibilities of a people united against the corporate lobby – but also a testimony to the cornucopia of the Wisconsinites, displayed in all the protests, cartoons and photographs during their spring of 2011.

### Notes and References

1 *The House I Live In* is a ten-minute short film written by Albert Maltz, produced by Frank Ross and Mervyn Le Roy, and starring Frank Sinatra. It was made to oppose anti-Semitism and racial prejudice at the end of World War II. Earl Robinson wrote the music and songs for the film.

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Anti-Fascist Work and Local Activism

Review by Mary Davis

THERE ARE DIFFERENT ways of writing a biography: they fall into three main categories. One is the thematic approach in which the subject's life is revealed through the main activities in which she or he participated. The second is the chronological approach which involves a detailed retelling of the subject's story and the third is through the memories of others. All three have their merits and demerits but this book to a greater or lesser extent combines all three approaches to biography (although the chronological approach is preferred) and is thus somewhat less focused than it otherwise might have been.

On the positive side, the book is very well researched and referenced, giving its readership a good introduction to the life and times of Phil Piratin, about whom, surprisingly, very little has been written to date. The chronological method is privileged here so we start with the story about the demonstration against the fascists at Olympia when Piratin heard a police officer shout "Get back to your slums, you Communist bastards." Apparently this is what spurred Piratin to join the Communist Party (CPGB), and certainly it was instrumental in inspiring him to throw himself headlong into the anti-fascist fight. The result was his leading role in the Battle of Cable Street (4 October 1937), in which Mosley's British Union of Fascists was routed, although this did not mean that the fascists were permanently excluded, as the local election results of November 1937 showed.

As a Jewish communist Piratin always accorded anti-fascist work a very high priority. However, as a local activist in the East End of London, it became increasingly clear to him that the central issue facing almost everyone was substandard, overcrowded slum housing,

whose tenants were facing rack rents. The response to this was the creation of the Stepney Tenants Defence League (STDLE) which became very adept at organising rent strikes throughout the borough. Women played a major role in the STDLE although in 1938 only 18% of Party members were women.

The war temporarily interrupted this activity on two counts. Firstly, was it to be viewed as an anti-fascist fight or an imperialist war? On this question the international communist movement was divided, at least until 1941 when the Soviet Union entered the war on the side of Britain and France. When, in October 1939 the CPGB changed its initial line from a 'just war' against fascism to an 'imperialist war', general secretary Harry Pollitt resigned in disagreement with the change, and Piratin was still 'in two minds'.

On the practical front the war demanded that communists devote attention to the construction of deep air-raid shelters for working class people, who were clearly going to take the brunt of Hitler's bombing raids. The blitz on London began in earnest in 1940. An obvious solution was to occupy Tube stations, but the government opposed this for the spurious 'health and safety' reason that children might fall onto the tracks. There was a luxurious shelter under the Savoy hotel and thus the Stepney tenants moved in.

Piratin was councillor for much of the war years. In 1945 it was expected that the coalition government would continue under Churchill. However, when it became clear that Churchill was deeply unpopular, especially with the returning troops, the Communist Party decided that it should try to win a majority Labour government. Thus

it reduced the number of Communist parliamentary contests from 52 to 22. Piratin was elected, scoring 1,214 votes over his nearest (Labour) rival.

Willie Gallacher was already a Communist MP representing West Fife. He was 10 years older than Piratin, and it was clear that the two men did not get on very well, although this fact is not explained. In 1946 Peter Zinkin and Malcolm MacEwen criticised Gallacher and Piratin for not working closely together in Parliament. The two Communist MPs did not sit together and allegedly did not co-ordinate their speeches – a somewhat harsh criticism.

Piratin's parliamentary career is well documented, especially his interventions on foreign policy. He supported the creation of the State of Israel (as did the USSR). He was particularly exercised about the massacres in Malaya. On the home front there was much to campaign on since the Labour government, supported by the TUC, had begun its purge of communists in the civil service. It was very difficult for communists to hold their own in this atmosphere of cold war hysteria – and nowhere was this more evident than in Stepney, where 3 of the 12 communist councillors lost their seats; among them Piratin.

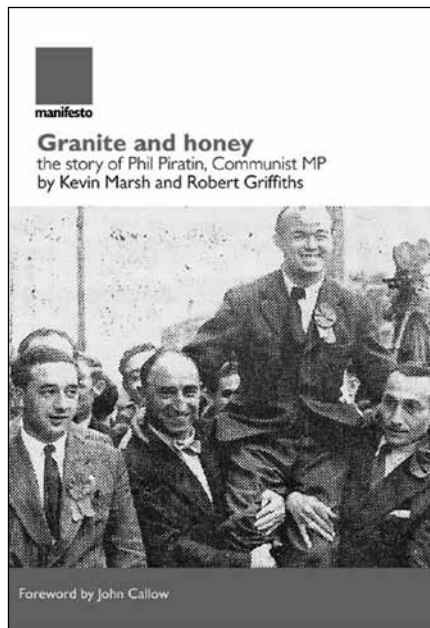
Piratin also lost his parliamentary seat in the 1950 general election, mainly as a result of boundary changes: Mile End was now swallowed up in the larger constituency of Stepney, Limehouse, Whitechapel and St Georges. But the loss was also due to the exodus of Jews from the East End, occasioning the collapse of the STDLE, Piratin's base of support. Gallacher also lost his seat. In 1953 the Communist Party lost the remaining 9 of its councillors in Stepney, although 4 years later Max Levitas and

## Granite and Honey: The Story of Phil Piratin, Communist MP

By KEVIN MARSH and  
ROBERT GRIFFITHS  
(Manifesto Press, 2012, 256 pp, pbk,  
£14.95. ISBN 978-1-907464-09-6)

Solly Kaye were elected. Obviously the Cold War hysteria which had penetrated the labour movement was greatly responsible for this hiatus in communist fortunes.

Piratin had a chequered Party career, from Stepney organiser to Mile End MP to West Middlesex district secretary, to circulation manager of the *Daily Worker* (a post from which he resigned in January 1957), to Executive Committee (EC) member, where he was chair of the subcommittee on social services. At the special 25<sup>th</sup> Congress in April/May 1957 he did not seek re-election to the EC. He confided to his daughter Jean that anti-Semitism was a major reason for his decision; but the book's authors doubt this since there were so many Jews in the London Party. However, at the point of his resignation, Piratin was expressing his view about the national scene in which he had never felt part of the 'inner circle', and anyway the national scene



could not be equated with the East End – an area which was changing demographically as Jews moved out to be replaced by other immigrants.

Piratin subsequently was involved on the fringes of politics; often invited to speak at events analysing fascism, the war and communist organisation in the East End. Most surprisingly he attended Douglas Hyde's birthday party in the early 1990s. Hyde was formerly a *Daily Worker* news editor, but he was a renegade and had embraced Roman Catholic medievalism in the late 1940s. He used his column in the *Catholic Herald* to attack the Party. Why did Piratin befriend him? And why, in his

later years did Piratin join Democratic Left? The book provides no clues other than he might have followed his new partner, Lillian Temple, "into the abyss".

So, I think we can see that Piratin's life up until the mid-1950s was politically interesting. The fact that the narrative tails off thereafter is something his biographers need to have dealt with and perhaps this means altering the chronological format. But the deed is now done!

### Subscription Rates

While the cover price of *CR* remains at £2.50, regrettably the annual subscription is increasing to £14 (Britain/Northern Ireland) and £20 (rest of world), with effect from *CR70*. This is a result of increased postal charges. However, from the start of 2014, subscribers will be able to get free access to an extensive back-archive of *CR* on the internet.

### Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip





# SOURWOOD

## A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

# IMAGINATIVE COMMONERS

REMEMBRANCE DAY is approaching. Sam Watts, from Bootle in Merseyside, was among those campaigning for many years to obtain pardons for the 306 men who, suffering from shell-shock, were shot for cowardice during the First World War. The pardons were finally granted in 2006. Sam has sent in the following poem of his.

### **Shot at Dawn** by Sam Watts

*In Memoriam, Uncle Private William Watts,  
executed by firing squad in the First World War*

The Court Marshal reads,  
"He's from the lower class,  
he's just the type who can't sniff the gas.  
The lower working stock –  
just the type who can't take shell shock.  
Just too bad, that's how you were born,  
take him down, you'll be shot at dawn."

One more on the list, of three hundred and six,  
who were shot at dawn.  
What was their story?  
Who knows who they were?  
Removed from history without a care.  
Did they die for their country? NO!  
They were shot by their country!  
Shot by their comrades.  
Did they have a choice?  
Did they have a voice?

Three hundred and six shot at dawn.  
Where is their monument?  
What were their names?  
Where were they born?  
You don't get a medal when you're shot at dawn.  
As Remembrance Day comes,  
And once more we mourn,  
Remember the three hundred and six,  
For they were 'our boys',  
who were shot at dawn.

Sam's uncle, Private William Watts, was sent home to convalesce during the war, suffering from a gas attack and shell-shock. Despite having a medical note declaring him unfit to fight, he was arrested by the Military Police in Liverpool, escorted back to France, court-martialled, and executed by firing squad.

Sam's father, Private Thomas Watts, was demobbed after the war, also suffering from shell-shock and the effects of a gas attack. On finding out his brother had been executed, he became 'mute' and was detained at Rainhill Lunatic Asylum, where he spent many years. He died in 1943; his eldest son, Private Thomas Watts, was killed in action at the Battle of El-Alamein in 1941.

\*\*\*\*\*

I'd like to present some poetry sent in by Alan Morrison, including an extract, exclusive to *CR*, of his new long poem. Alan is editor of the online poetry magazine *The Recusant* and of *The Robin Hood Book: Verse Versus Austerity*, from which I have excerpted a few poems in recent issues of *CR*.

We have published articles about Marxist approaches to literature and art in recent issues of this journal, the most recent being John Ellison's *Peering at Art and Literature through Marxist Spectacles* in *CR67*. This and other articles have dealt with the history of poetry, including the impact on it of the Industrial Revolution. Well, here is Alan's account – only he has managed to do it in verse!

### from **Blaze a Vanishing** by Alan Morrison

The Industrial Revolution wrested the means of  
publication  
To a lucrative vast-scaled enterprise of mass printing  
presses,  
Standardised and privatised; put out of reach of the poet  
And writer: the rolled-up-sleeves producers. No more  
The rudimentary means for imaginative commoners  
To pump out pamphlets and broadsides to semaphore  
On city streets: poems, folk songs, political tracts –  
Heady days of paper armies roiling up the people

To dissident beliefs: John Lilburnes, Gerard Winstanleys,  
 And Roger Crabs (herbivorous haberdashers spouting  
 Religious tracts, satires, polemics and herbal recipes).  
 Now establishments patented mass market methods  
 Of controlling printed matter for public consumption:  
 Publication had become the template for propertied  
 Elites to set their tenets into print for editors  
 And agents to appoint themselves as go-betweens  
 For steadily distancing grails of recognition chased  
 By scribes born into stations of rented obscurities,  
 Yoked commodities, tapping out 'work songs' to ectopic  
 Rhythms of their labours. Now publication was a property  
 To rent out, or be mortgaged; an abstract construction;  
 A marble rubric bracketed in vertical striations  
 Of literacies. No more the spontaneous act it was  
 originally:

That oral tradition of the ancients: the mnemonic  
 Epics of Homer and Hesiod, spouted by word of mouth,  
 Committed to memories of rapt listeners on indelible  
 Pages of cerebellums – not anymore a symbiotic part  
 Of the art-form of branding images and narratives verbally  
 On the brain. What was once termed to blaze, to blazen,  
 To publish forth, to share, proclaim. As soon as publishing  
 Was patented by the periwigged upper echelons,  
 It became another branch of power, and literature  
 Another type of property (and all those manuscripts  
 deprived  
 Of clothes, another type of poverty) open to the public  
 To peruse for pounds and pennies; their homologous  
 Heritage meted out to them at their expense, the spoils  
 Of all our ownership displayed behind blue cordons.  
 Refulgent rooms constructed from our common tongue  
 Honeycombing untouchable houses. Lingual  
 Ingenuities glimpsed through embrasures in turrets  
 Of establishments. The leaves of our deciduous cultures.  
 Ripe fruits of literatures, picked, packaged and sold back  
 To us in princely skins, choicest pelts bound in  
 Puckered religious gourds of gold-plate lettered leathers.

You could practically eat those last few lines, couldn't you?  
 There are any number of contemporary poems about the flowers  
 and the bees and the wind in the trees, but how many of them  
 offer an incisive historical materialist analysis of the history  
 of poetry from the 18<sup>th</sup> century right up to the current age of  
 austerity? Answer: none.

Here's another extract from a poem about the publication of  
 J K Rowling's latest novel:

Now, in this time of neighbourly espionage against  
 'Blinds shut during the day'; brown enveloped dawn raids;  
 Black spots, food banks, and sending out of 'clear' Herodic  
 'Messages' to unemployed mothers that the State will strip  
 Support for every third child born – the nation's favourite  
 Author splashes her first 'adult' work in blazes of yellow  
 and red: blasting caps of hardbacks robustly marketed,  
 As we turn the page into this bankrupt age of casualisation  
 To *The Casual Vacancy* ... Harry Potter's finally come  
 of age:  
 NHS spectacles crushed, he now has to squint  
 through Nature's  
 watery contact lenses; a wizard's apprentice who has  
 to train  
 With a plastic Poundland wand on JSA's Quidditch wage.

To say Alan Morrison is an angry poet hardly does justice to the  
 controlled and artfully expressed outrage and sense of injustice  
 that comes pouring out of his poems. Blakean –bardic – fearless  
 – Miltonic: if Alan's poetry was a bottle of wine, those are some  
 of the words which would be on the back label. To adopt one  
 of his favourite techniques, alliteration, this is prophetic, public,  
 purposeful, political poetry of the highest order.

Now to Alan's most recent poem, which is called *Odour of  
 Devon Violet*. In the accompanying box, he introduces it in  
 his own words.

### **ODOUR OF DEVON VIOLET: An Introduction By Alan Morrison**

My new long poem, *Odour of Devon Violet*, is a sort of  
 'dialectical immaterialist' poem-in-progress juxtaposing  
 the stagnating culture and attitudes of contemporary  
 Austerity Britain with those of the Thirties – that inter-  
 war decade during which the Western world endured its  
 first Great Depression. In many ways cultural attitudes  
 and particularly politics have come full circle, as if the  
 Attlee Settlement and 'post war consensus' were simply  
 compassionate but temporal interruptions. And it feels like  
 we're heading back to a kind of pre-Welfare State Thirties-  
 style Britain, under the Tories' atomistic reconstruction.

The ubiquity today of independent nostalgia boutiques  
 and antique shops cropping up on so many high streets  
 captured my attention in terms of how it seems to  
 symbolise a stagnant culture drifting – rather like an old  
 evocative scent – backwards in time to some sort of rose-  
 tinted halcyon past. But not the more compassionate and  
 cooperative past of the post-war austerity era when people  
 genuinely were 'all in it together' – but instead to the pre-  
 war hinterland of the Thirties.

The core olfactory leitmotif of this work references a  
 once popular cheap perfume known variously as *Devon  
 Violet(s)* or *Devonshire Violet(s)*. I stumbled on a mention  
 of this obsolete perfume in a *Guardian* article comparing  
 today's austerity culture to that of the Thirties. Since smell  
 is one of the most mnemonic (memory-aiding or evoking)  
 of our senses, it seemed an appropriate metaphor for the  
 present-day appetite for selected curiosities of the past, such  
 as antiques, and historical reconstructions.

This poetry project – 'sponsored' (excuse the satire!)  
 by an Arts Council Grant for the Arts Award – is my  
 most conceptual work to date, and in many senses, an  
 experiment. It is a kind of dialectical meditation on the  
 power of advertising, and the notion that some types of  
 poetry – what Christopher Caudwell would have called  
 'capitalist poetry' – might be perceived less as creative  
 writing, and more as 'advertising verse'. It is a kind of  
 versified engagement with Christopher Caudwell's Marxian  
 polemic *Illusion & Reality* (1937).

The poem itself deals with a plethora of Thirties-  
 related themes and topics, in glimpses and excerpts which  
 can be read in isolation or in sequence. These include  
 politics, poetry (much on W H Auden, naturally), music,  
 literature (Evelyn Waugh, Graham Greene, George  
 Orwell *et al*), and polemics.

The full poem will begin its life exclusively online via  
[www.odourofdevonviolet.com](http://www.odourofdevonviolet.com). I hope all readers will find  
 something of interest in whichever random sections of the  
 work they happen to click into on the website. Meanwhile,  
 here are a couple of extracts for readers of the *Communist  
 Review*: perfume samples, if you like!



## Odour of Devon Violet

Choicest excerpts from a dialectical poem-in-progress  
by Alan Morrison

Now a new mongrel pedigree – for aren't all pedigrees  
simply  
Aggregates of mongrels? – of independent nostalgia shops  
Have capitalised on the gap in the market: musty  
Curiosity emporiums displaying relics of the post-war  
Consensus and its proleptic edicts from the preceding  
decade:  
A scoop of Victor Gollancz' burnt orange offerings:  
Left Book Club Editions, stood like dusty bricks behind  
A glass partition, dialectical antiques of the proto-  
Welfare state, printed by the appropriately utopian-  
Named Camelot Press: *The Labour Party In Perspective*  
By C R Attlee; *The Road To Wigan Pier* by George  
Orwell (tome to the trope of perennial misappropriation,  
"The lower classes smell", in its notorious Chapter 8);  
*A Programme for Progress* by John Strachey; *Left Turn*  
By M J Coldwell; *Betrayal of the Left* by V Gollancz;  
*The Means To Full Employment* by G D H Cole;  
The Victory Books, *Guilty Men* by Cato (Michael Foot)  
And *Your MP* by 'Gracchus' (Tom Wintringham), as well as  
A snipping of 'Red' Ellen Wilkinson, and the rhetorical  
*Why Not Trust The Tories?* by 'Celticus' (Aneurin Bevan);  
*Studies in a Violet Culture* by Christopher St John Sprigg;  
*Better Red Than Violet* by 'Valeria' (Olive Vortiger);  
And *Odour of Devon Violet* by 'Nerva' (Ivor Mortise) –  
These ruby shrubs were published and circulated among  
Amicable libraries of like minds, to "help in the struggle  
For world peace and against fascism", but now these  
decrepit  
Spinsters and liver-spotted widowers grow stiff in their  
Blanched clothes, their age-abraded garments, embalmed  
Air-tight in state, as if to imply they'd disintegrate  
On contact with the toxic atmosphere (atrophic as it is),  
Each explicitly out of reach, hermetically sealed in  
Estranging legends NOT FOR SALE TO THE PUBLIC  
Scorched across the foot of their covers – that unspoken,  
Contradictory and self-immolating motto of historical  
Socialism, reverberating as a hoary apologia  
To a missed opportunity for germinating social gospels,  
Proselytising to the proletariat while their ideas were  
Still warm, unguent, fresh enough to seed and flower,  
To generate micro-cultures; now those tomes look  
pointless,  
Quixotic, smell sourly odourless like long-mummified  
Bandages once the wounds have rotted beyond cognition,  
Beyond the need for healing, past putrefaction; they've  
Encrusted themselves into gore-red colophons, tubercule  
Clumps of crushed-rose emblems, melted blood, bossages  
Of congealed haemoglobin, crimson knobs of sealing wax;  
Foxed apocrypha for political apothecaries, decomposed  
To papery mottled tissue ... The camphor of stumped  
polemic  
Dissipates to simplistic platitudes of artificial sprays,  
Purple resins of wilting potpourri, pink clouds of  
obfuscating  
Violet haze, the past as represented in a bowdlerised  
bouquet,  
A redacting scent that edits out the detail but retains  
Mystique of the elliptical: the odour of *Devon Violet* ...  
And its own portfolio of contemporary pheromone-  
polemic,

Olfactorily off-topic, quotidian, contrapuntal to current  
Nosterity narratives, scooping up for consumers a  
pedestrian  
Cherry-pick of a past transplanted – titles like: *Capitalism  
Is The Only Workable System*; *Common Purpose Comes  
Through Consumption, Unity Through Competition*;  
*Socialism, Imprisoner of Choice*; *Private Enterprise*,  
*The Public's Spice*; *Supply & Demand*; *We're All In This  
Regardless*; *The Violet Book of the Spendthrift Terror*;  
*'Tough Choices & Difficult Decisions': The Almanac  
Of Austerity Rhetoric* – all lusciously pressed in pristine  
Violet dust-jackets, and all, without exception,  
authorless ....

\*\*\*\*\*

This Thirties Reformation is filtered through the violet-  
tinted  
Lenses of choicest maps and territories of the left-side  
Of the mental hemisphere (that's the right of the political  
sphere),  
Subsequently so many details are edited out: there's no  
Atmospheric mention of Soroptimists, Storm Jameson or  
Vera Brittain, and less evangelical beneficiaries, Violet  
Markham and her circles; nor nostalgic odours of  
comrades-  
Of-the-cloth, Conrad le Despenser Roden Noel, the 'Red  
Vicar' of Thaxted, or Cosmo Lang, the anti-fascist  
Archbishop  
Of Canterbury (though, in spite of hegemonic  
smokescreens,  
Both Williams and Welby have kept up the mitre and  
crosier  
Of social conscience, spoken up for the poor, as, in Rome,  
Pope  
Francis has called for the Catholic Church to put the poor  
first –  
Such churchly beseeches, of course, are water off a duck's  
house  
To the number-crunchers in Whitehall); and the Audens,  
Spenders  
And Day Lewises of today are given vent in the *Communist  
Review*, and the *Morning Star*, the only newspaper  
cooperative,  
Thus suspect to corporate hegemonies – spurned by  
acquiescent  
Mainstreams who still insist on obfuscating and mystifying  
Jurisdiction of politics and poetry under Auden's  
Disingenuously hijacked lament that it "makes nothing  
happen" –  
Such a relief for the quietist Queens and Jacks of  
contemporary  
Supplemental poetry, they have a received verse mandate:  
Non-intervention – and pretention is better than pure  
Agitprop, plus nerveless verses need no spine or  
scansion ....

\*\*\*\*\*

And it's in their vested interests not to let politically  
Active verse sieve in through their vents, and if some  
Accidentally does, so their conservative servicing  
Critics must conceal their objections to left-sentiments  
Through overtures to vetting invertebrate letters,  
Asserting technical inadequacies, failings in leitmotifs,

Hackneyed language, “honeycombing with clichés” as  
 Connolly  
 Termed it in *Enemies of Promise*, convenient then to sift  
 Out only the weakest excerpts, exceptions to the rule,  
 The coarser corns of rhetoric, pulps of protest, hack away  
 At a lack of satire to tempt in the politically apathetic  
 Middle classes, and plant proleptic ripostes to anticipated  
 Backlashes at hatchet jobs – for “poetry makes nothing  
 happen”,  
 The only catalyst is criticism, which contrives in the valley  
 Of its raking, where editors tend to pamper; it survives –  
 A way of battering, a badmouth ... Now Auden’s  
 camouflaged  
 Aphorism is a dictum codified into post-modern rubric,  
 Light years away from C Day Lewis’s *Left Review* pamphlet,  
 We’re Not Going To Do NOTHING – right at the vanguard  
 Of the red double negative, eventually to be vandalised by  
 The Soviet transitive, and a volley of machine-gunned  
 missives  
 Spilling red on red, red against red (better red *and* dead!)  
 – but  
 Good on C Day Lewis for putting poetry where its  
 mouth is ....

DEVON VIOLET MAKES NOTHING HAPPEN –  
 SURVIVES IN THE DEVON VALLEY OF ITS  
 DISTILLING – IT’S A SPRAY OF HAPPENING – A SNOUT!

\*\*\*\*\*

In this current time of mythological construction,  
*Devon Violet* leitmotivs – ‘We’re all in this together’,  
 ‘Make work pay’, ‘Do the right thing’, ‘Roll up our sleeves’,  
 ‘Fairness’, ‘Shirkers and strivers’, ‘Scroungers’, ‘Culture  
 Of idleness’, ‘Sense of entitlement’, ‘Something-for-nothing’,  
 ‘Curtains shut during the day’, ‘Parasites’, ‘Spongers’  
 And ‘moral degenerates’ (courtesy of A N Wilson’s  
 Pilfering of the verbiage from eugenics textbooks in his  
 Diatribe in the *Daily Mail* *thusian*) – a whole new genealogy  
 Of disingenuous adjectives designed to separate the wheat  
 From the chaff, the NEET from the CHAV, the ‘need’ from  
 ‘Entitlement’, the ‘heating’ from ‘eating’, the light from  
 Enlightenment, draws the dividing lines in the rhetorical  
 dirt;  
 It might also be time to take stock of what period scholar  
 Samuel Hynes, in his 1976 retrospective  
 On the Thirties, *The Auden Generation*, termed the “Myth  
 Of the Thirties”, that time, indisputably, when, “the world  
 Of action and the world of imagination” came to  
 “interpenetrate”,  
 Yet not a decade as clear-cut in terms of dialectic  
 As hagiographic Marxian historians would have us believe  
 Of Them – but a period in which the British Left had yet  
 to  
 Fully fructify and define itself; and poetic preponderance  
 On the burgeoning burden of a Guilty Generation and  
 Its prehensile apprehension, anticipation of an approaching  
 Time when poetry and politics, art and action, would  
 converge,  
 Become symbiotically one, gushed donnishly from the  
 graduate  
 Pen of one Wystan Hugh Auden, whose Nordic-sounding  
 Surname bespoke Icelandic ancestors cut from the black  
 Gabbro crags of his fanciful imagination – by the mid-  
 Thirties, he penned to his friend, Christopher Isherwood,

A polemical birthday poem in which he augmented his  
 Private anguishing in “The squalid shadow of academy and  
 Garden” as to some guiding light to ignite their generation,  
 To “Make action urgent and its nature clear”; and here  
 the young  
 Oxford hope of Rookhope, his “sacred landscape”, would  
 Confer his name to a meta-terrain, what he termed  
 a “fabulous  
 Country” – a truly fabular one – but which became  
 commonly  
 Canonised as ‘Auden Country’, a metaphorical territory  
 Without barriers between literature and enactment, one  
 rinsed  
 Of all Cartesian Dualisms sprawled like patchworks across  
 the land,  
 Hedgerows cauterising essential seams which stitched  
 together  
 Old bedfellows of private art and public action ...  
 But from  
 The outset of his self-transcending Audenic dialectic,  
 The brilliant boy from Birmingham with the chafed face  
 Of a scholarly twelfth-century friar, carved eyes bevelled  
 With the belfry-dark of meticulous craft on parchment  
 and  
 Illuminated manuscripts, sent out mixed signals, sparring  
 Shadows always latticing his path: first he was for defining  
 An authentic political poetry, then, next, for obfuscating  
 Such lofty tolls for the subtler peals of “parable-Art” – but  
 surely  
 All art was parable? In his Introduction to *The Poet’s Tongue*,  
 Of 1935, Auden coined this grail again as “the parabolic  
 Approach”, whose quintessence was poetry: parabolic  
 poetry  
 Would teach us “love” but not “ideology”, it would bear us  
 Messages in paradigms, the sides, ours to decide on –  
 rather  
 Than didactic, it would lead us out from the dingy  
 schoolrooms  
 Of ethical tutelage and up to flights of self-enfranchisement  
 Through choice, a personal responsibility for interpreting  
 The parable with whichever messages seemed to strike us  
 first  
 In the figurative tapestry – and this was where anxiety  
 Stepped in, gingerly, with its weighted gingery grin:  
 Neurosis sourced from a species’ rinsing sin, the “dizziness  
 Of freedom”, chagrin of choice, the choking chain  
 Of impossible office, whichever Kierkegaardian coining  
 One picked, Anxiety was the defining temperament  
 Of the age, the thunderstruck lightning charge of  
 anticipation ....

---

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sam Watts for his poem, and the background  
 story, and thanks to Alan Morrison for sending in the  
 “choicest excerpts” from *Odour of Devon Violet*. Readers,  
 don’t be daunted by the quality of their poems – be an  
 imaginative commoner yourself, and send your poems in to  
 artseditor@communistreview.org.uk.

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## Notes and References

- 1 Alan Morrison, *Blaze a Vanishing and The Tall Skies*, Waterloo Press, 2013.



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