



COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Mike Quille** and **Chris Guiton**
Visions of Housing in a Communist Society
- **Kenny Coyle** *Marxism and Juche*, part 2
- **Aluta Msebenzi** *The Struggle for Radical Transformation in South Africa*
- **John Foster** *Britain's Overseas Territories*
- Plus book reviews and Soul Food



BUILDING JERUSALEM



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The news of Bob Crow's tragic death came just as CR was being prepared for print. We salute the memory of this outstanding socialist and trades unionist, and extend deepest sympathy to his family and the RMT.

contributors

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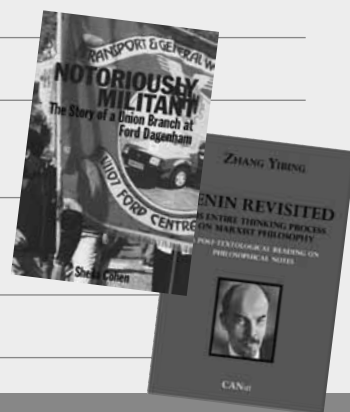
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editorial



By Martin Levy

In *CR70* we reproduced a round table discussion on 'Building the Fight Against Austerity'. One contributor made the point that

"The time may come when the CPB will need to assess whether Labour can still become the *mass* working class party. ... Miliband's proposals for individual trades union membership of the Labour Party will completely change its unique federal character."¹

Has that time for assessment now come? Labour's special conference voted overwhelmingly to accept the Collins Report, which, among other things:

- abolishes the college for leadership elections, in favour of one member one vote;
- restricts selection of parliamentary candidates to full members only; and
- creates new membership categories of "affiliated supporter" and "registered supporter".

It is ironic that these changes were adopted close on the 30th anniversary of the start of the Great Miners' Strike. In that dispute Margaret Thatcher's Tory government set out to break the National Union of Mineworkers, as the first step towards destroying the militant combativeness of the trade union movement as a whole. Some union leaders hid behind the lack of an NUM ballot as the pretext for not standing in solidarity with the miners. While the *Morning Star* gave outstanding daily support to the miners' cause, the Eurocommunist leadership of the Communist Party of Great Britain was at that time seeking to eliminate the paper's class perspective – objectively playing into the hands of the ruling class.

The Miners' Strike was one of those pivotal moments in history. Had it been successful, the road towards a more progressive future would have been opened up. The consequences of its failure can be seen today in the anti-

trade union laws, the reduced size and militancy of the trade union movement and the lack of confidence that austerity policies can be resisted by widespread mass action. Already industrially disarmed, the trade union movement faces becoming politically disarmed too, through the acceptance of the Collins Report. The continuing rightward shift in Labour policies is testament to the crisis in political representation of the working class.

Yet it would be premature to state that Labour can no longer become a *mass* working class party. Trade unions still have a significant collective voice within it – at least on paper; and they are now committed to winning many of their affiliated members to become individual Labour members or registered supporters in their own right. However, given the direction of Labour policies, and the lack of activists in the trade union movement itself, that's a tough call. Furthermore, there is another factor driving this, and one which is not being openly admitted.

The *Transparency of Lobbying, Third Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014* prevents individual unions from spending, in any 12-month period leading up to a general election, more than £390,000 UK-wide – £319,800 in England. But only one-tenth of this can be money targeted at a particular political party, including affiliation fees based on membership numbers – *ie* each union can give the Labour Party in England no more than £31,980, unless Labour provides written consent to receive more. Trade union freedom now depends on a licence being issued by the Labour Party.² In 2010, unions donated nearly £13 million to Labour, and Miliband is running scared of suggestions that these are not monies freely given. Instead of campaigning hard over the obscenity of corporate donations to the Tories – paid from profits generated by workers' labour – he is seeking to turn union-affiliated members into dues-paying members. In the absence of progressive policies to inspire prospective recruits, this will fail.

There is an urgent need to rebuild

confidence within the labour movement and to create a culture that mass struggle can succeed and alternatives to austerity are achievable. Without this, there is no chance that Labour can be won for a different course, let alone that any new mass workers' party can be created. The People's Assembly movement contains within it the potential to rebuild that confidence. However, the labour movement will ultimately need to go further, championing a different, socialist form of society.

A vision of how that future might look is essential. In this issue of *CR*, we start, as Mike Quille explains, an occasional series on *Tomorrow May Not Be the Same*. The first article, in the form of a Chris Guiton interview, focuses on housing and provides our front cover feature, *Building Jerusalem*. The poem which follows, *The Headroom Tax* by Alan Morrison, powerfully exposes the ConDem attack on housing as a basic right.

Overall, the rest of this issue may appear eclectic – or, alternatively, 'something for everyone'. We have part 2 of Kenny Coyle's discussion of the *juche* phenomenon in North Korea, Aluta Msebenzi's analysis of the challenges facing South African workers, and John Foster's elucidation of the military and economic roles of Britain's overseas territories. We finish off with two book reviews and the regular *Soul Food*, this time on Pablo Neruda. This editor has allowed himself the indulgence of a longer-than-normal book review because the topic – Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks* – emphasises the crucial importance of studying materialist dialectics. Would that Ed Miliband had learned that from his father, Ralph!

Notes and References

1 *CR70*, Winter 2013/14, p 10.

2 Keith Ewing: *Coalition's Attempt To Stop Electioneering By Unions – "Utterly Reprehensible"*, Campaign for Trade Union Freedom, 30 August 2013, online at <http://www.tradeunionfreedom.co.uk/keith-ewing-coalitions-attempt-to-stop-electioneering-by-unions-utterly-reprehensible/>.

Tomorrow May Not Be the Same

Introduction by Mike Quille

“In a fully communist society, a new morality would characterise the social relations between people: the egotistical individualism of capitalism will be replaced by collective care and concern for every individual and for the full, all-round development of the human personality.

For the sake of humanity, the future is communism.”

– concluding paragraphs of *Britain’s Road to Socialism*, 8th edition, Communist Party of Britain, 2011

Poem

by Karen Brodine

It’s like being sick all the time, I think,
coming home from work,
sick in that low grade continuous way
that makes you forget what it’s like to be well.

we have never in our lives known what it is to be well.

what if I were coming home, I think,
from doing work that I loved and that was for us all,

what if I looked at the houses and the air and the streets,
knowing they were in accord, not set against us,

what if we knew the powers of this country
moved to provide for us and for all people –
how would that be – how would it feel and
think and what would we create?

From Jerusalem

by William Blake

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In England’s green & pleasant Land!



IN 2012/13, the Communist Party’s Cultural Commission ran a consultation exercise, to find out how members wanted to take forward the ‘cultural struggle’, defined both as making interventions in the arts and literature, and the more general anti-capitalist ‘battle of ideas’.

Some helpful suggestions were forthcoming, including that we should try to sketch out what communism might mean in practice – that we needed to develop thinking on the things that matter to most people, and the questions they ask of socialists and communists about what kind of society we are struggling for and what it would actually look like.

So in this and forthcoming issues of *CR*, we are going to try to flesh out those last few sentences of *Britain’s Road to Socialism*, give some answers to the questions Karen Brodine asks in her poem, and equip us all to join Blake in the ‘Mental Fight’. The plan is to offer a brief, introductory perspective on particular areas of life, such as housing, food and drink, relationships, education, the arts, science, sport etc, and to outline some of the steps towards achieving the communist vision that might be taken by a left-leaning government committed to radical social change.

We thought it would be appropriate to present the articles in Q and A format, although the usual scholarly apparatus of notes and references will be added, for readers to pursue the subject further if they wish. And since the communist project is a creative project, we will be aiming to accompany the articles with not only the usual kinds of graphic illustration, but also other kinds of creative material relevant to the subject matter.

We want to help develop the debate about the shape of the society we wish to create. The communist project is by definition a democratic and participatory project, so readers are welcome to respond to the articles, send in contributions, illustrative material etc. and we will try and work them into future articles. Please write to artseditor@communistreview.org.uk.

So, on to our first piece, on the theme of housing, by Chris Guiton, convener of the Communist Party’s Economics Commission.

Building Jerusalem: visions of housing in a communist society

Mike Quille (MQ)
interviews Chris Guiton (CG)



MQ: Many writers have developed their visions of what a utopian society might look like. What can we learn from them in the context of the vital human need for shelter, and the provision of suitable housing to meet this need?

CG: The need for shelter from the elements is a basic human requirement, which took on greater significance as nomadic existence was replaced by a more settled society. In the process, this simple requirement evolved into something that might be a place of work as well as a home, with different rooms developing specialist functions, and where people developed relationships with their family and community.

Clearly, the architects and builders who design and provide our houses have a major influence on the wider shape of the society we live in. They have a social responsibility to produce housing which is not only functional and which meets daily human needs, but which is also aesthetically appealing, efficient in construction terms and its use of space, and which

is environmentally friendly. The vernacular is important, but so is recognition of the scope for innovation as new materials and construction techniques emerge and people's needs change over time.

But this is putting the cart before the horse. The nineteenth century was the first time when capitalists had to consider how to house workers. There was no end of commentators on the housing question. It was a central theme in literature (one thinks of references to poor housing in the novels of Charles Dickens such as *Sketches by Boz* and *Bleak House* and his descriptions of the squalid conditions in Canning Town after his visit there in 1857 ('Londoners over the border', from *Household Words*, Issue No. 390, 1857); and it was the subject of influential studies such as the social reformer Charles Booth's pioneering survey of the condition of people in the nation's capital, *Life and Labour of the People in London* (1903).

But what have specifically socialist or Marxist thinkers actually said about the design or provision of housing? There isn't room here to survey the whole literature, but Marx himself said nothing about the actual shape that

a communist society would take. And he certainly didn't stray into the housing field in any detail. He understood that communism would evolve out of socialist society, reflecting the circumstances of the time, in ways that we could not predict, while recognising, in the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, that in the higher stage of communist society "the springs of common wealth flow more abundantly".¹ For the purposes of this discussion, there is an important point to be made here: at a detailed level, who knows how people's needs and wants will change in the time it will take to establish a genuinely communist society? Nonetheless, this shouldn't prevent us speculating about general principles and starting to map out the key features and transitional stages that we would need to travel through to get to that point.

William Morris's *News from Nowhere* is a good place to start. In this classic of its type, his brilliance lay in producing a well-crafted vision of a future society based on common ownership, democratic control of the means of production and the abolition of the monetary system – and in which

work was a creative and pleasurable activity. Mindful of the challenges, Morris had deliberately set *News from Nowhere* well into the future. And it is noticeable that, while he had spent some time training as an architect, he shied away from setting out in his writing a detailed vision of how the 'housing question' – essentially its provision and allocation – would be solved.

But the significance he attached to the issue is evident. He wrote elsewhere, "If I were asked to say what is at once the most important production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should answer, A beautiful House."² He was very conscious of the role of architecture in society:

"the untouched surface of ancient architecture bears witness to the development of man's ideas, to the continuity of history, and, so doing, affords never-ceasing instruction, nay education, to the passing generations, not only telling us what were the aspirations of men passed away, but also what we may hope for in the time to come."³





William Morris
Red House

And he appreciated the importance of simple beauty in things, where architecture was an expression of handicraft as well as a work of cooperation:

“The very designer, be he never so original, pays his debt to this necessity in being in some form or another under the influence of tradition; dead men guide his hand even when he forgets that they ever existed. But, furthermore, he must get his ideas carried out by other men; no man can build a building with his own hands”.³

In other words, it isn't just about the building of a house, but also, at a fundamental level, about the act of construction itself.

Morris left a lasting legacy through, for example, his influence on interior design and the creation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. His singular contribution was to pose the question of the

relationship between work and home. He wanted factories which were like palaces and he wanted work to be located in the home, where it could be shared as a pleasure by families and controlled by communities – arguably not such a fanciful notion given recent developments in technology. He also wrote at length about the eradication of the difference between town and country and wanted factories moved out of the city (in contrast to Engels who was untroubled by them being in the heart of the city).

More prosaically, perhaps, Robert Owen, the social reformer and spiritual father of the co-operative movement, established his model community at New Lanark in the early 19th century in an attempt to temper the impact of the Industrial Revolution with a more humane regime, based on a number of workplace, social and educational reforms. These included good quality housing and “gardens ... [and an] abundance of space in all directions to keep the air healthy and pleasant...

[with] walks and plantations before them”⁴. The aim was to promote the good health and happiness of the workforce and their families.

The French utopian socialist, Charles Fourier, had some decidedly eccentric ideas about the world but also had the vision to create ideal communities based on cooperation between people, tackling alienation in the workplace, promoting the rights of women and supporting individual self-fulfilment. The key to his model community was the *Phalanstère* (or phalanstery), ideally consisting of 500-2000 people working together for mutual benefit. He viewed existing towns as being

“perversely organised and meant for families having no societary relations. Instead of the chaos of little houses which rival each other in filth and ugliness in our towns, a Phalanx constructs for itself a building as perfect as the terrain permits.”⁵

A phalanstery would be organised around a central area for quiet activities (eg dining rooms, meeting rooms and library), a separate area for ‘noisy workshops’ and children’s activities, and private apartments and social halls. Inhabitants were to be segregated by age, with children and the elderly kept apart from adults.

Some of Fourier’s ideas were quite influential on later thinkers, including Marx (although his conception of the physical organisation of such communities probably strikes most of us today as far too rigid). Perhaps that is why it appealed to 20th century architects like Le Corbusier, who incorporated the concept of the *Phalanstère* into his decidedly prescriptive urban planning philosophy. See, for example, the *Unité d’Habitation* in Marseilles,

a self-contained community designed as a ‘vertical garden city’ which, while offering bold and innovative design features, has also been criticised for failing to realise its utopian ideals in its use of community space, lack of flexibility within individual units and its relationship with the surrounding community. In that connection, it is also noteworthy that Le Corbusier’s fetishisation of the motor car contributed to the isolation of working class communities within their own cities as it became a substitute for accessibility on a human scale, and public transport links were neglected.

But the debate here isn’t just about the design and layout of housing, it’s also about its provision. Engels made a significant contribution in this area in a series of articles in 1872, later re-published in pamphlet form as *The Housing Question*. Typically, he got straight to the nub of the problem: housing shortage under capitalism is an inevitable consequence of rapid industrialisation as mass migration occurs from rural to urban areas, increases in land values lead to colossal increases in rents, downward pressure on wages reduces workers’ ability to pay these rents and the availability of workers’ housing in cities is reduced as it is replaced by buildings which offer better opportunities for speculation:

“In [bourgeois] society the housing shortage is no accident; it is a necessary institution and it can be abolished together with all its effects on health, etc, only if the whole social order from which it springs is fundamentally refashioned.”⁶

Engels’ analysis was spot-on – and is still relevant today. The solution was not to support the existing system, as proposed by bourgeois

social reformers, by promoting misplaced attempts to turn workers into home-owners, which only weakened workers resistance to capitalists' efforts to reduce wages, but to end class exploitation and the capitalist mode of production. As part of the transition, artificially created scarcity could be resolved "by the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses the homeless or those workers excessively overcrowded in their former houses."⁷⁷ Without going into detail, Engels appeared to accept that the transition to socialism would require the collection of rent and a mechanism for allotting housing according to need. But this doesn't really tell us much about how people would combine their need for housing with other, parallel needs around work and community.

So we have a mixed story from all the writers I have mentioned: some excellent analysis of the fundamental causes of 'housing shortage'; a varied range of proposals for meeting people's housing requirements, rooted to a greater or lesser extent in a practical recognition of fundamental social needs; but little real detail about how this would work under either socialism or communism. In parallel, what emerges clearly is that capitalism is fundamentally incapable of fulfilling this basic need, the satisfaction of which brings together all the things capitalism is inherently bad at: planning, integration of services and a democratic ownership model.

MQ: What do we mean by a 'socialist architecture'?

CG: Some might say we need to challenge the myths propagated by the bourgeois media about socialist architecture constituting nothing more than 'endless blocks of lifeless, monotone,

grey buildings'. Undeniably, much housing of this type was built in socialist states, but it often reflected challenging economic and political circumstances and the imperative to construct at least basic housing quickly for rapidly industrialising and urbanising societies. And, of course, limited facilities or a lack of architectural ambition is hardly unique to socialist states. Frankly, much housing, public or private, in the capitalist West is simply awful. Witness the tedium of speculative, suburban, monotone architecture; and the social problems generated by the boom in the construction of high-rise tower blocks from the 1950s, characterised by a loss of community; deliberate corner-cutting reflected in poor construction and inadequate maintenance; and the lack of thought given to either the social consequences of these designs or the need for decent public transport and other facilities. In effect, old slums were replaced by new slums.

Think what it would feel like to have a different culture of property ownership, where the imperative to build for profit is removed and you don't have to think of your house as a commodity. Or what would happen if all land was nationalised, which would radically shift the debate about land value and taxation and give social building a moral high ground to attract the best pioneering urban planners and architects. This would open up the door to self-build, currently the preserve of a privileged few, and would be a key component of any future society. We need to articulate the principles of a socialist architecture that meets social needs, is aesthetically pleasing, is constructed to high standards and contributes to a sense of community.

If we think of socialism as being about a more direct line between production and need we also need to consider how housing need

would be assessed and how housing would be allocated to people. What transitional steps would be required to change and eventually replace the current housing market? Could we imagine another NHS, a 'National Housing Service', organising delivery of appropriate housing on the basis of need? And, linked to that, could industries be charged with disposing of the social element of their surplus value by putting it back into schools, communities and housing (as was done by the rail industry). For the transitional period, this would probably need to sit in parallel with some degree of owner-occupation, especially if the homes were built by cooperatives. For better or for worse, owner-occupation is now deeply rooted in the British working class and (mansions apart!) there are no proposals for public acquisition of the current large stock of owner-occupied homes, which would be seen as a threat by the many residential owner-occupiers on lower incomes. So we might envisage a transitional period during which council houses and private houses co-exist, and families perhaps have a genuine choice between renting and buying for the

first time?

But let's be clear, the communist society that evolved from this would have moved beyond the requirement for housing need assessments or allocation procedures. It would simply arrange to produce sufficient building materials and assign sufficient land for each household to have a modest but adequate home. Private ownership of housing would then become a non-issue.

MQ: What have socialist architects and urban planners already achieved in the sphere of socially responsible architecture? What can be learned about housing design and provision from societies which have attempted to 'build Jerusalem'?

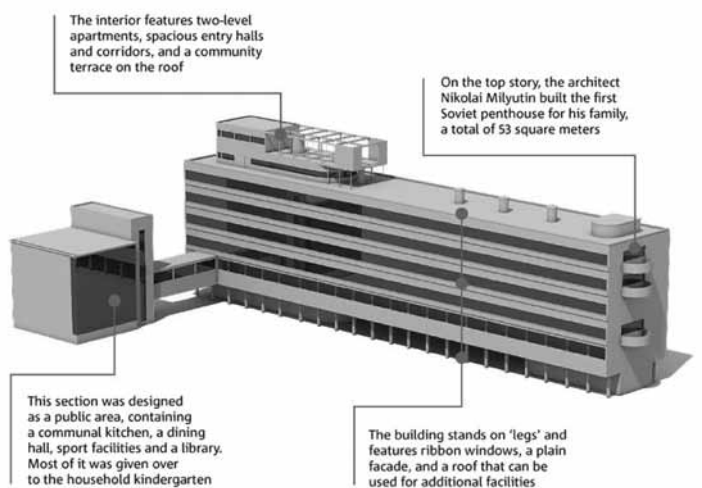
CG: There is much to be learned from the examples of now defunct or still existing socialist countries which constructed significant volumes of housing for social need, often in difficult economic and political circumstances.

In the USSR, the ideological drive to forge a new socialist society, allied with rapid

The Narkomfin House

Architects: MOISEI GINZBURG and IGNATY MILINIS

Was constructed in 1930 for employees of the People's Commissariat of Finance. The house is a monument of Soviet constructivism.



industrial development and accompanying migration from the countryside to the cities, combined to create a synthesis between radical art and architecture. The Constructivist movement created a number of highly innovative, large-scale housing developments, which were designed to create new forms of communal living, with shared spaces for eating and recreation. A classic example is the Narkomfin Communal House in Moscow, built in 1930, which actually combined self-contained flats and integrated shared living spaces, reflecting the transitional nature of the times. It's astonishing to reflect on how Constructivist architects created a new visual language in the face of material shortages, under-developed technology and a rapidly evolving political environment. Eventually, Constructivism and other experiments were abandoned when they were considered too advanced for the conditions that prevailed at the time. This illustrates the ideological problems of building socialism when many people are still imbued with bourgeois and petty bourgeois ideas and values, or when economic constraints present too much of a hurdle. But this shouldn't detract from the very real sense of innovation that these

movements expressed. Food for thought, perhaps, for future designers and architects!

The story of 'Red Vienna' from 1919 to 1934 is a fantastic example of what socialists can achieve at the municipal level within a capitalist society with determination and the right political circumstances. Responding to an acute housing shortage and significant popular pressure for change, it was decided that a significant public housing programme was needed, which aimed much higher than satisfying basic accommodation needs. The goal was to provide a platform for a new society, linked to the provision of decent education, health and cultural facilities, as the first step towards the delivery of a social utopia. The emphasis was on good quality design and effective use of communal spaces; rents were kept low and apartments were allocated on the basis of social need. The aim was to demonstrate what a socialist society could achieve:

"... big cities are able even in a capitalistic society to carry out a considerable piece of socialist work. A social democratic majority in the City Council can also show

in a capitalistic state what creative power is inherent in socialism".⁸

Karl-Marx-Hof was a symbol of the new vision.

On a different scale, huge volumes of housing have been constructed in China since the revolution. Like the Soviet Union, they have had, in the past, to build rather minimal dwellings quickly and cheaply. But the great achievement of both the Soviet Union and China was to have urbanised peasant countries without producing slums or shanty towns. And it is worth noting that the USSR had to rebuild huge volumes of housing destroyed in World War Two – an enormous achievement. Unfortunately, what started as a necessary top-down approach became paternalism of the sort adopted by Labour councils in Britain. And, in China, the debate continues over the growing role of the market in more recent years as the country strives to build the 'primary stage of socialism'. While, at a general level, there is no denying that the introduction of the market as a mechanism for developing China's productive forces and raising living standards has led to improvements in the quality of life experienced by its inhabitants, there would appear to be emerging problems with the supply of sufficient housing to meet social need, as challenges are generated by the privatisation of a large chunk of the housing market since the 1980s. And the images of gleaming skyscrapers in Shanghai or Beijing don't really make Chinese cities look like models of communist construction in practice. But, arguably, the Chinese are at an early stage of building the economic foundations for *socialism* and therefore still a long way from communism. It is to be hoped that the higher standards and the cultural flowering required really to fulfil social needs will come later.

MQ: Did 'municipal socialism' make a useful contribution to architecture and the provision of housing in Britain?

CG: Without a doubt. A number of Labour (often quite right wing!) local authorities built housing for social need rather than for speculative ends, to high design standards.

"Municipal socialism" describes the local government-led social reform developed in some British cities from the late 19th century. Joseph Chamberlain, Mayor of Birmingham, 1873-5, is often cited as a good example. Reforms included taking gas and water supplies into public ownership, creating city parks and – relevant for our purposes – significant slum clearance and public housing programmes.

Lenin was rightly critical of municipal socialism's tendency to promote "dreams of social peace, of class conciliation" and to "divert public attention away from the fundamental questions of the economic system as a whole, and of the state structure as a whole, to minor questions of local self-government."⁹ But, as with many things which have the potential to be progressive and improve the lot of mankind, without being explicitly revolutionary in themselves, municipal socialism did achieve some impressive results in the public housing sphere. And, while council housing undoubtedly exists within the capitalist system, it constitutes a first step towards the socialisation of housing provision, based on a democratic, cost-effective mechanism for allocating housing based on social needs.

Berthold Lubetkin is a potent example of the potential to marry good design with a socialist aesthetic and the construction of buildings for human needs within the local authority context. Born in Tbilisi, Georgia,



Karl-Marx-Hof Vienna

he studied in Moscow and Leningrad (where he witnessed the Russian Revolution and absorbed elements of Constructivism), before eventually emigrating to Britain in 1931.

With other young British architects, he established Tecton, an architectural practice keen to explore the European modernist movement. Their flagship project, Spa Green Estate, in Clerkenwell, London EC1, is the most complete post-war realisation of the pre-war aim to provide social regeneration through Modernist architecture. It was the first public housing to show that the working class could have affordable, well-designed and efficient housing, and set a benchmark for public housing in Britain. It was praised for being the most innovative public housing of the time: visually attractive, well-lit and spacious, with modern facilities not previously available to working families, including lifts, central heating, balconies and a spectacular roof terrace for common usage.

Although beyond the scope of this article, I think it is also worth mentioning Lubetkin's Finsbury Health Centre. This was a monument to social idealism and a pivotal moment in British social history that foreshadowed the creation of the NHS. The building was commissioned by the Labour-controlled Metropolitan Borough of Finsbury and opened in 1938 with Lubetkin's assertion that "nothing is too good for ordinary people".¹⁰ It is notable for its success in resolving the tension between three key modernist ideals: a social function, the political and the aesthetic. The building's glorious open and democratic structure, designed to attract local residents into the centre, underpinned Lubetkin's belief that architecture "cried out for a new world".

'My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.'
- Isaiah 32:18

MQ: What is the role of urban planning in offering solutions to the housing needs of complex, socialist societies?

CG: Worldwide, there's been a significant increase in the proportion of the population living in cities, which is now around 50%. This trend shows no sign of slowing. In the UK itself around 80% of the population now live in towns and cities. We can learn a lot from the development of urban planning in this country, going back to the industrial revolution, and the successes and failures of successive governments' urban planning policies. These range from the largely *laissez-faire* approach of most 19th century governments, through the more interventionist approach adopted in the 20th century to the return to full-blooded neo-liberalism we are witnessing in the 21st century.

The daily lives of most of us are conditioned by how this urban environment is controlled. But the sad fact is that, under capitalism, we experience a huge democratic deficit in our urban lives. In this connection, on top of the earlier expropriation of the traditional commons for private gain, we are now witnessing the ongoing expropriation of the civil commons for private profit. City dwellers have little or no control over the process of urbanisation, over decisions about what happens to the space around them, access to public services or the availability of the social and community facilities required to make life bearable.

The growth in private, gated, housing developments

or the example of Liverpool ONE, the largest city-centre development in Europe, should give us all pause for thought. In Liverpool, 35 city-centre streets have effectively been privatised via a no-cost 250-year lease granted by the city council to a private developer. Electronic surveillance is all-pervasive, a private police force controls what happens on the streets and there are no public rights of way. This represents the neo-liberalisation of urban space as corporate interests take primacy over democratic rights to gather or protest, as electronic media colonise public space (a large public TV screen is used for major events and local advertising) and sophisticated marketing techniques are used to sell the 'magic of consumerism'.

But we all have a fundamental right to urban spaces that work for our interests rather than against them. This includes efficient and low cost public transport; access to decent schools and hospitals; plenty of public spaces for recreation; effective distribution of good quality food and other necessities; and, of course, affordable, good quality housing. To deliver this means taking control over our lives, reclaiming cities for ourselves and implementing radical political changes which enable ordinary people to influence the shape of their urban environment.

This battle for 'urban space' is, of course, itself a product of economic and historical circumstances. Self-evidently, this is a class struggle as working class communities find themselves pitched against rapacious landlords and developers; well-intentioned but often authoritarian and paternalistic attempts to clear slums and create model communities bump up against working class communities' fight to assert their democratic rights and define urban space according to their needs; the continual search for profit

and the capture of land value leads to 'social cleansing' as lower income communities are forced out of cities by the ongoing process of capital accumulation; cities are explicitly redesigned in response to the threat of revolution, as in the rebuilding of Paris by Haussmann, or according to the demands of planners, bureaucrats and architects representing the interests of capital.

There isn't room here to consider in detail the work of Marxist intellectuals and geographers such as Henri Lefebvre and David Harvey, but they have made a significant contribution to the discussion of the relationship between capitalism and urban space. Lefebvre coined the term, "the right to the city" in 1968. He summarised it as a "demand ... [for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life", where people exercise collective power to re-shape the very process of urbanisation in a way that underpins self-determination, the appropriation of social and physical spaces and the establishment of meaningful social relationships.¹¹ For Lefebvre there was a dialectical relationship between urban reality and everyday activity (eg work, leisure, education and housing). By contrast with the cold, modernist urban visions represented by architects and urban planners like Le Corbusier, his thinking offers a bottom-up approach based on the lived experiences of individuals which offers some useful pointers for the way forwards.

At a very practical and immediate level this means learning from the experience of the various development corporations that were established in this country in the last century to build new towns such as Letchworth, Welwyn Garden City and Crawley. Although they usually suffered from a distinctly 'top-down' approach which limited the imagination



of some of the more idealistic architects and planners involved, they also offered a vision of urban environments, based on the ideas of Ebenezer Howard and other far-sighted thinkers, which, whatever their limitations within a capitalist context, were designed to meet a range of social needs. As David Grove has suggested,

“with their neighbourhood centres, generous open space, safe walkways and cycleways, the new towns are ... the best vindication of positive and comprehensive planning ... [which] perhaps ... should be seen as an instalment – or component – of utopia”.¹²

But this is contingent on the government of the day accepting the need for public ownership of land and democratic control over its use. Wouldn't it be interesting if a socialist administration were to “pioneer new urban forms where people will enjoy enough private space while feeling part of a community ... while remodelling our existing urban fabric with similar objectives”.¹²

MQ: You mentioned Ebenezer Howard just now – what exactly was his contribution?

CG: It's well worth saying a few words about Ebenezer Howard, who was very influential in the urban planning field. He created the concept of the 'garden city' to tackle what he saw as the self-defeating growth of cities which only added to traffic congestion, increased the disconnect between its citizens and its facilities and encouraged endless suburban sprawl. In his seminal work, *Garden Cities of To-morrow*, he defined the solution as reintroducing into city planning the ancient Greek notion of a natural limit

to city growth, based on clear urban boundaries (an agricultural green belt); limits to population numbers and density; and organised around a healthy mix of community, industry, public spaces and public services.

His genius was to take a holistic approach to urban planning, recognising the need for an organic balance between city and country, the management of urban growth via a controlled process of decentralisation married with effective public transport links, and the benefit of avoiding prescriptive urban design models which failed to recognise local peculiarities of climate, landscape or community needs. Crucially, he also understood the need for local authorities to own the land, control the planning process and deliver the public services that people required. His ideas have often been misunderstood or misinterpreted by subsequent urban planners, and his social reformist message obscured in the process, but there's no denying the radical conviction of his message about the importance of using planning to construct environments that meet fundamental human needs and create a genuine sense of community.

*'Would to God that
all the Lord's people
were Prophets'*
- Numbers 11: 29
(inscribed by Blake
beneath his poem
'Jerusalem')

MQ: What was the role of council housing in Britain, and do we still need it?

CG: The industrial revolution led to an explosion in the urban population. Most of the housing developed to cater for this need was provided by factory owners and private investors who built to rent.

The growing working class encountered housing that was cramped, over-crowded and squalid, usually without mains water or sanitation. In the first half of the 19th century life expectancy actually fell in many urban environments. And while conditions improved in the second half, because public health and housing legislation set higher space and sanitary standards for new housing, the slums remained. This departure from *laissez-faire* was, of course, only because epidemics of cholera and other diseases affected the rich as well as the working class, and because more technically developed capitalism required some of the labour force to be healthier and better educated. Concessions also had to be made to the skilled workers who now had the vote. Housing improvements can be seen as one form of divide and rule, consolidating class collaboration by the 'aristocracy of labour'. The improvements also increased building costs, making private investment in housing for working people less profitable, leading eventually to council housing and to speculative building for sale rather than rent. In sum, the largely *laissez-faire* policies pursued by 19th and early 20th century governments were clearly unable to provide decent quality housing or cope with the cycles of boom and bust that conditioned actual private-sector housing provision.

Council housing was introduced in some larger cities' areas on a limited basis in the early twentieth century, in an attempt to tackle this problem, following the introduction of limited subsidies by government. But it didn't really help those most in need. Rents of early council houses, as with Peabody and other 'philanthropic' dwellings, were too high for many of those living in slums. The scale of building increased after the First World War. Just over a million council homes were built between 1919 and 1939.

Almost every town and village had its council estate, and some whole new communities were built, like Norris Green in Liverpool, Wythenshawe in Manchester, and the London County Council's out-county estates, such as Becontree. But 3 million private houses were also built during the same period, which marked the start of large-scale owner-occupation by working people. Under a post-war Labour Government determined to meet wider social needs, to rebuild communities destroyed by the war and to provide housing for all, the local authority building programme was ramped up, with a greater emphasis on quality, community and location. Aneurin Bevan, the Minister for Health and Housing, and one of the architects of the Welfare State, famously promoted a radical vision of new estates where “the working man, the doctor and the clergyman will live in close proximity to each other.”

Council housing has served the country well. It is worth defending. It is a public asset, providing decent, affordable and secure housing that pays its own way. The cost to government is more than returned over time by the rents collected, which, traditionally, were the lowest of any form of tenure. The security of tenure given to tenants promotes stable homes and communities. Public accountability is protected by its ownership and management by local councils. Council housing should be available to all on the basis of general need, based on the recognition that these needs change over time, that employment is increasingly unstable and that people often have to move to find work. That means rejecting means testing and the deliberate creation of ghetto estates for the poorest and most vulnerable, which is what has happened to council housing since Thatcher. The iniquitous subsidies to support right-to-buy resulted in all

the best council houses being sold to better-off workers, an infamous piece of social engineering which further divided the working class. Housing provision was further fragmented by the enforced sale of council houses to housing associations (being transformed from locally accountable charities into big businesses). But some tenants have fought successful campaigns against the sell-offs, for example in Cambridge, where the council has started building housing again.

A massive council house building programme is an eminently practical alternative to the palpable failure of the private housing market. At its peak in the 1970s, one in three British people lived in a council house. Since then it has been starved of investment. But there are still nearly two million council tenants, with 4.5 million on housing waiting lists. House-building has collapsed as property developers and house-builders sit on huge 'land banks' and speculate on land values. It is reported that 1.3 million private tenants are facing homelessness or debt as private landlords exploit the housing shortage to raise rents to speculative levels and enforce unfair tenancy agreements. And around 35% of privately let homes are considered to be below minimum standards.

MQ: While planning for a just future society, what practical measures should we push an incoming Labour government to adopt immediately?

CG: As already described, it stands to reason that one of the key priorities for an incoming Labour government would be to institute a major council house-building programme. But there are a host of other very relevant policies which should be adopted. The interesting question is whether such a government would have the imagination and the

courage to develop a wide-ranging housing programme which actually creates a new paradigm and offers a housing model that starts to provide a bridge between capitalism and socialism over the following ten or twenty years.

The key to this would be to develop an ambitious but strategic approach which revolves around the following elements:

- A long, hard look at the way housing is financed and taxed in Britain. Under capitalism, the artificial creation of scarcity leads to higher prices and higher rents. This needs to be addressed.
- The promotion of new ownership models. During the transition to socialism, you would expect to see a mix of council/social housing, private renting and private ownership. But a significant, government-backed extension of the cooperative or mutual housing principle would be a radical step. A number of studies have shown the value of this type of housing, whether based on tenant ownership or tenant management. Democratic control of housing by residents brings clearly identifiable benefits in terms of better housing management, higher levels of resident satisfaction, better value for money and greater community engagement.
- The development of housing allocation mechanisms which facilitate the easy movement of people around the country as well as into bigger or smaller units or different types of housing as their housing needs change over time.
- Significantly increased investment in green construction technologies, use of sustainable materials and development of zero-carbon housing to help tackle the damage to the

environment caused by unbridled capitalism in the housing market.

- The direct involvement of construction sector trade unions (*eg* UCATT, Unite and GMB) in the development of housing recruitment and training programmes, continued development of skills levels and the promotion of quality workmanship.
- Legislation to ban labour-only subcontracting ('the lump').
- The nationalisation of building materials monopolies (cement, bricks, etc).
- The restoration of *mutual* building societies and the reform of housing associations to return them to their original purpose, *ie* providing cheap finance and building homes at affordable rents.
- The use of existing powers to establish 20 development corporations to build new eco-towns, especially in former mining and heavy industry areas.

At a more immediate level, we should push for:

- An end to right-to-buy.
- The empowerment of local authorities, including ensuring they have sufficient finance to undertake significant council house-building programmes appropriate to local need and can reinstate local authority direct labour organisations, which should be encouraged to federate and operate across borough and shire boundaries, sharing major equipment and establishing apprenticeship schemes to tackle youth unemployment.
- Compulsory registration of private landlords to ensure they meet minimum housing decency standards.
- The introduction of private sector rent controls.
- An end to the bedroom tax.

- The reinstatement of government regulations on minimum space standards for all residential property (based on an updated version of the Parker-Morris standards abolished in the 1980s).
- Changes to social and private housing provision rules requiring all new house-building to be undertaken with robust procurement rules which require companies to offer genuine apprenticeship programmes and directly employ workers under terms which guarantee industry employment standards.

MQ: How do we, as communists, understand and deal with the contradictions of capitalism in the context of the provision of housing?

CG: Inevitably, there's a tension between the way housing is currently provided in 21st century Britain and what we'd like to see under socialism; and the sort of transitional measures that would need to be introduced under socialism and the longer-term vision of what housing would look like under communism ('deed' vs 'need'). But it's instructive to focus on the very basic contradictions within a capitalist system that undermine its ability to provide good quality, affordable housing for all.

As any Marxist will appreciate, all commodities have a use value and exchange value. The use value of the house people live in is the shelter it provides them. The exchange value of that house is how much it costs on the open market. This creates a situation where housing is built for speculative purposes, and homeowners regards their home as a rising asset rather than a place to live; and it encourages social apartheid and divisions in society between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots'.



And, of course, speculation leads to house-price bubbles which then, inevitably, explode. In Britain, this speculative process goes back to the 18th century. But it steadily developed through the 19th century, particularly as private rented housing was replaced by owner occupation, and really took off in the 1980s with the deregulation of the banking sector and the easy availability of credit leading to an explosion of house prices. We are now witnessing a growing disconnect between house prices and average wages, and a decline in the proportion of the population able to afford housing to buy or, for that matter, to rent as rents follow suit. The housing market in this country is self-evidently dysfunctional, underlines the contradiction between production for profit and production for social need and requires fundamental change.

Of course, our role as communists is not to reform capitalism but to abolish it. However, actions which may not be revolutionary in themselves can still serve to promote social justice. A commitment to provide everyone with a decent home, at a cost they can afford, is surely a first step in this direction.

MQ: On a subjective level, what differences do you think there might be in how people would feel about living in the kind of housing you've been describing?

CG: I think there would be a number of significant differences. Let's think first about what housing means to us. Shelter is one of the most basic of human needs, so having a good stock of social housing would remove a lot of the anxiety people have about finding somewhere to live for themselves and their families. But it means a lot more to us than this. Where we have a choice, we express ourselves in how we choose our accommodation, and in

how we modify it, decorate it and ornament it. This gives us pleasure, and neighbours and friends too. In other words there is a strong social element to our feelings about the houses we live in.

At the moment, as discussed above, the speculative operation of the housing market, and of capitalist society generally, encourages people to see their homes as an investment rather than a pleasant place to live. This generates feelings of competitiveness as well as conformism with neighbours, and the perception of 'one's home being a castle', a last redoubt of personal space and ownership in an economy which denies us full ownership of our labour power.

So I think that in a more socialist society, and certainly in a communist society, we would all feel more equal, more open, less defensive and less threatened by differences in status and differences in personal ownership of wealth. The characteristics of our accommodation would be more closely linked to our personal and social needs and abilities, not only the fulfilling of our basic needs for shelter and warmth but also our need to express our artistic, decorative and gardening abilities, and our desire for happy lives with our families and neighbours and local communities. Not to mention being more environmentally sustainable. Our homes would be freer expressions of our less alienated lives, and thus more pleasurable to live in. And to visit!

MQ: And what about public architecture and public spaces?

CG: Linked to the question above, we should strive for a public architecture and public spaces that are planned to meet over-arching human needs rather than the pleasures of a bourgeois minority, which are invariably based on the exploitation of the labour which built them. This isn't to deny the quality of

architecture in cities such as Venice or Paris or the high 'liveability' standards offered by cities such as Ottawa or Melbourne. But the headline features often disguise major social problems in associated slums or outlying districts.

And there is much to be done to correct the problems generated by the explosion of slums and shanty towns around many cities in less-developed countries. Tackling widespread urban deprivation is a huge challenge. But there are interesting attempts being made to urbanise slums and promote sustainable development in a way which empowers people and promotes citizenship. A good example is the work being undertaken to tackle criminal gangs and develop public services in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro. Although still in its early stages, the focus of the programme is on green building, neighbourhood development and community infrastructure. Houses are being retro-fitted to improve both structures and the quality of life; while new housing, sewage collection, running water and transport facilities are improved. A very public illustration of this is Rio's new, affordable cable-car system over a group of favelas, the

Complexo do Alemão, which has significantly improved access and slashed journey times. Jorge Mario Jáuregui, the architect behind the cable car system, believes the project has real and symbolic value, "real because the connection has been built, and symbolic because it makes the informal city part of the formal city."¹³

MQ: Thanks Chris, for such a comprehensive and inspiring survey of housing issues. Any final words?

CG: In a communist society, we would be able to remedy the manifest defects of capitalist housing provision and urban 'development', build beautiful environments without impoverishing other areas and exploiting people, and would be able to empower people in the planning and construction process in a way that meets what is, after all, a fundamental human need.

We might finish with a quote from John Ruskin: "I say that if men lived like men indeed, their houses would be temples – temples which we should hardly dare to injure, and in which it would make us holy to be permitted to live".¹⁴

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The Headroom Tax

by Alan Morrison

Unauthorised households no longer have the right to hold
 Ghosts and memories hostage in spare rooms, those
 Unoccupied spaces, shrines of worship, perfectly-kept
 Time-capsules of sons' and daughters' last trails, left
 Authentically intact in their absences; or store rooms
 For surplus furniture, blanketed shapes – ergonomic ghosts –
 Or spaces for keeping special equipment to aid disabilities;
 Now Council households are disallowed some phantom
 'Spare room subsidies' for upkeep of such reliquaries,
 These 'under-occupied' guest rooms for visiting relatives,
 Or domestic carers; or occasional stopping-points for
 Offspring returning to the source of their bloodstream,
 To replenish their penuries, or, in salmonid pilgrimage,
 Gasp their last in brackish shallows of familiar surroundings,
 Those hopeless trophy rooms of long-pawed childhoods,
 Knowing they'll never be able to make that leap in shortfall
 From the precipice of caps, let alone one day sip the spiced
 Price of ownership ... Or simply spaces where people can
 Come to stay, instead of shelling out on B&Bs – in any
 Case, currently occupied as permanent ports of 'temporary'
 Accommodation by rental refugees from the same purge
 Of 'spare room subsidies' – known by the bitter sobriquet
 Of the 'bedroom tax' ... Or due to rent arrears triggered by
 The caps to benefits *in lieu* of re-introducing rent controls:
 Ripe pickings for tenancy cleansers, corpulent with properties,
 Fattening-up on unfurnished profits (this is the age
 Of regulating the indigent, while letting 'Buy-to-Let' vet
 Tenants and bet away the shelters of their fellow citizens –
 Right-to-Buy for the already propertied, but *no* 'Right-to-
 Rent' for the unfunded young relegated to single rooms
 And house-sharing in Buy-to-Vet kibbutz) – no spacial
 Privileges in huddled hovels; now all Council homes are
 Front-loaded onto bowing lobes of drooping-brow windows –
 No pipes for expelling pressures damned-up to the limits:
 The domestic subconscious sub-let to lodgers, tent-
 Veterans to tenants – There's no room left! Not even
 For the converted; occupancies cramped to capacities:
 No vent for over-crowding; all available space to be filled up
 With bodies, the barely living, and the dead in all but arrears:
 Damp partitioned tombs to accommodate bundles of bones,
 Nerves and limbs genetically charged to generate rent

The Korean Ideology: Marxism and *Juche*

By Kenny Coyle



PART 2: “MARX’S THEORIES AND FORMULAS ... CANNOT ACCORD WITH THE PRESENT REALITY”



In the first part of this article,¹ I looked at the emergence of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and its roots in Korea’s anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles. This second part looks in more detail at how North Korea’s official ideology has developed in the past four decades and has increasingly diverged from Marxism.

I. From Marxism to Kimilsungism

In the first two decades after *juche* was launched in 1955 by Kim Il Sung, the theory was presented as essentially a Korean adaptation of Marxism to specific national conditions. However, a dramatic shift in Korean ideology appears to coincide with the gradual rise to public prominence of Kim Il Sung’s heir Kim Jong Il. In a speech, apparently given in 1976 by Kim Jong Il, entitled *On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism*, a sharp demarcation was drawn between this theory and

mainstream Marxism. The younger Kim said: “Both in content and in composition, Kimilsungism is an original idea that cannot be explained within the framework of Marxism-Leninism.”² In this (and in a series of later works attributed to Kim Jong Il), a number of themes were developed to explain this.

First, there was the claim that Marxism-Leninism was outdated and belonged to a previous epoch:

“The revolutionary theory of Kimilsungism is a revolutionary theory which has provided

solutions to problems arising in the revolutionary practice in a new age different from the era that gave rise to Marxism-Leninism.”

Second, there was a rejection of dialectical materialism:

“The materialistic dialectic of Marxism presented the correlation between matter and consciousness and between being and thinking as the fundamental question of philosophy and proved the primacy of matter, the primacy of being. On this basis it clarified the laws of motion of the objective world. The material nature of the world and its universal laws of motion having been clarified, the *juche* idea presented the position and role of man in the world as the fundamental question of philosophy and proved that man is the master of everything and decides everything. It explicated on this basis the law that governs the domination, transformation and development of the world by man. The *juche* idea puts man in the place of master who dominates the world, instead of simply presenting him as a part of it. This philosophical principle of the *juche* idea cannot be explained within the framework of materialistic dialectic.”

This represents a fairly comprehensive assault on a basic principle of scientific socialism. The *juche* idea that “man is the master of everything” is counterposed to the Marxist approach that “men make their own history but they do not make it just as they please”,³ in other words that the subjective factor is always conditioned by objective factors independent of human will or intention. This second interpretation of the *juche* idea shows a marked shift toward philosophical idealism and its political counterpart, voluntarism.

Third, Kim Jong Il proposed the idea that Marxism-Leninism was relevant only for the period before the triumph of the revolution but not afterward:

“The problem of building socialism and communism has been clarified in a new way by Kimilsungism. True, the founders of Marxism-Leninism, too, expounded some views about socialist and communist society, but their views did not go far

beyond the limits of prediction and supposition.”

The final factor demonstrating the superiority of the *juche* idea given by Kim Jong Il was that Kim Il Sung had developed an entirely new theory of leadership:

“Furthermore, Kimilsungism raised the new question of the method of leadership in the revolutionary theory of the working class and elucidated it in a comprehensive way. The question of the leadership method holds an independent place, both theoretically and practically, in the revolutionary struggle of the working class. The revolutionary cause of the working class, the cause of socialism and communism, is a deep-going, complicated struggle to transform the world thoroughly and a great struggle in which the broad masses participate. Therefore, this revolutionary cause would be victoriously achieved only when a correct leadership method, together with a correct guiding idea and theory, is applied. The question of the leadership method assumes still greater importance when the working-class party takes over power, administers a new society and directs the building of socialism and communism. But in the revolutionary theory of the working class this question was never systematised as an independent theory before. Kimilsungism’s important service is that it provided a new elucidation of the theory on the leadership method and systematised it as an independent element.”

The claim that no Marxist before Kim Il Sung had bothered to develop a method of revolutionary leadership seems spurious, since issues of leadership had been central to Lenin’s development of Marxism in particular, and Kim Il Sung was certainly well aware of the writings of both Stalin and Mao.

The insistence on the role of leadership becomes clearer if we see it as a rationalisation, or theorisation, of the personality cult itself. Already powerfully entrenched by the late 1960s, Kim’s personality cult had taken on unimaginable proportions by the 1980s.

In 1987, Kim Jong Il again explained

his view on *juche*. The following three excerpts are from *On Establishing the Juche Outlook in the Revolution*:⁴

“Victory in the revolution depends, in the long run, on how the subject of the revolution, the integral whole of the leader, the party and the masses, is strengthened and how its role is enhanced. In establishing the revolutionary outlook, it is necessary to have a clear understanding of the object of the revolution, but it is most important to have a correct concept of and attitude towards the subject of the revolution.

...

If one is to establish the *juche* outlook on the revolution, one must, above all else, establish the revolutionary outlook on the leader. In doing this, it is important to have the correct understanding that the leader is the centre of the life of the socio-political community.

...

The essence of the leader in all contexts lies in his being the centre of the life of the socio-political community. There is no doubt that the centre of life is important for the existence and activities of the organism. Unless the masses are united, centring on the leader, they cannot acquire vitality as an independent socio-political community. We must understand and believe that the leader is the centre of the life of the socio-political community and that it is only when we are linked to the leader organisationally, ideologically and as comrades that we can acquire immortal socio-political integrity.”

Kim Jong Il’s descriptions bear little similarity to classical Leninist conceptions of collective leadership, which emphasised discussion and discipline within the party, and a vanguard party that would link up with the non-party masses (“tribune of the oppressed”⁵).

2. Tradition and Revolution

The uniqueness of Kim’s argument is that, apart from the party and masses, there is a “leader” who stands outside the masses and the party and yet at the same time takes centre stage. If not from Marxism, where does this concept come from?



These aspects of the *juche* idea seem to draw heavily from Korean Buddhist tradition, *Seon*, which is best known in the West through the related Japanese term *Zen*. This outlook is deeply rooted in Korean culture. The emphasis on the leader in *juche* has its counterpart in the Seon tradition of masters, who share their enlightenment by instructing others. Just as *Seon* emphasises the ‘oneness of the universe’, *juche* seeks to realise the monolithic unity of the Korean nation with “socio-political integrity”.

Other commentators have also noted the strong element of Confucianism within North Korean discourse. The Korean American scholar Han Park offered the following insight:

“Confucianism led to the development of a particular social order in Korea. In addition, it is clear that the Confucian familial and social structure contributed to the development of a distinct political culture and to the observable configuration of values, symbols, orientations, and behavioural patterns. Although the North Korean regime made efforts to eliminate Confucian beliefs and behaviour from North Korean society and political culture, it can be argued that strong vestiges of Confucianism exist in the current North Korean political and social structure.

In short, several salient and characteristic elements of Korean Confucianism have clearly reinforced the formation and maturation of the political ideology of *juche*. Elements such as a family-centred outlook, the human (rather than matter) as the centre of the universe, and the notion of life after death have all exerted profound influence on the philosophical structure of *juche* ideology.”⁶

The concept of ‘filial piety’, that is devotion and obedience to one’s parents, is considered to be an essential Korean trait. One South Korean offered this definition:

“Filial piety, which is called ‘hyodo’ in Korean, is defined as supporting and serving one’s parents, and is a natural duty of a person. From ages ago, morality in oriental society was derived from the ‘hyojae’ of Confucianism. ‘Hyojae’ means

honouring one’s parents and intensifying one’s brotherly love toward one’s siblings, and represents peace and harmony within the family.”⁷

North Korean media often refer to Kim Il Sung as the ‘fatherly leader’. In one Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) editorial marking Kim’s birthday in 2013, it was suggested that even the most mundane domestic detail was a matter for his benevolence:⁸

“People in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea [DPRK] call him ‘our fatherly leader’. The call is an expression of their deep reverence for him His care for the people’s living covered all from clothes and footwear to daily necessities. He even settled family problems on his field guidance tours. Therefore, he always remains in the hearts of the DPRK people as their real father.”

If Kim Il Sung can be personified as the father, Kim Jong Il ensured the party took on a maternal role. In another KCNA editorial a few weeks later we read:

“General secretary Kim Jong Il in his lifetime had worked hard to develop the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) into a motherly party faithfully serving the people He always said that the WPK should bear responsibility for the popular masses’ destiny and take good care of it as a mother does for her child.”⁹

The North Korean cult of the Kim family goes beyond simply nepotism in political leadership: it is aimed at reinforcing a wider message, ‘blood is thicker than water’, the whole nation is one family, led and cared for by each succeeding Kim. The grandfather-father-son succession fits seamlessly into this framework. For this reason, superficial comparisons with the USSR during the Stalin era or China during the Cultural Revolution have their limits. Undoubtedly the hefty influence of Stalin’s, and perhaps more directly Mao’s, personality cult shaped Kim Il Sung’s political formation. Yet, despite obvious similarities, the Kim *family* cults go far beyond those two examples of *personality* cult.

If the family-centred notion

represents the soft side of *juche*, then *songun*, the ‘army first’ policy that appeared in the 1990s, appears as the hard edge.

3. Songun Politics

The Korean peninsula is one of the most heavily militarised regions in the world. North Korea spends approximately 16% of its entire gross domestic product on defence but is still massively outspent by the South Korean budget of around US\$25bn a year. One million North Korean military personnel face 600,000 well-armed South Koreans and around 35,000 US forces stationed in Korea.

In this context, the development of the *songun* (military-first) policy by Kim Jong Il in the late 1990s is yet again a rationalisation of necessity. The DPRK faces military threats from the US and an increasingly militarised Japan. However, it was also developed at a time when the DPRK’s economy was in freefall, with the state’s industrial sector grinding to a halt and the public distribution system of food rationing breaking down. While army units had regularly been employed in construction projects and seasonal agricultural work in the past, the military began to play an even more significant role during the economic crisis, dubbed ‘The Arduous March’.

As one Korean-American academic puts it:

“To North Koreans, the military is not an abstract authority but a practical performer. It responds directly and effectively to people’s needs and wants. It delivers in a way that no others can: it delivers services and goods to the people and provides security. When I asked a farmer about his understanding of the *songun* doctrine, he offered that ‘it is the military that makes farming possible as the soldiers come into the village to perform the complete range of farming tasks from tilling the soil to seeding, irrigating, and harvesting.’ He continued, ‘The military not only protects the people’s lives from foreign hostility, but it also delivers food and services.’”¹⁰

In short, the army took on tasks that other arms of the state were no longer able to take on.

The North Korean political system, established by a former guerrilla leader whose close comrades-in-arms filled the leading posts of party and state

for decades, has always been highly integrated with its military. Article 100 of the DPRK constitution states that the role of “supreme leader” is derived from the chairmanship of the National Defence Commission.

Since the North Korean military plays such a widespread social and economic role Han Park notes that:

“*Songun* is much more than a political slogan, and it is more than the simple practice that the military holds all the power and the civilian sector is thus undermined and neglected. It is, in a single phrase, a pervasive philosophical ideology that undergirds [*ie* bolsters –KC] the very structure and function of North Korean society. Understanding that fact renders the society intelligible.”¹¹

With *songun*, Kim Jong Il took the rejection of Marxism even further by denying the leading role of the working class:

“On the basis of its deep analysis of the development of the times and the changed social and class relations, our Party put forward, for the first time in the history of the revolutionary movement, the idea of ‘precedence of the army over the working class’, giving prominence to the People’s Army as the core unit and main force of the revolution.”¹²

Using arguments that will be familiar to anyone who has followed the debates on class within British and European Marxism for over three decades, Kim now proposed that the changing composition of the working

class had transformed its character due to the domination of mental over manual labour and the scientific and technological revolution. As a result:

“Marx’s theories and formulas, which had been set forth one and a half centuries before, cannot accord with the present reality. The times have advanced further, witnessing a great change in social atmosphere, class relations and the status of the working class. With the development of capitalism, especially with the rapid development of science and technology and the arrival of the IT age, the living basis of the working class has been changed and work is being done on a more technological and intellectual basis. The ranks of the working class have been intellectualised and the working masses engaged in technical, intellectual and mental labour are quickly outnumbering manual workers.”¹³

While the amended constitution adopted in the last years of Kim Jong Il’s leadership continued to proclaim the DPRK’s socialist character, previous references to “communism” and “communist” in articles 29, 40 and 43 were deleted.¹⁴

4. From *Songun* to *Byungjin*

Since Kim Jong Un took power after his father’s death, there have been some significant adjustments. Judging by the published materials so far, the youngest Kim no longer feels much need to situate the WPK’s philosophy in relation to Marxism. Instead he has proclaimed a new stage in the *juche* idea. “The guiding ideology of the WPK is the great Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism.”¹⁵

In apparent contradiction of *songun*’s ‘military-first’ principle, Kim Jong Un has said that “Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism is, in essence, the people-first doctrine”.¹⁶ His speeches have stressed the need to raise people’s living standards and to upgrade civilian technology, especially in IT and computer-controlled manufacturing, alongside maintaining the DPRK’s nuclear weapons programme as a guarantee of independence. This twin-track approach, known in Korean as *byungjin*, appears to be a hallmark of Kim Jong Un’s line.¹⁷ A WPK central committee report from 2013 outlined its key features [emphasis added – KC]:

“The plenary meeting set forth a new strategic line on *carrying out economic construction and building nuclear armed forces simultaneously* under the prevailing situation and to meet the legitimate requirement of the developing revolution.

This line is a brilliant succession and development onto a new higher stage of the original line of simultaneously developing economy and national defence that was set forth and had been fully embodied by the great Generalissimos.

It was stressed at the meeting that the party’s new line is not a temporary countermeasure for coping with the rapidly changing situation but a strategic line to be always held fast to, in the supreme interests of the Korean revolution.”¹⁸

A number of insightful commentators believe that there are definite signs of a modest economic recovery, a more varied consumer market, state firms branching



out into private sector operations and, despite the temporary closure of the Kaesong Industrial Complex in early 2013, willingness to engage in joint ventures and expand special economic zones. Most of these projects were already in operation or well under way before Kim Jong Un took power.

“In many regards, Kim Jong Un is just harvesting what had been sown years ago, be it long-term macroeconomic trends like marketisation, monetisation and intensified foreign trade with China, or specific construction and renovation projects.”¹⁹

It is still too early to predict if these changes are merely reluctant adaptations or represent the beginnings of more radical reforms.

By contrast, in China, Deng Xiaoping’s reforms launched in 1978 were based on a whole number of national and international factors that do not apply to the DPRK, such as a large reserve of rural labour, a huge domestic market and initially favourable international relations. Deng was also able to reorient China ideologically by offering a critical assessment of Mao Zedong (“70% good 30% bad”) that allowed him quickly to jettison the most dogmatic elements of Mao’s philosophy while embracing the pragmatic aspects. One of Mao’s favourite maxims, “Seek truth from facts”, became a key slogan of Deng’s. It is almost inconceivable to imagine Kim Jong Un being able to criticise his father’s or grandfather’s ideas in the same way.

5. *Juche* in Comparative Perspective: Anti-Imperialism and Ethno-Socialism

While *juche* has been built explicitly with Korean elements, there are some parallels with the various forms of ‘African socialism’, or the ‘Arab socialism’ associated with Nasserist and Ba’athist movements in the post-colonial period. These radical ideological currents emerged in regions where imperialism had artificially drawn boundaries that bore little relation to historic or ethnic communities, just as the single nation of Korea has been divided.

There are several common themes shared by these ‘ethno-socialisms’:²⁰

- a) The preference for independence even at the expense of material wealth. “We prefer poverty in liberty to riches in slavery,” as the Guinean leader

Ahmed Sékou Touré once said.²¹

- b) The use of tactical non-alignment. For the Arab and African socialists this meant tilting toward the socialist camp without joining it, while for the Koreans it often meant a balancing act between the USSR and China.
- c) The tremendous emphasis placed on perceived traditional values and culture as the source of the nation’s strength. The Senegalese leader Leopold Senghor remarked that “Culture is the very texture of society,”²² and built his theory of negritude around this idea, while Kwame Nkrumah talked of a specific “African personality”²³.
- d) Placing the priority on ideology and mental outlook. Julius Nyerere said, for example:

“Socialism – like Democracy – is an attitude of mind. In a socialist society it is the socialist attitude of mind, and not the rigid adherence to a standard political pattern, which is needed to ensure that the people care for each other’s welfare.”²⁴

- e) Giving priority to national unity over class struggle. The original programme of the Ba’athist movement put it this way:

“The Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party is nationalist for it believes that nationalism is an eternal and living truth [T]he national idea to which the party adheres is the desire of the Arab people for freedom, unification and the realisation of its historic character.... The Arab Socialist Ba’ath Party is socialist for it believes that socialism is a necessity which derives from Arab nationalism.”²⁵

Yet, despite these common elements, *juche* still stands out in its attempt to be an all-embracing philosophy, encompassing all aspects of social behaviour and personal conduct.

6. Revival or Survival?

Given the catastrophic scale of North Korea’s economic crisis in the 1990s, its imminent collapse was widely predicted. Yet, not only has the DPRK survived but, most remarkable of all, political power has now been wielded by three generations of the Kim family since 1945. Beneath this apparent continuity, as I have shown, the DPRK and WPK

have steadily discarded their Marxist origins and instead have adopted ‘Korean socialism’ or ‘socialism of our own style’, based on the *juche* idea.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the DPRK’s origins as a Soviet-supported people’s democracy, the Korean leadership focused on creating an unchallengeable national legitimacy and shaped its ideology to that end. It did so by underpinning its revolutionary aspects with conservative approaches to culture and tradition. The most outstanding example of this is that, while uprooting traditional Korean ancestral class heritage, Kim Il Sung established a new hierarchy with a focus on revolutionary lineage and on honour derived from patriotic resistance. This maintained the family at the centre of North Korean society while all around it changed.

The recent execution of Jang Song Thaek, who was married to Kim Jong Un’s paternal aunt, provided a vivid, if bizarre, example of this. Jang was not a blood relative of Kim and the communique announcing his execution clearly separates him from those descended from the Kim family, referred to in the text as “the lineage of Paektu” – a mountain sacred to early Koreans and a location assiduously and often inaccurately linked to the Kim family, in particular as Kim Jong Il’s fabled birthplace.²⁶

The metamorphoses of *juche* ideology have allowed the North Korean leadership first to evade de-Stalinisation and then to survive the collapse of its Soviet ally, even if the costs have been unbearably high in human terms. The next conundrum is how far the latest incarnations of *juche* ideology can be taken. If the bureaucratic rigidity of the leaderships in the European socialist countries and their dogmatic presentation of Marxism antagonised an increasingly educated and cultured population to the point of mass unrest, how long will North Koreans accept the outrageous myths of the family cult on which *juche* is based?

It is likely that Kim Jong Un himself is aware of this:

“It is the world trend to put the economy on a knowledge basis, and we are faced with the epochal task of transforming our national economy into one that develops by dint of knowledge.”²⁷

But knowledge is not the same as ideology. While predictions of the DPRK’s imminent collapse are less

plausible than they were 20 years ago, the contradiction between a mystical ideology based on fanatical devotion to an all-knowing supreme leader and the need for a scientifically grounded approach to socio-economic development can only sharpen.

The DPRK's economic recovery can only be sustained with increased overseas trade and outside investment, which has also been recognised by the Kim Jong Un leadership:

“The country's economy should be shifted into knowledge-based economy and the foreign trade be made multilateral and diversified and investment be widely introduced.”¹⁸

However, it is not clear precisely how this can be accomplished without substantially opening up the country to foreign influences. China, Vietnam and to a lesser extent Cuba have all undergone this process and found their own methods of handling the challenges and opportunities with varying degrees of success. In all three cases, the ruling parties have maintained their core attachment to Marxism while reassessing the role of markets and planning,

according to their own conditions, as well as the extent and pace of interaction with the global market.

Jang's execution certainly suggests both that the monolithic character of the DPRK leadership fractured at the highest levels, while several of the charges against him related to his relations with a foreign country, almost certainly a veiled reference to China.

Given the abandonment of Marxism and the entrenchment of hereditary succession in the DPRK, it is impossible to predict the country's future trajectory with any certainty. In the past, while there was an obvious dichotomy between the political structures centred on the personality cult and the collective socialist organisation of the economy, the country was generally stable and made genuine economic progress at least into the 1970s. Today its stability is less assured and the country lags far behind its southern counterpart and now its northern neighbour too.

7. Conclusions

These two articles have focused on ideological questions regarding the DPRK. Evaluating the DPRK's current social and economic status is more

difficult due to the lack of reliable data and information from inside the country. Without such evidence, further questions about the precise character of the DPRK that I think need to be explored cannot be adequately answered.

For the moment, the characterisation of the DPRK as a socialist state, as *Britain's Road to Socialism* does, seems broadly adequate economically to describe the still largely state-owned and state-controlled industry and co-operative agricultural systems, but on the political level how does any concept of socialist democracy fit with what is now a fully-fledged dynasty?

Since North Korea remains a target of the US military and its regional allies, the British left must continue to uphold the demand that the future of the Korean peninsula should be determined peacefully by the Korean people themselves and not outsiders. However, as communists we should not confuse that elementary principle of solidarity with any kind of endorsement of political and ideological lines that run counter to the principles of Marxism-Leninism and the original potential and promise of the Korean revolution itself.

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16 KCNA, *Kim Jong Un Delivers Address at the Fourth Conference of Cell Secretaries of the Workers' Party of Korea*; accessed at www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201301/news30/20130130-20ee.html. This speech to WPK cadres is packed full of family references, such as telling cell secretaries to “get closer to the minds of people like the mother of a family and rally them firmly behind the Party”.

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The Struggle for Radical Transformation – Key Challenge of our Time

Uniting workers behind the programme of radical transformation: confronting the challenges facing COSATU'

By Aluta Msebenzi

WE ARE INVOLVED in a complicated transition period which began in April 1994 when our people led by the African National Congress (ANC) attained political power. It is a period

which has now entered its second phase for a radical transformation of the economy and a phase which will require transforming the present and persisting apartheid-colonial economy

– *ie* shifting the control of the economy from the hands of the minority to the majority.

This is also a period where the workers around the world are under relentless attack from their class enemy

– the capitalist class. The attack by the capitalist class is an attempt to respond to the global economic crisis which they inflicted upon themselves. In this attack the workers are blamed for the



crisis not of their own making. Everywhere, especially in North America and Europe, the wages of workers are being pushed downwards, pensions and benefits cut. Millions of workers have lost and are still losing their jobs and others are casualised. The public sector is being downsized and privatised.

In South Africa a million workers lost their jobs when the economic crisis began in 2008. Indeed, the bosses' profits were also hit hard, especially in the mining and manufacturing sectors. The bosses blame the economic crisis on workers' rights, including strike action, and on the material gains the workers have made in terms of above-inflation wage increases, collective bargaining and so on.

The situation in the mining sector, which led to the Marikana tragedy² and the emergence of a 'vigilante trade unionism', must be understood within the context of the capitalist attack against the working class and the trade union movement as a whole. The attack on the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) in particular is an attack on COSATU in general.

At the same time this is a context where the crisis of capitalism provided the ANC-led government with an opportunity to pursue a programme that builds and strengthens the public sector, rather than privatise and outsource its services; a programme that prioritises job creation and reindustrialisation to reverse policies that deindustrialised the economy. It is a programme committed to expanding basic services to our people and to a National Health Insurance that will bring about free and quality national health care to all South Africans. It is a programme that expanded social grants to 16 million of our population.

It is a programme committed to realise a

vision of full employment, eliminating poverty and creating an egalitarian society in the next few decades. All these commitments require a radical transformation of our economy driven by the ANC-led Alliance.

All of us in the Alliance agree on the need to pursue the struggle for the second radical phase of transition whose outcome will depend on a programme which unites all our people and in which the working class will play the leading role.

In the present situation, the role of each organisation in the Alliance is therefore critical. For the organised working class, the critical task remains that of building a united, powerful, class conscious and militant COSATU. Our federation has, since its formation, drawn into its ranks hundreds of thousands of workers, organised in various sectors of the economy and the state. In organisational terms, we have always advanced a viewpoint that a class conscious and militant leadership, from the shop floor upwards, needs to be present in all trade union sectors organised under the banner of our federation if we are to play the role of a united, powerful, class conscious and militant COSATU.

However, it would be a disaster in the present situation if, in the name of trade union independence, COSATU and its affiliates fail to locate their role within a common Alliance programme for radical transformation.

It would also be a disaster if any debate or disagreement within the federation is allowed to undermine unity and incite a split. We must stand strong for the unity of COSATU. This is the key challenge of our time. We must expose any activity that threatens to split the federation for what it is - a renegade activity against organised workers and our revolution!

Understanding the Role of the Trade Union Movement in the Present Period and Beyond

The basic character and role:

The trade union movement in South Africa has been and remains the best organised mass contingent of the working class, and indeed of the broad progressive forces in our country. Of all mass-based organisations of the working class, a trade union is the **primary organisation**. The trade unions that we have built in South Africa have been, first and foremost, trade unions which are as broad as possible by scope of membership and sectors they organise. In the sectors or industries which progressive trade unions organise, we sought to be open to all workers, irrespective of race, gender, geography, income or occupation.

Therefore, the trade union movement seeks to unite all workers on a sector or industrial basis, irrespective of the level of political or ideological orientation of its members. **This defines their mass-based character and we must defend this character no matter the level of class consciousness of its leading cadre.** It is only by maintaining this basic role and character of the trade union, and through workers' experience in trade union struggle, that we can provide fertile ground for class and political consciousness among the workers.

However this does not mean that trade unions are apolitical. They must take part in the political struggle, rather than focusing narrowly on basic economic struggle issues like wages and conditions of work. Historically speaking, the trade union movement in South Africa has always understood that racism, as perpetrated by the apartheid regime, and exploitation of the working class by the capitalist class are **two sides of the same coin**.

Even though the apartheid state was defeated in 1994, the capitalist class still retains monopoly economic power in present-day South Africa. Democracy has delivered majority rule in the political sphere, but democracy has yet to deliver majority rule in the economic sphere. This is why the struggle continues.

The capitalist class uses everything it has in its power, including constant efforts to influence the government by all means, to defend its class domination over the working class. In other words, even when we are building a new state from the ashes of the apartheid state, **the democratic and working class-friendly state we are trying to build is daily contested by the capitalist class**.

This is why the trade union movement in South Africa, in post-apartheid South Africa, has repeatedly rejected the calls from its detractors to pull out of the broader **political conflict**. Indeed we cannot stand aside, in the name of trade union independence, when the capitalist class forces (aided by the commercial media and the DA³) launch an offensive against our own government.

If the trade union movement rejects being part of the broader alliance, as Comrade Joe Slovo once wrote, they "*would in fact be surrendering the leadership of the national struggle to the upper and middle strata*".⁴ **Indeed, it is only through participation of the trade union movement in the national liberation alliance that the leadership and hegemonic role of the working class in the present phase of radical transformation can be strengthened.**

The above perspective helps us not to confuse the **general** political leadership of the working class with the **specific** trade union leadership. We now turn to this matter.



Trade union struggle and political leadership of the working class

We have noted that trade union struggle cannot be separated from the struggle for national democratic revolution and for socialism. In this context the line between trade union politics and overall leadership of the working class and society as a whole may not, in practice, appear clear. However there is distinction between specific trade union politics and general leadership of the revolution. **A trade union movement which attempts to play these two roles will end up committing suicide, since it would have liquidated its role and character as a broad mass democratic workers' organisation.** It is impossible, therefore, for a trade union, including a trade union federation, to attempt to play a role of revolutionary political vanguard of the working class.

In the present situation an unfortunate **workerist tendency has resurfaced within the ranks of our trade union movement that tends to conduct itself as a vanguard political party.** We are saying that this tendency has resurfaced, because there were times in the history of the working class movement – such as the 1980s – when this tendency acquired some importance within the trade union movement, first in FOSATU⁵ and subsequently in early COSATU. One of the notions advanced by this tendency has been that **trade unions should act as political parties.** This notion was so discredited that it had few, if any, open supporters.

Now we see this workerist tendency emerging in a new form – this time the tendency seeks to misappropriate our struggle languages, our communist heritage and slogans in order to position a 'workerist political party' for the trade union movement.

The Party of the Working Class and COSATU

COSATU has over many years since its formation recognised the true political leadership role of the vanguard of the working class – the South African Communist Party (SACP). It is through the SACP – the party committed to building socialism in South Africa – that the workers seek political guidance for the challenges they face and the 'line of march' with regard to the general political tasks of the working class as whole.

Indeed, South African communists have for many decades played a central role in building the revolutionary trade union movement. COSATU is what it is now precisely because of the outstanding contribution of South African communists. Therefore it is no surprise that, within the trade union movement, many communists are occupying leading positions, as shop stewards, and provincial and national leaders, as well as officials, and are expected to lead the workers by example. **They are expected to be the first to strive for maximum unity of the workers and for advancing the day-to-day demands of the workers, respecting the internal discipline and internal processes of the trade union organisation.**

Building class consciousness, socialist organisation and socialist activism requires, amongst other things, joint political programmes between the SACP and COSATU and its affiliates, so as to strengthen the militant and campaigning working class movement committed to the struggle for national democracy and socialism.

The Economic and Political Struggle

We have already noted that workers in South Africa have learned, through struggle experience, that

trade unions cannot stand and develop outside of the political movement. By connecting the trade unions with the political movement, the workers were basically rejecting the advocates of workerism in South Africa. It was really in the 1980s that workerism sought to disconnect the struggle of the workers at the workplace from the struggle at the community level. That idea never received any serious support from the workers. Thus workers learned very well the connection between politics and economics.

It is true that during the 1980s trade union leaders in FOSATU (of whom a number had Trotskyite or anarchist backgrounds) did propose that trade unions should remain neutral in politics. They argued that workers must focus on the workplace issues and not get involved in struggles at the community level. **In advancing this argument, the workerist tendency within the trade union movement sought to separate, politically and ideologically, the trade union movement from the broader national liberation movement led by the ANC.**

In other words their call for workers to be neutral on politics was not about 'political neutrality', but was an attempt to build an independent workerist political base away from our ANC-led broader movement. Indeed over time, this project came to be known as Worker(ist) Party project, which was pursued even inside COSATU.

But we need to emphasise that this workerist party project, throughout the history of COSATU, remained a **minority project.** It has never at any point enjoyed popular influence within trade unionism and was confined to few unions, particularly NUMSA⁶.

Being Independent and Being Part of the Alliance

The whole perspective of trade union 'independence' is closely related to what we said above, an attempt to divide the political and the economic. It is based on the view that a trade union movement, no matter what circumstances, must have a different policy from that of the ANC and the government it leads. Its argument goes like this: 'If you do not have a different policy, then you are not independent. Being oppositional means being independent.'

This is of course nonsensical and represents a liberal notion of 'independence'. The trade union independence we have always believed in is not one that transforms COSATU into a conveyor belt, either for the SACP or for the ANC. The trade union independence we believe in is one that builds a militant COSATU which takes up the day-to-day struggles of the workers.

This independent COSATU we believe in, however, cannot be opposed to the Alliance and therefore there is no contradiction of being independent and being part of the Alliance. There has been no such before and there is none today.

The ANC and COSATU

We have noted the relationship of the SACP and COSATU, but what of the ANC and the trade union movement? First of all, we need to understand the **basic character of the ANC as a multi-class organisation – representing no single ideology or class. As the head of the national liberation alliance and primary representative of all the oppressed, the ANC welcomes within its ranks all from whatever class they come, who support and are ready to implement the strategic vision of the**



Freedom Charter.

The overwhelming majority and the most strategically placed of our people are workers. The ANC therefore recognises the leading role of the working class. So participation of the workers in the ranks of the ANC is one of the important ways in which the working class plays its role in the national democratic revolution. **But the ANC is not the political vanguard of the working class. If it seeks to play such a role, it will lose its broad-based ('broad church') character.** The ANC is a multi-class organisation *with working class bias* – biased to working class interests and aspirations.

It is precisely because of these defining characteristics of the ANC that the progressive trade union movement has always encouraged workers to swell the ANC's ranks. Therefore, it is expected that the leading cadres in the trade union movement should also be active ANC members. **We have understood that the leading role of workers in the national democratic revolution includes active participation in the ANC, including contesting for leadership positions in the ANC, through the ANC's internal democratic**

process. Without such leadership, to paraphrase Comrade Joe Slovo, we will be surrendering class leadership of the national democratic revolution to the bourgeoisie, with all its consequences for the working class.

We have noted above that there is no contradiction of being independent and being part of the ANC-led Alliance. In contrast, the liberal notion of trade union independence has been to reject the active role of worker leaders in our movement.

COSATU and So-called Civil Society

As we have noted, the liberal notion of trade union independence, ironically, tends to service the agenda of workerism. By the same token it serves the agenda of the forces of opposition and so-called civil society non-governmental organisations (NGOs), who have relentlessly campaigned to separate COSATU from the Alliance.

But who are 'civil society'?

'Civil society' is not a homogenous entity – it is made of classes and strata in our divided society. As Comrade James Petras put it, those who are talking about 'civil society' (who are mainly NGOers)

tend to "obscure the class divisions, class exploitation and class struggle that polarizes contemporary 'civil society'".⁷ Petras observed how this obscured concept of 'civil society' conveniently facilitates "NGO collaboration with capitalist interests that finance their institutes"

However, there are NGOs which are largely formed to support revolutionary or progressive movements and do not compete with or oppose these movements.

In South Africa we do find a number of NGOs – involved in 'constitutional rights', 'governance' and so on which are openly right-wing, liberal, neo- and semi-liberal. They are opposed to the agenda of the ANC-led Alliance.

We are not concerned with the above NGOs, for now. We want to focus on those NGOs which go under the brand 'left', 'progressive' and 'democratic'. A number of these NGOs are orbiting around COSATU. They consist of former trade unionists, political activists and other individuals of the petty-bourgeois type. What are sometimes called 'issue-based' movements, are not actually mass-based movements, but NGOs that provide intellectual support to 'grassroots activists'.

Subordinating Trade Union Leadership to NGOs

Indeed, it is important to recognise that there are NGOs which do criticise neo-liberal policies, the IMF and so on, and therefore it will be simplistic to club them together with those that collaborate with capitalist interests. **But even in such circumstances, the trade union movement must be vigilant against the agendas or projects of these 'progressive NGOs' which seek to subordinate trade union leaders to their organisations.** This is the case where the agenda in the 'civil society' campaigns, in which the trade union movement is a participant, is determined by these 'progressive NGOs'. **In fact, in many cases, where campaigns are led and determined by the trade union movement, NGOs are nowhere to be seen or heard of.**

In the recent period, there have been times when the trade union movement's leadership got caught up in an agenda set and driven by 'progressive NGOs' – rather than by the trade union movement itself – such as those driven by SECTION27⁸ and Equal Education⁹. Although some of these NGOs patronise



COSATU by falsely describing the federation as the 'vanguard of civil society', they do this to separate the federation from our ANC-led movement, and to gain the legitimacy of their actions. And some of the public statements of some of COSATU's leadership tended to play into the hands of this agenda.

The kinds of NGO that we need to forge relations with are those that mainly exist to support the work and struggles of the trade union movement. They should not seek to compete with or displace the voice of the trade union movement. These are NGOs which must be rooted inside the mass democratic movements led by the ANC-led Alliance to ensure that their projects are not determined by external donors, but by the mass-based organisations themselves.

Confronting the Challenges Facing COSATU

We have presented the major political challenge of our time – the struggle for radical transformation as we enter the second phase of post-1994 transition in our national democratic revolution – and we have identified the strategic role of the revolutionary trade union movement under the banner of COSATU in such struggle. We have also clarified the tendencies within our trade union movement which seek to turn COSATU into what it is not.

These tendencies distort not only the role of the trade union movement in the current period, but consequently the relationship between COSATU and the Party of the Working Class (the SACP) and the head of our national liberation alliance (the ANC). As a result the leadership of the trade union movement faces the danger of falling into the agenda of our class enemies – to separate COSATU from the Alliance – and in fact some have already fallen into this agenda. They

do this by giving COSATU the mantle of 'vanguard of civil society', or worse, to do the impossible – transform COSATU into some kind of workerist political organisation.

Let us also note that we are talking about a tendency and not this or that individual. This characterisation of tendencies and analysis helps us to identify clear tasks we need to carry out in order to root out these destructive tendencies, irrespective of the individuals involved. Where there is ideological and political rupture within some in the COSATU leadership with the tradition and role of the progressive trade union movement, this too must be exposed as we have done in this intervention.

It is clear that the strategic direction of COSATU is contested and we must strike to the core of those who seek to divide our beloved 'parliament of the workers'.

Uniting our Federation - What do we Mean?

The challenges facing COSATU, therefore, have to be confronted and they are being confronted. And they all revolve around the question of uniting the federation and isolating forces that seek to steal our federation:

Unity of COSATU means collective leadership: no leader can conduct himself or herself outside of the collective or disregard the decisions of the collective, or demand to be judged by his or her own values instead of those set by the collective. In doing so – *ie* the contrary – such a leader will immediately undermine the internal processes of the organisation and elevate himself or herself above the organisation – often demonstrated by a public posture that paints the picture of the organisation differently than it is. Such leaders sometimes project themselves as above the organisation and are liable to be co-opted into anti-movement agendas

(like the tendency we have presented above), wittingly or unwittingly.

We have said collective decisions mean adhering to the decisions arrived at by the collective and democratically.

This includes matters related to deployment. Deployment as opposed to employment is not a matter of choice of an individual. Leaders do not choose where and when they should be deployed, it is structures of the organisation at appropriate levels which decide where and when a comrade should be deployed.

Unity means isolating those against unity! It is an open secret that there are elements (of syndicalist type) within the federation who are basically inciting a split within the federation. They opportunistically use that current situation in the federation to justify separation from COSATU and the Alliance as whole. These elements must be roundly condemned and exposed for what they are – renegades bent on destroying our federation and weakening our revolution.

Unity, above all, must be based on a programme: this means that we can only unite our federation if we take up the concerns and needs of the workers, around a programme

committed to a radical transformation. Aspects of this programme are contained in our COSATU Congress resolutions and the 2015 Plan. This programme is further taken forward through the Alliance, especially the recent Alliance Economic Summit which provides a basis for a common Alliance programme beyond the 2014 elections.

Unity means unconditional support for an ANC decisive majority victory in 2014! It means mobilisation of a massive campaign force from COSATU and its affiliates, to ensure not only that the Election Manifesto reflects working class bias, but that we deliver a more than 70% landslide victory against the forces of reaction and doom!

■ *Republished with permission from Bua Komanisi!, the information bulletin of the central committee of the South African Communist Party (SACP), Vol 8(2), December 2013, pp 8-14. The text has been marginally edited, and notes and references added, for clarity for readers in Britain. The author is an all-round Alliance member of a COSATU-affiliated trade union, the ANC and the SACP, and writes in her personal capacity.*

Notes and References

- 1 COSATU = Congress of South African Trade Unions.
- 2 Marikana Tragedy: on August 16, 2012, 34 people, mostly striking miners, were shot dead and 78 people were wounded when police fired on a group gathered at a hill near the Lonmin mine at Marikana. In the preceding week, 10 people, including two policemen and two security guards, were killed in strike-related violence.
- 3 DA = Democratic Alliance, the main opposition party in South Africa.
- 4 J Slovo, *The South African Working Class and the National Democratic Revolution*, an Umsebenzi discussion pamphlet, South African Communist Party, 1988, p 8; online at <http://www.marxists.org/subject/africa/slovo/1988/national-democratic-revolution.htm>.
- 5 FOSATU = Federation of South African Trade Unions; founded on 1979, it merged into COSATU in 1985.
- 6 NUMSA = National Union of Metal Workers of South Africa.
- 7 J Petras, *NGOs: In the Service of Imperialism*, *Journal of Contemporary Asia* Vol 29(4), 1999, pp 429-440; online at <http://www.neue-einheit.com/english/ngos.htm>.
- 8 SECTION27 is "a public interest law centre", named after Section 27 of the South African Constitution, "that seeks to influence, develop and use the law to protect, promote and advance human rights" – <http://www.section27.org.za/about-us/>.
- 9 Equal Education is "a movement of learners, parents, teachers and community members working for quality and equality in South African education, through analysis and activism" – <http://www.equaleducation.org.za/>.

Britain's Overseas Territories: where British and US imperialisms meet



By John Foster

BRITAIN'S OVERSEAS territories are generally viewed as the last relics of Britain's colonial empire, minimal in size and of little wider political significance. This article, written on behalf of the Communist Party's International Commission, seeks to challenge this view. It argues that Britain's Overseas Territories and Crown Dependencies have a crucial place in the current operations of British finance capital, not least because in most cases the financial and military use of these territories takes place jointly with the United States. To this degree these territories have provided our ruling class with a bargaining tool of no small importance in maintaining its special relationship with the US, a relationship that has been, and still is, crucial to its own global activities.

At the same time, the material basis of this relationship is changing. Following the 2008 financial crisis, new strategic priorities are emerging in the US. In particular, the corporate offshoring of wealth is increasingly being seen as prejudicial to the longer term interests of the US as a world power; and restrictions have already

been imposed on tax-evading holdings by US citizens and companies. Britain's overseas territories are therefore facing new pressures – pressures that provide an opportunity for the Left to raise the role of these territories in a more fundamental way and to demand an end to constitutional arrangements that are both anti-democratic and prejudicial to the interests of working people in the territories and in Britain.

The Territories

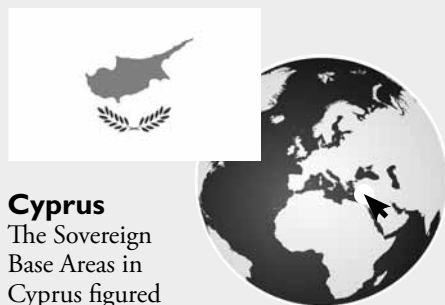
Britain has three Crown Dependencies and fourteen Overseas Territories. The three Crown Dependencies are Guernsey, Jersey and the Isle of Man. The Overseas Territories are: Anguilla, Bermuda, the British Antarctic Territories, the British Indian Ocean Territory (Chagos Islands), the British Sovereign Base Areas of Akrotiri and Dhakelia (Cyprus), the British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Gibraltar, the Mid-Atlantic Territories (St Helena and the St Helena Dependencies of Ascension and Tristan Da Cunha), Montserrat, the Pitcairn Islands, the South Atlantic Territories (Malvinas, the South Sandwich Islands and South



Georgia) and the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Those territories in British territorial waters are designated Crown Dependencies. Those elsewhere are Overseas Territories. But all remain under the direct jurisdiction of the Crown in Council. All are ultimately bound by decisions taken by the British Government. While most have some form of devolved or local government, decisions taken locally can be overruled. Nine of the territories operate as offshore financial centres for both Britain and the US. At least three function as joint strategic centres for US and British military operations.

MILITARY OPERATIONS



Cyprus

The Sovereign Base Areas in Cyprus figured briefly in the news in 2013 during contingency planning for NATO air strikes against Syria. Situated on the south of the island the bases are only a few minutes' flying time from Lebanon, Syria and Israel, and just slightly more from Egypt and Libya. If the House of Commons had not voted against intervention, these bases would have become key strategic assets for the US and Britain in a hot war that is likely to have stretched from Lebanon to Iran.

Just before, in August 2013, Edward Snowden had revealed that the bases were being used to intercept communications passing through underwater fibre optic cable networks in the Eastern Mediterranean. The data is screened for sensitive material and then passed on to GCHQ in Cheltenham and the US National Security Agency. This secret UK/US programme, code-named 'Tempora', is very recent, was signed off by David Miliband while foreign secretary in 2008 and funded by the UK government to the tune of £1 billion. British companies BT and Vodaphone are participants.¹

The bases were ceded to Britain as a condition for Cyprus's independence in 1960. Their continued existence, and their use by NATO, remains an issue of grave contention in the island. This is in particular because of the role played by the US during the fascist

coup in July 1974 and the subsequent Turkish invasion which annexed 40% of the island. Although the invasion was declared illegal by the UN, Henry Kissinger, as US Secretary of State, vetoed any intervention to reverse it. The invasion displaced 160,000 Greek Cypriots, many of whom remain refugees.²

The bases cover 254 square kilometres. Their coastline is claimed to give Britain legal right to up to 20% of the Republic of Cyprus's offshore waters – now known to contain major oil and gas reserves. 3,500 military personnel are currently in occupation.

British Indian Ocean Territory (BIOT)

This is a group of sixty islands a thousand miles south of the Maldives and previously called the Chagos Islands. It provides an even starker illustration of the strategic links between the US and Britain. The islands had previously been governed from the British colony of Mauritius, and were commercially developed for palm oil plantations, originally worked by slaves. As part of Mauritius's independence settlement in 1965, Britain bought an absolute right to the islands for £600,000. It did so in liaison with the US with the intention of turning the largest of the islands, Diego Garcia, into a US military base. Between 1965 and 1970 the entire population of 2,000 islanders was removed and dispersed to Mauritius and the Seychelles (a minimal compensation of \$6,000 was later paid after court action).

Today the islands' sole inhabitants are 2,700 US military personnel and 300 British government personnel. Diego Garcia contains a submarine base, a naval base and a major air base. It was used for US bomber missions at the start of the Afghan and Iraq wars. In 2008 David Miliband had to confirm in the Commons that it had also been used by the US for extraordinary rendition flights.³ It contains one of the five US military global positioning system (GPS) sites required for the flying of drones. Writing in 2013, Andrew Erickson (of the US Naval War College) and co-authors highlighted Diego Garcia's central importance for US control of the Indian Ocean Region and containment of China: secure from military attack or terrorist action, yet big enough to host major military strike forces, and to do so at the heart of the region.⁴

The Chagos Islanders have launched a series of legal actions to recover their homeland. In 2006 they won a High

Court action in London permitting their return. This was appealed by the British government and overturned by the House of Lords in 2008. In order to prevent any further action the British government then announced in 2009 that the whole area would become a marine nature reserve entitled the Chagos Protected Area. Only military personnel would be permitted access. The political counsellor at the US Embassy in London reported to his government that Colin Roberts, Director of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, had told him that "the UK and U.S. should carefully negotiate the details of the marine reserve to assure that US interests were safeguarded and the strategic value of BIOT was upheld. He said that the BIOT's former inhabitants would find it difficult, if not impossible, to pursue their claim for resettlement on the islands if the entire Chagos Archipelago were a marine reserve."⁵



Mid-Atlantic and South Atlantic Territories

The Mid-Atlantic territories of St Helena and St Helena Dependencies (Ascension and Tristan Da Cunha) are also primarily of military value. They have 200 British service personnel, mainly signals intelligence and naval. Ascension provides the US with another of its five global GPS bases. Otherwise the St Helena population of 600 is mainly of historic British origin and dependent on British government activities. The islands are strategically positioned between South Africa and South America. The South Atlantic Territories (including the Malvinas) also house a significant British military presence. It is possible that there is some US involvement given the islands' strategic position in the South Atlantic, but the main current objective of the British occupation is to lay claim to the region's oil and gas reserves.⁶

Other British Overseas Territories may also support shared military uses

with the US or are seen as having that potential.⁷ The transformation of war technology over the past decade, in particular the switch from troop-intensive land-based operations to the use of irregular forces supported by air power, gives a new importance to these small and generally offshore territories dispersed strategically around the globe.

Offshore Financial Centres

All the three Crown Dependencies and six of the Overseas Territories serve as offshore financial centres or tax havens. None levies corporation tax on company profits; taxes on income are either minimal or non-existent. Companies use these locations to relocate profits from higher tax jurisdictions – as do wealthy individuals. The territories are also used by financial institutions for operations that require secrecy and in particular by hedge funds to evade regulations that limit leverage – magnifying profits by increasing the proportion of short-term borrowing.

British governments have traditionally resisted demands for regulation. The financial crisis of 2008 changed this – at least superficially. The government became concerned that these centres might, either as entities or in terms of

their financial institutions, expose Britain to serious financial risk as legal superior⁸ and in some cases lender of last resort⁹. The result was the 2009 *Report of the Independent Review of Britain's Offshore Financial Centres*.¹⁰ Its main objective was to define the magnitude of cash flows and to assess the potential liabilities. The Bank of International Settlement provided an estimate of the total cash flowing annually into tax havens across the world as \$3.6 trillion. Of this total, British tax havens accounted for over two-thirds, considerably in excess of the value of Britain's gross domestic product (GDP).¹¹

The *Report* also shed light on the US use of British tax havens.¹² Of the financial cash flows 42% was accounted for by the Cayman Islands and almost all of it came from US banks for overnight interest-bearing deposit – a practice banned in the US since 1933 – and at any one time amounting to one third of the cash in the US banking system. The Cayman Islands are also the world's leading centre for hedge funds, most from the US. Bermuda specialises in insurance and reinsurance (the third largest in the world “writing significant volumes of business in the UK and the US”). The British Virgin Islands

are the world's “leading domicile for company registrations ... with strong links to the US”. Such registration enables companies to transfer profits made elsewhere in the world to a no-tax jurisdiction. Gibraltar is significant for US and UK companies because it is within the EU single market, uses the euro and gives more direct access to these markets. Although its role in short-term lending is limited compared to the Cayman Islands, it is host to a significant number of investment banks and hedge funds. Anguilla and the Turks and Caicos Islands generally operate on a smaller scale.

The *Report* called on the British government to ensure that all offshore centres under its jurisdiction worked towards the minimum standards of regulation set by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). However, it warned that it would be counterproductive for the British government to act unilaterally in setting higher standards. It also stressed the value of these offshore centres for the British banking system. During the financial crisis British banks were able to draw on significant liquidity from their subsidiaries in the British Crown



Photo: ActionAid



Dependencies (Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man). Much lending into the British banking system comes through the Crown Dependencies and Overseas territories – a total of \$325 billion at the end of 2009 – and the overnight deposit in the Cayman Islands is particularly important for short term liquidity.¹³

In terms of the relations between British and American finance as a whole, the overseas territories have played a critical role. They complement the City of London as a platform for US banks and they do so by enabling these banks to minimise declared profits and, probably still more important, to utilise and develop unregulated investment vehicles, such as hedge funds, able to deploy the massive accumulations of cash required to seize assets in global markets. While other jurisdictions, for example Switzerland, Luxemburg or Ireland, can also serve this purpose, the close links between Britain's offshore territories and the City of London have made them the preferred locations for US investment companies.

There is therefore a strange symmetry between the financial and military uses of Britain's overseas territories. They provide the geographical base for the joint exercise of military power by Britain in its special relationship with the US – and financially they enable power to be exercised offensively and aggressively to mobilise the vast sums of capital required for market domination and for seizing productive assets elsewhere, particularly in the world's biggest market, Europe.

However, the past decade has seen the emergence of new challenges to this power – from two directions. One is from the European Union – combined, it seems, with other major powers within the Organisation for OECD. The second is from within the US itself.

The major capitalist nations within the OECD have over the past seven years developed a framework for monitoring tax havens and requiring minimum levels of disclosure for tax purposes. The OECD's 2013 report highlighted non-compliance by the British Virgin Islands along with Luxemburg and Switzerland.¹⁴ In 2011 the European Union passed an Alternative Investment Fund Managers directive that came into force in 2013 and which limits the level of leverage that can be deployed by hedge funds.¹⁵ This applies to all funds trading within the EU even if their base is elsewhere. The directive was seen to be aimed particularly at hedge funds operating from British jurisdictions.¹⁶ EU provisions also obliged Gibraltar



to introduce a 10% tax rate in 2010 (Income Tax Act 2010) and in 2013 to amend legislation to strike out a clause exempting companies from tax on inter-company loan interest.

At the same time, there has been a significant shift of attitude within the US itself. This appears to derive from a combination of different strategic assessments and political pressures. Top level strategic analysts in the State Department and elsewhere are concerned at falling levels of investment within the US itself, the erosion of its productive economy and the massive balance of payments deficit. This is seen as potentially endangering the international status of the US over the next two decades – particularly in relation to China. Politically, both Democrats and Republicans face constituencies concerned with mounting unemployment. Additionally, the small and medium business sectors, of considerable importance in the US, also suffer the consequences of regional industrial decline and gain few of the benefits of overseas trading. The result has been FATCA, the Foreign Account Tax Compliance Act, a component of the US Home Incentives to Restore Employment Act of 2010.

The Obama administration's initial briefings in 2009 drew attention to the consequences, for US tax income and jobs, of the corporate transfer of profits: "our tax code actually provides a competitive advantage to US companies that invest and create jobs overseas compared to those that invest and create those same jobs in the US".¹⁷ The briefing went on to note that in 2004: US companies paid a tax rate of only 2.3% on \$700 billion foreign

earnings; 83 of the top US companies have subsidiaries in tax havens; and, in the Cayman Islands, one address houses 18,857 companies. An investigation by the Congressional Research Service in 2013 compared the proportion of profits declared by US companies in tax havens with the proportion declared in a sample of other countries. It found that these companies declared 43% of their profits in tax havens, while hiring only 4% of their labour there; whereas, in countries in which they hired 43% of their labour, they declared only 14% of their profits. The investigation also found that this practice was accelerating: in 1999 the profits declared by these companies in Bermuda amounted to 260% of its GDP; by 2008 they had reached 1000%.¹⁸

The US legislation also targets "wealthy Americans [who] ... evade paying taxes by hiding their money in offshore accounts".¹⁹ It does so by requiring overseas financial institutions that have dealings with the US to sign an agreement to become a Qualified Intermediary and accept an obligation to report all dealing with US citizens. It is for this reason, and not for any other, that the UK government has over the past year been negotiating with, and on behalf of, Jersey, Guernsey and the Isle of Man, automatic tax information exchange agreements based on FATCA.²⁰ Agreements with the three Crown Dependencies were signed in 2013; further agreements are being negotiated with the Overseas Territories.

It remains to be seen how thoroughly the new tax obligations will be enforced – particularly how far Revenue and Customs will use the new information in Britain itself. Moreover, other tax haven activities will continue. British overseas

territories will still be the favoured base for hedge funds and for subsidiaries of the major City of London banks (US as well as British) to use as an unregulated platform for short-term lending and borrowing. Furthermore, despite its rhetoric, the FATCA legislation does nothing to stop US corporations shifting taxable revenue to low tax jurisdictions such as Bermuda or the Caymans. International initiatives on this front remain at the discussion stage. The OECD and the G20 have considered the feasibility of unitary (or country by country) reporting of corporate profits but have not produced any agreed proposals.²¹

Conclusions

The objective of this article has been to highlight the role of Britain's Crown Dependencies and Overseas Territories within the joint operations of British and US finance capital. The special legal position of these territories enables them to be used to mobilise the vast sums required by US and British banks to dominate world markets, to seize productive assets and to minimise tax payments. Britain's overseas territories also play, as we have seen, a major role militarily and one that is likely to increase in importance. As such these territories provide a key element in the special (but dependent) relationship between our ruling class and the US. They form an integral part of the architecture of modern day imperialism.

For the Left in Britain the overseas

territories pose a challenge. Policy positions in the trade union movement are neither comprehensive nor coordinated. Most unions have policies calling for the termination of tax havens and of transfer pricing. There have been frequent demands for the return of the Chagos Islanders to their homeland. The Communist Party and some other left groups have called for the Malvinas to be returned to Argentina and for the handing back of the Cyprus base territories. The Communist Party has also called for the three Crown Dependencies to be brought fully within the democratic structures of the British parliament and within British law. Yet so far there is no comprehensive approach to the constitutional status of these territories, to their strategic use by British and US finance capital and to the political challenges posed by any attempt to end their special status.

Quite complex issues of transition are posed. Economically, most of these territories are dependent on financial services, some almost entirely. Politically, resistance can be expected locally to any major change in their status. In the case of the Caribbean territories, expatriates from Britain and the US sometimes make up over 30% of the population and exert very considerable political influence – and, even where this is not the case, the political clout of the banking sector remains significant. In the case of the South Atlantic Territories much of the population is dependent on military work. Gibraltar, although it has

a more diversified economy, still derives over 20% of its national income from financial services.²²

For this reason technical adjustments in taxation law are not enough. Nor are one-off attempts to change constitutional status. These territories are key parts of the apparatus of British state monopoly capitalism and any attempt to break the links requires an active political engagement with those sections of the local populations whose long-term interests are not those of finance capital – a process similar to what is envisaged for the development of a democratic and anti-monopoly alliance in Britain. While swift action can certainly be taken to restore the rights of the Chagos Islanders and return the Cyprus bases to the Republic of Cyprus, elsewhere any process of change must involve dialogue. Mutually agreed programmes need to be developed, specific to each territory, that will provide alternative avenues of economic development and sustain a process of self-determination that does not remain subordinate to external finance capital, whether British or US. Current international moves against tax havens, hedge fund leverage and transfer pricing provide the political opportunity. These moves are themselves the product of deepening inter-imperialist rivalries and in turn highlight the urgency of detaching Britain from its subordinate relationship with the US and thereby weakening the grip of finance capital in Britain.

Notes and References

- 1 *The Independent*, 23 August 2013.
- 2 *Akel Bulletin*, No 37, September 2013, pp 7-9.
- 3 *Hansard*, 21 February 2008; online at <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080221/debtext/80221-0008.htm>.
- 4 A Erickson, W Ladwig and J Mikolay, *Anchoring America's Future Presence in the Indo Pacific*, in *Harvard Asia Quarterly*, 15:2, 2013, pp 20-28.
- 5 Cable 150700Z MAY 09 FM AMEMBASSY LONDON TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2316, online at Wikileaks, http://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/09LONDON1156_a.html.
- 6 Some estimates put the total recoverable at 60 billion barrels (three times UK Continental Shelf reserves): <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-03-27/falkland-oil-claimed-by-argentina-sees-islanders-join-1-energy.html>. London-based Premier Oil is scheduled to start pumping the Sea Lion Field (estimated reserves 400 million barrels) in 2017/2018 (<http://www.theguardian.com/business/marketforceslive/2013/oct/03/falklands-oil-gas-buys-desire-petroleum>).
- 7 The main US naval base on Bermuda was closed in the 1990s but the NASA satellite tracking station remains. The Turks and Caicos Islands also

- retained a US base until relatively recently.
- 8 *Legal superior* = in law, an entity which has rights over another.
- 9 *Lender of last resort* = a term commonly applied to a central bank as the ultimate provider of liquidity if there is no other way to increase its supply when it is lacking.
- 10 http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/foot_review_main.pdf, now archived at <http://www.gov.im/media/624053/footreport.pdf> (*Foot Report*)
- 11 *Ibid*, p 16, Chart 2A.
- 12 *Ibid*, p 6, Box 1A for all figures cited in this paragraph.
- 13 *Ibid*, p 6, para 1.13.
- 14 <http://www.oecd.org/tax/transparency/draft%20annual%20report>: <http://www.gov.im/media/624053/footreport.pdf> for %202013%20%20for%20GF_2.pdf.
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- 22 *Foot Report*, p 24, Chart 3A.

BOOK REVIEW

Grudging Cynicism

Review by Graham Stevenson

NOTORIOUSLY MILITANT is a study of the Transport & General Workers' Union (Unite) 1107 Ford Central branch. Given its subject, I wish I had liked this book more. Rescuing workers from obscurity is always important work and the scale of the detail is impressive. Fords' workers' pay claims were closely studied in the 1970s, so this could be a potentially important book.

But 1107 was not the whole of Dagenham and that wasn't even the sum of all Ford workers. Plus, Cohen combines admiration for branch anarchic insularity with an underlying tone of grudging cynicism about communists. Much of her focus misses the point, to my mind.

A recounting of the struggle in 1956, just as the Suez crisis began, when Ford announced 2,400 redundancies "as a result of a strike at the British Motor Corporation" (later British Leyland), leaves it at that. As it happens, communist Dick Etheridge, convenor at Longbridge, chaired the BMC Joint Shop Stewards Committee and this shut down the car industry until the first ever 'notice and redundancy payments' agreement was won. After that, workers no longer could

be hired and fired at will; and the gain was subsequently incorporated in the legislation governing statutory notice. This BMC dispute was critical to an upsurge in class consciousness that continued for more than two decades (just as the sacking of Etheridge's successor, Derek Robinson, was the signal for its curtailing). Cohen prefers too much the focus of 1107, rather than contextualising it against such a powerfully important backcloth.

Prior to the Second World War, the commonly held view was that car factories were unorganisable. Dagenham workers were pretty late to unionisation, with Midlands' car workers there long before. In 1930, Longbridge had already had its first strike, albeit a defeat. With the Pressed Steel strike in Oxford in 1934, the TGWU gained a firm foothold in the car industry for the first time and all the rest, *except Ford*, followed. Also, Ford never joined the Engineering Employers' Federation, a key obligation of which would have been to accept unions. Finding no space for any of the foregoing, Cohen nonetheless mentions the supposedly 'anti-strike' position of the Communist Party (it was much more complex) during the war in support of "their beloved

Soviet Union".

The Second World War much buoyed the development of the shop stewards' movement. The desperate need of employers to ensure co-operation, along with the determination of a generation that had known the 1930s, dealt a strong bargaining position to trades unions. It was the emergence of Joint Production Committees in factories, not even considered by Cohen, that laid the basis for workplace democracy and bargaining.

The author cannot resist a passing negative note of various ahistorical things, such as the oddly jarring tone of one *Daily Worker* quote that is simply representative of the way sexism was part of life – associating women with knitting, say. But this is a mere side-show to the distinct whiff of passive-aggressive hostility to the Communist Party (CP) that goes beyond political knock-about. This writer has 'issues' here.

So we hear of "one Joe Scott"; oh, that would be the communist Joe Scott, who was National Secretary of the Minority Movement? The long-standing EC member of the AEU? Similarly, Kevin Halpin is always an "AEU activist", never a communist. Halpin's own excellent recent memoir stresses the

fight to ensure the Ford plant national framework, in which he was personally involved; but, although he is extensively quoted, I didn't get the impression that the significance of this was grasped. Indeed, national co-ordination is presented throughout as an aspect of bureaucratisation.

Attributing prosaic statements of leading communists in a negative light when they are acting as officials of an organisation is one thing. But, when a commentator in the 60s is named and quoted, and you need to go to the reference pages at the end to find he is a writer for the *Morning Star*, you know you've found an instance of an overall odd effect of downplaying the absolutely central role the CP through acknowledging it as silently as possible.

I don't deny that there are sell-out merchants amongst negotiators but it's always complex. Cohen's assumption, whether it's Claude Berridge or Jimmy Airlie, that union officials 'decide' things in negotiations, can only be said by someone who has little experience of high-level negotiations. Today, we hear the same refrain, an echo of the mass media's sneer about 'union bosses', when the ultra-left claims, for instance, that Len McCluskey has 'delivered

Notoriously Militant: The Story of a Union Branch

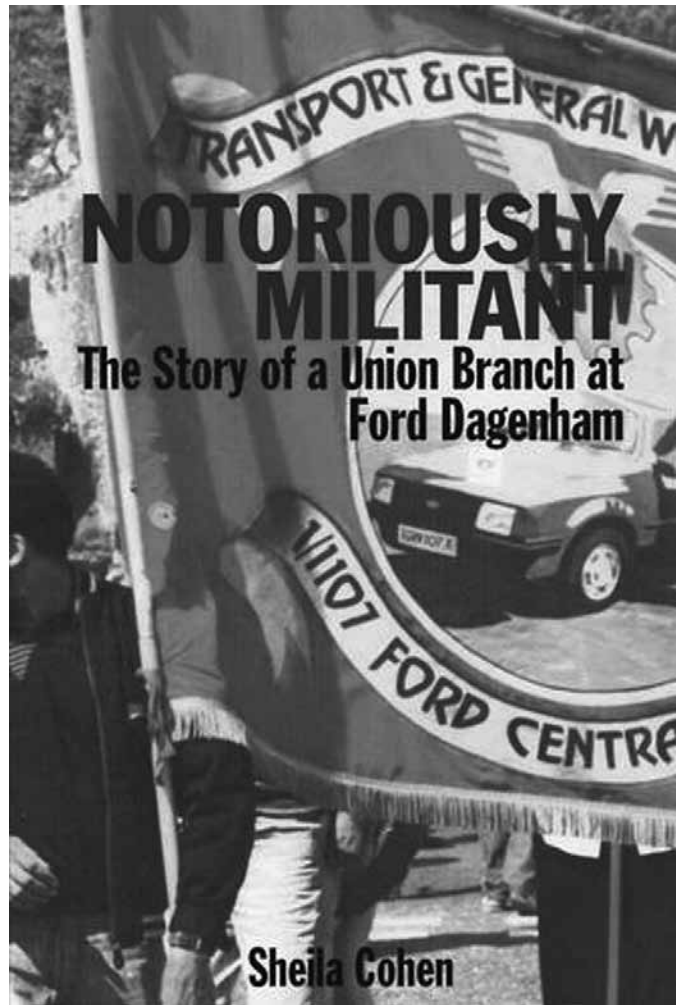
By SHEILA COHEN
(Merlin Press, London, 2013,
233 pp, pbk £15.95. ISBN
978-0-85036-645-7)

austerity', while it was the Grangemouth workers themselves who ordered a pull-back when facing defeat, fearing greater losses if an onward march was sustained.

The tension between sectional interests of skilled workers, and militancy that can assume political form, is a nuance commonly lost on the workerist tradition. The organisational forms that this can take are complex. In this sense, the role of 1107 was positive in that militant cross-union co-operation is shown to have been always an aim, at least in relatively modern times. But the strange absence of significant local bargaining in Dagenham contrasts with its presence at all Midlands' car factories, where everyday

conflict ensued, especially over piecework. The effect on the ground was to escalate trade union consciousness through to class and even revolutionary consciousness. 'Militancy is not enough' became a key 1970s CP slogan.

Ultra-leftists focused on the supposedly socialising tendency of day rates, berating communists for defending piecework workshop bargaining as not being sufficiently revolutionary – a call then taken up by Eurocommunists. In the tool-room disputes, highly skilled workers (unknowingly about to lose the importance of their skills to new technology) were supported in their sectional demands by



the right wing and the ultra-left alike.

There are lessons aplenty for today in getting our resource priorities focused. Connecting with mass groups of workers sharpens our

revolutionary work. Perhaps this is no longer in giant fortresses of labour in one town. But, even back in the day, many islands of workers' power had to be carefully linked.

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip



BOOK REVIEW

Lenin's Philosophical Notebooks

Review by Martin Levy

44 YEARS AGO I was on a British Young Communist League trip to the Soviet Union, visiting Rostov Velikii, Yaroslavl, Moscow and Minsk. It was the year of the centenary of Lenin's birth, and Lenin memorabilia were everywhere – even to the point of children's badges of 'Lenin as a child'. This was not the Lenin I knew, the author of *Left Wing Communism, Imperialism – the Highest Stage of Capitalism, State and Revolution, The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky* and much more. Those works provoked the reader to think critically. It seemed to me that the Soviet authorities were in danger of fetishising Lenin, of turning him into a god who could do no wrong; and I said as much in open discussion with our Soviet hosts. That did not go down well, including with the leaders of the British delegation, who in other circumstances would have been vociferously critical of the USSR.

On another occasion during that visit I was asked by a Soviet young woman communist if I had read Lenin on philosophy. When I replied, "Yes, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*", she said, "No, I mean Lenin's *Philosophical Notebooks*." I was nonplussed. Up to that point I had not heard of the *Notebooks*, nor did they form part of any YCL or Party political education programme. Only later did I find out that they constituted, at least in English, volume 38 of Lenin's *Collected Works*.

These two anecdotes came to my mind on reading Zhang Yibing's *Lenin Revisited*. As the author points out, the *Notebooks* have been treated at times as the pinnacle of Marxist philosophy, and Lenin himself as an all-round fully-fledged Marxist from the year dot. At other times the *Notebooks* have been considered to be "immature". Both of these interpretations are wrong. But that does not mean that the *Notebooks* are not

worthy of study.

Part of the problem is that the *Notebooks* are not actually a work that Lenin consciously wrote, but rather "a collection of Lenin's qualitatively different reading notes, thoughts and commentaries over the course of 20 years (from 1895 to 1916) brought together, organised and edited by various scholars."¹ In the English language version, they don't even follow a chronological order: we start off with Lenin's 1895 conspectus of *The Holy Family*, move chronologically through notes on Haeckel, Feuerbach and others to Hegel's *The Science of Logic* (1914-16) and then jump backwards and forwards between extremes of 1897 and 1911. None of these documents was published during Lenin's lifetime, and indeed they were not first published all at the same time.

In China the situation is worse: in the first edition of the *Collected Works*, there was an attempt at a historical logical framework for Volume 38, but with the documents divided into three hierarchical levels. For the second edition, the *Notebooks* moved to volume 55, but with some articles omitted and the chronological structure completely abandoned. Zhang Yibing excoriates this approach, arguing that both editions amounted to the imposition of "subjective intentions and ideological frameworks"². His own book is based entirely on a historical research line of thought.

In the Soviet Union, the first documents from the *Notebooks* to come under scholarly attention were the excerpts and notes written by Lenin on Hegel, Feuerbach and others. At the time of writing, Lenin was living in Bern, Switzerland, so Zhang Yibing calls these the *Bern Notebooks*. In 1929 Abram Deborin, editor-in-chief of

Under the Banner of Marxism, wrote an introduction to Lenin's Hegel conspectus, arguing that Lenin appeared to be preparing to write a book on materialist dialectics. Deborin had been a Menshevik philosopher, but had sided with Lenin and Plekhanov in criticising the Russian Machists and empirio-critics. Zhang Yibing does commend the historical chronology of Deborin's analysis of the *Bern Notebooks*, even if Deborin's analysis was weak and downplayed Lenin's criticism of Hegel's idealism.

Around that time a debate took place in the Institute of Red Teachers, with Deborin's school coming under criticism for tending to depart from reality and for not sufficiently praising Lenin's work as a 'higher stage' of dialectical materialism. On 9 December 1930, Stalin gave a speech at the Institute, coming down strongly against Deborin. Not long afterwards Deborin was removed as editor of *Under the Banner of Marxism*, and subsequently he publicly admitted his 'mistakes'.³

Thereafter the first Soviet philosopher to attempt a theoretical summary of Lenin's philosophical thought was V V Adoratsky, who had worked closely with Lenin. While he did take a fairly objective view, he opened a non-historical precedent by mixing works from different time-periods. The new generation of Soviet philosophers then homogenised Lenin's philosophical thought structure as "the Leninist period in Marxist philosophical history"⁴. Zhang Yibing states that, "when the 1930s made necessary a unified system of thought, Stalin established a new, forced ideological discourse system" through his *Dialectical and Historical Materialism*, and "the easily understood, easily propagandised *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* as the basic viewpoint of Lenin's

Lenin Revisited: His Entire Thinking Process on Marxist Philosophy

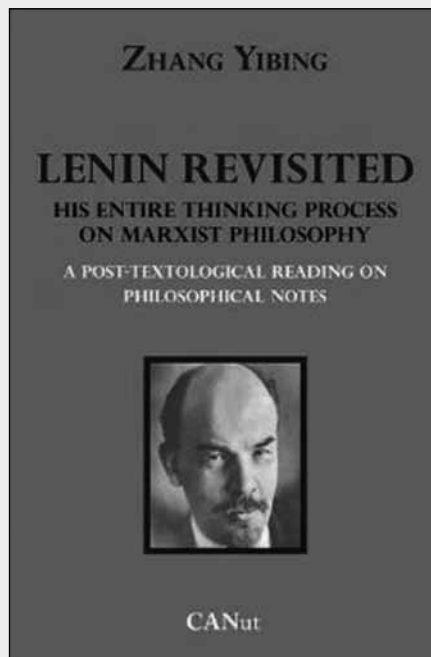
A post-textological reading on philosophical notes

By ZHANG YIBING
(Canut International Publishers, Berlin & London, 2011, 467 pp, pbk £25. ISBN 978-605-87737-0-7)

philosophical thought”⁵. In 1946, he says, Stalin identified the *Philosophical Notebooks* as an immature “thought laboratory”, after which point study of them virtually ceased; and they were not included in the Soviet edition of the *Collected Works* until after Stalin’s death.⁶

When the *Notebooks* did reappear, Soviet interest redeveloped, but largely from a nonhistorical, homogeneous perspective. Zhang Yibing says that there arose a dominant subjective view that Lenin was never wrong, creating the impression that he was always different from Plekhanov, although the latter was originally his teacher. He does agree that Lenin “truly did bring Marxism to a new Leninist stage in terms of political and economic theory ... [and] did make great efforts and contributions in opposing Machism, upholding materialism, and in profound understanding of the materialist dialectic.” However, he does not believe “that there was ever a Leninist philosophy as differentiated from a Marxist philosophy.”⁷

By the late 1970s, states Yibing, the most important research model in the traditional study of Marxist philosophical history in the USSR was due to B M Kedrov – his so-called “planned conception theory”, whereby the *Bern Notebooks* were considered to be Lenin’s preparations for a scholarly work on materialist dialectics that he never had the opportunity of writing.⁸ A central feature of this work was to have been the 16 ‘Elements of Dialectics’, from Lenin’s conspectus of Hegel’s *Science of Logic*. Zhang Yibing does recognise that Kedrov was the first Soviet scholar to focus on and study Lenin’s separate notebooks¹⁰ on the *Correspondence of Marx and Engels*, which Lenin had read a little before Hegel’s *Logic*; but Zhang regards Kedrov’s approach as an “a priori, deterministic, illusory interpretative model to the study



of Lenin’s philosophical thought”.¹¹

With perhaps a couple of exceptions, no significant in-depth studies of the *Philosophical Notebooks* seem to have appeared in English, prior to *Lenin Revisited*. Volume 38 of the *Collected Works* was published in 1961, the same year as *Fundamentals of Marxism-Leninism*,¹² which carried just a few quotations and references from the *Notebooks*. Yuri Kharin’s later *Fundamentals of Dialectics*¹³ has a bare 5 references to the *Notebooks*. Among philosophers of science, Helena Sheehan¹⁴ devotes a couple of pages to comparing a few aspects of *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* and the *Philosophical Notebooks*, to demonstrate advances in Lenin’s understanding; while Kenneth Neil Cameron¹⁵ draws on the *Notebooks* somewhat more extensively, pointing out that they were not intended for publication; but he nonetheless sets the quotations in context, albeit with some critical comments.

The two exceptions are Louis Althusser’s *Lenin and Philosophy*, which came out in English in 1971¹⁶ – but has major deficiencies, as remarked below – and Evald Ilyenkov’s *Dialectical Logic*, written in 1974, and published in English by Progress in 1977. The latter devotes a whole chapter to a single aspect of the *Philosophical Notebooks*, “the coincidence of logic with dialectics and the theory of knowledge of materialism”,¹⁷ which

is developed explicitly in Lenin’s unfinished manuscript, *On the Question of Dialectics*.¹⁸

Why, however, did Lenin write the *Bern Notebooks* if he did not intend to prepare a scholarly work on materialist dialectics? Hans Heinz Holz has put this bluntly:

“On 1 August 1914 the First World War started. In the September Lenin took up the study of Hegel’s *Science of Logic* The working class parties of the Second International had failed in the face of the new phase of capitalism – which Lenin then analysed as imperialist – and had abandoned the class struggle with subordination to the interests of the national bourgeoisies. At the front, workers shot at workers. The aims of socialism appeared to be put off into the distant future, and the socialists had prepared for themselves a devastating downfall, which destroyed their political identity. ... And Lenin read philosophy! Worse still, he studied the ‘Prussian state philosopher’ Hegel, the patriarch of idealism. Perhaps there was nothing more important.”¹⁹

And indeed there was nothing more important. Firstly, Lenin had to get to grips with the reasons for this failure of the social-democratic parties, who were justifying imperialist wars “with a stock of false quotations from Marx”²⁰, while asserting that their theoretical basis was ‘dialectics’. Plekhanov had been prominent among those supporting the war, accusing Lenin of metaphysics, and asserting that “all of Lenin’s words lack dialectics”.²¹ Secondly, for his theoretical examination of actual revolutionary

practice, Lenin needed to move beyond Plekhanov's interpretation of Marxist philosophy (philosophical materialism, which emphasised the determination of consciousness by matter) to a standpoint and method that would recognise the active, creative role of the revolutionary subject.²² But an additional incentive for reading Hegel was that, as noted above, Lenin had just finished reading the *Marx-Engels Correspondence* and found that "Hegel was present each time Marx and Engels discussed dialectics."²³

Early on in his *Conspectus of Hegel's 'Science of Logic'*, Lenin says "I am in general trying to read Hegel materialistically: Hegel is materialism which has been stood on its head (according to Engels)".²⁴ Later, in his notes on 'Essence as Reflection in Itself', he writes "Movement and 'self-movement' ... the opposite of 'dead being'" as "the core of Hegelianism" and adds: "This core had to be discovered, understood, rescued, laid bare, refined, which is precisely what Marx and Engels did."²⁵ Hans Heinz Holz remarks,²⁶ as does Zhang Yibing,²⁷ that Althusser relied on this second quotation in order simply to reduce Lenin's reading to paring down Hegel to a few choice phrases which could be used. Both authors demonstrate that Althusser is quite wrong.

Lenin's *Conspectus* is not an easy read – but then the same applies to Hegel's work itself. Anyone trying to follow Lenin, as he progresses through the text, would need a copy of the *Logic* at hand, and perhaps a philosophical dictionary. Lenin reproduces excerpts, sometimes emphasising the text in capitals, and in other places making marginal comments, differentiated by one, two, three or four vertical lines. In other places he writes comments in boxes; and, particularly from Hegel's Part II, section 1, 'Subjectivity', onwards, he divides the page into vertical sections in order to contrast Hegel's words with his own materialist 'inversion'. In several places he writes "aphorisms", the most famous of which is:

"It is impossible completely to understand Marx's *Capital*, and especially its first chapter, without having thoroughly understood the *whole* of Hegel's *Logic*.

Consequently, half a century later none of the Marxists understood Marx!!"²⁸

Zhang Yibing considers that there are two levels of meaning to this "aphorism": firstly, the intention of explaining "the

inevitable connection between the logical structures of Hegel's dialectics (this is the meaning of 'whole') and the scientific dialectics employed by Marx in *Capital*"; and secondly, an element of self-criticism.²⁹

In his own article dealing with Lenin's critique of the *Science of Logic*, Holz focuses on examples of inversion of Hegel's text as forms of mirror-image reflections, remarking that Lenin only really takes these up in the last third of the *Conspectus*. He considers that this arises because it is only in the third part of the *Logic* that "the idealistic picture of reality as totality is constructed, and thus a materialist reconstruction of the ideal totality in the dialectics of the real becomes possible."³⁰ Later, he notes Lenin's comment that "Marx ... clearly sides with Hegel in introducing the criterion of practice into the theory of knowledge: see the *Theses on Feuerbach*"³¹, and writes that

"In the following parts Lenin develops the dialectical materialist theory-practice relationship totally on the ground of Hegelian philosophy (or, in order to remain in the picture: in the reflection of Hegelian philosophy)."³²

In an earlier footnote Holz remarks, in relation to Lenin's comments and markings:

"Taking the epigraphical findings into consideration is indispensable for understanding Lenin's Hegel-reading. The semantic function of a graphical emphasis (for example, marginal lines, boxes, explorations) has to be investigated in every individual case. Such an analysis must be connected with analysis of the principles by which the excerpts are selected. (Althusser saw the second aspect, but only quite superficially and insufficiently treated.) The relationship of weighting and classification of the problem with Hegel and Lenin is illuminating for the relationship of idealist philosophy and the materialist reading of it."³³

And this is what Zhang Yibing has done – but in the context of the whole of Lenin's philosophical output, starting with *What the Friends of the People Are*³⁴ and going through to *On the Significance of Militant Materialism*³⁵. His method is one of

"approaching the object of research in a **re-simulated thought space and with reconstructed logical structures** in textological research. ... I attempt to realise a methodological shift ... from textual interpretation in an explanatory context to a re-situating of the true thought context. In doing so, my goal is to construct a completely new contextual framework of scholarly logic, thus surpassing traditional textual interpretive methods, or in other words, establish a **post-textological** line of thought."³⁶

Essentially, this means trying to enter Lenin's mental processes, to consider the dominant discourse on which his thought construct depended at different stages. He says:

"I have found that the theoretical generative process of nearly every thinker moves from an **Other mirror image space**, through an **independent thought situation**, and finally to an **innovative thought situation**."³⁷

Lenin's original "Other mirror image space" was Plekhanov's teaching and he did not completely free himself from it till he had read and digested Hegel's *Logic*. Things might have been different had he had access to Marx and Engels' *The German Ideology*³⁸, which was only published in full after his death. Zhang shows, quite convincingly for me, the changes that Lenin went through and the step-by-step struggle he had with himself as he read Hegel's *Logic*. Starting out with a refutational attitude, where he finds Hegel obscure, and rejecting the idealist basis of Hegel's philosophy, he starts to agree with some of Hegel's discourse fragments on dialectics and to find that some of Hegel's comments "sound very materialistic!"³⁹

It is however precisely where Lenin divides his notebook into vertical columns that he starts to move from materialistically 'inverting' Hegel to recognising the importance of Hegel to Marx's philosophy: "Marx *applied* Hegel's dialectics in its rational form to political economy."⁴⁰ The above-cited "aphorism" on Marx's *Capital* is one of three which Zhang says point to Lenin's "cognitive breakthrough".⁴¹ Thereafter, Lenin no longer wanted simply to turn Hegel 'upside-down', but to penetrate deeply into his philosophy to discover the basic

logic that expresses dialectical thought. As noted above, from then on “Lenin develops the dialectical materialist theory-practice relationship totally ... in the reflection of Hegelian philosophy.”

Zhang Yibing’s *Lenin Revisited* is like a readers’ guide to the *Philosophical Notebooks* and indeed to almost all of Lenin’s philosophical writings. I say “almost” because I would have expected more than just the perfunctory references to *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism* – but then, that would have made an already long book much longer and diluted the focus on the *Bern Notebooks*. It certainly helps the reader to make sense of the *Notebooks*, and to deepen one’s understanding of materialist dialectics, even if it is another book to refer to alongside the *Notebooks* and the *Science of Logic*.

I did however find *Lenin Revisited* difficult to get to grips with at a first read. There is extensive use of bold and italic font, both for emphasis.

Some of the writer’s terms, such as “logic ray”, “power discourse” and “scholarly memory points”, are rather impenetrable for the lay person; and, while they are defined in footnotes, there really should have been a glossary. There are a few annoying proof-reading errors but, much worse, there is no index – essential in a theoretical book of this length. Most annoyingly, the reference citations are all to Chinese editions, although many of the cited works are available in English. A little extra effort would have paid off here. It took me a while, but I did manage to find English equivalents to most of the citations of Lenin’s *Collected Works*.

The price is a bit steep but this is a comprehensive study and the publishers are to be commended for making *Lenin Revisited* available to English audiences. I would encourage readers to buy it and read it, and thereby to enrich their own understanding of Marxist philosophy.

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- 4 *Ibid*, p 65.
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- 26 H H Holz, *Hegel – vom Kopf auf die Füße gestellt: Lenins Kritik der Hegelschen ‘Wissenschaft der Logik’ (Hegel – Turned from his Head onto his Feet: Lenin’s critique of Hegel’s ‘Science of Logic’)* in *Vom Mute des Erkennens: Beiträge zur Philosophie G W F Hegels (From the Courage of Cognition: Contributions on the Philosophy of G W F Hegel)*, M Buhr and T I Oiserman, eds, Verlag Marxistische Blätter, Frankfurt am Main, 1981, p 46.
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- 31 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 38, p 212.
- 32 Holz, *Hegel – vom Kopf auf die Füße gestellt, op cit*, p 55.
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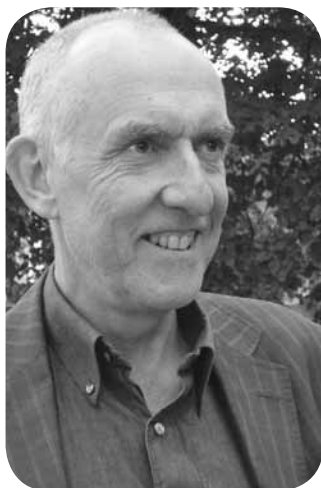
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SOULFOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

THOSE WHO MAKE BREAD SHOULD EAT

DO YOU REMEMBER the film *Il Postino*? Made in 1995, it tells the story of how the poet Pablo Neruda befriends the local postman on an island off Italy. It is based to some extent on fact: Neruda did indeed visit Capri in 1952, whilst he was in exile from Chile because of his attacks on the government.

The postman is barely literate, an ordinary man, a kind of Everyman, and the actor playing him (Massimo Troisi) well deserved the Bafta award he received for the performance. One of the hardest jobs for any actor must be to play a character who is gauche, undistinguished, and inarticulate.

The inarticulateness of the postman does not last, however. The magical power of Neruda's love poems, and his political poems, transforms his literary and political awareness. The film ends with the postman's death at the hands of the police, at a political demonstration where he is due to read one of his own poems, inspired by Neruda's example.

The story in the film is thus a kind of synecdoche of Neruda's whole life and work. Driven by love and political commitment, he wrote great love poems,



and also great political poems, and inspired a huge worldwide readership with both kinds of poetry. He became a true poet of the people, concerned to write poetry with immediacy and relevance, poems which truthfully re-created everyday material reality:

“Let that be the poetry we search for: worn with the hand's obligations, as by acids, steeped in sweat and in smoke, smelling of lilies and urine, spattered diversely by the trades that we live

by, inside the law or beyond it. A poetry impure as the clothing we wear, or our bodies, soup-stained, soiled with our shameful behaviour, our wrinkles and vigils and dreams, observations and prophecies, declarations of loathing and love, idylls and beasts, the shocks of encounter, political loyalties, denials and doubts, affirmations and taxes.”¹

In this article, I'm going to present extracts from a few of the poems of this great communist poet, with a few comments where appropriate. Those comments will not be entirely uncritical, however, and they focus on one particular issue, which is the treatment of women in Neruda's poetic imaginary – the totality of people, things and relationships in his imagined, poetic world.

Readers may recall the points made by Anita Wright and Liz Payne in the last *CR*, in the round-table session on *Building The Fight Against Austerity*, about how issues around the oppression of women have been systematically downplayed in dominant discourses, even

communist ones, perhaps subliminally. Their comments made me wonder about how far their points applied to political poetry by men, particularly the poetry of Neruda, who is widely regarded as one of the finest poets of the twentieth century.

So just as Brecht, in his famous poem *Questions From A Worker Who Reads*, invites us to think about how workers appear (or more often, don't appear) in accounts of famous historical events, let us ask some questions about how women appear (or don't appear) in some of Neruda's political poetry.

Let's start with his *Elemental Odes*, published in the 1950s. As the title suggests, Neruda's poetic and political project was to bring the ode, which is traditionally thought of as one of the loftiest poetic forms, firmly down to earth. Here is an extract from one of them, *The Invisible Man*, which functions as a kind of poetic manifesto:

I cannot live
without life,
without man's being man,
and I run and look and listen
and sing,
stars have nothing
to do with me,
solitude bears no flowers,
no fruit.
For my life, give me
all lives,
give me all the sorrow
of all the world
and I will transform it
into hope.
Give me all the joys
even the most secret,
for if not,
how will they be known?
I must tell of them,
give me
the daily
struggle,
because these things are my song,
and so we will go together,
shoulder to shoulder,
all men,
my song unites them:
the song of the invisible man
who sings with all men.

Neruda is saying he wants to create a different, more inclusive kind of imaginary than the traditional poetic one, the individualistic, self-obsessed Romantic stereotype of poetic solitude amidst stars and flowers. He wants to efface his individual poetic voice and 'collectivise' his poetry so that it speaks for "the invisible man".

This is clearly a progressive political

aim, skilfully and simply expressed poetically, with a convincing air of spontaneity. But might a Brechtian *Worker Who Reads*, particularly if female, feel a little uneasy about the rather gendered language?

Here's a couple of extracts from another ode, *The Onion*:

Beneath the earth
the miracle took place
and when your ungainly
green stem appeared
and your leaves emerged
like swords in the vegetable patch,
the earth hoarded its might,
displaying your naked transparency,
and just as the distant sea in

Aphrodite,
duplicated the magnolia,
lifting up her breasts,
so the earth
made you,
onion,
clear as a planet,
and destined
to shine,
constant constellation,
round rose of water,
upon
the table
of the poor ...

... within reach
of the hands of the common people,
sprinkled with oil,
dusted
with a bit of salt,
you kill the hunger
of the day-labourer on his hard
path.

The message of the poem is clear: a simple onion which gives sustenance to the poor is as beautiful as Aphrodite, the epitome of female beauty. With this simple yet revolutionary sentiment, expressed with consummate skill, Neruda reverses the usual flow of aesthetic value in the same way communists seek, in economic struggle, to reverse the flow of economic value in a capitalist society.

At the same time, our Brechtian question might be, is Neruda presenting females not as "common people" or "day-labourers" themselves, but (merely?) as symbolic vehicles for the people's salvation?

In 1962, one of Neruda's own favourite collections appeared, called *Fully Empowered*. The first poem, *The Poet's Duty*, is again a kind of poetic-political manifesto. This is the first stanza:

To whoever cannot hear the sea
this Friday morning, to whoever is
cooped up
in house, office, factory or woman,
or street or mine or waterless cell:
to him I go and without speaking or
seeing
I arrive and open the door of his
prison
and something vague, endless,
insistent is heard,
a long, broken rumble of thunder
chains itself
to the mass of the planet and the
foam,
the roaring rivers of the ocean
rise,
a fleeting star throbs in its rose-bed
and the sea heaves, dies and
endures.

Again, we have a beautifully expressed sentiment of the poet helping to liberate people from their cooped-up, alienated lives. Our Brechtian question, however, might be this: why does "woman" appear alongside factory, office, mine and cell, as a site of imprisonment?

The last poem in the collection is *The People*, perhaps Neruda's finest political poem. Here is an extract:

That was the man all right, without
inheritance,
no cow, no coat of arms,
and indistinguishable from all the
rest,
from the others who were himself,
from above he was grey, like clay,
he was brown, like leather,
he was yellow when harvesting
wheat,
he was black when down the mine,
he was stone-coloured when in the
castle,
in the fishing boat he was the
colour of tuna,
and horse-coloured in the
meadows:
how could anyone make him out
if he had no being of his own, was
base matter,
earth, coal or sea in a man's
clothing?

Where he lived whatever
a man touched grew:
the hostile stones,
quarried
by his hands,
took on order
and one by one formed
the right clarity of a building,
he made bread with his hands,



moved the engines,
the distances peopled themselves
with towns,
other men grew,
bees arrived,
and by man's creating and breeding
spring walked the market squares
between bakeries and doves.

The maker of loaves was forgotten,
he who quarried and journeyed,
beating down
and opening furrows, transporting
sand,
when everything existed he no
longer existed,
he gave his existence, that's all.
He went elsewhere to labour, and
at last
he was dead, rolling
like a stone in the river:
death carried him downstream.

I, who knew him, saw him descend
till he was no longer except what
he left:
roads he could scarcely know,
houses he never ever would live in.

I turn to see him, and I await him

I see him in his grave and
resurrected.

I distinguish him among all
who are his equals
and it seems to me it cannot be,
that like this we go nowhere,
that to survive like this holds no
glory.

I believe that this man
must be enthroned, rightly shod and
crowned.
I believe that those who made such
things
must be the masters of all these
things.
And that those who made bread
should eat!

The poem is the most sustained and effective expression of Neruda's wish for us to remember that all those workers who are exploited and forgotten by bourgeois society, even though they make all the goods, are the source of all value. This theme is clearly not a million miles away from the theme of many of Brecht's poems! But our Brechtian question might be around the masculinist language and imagery of the poem, particularly the religious imagery. It may ennoble and enrich the theme of liberation, but does it not also restrict it, by gendering it so prominently? And another question

might be, is the account of harvesting, mining, fishing, quarrying, bread-making and building broadly representative of the actual work done by both men and women?

I don't claim that my selection of excerpts from Neruda's poetry is an authoritative, representative selection. His output was vast: *Obras Completas*, constantly republished, comprised 459 pages in 1951, 1925 pages in 1962, and 3237 pages in two volumes in 1968. I have not read all of the ones translated into English, let alone all of them in the original Spanish.

Neither do I think that Neruda never mentions women in public and indeed in active political roles, because he does in some poems, although again the language is often rather gendered. And I have only focused on some of the most well known political poems. There are other great poems, such as *The United Fruit Co.*, which we presented in *CR66*, which far from provoking Brechtian questions, answer them.

However, it does seem clear that women as workers are inadequately imagined in many of Neruda's poems, and so it seems clear that the comments of Anita Wright and Liz Payne can apply as much to poetic discourse as they do to other forms of discourse. Perhaps we need to be alert to imaginative bias in poetry, even committed political poetry, as much as in any other kind of text.

Finally, I would like to present some lines from *Ode to The Air* which sum up Neruda's communist poetic vision:

Soon a day will come
when we shall set free
light and water,
the earth, man,
and everything will be
for everyone,
just as you are.

These lines exemplify the best of Neruda, the clear, translucent, airy yet simple poetic expressions of the communist vision of the full, free and interdependent development of the individual, within a society which exists in harmony with the world.

He was a poet of and for the people, the kind of public poet we haven't seen in Britain for a long time. Here are two examples of his closeness to ordinary people, which probably inspired the ending of *Il Postino*.

On a visit to Buenos Aires in the thirties, Neruda was briefly imprisoned by a suspicious state. Whilst he was being released, a guard pressed a poem

he'd written into Neruda's hand. Has any other poet ever received such a gift from a prison guard, I wonder?

The other example occurred after his death. Neruda was a close friend of Allende, but was hospitalised with cancer at the time of Pinochet's CIA-backed coup against the democratically elected president. Pinochet denied permission for the funeral to be a public event, but thousands of grieving Chileans disobeyed the curfew and crowded the streets as the cortege passed through. Shouts of "Camarada Pablo Neruda!" were answered with the defiant reply "Presente!" At the graveside, and surrounded by a ring of heavily armed soldiers, the mourners sang the *Internationale*, bellowing the words and punching the air with their fists.

Then new cries were heard. First came "Camarada Victor Jara!", who had been viciously tortured and murdered days after the coup, answered by "Presente!" And then, finally, "Camarada Salvador Allende!", which was met with "a hoarse, broken howl distorted by emotion and terror and the desire to shout it out so the whole world could hear: 'Presente!'"²

Someone recited Neruda's condemnation of Franco's invasion of Spain:

Jackals which the jackal itself would
spurn,
Generals,
traitors:
look at my dead house,
look at shattered Spain.

From beyond the grave, Neruda had thus enabled the first popular protest against the new military dictatorship. What fitter memorial could there be for a great communist poet?

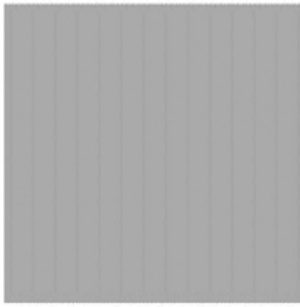
Acknowledgements

Extracts from Neruda's poems are taken from: Dominic Moran, *Pablo Neruda*, Reaktion Books, 2009; Mark Eisner, *The Essential Neruda: Selected Poems*, Bloodaxe 2010; and Pablo Neruda and Alastair Reid, *Fully Empowered*, Condor Books 1976. All are gratefully acknowledged.

Notes and References

1 From Pablo Neruda, *Five Decades: Poems 1925-1970*, edited and translated by Ben Belitt, Grove Weidenfeld, 1974.

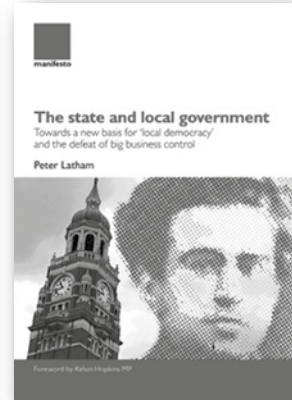
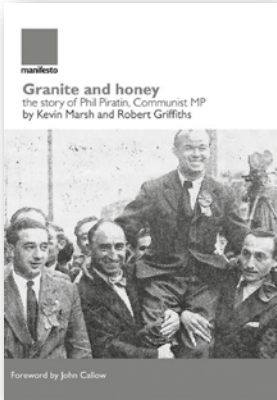
2 These two examples are cited in Adam Feinstein, *Pablo Neruda: A Passion for Life*, Bloomsbury 2004.



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