



COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Mike Quille and Graham Stevenson** Alienation
- **Shiraz Durrani** The Revolutionary Legacy of Makhan Singh
- **Rajani Palme Dutt** Marxism and the Outbreak of WW2
- **S G Hutchins** Founding of the First International
- plus reviews and Soul Food



Tomorrow May Not Be the Same

ALIENATION

£2.50



Theoretical and discussion
journal of the Communist Party
Number 73 • Autumn 2014



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Printed by APRINT

Cover: from *Modern Times* by
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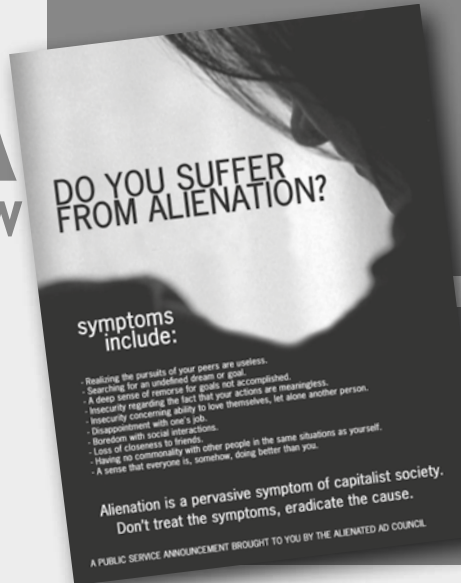
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editorial



By Martin Levy

AT THE TIME of writing, the people of Scotland have spoken – but the dust is far from settling. The scale and demography of the ‘Yes’ vote, and the promises made by the Westminster supporters of the successful ‘No’ side, will have wide repercussions for the political process in Britain.

How could it happen that a people, which in 1997 returned 56 Labour MPs out of 72 to Westminster, was in 2014, in a record turnout of 84.6%, on the brink of choosing independence, and with the Labour heartlands showing the highest ‘Yes’ percentages?

Of course, the electorate today is not the same as 17 years ago. However, while Labour’s percentage vote in Scotland held up quite well at the 2001, 2005 and 2010 general elections, it has never been above 33.6% for the Scottish Parliament; and the SNP was able to build up to its most recent 44% stake, in part firstly by the drop in the Scottish Greens’ and Scottish Socialists’ votes in 2007, and then largely by the collapse in the Lib Dem vote in 2011. Labour’s fall to 26.3% in 2011 did not help, and indeed its ‘austerity-lite’ policies clearly disillusioned many core supporters, while its collaboration with the hated Tories and Lib Dems in the ‘Better Together’ campaign can hardly have helped rebuild trust.

While the Establishment may have got the jitters, and David Cameron’s position might have been at stake if ‘Yes’ had won, what was never in doubt was the rule of finance capital. The independence on offer was a sham: the monarchy and membership of the EU and NATO were all to be continued, along with even lower corporation taxes and presumably – since they got no mention in the campaign – the draconian anti-union laws and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. This ‘independence’ was a pro-capitalist, pro-imperialist agenda. Nationalism without a progressive content is ultimately reactionary.

Unfortunately a significant section of the Scottish working class was diverted in this direction. But perhaps that is no surprise, given the betrayals of the leaders of the Labour Party and the low general

level of industrial mobilisation of the working class itself. The urgent priority now, as the Draft Domestic Resolution for the Communist Party’s 53rd National Congress argues, is the building of “a united, militant and political movement to defeat the ruling class offensive”.¹ An essential part of this will be to “win the labour movement across Scotland, Wales and England for progressive federalism to resolve the national question in the interests of a united working class movement against British state-monopoly capitalism.”

Our lead article in this issue of *CR*, the second in our series of *Tomorrow May Not Be The Same*, deals with the issue of *alienation*. Certainly, the Scotland referendum demonstrates widespread alienation from the Westminster political process; but then that same perspective could be found in many parts of England and Wales too, particularly those areas which, like the Scottish central belt, have been deindustrialised, where work has become precarious, where public services are no longer owned by the people and where debt and poverty are widespread. At the root of this is a society in which the worker is alienated from the product and from nature, and where everything is commodified, *ie* turned into something to sell. As Graham Stevenson says in the article, “A state of being alienated means that society is forcing individualism upon us; whereas the true nature of humanity is to value communal outlooks and activities which enable our sense of individual self to come into a state of full flowering.” That is the basis for building working class solidarity across our nations.

You wait years for an anniversary, and then 3 come along together. In *CR72*, our main feature was the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War; but this autumn also sees the 75th anniversary of the declaration of the Second World War, and the 150th anniversary of the founding of the First International. For that reason we have included here two archive articles from *Labour Monthly*. In his ‘Notes of the Month’ of October 1939, Rajani Palme Dutt demonstrates how Britain and France actively rearmed Nazi Germany as a bulwark against communism, only to

find those weapons turned against them when appeasement no longer worked. In the modern world we see imperialism caught on the horns of a similar dilemma over the reactionary forces it has also released, first Al-Qaeda and now Islamic State. The basic problem is imperialist aggression. The need for international unity against this is the subject of the Draft International Resolution for the Communist Party’s Congress.²

Stanley Hutchins’ article from September 1964 shows that internationalism was at the heart of the very first International Working Men’s Association. That internationalism, carried forward into the Second International, was destroyed in the imperialist bloodbath of the First World War but resurrected in the Third, Communist International. It is that same internationalist perspective which underpins Dutt’s article, where he writes that the working class and democratic anti-fascists must have “an independent standpoint, irreconcilably opposed to that of the imperialists.” The British imperialists wanted to preserve the Empire. Communists fought both against fascism and for the liberty of the colonial peoples. After the war was over, those peoples still had to fight for their liberation. Shiraz Durrani’s article in the present *CR* pays tribute to one towering national liberation movement figure, communist Makhan Singh from India and Kenya. As Shiraz shows, Makhan Singh saw independence as an inseparable part of the struggle for working people to take state power, a process which, as Paul Dobson records in his diary extracts, is currently taking place in Venezuela.

We round off with a couple of review articles, and of course the ever-excellent *Soul Food*.

Notes and References

1 https://secure.comunist-party.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=37&Itemid=315.

2 https://secure.comunist-party.org.uk/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36&Itemid=316.

Tomorrow May Not Be the Same

ALIENATION

**Mike Quille (MQ) interviews
Graham Stevenson (GS)**

MQ: In the first article¹ in this series, Chris Guiton focused on a specific area of life, housing. In this one we're discussing the subject of alienation, a concept with a wide application over a number of areas of life. Before looking at some of those in more detail, I wonder if we could stay with housing issues for a moment, and whether you could explain the relevance of the concept of alienation to the issues around housing that Chris identified?

GS: Yes certainly. If you think about the nature of the housing market today, the contradiction between the basic need for somewhere to live and the unnatural desire for bloated wealth screams out at you. Homes have become a key part of our commodified economy – so much so that business is reliant on the housing market for growth, and property-buying as an investment device (or tax dodge) by those who do not need family homes makes life more difficult for young people who actually want to live in one.

There are many ways in which housing issues show how alienation applies today. Humans are alienated from product. New houses are more about look than practical living, let alone green concerns. The very design of homes is more to do with the ease of production than with the needs of people. Rooms are too small, and the construction is flimsy.

Our housing estates have become alienated from the natural world by the casual disregard for wildlife, where the sun sets, what prevailing winds there are, gardens for pleasure, tarmac or gravel on front gardens instead, and parking on the roads. We build houses on every new brownfield site, so that old factories become housing estates, leaking toxicity everywhere. We have both urban sprawl, and isolated rural communities. Housing estates usually lack necessary community provision except a pub, if you're lucky, and an off-licence where the kids hang out.

We become alienated from other people when private estates demand walls against social housing, or when architects plan roads so that some housing is in cul-de-sacs and others become rat-runs.

We even become alienated from ourselves, when we are wealthy and demand fortified boundaries, lights, alarms, and a no man's land between ourselves and others.

In a socialist society, housing would become more a right than an obligation. The home would be much less of a commodity. We would see unused big houses divided sensitively into decent flats, with a range of bedroom options from one to many. Rents would be controlled, set at a suitable recognised proportion of income, and ensuring adherence to rights and responsibilities on both sides. Buying a home would need to be within a controlled market, with local authorities dominating it. Perhaps in suburban and rural communities, we would see more detached houses in democratically managed living spaces. Devolving the powers and funding of local authorities serving hundreds of thousands of people to smaller communities of a thousand or so would lead to the popular management of communal local services such as crèches, a local lending library, a community hall, and sports centre.

Accommodation of all kinds would become eased

by more communal living. How often have we heard how nice it was not to lock your back door and to be able to 'borrow' a cup of sugar anytime? We needn't fear the notion of communal. Isn't the neighbours' barbeque already a feature of life? And friends already bring food to dinner parties. Without stretching into 1960s commune territory, we could easily begin to imagine a less commodified society.

ALIENATION FROM THE PRODUCT

MQ: OK, thanks, let's move on then to look in more detail at the different kinds of alienation, starting with alienation from the product. What does that mean in practice for people at work? What would be the difference in a socialist and communist society?

GS: For Marx, money is the 'alien'; his critique is of social systems based on commodity production, which turn everything, as he says in *On the Jewish Question*, "into alienable, vendible objects

in thrall to egoistic need and huckstering. Selling is the practice of alienation.” When people take up religion, they objectify an alien and fantastic being. The religion of commodity production, or egoistic need, ends in attributing “the significance of an alien entity, namely money.”² Alienation arises from the transformation of everything into commodity. Even people are converted into ‘things’ and society is fragmented into isolated individuals. Expressing this approvingly, Thatcher once famously said that “there is no such thing as society”.³

In the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx tells us that we are all “products of circumstances and upbringing” and that life experiences change perceptions and beliefs.⁴ This recalls the so-called ‘nature versus nurture’ debate, but Marx avoids posing one against the other, placing the nature of humanity precisely in the realm of actuality, and urging that “it is men who change circumstances”. Humanity, in the Marxist view, is not made by some outside conscious agency, as humans are able to think and to act. This defines us as able to unite both theory and practice, interacting in a continuous modification of human nature: “By thus acting on the external world and changing it, [man] at the same time changes his own nature”.⁵

So, we don’t simply wait upon some perfect society to acquire a socialist outlook. Alienated humanity can produce an unalienated society through the struggle against capitalism and imperialism. These enemies of humanity restrict the nature of people, turning them against each other. It is in the struggle in unions, in national liberation movements, in a Marxist political party, that humans begin to gain a truly human attitude, changing our nature by developing our “slumbering powers”.⁴ The ultimate victory for those who would

DO YOU SUFFER FROM ALIENATION?

symptoms include:

- Realizing the pursuits of your peers are useless.
- Searching for an undefined dream or goal.
- A deep sense of remorse for goals not accomplished.
- Insecurity regarding the fact that your actions are meaningless.
- Insecurity concerning ability to love themselves, let alone another person.
- Disappointment with one's job.
- Boredom with social interactions.
- Loss of closeness to friends.
- Having no commonality with other people in the same situations as yourself.
- A sense that everyone is, somehow, doing better than you.

**Alienation is a pervasive symptom of capitalist society.
Don't treat the symptoms, eradicate the cause.**

A PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT BROUGHT TO YOU BY THE ALIENATED AD COUNCIL

struggle for a communal society is the end of alienation. ‘Alienation’ is thus used by Marxists to define how they see class-structured societies deforming human relations, separating humans from their essential nature.

Marx introduced the concept of what he called the “fetishism of commodities”.⁶ If we recall that Victorian society was then discovering and converting many ancient cultures to Christianity, finding unusual ritual object-practices, it may become a little clearer why Marx used this term. Freudian

thinkers later acquired the term to describe how objects can become a fixation when they act as sexual triggers. Fetishising things with a kind of religious zeal disguises the true nature of human relationships.

Whilst we have all wondered what on earth the point can be to a multi-billionaire adding another few billion to their pile, this is but one form of insanity that makes no sense to any unalienated human being. Native North Americans simply could not grasp the notion that a gift from

Englishmen for allowing them to live nearby had meant that they had acquired the land by purchase. ‘How can anyone possess land?’ they complained. Indeed! The fixation of our world, that commodities are the only feasible means of obtaining goods and services, was incomprehensible to all hunter-gatherer societies. Which group of humans was more human, more sensible?

A commodity is not just something bought and sold; actually it’s a rather strange thing. Marx’s view is that commodities capture human



labour within themselves. The relationships between people get caught up in the relationship between things. Whilst people may not feel alienated, many grasp that we are not what we could be. The sheer task of survival and the boredom of workaday life is known to most of us. So, in hobbies if not in work, people try to combat any lack of control that prevents them from being their true selves.

In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels sum this up by saying that “the vocation, designation, task of every person is to achieve all-round development of all his abilities”.⁷ In truly free labour, we value what we do, not by the value of commodities but by gaining pleasure from our own achievements. A state of being alienated means that society is forcing individualism upon us; whereas the true nature of humanity is to value communal outlooks and activities which enable our sense of individual self to come into a state of full flowering. Even in modern society most of us contribute to the common good in one

way or another. When we work for others, our work is an alienation of our own lives, for we work in order to live. Our work is not our lives.

The very struggle to maintain life means that our entire life is managed via commodities; even our labour power is exchanged for cash to get the things we want. Yet the gleam of socialism exemplified by independent self-activity is ever present – because, strangely, money does not buy you happiness! In *The Holy Family*, Marx and Engels say that capitalists and proletarians are equally alienated although they experience their own alienation in markedly different ways.⁸ The wealthy and powerful know full well that they are somehow marked out as being different but see their own alienation as a badge of their elitism. Working people ultimately always know that they are powerless, and they can sometimes express this in highly destructive ways.

Production and consumption are largely private experiences embodied in things and not in person-



FROM CHAPTER 2 OF THE GREAT GATSBY

by F Scott Fitzgerald

This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens; where ashes take the forms of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and, finally, with a transcendent effort, of ash-grey men, who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. Occasionally a line of grey cars crawls along an invisible track, gives out a ghastly creak, and comes to rest, and immediately the ash-grey men swarm up with leaden spades and stir up an impenetrable cloud, which screens their obscure operations from your sight. The valley of ashes is bounded on one side by a small foul river, and, when the drawbridge is up to let barges through, the passengers on waiting trains can stare at the dismal scene for as long as half an hour.

FROM THE LOVE SONG OF JALFRED PRUFROCK

by T S Eliot

Let us go then, you and I,
When the evening is spread out against the sky
Like a patient etherized upon a table;
Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,
The muttering retreats
Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels
And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:
Streets that follow like a tedious argument
Of insidious intent
To lead you to an overwhelming question.
Oh, do not ask, “What is it?”
Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go
Talking of Michelangelo.

to-person exchanges, involving common interest – as we would normally expect, say, in a community or campaign group, when embodiment is in people. In our world, ‘the customer is always right’ only because we want them to buy something, not because we care about their likes and dislikes as a human being. The money-god dominates social relations, hardly involving people. ‘The market’ becomes a thing, almost a person. How often have we heard on the news an expression from the newsreader such as ‘The market was gloomy yesterday but today rallied and showed signs of positive jubilation?’ It’s almost as if they are describing someone rising from their sick bed and dancing in the streets with a bottle of bubbly in their hands!

This brings us to another concept that appears in Marxist thinking on alienation:

‘reification’. We might call this the ‘thinging’ of human relations! – or, more elegantly, devaluing human relations to the point of treating them like things, or attributing to a thing the qualities of a living organism. ‘Objectification’ of human beings, such as viewing women as sex-objects, is comparable. When 19th century mill owners advertised jobs for ‘hands’, they did more than just demean their employees, they objectified them.

After the end of feudalism, people accepted a new kind of servitude. Perversely, this was an advance since it allowed civil society to develop more, but the rule of money led to the growth of egoistic need. Now the market almost seems to be making all the decisions, filled with human – even super-human – powers, and people become unaware of the real nature of ideological, political and economic relations.

FROM BIG YELLOW TAXI

by Joni Mitchell

They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot
With a pink hotel, a boutique
And a swinging hot spot

...

Hey farmer farmer
Put away that DDT now
Give me spots on my apples
But leave me the birds and the bees
Please!

Don't it always seem to go
That you don't know what you've got
Till it's gone
They paved paradise
And put up a parking lot.



ALIENATION FROM NATURE

MQ: Fine, now alienation from the natural world. What does that mean in practice in our lives? What would be the difference in a socialist and communist society?

GS: The great shibboleths today are 'supply and demand', not being able to buck the market, not having

a thing such as 'free lunch'. These supposed iron laws of society are actually no more than justifications for selfishness and inequality of power and wealth.

Yet, as Marx wrote in 1844: "The worker can create nothing without nature, without the sensuous external world."⁹ Whether it's heating, clothing, or nourishment, we humans use nature as a kind of organic extension of ourselves. The contradiction is that we remain far from the natural world, only engaging

with it in processed form, being alienated from it.

Engels wrote on nature in his 1883 *Dialectics of Nature*, and other texts. While the intervening period has seen a massive rise in scientific knowledge, his writings were a start to thinking about humanity and nature in the context of social and economic developments – instead of believing that our destruction of nature is a matter of just the way things are. Today, more people are minded to question how we treat the planet, yet we shop at Tesco, which has a system of processed commodities imported from every corner of the globe. What is 'nature' now? Our gardens, perhaps, a National Trust reserve certainly. The hedgerows of a concrete motorway? Town parks, zoos?

But without organic life, we die. Ultimately, humans do not stand outside of nature but belong to it. We can't really understand any environmental issue if we don't take into account the economic system. Reducing personal carbon footprints by selfless denial through lifestyle changes helps us understand how more sustainable living might appear. However, just as fighting for equality, one person at a time, produces only well-paid careers, fighting for a green future by putting the right refuse in the right colour carton doesn't change much, except make ourselves feel better, a bit less alienated maybe. Serious state action against powerful economic interests is the only way to check environmental disaster.

Politics and the environment are totally linked. Amur tigers were once found throughout Siberia and parts of Asia, but by the 1930s the species was on the brink of extinction. The USSR became the first country in the world to grant the species full protection, so that the population had increased twelve-fold up to the 1980s. The demise of the Soviet Union then saw great reverses as conservation and

cross-border anti-poaching efforts were challenged by looser regulation, a lack of funding, and lawlessness.

Nature isn't just green stuff. Our society remains alienated from other animals and thus from nature itself. Even when we take animals into our home, as with pet cats, their needs are commodified, whilst we anthropomorphise and fail to recognise that these are essentially wild creatures which have become socialised to ourselves – nice to us as honorary cats when we feed and play with them but wild in their thinking about small furry and feathery things!

In socialism and then even more in communism, we would see a close connection with the natural world. We'd see more parks, more national parks. Perhaps the NHS, fully restored to look after humans from the cradle to the grave, from teeth to toes, will nurture all living biology?

Not only is it wrong to commodify human body parts, or medical procedures, so too is it immoral that species become endangered primarily because of economic difficulties. The market in big cat anatomy or elephant tusks created by humans is a completely fake worth. A different approach in socialism will see more reserves and protected species and more involvement of communities in the safeguarding of the future of nature. The plains in Africa should see lions roam free and wild, and every school student should be able to see wildlife in its natural habitat at minimal cost and with maximum educational benefit.

In a sense, under communism we won't have any rules – not rules that govern people, at any rate, only for the administering of things. Socialism starts us along the road of understanding what is madness and what is behaving sensibly. This should be seen in most energy issues. We ought to be able to function well enough with renewables, with proper investment.



ALIENATION FROM ONESELF AND OTHERS

MQ: What about alienation from other people? What does that mean in practice for people with mental health issues, or at work? What would be the difference in a socialist and communist society?

GS: It has been well observed that the Western world is subject to a sweeping malaise of mental illness, and that this worsens with public spending cuts. Anxiety and depression are at a serious and unprecedented level, as far as causing major absences from work. Alcoholism, drug addiction, and other self-harming behaviours proliferate. More than that, some experts on personality disorders and high-conflict behaviour point to a signal rise in all-or-nothing thinking, unmanaged emotions, extreme behaviours, such as over-entitlement sensing, and the blaming of others, as facets of a current dominant culture that could be dubbed a “borderline society”¹⁰, a phrase rooted in a now archaic description of a particular malaise. A related disorder, the so-called anti-social personality disorder, usually attributed predominantly in men, is also often linked to those who become locked up in an insatiable prison system. One study of 62 surveys from 12 countries covering nearly 23,000 prisoners suggested 65% had a personality disorder, with 47% diagnosed with anti-social personality disorder, about ten times the rate in the general population.

The suggestion is that the prevalence of such disorders has been boosted because of the stresses of isolated family life, fragmented economic and social structures, challenging gender roles, increased divorce rates, and greater geographical mobility. In

such a “borderline society” Tony Blair enjoyed pop-star rating before his Iraq venture, President Bush II also got high approval ratings, while a little leg-up from the media gave votes to UKIP – and Boris Johnson could get elected in London! This is surely connected to that fact that we can produce celebrities known for being celebrities, and that vacuous pop stars are adored and adulated – a culture that creates an environment where celebrities are alienated from real life, enabled to do what they like, whether incorrect or illegal, because their fame lets them get away with it.

Socialism, and more especially communism, will begin to end the many social problems that have their seeds in class conflict, but it won't be paradise. There will still be lots of human problems, including those of a psychological nature. But under socialism, humanity should see a marked decrease in what are currently termed Cluster B Personality Disorders.¹¹ These are often called the dramatic, emotional, and erratic PD cluster. (Cluster A includes eccentric behaviours and Cluster C the anxious, or fearful.) People with a PD are not able to do anything other than offer a set response mechanism within that type, whilst neuro-typical persons are able to reach for a range of approaches.

Cluster B PDs include: *borderline*, with its polarised and angry thinking; *narcissistic*, betraying a powerful sense of entitlement; *histrionic*, with its attention-seeking; and *antisocial*, a pervasive disregard for the rights of others. These disorders share behavioural problems with particularly poor impulse control and emotional regulation at the core. Less disordered societies see these tendencies more as extreme personality traits. Modern capitalist society has nurtured inflexible versions that cause impairment which severely interferes with a

TOKEN

by David Smith

There was a knot in his stomach.
The crowd was getting bigger. Ted hated the big crowds,
it always made it worse.
Every morning he made his way down to the dock gate,
along with about one hundred others.
The foreman came and stood on the small dais.
“Twenty today” he shouted.
He threw the tokens above the waiting men who
scrambled and fought to claim one.
The foreman laughed.
“Jesus! Yes, y’a beauty!” Ted had grasped a token.
Handing it to the gateman he passed into the yard.
Relief flooded through Ted, for a day at least. Work.

This poem won a recent flash fiction competition, limited to 100 words, on the subject of ‘Work’, and was published in Freelance Market News, September 2014.

person's ability to function well in society, damaging interpersonal relationships and causing sufferers and close ones stress-related medical ill-health.

The nature of socialism, with legality as its core *modus operandi*, contradicts those types. In primitive communism, prior to the rise of late Bronze Age-early Iron Age elites, social ostracism and then banishment were the main devices used to control these impulses. Once socialism transforms into communism such disorders in the main should trend back into becoming more of a trait than anything else. Care in the community should mean just that.

Mental ill-health beyond the PD Clusters would still be unresolvable without powerful narcotics. But attempts by wider society to spot and tackle problems in children when something can be done would be more efficacious. Currently no child is ever diagnosed as having a PD because of the requirement that those are seen to represent

enduring problems across time. But strong personality trends in children can be seen. To pick up mental illness trends, and address them, socialism would need more interconnection between the health, social work and education services, and an end to their financialisation. Under communism the caring responsibilities of doctors, teachers and social workers would be massively enhanced in role and importance, meaning that problems are spotted quickly.

Before the rise of the commodity economy, members of special elites were often those with special qualities – insight, judgement, healing or even a capacity for visions (often enhanced by drugs). A more rational version has almost been upon us with poets, art, and artists. Perhaps jobs under communism will become more like vocations, with everyone having their special subject as themselves, with individual enhanced self-worth within society, not above it?

ALIENATION IN THE WORKPLACE

MQ: Yes, let's look at jobs and work. What about alienation in the workplace?

GS: The lack of job satisfaction is a key area where alienation damages us in our world and time. Managements have even begun to employ a variety of psychological techniques, including 'personality profiling' – to pigeonhole workers – and 'positive psychology' check-lists – which might be termed 'creating a happier workforce'. The most insidious method is 'psychometric testing', based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator test,¹² which relies on the theories of Carl Jung. Basic differences in the ways individuals prefer to use their perception and judgment are supposed to be naturally grouped. Thinking, feeling, sensing, and intuition are supposedly expressed in predictable ways.

Some modern management theorists suggest that happiness at work comes when there are as few negative emotions as possible; a higher level arises if you often rely on character strengths. But great gratification arises when you use your character strengths in the service of some cause larger than yourself. Employment psychology suggest these states feed into three kinds of work: a job, a career, and a calling. With the last-mentioned, it is said, workers experience a psychological state known as "flow"¹³, when the challenges you face mesh perfectly with your abilities to meet them and you lose sense of time and self.

As we know well, the very nature of work has changed dramatically over the centuries and over the decades. Even so, most people well understand the notion that the lives we lead in paid employment are often not very fulfilling. Many people may be lucky enough to attain an element of

contentment in their working lives but nearly all of us find ourselves at odds with the purpose of what we do for a living.

There's a popular song from the Second World War where a cheerful refrain goes something like: "It's the girl that makes the thing that holds the oil that oils the ring that works the thing-ummy-bob that's going to win the war."¹⁴ The point of this was to emphasise that any sense of disconnection between menial tasks performed by factory workers engaged in wartime production was disloyal. Everyone could take comfort in the fact that whatever they did was helpful and, ultimately, courageous. Unfortunately, such simplicities do not suffice for most within the capitalist mode of production.

In the world of work under socialism, there would be much more opportunity for people to get the sort of job they want, providing they are qualified for it. Of course, supply of particular types of job will not be infinite, and sometimes – as recent developments in Cuba have shown – people will need to change employment. However, whatever job you have, your pay (and that of your partner if you have one) would be capable of sustaining you and your immediate family. Adequate childcare, universal benefits and generally reduced housing costs would mean that children are no worse off in single-parent families.

We would destroy food banks as alien, an abomination to human beings. If you want food, you should have it! The very idea of having a food bank is senseless. Under socialism some will still need state benefits and there would need to be some regulation of that, but infinitely fairer than now and with the sole aim of matching people up to jobs where they feel valued and can develop their potential. Tasks which are currently regarded

as menial – eg waste collection and disposal, cleaning, sewage management – would be regarded much more highly by society.

People would be able to learn new ways of work, not be pigeon-holed for life. People can change, people do change, expand and develop. It might be possible to spend, say 5 years being a bus driver because you always fancied that and then to retrain, again, to do something else ... be a teacher ... or vice versa. Planning employment on the transferable skill sets that people have could be a really powerful economic lever.

RELIGION AND SOCIALISM

MQ: Can we look at issues around religion and spirituality? Marx makes very interesting suggestions about how religion both expresses and inverts material and mental alienation, so how do you think religion functions in modern capitalist society, and what would be the place of religion and spirituality in a socialist/ communist society?

GS: The notion of alienation as a term rooted in a rational explanation of odd kinds of human behaviour can certainly be traced back to at least the 12th century. Early attempts to elaborate a discipline that we might call 'psychology' saw the old word 'alienist' for a mind doctor emerge from the Latin root word *alienare*, meaning to make strange. When Marx referred to opium in the famous passage about religion, which he penned in 1843, it is highly likely that his contemporary knowledge of the work of alienists informed the sketching out of his own notion of alienation. There was no term for it, so he had to invent or adapt one. If he

were writing today, perhaps we might say he could just as well have coined the term 'psycho-social distress' instead!

Let's look at what Marx actually said, because it's a lot more subtle and sympathetic than is commonly thought:

"Religion is, indeed, the self-consciousness and self-esteem of man who has either not yet won through to himself, or has already lost himself again. But *man* is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is *the world of man*, the state, society. This state and this society produce religion, an *inverted world-consciousness*, because they are an *inverted world*. Religion is the general theory of that world, its encyclopaedic compendium, its logic in a popular form, its spiritual *point d'honneur*, its enthusiasm, its moral sanction, its solemn complement, and its universal basis of consolation and justification. It is the *fantastic realisation* of the human essence because the *human essence* has no true reality. The struggle against religion is therefore indirectly a fight against *the world* of which religion is the spiritual aroma.

Religious distress is at the same time the *expression* of real distress and also the *protest* against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the *opium* of the people. To abolish religion as the *illusory* happiness of the people is to demand for their *real* happiness."¹⁵



FROM THE FINAL SPEECH IN THE GREAT DICTATOR

by Charlie Chaplin

We all want to help one another. Human beings are like that. We want to live by each other's happiness – not by each other's misery. We don't want to hate and despise one another. In this world there is room for everyone. And the good earth is rich and can provide for everyone. The way of life can be free and beautiful, but we have lost the way.

...do not despair. The misery that is now upon us is but the passing of greed - the bitterness of men who fear the way of human progress. The hate of men will pass, and dictators die, and the power they took from the people will return to the people. And so long as men die, liberty will never perish.

...do away with greed, with hate and intolerance. Let us fight for a world of reason, a world where science and progress will lead to all men's happiness



Marx was clearly not deliberately denigrating religion and religious people, just pointing out the potential for religion to distort our understanding of the real world. When he was writing, opium was one of the few seriously available commercial medicines. It was not until well into the 20th century that governments began to ban its use and trade. In 1839 and 1858, Britain even waged war on China to force it to accept that British merchants could sell the stuff without hindrance in that country. In Marx's day, opium was a sedative or a painkiller, prescribed for a wide range of illnesses, just as today the resin of raw opium enables the production of codeine, which we view as merely as a

painkiller. Laudanum, often mentioned in 19th century novels in the way mid-20th century culture might have referenced alcohol, is an alcoholic extract of opium in liquid, or a 'tincture', and was frequently recommended by doctors for sleeplessness, pain, and diarrhoea. Tinctures of cannabis were also common.

Laudanum was often prescribed to babies that had problems with cutting teeth. Sometimes, it was hinted, wayward working class mothers dosed their babies to keep them quiet when it suited them. Special opium formulas for babies were widespread. They had names such as (this is no joke) 'Mother's Helper', 'Godfrey's Cordial', 'Daffy's Elixir', 'Mrs Winslow's Soothing Syrup',

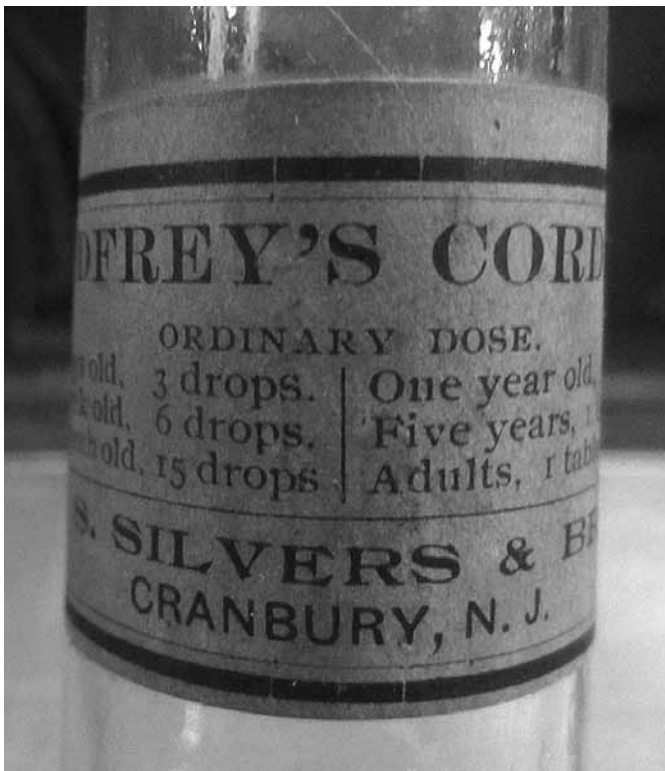
'Street's Infant Quietness', and 'Dalby's Carminative'.

Marx may well have had in mind a phrase, "This opium you feed your people", from a 1797 novel by the Marquis de Sade, then only half a century beforehand (at the time he wrote, Marx was living in Paris). Many educated people would have understood this as a wry comment, not a savage assault. In this sense, the reference has the image of something handed down by the elite to keep people quiet. Perhaps, in the modern day, we might be more inclined to say that watching 'Britain's Got Talent', or 'The Only Way is Essex', is motivated by an underlying expectation that good things can happen to ordinary people like us.

MQ: Will religion fade away over time? Will it be replaced in some way by communism?

GS: I doubt it. It's even suggested that those who are prone to 'spiritual' thoughts are favoured by natural selection in special gene applications. By this theory, maybe a quarter of us are provided with an innate but illogical sense of optimism based on the notion that some higher force is always looking after us. I'd have thought that would lead to innate risky behaviour but I can see the reasoning. The Gramsci line of "pessimism of the intelligence, optimism of the will"¹⁶ comes to mind.

Religion as a political tool will be eliminated



by communism. But, in itself, religion is not responsible for war and injustice. People defending or fighting for special rights that are somehow marked by religion are responsible for abusing religion to become a justification for any exercise that would otherwise be seen as insane. Look at Gaza today.

When people get an idea into their head and, fixated on this, refuse to abandon it, despite all evidence that is put up against it, they are indulging in what Marxists call 'idealism' – not the idealism that makes people do wonderful things but a position based on ideas and not on reality: 'I think, therefore I am 100% right.'

But, when I propose an idea that hurts no-one, why be concerned? If I think to myself, 'I can really make that ball go into the net on TV, if only I think about it harder', I know that it's not realistic. But millions of people every day engage in magical thinking, hardly without thinking about it. When that happens too much, we start to define it as an illness. People with obsessive-compulsive disorder are amongst those who come to believe that they can avoid harm by doing some

sort of ritual, often secret. Many children start life with a habit of not stepping on a pavement slab edge! It's part of individual human development but we don't ban it *per se*. When it's harmless, or even helpful, we tolerate magical thinking.

But, in the early stages of socialist development, there should be no special favours to religious institutions, such as we now have, like tax breaks for church schools, or special privileges to say what they like, when they like. No *Thought for the Day*-type programmes, unless we all get a crack!

Marxists should have no axe to grind when it comes to the place of religion or spirituality in either a communist society or, generally, in earlier socialist society. But in the latter, there are issues of fairness to address. *Organised* religion, which sets itself up as some kind of panacea, is counter to any real democracy. But, once scarcity is brought to heel, if people want to celebrate the Man in the Moon, they should be able to get on with it, so long as they don't impinge on anyone else's view of the world – or football match.

CONCLUSIONS

MQ: What sort of a vision for the future is inspired by all this? Just to round it off?

GS: Well, who knows? We are struggling to combat elitism so that the true nature of humanity can flourish. That elitism is based on a specific form of class rule, employing a very specific form of economic production.

When people rightly attribute the defeat of Nazism to the power of Soviet tanks at the Battle of Kursk and the loss of 28 million citizens, one million at Stalingrad, it should not obscure the fact that the ability of the Soviet Union to order, at a stroke, all manufacturing to be moved behind the Ural Mountains was the moment the war began to be won. Social ownership, coupled with the quality of humanity that comes from collective endeavour, is truly

remarkable. That's what communism as a political philosophy is really all about.

No species can expect to survive intact forever without real effort. The degree of evolution we are going through right now is unknowable at present. What of the future, the far distant future then?

Soviet science-fiction in the 1960s speculated that, if we ever met ET, or the Aliens, they would not be operating a joint stock corporate system! Space credits (dollars) and 'The Federation' (the United States) just don't hit it. Humanity's future, either on Earth, or in the asteroid belt, or in intra-galaxy transport, must be rooted in some beyond-the-Urals moment, when collectively, as Planet Earth, we determine our destiny. In a nutshell, no elite can ever be capable of such a gigantic endeavour, only unalienated humanity. The fight for that, as always, starts today.

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Reflections on the Revolutionary

“Mr Makhan Singh was known as ‘a controversial figure’, ‘a very dangerous man’, ‘a communist’, ‘a born agitator’ and by many other names. But to me I know him as a fighter, every inch a fighter, a Kenyan nationalist of the highest order and a brother in trade unionism and in our national struggle for independence.”

(Fred Kubai, 1969¹)



By Shiraz Durrani



Legacy of Makhan Singh in Kenya

The centenary of Makhan Singh's birth was on 27 December 2013. It is thus an appropriate time to assess his achievements and sacrifices so that his history can be passed on to today's youth. Since his history is linked to that of Kenya and India, such an assessment will enable a correct understanding of the histories of both these countries as well as of anti-imperialist struggles worldwide.

The entire history of anti-colonial struggles by the people of Kenya has in general been either suppressed or interpreted from an imperialist perspective. Similarly, struggles waged by trade unions and the working class for economic and political liberation have often been seen in terms of the needs of the ruling class.

The working class, organised around trade union movements, played a critical role in the struggle for independence as well as in achieving the rights of working people. Within this struggle, Makhan Singh stands out as the towering figure who helped lay the foundation for the militant trade union movement in Kenya. It is therefore no surprise that he was the target of attacks from colonial authorities (not only in Kenya but in India as well); and that, after independence, the Kenyan ruling class, which was no friend of the liberation movement and which stayed firmly within the US-British imperialist orbit, similarly saw him as a threat to their continued control and power.

Both these forces, imperialism and the neocolonial regimes in Kenya, regarded the liberation movement, with its socialist ideology, uncompromising leadership and strong organisation which united working class and peasant forces, as particularly dangerous for their continued survival. When the radical trade unions and progressive anti-imperialist political forces came together, they created a powerful movement that posed a major challenge to colonialism and imperialism. The response from colonialism-imperialism was on the one hand a military attack, and on the other a suppression of the three aspects of the liberation movement – its ideology,

its organisation and its leadership. In all these aspects, Makhan Singh was identified as one of the greatest threats, hence the harshest punishment was reserved for him.

Makhan's role in the Kenyan people's struggle against colonialism and imperialism was crucial. His perspective was not a narrow one of gaining a limited political independence under imperialism. He saw the economic as well as the political liberation of working people, and the achievement of a society based on principles of social justice and equality, as the ultimate goals of the trade union and nationalist struggles. He recognised the need for achieving the economic and political rights of working people, who had been marginalised by colonialism, imperialism and ultimately by capitalism, as the primary goal for the people of Kenya. His base for achieving his goals was the trade union movement, which he did much to organise and radicalise along class lines. He realised that the economic demands of working people could be met only on the basis of becoming active in the political as well as the economic fields.

He was among those Kenyans who saw clearly what the needs of the time were. He devoted his life to developing and committing himself totally to a vision of a society that was fair and just for working people. He helped set up appropriate organisational frameworks – in trade unions and in the political field – as a way of ensuring the achievement of his vision. He developed appropriate forms of communication to ensure people understood the working of capitalism and took necessary action at different stages of their struggle. He lived by the principles he believed in, making sacrifices which very few people were – or are – ready to make. He refused to remain silent even if this led to his detention and restriction for the longest period in the history of Kenya – this was in addition to similar treatment he suffered under the Indian colonial administration.

In spite of his revolutionary contribution to the cause of real liberation for Kenyan working people,

or perhaps because of it, not many people know about him today. His achievements have been sidelined by colonialism-imperialism and also by the ruling classes in Kenya after independence. Information about his work and his enormous achievements are not in the public domain. The ideals he struggled for remain forgotten in the rush towards an unequal society created by corporate greed and sustained by the rich elite in power. Schools do not teach about him. Trade unions have been tamed into silence about him. Few are inspired by his writings, his actions and his vision for a society based on justice and fairness. As a nation, Kenya has not celebrated the crucial role that Makhan Singh played in the struggle for the rights of working people and for the liberation of Kenya. And yet, his outlook, his vision and his political stand are as necessary today as they were in his time – perhaps even more so, given the globalised impoverishment of working people sponsored by capitalism in the world today. Today, we lack a visionary activist like Makhan Singh to guide us out of our current problems.

Early Influences

Makhan Singh was born in the Punjab but moved with his family to Nairobi in 1927. His background in Kenya and India prepared him well for the important role he was to play in both countries. His autobiography mentions early influences which came to prominence in later years:

“During the period of his schooling in Nairobi Makhan Singh continued taking an interest in world events and was influenced by the workers' and peasants' movements (both communist and socialist) and trade union struggles. At the same time he also commenced composing and reciting poems in Punjabi on religious, social and political subjects with emphasis on the struggle for freedom.”²

Added to this early learning, he



continued “a serious study of political literature of all types” when he started work at his father’s printing press in 1931. He continued his learning and links with various communist organisations in South Africa, Britain and India and studied their documents. Kenya had an early taste of anti-imperialist movements in the Ghadar movement.³

Achieving Workers’ Rights

The first level at which Makhan Singh fought was to achieve workers’ rights. It should be noted that resistance to Portuguese and British colonialism was a feature of the entire colonial period in Kenya, and so was the resistance of workers to their employment conditions. In the first part of his history of the Kenya trade union movement,⁴ Makhan Singh himself records some of the earliest strikes, including those of railway workers (1900, 1908, 1912), African police constables (1902) and farmworkers (1908, 1912). A number of unions were formed, but faced problems which made it difficult for them to survive. Two important impediments were mentioned by Makhan Singh.⁵ First:

“The basic difficulty was the usual one. There was no team of workers who, after having been elected officials of the union, were prepared to devote their time regularly and fearlessly to making the union function in a spirit of co-operation, unity, sacrifice and service. The reasons for the lack of such a team were not hard to find. The trade union functionaries from the very beginning had to face the general hostility of employers and the colonial rulers. The threat of victimisation by employers and/or deportation by the government was always there.”

Secondly:

“There was no trade union legislation. The nature of the existing labour legislation was such that there could only be discouragement for the formation of trade unions. The migratory character of workers made the continuity of a union nearly impossible. Industry was undeveloped. There was none worth the name except the railway. That made the

employment of a worker generally short-lived, so that he was compelled to go from job to job, workshop to workshop, town to town. All these factors equally affected the trade unionists. So it was no wonder that the Kenya Indian Labour Trade Union was in the same quandary as some of its predecessors.”

But this time, there was a new element in the oppressive situation: someone prepared to “to devote their time regularly and fearlessly to making the union function in a spirit of co-operation, unity, sacrifice and service.” Makhan Singh’s unique qualities did not go unnoticed among trade union activists of the time. Again he takes up the narrative:

“About two months after the formation of the Kenya Indian Labour Trade Union, it became obvious that it would be difficult for the union to continue to function. In February 1935 Makhan Singh was asked by the railway artisans if he could give a hand to help the union. He agreed.”

Makhan Singh made his presence felt in a matter of weeks. At his and others’ suggestion,⁶ the union was made non-racial, changing its name to the Labour Trade Union of Kenya (LTUK, later the Labour Trade Union of East Africa, LTUEA).

“Its membership was made open to all workers irrespective of race, religion, caste, creed, colour or tribe New officials were appointed with Gulam Mohamed (railway) as President and Makhan Singh as Honorary Secretary.”⁷

He remained Secretary until August 1949, when he was elected President.⁵

Thus was addressed the first obstacle mentioned above. Colonialism had kept the working class divided on the basis of the colour of their skin or locality, not allowing nationwide organisations. Now, the LTUK entered the scene as a nationwide organisation, open to all workers. The result was a much stronger body which was difficult to ‘divide and rule’, as per colonial and employer practice. Makhan Singh recalls:

“The LTUK began to function in earnest. An office was rented ...

it was furnished with necessary office equipment, including a typewriter and a rotary cyclostyle machine. Meetings of the management committee and the constitution subcommittee began to take place regularly and the enrolment of members commenced.”⁸

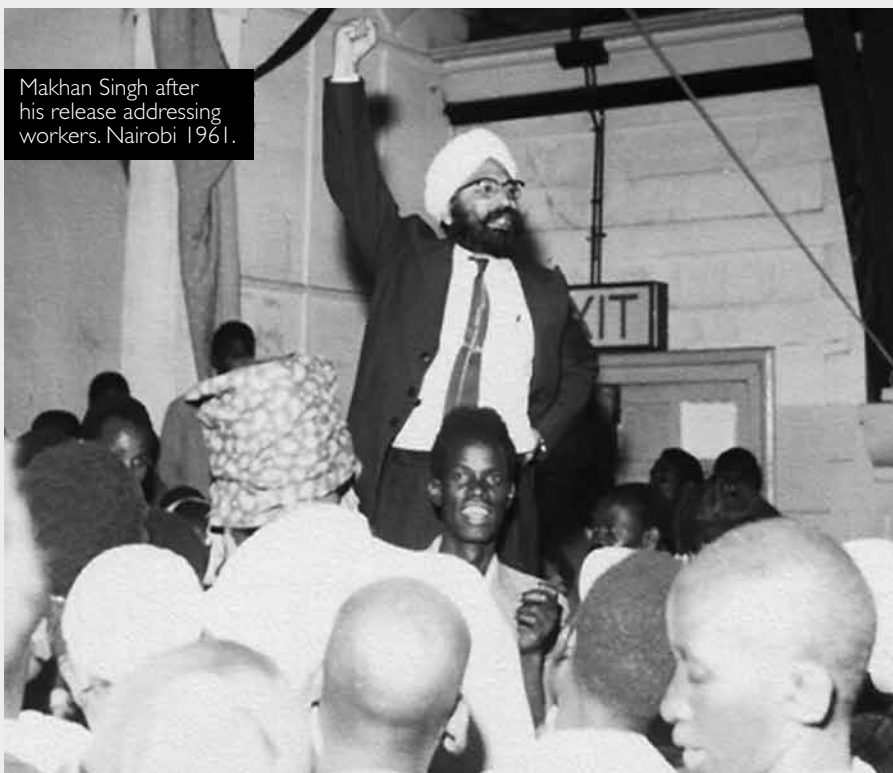
Thus a functioning organisation was created by Makhan Singh and it was this that changed the worker scene in Kenya. The acquirement of printing facilities enabled the trade union movement to keep workers informed about its struggles and strikes. Leaflets in various languages were widely circulated in Nairobi as well as throughout the areas covered by the railway line, being distributed by worker activists employed on the railways. Thus another disadvantage faced by workers – lack of communication facilities and system – which had hampered earlier actions was removed by the LTUK.

Among the early actions of LTUK was the addressing of the major worker grievance of long hours. Makhan Singh himself provides some highlights:

“The LTUK took up the problem of long working hours that was very prevalent at that time [O]n 10 August 1935 a resolution was passed by a mass meeting of workers [which] ‘condemns the action of those employers ... who are weakening the workers physically and are increasing unemployment ... hence it strongly demands from all the employers that in no case should they keep their employees at work for more than eight hours a day, and wages should remain as they are.’”⁹

The increasingly militant union then set a date of October 1936 for its demands on the working hours to be accepted by employers. It is a reflection of the success of the union’s strategy and hard work that their demands were met. They gained the support of African workers as well and large numbers began to join. “The effect of the success was felt all over Kenya and in Uganda and Tanzania too. The membership of the union went up more than 1000”, observed Makhan Singh.⁸

Following the success of this campaign, the union “decided in a mass meeting of Nairobi workers that notice be given to employers that wages of all



Makhan Singh after his release addressing workers. Nairobi 1961.

employees be increased by 25% from 1 April, 1937.”¹⁰ A strike was declared to achieve this aim:

“In accordance with the plan the strike began on Thursday, 1 April 1937. It was a complete strike. A strike committee was formed. Picketing was organised. A free kitchen was started, where strikers and unemployed could have their food.”¹⁰

The strike lasted 62 days and ended in success: “The employers agreed in writing to a wage-increase ranging from 15 to 22%, an eight-hour day and reinstatement of all the strikers.”¹¹ But there was another significant outcome:

“The result of the victory was that Union’s membership rose to about 2,500 ... another result was that the government came to the conclusion that the trade union movement in Kenya had come to stay and that trade union legislation was necessary. A Trade Union Bill was published in the middle of May 1937 when the strike was still continuing and it became an Ordinance in August. The Union was registered under it in September, 1937.”¹²

Thus an important requirement for any struggle, the formation of an organisation, was met. In this way the two obstacles mentioned earlier

were removed. Kenya had reached a new stage in its anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist struggles.

It is of interest to note that while Makhan Singh played a crucial role in this transformation, he worked without payment. Furthermore, his autobiography⁶ and his two books^{1,13} barely mention his role in the history of the period, instead giving credit to union actions.

Activities in India

Makhan Singh relates that:

“Towards the end of December 1939, he [Makhan Singh] left for India, there to study working class conditions and the functioning of trade unionism in Bombay and Ahmedabad [I]n the first week of March (1940), he addressed a large mass meeting of about 30,000 Bombay workers and strikers. A few days later he attended the Ramgarh Session of the Indian National Congress as an African delegate.”¹⁴

Makhan Singh was totally immersed in the freedom struggle and in the working class movement in India. For this he was arrested by the British colonial authorities on 5 May 1940. No charges were brought against him, as his autobiography notes. It was during his detention that he strengthened his links with communist, socialist and other revolutionary leaders from all over India. He was one of the 140 detainees who

went on hunger strike in 1941. He was released from detention in July 1942, but was kept under restriction in his birth-village of Gharjakh until January 1945. In all, he was under detention and restriction in India for more than four and a half years.

On release, he worked as a sub-editor of *Jang-i-azadi (Struggle for Freedom)*, the weekly organ of the Punjab Committee of the Communist Party of India, until he returned to Kenya in August 1947. As his autobiography notes, “one main aim of Makhan Singh’s life, the freedom of India, had been achieved”.¹⁵ He next turned to his other aim – freedom and liberation in Kenya. His exposure to new ideas, to experiences in organisational work and mass action in India, enriched and developed the trade union, anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Kenya.

Linking Economic and Political Struggles

Makhan Singh saw class divisions and class struggles as the primary aspects of resistance to colonialism and to ensuring that the interests of workers, peasants and people of Kenya were in the forefront of an independent country. This was a turning point in the struggle for liberation in Kenya. Colonialism had succeeded in previous periods in dividing people’s struggles into ‘tribal’ attacks on aspects of colonialism or limiting them to specific locations or on specific issues. Makhan Singh was able to see through such tactics. He had learnt lessons from his studies of Marxist literature and from his practice in India. He saw that the need in Kenya was to politicise the working class, unite them with other progressive classes and wage a struggle that would remove the causes of poverty and injustice from the country.

Steve Ouma and Makau Mutua explain the two aspects of his work:

“The legacy of Makhan Singh points to the centrality of trade unions as one of the major epicentres of democracy. Singh wanted workers to get organised on both practical and strategic issues. The practical issues varied from housing, wages, working conditions, health, and safety among others. Strategically, he was conscious of the fact that colonialism and crude capitalism were the key foundations for the privation of workers.”¹⁶

Dana Seidenberg sums up his



contribution to the trade union movement in Kenya, as well as to the struggle for independence:

“With the return of Makhan Singh in August 1947, the trade union movement also acquired a radical wing. Having spent eight years in India actively participating in the trade union movement and the political struggle for independence, Makhan Singh was well-equipped to breathe new life into Kenya’s labour and freedom campaign. The Labour Trade Union of East Africa formed in 1937 and later the larger East African Trade Union Congress (EATUC) formed in May 1949 became the nerve centres for activities of the more militant Asians. From 1947 until 1952, when all trade union activities were proscribed, Makhan Singh worked in behind-the-scenes activities with prominent African trade unionists including Bildad Kaggia, Aggrey Minya and Tom Mboya.”¹⁷

An example of how Makhan Singh linked economic and political demands of workers will indicate his approach. Seidenberg recalls the joint Indian National Congress and KAU (Kenya African Union) meeting in 1950 in response to the European Electors’ Union’s so-called Kenya Plan for the establishment of a British East African Dominion:

“Then Makhan Singh took the floor ... he boldly moved an addendum to the resolution declaring that ‘complete independence and sovereignty of the East African territories’ was the ‘real solution’ and the one which should be implemented ‘at an early date’. In an impassioned speech, he said that the time had come for the people to unite and to demand in a single voice that the country was theirs and that no foreign power had the right to rule over it. That should be the aim of Africans, Indians and progressive Europeans. The British Government had declared the independence of India, Burma and Ceylon; similarly, it should immediately declare the independence of the East African territories. This was the first time in the history of the freedom



struggle in Kenya that anyone had actually dared to make such a demand in public.”¹⁸

It is clear from this example that, for Makhan Singh, the economic demands of working people could only be fully met once they had political power to make appropriate policies independently of corporate and finance capital interests. The real issue is which class has power to make policies, rules and regulations and in the interest of which class the state power is used. Workers’ demands could only start to be met once there was political independence, hence Makhan Singh’s call for independence for East Africa in 1950.

At the same time, Makhan Singh realised that for both struggles – economic and political – it was essential that people are politicised to understand the context of capitalism and imperialist rule under which the country was. Liberation could not come if only a few people in trade unions and politics were aware of the social and political contradictions in the society. Years of colonial education and mass media propaganda from colonialism had influenced people’s thinking along a ‘colonial mind-set’. It was thus the entire population that had to be ‘activated’ by the provision of appropriate information and knowledge that was based on progressive, people-orientated ideas, values and experiences.

Makhan published articles in the press, disseminated pamphlets and repeatedly addressed African audiences. He told them, *inter alia*, that His Majesty’s Government was a “foreign power who had no right to rule in Kenya”, that the Kenya Government had introduced slavery, and that secret plans were being hatched to take more African land for the City of Nairobi.¹⁹

He used his experience in press work and his communication skills to present to workers and other people of Kenya an alternative perspective from that projected by colonialism and imperialism. His study of the history of working class struggles in the world had shown that capitalism was not the only way to organise a society, and that socialism ensured a just way. The experience of the USSR was a clear example of how an alternative system could work. For this to have an impact in Kenya, it was necessary to establish various methods of communications, including newspapers, leaflets and oral methods as well as creative means such as poetry, among others, in the languages used by the people. But the crucial aspect was the content of such messages. The EATUC leaflets were clear on the class nature of the struggle in Kenya. Terms such as *capitalist*, *workers*, *comrades*, *exploit*, *struggle*, *workers’ rights* all indicate a departure from the way that Kenyan people had struggled against colonialism and imperialism in the past.²⁰

Influence of the Trade Union Movement on Mau Mau²¹

John Newsinger clearly states the role played by Mau Mau in anti-colonial history:

“[Mau Mau] was without any doubt one of the most important revolutionary movements in the history of modern Africa and one of the most important revolutionary movements to confront the British Empire.”²²

But the question then arises as to where the movement got its revolutionary agenda. That important input came from the trade union movement which itself was deeply

influenced by the ideology and actions of Makhan Singh. Newsinger continues:

“The movement [Mau Mau] was radicalised by a militant leadership that emerged from the trade union movement in Nairobi. Here the Transport and Allied Workers Union led by Fred Kubai and the Clerks and Commercial Workers Union led by Bildad Kaggia were at the heart of the resistance. Most accounts of the Mau Mau movement either ignore or play down the role of the trade unions in the struggle, but the fact is that without their participation a sustained revolt would not have been possible.”

Bildad Kaggia joined the LTUEA when his own organisation, the Clerks and Commercial Workers Union, could not be sustained. Later he became the president of the LTUEA. In his own autobiography he explained how the militant trade union movement entered the political arena and radicalised it:

“People in Nairobi looked to the trade unions for leadership, not to the ‘political’ leaders of KAU [Kenya African Union]. Encouraged by this support, the trade unions decided to try and capture the political leadership as well. We would begin by taking over the Nairobi branch of KAU.”²³

Thus those involved in the radical trade union movement, including Makhan Singh, had a profound impact in the national liberation movement. Amarjit Chandan confirms this:

“By the 1950s, new unions were forming, strikes were frequent and Makhan Singh directed trade unionism towards anti-colonial nationalist struggle, indeed the labour movement effectively turned into a militant vehicle for African political aspirations.”²³

Maina Kinyatti says:

“The EATUC leadership is credited for deepening the anti-imperialist resistance among the working class and for producing the Mau Mau revolutionary leadership. It is, therefore, important to note that the

driving forces of the Mau Mau movement were the workers, the peasants and the patriotic petty-bourgeoisie. On every level of the struggle, the working class and its proletarian leadership played the leading role.”²⁴

Detention of “a Power Behind the Scenes”

Makhan Singh’s principled stand in the struggle for the liberation of Kenya made the colonial administration determined to take him and his ideas out of circulation. On 15 May 1950, just 21 days after his impassioned speech for independence, he was arrested. Despite being acquitted at a subsequent trial, he was ordered to be detained for an indefinite period. He was not released till 20 October 1961. Again, from Kinyatti:

“He had committed a double crime: he was a communist and a leader of the trade union movement. Since he was the key leader of the anti-imperialist labour movement, his banishment to Lokitaung, the imperialist occupiers thought, would weaken its leadership.”²⁵

Makhan’s removal from the struggle – as also that of many others, including Chege Kibachia, Bildad Kaggia and Fred Kubai – made it easier for the conservative forces in Kenya, both internal and external, to marginalise the working classes and divert independence into a neocolonial future. Kinyatti shows what happened to the radical trade unions:

“In 1950, the colonial state had proscribed the East African Trade Union Congress (a pro-Mau Mau, anti-imperialist trade union) and imprisoned its leadership without trial. A reactionary, pro-British element consisting of Aggrey Minya, Tom Mboya and Mucegi Karanja took over the leadership of the labour movement with the support of the British.”²⁶

The colonial administration used the period before independence in 1963 to embed a system of laws that ensured that the economic struggles of working people were kept separate from their political struggles. Fred Kubai sees the significance of the linking of these two aspects:

“I have always encountered critics who believe that our trade unions in those days were not trade unions at all in the real sense because they were politically formed and were not confined to industrial collective bargaining. [Makhan Singh’s] book [*History of Kenya’s Trade Union Movement to 1952*] informs them the reasons why it was necessary for the trade unions of those days to conduct their struggles not only industrially but also politically and to take an active part in the national struggle for Kenya’s independence.”²¹

By detaining and restricting Makhan Singh for the longest period that anyone in Kenya had suffered at their hands, the colonialists aimed to isolate him from his base of support – the working class, the trade union and the national liberation movement. The reasons for the long restriction are revealed in secret Minutes of the 77th Meeting of the Council of Ministers held on 18 October 1961:

“The Governor pointed out that Makhan Singh had not any time been tried for any offence, although he had now been in restriction for a period of 11 years. On the other hand, there was no doubt that he was a potentially dangerous person and there was evidence that he would never change his political views.”²⁷

In the twisted logic of colonial world, standing up for one’s political principles was considered “dangerous” and deserving long detention – no matter that the person may have committed no offences. The Minutes then go on to explain why colonialism thought that Makhan Singh was so dangerous to its rule:

“There was at present a spate of subversive societies throughout the colony and, in addition, there was within the groups which formed the Opposition in Legislative Council a tense political situation brought about by the struggle between the constitutionalists and the revolutionaries. The immediate release of such person as Makhan Singh would tend to strengthen the revolutionaries Makhan Singh had in particular a history of influence in the trade union movement and if released there was a possibility of his becoming



a power behind the scenes to turn the movement in a revolutionary direction.”

Thus emerges the reason for his persecution. He represented the revolutionary strand of the Kenyan liberation movement whereas the colonial administration tolerated or supported the “constitutionalists” who were considered the best way for colonialism to morph into neocolonialism and to support imperialism. From the colonial perspective, its repressive actions had helped to create a neocolonial state in Kenya and were thus successful. The stand that Makhan Singh took would have led to real liberation for the working people of Kenya, and that was considered unacceptable to the imperialist powers. That the ‘independent’ governments of Kenya after 1963 continued the colonial-period treatment of Makhan Singh as a dangerous revolutionary is a testament to the success of the imperialist vision of the new Kenya. It is indeed ironic that Makhan Singh, who was the first one to demand and struggle for *uhuru sasa* (freedom now), became a victim of the *uhuru* government itself.

Lasting damage was done to the movement for workers’ rights and to achieving an independent nation free from imperialist manipulation. It remains a matter of speculation as to what might have happened if Makhan Singh and others had not been prevented from continuing their liberation struggles. However, it should be noted that the struggle did not die out, as others took up the mantle into independence and beyond.

Conclusions

Makhan Singh is not alone in his imperialist-imposed isolation and marginalisation. One hears little of many other prominent activists who achieved much and in many cases sacrificed their lives for the cause of national liberation. Among them are revolutionaries like Kimaathi, Chege Kibachia, Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai, Pio Gama Pinto,²¹ among thousands of others who took up arms and resisted colonialism. In addition, there were revolutionaries throughout the period of British colonialism in Kenya who stood against the might of the colonial empire. Their histories, as those of Makhan Singh and Mau Mau, remain hidden to this day.

Capitalism often has a limited perspective on popular resistance to its domination over people’s rights and resources. Its short-term interest

is towards maximum power, profits and control. Its approach is that the long-term will take care of itself – assuming that the world survives the environmental degradation created by capitalism. Imperialist defeat in Vietnam is easily forgotten amidst the euphoria of current victories of globalisation and new conquests, both at home and globally. Mao, Ho Chi Minh, Castro, Nkrumah, Lumumba, Kimaathi among many others are turned into villains and best forgotten. To this way of thinking, Makhan Singh is but a passing phase, easily disregarded and whose memory is sealed in dusty archives. Pio Gama Pinto matters little; Mau Mau has but little interest amidst the new conquest of the Kenyan state after independence.

On the other hand, those who resist imperialism, of necessity, have to have a long-term perspective on their struggles, sacrifices and victories. Each battle lost provides lessons for the next; each victory strengthens the prospects for a final victory.

Makhan Singh, and the progressive trade union movement he helped consolidate and radicalise, recognised that for power to be attained and used effectively in the interest of the working classes, some essential elements were necessary: an appropriate ideology and vision of the desired society; an organisation that could lead people to achieve its vision; and effective leadership supported by well informed and experienced activists. Without these essentials, movements and revolutions can – and are – diverted by enemies of working people, as Seamas Milne points out in the context of today’s struggles:

“In the era of neoliberalism, when the ruling elite has hollowed out democracy and ensured that whoever you vote for you get the same, politically inchoate protest movements are bound to flourish. They have crucial strengths: they can change moods, ditch policies and topple governments. But without socially rooted organisation and clear political agendas, they can flare and fizzle, or be vulnerable to hijacking or diversion by more entrenched and powerful forces.

That also goes for revolutions – and is what appears to be happening in Egypt. Many activists regard traditional political parties and movements as redundant in the internet age. But that’s an argument for

new forms of political and social organisation. Without it, the elites will keep control – however spectacular the protests.”²⁸

Documenting the history of resistance is an important role that liberation forces have to undertake so as to ensure that their version of history and events is not forgotten or seen from an enemy perspective. That was certainly the case with Makhan Singh, who realised the importance of documenting workers’ struggles so as to ensure that the current and future generation were not brought up on a blinkered version of history. For this he left over 20,000 documents which are now available in the Makhan Singh Archives at the University of Nairobi. He also wrote the two most important books on the history of Kenya: *History of Kenya’s Trade Union Movement to 1952*¹ and *Kenya’s Trade Unions: Crucial Years, 1952-56*.¹³ In the first of these, published in 1969, he states:

“There are two Nairobis – that of the rich and that of the poor. The status of the latter has not changed ... celebrations will be justified on the day when this country’s Government becomes truly democratic, with the workers fully sharing the tasks of government.”²⁹

What was true of Nairobi in 1969 remains true to this day. There were – and are – two Nairobis; there were – and are – two Kenyas. Kenyan society remains deeply divided into a small ruling class backed by international finance capital and the majority of working people who remain marginalised and subject to unequal laws. And it is the rich elite in power who decide which facts, which events and which personalities are to be included in ‘national’ history. The achievements of working people, the entire Mau Mau war of liberation, the history of militant trade unionism are ‘disappeared’ by the elite – together with their leaders who include Kimaathi, Bildad Kaggia, Fred Kubai and Makhan Singh.

It is a measure of the success of imperialism that the documents and historical records left by Makhan Singh have been allowed to remain underused on library shelves. But this also indicates that the stand he took has relevance even to this day, as the ruling classes still fear his message, captured in the terms *capitalist, workers, comrades, exploit, struggle, workers’*

rights. Again, this provides a strong indication for the working class and other struggling people in Kenya that their fights have a legitimacy and a long history upon which they can draw for current and future battles.

The silence about Makhan Singh in the public arena in Kenya needs to be ended. What is lacking is an appropriate academic environment which can develop scholarship around the working class history of Kenya. Perhaps a Kenyan university in the future will see it fit to set up a Trade Union and Liberation Research Institute to change people's perspectives on the liberation struggle, the role of trade unions in this and also the role of pioneers such as Makhan Singh and others currently missing from

national consciousness. It is this history from a working class perspective that will finally restore Makhan Singh and other progressive, committed and socialist leaders and activists to their rightful place in the history of Kenya and in the global anti-imperialist struggles.

Yes, Makhan Singh is dead, but his revolutionary legacy cannot die. It arises from the depths as a deadly tsunami to take charge of the next wave of resistance and struggle. That is the lasting – and perhaps the best – testimonial for Makhan Singh and heroes like him. As his son Hindpal Singh says:

“People like Makhan Singh never expect any rewards. They do selfless service to whatever cause

they passionately believe in, then quietly depart, leaving a great mark behind.”³⁰

This mark is such that it cannot be erased. Ever.

■ *This is an abridged and edited version of a talk given in Nairobi on 3 August, 2013 to mark the centenary of Makhan Singh's birth. It is a companion article to Mau Mau: The Revolutionary Force from Kenya, published in three parts in CR67-69.*²¹ The fuller version of the current article will appear in the forthcoming book, *Makhan Singh: a Revolutionary Kenyan Trade Unionist*, S Durrani, ed, Vita Books, London.

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75th Anniversary of the Formal Outbreak of the Second World War

From the archives (October 1939):

MARXISM AND

By Rajani Palme Dutt

THE war against which revolutionary Marxism has given consistent warning to the peoples as the inevitable consequence of the policy of refusal of the Peace Front has now broken out. The peoples of Western and Central Europe are involved in war; its flames threaten to spread over the world. It is no longer a question 'only' of isolated weaker or 'far-away' nations. The bombing planes which were ignored over Peking or Harrar or Madrid¹ have now reached Warsaw and closely threaten Paris and London. Three Great Powers of Europe are at war; a fourth, the partner of the Axis, awaits its moment; a fifth, the partner of fascism in Asia, continues its war in the Far East. Only the two greatest world Powers, the Socialist Soviet Union and the United States, remain at present outside the conflict, and may be in a position eventually to exercise a decisive influence on its outcome. The present conflict is not yet a world war; its first stages in the West unfold themselves with the same ominous slowness which have characterised its eight long years of incubation; but its further development may be none the less deadly and destructive beyond present imagination, extending not only to world conflict, but to a vast complex of social, national and imperialist

struggles intertwined, expressing the culminating stages of capitalist anarchy.

This war, which the imperialist reactionaries sought in vain to divert at the expense of other peoples and whose outbreak is the proof of the inextricable dilemmas of present imperialism, is the third great warning signal, after the war of 1914 and the world economic crisis of 1929, of the bankruptcy of the capitalist world order. The chain of stormy struggles to which it will give rise, through whatever sufferings and horrors humanity has now to pass, can only end in the downfall, not only of the fascist dictatorship which has directly launched it, but of the whole reactionary social order which has nurtured and armed the fascist brigands and brought the world to this pass. This situation, which is only in its opening stages and will pass through many vicissitudes, calls for the coolest judgment and most responsible leadership of all those in whose hands lies the charge of the working-class movement. The decisions we have now to take not only involve the lives of hundreds of thousands and probably of millions of human beings. They involve also the future of socialism and of human civilisation.

MARXISM judges every war concretely.

"We Marxists", wrote Lenin, "differ both from pacifists and anarchists in that we recognise the necessity of an historical study of each war individually, from the point of view of Marx's dialectical materialism. There have been many wars in history which, notwithstanding all the horrors, cruelties, miseries and tortures inevitably connected with every war, had a progressive character, *ie* they served the development of mankind, aiding in the destruction of extremely pernicious and reactionary institutions (as, for instance, absolutism or serfdom), or helping to remove the most barbarous despotisms in Europe (that of Turkey and Russia)." (Lenin, *Socialism and War*²)

And again:

"From the Marxist standpoint it is necessary in each separate case, for each war in particular, to determine its political content." (Lenin, *Open Letter to Boris Souvarine*³)

In conformity with the historical circumstances, the inter-relation of classes, etc, our attitude towards the war must be different at different times. It is foolish to renounce participation in war forever and as a matter of principle." (Lenin, *The Proletariat and the War*⁴)

At no time is it more important to recall this essential approach than in connection with the present war, in which the basic character of imperialist conflict for the redivision of the world appears intermingled with other factors, with questions of national liberation and with the question of the working-class and democratic struggle against fascism, in a tangled knot which requires the most careful unravelling. This situation, which places different tasks according to their conditions before different sections of the international working-class movement in pursuit of their common aim, and which will require correspondingly differing tactics at successive stages of development according to the sharp changes in the alignment of forces which may be expected, demands the most sober judgment in order to

The War – Marxism and War – The Lesson of the First Imperialist War – Causes of the Second Imperialist War – Harvest of Versailles – Strangling the German Revolution – Anglo-French Reaction and Nazism – Who Armed Hitler? – Who Financed Hitler? – Arming the Enemy – The Second Imperialist War – Betrayal of the Polish People – Playing with Fire – Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact – The War Incendiaries – Fruits of Chamberlainism – Imperialist War – Working-Class Policy – Role of British Imperialism – The Historical Task of the Working-Class Movement

ND THE WAR

determine our line and give the sharp and positive answers for action to the questions which the war raises for every working-class fighter. We are in a new type of situation which will demand every capacity of leadership in the working-class movement.

THIS is the second imperialist war. The first imperialist war of 1914 was the war between the then leading rivals of world imperialism, between British and German imperialism for the redivision of the world. All the other myriad issues and conflicts, the French-German and the German-Russian conflict, the national liberation struggles in Europe, the struggles of the Belgian and Serbian peoples against conquest and annexation, fell within this central antagonism. This was decisive for the character of the war: both imperialist groups were pursuing predatory annexationist aims under cover of lying talk about defensive war and phrases about national self-determination. From this followed the necessary tactics of the proletariat in the war, as laid down in the Basel Manifesto of the International before the war and carried out by the Bolsheviks: the concentration of the struggle against their own imperialism; repudiation of the slogan of national defence as the



cover for annexationist aims; repudiation of defencism until the conquest of power by the proletariat. This was the specific form for the development of the imperialist war into the socialist revolution, for the transformation of the imperialist war into civil war for the victory of the socialist revolution, in accordance with the basic aim of the working class in all imperialist wars. The war of 1914 gave rise to the beginning of the world socialist revolution, with the victory of the socialist revolution in Russia, the initial victory of the revolution in Germany and Central Europe and the spread of the revolutionary wave through the world.

FROM this point the world situation has been transformed. The central issue of world socialism and world capitalism dominates all other issues. The imperialist conflicts, which continue to develop in sharpened forms out of the consequences of the war of 1914, henceforth orientate themselves and develop in relation to this central antagonism. This is the decisive factor which made possible the rapid revival and renewed military threat of the crushed and defeated German imperialism of 1918.

In the normal course the next stage of imperialist antagonism, after the crushing of German imperialism, would have passed to the Anglo-American antagonism representing the two major giants of imperialism; and indeed this began to flare up rapidly in the first phase 1918-20. But this deep underlying antagonism remained beneath the surface, slowly maturing; it was overlaid by the immediate sharper central antagonism of capitalism and socialism, by the fear of the repercussions of this situation in Europe.

Instead, the defeated German imperialism, which

it had been intended by Versailles to hold crushed and bound and unable to arise anew, was able in a short space to climb back to power on the basis of this central capitalist-socialist or Anglo-Soviet antagonism. This tactical process underlay the successive stages of Rapallo, of Stresemann's manoeuvres, of Hitler's coming to power as the champion of the West against Bolshevism, and of the ease with which Hitler was permitted to rearm, to receive financial assistance, to tear the bonds of Versailles as if they were made of paper, and to terrorise Europe.

British imperialism, which from 1904 to 1918 spent all its resources to deliver the knock-out blow to German imperialism, from 1923 to 1938 spent all its resources to rebuild and restore German imperialism on an even more powerful basis than before as the supposed weapon against Bolshevism. Thereby it forged the weapon which has been turned against itself. This is the basic cause of the war.

THE Allied Powers at Versailles pursued contradictory aims. On the one hand, they sought to strike down decisively once and for all German imperialism, alike in the economic, in the political and in the military field. Recognising that the weight of numbers of the German people in the centre of Europe, equal to the united populations of Britain and France, and combined with the highest technical industrial development of any European people, must inevitably, under the conditions of imperialism, lead to German domination of Europe, unless violently restrained, they sought by a Punic peace to hold the German nation forcibly divided, lopping off whole sections of the German people and handing them out to satellite states, to shatter German commercial and industrial

development by the seizure of shipping and colonies and the load of reparations, and to destroy German naval and military power by enforced disarmament.

They understood very well that they were thereby sowing the seeds for a future war of revenge, just as the Germans themselves had done by their Treaty of Frankfurt in 1871. But they calculated that they held such overwhelming power, and had imposed such stringent provision of disarmament and control, that Germany could not begin to attempt to rearm and build its power anew without being struck down again before it had reached the earliest stage. All they had failed to calculate was how rapidly dialectics can crumple up and turn inside out the most unbreakable iron bonds. Foremost among the rank and file of British Conservatism, among the 200 MPs who stormed and blustered for a super-Carthaginian peace against Germany in the blindness of imperialist greed, and thus laid the seeds for Hitler's coming to power and for the present war, was one Mr Neville Chamberlain.

BUT then came the other side of the picture. The Allied Powers at Versailles were even more afraid of Bolshevism or a genuine popular revolution in Germany than they hated German militarism and imperialism. Between these two conflicting aims they signed their own death-warrant. Only a genuine popular revolution in Germany, which destroys the military and bureaucratic caste, which strikes down the power and possessions of the Junker large landowners and of the big industrialists, and thus establishes the basis for a real democracy in place of the sham democracy of Weimar, can end the menace of German militarism and imperialism for the peoples of Europe.

This the German people sought to accomplish in 1918-

23. This the Allies would not allow them to accomplish. Under the fig-leaf of German Social Democracy, which acted as the docile agent of the Allies, the German Spartacist revolution was crushed in blood, the Marxist leaders of the workers were murdered, the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils were dissolved; and in order to accomplish this, the old military caste was re-established in power and armed anew. With the benevolent connivance of the Allies militarism was re-established in Germany in order to fight Bolshevism.

The Inter-Allied Military Missions for the control of disarmament had before them sheaves of reports and documents on the illegal rearming and the irregular military formations which were allowed to be formed to combat the workers; but the high authorities turned a blind eye to these reports. The Orgesch, the Black Reichswehr, the Organisation Consul, the Ehrhardt Brigade⁵ and the like formed the nucleus of the future fascist corps. All these were built up with the connivance of the British and French ruling class. The Weimar Republic was a façade behind which the old regime held power, until the work of counter-revolution was completed, the façade could be thrown aside and the open terrorist dictatorship proclaimed of the most reactionary and chauvinist sections of finance capital.

IN this way the British and French ruling class threw away in a few years the outcome of all the sacrifices they had exacted during 1914-18 from their peoples, who had fought, as they believed, to free the world from the menace of German militarism. On the one side, they sowed the seeds of future war through the Treaty of Versailles by establishing the oppression of the German people. On the other side, by strangling the German popular revolution

and encouraging the re-establishment of the military caste, they created the force which could utilise the national grievances in order to rebuild the fighting power of German imperialism with a basis of support in the people.

The national oppression alone could not have produced the power to threaten the overwhelming military superiority of Britain and France. The discredited military and reactionary forces alone could never have found a basis of support in the people without the genuine national grievances to play on. But the combination of the two produced the explosive compound – Nazism.

From this moment the short-sighted cupidity and brutality of the British and French reactionaries turned to suicidal frenzy. With their own hands they tore down the bonds of Versailles. Arms, finance, territories, all that they had they poured into the lap of the Nazis as their heart's ideal of the noble warriors of civilisation against Bolshevism. "They will cheat you yet, those Junkers",⁶ the *Daily Mail* had brawled with monotonous insistency in the days of the Versailles madness. The prediction was correct; but it was the *Daily Mail* that was "cheated", that lauded Hitler to high heaven, tore down Versailles and handed all to the Nazi-Junker alliance.

Hitler is the direct and visible incendiary of the present war. But Hitler is the product of British and French imperialism. *If Hitler applied the match to the gunpowder, it was the British and French ruling class that laid the trail of the gunpowder and placed the match in his hand.* And once again, as the embodiment of both stages, of the Versailles stage and of the Munich stage, as the personification of a decrepit ruling oligarchy caught and torn on the spikes of its own impotent lusts, appears the figure of Neville Chamberlain, the architect of the misfortunes of the British people.

IF British and French soldiers have today to give their lives before the Siegfried line, their compatriots will do well to remember that the illegal armed reoccupation of the Rheinland three and a half years ago, and the building of fortifications, in violation of the Versailles Treaty, was carried out with the connivance of the British Government, which vetoed the demand of the French Government for a stand to prevent it, and amid the applause of the *Daily Herald*, which denounced as warmongers those who called for opposition to prevent this preparation of future war at the same time as it denounced the conception of an Anglo-French-Soviet Peace Pact as equivalent to a military alliance and contrary to the principles of collective security. If German submarines today sink British ships and kill British sailors, let it be remembered that it was the Anglo-German Naval Pact of 1935 which violated the naval disarmament clauses of Versailles and accorded Germany the special right to build the highest proportion of submarines ("Germany ... shall have the right to possess a submarine tonnage equal to the total submarine tonnage possessed by the members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."⁷).

IN the last war it was considered a sinister demonstration of the role of the arms profiteers' international when in isolated cases guns and shells of British manufacture destroyed British lives. But in this war the entire arms machine of the Nazis has been built up in these six years on the basis of the support of British finance. In this connection it is appropriate to recall the statement of the *Stock Exchange Gazette*:

"The more pertinent question is: Who finances Germany?"

Without this country as a clearing house for payments, and the opportunity to draw on credits under the standstill, Germany could not have pursued her plans. We have been so ready to sell to Germany that the question of payment has never been allowed to interfere with the commercial side The provisioning of the opposing force has been financed in London." (*Stock Exchange Gazette*, May 3, 1935)

With this may be compared the verdict of the Foreign Editor of the *Financial News*:

"There can be no doubt that practically the whole of the free exchange available to Germany for the purchase of raw materials was supplied directly or indirectly by Great Britain. If the day of reckoning ever comes, the liberal attitude of the British Government in this matter may well be responsible for the lives of British soldiers and civilians.

War material, which will eventually be used against this country, could never have been produced but for the generosity with which Great Britain is giving her enemy free exchange for the purchase of raw materials." (Paul Einzig, *World Finance*, 1938-39)

When the time comes, these things will not be forgotten in the count of Britain's present ruling class.

IN 1938 Germany received from the British and French Empires 26 per cent of her supplies of iron ore, 33 per

cent of lead, 50 per cent of chromium, 62 per cent of copper, 61 per cent of manganese, 94 per cent of nickel, 60 per cent of zinc and 52 per cent of rubber. Without these supplies Germany could not have made war. Right up to the very last this building up of German armament supplies from Britain went on. *In the very last month before the war, in August 1939, the London market was occupied overtime in supplying Germany with war materials:*

"Huge German orders for rubber and copper were executed in London yesterday regardless of cost. The buying of nearly 3,000 tons of copper sent the price rocketing 18s 9d⁸ to £44 18s 9d a ton.

Already Germany has bought over 10,000 tons this month in London alone.

The London Rubber Exchange enjoyed almost a record turnover owing to a German order for 4000 tons. The price shot up $\frac{3}{16}$ d to 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ d lb. Germany is reported to have bought 17,000 tons already this month – two months' normal consumption." (*News-Chronicle*, August 19, 1939)

Thus the equipping of the enemy with war materials at an accelerated pace went on to the very eve of war. There could be no clearer indication that up to the very last the ruling circles of British finance capital calculated on these war materials being used elsewhere.

THE second imperialist war did not begin in September 1939. It already began years earlier. Its preparation may be traced over the past eight years. Its character was described already in the *History of the CPSU* in 1938:



“A second imperialist war has actually begun. It began stealthily without any declaration of war. States and nations have almost imperceptibly slipped into the orbit of a second imperialist war. It was the three aggressor States, the fascist ruling circles of Germany, Italy and Japan, that began the war in various parts of the world In the final analysis it is being waged against the capitalist interests of Great Britain, France and the USA, since its object is a redivision of the world and of the spheres of influence in favour of the aggressor countries and at the expense of the so-called democratic states.

A distinguishing feature of the second imperialist war is that so far it is being waged and extended by the aggressor powers, while the other powers, the ‘democratic’ powers, against whom in fact the war is directed, pretend that it does not concern them, wash their hands of it, boast of their love of peace, scold the fascist aggressors, and ... surrender their positions to the aggressors bit by bit, at the same time asserting that they are preparing to resist.”⁹

Similarly we have the description of Stalin in his speech in March, 1939:

“It is a distinguishing feature of the new imperialist war that it has not yet become universal, a world war. The war is being waged by aggressor states, who in every way infringe the interests of the

non-aggressive states, primarily England, France and the USA, while the latter draw back and retreat, making concession after concession to the aggressors.”¹⁰

The new fact since September 1939 is that, following the German aggression on Poland on September 1, Britain and France, after previously refusing a general peace front which could have checked the aggression, have declared war on Germany.

WHAT is the significance of this new step? Where does it lead, and what must be the conclusions for action to be drawn by the working class and the anti-fascist forces? We are dealing here with a situation which is not simple, but complex, which is characterised by many contradictory elements, and in which it is evident that the forces have got out of control of the actors and that many sharp turns and changes may be expected.

Up to the last stages British and French reaction undoubtedly counted on reaching a settlement with Germany. Poland and the Polish Treaty were originally a pawn in the game: that there was no serious consideration of the problem of military resistance at the time the Treaty was drawn up by the British Government and by Colonel Beck¹¹ was shown by the placid rejection of the only help which could have saved Poland, Soviet military help, and by the complete absence of any plan of combined action and the terrible outcome when it came to practice. The warnings of Lloyd George and of Churchill at the time were explicit:

“If we are going in (to help Poland) without the help of Russia, we are walking into a trap I ask the

Government to take immediate steps to secure the adherence of Russia, an alliance, an agreement, a pact – it does not matter what it is called, so long as it is an understanding to stand together against the aggressor. Apart from that, we have undertaken a frightful gamble, a very risky gamble.” (Lloyd George in the House of Commons, April 3, 1939)

“He (Chamberlain) guaranteed Poland, Rumania and Greece against the huge army of Germany. I was the first to call attention to that obvious fact in the House of Commons. I denounced it as sheer madness to give such a pledge in the absence of military support from Russia Russian troops alone could reach the battlefield in time to save the Polish Army from being crushed.” (Lloyd George in the *Sunday Express*, July 27, 1939)

“There is no means of maintaining an Eastern Front against Nazi aggression without the active aid of Russia.” (Churchill in the *Daily Telegraph*, May 4, 1939)

These warnings of the Spring of 1939, which became a terrible reality in the Autumn, were not a secret; they were spoken from the housetops. The fact that these warnings were ignored is evidence that there was no serious expectation of a conflict; the guarantees were a form of diplomatic pressure on Germany; the certainty of a deal with Germany, including a German-Polish settlement, was assumed. Hence also the placid acceptance of the Nazi military occupation of Danzig

and the pressure on Poland to make no opposition. It became evident, when the British Military Mission reached Moscow, that the problem of military resistance was not being considered as a practical problem, and that between the Soviet authorities, who were considering it as a serious strategic problem, and the British authorities there was no common ground. The financial oligarchies were only playing, as they thought, with diplomatic pawns. But the diplomatic pawns were the lives of nations.

THE same situation and calculations – or miscalculations – were clearly shown in the character of the negotiations with the Soviet Union. There was neither any conception of urgency, nor any serious intention to reach a Peace Front. Had there been either, the offer of the Soviet Union for a firm and binding reciprocal Peace Pact would have been immediately closed with, as soon as it was made, instead of being first ignored, then repudiated on principle (Chamberlain in April), and then played with through every device ingenuity could invent for delay. It is evident that the intention here also was to use the negotiations as a diplomatic bluff, in order to exercise pressure on Germany to reach an agreement by the threat of a possible alternative. Meanwhile the serious approaches and negotiations with Germany went forward (Hudson-Wohlhat,¹² Kemsley-Hitler,¹³ etc), until the situation was considered ripe for the conception of the Five Power Conference, excluding the Soviet Union, to be publicly launched in the British press.

During all this period the Nazi military preparations went openly forward. It was known that mid-August would see the completion of the Nazi mobilisation. Yet this knowledge produced no sense of urgency in British ruling circles for the necessity



Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and Adolf Hitler in Munich, Sept. 30, 1938,

of building an immediate front to meet the menace of aggression. On the contrary, as late as August 3 the British Minister of Defence (!) placidly declared that “War is unlikely – and the Government has very good reasons for saying that.” They were very confident of their plan for the second Munich. They were very confident that the Nazi mobilisation would be directed elsewhere. They were very confident that they had the poor Soviet simpletons on a string. Unfortunately for themselves, they did not realise that they were not dealing with Blums and Attlees, but with men who understood every move of the “big and dangerous game” the Munichites were playing and the “serious fiasco”¹⁴ to which it would lead.

WITH massive patience the Soviet Union waited till the very extreme edge of risk and danger, till the second half of August, not because they failed to understand the manoeuvres of Chamberlain (the successive warnings of Molotov and Zhdanov were sharp and open), but to give the utmost chance to the forces in Britain which

wished for a Pact to awaken from their daydreams to the real menace and to compel the Peace Front which could alone save peace. But the official opposition forces in Britain remained fatuously complacent and passive, noisily proclaiming every few days that the Peace Pact was just about to be reached (which was exactly what Chamberlain wanted them to do), trusting Chamberlain, refusing to lift a finger against Chamberlain, refusing to unite, elaborately discussing the terms of a deal with Hitler ‘after’ the Peace Front instead of fighting for the Peace Front. When the British Military Mission to Moscow, at the very moment of Hitler’s full mobilisation, made clear that they had not the slightest intention of even discussing any common action, the Soviet Union drew the necessary conclusions and took immediate steps to meet the situation. It was no longer possible to save general peace by a Peace Front, when the Peace Front was refused by the Governments of the West, and the Western peoples proved incapable of checking the sabotage of their Governments. It was not

possible to save the doomed and passive peoples of the West against their will. It was necessary to find an alternative path to break the counter-revolutionary front. On August 23 the Soviet Union signed the Non-Aggression Pact with Germany. The reactionary plans of Chamberlain were smashed with a single blow.

FROM this point the fiasco of Chamberlainism was manifest to the world. The refusal of the Peace Front recoiled on the heads of the non-interventionists. From the moment that Hitler was clear that Chamberlain had finally refused the Peace Front, he knew that he could strike his blow. The Munichites, the British reactionaries who refused the Peace Front and let loose catastrophe upon the world, now try to hide their guilt and to claim that the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact let loose Hitler’s attack. This is like claiming that, because the thunder follows the lightning, the flash is the cause of the thunder. Hitler’s mobilisation was reaching its height already by mid-August. The blow was visibly preparing. Only

the immediate conclusion of the Peace Front could have checked it. The Soviet military authorities put forward the most urgent and concrete proposals for action to check it. These proposals were refused. From the moment of that refusal the fate of Western and Central Europe was sealed.

The refusal of the Peace Front by Chamberlain led equally to the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact and to Hitler’s attack. The two consequences followed from a single cause.

The blood-guilt cannot be escaped. The responsibility for this war lies not only with Hitler, the direct aggressor and launcher of the war, but with British and French reactionaries who could have checked the aggression without war and who refused, thereby choosing the path of war.

BY their own act the British and French reactionaries had left themselves with no choice save to surrender their entire imperialist position or to fight. For two whole days after Hitler’s armies had invaded Poland, Chamberlain was still seeking for the way out from the dilemma in which he had caught himself. He was



still seeking for his dream of a Munich that had vanished from the chessboard. He was looking for something that was not there. The angry scene in the House of Commons on the night of September 2, and the hastily precipitated ultimatum of the following morning, was only the final expression of his bankruptcy. Those two days had only served to give time for the Nazi ships to reach port and for the Nazi U-boats to take position on the high seas. This was the final gift of Chamberlain to the British people on the eve of war.

Those who would not fight with the well-appointed armies and overwhelming power of the European peace system at its height ('for fear of war', 'a stand might mean war'), those who would not fight for democracy in Spain or Czechoslovakia, those who would not fight with the fortified bastion of Czechoslovakia to check the advance and with the overwhelming power of the Soviet Union to determine the issue, had now to fight with the ramshackle fascist state of Poland as their only ally, and had in consequence to bring in the final analysis the British and French peoples in isolation to face the Nazi military machine. Such was the outcome of the diplomacy of a Chamberlain.

NOW that the war is here, under the conditions of Chamberlain' choosing, not of our choosing, what course must the British and French peoples, what course must the working-class fighters against fascism pursue? Though it is a war against Hitler, the spearhead of international reaction and the deadly enemy of the international labour movement, the fact must be faced that it is an imperialist war. This war is not the war of the Peace Front against fascist aggression, for the Peace Front was never realised; the realisation of the Peace Front would have meant, not war, but peace.

The British and French reactionaries are not fighting for democracy against fascism; or they would have stood by Spain and Czechoslovakia. They are not fighting for the freedom of small nations, or for the sanctity of treaties, or for the maintenance of peace against aggression. They have trampled all these principles under foot and shown in practice that they have no care for them. They are fighting for their own imperialist interests and for nothing else. They are fighting because the further advance of Hitler-fascism, to the domination of Europe, to the south-east and to the Middle Eastern Empire, and to the demand for colonies, threatens the vital interests of British imperialism. They are fighting for the maintenance of the British Empire against a rival imperialism.

And even after they have formally declared war, they still seek for a way out, for a basis of settlement that could divert the imperialist war, whose deadly menace to their whole system they well understand, into the channels of counter-revolutionary war. They use the slogans of anti-fascism for their own dirty aims. They will pursue the war for their imperialist aims to reach an imperialist peace. On all these harsh realities there is no room for illusions.

THE standpoint of the working class and of the democratic anti-fascists in relation to this war must be an independent standpoint, irreconcilably opposed to that of the imperialists. This is the first elementary condition for approaching correctly the tasks of the working class in the war. The working class cannot allow itself to be tied up with the aims of imperialism. It would be an obvious error to apply the conceptions of the Peace Front to this type of war which has arisen solely because of the refusal of the Peace Front by British imperialism.

Since the collapse of

the aim of the Peace Front, through the failure of the Western democratic movements, and the consequent alternative path of the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, we have entered into a completely new international political situation in which it would be self-destructive blindness to endeavour to operate with conceptions belonging to conditions which have vanished. We need to face the new situation, which will require the most careful review of all problems by the working-class movement. With merciless realism the working-class leadership of the Soviet Union has faced the new situation and seen how to utilise it to advance the interests of world socialism. The working-class movements of Western and Central Europe will need to face the situation, and the sharp problems raised by the war, with no less realism and audacity in defining their tasks and seeing the historical role which falls to them in the present developing situation.

WE need to analyse with especial care the world role of British imperialism in the present situation, in determining our policy. The previous main counter-revolutionary front against the Soviet Union, with German fascism as its spearhead, and organising the combination of the so-called Anti-Comintern Pact, has received a decisive setback. The advance of the Red Army holds the Nazi advance in Eastern Europe in check.

But with this shift of forces, the role of British imperialism undergoes a corresponding evolution. The violent anti-Soviet crusade, especially in the Liberal-Labour press, at the very moment when the Red Army came to the rescue of the peoples in Western Byelorussia, Western Ukraine and Eastern Poland, is an ominous sign. Under these conditions Greenwood's¹⁵

demand for the "resurrection of Poland" (without distinction of what Poland) becomes a demand, not for national liberation, but for aggressive war against the Soviet Union in order to re-establish a semi-fascist dictatorship over national minorities which were originally torn away by a brigand expedition and have now been liberated, not only nationally, but socially. "The French-British war aims include the reconstitution of Poland, which affects the Soviet Government" (*Times*, September 23, 1939). The propaganda against Nazism is increasingly turned into propaganda against 'dictatorship' in general. This issue affects, not only the question of the Soviet Union, but also the development of the revolution in Central Europe.

What is meant by the only officially proclaimed war aim, alongside the 'restoration of Poland', the 'overthrow of Hitlerism'? No answer is vouchsafed. In fact the overthrow of the Hitler regime is the task, not of military action to impose from without a new regime on the German people, but of the German people. But the ambiguous phrase can be used to cover the aggressive aims of British imperialism, and the determination to impose a new form of reactionary regime in order to strangle the German popular revolution. The struggle against all imperialist war aims now becomes of the greatest importance. The aims of the aggressive imperialist elements, who steer their course towards a super-Versailles, in fact, by the very menace of such aims, strengthen the hold of fascist dictatorship on the German people.

THE official policy of the Labour Party of complete wartime collaboration with the Chamberlain Government, through the thinly veiled coalition form of 'liaisons' with the Ministries, and proclamation of a 'political truce', is fatal to

the interests of the working-class movement and of the British people. It is the repetition of 1914. The first task of the working-class movement is to establish its independence of imperialism and of imperialist war aims, to end the collaboration with Chamberlain and re-establish its freedom of movement.

The struggle needs to be waged against the new attacks on the working people against high prices and profiteering, against the economic offensive of the employers on labour standards and conditions, and against the reactionary measures through which it is being attempted to prepare the conditions for fascism here. Only a strong, independent and militant working-class movement can defend the interests of the workers against these attacks. But this social and economic struggle is inseparably bound up with political independence of programme and aims in relation to imperialism and the question of the war. These issues will inevitably deepen as the war proceeds. The struggle needs to be directed to the establishment of a new

Government, representative of the masses of the people, and completely freed from imperialist elements and aims.

The problems before the working-class movement are sharp and urgent. But the dilemmas of the imperialists are a hundred times greater. They can neither find their solution in peace nor in war. The Soviet Union grows immeasurably stronger. The basis of the fascist dictatorships is being undermined. Explosive situations develop in all the belligerent countries. The colonial peoples stir against their bonds and see before them new possibilities of advancing their struggle for liberation. The second imperialist war is the historical signal for mass awakening in the countries of Europe and in all the colonial countries, and for new advance to the goal of world socialism.

■ *'Notes of the Month' from Labour Monthly, Vol 21, No 10 (October), 1939, pp 579-596. Annotations here from the CR editor.*

Notes and References

- 1 This refers to the aggressions by Japan on China, Italy on Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and the fascists on the Spanish Republican government.
- 2 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 21, p 299 [here and elsewhere the translation uses different words, but with the same sense –Ed]
- 3 *Ibid*, Vol 23, p 196.
- 4 *Ibid*, Vol 36, p 297.
- 5 Names of various paramilitary organisations in Germany in the aftermath of World War I.
- 6 Attributed to Carl Rosemeier, a German living in Switzerland, on 7 May 1919; see O Wister, *Neighbors Henceforth*, Wildside Press, 2007, pp 251-2.
- 7 See *Major International Treaties of the Twentieth Century: A History and Guide with Texts*, J Grenville and B Wasserstein, eds, Routledge, 2001, p 209.
- 8 s = shilling, d = pence. There were 12 pence in every shilling and 20 shillings in every £1.
- 9 *History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): Short Course*, Foreign Languages Publishing

- House, Moscow, 1939, pp 333-4.
- 10 Stalin, *Report to the Eighteenth Congress of the CPSU (B)*, 10 March 1939; in Stalin, *Leninism*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1940, p 625.
- 11 Beck was Foreign Minister in the pre-war Polish government.
- 12 Secret and private talks, later leaked, in 1938, between Robert Hudson, British Secretary for Overseas Trade and Helmut Wohltat, German Export Minister. See, eg, M Zalampas, *Adolf Hitler and the Third Reich in American Magazines, 1923-1939*, Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1989, pp 207-8.
- 13 In late July 1939, Lord Kemsley, owner of several British newspapers, including the *Sunday Times*, visited Hitler. See, eg, D Hucker, *Public Opinion and the End of Appeasement in Britain and France*, Ashgate Publishing, Farnham, 2011, p 181.
- 14 Stalin, *op cit*, p 628.
- 15 Presumably a reference to Arthur Greenwood (1880-1954), deputy Leader of the Labour Party in September 1939.

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*150th Anniversary of the Founding of the International Working Men's Association
From the archives (September 1964):*

The First International

By S G Hutchins

ONE hundred years ago this month, on September 28, 1864, a big international meeting was held in St. Martin's Hall, London, to receive a number of French workers elected to bring greetings and information to the organised workers of Britain. Professor E S Beesly presided. George Odger, a ladies' shoemaker and trade union leader, read a welcome to the delegation and a Frenchman, Tolain, read a reply. The themes generally were the exposure of capitalist society, the fight for the oppressed peoples and the need for international unity.

A committee of twenty-one was elected, including old Chartists, Owenites, trade union and radical leaders and also Karl Marx, who had been invited to sit on the platform. This committee had the task of drafting the inaugural address and provisional rules and setting the movement on its historic course. After three other drafts had been submitted, Marx's proposals were adopted after lengthy discussion. His hand marked the turn from a contemplated organisation of narrow aims and activity to one which treated everyday problems as a means to action on the broadest front. Membership was open; indeed, individuals and organisations who were in agreement with the declared aims of the Association were invited to join.

The Provisional Rules set forth the aims that had brought the organisation into existence:

“Considering

That the emancipation of the working classes must be conquered by the working classes themselves; that the struggle for the emancipation of the working classes means, not a struggle for class privileges and monopolies,

but for equal rights and duties, and the abolition of all class rule;

That the economical subjection of the man of labour to the monopoliser of the means of labour – that is, the sources of life – lies at the bottom of servitude in all its forms of social misery, mental degradation, and political dependence;

That the economical emancipation of the working classes is, therefore, the great end to which every political movement ought to be subordinate as a means;

That all efforts aiming at that great end have hitherto failed from the want of solidarity between the manifold divisions of labour in each country, and from the absence of a fraternal bond of union between the working classes of different countries;

That the emancipation of labour is neither a local nor a national, but a social problem, embracing all countries in which modern society exists, and depending for its solution on the concurrence, practical and theoretical, of the most advanced countries;

That the present revival of the working classes in the most industrious countries of Europe, while it raises a new hope, gives solemn warning against a relapse into the old errors, and calls for the immediate combination of the disconnected movements.

For these reasons – The International Working Men's Association has been founded.”¹

Thus was born the body, the IWMA,

which was to pass into history as ‘the First International’.

Neither the idea, nor its actual foundation, can be attributed to any one man or movement. From much earlier in the nineteenth century there had been demands for an international body to unite working people against their common enemies for emancipation. The Fraternal Democrats (founded in September 1844), composed of European nationals, called in September 1847 for an international congress of revolutionary social democracy. Karl Marx spoke to a gathering of Fraternal Democrats in London that year of the need for a “Congress of Working Men”.² The next attempt at an international organisation arose from the visit of Napoleon III to England in 1855. The International Committee was founded to use the occasion to draw the attention of the British public to the plight here of the refugees from the ‘Bonaparte usurper’. Although, after a great deal of political agitation and rallying of support for numerous national causes, the organisation died in 1859, its importance has been overlooked by labour historians. The stirring events of the next few years brought the demand for permanent international organisation to a head. Frederick Lessner, a member of the old Communist League and of the General Council of the First International, wrote later, “The idea of an International Association of Workmen originated at the London Universal Exhibition of 1862. The immediate inducement for founding the International was given by the Polish revolution of 1863.” George Howell (also of the General Council) corroborated this and added that other events in “Italy, Hungary and the United States contributed to it.”



At the inaugural meeting George Odger was elected President on the motion of Marx, after the latter had himself declined the honour, saying that he thought a “hand-worker” rather than a “brain-worker” should hold the post. Marx’s influence on the First International was profound. Although he was able to attend only a few of the subsequent International Congresses, he was indefatigable in his work on its leading body, the General Council, and his influence was always present, whether in quotations from his written work or in the oral advice given prior to the sittings. He maintained constant contact with individual members and organisations, welcomed foreigners at his home and was as keen to question them as to impart advice.

From its inception the International Association was able to rally workers of many nationalities, and its members provided the leadership in numerous strikes: Lessner, in the London tailors’ strike of 1866; Camelinat, in the bronze workers’ strike of 1867; Harriet Law in the strike of the Lyons silk fabric workers, when men and women were equally active; and Assi, the engineers’ leader, in the strike of 1870 at the Creusot works. It is also thought that the Chinese workers’ strike on the San Rafael railway in the United States had a strong International influence. Wherever the workers pursued their rights, an Internationalist would be found in the forefront. The bourgeois press termed it ‘the dreaded International’!

With the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 a testing time for international solidarity began. The General Council campaigned energetically against the war, and in an

Address on July 28 (written by Marx) declared boldly that “Whatever may be the incidents of Louis Bonaparte’s war with Prussia, the death knell of the Second Empire has already sounded at Paris.”

With the capitulation of France began the days of the Commune when the workers, in Marx’s words, “stormed heaven”. Here twenty known members of the International played a notable part, including Eugene Pottier, author of the *Internationale* verses, Louis Chalain and Louis-Jean Pindy. Some died in the fighting during the last days of the Commune and the reaction which followed. Internationalist leaders Duval and Varlin died like heroes. Again Marx showed his ability to pen quickly and trenchantly the working class viewpoint on the significance of the Paris Commune in his *Civil War in France*, written on behalf of the General Council, whose members campaigned in the main against the horrors of the repression and for the entry of the defeated communards into Britain.

Within the First International Marx and the Marxists were faced with the attempt of Bakunin and his followers to turn the IWMA into an anarchist organisation. Bakunin’s main support was in Spain, while Marx was supported by the sections in Britain, America and Germany. The conflict came to a head at the last real Congress of the International at The Hague in September 1872. Realising the need to maintain the original centralised organisation of the International against Bakunin’s attempts, Marx proposed, successfully, to transfer the centre from London to New York, where it would be away from the European arena and, perhaps, gain a much larger field of influence. After

an intense fight, Bakunin and his chief aide Guillaume were expelled from the International.

In New York F A Sorge, an old and loyal comrade of Marx, became Secretary but resigned from this post in August 1874. The organisation carried on for two more years with another Secretary until the last meeting of the International, held in Philadelphia in 1876. The proclamation issued at that meeting declared:

“The comrades in America promise you that they will faithfully guard and cherish the acquisitions of the International in this country until more favourable conditions will again bring together the working men of all countries to common struggle, and the cry again will sound louder than ever.

Proletarians of all countries, unite!”

One hundred years have passed since the birth of the International Working Men’s Association. Then it was almost wholly European. Today, in many countries thousands of miles away from its first centre, the achievements of socialism testify to the pioneering struggle of the men of the First International. Organise, educate, agitate and emancipate: these were the themes of the several addresses of the International, penned by its leading figure, Karl Marx. In 1895, years after Marx’s death, William Townsend, a member of the General Council, remarked that of all the members of that body, Marx was far and away the principal character, in knowledge, thought and activity. His consistent leadership of the first real organisation of the international working class movement as writer, teacher and organiser has linked his name for ever with that of the International Working Men’s Association.

■ *First published in Labour Monthly, Vol XLVI, No 9 (September), 1964, pp 410-3. Notes and references here added by the CR editor. For further reading on the First Internationale see, eg, R P Dutt, The Internationale, Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1964, Chs II & III.*

Notes and References

- 1 K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 20, pp 14-15.
- 2 See *Ibid*, Vol 6, p 691, Note 206.

VENEZUELA DIARY

selection



By Paul Dobson

Tuesday 15 July

Venezuela has more Democracy than USA, and Leftist Countries most value Democracy, study shows

Venezuela is one of the countries which most appreciates its democracy, concluded the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Latin Barometer Corporation, following their study of democratic evaluation in the Latin America populations. Venezuelan citizens provided the second highest approval rating of their democratic model of all of the 17 countries where the study was held.

“The 5 countries which best value their democracy are countries governed by the left”, explained the study. “Uruguay, Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador and Nicaragua, and is there a relation there or is this just chance?”

“Venezuela doesn’t stop surprising us”, the Chilean based NGO went on to state, “finding itself in second place after Uruguay with a rating of 7.0.” The study quizzed 19,004 people, including 1,200 people in Venezuela, with an error margin of 2.8-3.5% and a trustworthiness of 95%.

The report also asked

Latin-Americans about their perception of the levels of democracy in the most influential non-Latin nations in the region. Following the findings, “Venezuela, according to the Venezuelans, has higher democratic levels than in both the USA (6.5) and Spain (6.6)”, whilst only “26% of Venezuelans consider that the USA is completely democratic”.

Furthermore, “the image that the Latin-Americans have of US democracy has fallen from 7.7 points to 6.9 points in 4 years” the report concluded, whilst “only 12% of Latin-Americans consider that Spain is democratic”. Regarding China, the report concluded that “an average of only 11% (of Latin-Americans) believe that China is *not* democratic”.

The study, which did not impose a definition of democracy on those polled, concludes that “the world’s vision is heavily based on the tangible results that a democracy or country can give to its citizens”.

However, whilst the statistics speak for themselves, the subjective conclusions of the report impose the idea of a reality different from that expressed by

the quizzed populations, and the authors of the report arrogantly suggest mass misunderstanding in the perceptions in Latin-Americans with respect to the meaning of the term ‘democracy’.

Referring to the left wing nations of Venezuela and Nicaragua (which “places its level of democracy at 6.4, higher than the Latin-American average”) the report claims without evidence that there exists no “separation of powers, of the functions of a State of Rights” in either country, and that “both countries have very high levels of discrepancies and disparity of equality in the law. So, what is democracy for them?” Such conclusions are in vast contradiction to the statistical findings of the study, which shows high democratic levels in both countries.

Furthermore, despite 89% of those polled stating that they consider China to be a democratic State, the report states without evidence that China “does not have a democratic regime” suggesting that Latin Americans are confused in their perception of the Asian giant: “The economic importance of China in the world means that

it is not transparent for the population of Latin America the fact that China does not have a democratic regimen. Isn’t this a strong message that the economy is more important than democracy?”

Finally, in an independent study by Venezuelan pollsters Hinterlaces this week, 65% of the Venezuelan population admitted feeling ‘happy’, whilst 62% feel ‘optimistic’, 76% ‘hopeful’, and 62% ‘calm’. The Venezuelan population was declared the ‘happiest’ on the globe recently following international studies.

Tuesday 29 July

Venezuelan Consul Released, US “Kidnapping” Defeated

Venezuela celebrated a significant victory in international relations this week, after the arrested Major-General Hugo Carvajal, Venezuelan Consul in the Dutch island of Aruba, was released and his US-backed detention declared “illegal”. Carvajal was safely returned to Venezuela, receiving a hero’s welcome at the Socialist Party’s Congress in Caracas.

“This is a new victory for the dignity of the nation



and the respect which the world has for Venezuela” declared Venezuelan Foreign Minister Elias Jaua. President Maduro congratulated the Netherlands for “a brave decision” in the face of US pressure on the Dutch tiny colony, and classed it as a “great moral, diplomatic, and political victory for peace in our continent” against “a kidnapping” committed by the “hawks of Miami”.

“They recognised that there had been a violation of international law” explained Maduro at the Congress.

Carvajal was arrested on 23 July by the Aruban Attorney General, Peter Blanken, for supposed association to drug trafficking and financing the Colombian left wing group FARC. The arrest was, in the words of Blanken, carried out following a direct extradition request from the White House in the USA.

Following his arrest, the Venezuelan authorities bypassed the Aruban Attorney

General and requested that the Kingdom of the Netherlands, to which Aruba belongs, respect international law and diplomatic immunity as stipulated in the Vienna Convention of 1963. Blanken argued that the Netherlands had never accepted the credentials of Carvajal as Venezuelan consul to the Caribbean island, and hence he did not enjoy diplomatic immunity.

Nonetheless, Carvajal was released following a direct order from Amsterdam on 27 July, in which they explained that “the consular chief can be provisionally admitted to exercise his functions ... this means that the detention of the 23rd July was a violation of his immunity”.

Carvajal is better known in Venezuela for being the Director of Military Intelligence under President Chavez, leading many to suspect that the motive behind his US-instigated arrest was political.

Carlos Aquino from the

Venezuelan Communist Party emphasised that “This is more than an aggression against an individual What it represents is part of a phase of international pressure against the national political process”. He went on to warn against further such attacks from the US government, explaining that in light of his release, “The US Government doesn’t do anything for free”.

Carvajal himself, on his return to Caracas, accused the Aruban Attorney General and judge who issued his arrest warrant of being corrupt: “I suspect that they received money to do what they did to me”. The White House stated that it was “deeply disappointed” at the Dutch decision.

Thursday, 31 July
PSUV Congress Sets Out Tasks Ahead

The III Congress of the largest party in Venezuelan politics got under way this week, as the ruling Socialist Unified Party (PSUV) held 5 days of

activities in Caracas.

The 537 elected and 448 natural delegates undertook the monumental task of ordering, perfecting, and amplifying the policies of the party founded by ex-President Hugo Chavez in 2006. The PSUV claims to have 7 million members, despite only 1.4 million votes being cast in delegate elections.

President Maduro called for a “lively Congress, which has looked for a debate as the boxer looks for a fight, which doesn’t run from criticism nor public opinion”. The Congress comes as major PSUV allies, the Communist Party, also finish preparations for their XIII National Conference in August, and the opposition MUD alliance hold crisis talks to decide on their survival.

The Congress, which lasted from 26-31 July, opened and closed with plenary sessions, and involved 3 worktables covering the definition of Chavismo, international affairs, and the remodeling of the party.



Maduro elected as president

The first decision taken by the delegates was to elect by unanimity President Maduro as PSUV president after the position was left vacant by the death of Hugo Chavez 15 months ago. The decision, declared 1st PSUV vice-president, Diosdado Cabello, was taken “considering his strength in the face of difficulties, his political capacity, loyalty to the people, and love of the Nation”.

Furthermore, the delegates elected the physically absent Hugo Chavez as “eternal leader and Founding President of the PSUV, in loving homage of we who feel ourselves to be his sons and daughters, and in recognition of his immeasurable legacy for our and future generations”. The Congress included vivid commemorations for the 60th birthday of Chavez, which saw celebrations across the nation on 28 July.

1+5+8

The bases of the PSUV submitted 25,000 proposals to be discussed at Congress, which were accompanied by numerous documents prepared by the leadership. President Maduro presented his own proposals which included the admission of “Chavez’s philosophical thinking” as 4th ‘root’ in the 3-root ideology of the PSUV: “If we talk of a tree with 3 roots which founded this historic project, we must refer to a 4th root called Hugo Chavez.”

Maduro also unveiled a series of tasks and focal points around which the PSUV must work, using the Chinese 1+5+8 system. The ‘1’ he defined as the Plan of the Patria, the last work plan written by Chavez before his death, and now part of his Plan of Government.

The ‘5’ refer to five essential focal points around which the PSUV must develop its militancy and policies.

They are, he explained:

- 1 “without socialism, independence and sovereignty in Venezuela is not sustainable”;
- 2 “the sustainability of the Revolution depends on the development of constructing a productive economy through a transition to socialism”;
- 3 “the consolidation of the democratic project with the people exercising political power, with the construction of a new State, a new type of Government”;
- 4 “the spiritual revolution, the revolution of love”; and
- 5 “the struggle for a balance in a multi-central and multipolar world, for a Latin America and Caribbean which consolidates its union and new independence”.

Finally, the ‘8’ tasks which must be addressed by all of the members of the PSUV are, he elaborated:

- 1 “recognise Hugo Chavez as eternal leader and founding president of the PSUV”;
- 2 “assume the transformation of the bourgeois state ... and the party-government relation to materialise a democratic, social state based on rights and justice”;
- 3 “the definitive development of a system of socialist training of the militancy, leadership, and Venezuelan people”;
- 4 “the immediate modification of the party statutes to perfect the organisational structure, to work for the people and incorporate new base structures”;
- 5 “approve the proposed chronogram to reorganise, renovate, and legitimise the organs of the PSUV within 6 months”;
- 6 “assume the civic-military character of the Revolution through revolutionary

- 7 “reaffirm our anti-capitalist character”; and
- 8 “reaffirm our anti-imperialist commitment against all types of interventionism”.

International presence

The Congress counted on the presence of over 70 left-wing delegations from across the globe. Presidents Evo Morales (Bolivia), Pepe Mujica (Uruguay), Daniel Ortega (Nicaragua), Salvador Sanchez Ceren (El Salvador), prime ministers from Antigua and Barbuda, and San Vicente, the Cuban vice-president and expelled Honduran president Manuel Zelaya all joined representatives from socialist and communist parties from Europe, Africa and Asia at the Congress.

The Congress is seen by many within and outside the PSUV as an opportunity to purify the party of pro-capitalist elements, corrupt officials, and right wing agents. It is also seen as an opportunity to address some of the glaring problems that the PSUV has faced since the death of Chavez, including divisionism, censorship, and opportunism, all of which are considered detrimental to the successful advancement of the revolutionary project initiated by Hugo Chavez.

Wednesday 13 August

Communist Congress Reaffirms Critical Support for Maduro

The 13th National Conference (Congress) of the Venezuelan Communist Party (PCV) was held this weekend, only a week after the governing Socialist Party (PSUV) successfully held its own congress, and on the same weekend that the largest trade union federation, the Bolivarian Socialist Workers Centre, held its congress.

The PCV Congress culminated a process of branch, local, and regional congresses to channel political and organisational

proposals from the bases, a process which lasted over 4 months and reached every municipality of the country. PCV General Secretary Oscar Figuera described the Party as being “comprised of heroes”.

The Congress reaffirmed the Party’s commitment to support the PSUV Government of Nicolas Maduro as the correct strategy in the drive towards socialism. However, Figuera explained that “we are worried” about the state of the Revolution, but that “we are busying ourselves” to guarantee its continuity and authenticity.

In response to calls for unconditional loyalty to the PSUV, Figuera affirmed that loyalty means being able to criticise constructively and to identify errors: “Some who ask for our loyalty ask us not to criticise, but criticism is an act of loyalty”, he stated at the opening act of the Congress.

Numerous criticisms of the PSUV mandate were articulated by the 500 communist delegates, who made calls for a genuinely collective leadership to the revolution, a new correlation of revolutionary forces in parallel to the Great Patriotic Pole, a progressive tax reform, and a deepening of revolutionary policies in favour of the workers in the face of a reformist threat at the heart of the PSUV. The PCV have seen increasing percentages of the population voting for them, and are currently experiencing a significant influx of new members.

Figuera also sent a solidarity embrace to the people of Palestine in the face of the “Zionist massacre” in the Middle East by capitalist elements looking to “take over the Palestinian lands”.

The PCV Congress celebrated 83 years since the formation of its first branch in Caracas in 1931, and 77 years since the 1st National Congress, held on the 8th August 1937.

On the Racial Theories of Thor Heyerdahl

By Lars Ulrik Thomsen

The film *Kon-Tiki* from 2012 is about the Norwegian zoologist Thor Heyerdahl and his 1947 expedition on a balsa raft from Peru to Polynesia. This is not an ordinary review of the movie, but more a general comment on some of the aspects of Heyerdahl's theories that are missing from the movie, and their parallels in modern society.

The film is well made and provides both a portrait of the main character and a description of his relationship with his family and the other members of the expedition. If you choose to watch the movie as an adventurous expedition and for dramatic development over time, then it is a very successful film.

When I was young I read Heyerdahl's book *The Kon-Tiki Expedition* and I was fascinated with both the story and the courageous crew who crossed one of the most dangerous oceans in the world.¹ However, as the years have gone by, I have become more sceptical of Heyerdahl's ideas. If one goes a little deeper into the action of the movie, then a number of questions inevitably emerge. Were Heyerdahl's hypotheses correct, and have they been confirmed by other scientists?

In 2004, the Australian anthropologist Graham Holton wrote an article about the expedition.² He carefully analysed Heyerdahl's views and how different racial theories influenced him in the 1920s. These issues are not mentioned at all in the film, and hence one misses an important point, of Heyerdahl's theory of 'the white man' as superior to the natives or indigenous peoples of Polynesia and elsewhere. Heyerdahl's main thesis, that there was a major exodus from Peru, preferably of 'the white man', has not been demonstrated in cultural, anthropological or zoological excavations.

Holten asks if it is likely that a major exodus could occur on balsa rafts over such long distances. The only evidence Heyerdahl could present was a number of discoveries of sculptures and plants that could be common to both the Inca

Indians and the Polynesians. But these are eclectic discoveries and not systematic evidence.

In his article Holten very thoroughly discusses the issue of racial theories and how they are consistent with the interests of wealthy elites and imperialism:

"Racism is deeply apparent in Latin America, where great disparities of wealth accord significantly with ethnic differences, and where acts of state-institutionalised violence against mulattos, mestizos, and indigenous peoples have been common."³

Is it wrong just to rely on one single source in a review of the movie? No – Holten refers to many leading scientists who have commented on Heyerdahl's expeditions, and his article is a quite recent publication.

The super-human theory and elite worship, that one finds with Heyerdahl, is a common policy feature of all advanced states as soon as they have *imperial ambitions*. And Heyerdahl never withdrew the racial theories of his books. Similar theories underpinned both Nazi ideology and the racism of the various colonial powers, eg in Rhodesia before it gained its independence and became Zimbabwe.

With the current international trends, where the US, the EU and Japan act with renewed aggressiveness towards former colonies and other states, we can see the same features as in 1930s fascism. Furthermore, there are parallels in the new forms of an *elite cult*, eg in the arts and culture, in the great monopolies and their HQs, but also in general in political life. The main aim is no longer democratic and popular traditions, but personal ambitions and elite worship. This dangerous development has major consequences for people's freedoms and social rights.

If the people behind the *Kon-Tiki* movie had given an honest picture of this side of Heyerdahl's work, and the context



that I have mentioned in this article, then the film would have been a true historic document of a very complex nature. Heyerdahl was given the opportunity to realise his dreams, regardless of the human and moral costs, including to his family. The film would have risen above the daily current interest for entertainment and excitement.

There is an important parallel between Heyerdahl's way of thinking and that of the Norwegian scientist described in the 1940s film script *Greater Wars* by the poet Nordahl Grieg.⁴ The protagonist – a meteorologist – rejects an independent assessment of fascism in Germany. The script has a strong effect even to this day, especially the poignant scenes when Norway is attacked by Germany. It deserves to be filmed, because the problem Grieg describes is still current. Today many scientists deny their responsibility to raise their voices against fascism and racism.

■ *Kon-Tiki is a Norwegian historical drama, directed by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg, and produced by Nordisk Film in 2012. Each scene was filmed twice, first in Norwegian and then in English, so that two separate language versions could be released.*

Notes and References

1 T Heyerdahl, *The Kon-Tiki Expedition*, abridged and simplified by Norman Wymer, Longman 1965.

2 G E L Holton, *Heyerdahl's Kon Tiki Theory and the Denial of the Indigenous Past*, in *Anthropological Forum*, Vol 14(2), 2004, pp 163-181.

3 *Ibid*, p 177.

4 N Grieg, *Greater Wars*. a draft for two screenplays written in London 1940-41, and found in Oslo in 1989; Gyldendal Norwegian Publisher, 1990.

BOOK REVIEW

Political and Behavioural Traps in the Construction of Socialism

Review by Roger Fletcher

DESPITE THE GENERAL truism that ‘histories are written by the victors’, this part-history from one on the vanquished side is invaluable to us, firstly for what it reveals; and secondly for what remains concealed – even if the latter occurs inadvertently!

Hans Modrow was Prime Minister of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) for the five tense months that followed destruction of the Berlin Wall; but, for the preceding fifteen years, he had played a leading role, within the ruling Socialist Unity Party (SED), in advocating the need for transformation “to a proper democratic form of socialism”. He is thus better-placed than most to discuss the subjects of this current book, not least because he retains his socialist perspective of human progress.

Significantly, the excellent Foreword to the book is by *Guardian* columnist Jonathan Steele, formerly the paper’s Moscow correspondent from 1988 to 1994. Following this and a chapter on ‘First Signs of Change’ there are three chapters on different stages and consequences of *perestroika*, culminating in ‘*Perestroika* and the end of the GDR’. The following

four chapters examine relations between the Soviet Communist Party and the SED, the demise of the Soviet Union, an overall assessment of *perestroika*’s effects, and the aftermath. The book ends with a useful timeline, a bibliography, an index of names and some short biographies, although unfortunately there is no general index.

Anyone, absolutely **anyone**, who seeks economic and social justice in today’s conditions, is at a serious cultural and political disadvantage. The 20th century witnessed the most intense and prolonged ideological conflict our planet has seen – and one which is far from over yet, as is evident from reading between the lines of this present volume. The reach of ‘global media’ has seen to it that one side in this conflict has been able grossly to distort the views and practices of its opponents – namely, our movement.

If this seems too sweeping a statement, the reader could perhaps consult the book *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, published in 1999 by Granta. Writer Frances Stonor Saunders showed how all fields

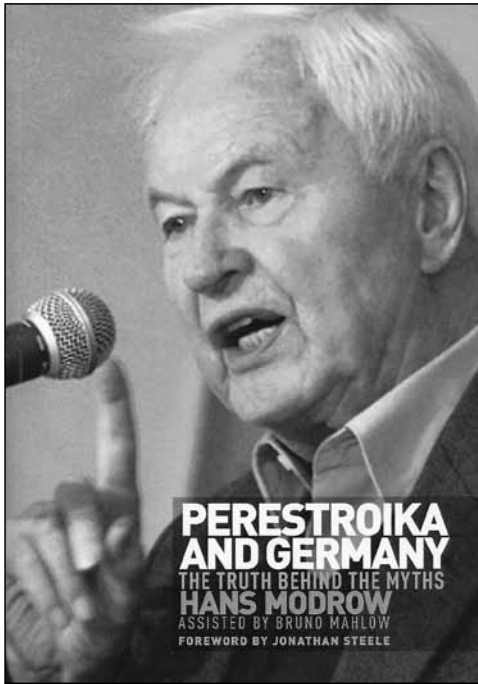
of cultural activity, from artists to orchestras to zoologists, had been bent and distorted – with the aid of obscene levels of US funding – to suit the needs of an international ruling class, although Saunders notably does not work from such a perspective. Hers is a more scholarly work, but it is pertinent to recall that, in the past, Russian Bolshevism was equated with humans who ate babies, and that today socialism and communism are too often equated with terrorism and child abuse.

Some of the disadvantages mentioned above soon become apparent in Modrow’s book, as early as page 20, and at this point we all need to consider some of the deeper pernicious effects of the Cold War. At 17 years of age Modrow had been drafted into the Hitlerite armies that were then swamping most of Europe. One can only imagine the intense indoctrination and brain-washing to which young Hans would have been subjected at this time, that only ended with his capture by the advancing Red Army. Traumatized by the Nazi experience, he decided to build a better post-war Germany, joining the Free German Youth)

and then the SED, where he gained positions of wider responsibility, and finally the high office mentioned above.

Given his background, perhaps it is not surprising that dubious clichés crop up quite early on. For example, on page 20 we read that “35,000 Polish officers had been murdered in ... Katyn by Stalin’s NKVD”; a filmic despot is described as a “cross between Stalin and Hitler”; and the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact is resurrected, with no mention of the unpleasant historical realities (eg the threat from imperial Japan) that had menaced the Soviet Union since its formation, and which ultimately reached peak intensity with ‘Operation Barbarossa’. The ‘legality’ – or otherwise – of the Russo-Finnish war is raised by Modrow, without any mention of the Mannerheim line, a system of fortifications that should at least have raised questions about Finnish neutrality of that time.

Two pages later we come across a telling example of the myopia induced by life in what was, in some respects, the ‘closed society’ of the GDR. “The Russian Revolution of 1917”, writes Modrow, “known to history



**Perestroika and Germany:
The truth behind the myths.**

By HANS MODROW,
assisted by BRUNO MAHLOW;
Foreword by JONATHAN STEELE.
(Marx Memorial Library & Artery
Publications, London, 2014, 184 pp,
pbk, £10.00. ISBN 978-0-9558228-5-8)

as the Great Socialist October Revolution” [emphasis RF]. Well, that’s news to me, and my History degree dates only from 1984, but I have never seen the Bolshevik Revolution described thus ... apart from in CPB and Soviet publications!

To note these points is important but, as mentioned above, there are many more useful lessons. Modrow’s recollections portray many of the essentially petty

conflicts between high officials of both the Soviet and GDR administrations, and reflections on leaders from other Eastern European governments, together with clear evidence of Gorbachev’s duplicity and lack of attention to vital details (eg the *carte blanche* for NATO expansion into ‘socialist’ territory!).

Towards the end of this book, we come across the worrying revelation that, in Modrow’s eyes, none of the

leaders of the former socialist countries had understood Marx, and this is a point that Steele picks up in his Foreword. If true, that could explain a lot of the problems of Eastern Europe from the end of World War II. Certainly, in his own words, Modrow seems unaware of other positive international developments, and of what one Latin American leader has dubbed ‘the synthesis of Marx and Marti’ that began in the

Caribbean in 1959.

To sum up, we can learn, from what is both said and unsaid in this book, of the many political and behavioural traps that await us in the construction of socialism. In short, we need to maintain open minds, without letting our brains fall out; and this little volume is a better starting point than most of what is written in so much of the capitalist West!

Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip





SMOKESTACK

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

Bellow Out Your Pain

Recent poetry from Smokestack Books, Part I

On October 16-20 this year, the Teesside International Poetry Biennale – four words you don’t often see together – will be taking place at various venues in Middlesbrough. John Berger, Tara Bergin, Amir Darwish, Linda France, Bill Herbert, and Martin Espada are just a few of the stellar talents attending.

One of the festival sponsors is Smokestack Books, which is the go-to publisher for anyone interested in poetry with a social, political and historical resonance. So in this edition of *CR* I’m going to present a parade of poems from recent Smokestack collections, along with some brief comments where appropriate. There are so many good poems to choose that the parade is a long one, and will be continued in the next issue, which will give us chance to see some poems from the Teesside festival itself.

Dark Times

In one of the ‘Svendborg poems’ Brecht asks the question,

“In the dark times
Will there also be singing?”

It is a question that all of us – poets, critics, readers – need to ask ourselves,

about politics and poetry, and indeed art and culture in general, in these different yet still “dark times”.

Clearly the world is not as savagely and violently divided as it was in Brecht’s day. Yet still we live under the alienating domination of capital, which continues to block genuine political and economic democracy, and disfigures cultural life with celebrity prizes, creative writing battery-farms, and arts coverage by press-release and book-signing festivals. As Andy Croft, publisher of Smokestack Books, said to me, “If society does not belong to everyone, it is not democracy; if poetry does not belong to everyone it is not poetry.”

Smokestack’s stated aim is to challenge political and cultural inertia, obscurantism and irrelevance, by keeping open a space for what is left of the British radical poetic tradition in the twenty-first century. It does this by publishing not only poetry written in English, but by importing the work of radical poets from overseas whose work deserves to be better known in the UK.

Smokestack’s vision is of a poetry that is a **part of** and not **apart from** society. This doesn’t mean that all Smokestack books are directly about politics, or that Smokestack authors share a common



political history or ideology. But they are mostly unfashionable, radical, left-field and working a long way from the metropolitan centres of cultural authority.

Smokestack is interested in the World as much as the Word. Its authors include Victor Jara (Chile), Yiannis Ritsos (Greece), Gustavo Pereira (Venezuela), Heinrich Heine (Germany), Rocco Scotellaro (Italy), Nicola Vaptsarov (Bulgaria), Francis Combes (France) and Andras Mezei (Hungary). And next year, it will be publishing books by Jan Carew (Guyana), Goran Simic (Bosnia), Paolo Pasolini (Italy), Otto Rene Castillo (Guatemala) and Roque Dalton (El Salvador).

That is a tremendous parade of talented poets. Let’s start the parade of poems.

The Beginning of The End

How I Learned To Sing is a big and varied collection from Mark Robinson. With poems dealing with themes all the way from the domestic and personal to the political and international, there isn't such a thing as a representative poem, but here are some of the more political ones. The first expresses the way many of us felt in 1997, but also the movement from alienated individualism to dreams of a better world, which this journal's *Tomorrow May Not Be The Same* series is trying to address.

After Eighteen Years of this Sort of Thing

I will put my best heart forward
and hope
for a dip in the attentions of the day.
The rational city plays a peeping
game
behind the headlines and the
U-turns,
our friends' necessary betrayals.

The reversals, the blockage, the lost
and irreplaceable gather at our gate,
like snails that crunch under the
children's feet.
The afternoon feels like an in-joke
no-one can fully explain. I'm so
tired

of being English in this shabby
excuse
for what might be, so thoroughly
tired
of feeling like a man questioning the
rules
of cricket or football – why *can't* he
touch it
with his hand? – I can hardly
breathe these words.

But if I've inherited one thing from
my family it's a stubborn streak as
wide
as the Ribble. I am going to sit here
until
the image of Portillo at the stake
disappears from my morbid mind.

And then tomorrow you and I will
take the kids
to the allotment, where we will
plant sunflowers
on our communal land to mark the
beginning
of the end. To such small victories
am I reduced.
The light fades suddenly, is
swallowed by evening.



Here's an interestingly surreal take from the same period and – perhaps – on the same theme.

Documentary

I knew what would happen
next.
I walked out backwards into
the yard.
There was huge onion on the
step.
It smelt of acrid string and
Thatcherism.
I burst into tears and sobbed
uncontrollably.
If you'd have asked me why, I'd
have said nothing.
I was incoherent and
uncomplaining.
How the hell could an onion
smell of a political doctrine?
On estates to the north of
Stockton they would tell
you.
They would open the shutters
slightly.
They would put out a fist to
meet your nose.
They would explain that there
is little difference.
They were used to finding
onions on their doorsteps.
I was not, I was downright
puzzled into anger by it.
I'd have turned round and
wormed my way back in
again.
But words cannot be unspoken.
Besides, there was now a
chicken on my doorstep.



And finally from this collection, a poem which seems both appropriate in this WW1 centenary year, and as a pointer to a tomorrow which may not be the same as today.

Words for a Minute's Silence

Let the broad shoulders
of this still afternoon
take the dead weight
of a beaker of tears.
Plait ropes from sand
to pile at the scene
till the wind blows them
into tight averted eyes.
Go home by Weeping Cross.
Consult the book of platitudes.
With the millstones of your tears
turn to as they fall
grind the light from daisies,
the hope from buttercups,
the colour from the hot-house
blooms of other people's Spring,
and use all that to start again.

War Will Follow the Word

Oswald's Book of Hours is an ambitious, organic collection of poems by Steve Ely. Oswald was a Northumbrian king in the 7th century, and in the book he is set up as a kind of patron saint of northern England. The poems are imagined as elegies and eulogies written by, for or about him. They are organised into a 'Book of Hours', prayer books compiled by the wealthy and pious in pre-



Reformation England.

This religious format lifts the themes and tone of the poems, and gives the collection a cumulative coherence and echoing, multi-layered meanings. They are also very musical poems, partly because of their use of archaic language, and the convincing cadences of mediæval speech that Ely imagines. Hearing the different ‘voices’ in the poems feels like listening to a choir singing multi-part mediæval music.

Thematically, they are an exploration of identity, of Northern-ness and Englishness, but not as an exclusive geographical or nationalistic construct, but rather as emblems of lower class identity, distinct from the culture of the ruling elites. They are about pre-capitalist life for working people, and evoke a sense of organic wholeness destroyed by the various alienations of enclosure, the industrial revolution, and globalisation.

Here are two eulogies of English radicals, one from the South and one from the North. John Ball was a radical leader of the lower classes in the fourteenth century whose politics were inspired by the strand of communism in the Bible. It was Ball that coined the insurgent, rallying cry, “When Adam delved and Eve span, who was then the gentleman?”

John Ball

Wycliffe’s words and Langland’s
gave the English
back their tongue. Manor French
and church Latin,
cut-off in the throat, battening
behind
the buttresses of keeps and
cathedrals,
parsing and declining. Johon
Schepe
proclaims his hedgerow gospel,
singing
from the furze like a
yellowhammer:
*Johan the Mullere hath ygrounde
smal, smal, smal.*
*The Kynges sone of hevene schal
pay for al.*
*Be war or ye be wo; Knoweth your
freend
from your foo. Haveth ynow, and
seith “Hoo!”*
There were no lords in Eden’s
commune.
Scythes sharpened on
whetstones, *gente non sancta.*
War will follow the Word.



The next radical leader needs no introduction. The poem brilliantly links the miners to earlier generations of working people of the kind Ball led, interweaving archaic English with modern English, including dialect.

A word of explanation might be helpful. In the poem, “Henry Halls” was the early night shift, named after the eponymous bandleader, whose 1930s BBC radio programme came on at 5.15 pm every day, just before the men were going to work. “Neets reg” refers to the regular night shifts.

Arthur Scargill

The lowest of the low and low-
paid,
the primary men; farmhands,
quarrymen, *colliers*.
Crude men, of appetite and
violence, mumblers,
white-knucklers, averters of eyes.
Beasts of burden,
their lives lived out in the rhythm
of the Coal Board’s seasons: days
and afters,
Henry Halls, neets reg. Larks
orbiting the wheel
and the cold cage falling.
Crushed torsos under
splintered
chocks, amputations on the
maingate rip,
blood-streaked phlegm hocked-
up. Surface to the land
of cockaigne: egg and chips, beer
and the bookies.
You brought them health and
Palma de Mallorca,
Cortinas on the drive and kids in
college,
reading Marx and Mao and *The
Wealth of Nations*.



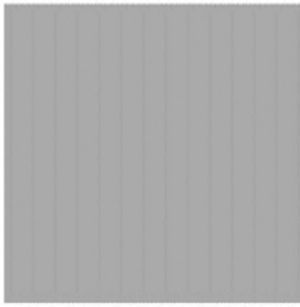
That’s all for now. We’ll continue with many more fine political poems in the next issue.

Acknowledgements

Many thanks to Smokestack Books for up to date information and publishing permission. The website is <http://www.smokestack-books.co.uk>.

Details on the books

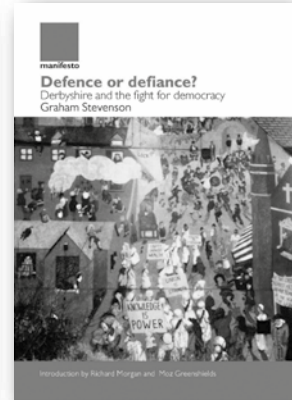
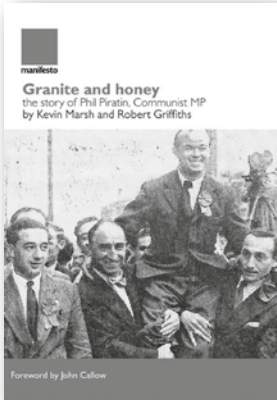
How I Learned to Sing, poems by Mark Robinson, Smokestack 2013, £8.95.
Oswald’s Book of Hours, poems by Steve Ely, Smokestack 2013, £7.95.



manifesto

Recent Publications

- **Granite and Honey: the story of Phil Piratin MP**
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