



COMMUNIST REVIEW

- **Utsa Patnaik** Capitalism and the Production of Poverty
- **Thomas Wagner** Oppression and Freedom in the Old Testament, Part I
- **Lars Ulrik Thomsen** Dialectics of History
- **Aliocha Wald Lasowski** Interview with Alain Badiou
- plus letters, book review and Soul Food



# CAPITALISM AND THE PRODUCTION OF POVERTY

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## Capitalism and the Production of Poverty

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# editorial



By Martin Levy

WITH THIS ISSUE the current series of *Communist Review* reaches a significant milestone – 75 editions, starting in Autumn 1988, the year when the Communist Party was re-established. The number of issues is however many fewer than the total of our predecessors of the same name, which came out monthly in three series – 1921-27, 1929-35 and 1946-53. In the gaps, the journal was replaced by other titles: *Discussion*, *The Modern Quarterly*, *The Marxist Quarterly* and latterly *Marxism Today*, which, despite the principled approach of its editor, James Klugmann, became a vehicle for revisionism after his untimely death in 1977.

The world is different now from 1988, let alone 1921. Indeed, since Re-establishment, it has at times been a struggle to produce 4 issues per year. But *Communist Review* has been the name of the theoretical and discussion journal of the Party for some 49 years in total – more than half the Party's lifetime. We can say with pride that we have restored the class-based approach to theoretical work that was so damaged by *Marxism Today* in its later years.

Recalling Lenin's *Three Sources and Three Component Parts of Marxism*, this journal aims to provide a Marxist-Leninist analysis of economic developments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, to dig deep into major philosophical questions, and to make the theoretical case for a socialist solution to society's problems. Like the Communist Party itself, it is internationalist, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and opposed to all discrimination based on race, colour, sex, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability – we welcome articles on all these themes. While *CR* cannot be an agitator or organiser, it certainly aims to be an educator, recognising that the labour and progressive movement needs to know about such issues as science, the environment, sociology and history – in particular labour movement history. Culture, an essential part of the struggle for working class hegemony, is reflected regularly in the *Soul Food* column, and frequently in other articles. And, of course, *CR* is also intended to be a *discussion* journal.

Regular readers will notice that the

journal draws heavily on contemporary articles written by communists and others on the left outside Britain. We make no excuse for bringing these insights to readers' attention – the interconnectedness of world developments demands it! Indeed, such an approach was the case from the very outset: Volume 1, No 1 of *The Communist Review*, in May 1921, included articles by Larissa Reisner (Russia), Filipp Makharadze (Georgia) and Frederick Ström (Sweden), together with resolutions and statements from communist parties in Russia, Georgia and Germany.<sup>1</sup>

This edition is no exception in its coverage. Our main feature article, by Utsa Patnaik from India, takes up Marx's statement that capitalist development always leads to absolute poverty at one pole of the social structure and to the accumulation of riches at the other. The statement has often been criticised in bourgeois circles; and indeed, from our vantage point in Western Europe, it seems indisputable that working class living standards have risen *absolutely* since the mid-nineteenth century, even if they may have fallen recently, while the wealth of the richest has massively increased in both *absolute* and *relative* terms. But Utsa argues that Marx was correct if we look at capitalist accumulation on a global scale. Western capitalism arose on the basis of modern slavery and reduced its own reserve army of labour by outmigration to lands seized from indigenous peoples in the Americas and elsewhere, and by creating a bloated reserve army in subjugated colonies. Third World countries seeking to industrialise today do not have these options; and Utsa shows, by analysis of staple food grain consumption figures, that there is growing undernutrition and poverty in the Global South.

In sharp contrast, we follow this article with part 1 of *Oppression and Freedom in the Old Testament* by Junge Welt journalist Thomas Wagner. Why is this important? Because, as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote, the quest for a society free from domination was the "basic sound" of the earliest biblical writings. Thomas shows that the 'kingdom of God' is in this sense very

much of this world. James Klugmann, who pioneered Marxist-Christian dialogue in the 1960s, would have approved.

Our international scope continues with documents from the recent 35<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union of Communist Parties – CPSU. The Soviet Communist Party did not die with the break-up of the USSR, but was transformed into a union of 17 parties. The Congress: reaffirmed its commitment to struggling for voluntary integration of the successor states of the Soviet Union; saluted the forthcoming 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory of the Soviet peoples in the Great Patriotic War; pledged to do everything possible to strengthen the union with the Ukrainian people; called on the anti-fascist and democratic forces of Europe and the whole world to stop the new aggression of fascism; and decided on a whole range of high-profile events to celebrate the centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in 2017.

After these 3 substantial contributions, Lars Ulrik Thomsen examines *Dialectics of History*, in particular the class roots of the 'New Left' and the tasks of communists given the new features of state-monopoly capitalism, in which context he encourages us to draw on the wealth of experience from decades of work building unity. Then, in an interview from *l'Humanité*, French Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou argues that "the targeted and constant use of the word 'communism' is indispensable." We conclude with one book review, two letters and the ever-excellent *Soul Food*.

Longstanding readers of *CR* will be saddened to hear of the death, on 19 February, of Erwin Marquit, American communist, physicist and philosopher. Erwin contributed to this journal and frequently participated in the Communist University of Britain and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Marxism. We salute his memory.

## Notes and References

1 [https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/communist\\_review/](https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/sections/britain/periodicals/communist_review/).

## T G Narayanan Memorial Lecture 2012

# Capitalism and the Production of Poverty



By Utsa Patnaik

### I. Introduction

I is a privilege for me to deliver the first lecture on social deprivation in memory of Shri T G Narayanan, who was such an eminent representative of socially responsible journalism before Independence, well known for investigating and reporting on the Bengal famine; and who went on to attain a highly responsible position at the United Nations in the years after Independence. The subject of social deprivation in India is usually treated in the context of our own society and its evolution; what this lecture attempts to do is to define the question broadly as mass deprivation and to situate it in the context of the dynamics of the global capitalist system of which India became a part long ago, and into which it is being increasingly reintegrated in the current era of globalisation.

The capitalist system of production rules virtually the entire world today after the breakup of socialist Soviet Union in the early 1990s and the increasing market- and profit-orientation of economic



Street scene in Manali, India  
Photo: Daniela Hartmann

policies in China since the 1980s, where private property has been reintroduced over significant areas of activity. Despite the deep financial and employment crises which have engulfed the advanced capitalist nations, we see therefore a certain arrogance, a hubris which marks the class of finance capitalists, that continues to rampage over the world, seeking to remake it after its own image, against a backdrop where alternative models of socialism have either collapsed or exist only

in a formal sense.

International finance capital, through its myriad institutions and the exercise of diplomatic pressure, has put in place in most developing countries local servitors in key decision-making positions, to implement that particular set of policies which serve the interests of global finance and, to a lesser extent, of global industry. The core elements of these policies include, as is well known by now, trade and investment openness, income-deflating fiscal and monetary

measures which reduce public development spending and social sector spending, privatisation of public sector undertakings, an attack on labour unions, and an attack on the livelihood and assets of small producers, mainly comprising peasants and artisans, in order to promote corporatisation.

In most developing countries the peasantry and artisans numerically outnumber by far the class of wage-paid workers. The attack on the peasantry's land

assets and forest resources by the corporate sector – both domestic and foreign – usually aided by the ruling state power, is seen virtually everywhere, in countries as diverse as India and China in Asia, and Tanzania, Madagascar and Ethiopia in Africa. The bitter reaction which it has provoked, the resistance of the peasantry to corporate and state acquisition of its assets, is the stuff of the most significant unfolding of social and political mass mobilisation to be seen today. What we see is a new phase of what Karl Marx had called the “primitive accumulation of capital”<sup>1</sup>, comprising the separation of small producers from their means of production. The difference between earlier phases of primitive accumulation and the present one however is all-important. Earlier phases were transitional to industrialisation in Europe and in the lands settled by Europeans in the New World. The present phase of primitive accumulation in developing countries is transitional, not to capitalist industrialisation but to the accumulation of riches at one pole of the social structure, with rising unemployment, pauperisation, the proliferation of small scale services and increased absolute poverty at the other pole. This conclusion of absolute immiserisation is not generally accepted in the extant mainstream or even so-called ‘heterodox’ discussions of globalisation; but I believe that the theoretical arguments leading to this conclusion are sound, and the empirical evidence which can be marshalled to support it is overwhelming. To recount the mounting evidence supporting this conclusion, and to analyse the reasons for this adverse outcome in developing countries, is the purpose and subject matter of my lecture today.

Most intellectuals, even those who might sympathise with the plight of the

displaced small producers in their own countries, tend to think of it as historically inevitable. This stance is strongly coloured by the past history of today’s advanced countries which, in the course of their 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century land enclosures, displaced their own peasantry on a massive scale. The argument is that, however painful such uprooting from their traditional way of life might have been for the self-employed peasantry, in the longer run they were reabsorbed as wage-paid labour in the new, dynamic sectors of developing capitalist production. This view sees “primitive accumulation” and displacement as representing merely a moment in the transition to a far more productive and modern society, namely industrial society. My argument, however, is that it is entirely fallacious to conflate the past trajectories of capitalist transition in Europe with present developments in poorer countries, because these past trajectories are inconceivable without the aggressive external expansion that today’s advanced countries followed, which permitted them to externalise the inner contradictions of their own societies to a substantial extent and to pass on the costs of industrial development to other peoples.

In short, their successful industrialisation was an outcome of colonialism and imperialism, in ways which cannot be replicated today by developing countries, even should they wish to do so; nor does there exist any modern substitute avenue for externalising the contradictions of following the capitalist trajectory. The features and dynamics of current globalisation therefore are substantially different from past globalisation via direct colonialism and imperialism. In particular, the capitalist system itself, at its core, has lost the flexibility and the

many degrees of freedom that it earlier enjoyed.

## 2. Dynamics of Present day Capitalism as Contrasted with Past Episodes of Globalisation

Some of the most powerful passages on the transformative role of capitalism, in raising the level of productive forces, are to be found paradoxically, not in the writings of the votaries of capitalism, but in those of the strongest critics of capitalism, especially in Karl Marx’s *Capital*, presaged by the passages describing capital’s destructive role in the *Communist Manifesto*. While capital “tears asunder”<sup>2</sup> all production based on direct patriarchal personal relations of servitude, and destroys traditional society, this is seen as clearing the way for an immense upsurge of productive forces, as the extraction of surplus value from employing free wage-paid labour becomes the dominant production mode. Marx was insistent that the capitalist growth path, however productive in the technological sense, always leads to the creation of unemployment, to a deliberately maintained “reserve army of labour”<sup>3</sup>, and therefore to absolute poverty of the exploited majority, the working class at one pole of the social structure, and to the accumulation of riches at the other pole. Capital itself eventually creates the social conditions for its own overthrow and the advance to an egalitarian socialist society.

Critics have said that Karl Marx was wrong: his predictions, in particular on the absolute immiserisation of the working class, were not borne out by developments in Europe, since there was substantial improvement in the living standard of the masses; nor did the insurrectionary phase of early industrial society in the 1840s ever develop later into a revolutionary upsurge of

the working class. If we view capital as working within the narrow confines of national economies alone then this criticism would be correct. But there is no reason to view capital as operating within national economies alone. From the prelude, the very inception of the capitalist mode of production, capitalist accumulation has arisen not merely from domestic but from global trade and investment flows, and has involved the subjugation and enslavement of peoples of non-European origin. Marx’s prediction, of the accumulation of wealth at one pole and of misery and impoverishment at the other, turns out to have been entirely correct provided we look at the dynamics of capitalist accumulation in the global context.

Marx himself fully intended to analyse the global working of capitalism. His intellectual project is summarised in the very first lines of the Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, where the last topics of his study were to be “the State, foreign trade, world market”:

“I examine the system of bourgeois economy in the following order: *capital, landed property, wage-labour; the State, foreign trade, world market*. The economic conditions of existence of the three great classes into which modern bourgeois society is divided are analysed under the first three headings; the interconnection of the other three headings is self-evident.”<sup>4</sup>

The method of abstraction that Marx followed was to start with a closed capitalist economy; and, although it is clear that his declared intention was to open it up, in practice his entire working life was taken up with the analysis



of the first three topics; while the last three – “the State, foreign trade, world market” – were never systematically elaborated. From Marx’s articles and news dispatches in the *New York Tribune* we obtain many references to European migration to the New World, Britain’s colonial exploitation of India and the drain of resources from the colonially subjugated world to the European industrialising countries. But these phenomena were never formally integrated into his analysis of capitalist accumulation, as they might have been had Marx’s working life lasted longer.

The actual history of capitalism raises important theoretical issues regarding the validity of associating capitalism with ‘free’ wage-labour, as contrasted with serfdom and slavery under pre-capitalist modes of production. In reality the revival of modern slavery as a major form of class exploitation, over a millennium after the slavery of the ancient world, was the dubious gift of the rise of the capitalist mode of production. The same eighteenth- and nineteenth-century English and French landlords, who leased out their land by contract to capitalist tenant farmers at home and obtained capitalist rent, also operated plantations based on slave labour in the Caribbean, to extract slave rent. Does it follow that it is incorrect to associate the rise of capitalism with the ‘freedom’ of the worker? No, for free wage-labour is an indisputable fact in the core countries, but so is lack of freedom imposed on peripheral populations.

The Marxist analysis of the relation between the growth of free wage-labour at one pole of capitalist accumulation and of chattel slavery at the other pole, an analysis which is yet to be undertaken, must take into account the dialectical interaction of these two antithetical forms of

exploitation. The freedom of workers in the core countries was historically conditional on the imposition of unfreedom on non-European peoples. The capitalist ruling classes imposed servitude on many non-European peoples, forcibly removed them from their communities, enslaved and transported millions of persons to the other side of the globe to work plantations for their own benefit, treating slave rent as profit. After the formal abolition of slavery another form of unfreedom continued under the indentured labour system. At the same time, the capitalist ruling classes bowed to the pressure of struggle by wage labour in the home countries for political representation and economic improvement through collective bargaining. The bargaining power of wage labour in the core countries necessarily improved through the dual route of outmigration of the unemployed, which reduced the reserve army of labour, and the massive inflow of colonial transfers which boosted domestically generated profits substantially, serving to raise mass living standards.

A few words are in order regarding these two crucial elements of accumulation in the past era of globalisation – unfettered outmigration of Europeans on a large scale to the lands they had seized from indigenous peoples in the Americas and elsewhere; and its complement, the creation of a bloated reserve army of labour in the subjugated colonially exploited countries, as a consequence of resource transfers through colonial exploitation. It is these two features which allowed the industrialising nations to *externalise the acute internal contradictions* which would otherwise have torn their societies apart, and served to undermine the potential for revolution at the core, while at the same time the conditions were generated for a shifting of the locus of struggles to the global South.

First, historically in the core capitalist countries, many millions more were displaced than were ever absorbed in non-agricultural activities within the boundaries of these countries. The nature of capitalist growth has always been, and continues to be, such that it engenders unemployment daily, hourly, and on a mass scale. The objective of capitalist production is to maximise profits for capitalists, not to provide employment to the existing unemployed, nor are capitalists or the state they control usually concerned with ensuring minimum livelihoods for the labouring poor.

To illustrate the effects of permanent outmigration as a solution to labour displacement from agriculture, let us consider Britain, the first industrial nation. Small farmers evicted in the course of enclosures, and the artisans thrown out of jobs as machinery was first introduced, became vagrants of whom only a fraction found employment in the growing factory sector. Even though the early machines two centuries ago were very simple, they displaced labour on a massive scale – a single spinning ‘jenny’ had 80 spindles, needed only one worker to operate it and threw 79 traditional spinners in Europe out of work (jennies with up to 800 spindles each were known to be used before being replaced by mule spindles). The effect of the much higher level of labour-displacing technology, and of automation today in developing countries, is to produce jobless growth; indeed many sectors in India are seeing job-loss growth. In Britain the unemployed and the poorly paid employed workers alike rose in insurrection against the state under the banner of Chartism in the 1840s – only the safety valve of emigration prevented revolution. Britain’s population was small, only 12 million in 1821, but 16

million Britons emigrated between 1821 and 1915, making up nearly two fifths of all Europeans who emigrated to the lands they had seized from indigenous peoples, mainly in the Americas. On average half of the entire annual increment to its population left Britain every year for a century. For India to be able to export its displaced peasants and unemployed on a similar scale, in the six decades from Independence up to the present, some 450 million persons, nearly equal to the entire initial population, should have emigrated and 10 million unskilled persons should continue to emigrate permanently each year. Unlike the populations of European colonising countries which grabbed global land resources on an unprecedented scale, the displaced peasants and workers in developing countries like India and China today have nowhere to go. The solution to their unemployment and livelihoods problems therefore has to be sought in a thought-out alternative to following the anarchic, mindless path of capitalism.

In the present era of globalisation, since the route of massive outmigration to new economic frontiers is closed for advanced country populations as well, the unemployment-generating effects of the capitalist trajectory manifest themselves much more clearly and to devastating effect. The dimensions of endemic employment crises produced by the capitalist system can no longer be camouflaged to anything like the same extent as in the past. True, the burden of unemployment is still sought to be externalised through policies pushed by the global financial institutions but their success is more limited and these policies are constantly contested.

Unemployment was also exported by industrialising countries through the flooding of the subjugated already

populous tropical colonies with cotton textiles and other manufactured goods, under a discriminating commercial policy which kept these markets compulsorily completely open to imports, while the home market was protected from their handicraft manufactures for nearly 150 years.<sup>5</sup> While employment and wages rose in the industrialising countries, with output expanding at about double the rate of domestic absorptive capacity, the other side of the coin was that, in the colonies, manufacturing employment went down sharply, resulting in deindustrialisation.

As the unwilling recipients of the export of unemployment from today's advanced countries, India the former colony, and China the former semi-colony, had ended up by the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century with mass poverty and with significantly tertiarised economies – a higher share of services and lowered share of both agriculture and industry in GDP – compared to their initial states. They inherited very high levels of unemployment and underemployment, which became a matter of serious concern as they sought to pursue an independent path of national development. The question of choice of techniques was much discussed in the early decades, the 1950s and 1960s, and it was recognised in both countries that industrialisation with employment-generation meant “walking on two legs”, to borrow Mao Zedong's words – capital-intensive heavy industries and intermediate goods production had to be built up from scratch or expanded; there had to be a simultaneous thrust for expansion in labour-intensive segments of manufacturing, including small-scale and village industry; and, for all this to occur in a non-inflationary way, agricultural growth had to accelerate to provide the required wage-

goods and raw materials. This was the rationale for giving priority sector status to small scale industry and agriculture in India, as regards credit.

However, though the fastest expanding segments of manufacturing output in the first 15 years of Indian independence logged 9% annual growth rate, the associated employment growth was only 3%. It was already very clear and widely recognised that no visible net shifting out of the workforce from agriculture could be expected even at such high manufacturing growth rates. Subsequently the elasticity of employment with respect to manufacturing output has been falling steadily and especially sharply after liberalisation in the 1990s, for obvious reasons. Maintaining competitiveness by firms in a trade-and-investment open economy entails adopting the latest technology, and the loss is in terms of employment generation. Additionally, the thrust of neoliberal reforms is always towards retrenchment of labour and ‘downsizing’, with a total ignoring of the impact of this on aggregate demand and hence on the inducement to invest. The combination of the two factors has led to near-zero impact of manufacturing growth on employment; while for organised industry there is absolute job-loss, as is well established by now.

The second difference of the current phase of globalisation relates to the inability of advanced countries to extract resources from developing countries while maintaining the legal fiction that the resources are legitimately their own. In the era of direct colonial exploitation, taking the relation of Britain to India as an example, the taxes raised from the subjugated population were used to purchase the goods directly exported to the metropolis; while foreign exchange earnings from India's

merchandise export surplus to other countries were not permitted to flow back to India, but were appropriated by Britain to settle its own trade deficits (mainly with the European Continent and USA) and to undertake capital exports to develop areas of new European settlement, with which it already had large current account deficits. This appropriation of exchange earnings not its own was done through the imposition of fictitious invisible charges on the colony. The smooth working of the gold standard, and the confidence reposed by the finance capitalists in its stability, was thus crucially predicated on this ability of the then world capitalist leader, Britain, to appropriate its colonies' vast exchange earnings from export surpluses to the rest of the world, while incurring no legal obligation to provide a return, since it could manipulate the accounts at will to maintain the fiction that these resources were its own.<sup>6</sup>

This high degree of flexibility does not exist for the current world capitalist leader, the United States of America. Just as, in the past, Britain depended heavily on the exchange earnings of its colonies from the world, and actually used their earnings to balance its own external accounts, at present the USA depends on borrowing heavily from China and to a lesser extent from India to fill its yawning current account deficits. ‘Global imbalance’, in which the world's poorest countries are made to finance the richest ones, has been the feature of capitalism from the era of imperialism. But while Britain could appropriate resources without being explicitly seen to borrow and hence with no legal liability to the countries it exploited directly, the USA has the highest explicit debt in the world and has a legal external liability, *vis-à-vis* India and China, just as it has to provide a return, *vis-à-vis* its advanced country creditors.. This, in

my view, makes for far greater vulnerability, to crises, of the present global payments system centred on the world capitalist leader, the USA, than was the case under the gold standard presided over by Britain. Although the pound sterling was considered to be ‘as good as gold’, Britain's ability to play out the role of world capitalist leader did eventually collapse along with the gold standard, as the most important material basis for its strength, the export earnings of India and other colonies, declined precipitously with the world agricultural depression of the 1920s. Even though the US dollar is considered to be almost as good as gold, any economic crisis which leads to a decline in China's current account surpluses, and its ability to lend to the USA, will have to lead to much the same *dénouement* today. Needless to say, this interpretation differs radically from the standard prescription of Northern economists that China should reduce its export surpluses. (It should indeed do so, but for a different reason, namely that doing so would benefit its own masses by retaining more output for domestic consumption).

Even after its effective demise as world capitalist leader Britain continued to exploit India for its own benefit. The burden of financing the Allies' war against Japan from 1941 to 1945 was placed on India, and a sum in excess of Rs 8 bn, or over £1200 million, was extracted over the period, mainly through a process of rapid price inflation, redistributing incomes. This meant forced reduction of consumption by the peasantry and artisans of Bengal to such an extent that more than 3 million persons starved to death.<sup>7</sup> The Bengal famine is documented in film, song and literature, but the criminal culpability of the colonial government finds no mention, nor has independent India asked for reparations from



Britain as it should have done.

The dependence of the advanced capitalist countries on the poorest countries of the world continues to be explicitly parasitic in nature, for it consists in grabbing primary resources in the global South, ranging from oil and minerals to forest resources and land. The common characteristic of all these is that they are natural endowments and are not the product of human labour; but the last, land, has the special characteristic that it is not homogeneous in quality and productive capacity. A hectare of tropical land is very different from a hectare of land in a cold temperate zone, for in tropical areas a given unit of land yields crops all the year round through multiple cropping, while additionally producing crops which cannot be grown at all in today's advanced countries. The diversification of the initially very poor European consumption basket was predicated on their following policies to alter cropping patterns in the global South with the objective of satisfying their own demands. But while the traditional export crops from tropical agriculture (cotton and jute, sugar, tea and coffee, cereals, tropical hardwoods) were non-perishables able to stand the long sea journey, today the demands made on tropical lands by advanced countries have multiplied manifold to include in addition a large range of perishable goods (fruits, vegetables, flowers) which are air-freighted within hours to fill advanced-country supermarket shelves.

Since land is not a product of human labour, and the maximum possible extension of cultivated area has been reached already, an increase in exports from the South to fill supermarket shelves in the global North entails a decline in the per capita production of the staple food grains required for maintaining the nutritional standards of the mass of

the developing country population. This inverse relation between primary exports and domestic food grains output is exacerbated further because, under the present neoliberal policy dispensation urged by global financial interests, the state in developing countries cuts back sharply on irrigation and other rural investments, reduces agricultural research funding and withdraws extension services. This makes it all the more difficult to raise yields in food crops to compensate for the diversion of area to exportables, so the colonial syndrome of falling per capita food grains output is rapidly recreated.

Developing countries were told that it is *passé* to seek to be self-sufficient in food grains output; rather they should specialise in the export crops which advanced countries demanded but could not produce, while purchasing their food grains from the advanced countries. In the last two decades, dozens of countries in the global South have been successfully pressurised by the Bretton-Woods institutions to dismantle their grain procurement and distribution system, on the argument that they could always purchase grain from the main global suppliers. They have also dismantled their domestic price stabilisation measures – in India for example the various Commodity Boards (tea, coffee, spices) which used to purchase about one-third of total market supplies from farmers at guaranteed minimum prices, under central government directives, ceased procurement operations from the mid-1990s. The resulting exposure of peasant producers to very high global price fluctuations is the reason for their loss of viability arising from unrepayable debt. To date on average between 16,000 to 17,000 peasants in India continue to commit suicide every year, and the proportion

of farmers committing suicide is significantly higher than the proportion in the general population.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. Growing Undernutrition and Poverty in the Global South

The present phase of global capitalist accumulation is producing absolute immiseration and increasing poverty of the masses in the South even as their ruling elites are integrated into the global elite in a subordinate status. The policy-makers of virtually every developing country today have suborned themselves to implement the policies serving finance capital at the expense of the welfare of the mass of their own population. The crucial indicators of welfare are employment and food security. Under neoliberal policy packages, employment growth has been severely hit in developing countries, while food and nutritional security have been severely undermined. One cannot think of any indicators of welfare which are more important than being employed productively, and obtaining enough income to consume basic necessities like food and clothing in adequate amounts, while availing oneself of minimum medical and educational facilities. Yet these are precisely the indicators which have shown consistent deterioration in the large labour-surplus economies, India and China, over the last two decades; while the exploitation of sub-Saharan Africa has led to an even larger decline in nutritional security over a shorter period of time.

The objective reality of absolute decline in welfare indicators has been denied by the global financial institutions like the World Bank, which produces poverty estimates by employing a method of calculating 'poverty lines' over time, which de-links it from its own original definition of

poverty line, and so ensures that the nutritional standards purchasable at these poverty lines are declining; in short the standard itself is lowered and then poverty reduction is claimed. If however the standard based on nutrition is held constant (which is the only logical and honest method of comparison over time and across countries), then we find an increase, not decline, in poverty – namely a much higher percentage of persons are unable to reach the minimum standard today, compared with when reforms started. We shall have more to say later on the incorrect methodology followed by the World Bank and by the Indian and Chinese governments, and their false claims of poverty reduction.

As regards employment, the severe reduction in public spending on development, especially rural development and on social sectors, has hit both growth and employment very hard; while the increasing export-orientation of agricultural production has reduced food grains output per head in both China and India over the last two decades. The core and essence of neoliberal economic policies can be summed up as: income-deflation through fiscal compression; privatisation of public assets combined with private provision of utilities and health care; and free trade, namely removal of all existing regulations with regard to trade. These policies taken together have had a disastrous impact on the mass of the population, even while the well-to-do minority has reaped very large benefits.

The results are clear to see from the employment and consumption data for India collected in the five-yearly large sample Rounds of the National Sample Survey (NSS). Between 1993-4 and 1999-2000 the percentage of unemployed on every time-criterion of employment – daily, weekly and annual – rose sharply as



public expenditures were cut drastically under Fund Bank-guided neoliberal reforms. After some improvement between 1999-2000 and 2004-05, the employment situation again deteriorated by 2009-10, the latest round of the NSS, with a higher incidence falling on female workers. The growth rate of employment during 2004-5 to 2009-10 virtually collapsed to 0.1 percent,<sup>9</sup> which is not surprising given the additional impact, over and above reform policies, of the global recession from 2008 which continues, and of the severe drought year 2009-10. On balance unemployment is higher in 2009-10 compared with the early reform years. Given the increasing capital intensity of manufacturing production and the inroads of the corporate sector into retailing, the situation is likely to worsen further.

The consumption data from the NSS are the basis of poverty estimates made by the Planning Commission in India which has been claiming continuous reduction in the proportion of the poor in the total population in both rural and urban areas. However, when we look at these data, we see that from 1993-94 to 2009-10 there has been an absolute decline in consumption of food grains per capita. Food grains (made up of cereals, cereal substitutes and pulses) were the source of 75% of daily calorie intake in rural India as late as 2004-05 and provided an even higher proportion of daily protein intake. Food grains are not only highly energy intensive (a kilogram of grain gives 3450 calories compared to 1000 calories from a litre of milk) but are the third richest source of protein, weight for weight, after nuts and animal products (about 75-120 g protein from a kilogram each of rice and wheat, compared to 40 g protein from a litre of milk). For poor Asian populations, food security still means food grains security. Further,

producing animal products on a traditional basis depends on food crop residues and husks as feed for animals, while modern livestock production systems rely heavily directly on cereals – mainly coarse grains – for use as feed. Thus food grains and their by-products double as feed grains, and the domestic per capita supply of grains used for all purposes – food, feed and processing – is a crucial indicator of the nutritional status of a population.

India's National Nutrition Monitoring Bureau observed correctly in its Report that "the NNMB has confirmed in repeated surveys that the main bottleneck in the dietaries of even the poorest Indians is energy and not protein as was hitherto believed."<sup>10</sup> If the typical cereals-pulses-vegetables dietaries of poor populations are sufficiently affordable by them to be consumed in quantities adequate to meet their daily energy needs, protein needs would be automatically satisfied with only minor supplementing by preferred, but much costlier, animal products. Hence the observed decline in the per capita production and supply of food grains is a very disturbing outcome of neoliberal policies and it has inevitably led to nutritional decline, with not only energy intake registering a fall but protein intake also declining.

Economists in India writing on the subject have contributed to the situation getting worse year after year because they put forward a wholly incorrect reading of falling grain consumption, saying that it is nothing to worry about because peoples' tastes are changing as they get better off, so they are voluntarily diversifying away from cereals which are inferior – and by inference only consumed in large quantities by country yokels – towards superior foods like milk, eggs, poultry meat, fruits and vegetables. These economists

wrongly believe that the income elasticity of demand for grain is negative. This reading arises from fallacious reasoning in which that part of total grain which is directly consumed as food is confused with the total grain consumption which includes additionally the feed grains converted to animal products like milk, poultry, eggs and so on. The fallacy involved is the 'fallacy of composition' which confuses the properties of the part (direct consumption) with the properties of the whole (direct, plus indirect grain consumption as animal products raised on grain by-products and grain). It is the total grain consumption for all uses, which has been falling in India on a per head basis, which cannot possibly happen if the mass of the people are actually improving their real incomes and consuming more animal products. The Indian NSS data show absolute decline in the quantities of animal products consumed by all spending classes from the poorest to the relatively well-to-do, with only the top 5-10% of all spenders registering a rise.

Fifty years of empirical evidence at the global level show that the consumption per capita of grain, far from falling as diets are diversified, actually rises quite fast, with a rising share going as feed grains. In short the income elasticity of demand for grain is positive. The higher the per capita income of a country, and the more diversified its diet towards animal products, the higher is its consumption per capita of grain. The latest data from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation relate to the year 2007 and are reproduced in Table 1 for selected countries and regions ranked by per capita income measured in purchasing power-adjusted US dollars. The range is from 174 kg for India to 890 kg for the USA.

The poorest countries (Least Developed, Africa,

India) had the lowest total per head grain consumption ranging between 175 and 200 kg, with at least three-quarters being directly consumed. Grain consumption in China was nearly 300 kg per head, close to the world average, with nearly half being indirectly consumed; the European Union averaged 557 kg while the world's richest country, the USA, recorded 890 kg per head, even after exporting a third of its output – the advanced countries consumed at least three-fourths of grain indirectly. The ranking remains unchanged whichever year we take, but the absolute levels of total consumption per head in India and China show a fall over time. Table 1 shows that India had the lowest per capita consumption for all uses in the world at 174 kg by 2007, lower than the average for Africa and the Least Developed countries (though higher than many individual countries in these regions). By 2008 the situation in India was worse, since exports and additions to stocks accounted for 31.5 million tons of food grains, reducing domestic supply and total consumption per capita to 156 kg, with the direct part amounting to only about 136 kg. Large additions to public stocks – which had reached 65 million tonnes by mid-2011 – reflect the inability of the majority of the poor to afford food grains at the prevailing price, since they are wrongly classified as being 'above the poverty line' and the benefit of subsidised grain is denied to them.

China has shown a steep decline of nearly 40 kg in its annual grain output per capita as well as its grain consumption per capita for all uses from the mid-1990s to date, even while the share of indirect consumption has been rising fast to almost half the total supply (Table 1). This indicates that, just as in India, there has been an absolute decline in direct consumption by significant sections of the



Table I: Output and consumption of cereals directly as food and indirectly for feed and other uses, in 2007 for selected countries/regions (million metric tonnes unless otherwise stated)

Country/Region	Production	Net imports and stock changes	Total supply	Food (DIRECT use)	Feed, seed, processing, other (INDIRECT use)	Direct/ kg per head	Total/ kg per head	Per cent of Indirect to Total
India	212.4	-95.0	202.9	177.7	25.2	152.6	174.2	12.4
Least Developed	125.9	14.5	140.4	105.5	34.9	136.9	182.1	24.9
Africa	130.8	58.1	188.9	138.7	50.2	144.1	196.4	26.6
China	395.3	-89.0	386.4	203.8	182.6	152.5	289.1	47.3
EU	261.0	14.0	275.0	61.7	213.3	125.1	557.3	77.6
USA	412.2	-137.6	274.6	34.5	240.1	111.6	889.5	87.5
<b>World</b>	<b>2121.3</b>	<b>54.6</b>	<b>2066.7</b>	<b>966.2</b>	<b>1100.5</b>	<b>146.6</b>	<b>313.6</b>	<b>53.2</b>

(Data from FAO sheets at [www.faostat.fao.org/site/368/DesktopDefault.aspx?PageID368](http://www.faostat.fao.org/site/368/DesktopDefault.aspx?PageID368). The break-up of indirect uses, into feed seed, processing and other, is available in the source.)

poorer part of the population, to accommodate dietary diversification and higher grain demand of the minority enriching itself under market-oriented reforms. Not only have nutritional standards of the masses declined in India; over the reform period the per capita consumption of cloth also shows a decline for every spending class except the top one-tenth. Thus the empirical evidence lends overwhelming support to the proposition that there is absolute immiseration and loss of welfare for the majority of the population. The structure of spending shows a significant rise in the share of spending on utilities, transport, medical and educational expenses. This reflects not any rise in the access to these essential services but the steep rise in their cost, as under neoliberal reforms the state has withdrawn from its responsibilities of ensuring basic education and health care, leaving the masses to the mercies of private operators.

If consumption of basic necessities is falling even for those who are already badly off, on any sensible concept of poverty this means that poverty is rising. Yet the World Bank claims poverty reduction for Asia, and the governments of India and

China similarly claim poverty reduction. But on careful examination these claims turn out to be false, derived from a methodologically incorrect procedure of calculating poverty suggested by the World Bank, in which the standard by which poverty is measured is lowered over time. The standard (the poverty line) is the observed level of spending on all goods and services, whose food spending part allows the spender to obtain a minimum energy intake. For India the energy norm was set at 2100 calories per day in urban areas and 2400 calories per day in rural areas, the latter being lowered in actual application to 2200 calories. This definition of poverty line was applied correctly in 1973 by looking at the nutrition data from the NSS consumption survey to give monthly poverty lines of Rs 56 and Rs 49 per person, but the definition was never applied again. Instead the poverty line for that year was simply brought forward using consumer price indices for agricultural labour and for industrial workers respectively; and since these had risen less than ten-fold three decades later by 2004-5, the official monthly poverty lines per person were Rs 539 urban and Rs 356 rural, or on a daily

basis Rs 18 urban and Rs 12 rural – absurdly low sums which would have bought only a bottle of water, whereas they are supposed to cover all daily expenses, food plus non-food. The problem is that price indices which are useful for short period calculations underestimate the cost of living severely over longer periods.

Applying the original official nutrition-norm based definition of poverty line, by using the NSS nutrition data for 2004-5, it is found that actual poverty lines were almost double the official ones, and 65% of urban and 70% of rural persons were in poverty, unable through their total spending to access the minimum energy intake (2100 and 2200 calories respectively), whereas the official poverty percentages were only 26 and 28 respectively. It is clear that in reality poverty has risen and the official claim of reduction is false because it is only derivable by reducing the standard – at the official all-India poverty lines. Only 1800 calories per day could be accessed. Statewise variations in the official poverty lines mean that, in many states ranging from Andhra Pradesh to Gujarat, the energy intake accessible at their official state

poverty lines were as low as 1400 to 1600 calories daily. The analysis by social groups shows strikingly higher than average poverty among the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST). Thus 79% and 82.5% respectively of the SC and ST in rural India could not reach the modest nutrition norm of 2200 calories energy intake by 2004-5, compared to 69.5% for the general population (including these groups). In urban areas, 87.5% and 81% respectively of the SC and ST were in poverty compared to 65% in the general population.<sup>11</sup>

In China, similarly, a nutrition norm was applied in 1984 to obtain a rural annual poverty line of 200 yuan, which was then brought forward by a price index which rose about six-fold over 27 years, to give only 1274 yuan by 2011 or 3.5 yuan daily, an absurdly low sum which would have bought 750g of the cheapest rice and nothing else, while it is supposed to cover all daily expenses. Actual poverty in China is far higher than is officially claimed. In December 2011 the Chinese government declared a one-shot hike of its annual official poverty line by a hefty 80% to 2300 yuan (or 6.3 yuan a day),

to take care of the obvious anomaly, and so included 100 million additional persons among the poor. But a quarter century of cumulative underestimation has still not been fully adjusted for, given the high rate of inflation and the steep rise in health care and education costs in China since its market-oriented reforms began. In India, however, where the anomaly between the actual cost of living and the official poverty line is even greater, and with market reforms producing an equally steep rise in food, transport, health care and education costs, the Tendulkar Committee<sup>12</sup> in 2010 raised the rural poverty line only by a trivial extent, from Rs 12 per day to Rs 13.8 for 2004-5, which with price-index adjustment gives official daily poverty lines of Rs 26 rural and Rs 32 urban for 2011. These continue to underestimate severely the minimum cost of living.

The World Bank takes these grossly underestimated local currency poverty lines of large populous and poor countries like India and China along with other poor countries, then applies purchasing power adjustment (namely these local poverty lines are multiplied by a factor usually lying between 2 and 3) before conversion to dollars at the current nominal exchange rate, and then takes an average to obtain the global daily poverty line, which at present is \$1.25. In order to calculate the poverty percentage in any individual country, it reverses the process, namely the local currency value of \$1.25 at the current exchange rate is taken and then deflated (taking generally between one-third to one-half depending on the specific purchasing power parity index of the concerned country) to obtain much the same poverty line as the local official one, thus obtaining severely underestimated poverty percentages. The World Bank's claim, that the proportion of the poor

in the population has been declining in Asia, is false since its global poverty line, being derived from local ones, is increasingly an underestimate and corresponds to lower and lower nutritional standards over time. No valid comparison over time is possible when the standard itself is being altered.

#### 4. Concluding Remarks

The proposition that Marx repeatedly put forward, that the capitalist growth process produces riches for a minority at the expense of an increasing reserve army of labour, unemployment, and mass deprivation at the other pole, continues to be validated in the present era of globalisation. While even advanced countries experience increasing unemployment and growing income inequality, at the global level the bulk of the adverse outcome is seen in developing countries, where already poor and inadequately nourished populations suffer further absolute decline in their standard of living. Absolute immiserisation is accompanied by an attack on the land, forest and water resources of peasant producers, which emanates from the local and global corporations.

Along with the agrarian crisis we see an intellectual crisis, in which apologetics and intellectual opportunism increasingly replaces objective analysis on the part of the orthodox economists serving the state. In the nineteenth century, Nassau Senior, a professor of political economy at the University of Oxford, had opposed the Ten-Hours Bill by putting forward the absurd theory, criticised by Marx, that capitalists made all their profits in the last hour of the worker's day, saying that all profits would disappear if the legal length of the working day was reduced from the then existing 11 hours to 10 hours. In India economists try to justify and rationalise the falling nutritional intake

of the poorest classes in the population, the labourers and peasants, by saying that it is a voluntary decline of food intake, because mechanisation has reduced their need for energy. This fallacious argument assumes that the nutritional intake was adequate before mechanisation, which is far from the case; and it ignores the fact that the countries with the most mechanised agriculture in Asia have seen a substantial rise in the energy intake of their workers. The apologists also reproduce uncritically the official and World Bank poverty estimates, ignoring all direct evidence on the increase of mass poverty; and they thereby not only acquiesce in but promote the incorrect methodology which falsely claims poverty reduction by lowering the standard against which poverty is measured over time.

The contestation of official apologetics today comes

not in the main from the universities, even though in theory these should be the centres of independent and critical thinking. It comes from the people themselves who are struggling against the government- and corporate-acquisition of their land, and from radical civil society organisations and progressive political parties that are battling to ensure the right of the people to adequate food and employment. The unfolding of these struggles in the coming years will determine the shape of the future for the millions of deprived people in the developing countries.

■ *First published in Social Scientist, Vol 40, Nos 1-2, Jan-Feb 2012, pp 3-20, and reproduced with permission. Also online at [http://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/00893/T\\_G\\_Narayanan\\_Memo\\_893967a.pdf](http://www.thehindu.com/multimedia/archive/00893/T_G_Narayanan_Memo_893967a.pdf).*

#### Notes and References

- 1 K Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Part VIII, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 35, p 704 ff.
- 2 K Marx and F Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, Ch I, in *Collected Works*, Vol 6, pp 486-7: "The bourgeoisie ... has pitilessly torn asunder the motley feudal ties that bound man to his 'natural superiors'" -Ed.
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- 12 A committee chaired by Suresh Tendulkar (1939-2011), former chief of the Indian National Statistics Commission. The committee was established by the Indian government to report on "the methodology of estimation of poverty". See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suresh\\_Tendulkar](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suresh_Tendulkar) -Ed.

# Oppression and Freedom in the Old Testament, Part 1



By Thomas Wagner

*What has the kingdom of Heaven, which Christians always describe as the kingdom of God, to do with what socialists want? At first sight, little. Some feel committed to the afterlife, others fight for a just social order here on Earth. But, plausible as this division sounds, it is not correct. The quest for a society free from domination is, as the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch wrote, already the “basic sound” of the earliest biblical writings. This is reason enough to investigate the seemingly paradoxical connection of the concept of God with the aim of a society of free and equal persons. “The kingdom of God”, which is also the text with which Section I begins, is in this sense quite of this world. The decidedly antimonarchical thrust of some biblical texts already resonates in the title to Section II, ‘The Briar-bush as King’.*

## I. THE KINGDOM OF GOD: A THEOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF SCRIPTURE

### Introduction

The birth of Jesus Christ, celebrated by Christians all over the world, is connected with a central message: that the domination of man by man here on Earth is replaced by an altogether otherworldly kingdom, the kingdom of God. This message is preached in churches, and the masters (and a few mistresses) of corporations, banks, governments and empires willingly go along with it.

The philosopher Ernst Bloch (1885-1977) wrote that the biblical word of the kingdom of God is directed inwards and in no way towards the afterlife:

“Jesus never said, ‘The kingdom of God is within you’; the momentous sentence (Luke 17:21) is rather literally: ‘The kingdom of God is among you.’”<sup>1</sup>

At this point Jesus was not addressing his disciples, but the Pharisees, the scribes.

“He means: the kingdom is already living among you Pharisees, as a chosen community, in these disciples; the meaning is thus a social one, not an internal, invisible one. Jesus never said, ‘My kingdom is not of this world.’”<sup>2</sup>



In fact, according to *Das Prinzip Hoffnung (The Principle of Hope)*, the chief work of Marxist scholars which appeared in the German Democratic Republic in the period 1954-9, this point was imputed to Jesus by John (18:36),

“as one for Christians before a Roman court of justice. Jesus himself, in front of Pilate, did not attempt, with any cowardly pathos of the afterlife, to give himself an alibi.”<sup>2</sup>

Furthermore:

“It was not a case of seeking an afterlife, where the angels sing, but rather the as-much worldly as supra-worldly kingdom of love, for which the early church should already constitute an enclave. It was only after the catastrophe of the Cross that the kingdom of that world was interpreted as otherworldly, especially after



the successors to the Pilates and Neros had become Christians; for the ruling class wanted to do everything possible to ‘defuse’ the love-communism in a spiritual direction.”<sup>2</sup>

Over the past 2000 years, the practice of believers who have relied on the ‘Holy Scriptures’ appears to have oscillated between a decided partiality for the cause of the exploited and a ruthless defence of the established ruling powers, up to the forcible conversion of the gentiles by Christian missionaries. This is because both aspects are raised in the traditional texts. State-supportive elements, and those critical of the ruling powers, sometimes stand in rough opposition to one another, and at other places are connected in the narrative. Often, the texts assembled in the Bible prove themselves as literary documents of the social aspirations and political struggles of their time, which were formulated from the perspective of resistance to the prevailing powers.

### Anti-Imperial Texts

The idea that God may reign in place of the people goes far back to the early days of Israel, and was in no way an expression of religious escapism. Rather, it is closely bound up with the class struggles in that one region, fought out from the end of the second millennium BCE, which then awakened the desires of the great powers of Egypt and Assyria (later Babylon), vying for ascendancy. In this context, the seemingly otherworldly kingdom of Heaven turns out on closer inspection to be an expression of a decidedly anti-imperial worldview. For the orientalist and biblical scholar Moshe Weinfeld, the prophetic literature of Israel, from the 8th century BCE, beginning with Isaiah’s prophecy against the Assyrians, is directed against imperial rule “as such, no matter what king reigns and against whom he is proceeding.”<sup>3</sup> The Israelite prophets placed the “image of humanity, living harmoniously under divine guidance”<sup>4</sup> in opposition to the imperial tyranny.

“In the imperial reality, crowds flocked to the capital in order to bring tribute and to express their allegiance to the ruler. In the image of the ideal future that Isaiah draws, people come to Zion, in order to submit themselves to the God of Israel.”<sup>5</sup>

Countless resistance movements against state, church and capital have drawn much hope and strength from the words of the prophets and other biblical texts. In the Middle Ages, they provided arguments for heretics and reform movements, with which they fundamentally questioned the existing order of inequality. Thus Thomas Müntzer, the leader of the peasants’ revolt of 1525, understood the kingdom of God as “a state of society with no class distinctions, no private property and no state authority independent of, and foreign to, the members of society”, as Engels wrote.<sup>6</sup> In England, in 1649, Gerrard Winstanley for the egalitarian



Digger movement produced a pamphlet against the tendencies towards restoration of the monarchy in Oliver Cromwell's revolutionary parliament, stating that "In the beginning of Time, the great Creator Reason, made the Earth to be a Common Treasury ... but not one word was spoken in the beginning, that one branch of mankind should rule over another."<sup>7</sup> And in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, different commentators, such as Ernst Bloch and the religious socialists Martin Buber (1878-1965) and Leonard Ragaz (1868-1945) allowed themselves to be inspired in the same way, in their political struggle for freedom and equality.

The theologian Ton Veerkamp, born in Amsterdam in 1933, also belongs to this tradition. He was for many years a pastor for foreign students at universities in Berlin. As a committed scientist, he produced the exegetical magazine *Texte und Kontexte (Texts and Contexts)*, collaborated on the *Historisch-Kritischen Wörterbuch des Marxismus (Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism)* and worked next on the art of a scriptural interpretation which sees the collected texts in the Bible standing in a dialectical relation to the socio-economic problems which the people had to solve.

### **Veerkamp's Concept of God**

For Veerkamp, 'God' is not a metaphysical principle nor a spiritual experience; instead, he considers that the concept stands for the particular basic principles by which a society operates. Thereby Veerkamp is seeking to express the view that these basic social principles, while man-made, can be changed only with great difficulty, and in any case not in all circumstances. Indeed, in a parliamentary system of liberal democracies, governments can be selected and deselected, enabling changes of detail; but the fundamental order, which in the example chosen is that of a capitalist class society, cannot easily be changed by a parliamentary vote. It is removed from the direct reach of the people striving for change, facing them in this respect as an untouchable, almost sacred power. In this respect, according to Veerkamp, it seems inescapable to call the respective order itself 'God'. Remaining within his picture, the various possible societies in principle – classless society, ancient slave-owning society, feudalism, bourgeois class society, socialist society, communism – correspond to their own, entirely different 'gods'.

"Inviolable right to ownership

of means of production – an essential element of today's society – functions as the god who alone can demand absolute loyalty. When this essential element is actually encroached upon, the order reacts with war and civil war. It is true that the god, in whose name this and much more is done, has an entirely different name from the gods of classical religion. The liberal name 'impersonal market forces' is innocuous because its abstract shell is better suited for the projection of wish-dreams to the ideologically seducible and seduced."<sup>8</sup>

Veerkamp uses the word "god" as a political function concept, which can be of a very different type for different social orders. Within this perspective, the question whether 'God' exists does not arise at all. In its place enters the question of which 'God' concretely rules in a society, whether it is the financial markets, 'Mammon' or that 'God' of the Bible, who is said to have freed the Israelites from Egyptian bondage.

In an interview with the magazine *Junge Kirche (Young Church)*<sup>9</sup> Veerkamp explains what brought him to this use of the concept. In the mid-70s, in the course of a biblical summer-school, he read the First Book of Kings. The story of the great assembly of the people on Mount Carmel reports Elijah asking the question, who is the 'God'? If Israel wants Baal, that 'God' who is the cypher of a society of patriarchal landowners, it should follow him. The alternative to this system of rule is the 'God' of Israel, since this stands, as Veerkamp sees it, for overcoming inequality, for liberation from domination.

### **The Message of Liberation**

In his articles published in the 2012 book *Die Welt anders: Politische Geschichte der Großen Erzählung (The World Differently: A Political History of the Grand Narrative)*, Veerkamp unfolds the core of his argument, using the example of the three lines that appear just before the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. He translates Exodus 20:2 as follows:

I, the NAME, am your God,  
who (because) I brought you out  
of the land  
of Egypt,  
from the house of slavery.

In order to see how these lines determined the basic order of Israel, it is essential to employ the correct translation. The usual translation of the first line, "I am the Lord thy God", tends to flatten the statement and miss what was meant: the issue here is not "God" as "Lord", the emphasis lying much more on the personal pronoun "I". Precisely this "I" and no-one else, occupies the function of "God" for the addressed "you". And this function consists in nothing other than leading "you" out of the land of Egypt, which is defined sociologically in the third line as a slave-house. It is a matter of leading away from Egypt, because it is a house of slavery.

In this way, says Veerkamp, the apparently familiar word 'God' that we associate with 'Lord', gains an entirely new content: "the leading away from the house of bondage".<sup>10</sup> This new name of God stands for a very specific political order, one which is fundamentally distinct from all the then known systems of exploitation, an order of free and equal people:

"You only have to serve the one that leads you away from the the house of bondage. That, and only that, is your 'God.'"<sup>9</sup>

What is meant is a system of freedom and equality, which is basically incompatible with the then existing orders of masters and slaves. It is a break with the normality of the ancient Near East. The exclusion of other gods aims for nothing else than the exclusion of the ruling orders of the then known class societies.

This biblical message of freedom leads Veerkamp back to a time when the external political situation temporarily favoured the side of the small farmers and the poor, who had settled in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River, in the fight with the former elites, to whom they been obliged to be of service.

### **Class Struggle**

At the head of the opposition to the Jerusalem monarchy at that time were the so-called *Nevi'im*, or prophets, who as spokesmen for the small farmers and virtually enslaved peasants called for a different social order in the domains of the large landowners and royal courts. They demanded land reform, debt relief and making the relations of servitude temporary – *ie* the freeing of slaves after seven years:

“Above all, the first two claims were to be heard again and again throughout the ancient Near East. In the last years of the Jerusalem monarchy, Jeremiah, the spokesman of the political opposition, managed to move King Zedekiah (598-587 BCE) to an emancipation decree. The elites were obliged to release their male and female slaves; however, with a view to continuing the relationship of servitude, they were allowed immediately to seize them again (Jeremiah 34:8 ff). For Jeremiah and his ‘party’, the monarchy had definitely lost its right to exist after this incident.”<sup>11</sup>

In 587 BCE Jerusalem was conquered and destroyed by the Babylonian army. The monarchy was eliminated. The majority of the urban elite and the big landowners were deported to Mesopotamia. With the help of an interim administration, the Babylonian military governor carried out a land reform, in the course of which fields and vineyards were distributed among the poor peasants, as an interim solution, so that production could be maintained until a loyal elite from another part of the Empire could be settled there.

However, that resettling did not happen, as the Babylonian rulers were too preoccupied in defending their empire against external enemies such as the Persians. In 537 BCE Babylon was finally conquered by the Persian King Cyrus II (559-529 BCE). When an attempted coup by the part of the court elite which had fled to Transjordan failed, and they consequently made off to Egypt, the new landowners and small farmers in Israel were on their own.

“They were always threatened with danger from the Judean elite which had emigrated to Egypt. So ‘Egypt’, because of its social structure and the fact that it offered a home to the detested emigrant cliques, became the epitome of oppression and exploitation of power.”<sup>11</sup>

Under the guidance of the followers of the prophet Jeremiah, himself deported to Egypt, they worked out a system of laws which managed without the rule of a king and in this respect carried republican currents:

“Looking backwards from the political and social experiences in

the 6th century BCE, there arose a historical legend which started from the original promise of the Promised Land, and especially from the freeing from Egypt, the house of slavery, a legend which knew a society without a state and which judged the monarchical period strictly according to the standards of the egalitarian social order taking shape in the 6th century BCE. It was largely a matter of stories, of fiction, and not of reality. But the fiction was a socio-politically productive fiction. Looking back to the past was intended to serve the consolidation of a desired political order.”<sup>12</sup>

Against the background of the political failure of the monarchy, which had brought nothing but misery, the establishment of a strong central authority did not appear desirable, and also it would certainly not have been tolerated by the governments in Mesopotamia and Persia.

Instead, the law of voluntary judges was expressed, and war was a matter of militias, of a people’s army, that could only be summoned when the matter appeared urgent. Taxes in favour of vulnerable groups who had no property rights over the land (orphans, widows, Levites) were to be effected to a small extent. The distribution was not regulated by any government headquarters, but rather undertaken by those concerned themselves. Basically, for a central institution, approximating the royal court, nothing was to be left of what constituted the essential state functions in the ancient Near East: warfare, levying tribute, jurisdiction and distribution. The nucleus of this law is passed down in that ancient Hebrew book, which the Jews call *Devarim (Words)*, and the Christians call *Deuteronomy* or the *Fifth Book of Moses*.

### Do Not Serve Mammon

Despite the externally enforced placement of Judea into an imperial power structure, Veerkamp sees in the interregnum (the government-free time 587-520 BCE) a historical period in which the desire for a society free from domination coincided with real experience: an anarchical, but ordered, national life was possible. Although, during the course of the 5th century BCE, they were unable to manage without their own central institution, on account of the tributes to the Persian central government, efforts were made to keep

the central point of contact with the Persian government in tribute matters as weak as possible, because the political class should have no property and thus no economic interests of their own.

Notwithstanding this, the social visions based on Deuteronomy always remained the views of a minority which were actually realised only in part. Messianic Christianity later transformed Deuteronomy’s domination-critical texts into components of a doctrine which could serve the Roman Empire as a state ideology, indeed because its followers held fast to the need for a different world, which under the given conditions of imperial rule they had no way to enforce politically. However, the text was able to inspire resistance to the exploitative order during the peasant wars, and again via the theology of liberation up to the present day. Indeed, the Gospel according to St Matthew (6:24) states:

*No-one can serve two masters.  
Either you will hate the one,  
and love the other,  
or you will be devoted to the one  
and despise the other.  
You cannot serve both God  
and Mammon.*

However, while Veerkamp linked this origin of the biblical striving for equality with the aftermath of the destruction of the Jerusalem Temple by the victorious Babylonian army in the sixth century BCE, Old Testament research oriented towards social history places that striving about half a millennium earlier.

## II. THE BRIAR-BUSH AS KING: THE PERSPECTIVE OF ETHNOSOCIOLOGY

Israel was created in the last third of the 2nd millennium BCE, from groups of semi-nomadic people, farmers, the dispossessed, outcasts and members of the lower strata of the cities of Canaan, who fought on the side of the rural population. These people gradually formed a new social union, organised according to familial and tribal principles, in which there was intended to be no central authority and no classes. This uniqueness also brought ancient Israel to developing a religious cult around the single god Yahweh, which contrasted with the polytheistic worship of the surrounding city-states. “The Israel of the early period was consciously designed as a free tribal society against the city-states of Canaan.”<sup>13</sup> This independence also resulted in Israel being



on a permanent war footing, which may have promoted male domination.

If Ernst Bloch described the memory of “nomadic, yet half-primitive communist arrangements”<sup>14</sup> as the “basic sound” of Israel, then that falls in with the largely egalitarian character of this society, but is however incorrect in the respect that it was not a matter of a ‘primitive society’ according to its narrow definition. Ultimately, the population of the area between Egypt and Mesopotamia area at this time was at least able to look back on 2000 years of experience with the rule of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian empires and the neighbouring city-states.

We can start from the point that the nomadic ancestors of the later Israel already lived in the outskirts of the Syrian-Arabian desert in a tense relationship with the townfolk. While they cooperated in general with the neighbouring farmers, on whose harvested stubble they drove their cattle at the beginning of the dry season, they avoided the centralising efforts of the states, the clutches of the tax collectors and soldiers. But certainly the interest in luxury goods, which were produced in the cities, led repeatedly to contacts that could sometimes take the form of peaceful barter, and at others of armed raids. While city officials therefore described the nomads disparagingly as ‘savages’, ‘tent-dwellers’, ‘robbers’ or ‘nonentities out of the steppe’, they in turn were reluctant to give up their lives of freedom and equality (under the male heads of household), avoided the state efforts to integrate them as settled in a hierarchical social order, and withdrew to remote areas.

Occasionally, however, settled people, including subject and indebted peasants, followed their example. As long as the apparatuses of surveillance of the empires remained defective, evasion into their periphery was an alternative to revolt.<sup>15</sup>

### “Regulated Anarchy”

To understand and describe the functioning of the early Israelite society, biblical scholars and historians<sup>16</sup> fall back on the “regulated anarchy” model developed by the sociologist Christian Sigrist (b 1935). In his 1967 book of that title, Sigrist studied how African societies without a state (eg Nuer, Amba, Tiv or Tallensi<sup>17</sup>) understood how to put their egalitarian relationships (which, to be sure, were in the main concerned with the relations between men) on a long-term basis and which conditions had to be met for them to be able to establish

generally lasting relationships of rule.

These societies of farmers and livestock-herders, which could comprise several hundred thousand members, became the subject of ethnological research, of British social anthropology, because they resisted the European colonial rule more persistently than those societies which had already produced classes and were accordingly centralised. For the latter, it was generally sufficient for the colonialists to capture the political leadership or the top layer in order to subdue them.

On the other hand, in political terms, the stateless societies were so pledged to the kinship organisation principles, that they played an important role, on the basis of various collective forms of property, in creating over and over again an almost egalitarian balance between family groups. So, for example, there was no birthright in succession, and the right to the use of the land was transferred for distinct groups, not individuals. Economic surpluses were over and over again reduced on the basis of a semi-forced approach, which prevented permanent asymmetries in possessions. In any area, particularly successful individuals were constantly exposed to envious suspicions. The idea behind this went that, if someone was blessed with good fortune over the masses of people, then it could be to do with witchcraft.

Social life was directed in conformity with norms of equality, which also found symbolic expression in stories, music, games, body jewelry and architecture, and in this way was an important basis for the alignment of child-rearing. Violations of norms could lead to feuds between kinship groups, if mediation attempts failed. In cases of conflict, there were also separations, and the relocation of smaller or larger groups. If there were a common threat from the outside, then temporary alliances were formed. In most cases, individuals distinguished themselves by a distinct distaste for orders. Admittedly there were experts, as well as authorities, for various social functions, and they possessed some influence. But, because they had no means of enforcement, they were never able to carry through their wishes against the resistance of other members of society.

### Centralisation of Rule

According to research, the basic features of a “regulated anarchy” characterise the early days of Israel, the period described in the Old Testament as the time of the Judges (ca 1250-1000 BCE).

This applies equally to those factors which in African societies, according to Sigrist, form the starting point for the development of a permanent and centralised rule: constant external military pressure, the solidification of initially volatile relations of allegiance and the appointment of foreign leaders who became eligible because they stood as outsiders separate from the norms of equality applicable in their own group. It was precisely the resistance to the threat of foreign domination that laid the basis for transformation from the temporary charismatic leadership in times of need, as the so-called Judges (also saviours) in the Bible exercised it, to a permanent position of domination.

It is accepted that, for the early days of Israel, the centralisation of rule which eventually resulted in the establishment of a monarchy emerged from the need for a permanent military leadership against external threats. In the Bible the first king over all Israel, David, is initially portrayed as the charismatic leader of an armed band but he also made his living by a protection racket:

“The band protected farmers against raids such as those from the Midianites. So far, so good; but if there was no threat? Then David just protected the farmers against raids from himself.”<sup>18</sup>

He was able to win the tribal elders for the monarchy without thereby setting aside the still operating norms of equality in the tribal associations. Still, the administrative organisation of the future King Solomon, son of David, was directed

“continually according to the old tribal laws. In the division of the kingdom after Solomon’s death, the striving for autonomy again gains acceptance.”<sup>19</sup>

### Subversive High Culture

In the light of contemporary research, pre-state Israel does not appear as a deficit entity that would of necessity have led to the establishment of a state, but rather as a self-reliant model of society with the social structure of a “regulated anarchy”, whose duration is estimated to have been at least some 200 years. From the very beginning, a Yahweh cult was significant for the egalitarian structure of this society, with the founding myth of the cult, the liberation from the Egyptian house of



slavery, playing an important role.

“In the Exodus myth subjects fleeing from Canaanite kings, and nomads in transition to a settled existence, could likewise recognise their socio-political ideal (and experience) as effectively escapees from Egyptian forced labour”<sup>20</sup>,

says the historian Rüdiger Haude, who evaluates the early Israelite Yahweh faith as “ideological safeguarding from state hostility” in an imperial environment. Indeed much of what is written in the texts of the Old Testament in this regard would be assignable only for the post-exile period, but this symbolism, he says, could “at least connect to pre-state kernels of the ritual representation of the Exodus.”

Since a relatively streamlined system of beliefs, and urban structures, were present in this society, and since the territory on which the early Israel was situated – where the Phoenician alphabet originated, at the interface of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian writing tradition – “was, so to speak, steeped in literacy”, Haude considers it not too daring to describe the Israel in the era of the Judges as an “anarchist high culture”. Writing, urban culture and belief system are the criteria that are commonly taken into consideration for such an assignment.

Certainly, given the numerous military campaigns of which the Bible speaks, this particular variant of a society against the state was not a harmonious idyll. In addition, in the context of today’s research, it cannot be assumed that the freedom from domination extended also to the relationship between the sexes. Here, on account of the comparatively poor source material, it is advisable to take a look at what has been found by ethnological research into the distribution of power between women and men in societies without a state.

### The Relationship between the Sexes

Very often these societies were organised with the help of partly fictitious lineages, which included either a male (patrilineal) or female (matrilineal) line of ancestors. While a whole range of matrilineally organised societies is known, in which a balance of power between the sexes was institutionalised (for example Iroquois in North America, Minangkabau in Indonesia and Mosuo in southern China), a male line of descent, as also transmitted for the Israelites, is usually associated with



From the *Song of Deborah*: Yael killing Sisera, as depicted by Artemisia Gentileschi

a more or less pronounced dominance of the male gender.

While the Israelite men, at least the family heads, looked on each other as equals, that seems not to have applied to the women over long stretches of history. Certainly, the biblical stories of prophetesses, the mention of witches, female magicians and sorceresses, as well as of girls dancing and making music with drums alongside processions, suggest that women and men in the early days of Israel “had a share in the religious activities of social life which was a approximately equal and differentiated more according to functions than to a hierarchy”.<sup>21</sup> Also, one of the oldest pieces of text of the Bible reports on a strong woman, the judge Deborah. She appears as a spokeswoman for the liberation struggle. According to Rüdiger Haude, the *Song of Deborah* (Judges 5) furnishes evidence, at least, for the pre-state existence of the ideological power resources of women, howsoever they were embedded.<sup>22</sup> Theologian Renate Jost has said that the majority of texts related from the women’s perspective originate from the 11th century BCE, *ie* from the pre-state period of Israel.

The two women mentioned in the *Song*, Deborah and Yael (Jā’-ēl)

“work hand in hand, whereby Deborah extols Yael. Thus, formulated in feminist terms, they demonstrate the power of sisterly solidarity. (...) The *Song of Deborah* is one of the most important texts of the Hebrew Bible, in which women are represented in a powerful role.”<sup>23</sup>

While the overwhelming majority

of academic experts seem to agree that the assertion of a prehistoric matriarchy for this particular region stands on feet of clay, there is also disagreement in feminist discourse about whether the emergence of the Israelite state, with its tendency towards giving a legal status to social relations, brought about an improvement or a deterioration in the situation of women.

### Subversive Literature

It is undisputed, however, that the Israelite family groups’ pursuit of autonomy, right into the time of the monarchy, remains a decisive political factor. One point of view which has gained acceptance is that the monarchy could only be set up against considerable resistance and thereafter was over and again called into question by a domination-critical opposition. While Israel in the egalitarian Judges period fought against the city-states of Canaan, David’s kingdom and its successor entities saw themselves confronted with anti-monarchical resistance.

Research speaks of a “latent dislike for this form of state, indeed to any kind of ‘rule’, at the beginning and during the entire period of the kings”<sup>24</sup> (albeit only to that ‘rule’ outside the home). Yet David’s monarchy was forced “to have recourse to the country’s resources and thus interfere with the structures of the tribes, the clans and families. Here massive resentment was rapidly ignited, as documented in pamphlets which the Old Testament has preserved.”<sup>25</sup>

Two of these texts will be briefly presented here. One recounts how the Israelites, victorious in a battle against the Midianites, want to make their temporary leader Gideon a permanent ruler. He uncompromisingly rejects this



for himself and his descendants. The Book of Judges gives his words as follows (Judges 8:23):

“I will not rule over you,  
Neither shall my son rule over you,  
HE shall rule over you.”

God alone appears to him as the legitimate ‘ruler’.

Yotam’s (Jō-thām’s) fable provides a mocking devaluation of the monarchy. His story of the trees that choose a king also comes from the book of Judges (9:8-15). At the end, the dubious honour of being permitted to become a king falls to, of all things, a briar-bush, *ie* a plant which acts as a figure of negative contrast throughout the whole fable literature of the ancient Near East:

“One day the trees went out to  
anoint a king for themselves. They  
said to the olive tree, ‘Be our king.’

But the olive tree answered, ‘Should  
I give up my oil, by which both gods  
and humans are honoured, to hold  
sway over the trees?’

Next, the trees said to the fig tree,  
‘Come and be our king.’

But the fig tree replied, ‘Should I  
give up my fruit, so good and sweet,  
to hold sway over the trees?’

Then the trees said to the vine,  
‘Come and be our king.’

But the vine answered, ‘Should I  
give up my wine, which cheers both  
gods and humans, to hold sway over  
the trees?’

Finally all the trees said to the  
briar-bush, ‘Come and be our king.’

The briar-bush said to the trees, ‘If  
you really want to anoint me king  
over you, come and take refuge in  
my shade; but if not, then let fire  
come out of the briar-bush, and  
consume the cedars of Lebanon!’”

The message is clear: only the briar-bush, about which there is nothing useful to report, imagines itself as suitable to be king.

This emancipatory thrust of many biblical texts has justified the positive opinion that the atheist Ernst Bloch had of the Bible. He regarded the condescending attitude, which in his eyes many Marxists showed in his time to Christians committed to this biblical message, as short-sighted and counterproductive for the revolutionary cause:

“Instead of this, genuine Marxism  
takes genuine Christianity  
seriously, and it is not a matter  
of mere dialogue, which

contributes to the position by which the standpoints are at best made jaded and compromising; rather, when Christian actually means the emancipation of the labouring and burdened people, when in Marxist terms the depth of the realm of freedom actually remains and becomes the substantiating content of revolutionary consciousness, then will the alliance between revolution and Christianity in the peasant wars not have been the last such – this time with success.”<sup>26</sup>

In the second part of this article I shall deal with the question of whether the Israelite faith in the one God must be held responsible for that religiously motivated violence which is widespread today. Intellectual spokesmen of the radical right go so far as to point to the desire for freedom and equality expressed in the biblical texts as the origin of an alleged ‘Jewish-Bolshevik’ conspiracy, which has been a threat to every order right up to our present day. They respond to it with a ‘political theology’, which advances a strong state against the promise of democratic equality of socialism.

■ Translated by the Editor from [www.jungwelt.de/2012/12-22/010.php](http://www.jungwelt.de/2012/12-22/010.php) and [www.jungwelt.de/2012/12-27/018.php](http://www.jungwelt.de/2012/12-27/018.php)

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# Resolutions and Statements of the 35th Congress of the Union of Communist Parties – CPSU

**The 35th Congress of the Union of Communist Parties – Communist Party of the Soviet Union (UCP-CPSU) took place in Minsk, Belarus on 1 November, 2014. It was attended by 119 delegates from 17 communist parties that form the UCP-CPSU.**

**The political report was delivered by the Chairman of the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU, Gennady Zyuganov. The Congress unanimously adopted the Resolutions and Statements printed below. The first organisation plenum of the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU after the Congress unanimously reelected Gennady Zyuganov as Chairman, and also elected a Secretariat and a Political Executive Committee.**

## **RESOLUTION ON THE POLITICAL REPORT OF THE CENTRAL COUNCIL TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNION OF COMMUNIST PARTIES**

Having heard and discussed the Political Report of the Central Council, the 35<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union of Communist Parties – Communist Party of the Soviet Union notes that in the period in between Congresses the situation in the world has deteriorated dramatically. The main threat to the present and future of humankind comes not from deadly epidemics, not from religious terrorism

and extremism, but from the bankrupt but still predominant system of capitalism which constantly reproduces economic crises, military brigandage, glaring poverty and barbarous destruction of the environment.

The situation in the world in recent years has been marked by a severe financial and economic crisis which has rocked the very foundations of the capitalist world order. According to the World Bank, “the storm is only approaching”.<sup>1</sup> Not surprisingly, the world financial oligarchy habitually tries to shift its insoluble problems onto the population of Asia, Africa and Latin America.



The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries occupy a special place in the plans of the 'managed chaos' strategists.<sup>2</sup> The Cold War waged by American imperialism and its underlings in the aggressive NATO bloc against our common Motherland, the Soviet Union, conducted inside the country with active assistance of the 'fifth column', ended in 1991 with the destruction of the historical united multinational power, which broke up into 'independent' territories, with the severance of economic, cultural and kinship ties among its peoples.

Yet the new 'masters of the world' are unhappy even with such truncated sovereignty of the former union republics. Their aim is to throw our peoples back into medieval savagery, to turn the space of the former USSR into a field of interminable bloody internecine feuds. For more than 20 years global imperialist reactionaries have been ruthlessly and relentlessly pursuing the policy of undermining the national statehood of divided Soviet peoples, promoting neo-Nazi and fascist trends, brazenly manipulating public consciousness and fomenting ethnic and religious strife.

These processes have manifested themselves in Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova and Estonia. However, at present the most explosive are the attempts to ruin the Russian state, to destabilise the social and political situation in the country, to dismember its territory and to plunder its riches. A ferocious onslaught on Russia and its friendly countries in the post-Soviet space has been launched on Ukrainian territory. In February 2014 the Ukrainian Nazis, generously financed by the US special services, perpetrated a military coup in the republic and provoked a fratricidal civil war. The results of the pro-fascist putsch have been sealed by pseudo-

democratic presidential and parliamentary elections that took place in an atmosphere of chauvinist frenzy and anti-communist hysteria, and physical suppression of the political opponents of the ruling clique.

In spite of the temporary successes of the Western puppeteers in the dirty business of separating fraternal peoples, the yearning for a revival, in one form or another, of our common union state is still in the hearts of millions of Soviet people. Besides, urgent economic needs are relentlessly making themselves felt. Through the efforts of the leaders of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia, the Eurasian Economic Union has been created, which has since been joined by Armenia. Kyrgyzstan will shortly join this international economic alliance, the largest in the world in terms of territory.

The most consistent political force that constantly struggles for voluntary integration is the Union of Communist Parties into which the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was transformed temporarily in 1993, pending the recreation of a renewed Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. During the period since the previous 34<sup>th</sup> Congress, the Central Council, the Political Executive Committee and the Secretariat of the CC UCP-CPSU have carried out a certain amount of work to unite the communist movements of the CIS countries as well as the Baltic states, Georgia and Ukraine. The UCP-CPSU today comprises 17 fraternal parties with a total membership of more than 300,000.

Among the milestones in the life of our Union were the holding in the summer of 2011 of an International Forum, *Unity: the Path to the Salvation of the Fraternal Peoples*, and the February 2012 declaration that confirmed allegiance to the principles of

the Treaty on the Formation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. International solidarity of the parties in counteracting imperialist aggression and the growing threat of fascism has grown stronger. The constant use of the institution of international observers during election campaigns has emerged as an effective mechanism of mutual help.

The members of the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU, led by its chairman, Gennady Zyuganov, have made a tangible contribution to the struggle of Abkhazia, Trans-Dniestria and South Ossetia for freedom and independence, to the recognition of their sovereignty and the self-determination of their peoples.

Ahead lies a long, arduous and large-scale task whose result will depend entirely on our ideological staunchness and organisational cohesion.

#### Congress resolves:

- to qualify the work of the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU as satisfactory.
- to support the assessments and conclusions contained in the Central Council's Political Report, and to be guided by them in the day-to-day practical activities of the communist parties which are members of the Union.
- to approve the Resolution *Carry on the Cause of the Great October*, and the Statements *We Believe in the Future of Ukraine*, *The Immortal Feat of the Soviet Peoples Will Live Down the Centuries* and *Stop the Fascist Aggression*.
- to regard, as priority strategic tasks of the fraternal communist parties, under the current dangerously complicated conditions, the unification of all the strata of the working people for an early exit from the global crisis, for overcoming its destructive consequences, for counteracting the fascistisation of social life and for the revival of the socialist social system. Working towards these goals it is necessary to combine flexibly the methods of parliamentary and non-parliamentary struggle.
- persistently and constantly to conduct the propaganda of Marxist-Leninist ideology, and the principles of proletarian internationalism; and promptly to rebuff nationalist actions and any attempts to sow the seeds of hatred and mistrust among the peoples.
- to initiate the creation of public committees to protect the monuments to V I Lenin, memorials to Soviet liberator soldiers, other monuments and symbols connected with revolutionary, military and labour achievements of the Soviet people.
- to deem it practicable to step up the work of preparing the new edition of the UCP-CPSU programme.
- to make greater use of the party press and electronic media.
- In the period preceding the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the great victory and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Great October Revolution, to organise more conferences and round-tables, days of culture and festivals, and to publish more political and scientific-theoretical literature. Congress believes that a key task is strengthening the role of the Union of Communist Parties in organising research into topical problems of the theory and practice of the struggle for socialism, the historical experience of implementing the ideas of the Great October Revolution.
- to recommend to the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU, jointly with the governing bodies of the

## STATEMENT: THE IMMORTAL FEAT OF THE SOVIET PEOPLES WILL LIVE DOWN THE CENTURIES

*(70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Great Victory)*

May 9, 2015 will mark the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Victory of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in the Great Patriotic War against fascist Germany and its satellites. The courage of the Soviet soldier, the unexampled fortitude of the common worker, the state and military genius of Stalin have saved humanity from the deadly 'brown plague'. The key source of the Great Victory was the monolithic unity of the multinational Soviet people forged in battle and in peaceful work under the leadership of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks).

Among the Heroes of the Soviet Union in the battles of that truly national war were 8,182 Russians, 2,072 Ukrainians, 311 Byelorussians, 96 Kazakhs, 91 Georgians, 90 Armenians, 69 Uzbeks, 43 Azeris, 34 Ossetians, 19 Moldavians, 18 Turkmenians, 15 Lithuanians, 14 Tajiks, 13 Latvians, 12 Kirgizians, 9 Estonians and 5 Abkhazians.

May 1945, which was a logical continuation of the history-making October 1917, crowned the world-historic achievements of socialism. It demonstrated the strength and viability of the new social system, greatly enhanced the authority of the Soviet power among the peoples of the planet and triggered revolutionary change on all the continents.

It was during the Spring of that Victory that international organisations of trade unions, women and youth, who wrote the slogans of peace, freedom, democracy and social progress on their banners, were born. Anti-fascist resistance of millions of communists and patriots developed into socialist revolutions in a number of countries in Eastern Europe, South-East Asia and in Cuba. Under the onslaught of the national liberation struggle of the oppressed nations, the colonial system of imperialism in Africa collapsed.

The victory of the Soviet people over fascism dramatically changed the balance of forces on the international arena. After the formation of the socialist commonwealth, a stable balance was established between the world social systems of socialism and imperialism, a military political balance on the globe that ensured

peaceful life for half a century.

However, no sooner did the trenches of the Second World War overgrow with grass than imperialist reaction, led by the US ruling elite, declared another 'crusade' to the East. The Cold War against the socialist countries, and the criminal ruining of the USSR, threw humanity back into the past, creating a real danger of a new world slaughterhouse that is growing year in and year out. The unprecedented global financial and economic crisis is a catalyst of a future catastrophe.

The looming calamities can still be prevented by uniting, like 70 years ago, all the progressive anti-fascist democratic national liberation forces throughout the world. It is the duty of each of the fraternal parties within the UCP-CPSU to make its contribution to the struggle against resurgent fascism, to defending the gains of the Great Victory.

We will not allow anyone to rewrite our common history, to pervert facts, to desecrate our common symbols and monuments and to whitewash Nazi butchers and their accomplices.

We will not allow financial tycoons, who had brought forth Hitler in their time, to set our peoples against one another in bloody fratricidal confrontation.

Together we will organise commemorative actions in all the former republics of the Soviet Union without exception.

We will recall again and again and immortalise the sacred names of those who died a hero's death, defending the multinational motherland, those who were burned alive and tortured to death by the fascist beasts. We bow our heads to the veterans, the surviving authors of the immortal feat.

We will bring the light and life-giving force of our Victory to the youth and help it to learn the truth and acquire confidence in tomorrow.

### OUR CAUSE IS RIGHT! WE SHALL OVERCOME!

communist parties within the Union, to consider the issue of creating, for the above purpose, a Scientific-Methodological Centre under the Political-Executive Committee of the CC UCP-CPSU.

- in order to strengthen the mass consciousness of historically belonging to a single Motherland, and of respect for all the nations, large and small, of the former Soviet Union, to continue the tradition of holding the congresses of the peoples of the Union State of Belarus

and Russia, the peoples of the Caucasus and of the Central Asian region; along with protecting their national languages, to render every support to the Russian language as the vehicle of international communication, mutual enrichment of cultures and exposure to the achievements of world civilisation.

- to build up a campaign of solidarity with the fraternal parties suffering repressions on the part of the ruling regimes, above all, the Communist

Party of Ukraine and the United Communist Party of Georgia; to give wide publicity to, and to condemn every fact of, the persecution of communists and their supporters for their political convictions. To us the entire arsenal of political and legal means must be used to secure an early release of our comrades languishing in jails.

- to pay serious attention to organisational strengthening of the party ranks; to focus on

the tasks of attracting to the fraternal parties new forces from amongst workers, farmers, women and youth; to improve the system of party studies and personnel training.

- To expand the circle of allies of the UCP-CPSU, to cooperate more actively with the trade unions, military-patriotic, veterinary, women's and youth organisations whose activities do not contradict the idea of reviving on a voluntary basis a union of equal and sovereign states of fraternal peoples.



- to promote the unification of the intelligentsia, workers in science and education for the sake of saving national cultures.
- considering the importance of close interaction with the communist and workers' parties, and other left-wing forces on the planet, of looking for common ground with a wide spectrum of world and regional non-governmental organisations, to develop the international ties of the Union of Communist Parties. Congress reaffirms the course of the UCP-CPSU for the unification of all the forces coming out for freedom and democracy, for peace and social progress.
- to instruct the new Central Council of the UCP-CPSU, within three months, to develop practical measures to fulfill the Congress decisions as well as to put into practice the proposals and critical remarks made by the delegates.

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## RESOLUTION: CARRY ON THE CAUSE OF THE GREAT OCTOBER REVOLUTION

*(On the Centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution)*

The centenary of the **Great October Socialist Revolution** is approaching. Our revolution is the most outstanding political event of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, that marked a breakthrough of humanity toward a future unheard-of in history.

The Great October Revolution is at once a peculiarly Russian and an international phenomenon. The Russian Revolution was bound to happen because by 1917 the country was a tangle of antagonisms that reflected the specific features of its historical development. Russia had to resolve acute contradictions between the

productive forces that needed room for development, and the vice of production relations of the semi-feudal type, between the monarchial superstructure and the social and political needs of the Russian capitalism which had achieved a median level of development, between the interests of the centre and the national borderlands. The Revolution pitted the union of the working class and peasantry against the union of land owners and capitalists. The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution became possible due to the aggravation of the numerous contradictions in the context of the First World War.

The Revolution was also a global phenomenon because the main contradiction between the forces and relations of production was crying out for resolution on the scale of the whole planet. The victory of the Great October Revolution marked the start of the development of a social system in which, for the first time in history, the exploitation of man by man was overcome.

The guiding star for the social creativity of the working masses, notably the Russian working class, was the scientific Marxist-Leninist theory of socialist development. Expropriation of big private property was a forced reaction of the proletariat to the massive sabotage by factory owners. At the same time this objective process marked a stage in implementing the transition from the omnipotence of private property to establishing socialist relations scientifically validated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. The nationalised enterprises became the property of the whole people. The state performed only managerial functions with regard to them.

The Great October Socialist Revolution turned the Soviets, the result of the revolutionary creativity of the masses, into the most



effective form of state power. This formed the foundation of genuine rule of the people. It combined direct democracy of the workers at factories, mines, and in farming and forestry with the representative democracy of a new type that did not envisage the separation of the legislative and executive branches. The Soviet power, born of the Great October Revolution, represented a unique unity of the largest social organisation of the working people and a new type of state.

The guarantee of the victory of the Great October Revolution of 1917 was the formation of a new type of political vanguard: the Russian working class resolutely supported the strand of revolutionary Marxism formed under the leadership of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin which went down in history as Bolshevism. It is not by chance that Lenin, in his work *'Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder*, stressed the "international 'significance' (in the narrow sense of the word) of Soviet power, and of the fundamentals of Bolshevik theory and tactics"<sup>3</sup>. Bolshevism combined the methodology of revolutionary Marxism with the organisational principles of a new type of party that envisaged united action of its

ranks and the solid support from the working class as its inherent social base.

The victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution initiated a reliable alliance of all the social classes that lived by their work on the basis of the proletarian dictatorship. The key feature of the proletarian revolution was its incompatibility with opportunism, which in practice is always an instrument for smuggling bourgeois ideology and politics into the activities of communist parties, the workers' movement, into the consciousness of millions of working people.

The Great October Socialist Revolution was logically developed through the heroic victory of the union of workers and peasants over internal counter-revolution and foreign military intervention, in the Civil War unleashed by Russian and world capital. That victory created the prerequisites for fruitful peaceful socialist construction during the rehabilitation period and in the years of the heroic pre-war Five-Year Plans. During the decade of the 1930s Soviet society, led by the Communist Party, accomplished what it took the leading capitalist economies of the world 50-100 years to accomplish.



Petr Simonenko (centre), general secretary of the Communist Party of Ukraine, and other delegates at the 35th Congress of the UCP-CPSU.

Socialist industrialisation, collectivisation and the cultural revolution were successfully implemented. The USSR became a leading country in terms of economic and cultural development.

The Great Patriotic War of the Soviet people against German fascism and Japanese militarism was the greatest test of the viability of the ideals of the proletarian revolution and the adherence of the multimillion multinational Soviet people to the historical route chosen in October 1917. The red flag over the Reichstag in May 1945 became an eternal symbol of the unity of the revolutionary generation of the fathers and the war generation of the sons.

Looking back, we can say, following Joseph Vissarionovich Stalin, that the viability of Soviet socialism and the Soviet state system was also confirmed by the successes of our people in post-war socialist reconstruction. The Great October Revolution manifested itself in the conquest of outer space, the creation of powerful territorial-production complexes on the Volga and Ob rivers in Central and Eastern Siberia, and radical economic and cultural transformations in all the Union republics.

## STATEMENT: TO STOP THE AGGRESSION OF FASCISM

69 years ago our fathers and grandfathers – members of the single multinational family of Soviet peoples – scored a victory in the Great Patriotic War. At the time, in 1945, it seemed that the defeated ‘brown’ monster would never again spread its lethal tentacles and that the long-suffering Earth would never again be soaked with human blood and tears. Fascism was exposed and condemned by the Nuremberg Trial as the greatest crime against humanity, but it was never annihilated.

Throughout the post-war decades the very fact of the existence of the Soviet Union was a solid guarantee that the Nazi followers would never dare rear their heads. The destruction of the world’s first socialist country opened up great scope for out-and-out pogromists and scum.

The Glory Memorial blown up by the Saakashvili people in the Georgian city of Kutaisi;<sup>4</sup> many years of desecration of the monument to General Chernyakhovsky in the Polish city of Pieniężno;<sup>5</sup> the disgraceful witches’ sabbath around the Bronze Soldier statue in Tallinn;<sup>6</sup> the marches of the descendants of Bandera<sup>7</sup> in Lvov, Kiev and other Ukrainian cities; the parades of former Nazi butchers in Vilnius and Kishinev; the sophisticated harassment by the Latvian security of the legendary partisan Vasily Kononov<sup>8</sup>; the burning of books of progressive political figures and outstanding writers; all these attest that the slippery path of anti-communism and anti-Sovietism inevitably leads to fascism.

Until very recently it was thought that literal reproduction of fascist methods of the 1920s-30s was simply impossible. The current bloody events in Ukraine have shattered those illusions. Oligarchic capital is again looking towards fascism and a new world war for a way out of the protracted global crisis. The political adventurers who are reanimating fascism are not aware of the consequences of their crazy actions. The tragic history of the past century has not taught them anything. The predecessors of Cameron, Hollande and Merkel – all those Chamberlains, Daladiers and Papins – in their time tried to flirt with the Hitlerites. These games cost our planet more than 72 million human lives. Now that the world has again found itself on the brink, there is no other political force than the international army of communists that is capable of organising and leading the resistance to fascism’s brazen aggression.

The words of the outstanding anti-fascist Georgy Dimitrov, which have been confirmed by time, today sound like an alarm bell:

**“Fascism is unbridled chauvinism and annexationist war; Fascism is rabid reaction and counter-revolution; Fascism is the most vicious enemy of the working class and of all the working people.”**<sup>9</sup>

The 35<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Union of Communist Parties – the Communist Party of the Soviet Union again appeals to the anti-fascist and democratic forces of Europe and of the whole world to stop the new aggression of fascism, to launch a massive movement against the fascist threat, and to create a powerful anti-fascist and anti-imperialist front.

**PUT THE FASCISTS IN THE DOCK!  
FASCISTS WILL BE STOPPED!**



## STATEMENT: WE BELIEVE IN THE FUTURE OF UKRAINE

In the eyes of the whole world the greatest tragedy is unfolding: the territorial disintegration and fratricidal war in Ukraine. What is taking place in what was only yesterday a prosperous republic is directed not only against the Ukrainian and Russian peoples but at the whole Slavic world. The Trans-Atlantic 'strategists' believe that Ukraine should act as a fuse that would set off a monstrous bomb capable of blowing up the entire Eurasian space, wiping away whatever remains of the post-Soviet statehood and plunging millions of citizens into bloody chaos.

In order to implement these cannibalistic goals, the USA and its accomplices in NATO brought to power in Kiev a pro-fascist, pro-Bandera clique. It is as if the former allies of the USSR in the fight against Hitler have suddenly lost historical memory. They appear to have 'forgotten' that, during the Second World War, the Banderovites were a docile and unthinking weapon of the German fascist enslavers. The Hitlerites used this riff-raff to perpetrate the most heinous crimes, whose sinister symbols are the Byelorussian village of Khatyn that was burned to ashes,<sup>10</sup> and the Volyn tragedy.<sup>11</sup> Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, Russians, Jews, Poles and people of many other nationalities died at the hands of these butchers.

In peacetime the Bandera movement turned out to be not a national liberation movement but a sect of crazy fanatics whom the special services of Western 'democracies' took under their wings. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the new Ukrainian elite used the poisoned ideological weapon of Nazism not only to dupe and intimidate the voters, but to protect the ill-gotten property of the oligarchs.

Rampant theft committed by bureaucrats, the sway of criminal gangs, catastrophic impoverishment of the population, lack of any future for the young people, lawlessness and arbitrary rule, universal fear and hopelessness have become, like in Germany of the 1930s, the spawning ground for radical neo-Nazi groups. These sentiments have brought forth the new 'Führers' of the

Kiev Maidan. The recent presidential and parliamentary election campaigns vindicated the words of Karl Marx to the effect that "A nation and a woman are not forgiven the unguarded hour in which the first adventurer that came along could violate them."<sup>12</sup>

But the followers of Bandera are not the whole Ukraine. It will never come to pass that the great nation of Bohdan Khmelnytsky<sup>13</sup> and Grigory Skovoroda<sup>14</sup>, Nikolai Gogol<sup>15</sup> and Taras Shevchenko<sup>16</sup>, Ivan Kozhedub<sup>17</sup> and Sidor Kovpak<sup>18</sup>, Vasily Sukhomlinsky<sup>19</sup> and Borys Paton<sup>20</sup> would resign itself to the disgraceful role of a factory of cannon fodder for the criminal adventures of foreign and home-bred moneybags.

Everywhere in the country the grapes of popular wrath are ripening. Ordinary working people – true patriots of Ukraine – are rising to defend their right to live peacefully on their land, to speak their native tongue, to commemorate the feats of their fathers and grandfathers performed during the Hitler invasion.

The 35th Congress of the UCP-CPSU expresses its solidarity with those who are resisting the spreading neo-Nazi evil, above all with the embattled Communist Party of Ukraine, which is subjected to brutal repressions and whose members are the targets of constant moral and physical terror.

We, the communists of 17 fraternal parties, believe in the future of the Ukrainian state. The only alternative that can save it is to follow the behest of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin that is etched on the granite pedestal of the outstanding monument destroyed by the angry crowd on Bessarabskaya Square in Kiev:

"Given united action by the Great-Russian and Ukrainian proletarians, a free Ukraine *is possible*; without such unity, it is out of the question."<sup>21</sup>

**That is why it is our common cause and our common duty to do everything to strengthen the fraternal union with the Ukrainian people at the time of severe trials.**

It is not the fault of the Great October Socialist Revolution that its ideals and their implementation sometimes diverged from the realities of Soviet society. The lag in the economic competition with the world capitalist system, the downgrading of ideological and theoretical work and political education of the masses, the violation of Leninist norms of Party life on the one hand led, in the 1970s-80s, to the dilution of the class basis of the ruling Communist Party; and, on the other hand, enabled cynical career-seekers and

turncoats to occupy the top posts. The consequences of their destructive activities were the massive retreat from socialism, bourgeois counter-revolution and the restoration of capitalism on the territory of the USSR and the East European countries.

However, the class struggle for implementing communist ideas continues, as witnessed by the determined preservation of the key elements of the socialist way of life in the Republic of Belarus, by the dream of the majority of Russians about the revival of a society which basically incorporates the achievements

of Soviet socialism, and by the fierce resistance to the Nazi followers in South Eastern Ukraine. Pointing in the same direction is the inability of the capitalist world to maintain classical bourgeois democracy in the context of the crisis and the fact that it is falling back on fascist methods.

Expressing the will and political position of its member communist parties the 35th Congress of the UCP-CPSU reaffirms the validity of the essential assessments of the Great October Socialist Revolution given by Marxism-Leninism. We reaffirm our

steadfast adherence to them. The Union of Communist Parties-CPSU is not only an heir to the ideals of Great October, but it continues its revolutionary cause. Socialism and the rule of the people are the main mottoes of our international communist organisation.

Proceeding from the Marxist-Leninist interpretation of the Great October Socialist Revolution, and on the need to struggle resolutely for further implementation of its great ideals, the 35th Congress of the UCP-CPSU recommends the communist parties that



are members of the Union to develop and implement a range of measures devoted to the centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution.

### The Congress deems it necessary:

1. to recommend to the communist parties, members of the UCP-CPSU, to hold, following the example of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), plenary sessions of their central governing bodies to analyse the state of the working class in their countries and strengthen the influence of the communist parties on the proletarian milieu.
2. to instruct the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU to develop a programme of solidarity actions aimed at protecting the interests of the class of hired and exploited workers.
3. to recommend to the new Political Executive Committee of the Central Council of the UCP-CPSU to hold, jointly with the CC CPRF, a jubilee international scientific conference in 2017 devoted to the significance of the Great October Socialist Revolution for the modern struggle of the working class and all the working people for socialism. During the course of preparation for the Centenary:
  - the Political Executive Committee of the CC UCP-CPSU, jointly with the Central Committee of the Trans-Dniestria Communist Party, may hold in 2015 an international scientific conference,
4. to recommend to the Political Executive Committee of the CC UCP-CPSU including in the curriculum of the International Party Studies Centre the course *The Significance of the Great October Socialist Revolution and Our Times*.
  - *All documents were first published in English by Solidnet at <http://www.solidnet.org/russia-union-of-communist-parties-communist-party-of-the-soviet-union/ucp-cpsu-xxxv-congress-of-the-union-of-communist-parties-cpsu-%E2%80%93-main-resolutions-en-ru-es>, but for clarity they have been edited here, with Notes and References added.*

### Notes and References

- 1 It has not been possible to source this quotation.
- 2 See, for example, Russian political analyst Oleg Nemensky, on the Maidan incidents in Kiev, quoted at [http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2014\\_04\\_14/Maidan-is-technology-of-managed-chaos-developed-in-US-political-analyst-6020/](http://sputniknews.com/voiceofrussia/2014_04_14/Maidan-is-technology-of-managed-chaos-developed-in-US-political-analyst-6020/). "That is the technology of managed chaos. It was developed in the US. It implies that a large crowd of people is gathered and constantly held in protest activity and agitation. No concrete goal is set; only intermediate tasks are given to the crowd, which need to be constantly changed as people get tired of them."
- 3 V I Lenin, 'Left-Wing' Communism: An Infantile Disorder, in *Collected Works*, Vol 31, p 22.
- 4 The memorial in Kutaisi to Soviet war dead – including 300,000 Georgians – was blown up on 19 December 2009 by the Georgian government under President Mikheil Saakashvili, to make way for a new parliament building.
- 5 Ivan Chernyakhovsky, who commanded the 3rd Belorussian Front in Pieniężno, was the youngest front commander, not yet 40 years old, when he was killed in battle on 18 February 1945. The Polish government has taken no action to find those responsible for the desecration of the monument.
- 6 The bronze statue, erected on the site of a Soviet war grave and originally entitled *The Monument to the Liberators of Tallinn*, was relocated, along with exhumed remains, to the Defence Forces Cemetery of Tallinn in April-May 2007.
- 7 Stepan Bandera was leader during the Second World War of the Organisation of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN), and collaborated with the Nazis to support the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, which committed genocide against Poles within occupied Ukraine. After the war former members of the OUN worked with Western intelligence agencies.
- 8 Vasiliy Makarovich Kononov (1923-2011) was a Soviet partisan who was prosecuted for alleged war crimes by the Latvian government in 1998, and convicted, but had his conviction overturned on appeal by the Latvian Supreme Court in 2000. He was charged again in 2001, again convicted and imprisoned and this time had to appeal to the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) to get the conviction overturned. However the Latvian government appealed against this decision and in May 2010 the Grand Chamber of the ECtHR reversed the verdict.
- 9 G Dimitrov, *The Fascist Offensive and the Tasks of the Communist International* (political report to the 7<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the Comintern, August 1935), in Dimitrov, *The United Front*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1938, p 15.
- 10 On 22 March 1943, the entire population of 156 of the Belarussian village of Khatyn, 50 km from Minsk, was massacred by the 18th Schutzmannschaft Nazi battalion, consisting mainly of Ukrainian nationalist collaborators and Waffen-SS. Belarus lost over a quarter of its population in the Second World War.
- 11 This refers to the massacre of up to 100,000 Poles in Volyn and Eastern Galicia by the Ukrainian Insurgent Army under Nazi occupation. See also Note 6.
- 12 K Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Ch I, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 11, p 108. The Editor considers that this quotation, taken out of context, would have been better avoided.
- 13 Bohdan Khmelnytsky (1595-1657) was leader of the Zaporozhian Cossacks who organised a rebellion against Polish rule in Ukraine, the eventual outcome of which was Russian control of Ukrainian lands east of the Dnieper river. See <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/316694/Bohdan-Khmelnytsky>.
- 14 Grigory Skovoroda (1722-94) was a Ukrainian of Cossack background living in the Russian empire, who made major contributions to Russian philosophy and culture. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory\\_Skovoroda](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gregory_Skovoroda).
- 15 Nikolai Gogol (1809-52) was a Russian dramatist, novelist and short story writer of Ukrainian background. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai\\_Gogol](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nikolai_Gogol).
- 16 Taras Shevchenko (1814-61) was a Ukrainian poet, writer, artist, public and political figure, as well as a folklorist and ethnographer. In 1847 he was imprisoned for satirising the Tsar. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taras\\_Shevchenko](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taras_Shevchenko).
- 17 Air Marshal Ivan Kozhedub (1920-91) was a Soviet World War II fighter ace and three-times Hero of the Soviet Union. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan\\_Kozhedub](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ivan_Kozhedub).
- 18 Sidor Kovpak (1887-1967) was a prominent partisan leader in Ukraine during World War II, and twice Hero of the Soviet Union. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydir\\_Kovpak](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydir_Kovpak).
- 19 Vasyl Sukhomlinsky (1918-70) was a Ukrainian humanistic educator in the Soviet Union who saw the aim of education in producing a truly humane being. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasyl\\_Sukhomlinsky](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vasyl_Sukhomlinsky).
- 20 Borys Paton (b 1918) is an outstanding scientist in metallurgy and welding, and long-term chairman of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine. He won many awards and prizes in the Soviet Union, including the Order of Lenin (4 times) and Hero of Socialist Labour (twice). See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borys\\_Paton](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Borys_Paton).
- 21 V I Lenin, *Critical Remarks on the National Question*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 20, p 31.

# Dialectics of History



By Lars Ulrik Thomsen

THE WORLD ECONOMIC crisis in 2008 completely changed the political future for capitalism. It raised the questions of whether this was an existential crisis and how the ruling classes could manage it. To understand the new conditions for the communist and labour movement, it is necessary to look at the dialectics of history over a longer period, and the class roots of the various movements.

In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx describes the difference between bourgeois and proletarian revolutions:

“On the other hand, proletarian revolutions, like those of the nineteenth century, criticise themselves constantly, interrupt themselves continually in their own course, come back to the apparently accomplished, in order to begin it afresh, deride with unmerciful thoroughness the inadequacies, weaknesses, and paltrinesses of their first attempts, seem to throw down their adversary only in order that he may draw new strength from the earth and rise again, more gigantic, before them, and recoil again and again from the indefinite prodigiousness of their own aims, until a situation is created which makes all turning back impossible, and the conditions themselves call out: *Hic Rhodus, hic salta! Here is the rose, here dance!*”<sup>1</sup>

These characteristics of the proletarian revolution can be extended to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first attempts at building socialism. But these changes in history are not accidental; they are

the result of the laws of development of society.

## I. The Class Roots of the ‘New Left’

The class roots of the ‘New Left’ are to be found in the great changes which state-monopoly capitalism underwent in the 1960s and 70s. The scientific and technical revolution meant a shift in the composition of the working class, especially in the layer of technicians, managers, teachers, social workers and other groups, which grew substantially in those years. People in these groups did not have the same sense of organisation as those in manual trade unions, and thought of themselves more as individuals than as a collective. Consequently, the growth of these layers, and the conscious cultivation of specific perceptions and views by the big monopolies, became crucial to the outcome of the political battles of those years.<sup>2</sup>

What were the ideas and trends that characterised this community? Their ideological influence ranged from bourgeois attitudes to socialist; but, in terms of the latter, it was not the version of Marxism which is associated with the labour movement. On the contrary, the socialist attitudes of this community, particularly those of the young leftists in this period, reflected the various schools within ‘academic Marxism’, in particular the so-called Frankfurt School around Max Horkheimer, Herbert Marcuse, Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin.

In addition, during this period there was a substantial growth in the environmental and peace movements, currents which to some extent were associated with ‘Utopian socialism’. The dominant philosophy in these movements was that it was not necessary

to overthrow capitalism in order to reverse the enormous damage caused to people and the environment.

This intermediate layer clearly had a very complex ideological foundation and a philosophy which was not homogeneous, but rather eclectic and often contradictory. These ideas were widely promoted by the bourgeois media, publishers and others, who thus created a completely new situation for the labour movement and its parties.<sup>3</sup> At the same time the various sectarian tendencies all claimed their particular version of Marxism as the correct one.

To understand the growth of these currents, we must put things into a wider context. In those years capitalism underwent some fundamental changes. The new technological and scientific opportunities had outstripped the framework of national governments and demanded supranational control in the interest of the monopolies.

There is a model for this development in the description and analysis that Karl Marx gives in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*.<sup>4</sup> He describes how the essence of contemporary class struggles focused on perfecting state power in the interests of the bourgeoisie, and how all other classes fell short. Something similar can be seen in the 1970s when the European Union consolidated itself and created a host of new institutions and other bodies.

The monopoly ruling classes knew very well who the real opponents of these changes were – namely the working classes and the communist parties. Therefore it was important for them to undermine the influence of the communists and to prevent that opposition to the EU from developing into a force for changing society. As part of their strategy they consciously



On the barricades, December 1851

utilised the pseudo-revolutionaries. With great skill and finesse they supported anarchists, sectarians and other rebels against capital. The working class was said to have become 'bourgeois' and to have lost its revolutionary potential, while the new currents had taken on this role.

The effect was two-fold. On the one hand, the old social institutions were shaken, and formed the basis for the creation of new ones. This applies to research and education, as well as other government agencies. On the other hand, the representatives of monopoly capital also fostered an alliance with elements of the radical left, the latter being offered well-paid positions in a number of public or private institutions.

The monopoly ruling classes have unlimited resources to buy just that expertise that in the most subtle and refined way can affect the public mood. This policy can broadly be described as successful until the economic crisis in 2008, which changed the whole economic, social and political conditions in the capitalist world.

## 2. The Recent Economic Crises in Capitalism

An understanding of the current economic crisis requires examination of the development of capitalism over a longer period than just the last decade. The formation of the EU in the mid-1950s, and its expansion in stages, signified a major change in the manifestations of imperialism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The aim of the EU was to resolve, in favour of the big monopolies, the fundamental contradictions that had accumulated in the individual nation states, between the interests of the people and the monopolies, and internationally, in terms of competition for markets and

resources with other imperialist centres. By the early 1970s those contradictions had become particularly clear. However, rather than resolve them, the EU, together with the whole finance capital-driven globalisation process, accentuated these contradictions many-fold.

Thus we also saw, with still shorter intervals, many crises of capitalism in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>. In particular, the IT-bubble that burst in 2000 was a serious setback for the apologists of capitalism, who had seen this new technology as a means to overcome these crises. In 2008 came the most serious world economic crisis of recent times. This was one of overproduction, but postponed by the massive expansion of credit, and including the creation of fictitious financial instruments. It was not the much-vaunted 'free market forces' that resolved the crisis by themselves, but massive government purchases of notes and bonds that initially saved capitalism from a total collapse.

The new crisis is not one of the regularly recurring cyclical crises that characterise capitalism, but a much deeper and more serious one. It is a manifestation of what Marxists describe as the general crisis of capitalism, a crisis which is not only economic but extends to the political, social, cultural and environmental fields as well.

It was this development that Marx foresaw in his works. He considered overproduction crises as being inherent in capitalism, and he warned about the rise of monopoly and finance capital. But many saw his theories as outdated and out of touch with reality. This also applies to the 'New Left', who rejected the leading role of the working class, and therefore Marxism, in practice, though not in theory.

Capitalism would not be capitalism if it did not understand how to exploit the crisis for its own purposes. The big monopolies are gaining new momentum in mergers and acquisitions of weaker competitors. At the same time, however, there is an explosive growth in unemployment, especially in southern Europe, due to austerity budgets within the Eurozone rules, the inability of weaker economies to devalue, and the failure of finance capital to invest.

There are many economists who draw a parallel with the crisis of the 1930s, but the opportunities that capitalism had in those days to stimulate the economy (Keynesianism) are no longer available. It is significant that, despite record low interest rates, the capitalist economies have not been able to generate significant growth seven years after the crisis began.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, Japan shows some worrying signs of prolonged stagnation, the so-called *stagflation* which has been going on for decades. This development also seems to be spreading to the EU and other countries.

## 3. New Features in State Monopoly Capitalism

The development of capitalism in recent times can be mainly summarised in nine points:

1. As described earlier, the superseding of the nation-state framework. This means that state-monopoly capitalism controls a wide range of economic policies in the interest of imperialism.
2. The expansion of the big monopolies into giant conglomerates, whose turnover even exceeds the budget of a medium-sized nation.



3. The role of the new sciences in production as a direct productive force. The scientific-technical revolution, which was particularly marked in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, completely changed production conditions and the class issues. This was made possible by an extensive use of computers and the internet.
4. Very importantly, the increased pressures on the state and municipal budgets in each country. This development is particularly evident after the outbreak of the economic crisis in 2008, when the representatives of finance capital succeeded in driving through harsh austerity policies, in the interests of boosting capital accumulation.
5. A separation between the direct value of production and speculative capitals. This creates tremendous pressure on taxpayers, when they are asked to cover the failure of speculation through an increased tax burden.
6. An intensified scramble for resources, and with it the direct use of military force or of threats to use it, as for example in the USA's 'pivot to Asia'.
7. Globalisation as a process of free movement of capital.
8. Continued reduction in the share of wages and salaries in Gross Domestic Product.
9. The worldwide drive to privatise public services as new sources of profit for finance capital.

Together, these changes in capitalism are a threat to people's living standards and social and democratic rights. Capitalism with its supranational governance brings its internal contradictions to the breaking point, as Marx foresaw it. These contradictions can only be overcome through the transition to a higher type of society.

#### 4. Tasks for Communists

The growing aggressiveness of capitalism arises because it has no other way out of the crisis than to trigger new wars. The biggest challenge for the labour movement and the communist parties in this century is to find new ways to strengthen internationalism and the peace movements as a counterweight to the build-up imperialism.

Here it is essential to draw on the



Palmiro Togliatti, leader of the Italian Communist Party from 1927-1964

experience of the communist movement from, among other things, the First World War, by virtue of Lenin's analysis of imperialism. Large parts of the labour movement and the left forces have taken over Kautsky's theories of ultra-imperialism and the policy of reconciliation towards capital.<sup>6</sup> They form the very basis of the social-democratic parties' policies. Therefore, a further development of Lenin's work is an imperative if we are to succeed in stemming reformism in the labour movement.

The difficulties of the labour movement and its parties were fully exposed after the victory of the counter-revolution in 1989. One of the most important tasks of Marxists is to regain the initiative and bring the labour movement into accordance with the developments in society.

The 'New Left' has been targeting the new middle layers and has rejected the application of the principle of unity, which is central to Marxism. They no longer view the working class as a force for changing society. Thus, they have made themselves vulnerable in the new political and economic situation, where their Utopian socialism no longer has the same public impact. They are also unable to form and unite anti-monopoly alliances, which could provide a counterweight to austerity.

The communist movement has a wealth of experience from decades of work in building unity. We must re-analyse these experiences and learn from the pages of particular importance for today's political struggles. United Front and

Popular Front politics were created in a complicated period of world history, with as big a challenge as those we face today.

The experience of the VII World Congress of the Comintern is an example of what the communist movement can accomplish. Its lessons are summarised in congressional reports and debates, and they can be a great help in the tasks we face today. The deep insights into class characteristics represent a model for similar studies today. Only through a true picture of class relations in each country is it possible to establish a proper policy that ensures that communists will come back onto the offensive.

Given the development of atomic and nuclear weapons, it is of particular interest to study Palmiro Togliatti's report on prevention of world war.<sup>7</sup> At that time, of course, the struggle was unsuccessful, but that does not diminish the importance of the work that was done. And, as everyone knows, a new and 3<sup>rd</sup> world war would irretrievably be the last.

Although history at first glance appears accidental and incoherent, the opposite is in fact the case. History does not fulfil its task in a steady and evolutionary way, but through leaps that are often catastrophic, and in a shift between revolution and counter-revolution. The advantage of Marxist theory is the ability to study the events scientifically, in order to predict coming changes in society and to devise a suitable strategy for the transition to a higher, socialist, form.

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#### Notes and References

1 K Marx. *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Chapter I, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1937; also in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 11, p 107.

2 It is widely acknowledged that big business bought the fascist parties in the 1930s in their fight against the labour movement. See, eg, D Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business*, Monad Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> American edition, New York, 1973.

3 The political battles of the 1970s were the first big international clash between Marxism and left radicalism. See, eg, W Gerns and R Steigerwald, *Probleme der Strategie des antimonopolistischen Kampfes (Problems of the Strategy of the Anti-Monopoly Struggle)*, Marxistische Blätter, Frankfurt am Main, 1973, p 148.

4 Marx, *op cit*, Ch VII.

5 The Gross Domestic Product for the 28 member states in EU has had an average annual increase of 0.3 % in the period 2008-14. (Eurostat)

6 V I Lenin, Imperialism, *The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, in *Collected Works*, Vol. 22, p. 266.

7 Ercoli, *The Fight Against War and Fascism*, Cooperative Publishing Society of Foreign Workers in the USSR, Moscow, 1935.

INTERVIEW

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# Alain Badiou: The Targeted and Constant Use of the Word 'Communism' is Indispensable

Interview by Aliocha  
Wald Lasowski



## INTERVIEW: ALAIN BADIOU

## INTRODUCTION

While recent popular uprisings have had a tendency to be varied, uncertain or unexpected, they can be seen as standard-bearers of the emergence of a new political order. For the Marxist philosopher Alain Badiou, communist politics shows us its full worth with its specific emancipatory vision of a dynamic movement with its own novel way of approaching history.

Far from the dominant consensus, Alain Badiou conceives philosophy as the illumination of the present – the voice of a strong concern for the state of humanity and for an active, positive intervention in the life of citizens. Philosophy can help, encourage (cautiously) and attempt to pull society out of its current nihilism, so that the world may be a little less dark than at present. “Resisting is thinking” could be said to be his motto. This radical thinker is one of the most important contemporary intellectuals on the left, and is faithful to the heritage of Sartre. Likewise, for him politics represents action and engagement of oneself, and philosophising is conditional upon an active role in the emancipatory struggle.

With *The Communist Hypothesis*<sup>1</sup>, Badiou has revived the vitality of communist thought and once again opened up the Marxist history book – a history which passes heroically from the slave revolts of Spartacus to the peasant wars led by Thomas Münzer in Germany, from the French Revolution (with all the scrutiny that the subject attracts), to the Paris Commune and, once more, the October Revolution of 1917. In *Que Faire? (What is to be Done?)*<sup>2</sup> he turns his attention to a dialogue with the philosopher Marcel Gauchet around the subjects of Marxism, capitalism and democracy.

Today the planet finds itself inexorably bound to the monetary necessities of capitalism, while society is torn apart by a global market of constant consumption, and the world is ordered along lines of extreme inequality whereby 10% of the world population own 86% of the world's riches. Yet, all the while, Alain Badiou organises numerous meetings with the aim of re-establishing strong bonds of solidarity and strong communist organisations. For Badiou, philosophy presents itself as an epic poem striving for – and demanding – justice. Philosophy has the potential to become the collective vision, as well as the means of thinking about and outlining a new type of world society, with a new vision of what politics could and should be. Communism, in its very essence, is the political projection of the things we all hold to be dear in our day-to-day lives.

## HIS FOREMOST ASSERTION: ‘A REVOLUTION IS WAITING TO HAPPEN’

*Born in 1937 in Rabat, Morocco, Alain Badiou was a pupil of Louis Althusser. From a very early age he reconciled his political activism with the demands of critical thought. He began his political life with the anticolonial struggle, protesting against the Algerian War. After May 1968, he founded the group UCFML (Union of Marxist-Leninist French Communists) and participated in the creation of the experimental university in Vincennes (Paris VIII) with Michel Foucault. Whether in meetings, occupations, in the heart of factories, workers’ housing, or defending illegal immigrants, his intense militancy feeds his philosophical work (Theory of the Subject and Being and Event (Bloomsbury)), his work as a novelist (Calme Bloc Ici-bas, not published in English), and his theatrical work (l’Echarpe Rouge and The Ahmed Plays, not published in English). The 1985 work, Can Politics Be Thought? (Duke University Press) outlines the role of revolt in the philosophy of rupture and event; Of an Obscure Disaster (Lacanian Ink) in 1991 sets out the historical ruin of the state; while his 1998 book Metapolitics (Verso) calls for a reinvention of politics. His more recent works include The Idea of Communism (Verso) and What Constitutes a People? with Jaques Ranciere and Judith Butler (not published in English). Throughout his work Alain Badiou has mobilised the thought of Plato, Rousseau and Marx as much to shine light upon the past (for example the historical events of the Haitian revolts led by Toussaint l’Ouverture), as to come to grips with current events, such as the extent to which the occupiers in Tahrir Square in Egypt were positively engaged. Yet the assertion which most matters to him is that a revolution is waiting to happen.*

**AWL:** With your works such as *The Communist Hypothesis*, you have managed to organise big international meetings around the word ‘communism’. How can associating the freedom of collective space from the dominance of capital and the withering away of the state and of the division of labour bring about an alternative historical process which re-establishes the very essence of communism?

**AB:** I think that we must target four different strategic aims, and in a different order from the one which you indicated. Of course, what must lead the way is the idea that Marx suggested was the defining summary of all his work in his famous *Manifesto*, that is to say the abolition of private property. Indeed it is more than possible to take the general organisation of production away from the dictatorship of private interests. It is possible for public benefit to replace private interests, otherwise known as ‘profit’, across the whole expanse of productive activity and all the infrastructure supporting it (transport, means of communication, exchange mechanism, etc.) Following this, the organisation of work at the heart of the means of production for public good would have to be modified rigorously. It is important to reduce and finally do away with the existing great disparities, such as the differences between intellectual work and manual work, between management roles and active roles, and even in the distribution of resources of human life (education, healthcare, culture, leisure, etc) available in big metropolitan areas and those available in smaller towns and the countryside. Marx qualified this as the advent of the multifaceted worker. The withering away of the state as

a separate coercive tool will come slowly as the product of the two preceding processes.

Marx also opened up the way to a possible fourth outcome: the end of the political rule of identities, be they national, religious, linguistic, cultural, etc. These aforementioned identity politics will be replaced by a true internationalism, with humanity in control of its own global destiny. It is this that Marx called “internationalism” and he saw it as a fundamental characteristic of communism. I don’t see any particular reason for us to stop asserting that all of the above is part of a strategic plan of action worthy of the human species, considering the point that humanity has reached as regards the intellectual and material means which it is able to mobilise. Capitalism will be unravelled by this plan, showing itself to be what it really is: a barbarous abusive system which is an obstacle to scientific and technical modernity.

**AWL:** In your recent discourse with Marcel Gauchet, you call upon emancipatory political models that don’t rely upon the model of parliamentary democracy. How can we create a new vision of history, one which by-passes the omnipotence of the state?

**AB:** Let me ask you this: where in the world has this thing that you call a ‘model’ of parliamentary democracy established itself, if not exclusively in the countries in which economic and social organisation adheres to the most advanced of capitalist systems? – in what the subservient media call ‘The West’? The fact that these countries are those which Marx viewed as the centre of the power of capital is even more obvious today than in the times of Marx himself!

For us, the tasks of today’s struggle have to focus around uprisings and popular movements, around the formation of political organisations that ought to address directly the international stage, and the unification of all proletarians, who are more numerous on a global scale than ever before, contrary to what we are told. The emergence of new, organic intellectuals, ready to join the masses under the banner of a reorganised intellectually modernised communist idea, and the rallying of a fraction of the petit-bourgeoisie let down by the smoke and mirrors of consumerist capitalism, will be crucial too. These are the concepts which will open the way to a third stage in the history of communism, after the prophetic times of Marx and Engels, and after the violent and state-heavy times of Lenin and Stalin. The third stage has been hinted at, in an even more chaotic and, eventually, powerless fashion, by Mao and the Chinese communists in the pivotal years of the 1960s and 70s. However, I firmly believe that we will be their rightful successors for a very long time.

**AWL:** How can a new political thought distance itself from the clash of the four seemingly mixed forces that are the educated youth, the working class youth, the drifting international proletariat and ordinary, precariously employed workers?

**AB:** I often insist and repeat the following: a new political model will be able to be created on a large scale only from the diverse social forces which you outline and under a shared strategic vision which would serve as a rallying point, and as a practical check-list for the considered support for a total independence from the propaganda and dominant opinions. This is why the

targeted and constant use of the word ‘communism’ is indispensable. The enemy would like the word to remain criminal and shameful. For a long time, we have repeated in a parrot-like fashion the agenda set out by our enemies (which states that communism is equivalent to bloody totalitarianism, and nothing but), and now we no longer have to speak in such an evasive and shameful manner. Even here [in France], when does the Communist Party actually talk about communism? Conversely, by highlighting the word communism and proposing through a grand historic gesture a new assessment of the previous period, and by simultaneously renewing the perspectives of the third stage, we can plan the exit from a world darkened by global capitalism, and deploy a thought and practice that are completely clear and attainable. I have been fortunate to see that from Turkey to Korea, from Prague to Berlin, from Amsterdam to Buenos Aires and Palestine, and even from London to New York, that an entire youth as well as a plethora of old, experienced militants are awaiting this liberation, and a new-found independence from the sinister consensus that we are made to think will be eternal.

**AWL:** In *Que Faire?*, you analyse the three stages which constitute the communisms of the 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries, drawing the conclusion that we are actually at a crossroads – a period in time which closely resembles the revolutionary situation in Europe at the end of the 1840s. Taking this perspective forward, what is the responsibility of communists to direct the future and shape what will happen?

**AB:** Who are the ‘communists’? That is the question of the day. Towards the end of his

life, Chairman Mao asked what he saw as a harrowing question: “Who are the worthy successors of the proletarian cause?” In the 1840s, Marx wrote the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* when there existed no more than a handful of communists, at least in the sense that he understood the term. There was the French workers’ movement, English political economy, and German dialectical philosophy, and with all those aspects, he was to form the new communists. We also must form new communists. The task of communists of the third stage is for us first of all to become communists of the third stage and to work in popular movements: in uprisings, factories, housing estates, universities, in big groupings of over-exploited workers, in unemployed workers’ associations, with small farmers in the famished southern countries, or with immigrant workers, etc. It is the ensemble of these groupings, and more, which make up the living heart of the modern proletariat, and communist ideas will be the affirmative strategy shared by all tactical movements looking to unravel the capitalist hegemony. If the old political parties attached to the history of communism want to rally around this renewed start, then nobody will complain ....

■ *First published in French in l’Humanité on 14 November 2014. Translation by Julian Jones.*

## Notes and References

- 1 A Badiou, *L’Hypothèse communiste*, Éditions Lignes, Paris, 2009; published in English as *The Communist Hypothesis*, Verso, New York, 2010.
- 2 M Gauchet and A Badiou, *Que Faire? Dialogue sur le communisme, le capitalisme et l’avenir de la démocratie (What is to be Done? A dialogue on communism, capitalism and the future of democracy)*, Philo Éditions, Paris, 2014.

BOOK REVIEW

# A Celebration of Positive Influence, Achievements and Victories

Review by Robert Griffiths

COMMUNIST HISTORIANS deservedly won a fine reputation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for unearthing, analysing and recording the history of the English working class and progressive movements. Whether it was Rodney Hilton on feudalism and the peasantry; Christopher Hill on the English civil war or – as he showed it to be – revolution; E P Thompson on the earliest workers' struggles; John Saville on the Chartist movement; Dorothy Thompson on the Chartists and women workers; A L Morton on the 19<sup>th</sup> century labour movement; Noreen Branson and Margot Heinemann on 20<sup>th</sup> century Britain; or Eric Hobsbawm on capital and labour across the world for the past four centuries; theirs is a roll call honoured far beyond the ranks of the Communist Party and Marxism.

This makes it all the more regrettable that so little of their talent was turned to writing histories of the Communist Party itself. Some were asked by Party leaders to undertake the task, but declined as they realised that their selection and presentation would be subjected to political direction from outside the ranks of the CP History Group.

As a result, the only comprehensive volumes of CP history written by Party members have come from James Klugmann, whose two books are very informative but orthodox and conservative, and Branson, whose two additions are livelier but only take that history up to 1951. Most of the other accounts fall into the following categories: propagandist efforts by anti-communist historians like Henry Pelling from the right and Hugo Dewar from the far left; well sourced but condescending works by those such as Kevin Morgan, John Callaghan and Keith Laybourn, who have devoted so much of their academic careers to a party whose pro-Sovietism and 'Stalinism' disturbs yet excites their liberal sensitivities;

more sympathetic and journalistic contributions from the likes of Frances Beckett; and the efforts of ex-communists like the defeatist Willie Thompson and anti-communist Geoff Andrews.

As a result, very little has been published in recent decades which not only reveals or recounts mistakes, failures and divisions in Britain's Communist Party, but which also records – and even dares to celebrate – its positive influence, achievements and victories.

John Green's new book concentrates almost entirely on the latter, and is nonetheless refreshing for doing so.

Much of what he reports will be familiar at least in outline to communists and socialists with a long and keen interest in CP history. But for many others the contents will come as an uplifting revelation. He has consciously and conscientiously set out to counter the barrage of anti-Party propaganda from the ruling class media and its politicians and academics. As Green explains in his opening chapter:

“The contribution made by communists to life in Britain has never been properly acknowledged, or has been credited to others, and today that contribution has been totally eclipsed or, if mentioned at all, then traduced.”

Thus he proceeds, in his own words, to

“redress the balance, to demonstrate that communists do belong in the mainstream of British society, despite the Party's small size and its lack of electoral appeal.”

To begin with, the author's own family, personal and extensive political connections mean that he knows – in a

way that so many anti-CP commentators and historians cannot – that communists here as elsewhere are not the heartless, cynical, bloodthirsty types paraded by so many of their enemies or critics, but often passionate and warm-hearted people motivated by the finest of ideals.

This has not enabled them to avoid making mistakes – some of them very serious – or behaving wrongly. Comradeship and loyalty bring their own perils as well as their advantages.

But those characteristics have, when informed by a mature Marxism and organised effectively in a disciplined party, helped CP members to play outstanding parts in almost every aspect of social progress.

For example, a guest chapter by Andy Croft contrasts the lurid depiction of communist intellectuals by George Orwell, Anthony Powell and their ilk to the contributions made by communists and their close allies to the world of culture, the arts and literature through their novels, poetry, journals and initiatives such as the Unity Theatre movement.

Many readers will be astonished to read the household names of those who joined, supported or collaborated with the CP and its prolific activities. Whether in science, medicine, architecture, the law, music, education or film (where John Green himself ploughed a brave and internationalist furrow when living in the German Democratic Republic), communists have overcome prejudice and discrimination to occupy positions of prominence and distinction, although in the case of composer Alan Bush his works were performed across the world at the same time as they were banned from the BBC.

Whereas the chapter on communists in the trade union movement proclaims this to have been the “main focus” of the CP's political work, in reality it comprises only a very small proportion of the book.



## Britain's Communists: The Untold Story

By JOHN GREEN,  
with contributions from ANDY CROFT  
and GRAHAM STEVENSON  
(Artery Publications, 2014, 348 pp, pbk,  
£12.50. ISBN 978-0-9558228-4-1)

This is disappointing, especially when so much published elsewhere has portrayed communist trade unionists as wreckers (Pelling again), as dupes or agents of Moscow and the Comintern (Mark Jenkins, Brian Pearce, Laybourn) or as 'comrades' embroiled in a constant state of in-fighting and despair (Nina Fishman and her bizarre portraits of 'Young Turks' in the 1930s and of miners' leader Arthur Horner who, apparently, spent his entire adult life on the verge of quitting the Party). At least we have the recent and valuable additions to the bibliography in this field of Tom Sibley and Roger Seifert's biography of former CP industrial organiser Bert Ramelson and the autobiography of one of his successors, Kevin Halpin.

Likewise, the book's chapter on the *Daily Worker* and *Morning Star* is a rather short summary which contains no new information or insight.

However, within the constrictions of space for a book of such scope, more justice is done to the Party's record of internationalism – a 'Cornerstone of Party Policy' indeed. At the heart of one of the world's biggest and oldest imperialist powers, the CP has played a huge and at times heroic role in solidarity with peoples fighting colonialism, imperialism and apartheid from Africa and India to Vietnam and Ireland. Not surprisingly, there are omissions, not least the work of Britain's communists – some of it necessarily clandestine – to assist comrades in Greece, Chile and more recently Iraq, Iran, Colombia, Sudan and Ukraine.

The book's uneven approach is, unfortunately, best exemplified by the paucity of attention given to the struggle against fascism at home. The four-page survey is woefully inadequate.

Admittedly, much has already been written about the leadership shown by Phil Piratin and the CP to turn back the British Union of Fascists in the 1935



Battle of Cable Street, overshadowing the ultra-leftist distortions and fabrications. It is mentioned here, too, as is the work done by Searchlight editor Maurice Ludmer in the 1960s. A previous chapter features the anti-racist campaigning by communists in London in the late 1950s, including by Claudia Jones who inspired the establishment of the Notting Hill carnival.

Yet so much could have been recounted about CP campaigns against fascism, racism and antisemitism in Britain, whether combating resurgent Mosleyites in the streets with the 43 Group or mobilising thousands of demonstrators against racist laws in the 1960s.

If this book has one major weakness, it is its highly idiosyncratic approach to both structure and content. Instead of submerging the 1958 Notting Hill race riots in a chapter on internationalism, followed by the cursory chapter on anti-fascism from the 1930s to the 1970s, and then a much longer one on the Second World War, the author could have combined them in a single, more substantial chapter on the Party's long and honourable fight against all forms of racism and fascism.

The final one-third of the book hosts informative chapters on the Young Communist League and the student movement and the peace and women's movements. In a guest appearance, Graham Stevenson pulls up some of the drains to uncover the secret war of 'Spooks and Dirty Tricks' waged by MI5 and Special Branch against the CP 'enemy within'. As former intelligence officer Annie Machon has revealed,

around 60 desk officers in department F2 at MI5 HQ devoted their full-time attention to the CP from the 1950s to the 1970s, each one backed up by office staff and operatives in the field.

A chapter on the fraught relationship between the Communist Party and the Labour Party, and within that the often warmer ones between communists and many Labour left-wingers, is interesting but appears out of place. It is more a potted and meandering history of the CP from its foundation in 1920 to the liquidation of its Eurocommunist-led section in 1990.

Among more minor quibbles is the mistimed reference to Aneurin Bevan's expulsion from the Labour Party (p 273) for associating with communists: this happened in 1939, not at the outset of the Cold War. There is also the claim that the CP's performance in local elections was "not very different" from its low votes in general elections (p 272). Without overstating its significance, at various times the Party had elected representatives in a score or more villages, towns and cities (and a total of 215 councillors after the 1945-46 municipal elections).

Nor am I convinced by claims from within the intelligence service that former ASLEF leader and CP ally Ray Buckton was one of the intelligence service's 'moles' at the top of the trade union movement (p 299). It is repeated as fact in this book although, as I argue in my history of ASLEF<sup>1</sup>, some scepticism might be called for in the absence of any concrete evidence.

Finally, Green could have made use of the abundant primary sources for CP history now available and, however daunting the prospect of compiling one, a subject index would have been very useful.

That being said, John has performed a valuable service not only for communists, their allies and sympathisers, but for everyone who might want to learn more about the Party and its impressive contribution to almost everything that has been progressive and genuinely democratic – of the people, by the people, for the people – in British society since 1920.

### Notes and References

1 R Griffiths, *Driven by Ideals: A History of ASLEF*, Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen, London, 2005.

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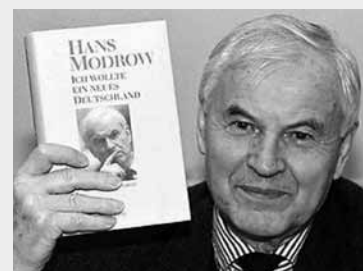


## Letters to the Editor

### From Roger Fletcher

At first glance there is some justice in Dave Stavris's objections (CR74) to my review of Hans Modrow's *Perestroika & Germany: the truth behind the myths* in CR73. But surely the job of a reviewer is to get behind a first glance; and, despite my political sympathies with Modrow, that is what I tried to do.

I selected three examples from the book for comment – the Russo-Finnish war, the Katyn massacre and the illogical merging of Stalin and Hitler – because these are major planks in the western capitalist



'case' against the Soviet Union. In describing them as "dubious clichés", I don't think that Modrow, (pictured) having introduced them in a book on *perestroika*, dealt with them at all effectively – more's the pity! (It would be truer today to say that the Soviet Union won WWII, but lost the subsequent 'peace'). Furthermore, to find Condoleezza Rice – of all people – quoted with seeming approval as early as the Introduction (p 7) suggests a paucity of sources.

More relevant (perhaps) to our contemporary situation, Dave "cannot understand" my comment that "Modrow seems unaware of positive international developments". I suggest that Modrow's almost throw-away comment, on four exceptions to unbridled capitalism (p 159), supports my charge of "an undialectical approach"; one of the countries cited by Modrow seems almost to justify western reservations about 'socialism', whilst another has managed (repeatedly) to trounce US foreign policy.

However I'm pleased that Dave agrees with my overall value of Hans's book, not only to communists, but to others who may read it with (perhaps) less acuity.

### From Lars Ulrik Thomsen, Esbjerg, Denmark

#### *Congratulations to Communist Review*

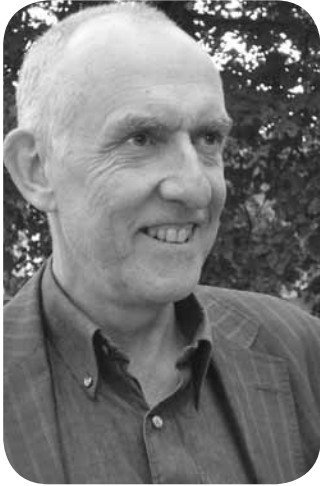
The 75th number of *CR* is an opportunity to estimate the significance of the magazine.

From a Danish standpoint, *CR* gives broad information of everything connected with the labour movement and the democratic forces in many parts of the world.

Thanks to good relations with the CPs in the former colonies, *CR* also gives valuable information of the liberation movements in Africa, India, Latin America and other parts of the world.

Last but not least the theoretical level is of an extraordinary standard, with a focus on developing Marxism according to the new needs.

It serves the Communist Party of Britain with great honour that despite all difficulties, it has been able to maintain the *CR*.



# SOURWOOD

A regular literary selection

Selected by Mike Quille

## Ironopolis, Chrome Mud and Computers

Do you realise how influential this column is? In *CR74*, I bemoaned the lack of poems about work. This must have made a young poet called Martin Hayes quickly write over 100 poems about his soul-destroying job as a controller of cycle couriers, and get them printed and published in time for me to present two of them to you. Well either that, or I was wrong.

The first poem is typical of many of his, in its fluent capture of casual, matter-of-fact conversational rhythms which both express and conceal the deadening, repetitious reality of a lot of modern jobs.

### **justice**

three days before the monthly controllers' meeting  
 Tim  
 the elected representative for us spineless bunch of  
 yellow men  
 comes around with his notebook and pen  
 to ask us how we are doing and whether  
 we want anything in particular raised  
 at the upcoming monthly controllers' meeting.  
 we tell Tim  
 that it doesn't matter what's raised  
 because it will all just continue cartwheeling down the  
 hill  
 and the computers will still crash the fifteen times a  
 day  
 that they usually do  
 and we will all still have our bonuses stopped  
 for reasons that aren't our fault  
 and we'll still find rat droppings in the kitchen

and we'll still have to continue working  
 with inferior communications equipment  
 and we will all still be threatened with the sack  
 by supervisors who have less of a hold on reality  
 than we do.

Tim then tells us  
 not to be so cynical  
 and for the thousandth time  
 about his grandad  
 whose union representatives  
 through diligence and persistence  
 forced British Steel into paying out a five figure sum  
 and admit in a court of law  
 that it was their faulty ventilation equipment  
 that contributed to his grandad  
 losing the use of both his lungs.

Most of the poems, like that one, tell stories from the modern workplace.

The next poem is a more reflective, plaintive lament for the alienation from nature (see Graham Stevenson's article in *CR73*) caused by working in dead-end jobs.

### **terror street**

why must we move mountains  
 just to hold down council flats  
 so that the roof  
 isn't ripped from us?



why must we be scared of the changing winds  
stuff our mouths full of cotton-wool  
just so they can't get in  
and freeze our guts?  
why must we go to bed fearing the day  
only to mumble over and over ourselves to sleep  
that we don't?  
why must we sit in armchairs  
sipping at dead wine in half-dead dark?  
why must we walk through parks looking up at the  
sky  
feeling nothing?  
why must we pretend to believe  
in the 50,000 times a day  
rather than in the 50,000 times a day  
that we don't?  
why must we believe in protecting our jobs  
when the sea  
doesn't believe in anything?

While we are on the subject of depressing, boring jobs and hopeless, alienated working lives, I want to introduce you to Middlesbrough. If you have never been there, imagine a town built quickly and cheaply to extract maximum surplus value from people labouring in hard, dangerous industries: iron, steel, and chemicals.

These industries have nearly all been destroyed by neoliberal capitalism; and, like many other towns in the North East and elsewhere, Middlesbrough is trying desperately to conceal its decline, poverty, and lack of a future, with the usual attempts at 'regeneration', *ie* riverside developments for service industries, yuppies and a 'vibrant night-time economy'.

That means persuading young people to part with their money, health and happiness in exchange for cheap food and strong alcoholic drinks. Yes, that's right: there's a place like that not far from you, isn't there?

Here are some poems to introduce the town. The first is by Andy Croft, who organised the recent poetry festival held there, called the Teesside International Poetry Biennale.

### ***From Sunlight and Heat***

The story of this town's a neat device  
For moralists who think the past must owe  
The present some accounting for the price

Of change, as if the River Tees could flow  
Uphill, upstream, in order to forgive  
The foolish hills or what they did not know.

This river-bank is where the present lives,  
The future is an ocean that can't wait  
To swallow up the past's alternatives:

A little town, the well-planned new estate  
Of Joseph Pease, a dock, a railway line,  
A pottery, a square – a model state;

Or else a classic study in decline,  
A 1930s slum-town, workless, broke,  
A failed experiment of flawed design;

A gold-rush Klondyke, breathing fire and smoke,  
Ironopolis! An infant Hercules!  
A commonwealth of work, a field of folk;

Or this one – post industrial, on its knees,  
Awash with crack and smack, that likes to boast  
A thriving trade in women by the Tees;

A monastery perhaps, a staging-post  
Where footsore Dunelm travellers could spend  
The night, midway to Whitby down the coast;

Or here, beyond the river's hairpin bend,  
A wilderness of weeds and broken glass  
That marks the town's beginning and its end,

A monument of burned-out cars and grass  
In praise of mighty Ozymandias.

And here are some lines from p h morbid, one of the many poets in what is actually an extremely lively, genuinely vibrant local poetry and arts scene.

O Middlesbrough! My Middlesbrough  
 What are you now my crippled Hercules?  
 Have you outgrown the stain of a Dark Satanic past?  
 Scattered along the banks of your river  
 the furnaces burning like a suburb of Hell  
 while the workers and their families slaved on  
 choking on the smoke and the stench  
 as they waded through narrow streets  
 when the waters rose and Peg flooded the town.  
 While the great and the good –  
 those whose names adorn the statues and plaques –  
 moved further and further from that black heart of  
 yours.

Now you know something about Middlesbrough, let me introduce you to some of the poems which were read at the festival, by an outstanding, international group of poets.

First, a poem about history and memory, by the Balkan poet Nikola Madzirov. The dignified, assured rhythms and repeated imagined scenes (“If I were ...”) sweep us through memories of war, violence and suffering.

### **Fast is the Century**

Fast is the century. If I were wind  
 I would have peeled the bark off the trees  
 and the facades off the buildings in the outskirts.

If I were gold, I would have been hidden in cellars,  
 into crumbly earth and among broken toys,  
 I would have been forgotten by the fathers,  
 and their sons would remember me forever.

If I were a dog, I wouldn't have been afraid of  
 refugees, if I were a moon  
 I wouldn't have been scared of executions.

If I were a wall clock  
 I would have covered the cracks on the wall.

Fast is the century. We survive the weak earthquakes  
 watching towards the sky, yet not towards the ground.  
 We open the windows to let in the air  
 of the places we have never been.  
 Wars don't exist,  
 since someone wounds our heart every day.  
 Fast is the century.  
 Faster than the word.  
 If I were dead, everyone would have believed me  
 when I kept silent.

Next, we have a topical poem from Tara Bergin, an Irish poet, about gender, abuse, victims and perpetrators.

### **Reading Aloud to Twelve People**

In Court a forty-four-year-old woman  
 stands behind a curtain;

her face is hidden from the crowd.  
 She is the victim, but even so, they make her speak  
 aloud;  
 they make her recount her shameful memories  
 into the microphone.

The listeners cough and feel appalled  
 even though those sort of feelings are not allowed in  
 Court.

Meanwhile (that same day)  
 somewhere two hundred miles away,  
 someone stands before a group –  
 a small semi-circle –  
 and holds up a book.  
 It is a book they wrote.  
 It is their shameful memories,  
 recounted one by one.

The listeners cough and are appalled –  
 but also a little bored –  
 even though that's not allowed.

And even though it's not allowed  
 the words fall into the room –  
 they fall onto the floor without anyone really knowing  
 where they came from, and what they're for.

By the time the cleaners come,  
 only the forty-four-year-old woman is left,  
 scrabbling on the carpet, searching, all bereft,  
 for what she said.

They were hers, those words.  
 They were all she had.

And finally, here's a great poem by Bob Beagrie, who lives and works on Teesside. The place names are from the North East, but again you can imagine this kind of scene somewhere not far from where you live. Each of the poem's long lines, winding like a muddy, sluggish river, tells a story of boredom, exclusion and – like our opening poems – alienation.

### **Marginalia**

With kitten gloves the support worker rouses us  
 from ketamine molasses  
 Rounds us up in the harsh daylight of daffodils singing  
 the car park into being  
 Her words are kindly meant and offer a temporary  
 lifeline with regular knots  
 We might grasp, might use to shin up out of the  
 grease pits  
 Of our own particular destruction, if only we could  
 muster the will,  
 If we could only see why it might be worth the effort,  
 but her voice  
 Is shrill as a tin whistle and she knows we know that  
 once you start  
 To climb there is no stopping and no one ever  
 reaches the top  
 And how she's hanging on to her own rope with  
 chewed fingernails





Like some guy I saw on a documentary once, black and white footage  
A zeppelin rising into the sky and the guy dangling from a cable  
For way too long knowing it is already too late to let go of today,  
Today we are going to look at acceptable behaviour for the workplace  
Writing CVs and interview techniques ... except work around here  
Is a grim tale like Rumpelstiltskin, it has so many pseudonyms  
All we can do is hope to spin our yarns of straw into golden thread  
Craving energy drinks, coffee, diet coke and the daft cow in finance  
To put our allowance through at dinnertime so we can slip off at break.  
She tells us we need to build a compelling story, employers are out there –  
They're looking for those who can tailor their story to the job.  
But the river is calling from over the Scotswood Road, the tide is outskirts  
And the mud is chrome around the tarred stumps of rotten staithes;  
Cavalier ghosts are hunkered down by the thunder bushes  
A thirty year fire still smoulders in the mine shaft at Benwell,

The Legions are leaving the Wall. Vortigern will sell us to sea wolves  
If we don't find a job we'll have to work for our benefits in Poundland,  
Jimmy's a'reet 'cos he's got an uncle who's minted and he's in the Will  
And me, I'm not intending on growing any older.  
When they're all  
Ogling their air-blown aspirations as the next pre-ordained step  
Towards their occupation I'm planning on slipping through this net,  
Sinking into the magnolia emulsion on the wall of the mock  
Interview room, it is the unblendable colour of that moment before  
Proper dark settles, we'll call it The Bright of the Night on  
The Stain of the Day. It's our time to mooch through the world  
Reduced to a graffiti tagged authority of tanyards between  
Sunwither and Moonslide on a Spring dusk beside the Tyne.

I hope you picked up the allusion to the 30th anniversary of the 1984 Miners' Strike. Vortigern, Sunwither and Moonslide are (I think) names taken from the world of fantasy war gaming. But again, I may be wrong.

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*Fast is the Century* by Nikola Madzirov is from *Remnants of the Age*, Bloodaxe Books, 2013  
*Reading Aloud to Twelve People* by Tara Bergin is from *This Is Yarrow*, Carcanet Press, 2014  
The poems by Bob Beagrie and p h morbid are from from *The Black Light Engine Room*, a poetry magazine available for £18 (3 issues per year) from 12 Harrogate Crescent, Middlesbrough TS5 6PS

### Junk food: an irregular cartoon strip





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