CR

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Cover image: Irish Citizen Army drilling at Croydon House in Croydon Park, Clontarf

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editorial by Martin Levy

> "From the standpoint of the economic conditions of imperialism – *ie* the export of capital and the division of the world by the 'advanced' and 'civilised' colonial powers – a *United States of Europe, under capitalism, is either impossible or reactionary.*"[1]

THE ABOVE dictum of Lenin's is a timely reminder in the context of the debate over Britain's European Union membership. Of course, Lenin was writing at the height of the First World War, and that era of colonial empires is now largely past, at least in political terms. But economically, is the situation so very different today? Now, as then:


Martin Levy

> "Capital has become international and monopolist. The world has been carved up by a handful of Great Powers, ie powers successful in the plunder and oppression of nations …."[1]

Huge transnational corporations dominate the world economy. Acting on their behalf, the major imperialist powers resort to embargos, economic blackmail and war – either directly or through surrogates – to maintain and extend control over sources of superprofits. At times, they pool their own resources in order to minimise damaging inter-imperialist conflict, but the essence remains. Once more, Lenin:

> "In this sense a United States of Europe is possible as an agreement between the European capitalists … but to what end? Only for the purpose of jointly suppressing socialism in Europe, of jointly protecting colonial booty …."[2]

In British trade union circles, the EU is often seen – despite its increasingly neoliberal agenda – as some sort of benign protector of workers' rights. It is far from that.[3] Its essence, ever since it was founded as the Common Market, has been suppression of socialism, and protection of imperialist booty. British workers should have no part in such an imperialist project.

As Engels said, "A nation cannot become free and at the same time continue to oppress other nations."[4] In Britain's case, that must apply particularly, to Ireland, Britain's oldest colony and still not free due to the enforced partition of 1921. The centenary, this April, of the Dublin Easter Rising is therefore crucially important for Britain, as well as for Ireland, hence our cover feature and first article by Eugene McCartan. The Rising was, as Eugene says, a democratic and anti-imperialist challenge, with James Connolly seeking to put the labour movement and socialism at the heart of the struggle. The centenary must inspire debate within the British labour movement, to raise the demand that the government commit itself to act as a persuader for unity within the island of Ireland.

You wait ages for an anniversary, then a whole series arrives. This May sees the 90th anniversary of the 1926 General Strike, and in July there will be the 80th anniversary of the launching of the fascist war against democracy in Spain. We shall have a contribution on the latter by Ken Fuller in our next issue.

Here, for the General Strike, we reproduce an insightful article by the late Jack Cohen from the May 1976 issue of *Marxism Today*. The two trends in the labour movement, to which he refers, still exist today, although the reformist one is weaker and not so wedded to 'constitutionalism'. Yet there will need to be a complete break with such an approach if the movement is to defend itself against the continuing onslaught of austerity policies and the challenge of the soon-to-be-enacted Trade Union Bill.

We continue our serialisation of *State Monopoly Capitalism* (SMC), by Gretchen Binus, Beate Landefeld and Andreas Wehr. In Chapter 2, they discuss the development of the theory in the German Democratic Republic, Federal Germany, the Soviet Union and France, and its disappearance after the overthrow of 'actual existing socialism' in Europe in 1989-91. They describe the many insights provided and a few of the shortcomings. They make no reference to any British contributions, but that is unsurprising, given the lesser theoretical effort here. However, the SMC concept has in fact been a central feature of the Communist Party's programme, *Britain's Road to Socialism*, from its 1968 edition; and, ever since the Party was re-established in 1988, SMC has been re-emphasised. Unfortunately, *CR* has not been able to publish more than about a dozen articles on the topic. There is a need, as Binus, Landefeld and Wehr point out, for "a significant group of Marxist economists, capable of continuing such a scientific tradition of the twentieth century as the theory of SMC."

We normally aim to keep book reviews fairly short, but we depart from that policy on this occasion, to allow Mary Davis to do justice to Sarah Boston's *Women Workers and the Trade Unions*. As Mary notes, women were a part of the industrial labour force, albeit a minority, from the early nineteenth century, but their organisation into trade unions was slow, particularly due to the degree that capitalist ideas had seeped into the thinking of the labour aristocracy. Today, even though the TUC and many unions have adopted policies to increase women's participation in leading committees, "there is still clearly much room for improvement … trade unions are still predominantly white male organisations and as such mirror the hierarchy in the world of work."

We complete this issue of *CR* with a further book review, by Lars Ulrik Thomsen, Jimmy Jancovich's article on the left in France, a Letter to the Editor and, in Soul Food, a terrific and inspiring set of poems by American worker-poet Fred Voss.

Notes and References

1 V I Lenin, *On the Slogan for a United States of Europe*. Published in *Sotsial-Demokrat*, No 44, 23 August 1915; in *Collected Works*, Vol 21, p 340 (*editorial emphasis*).
2 *Ibid*, p 341.
3 See J Foster, *Britain and the EU: What next?*, Communist Party of Britain, February 2016.
4 F Engels, *Speech on Poland*, 29 November 1847, in K Marx and F Engels, Collected Works, Vol 6, p 389.

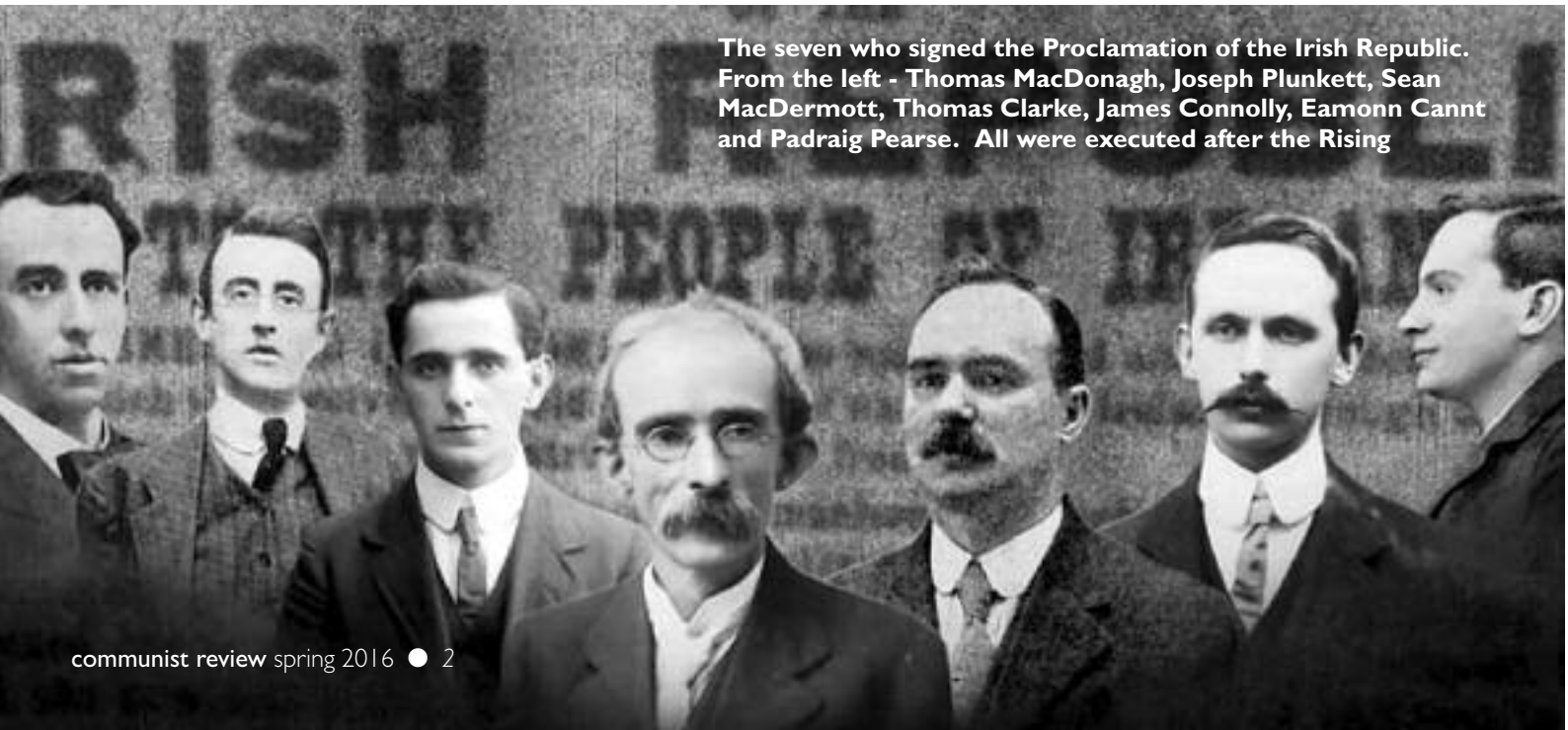
The 1916 Rising

A risen people challenges the empire

by Eugene McCartan

"The cause of labour is the cause of Ireland, the cause of Ireland is the cause of labour. They cannot be dissevered. Ireland seeks freedom. Labour seeks that an Ireland free should be the sole mistress of her own destiny, supreme owner of all material things within and upon her soil. Labour seeks to make the free Irish nation the guardian of the interests of the people of Ireland, and to secure that end would vest in that free Irish nation all property rights as against the claims of the individual, with the end in view that the individual may be enriched by the nation, and not by the spoiling of his fellows."
James Connolly, *Workers' Republic*, 8 April 1916.[1]

"... no private right to property is good as against the public right of the nation."
Patrick Pearse, *The Sovereign People* (1916).[2]

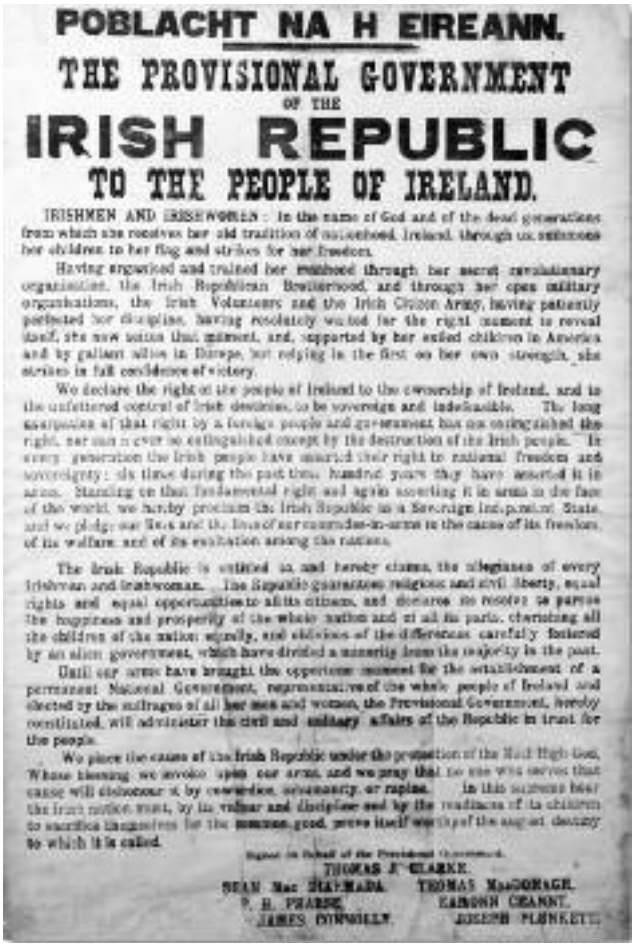


The seven who signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic. From the left - Thomas MacDonagh, Joseph Plunkett, Sean MacDermott, Thomas Clarke, James Connolly, Eamonn Cannt and Padraig Pearse. All were executed after the Rising

THIS YEAR the Irish people, in Ireland and around the world, will unquestionably and rightly celebrate the heroic events of 1916. They will honour the seven leaders who signed the Proclamation of the Irish Republic in April 1916. They will also remember the hundreds of men and women volunteers who put their lives on the line, and especially those who laid down their lives, during those traumatic days in Dublin and in a small number of other places around the country.

On Monday 24 April 1916 members of the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army – about 1,000 men and women in all – marched out and seized a number of buildings and strategic sites around Dublin. They established their headquarters in the General Post Office in Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street). It was outside the GPO that Patrick Pearse read out the Proclamation of the Irish Republic *below*.

Eugene McCartan is general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland



POBLACHT NA H EIREANN.

THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT
OF THE
IRISH REPUBLIC
TO THE PEOPLE OF IRELAND.

IRISHMEN AND IRISHWOMEN: In the name of God and of the dead generations from which she receives her old tradition of nationhood, Ireland, through us, summons her children to her flag and strikes for her freedom.

Having organised and trained her manhood through her secret revolutionary organisation, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and through her open military organisations, the Irish Volunteers and the Irish Citizen Army, having patiently perfected her discipline, having resolutely waited for the right moment to reveal itself, she now seizes that moment, and, supported by her exiled children in America and by gallant allies in Europe, but relying in the first on her own strength, she strikes in full confidence of victory.

We declare the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible. The long usurpation of that right by a foreign people and government has not extinguished the right, nor can it ever be extinguished except by the destruction of the Irish people. In every generation the Irish people have asserted their right to national freedom and sovereignty: six times during the past three hundred years they have asserted it in arms. Standing on that fundamental right and again asserting it in arms in the face of the world, we hereby proclaim the Irish Republic as a Sovereign Independent State, and we pledge our lives and the lives of our comrades-in-arms to the cause of its freedom, of its welfare, and of its exaltation among the nations.

The Irish Republic is entitled to, and hereby claims, the allegiance of every Irishman and Irishwoman. The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.

Until our arms have brought the opportune moment for the establishment of a permanent National Government, representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women, the Provisional Government, hereby constituted, will administer the civil and military affairs of the Republic in trust for the people.

We place the cause of the Irish Republic under the protection of the Most High God, Whose blessing we invoke upon our arms, and we pray that no one who serves that cause will dishonour it by cowardice, inhumanity, or rapine. In this supreme hour the Irish nation must, by its valour and discipline and by the readiness of its children to sacrifice themselves for the common good, prove itself worthy of the august destiny to which it is called.

Signed on Behalf of the Provisional Government,

THOMAS J. CLARKE.
SEAN Mac DIARMADA. THOMAS MacDONAGH.
P. H. PEARSE. EAMONN CEANNT.
JAMES CONNOLLY. JOSEPH PLUNKETT.

The Proclamation was drafted, agreed upon and signed by the seven signatories *left*, all of them members of the Military Council of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They were Patrick Pearse, Seán Mac Diarmada, Thomas MacDonagh, Thomas Clarke, James Connolly, Éamonn Ceannt and Joseph Plunkett. These revolutionaries were concerned and motivated by the economic, social, cultural and political conditions imposed on and experienced by the people of Ireland. They firmly believed that the needs of the people and the problems they faced could only be overcome by the establishment of an independent Irish democracy, in which the people would be sovereign over all matters, and that sovereignty and democracy would be the core values of the new state.

The revolutionary forces held the GPO and a number of the other positions for nearly a week, against all the odds, against a better-armed and superior military force. The GPO garrison finally surrendered on Saturday 29 April, "to prevent the further slaughter of Dublin citizens, and in the hope of saving the lives of our followers, now surrounded and hopelessly outnumbered."[3] In this the revolutionary leaders showed greater humanity and more respect for the people than was shown by the military forces of imperialism. They held out despite heavy shelling by British artillery, which killed hundreds of civilians and virtually destroyed the centre of the city, heavily populated by the Dublin working class.

By the end of that week large parts of Sackville Street lay in ruins, as well as Liberty Hall, headquarters of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union as well as of the Irish Citizen Army. It was here that the Proclamation of the Irish Republic was printed on the union's printing press, and it was from here the Citizen Army marched out on Easter Monday. It was specially targeted by the British forces, being shelled from an armed patrol yacht in the River Liffey until it was a ruin.

The 1916 Rising was the seminal event in twentieth-century Irish history and one of the most important events in the long struggle of our people to achieve an independent and sovereign country with real and meaningful democracy for all our people.

Separatist republicanism and nationalism were strands in the political and social ferment that Ireland was experiencing during that period. But they were not the only ones. It is essential to recognise and to understand the contribution and the importance of the other strands of thinking, organisation and forms of struggle that were part of the revolutionary decade. Other significant forces included the labour movement, the trade unions and socialist organisations; feminism and the women's movement; pacifism and the anti-war movement; the Irish language movement; the literary and artistic revival, including the establishment of the National Theatre; the co-operative movement; and the Gaelic Athletic Association. Movements agitating for land reform continued into the 1930s, despite reform legislation introduced by the British state in the late nineteenth century.

This process was not a uniquely Irish one but was a reflection of a worldwide movement of forces demanding radical change, and an emerging and growing resistance to colonialism and imperial domination.

The new trade unionism that emerged with the establishing of the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union was also a new and significant element. This new trade unionism broke with the old craft unionism that had dominated the Irish labour movement and that saw itself as an adjunct of the British labour movement.

James Connolly and James Larkin held a common view that the relationship between the Irish and British trade union and labour movements should be, in Connolly's words,

> "based on comradeship and mutual assistance … should be fraternal and not organic, and should operate by exchange of literature and speakers rather than by attempts to treat as one, two peoples of whom one has for 700 years nurtured an unending martyrdom rather than admit the unity or surrender its national identity."[4]

This position was clearly articulated in the polemical exchange of articles between Connolly and William Walker, a leading member of the Belfast labour and trade union movement, an advocate of 'Orange socialism' and defender of Ireland's remaining within the British empire.

The emergence of the women's movement was also a new

factor, with its demand for women's suffrage and its claim that women would have a central and equal place in a new Ireland, which broadened the debate about what a future Ireland would be like. The new women's movement was inspired and influenced by the role played by women in the land struggle, by the emerging women's suffrage movements around the globe, and by the militant labour struggles often spearheaded by women workers.

Inghinidhe na hÉireann, founded in 1900, was made up mainly of middle-class women. One of its founders, Helena Molony, wrote in its paper, *Bean na hÉireann:*

> "Now there were some young girls in Dublin, chiefly members of the Irish classes of the Celtic Literary Society …. They were (with one exception) all working girls. They had not much gold and silver to give to Ireland. Only willing hearts, earnestness and determination."[5]

Working-class women were beginning to find the space, the confidence, and their voice.

Divisions deriving from past Colonialist Strategies

During the same period, unionism was also reinvigorated by what its supporters saw as the threat posed by the possibility of 'home rule' – a form of limited self-government within the British state. They saw this as a threat to their economic and class interests, which derived from their subservient relationship with the British empire. That section of the Irish capitalist class that espoused unionism wanted no weakening of the relationship with the British imperial state. This alliance with British Tories remains in place to this day.

In 1914 the Liberal government in London felt compelled to introduce (for the fourth time since 1886) a Government of Ireland Bill, as it relied for its government majority on the support of John Redmond's Irish Party, which dominated constitutional nationalism in the decades before the Rising. The bill was passed into law in 1914, but its implementation was suspended for a minimum of twelve months, as the British state had already decided that war with Germany was necessary and inevitable.

Unionists established the Ulster Volunteer Force in January 1913 to resist, forcibly if necessary, the introduction of 'home rule'. Tens of thousands of unionist supporters joined this militia. On 24-25 April 1914 it illegally imported German, Austrian and Italian weapons – 25,000 rifles and 3,000,000 rounds of ammunition – and landed them at Larne, Bangor and Donaghadee, not interrupted or challenged by the British authorities.

The Irish Volunteers was established in Dublin in late 1913 in response to the establishment of the UVF. The strength of the Irish Party (the parliamentary wing of constitutional nationalism and the 'home rule' movement) gave its leader, John Redmond, the power to demand a controlling influence within the Irish Volunteers. In response to the importing of arms by the UVF, the Volunteers also began to look for arms from abroad. On 26 July 1914, Erskine Childers (better known in England as a member of the political establishment and the author of *The Riddle of the Sands*) landed nearly a thousand rifles, purchased from Germany, at the fishing village of Howth, Co Dublin, and distributed them to the waiting Irish Volunteers. Additional weapons were smuggled in, also from Germany, in a landing at Kilcoole, Co Wicklow.

As the Volunteers marched from Howth back to Dublin they were met by a large force of the Dublin Metropolitan Police and the British army. The Volunteers escaped largely unscathed with their new weapons; but when the soldiers arrived back in the city on their way back to barracks they were followed by a crowd of civilians who heckled them. The soldiers fired on the crowd, killing four and wounding thirty-seven.

The Irish Citizen Army was established (two days after the Irish Volunteers) by James Larkin and James Connolly. The Citizen Army was born as a workers' defence organisation, to protect them from attack during the Dublin Lock-out of 1913. It was born in the cauldron of intense class struggle and hardened in the street battles during the eight-month lock-out by the Dublin employers. The steel had been tempered for the battles that Connolly knew the Irish working class would have to face.

Ireland in the European Context

While the events of Easter Week 1916 are indeed very important, we cannot fully understand them in isolation from the long historic struggle of the Irish people or from the struggle for home rule or, most importantly, from events in Europe: the First World War, and the mass slaughter of workers and peasants on the battlefields of Europe, a war that had a huge influence on the social, political and economic dynamics of Europe and the wider world.

This was a period of revolutionary upheaval, not alone in Europe but around the world. The old order was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain its power, and new social forces were no longer prepared to be controlled in the old way. A break in that world order was inevitable; but where was it to happen?

The war drew in millions of people from the countries dominated by the various warring colonial empires, fighting it out to see which would be the dominant power, to carve up the world and acquire new spheres of influence, to continue with the material and cultural plunder of the colonies and the enslavement of tens of millions of people. Both imperial blocs – that centred on Germany and that centred on England – had used the old tactic of divide and rule, holding out false hopes to the many nations wanting to establish their independence and sovereignty, to escape from colonial domination.

The imperial powers were not slow to support and encourage nationalism in each other's back yards. Britain promised self-determination to both Arabs and Zionists, on the same piece of land (like the unionists and nationalists in Ireland), to undermine the Ottoman Empire. It also sponsored the Congress of Oppressed Nationalities, bringing together Poles, Czechs, Croats and Slovenes – peoples keen to throw off the yoke of the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Germany called for a jihad of Muslims in the British, French and Russian empires. Finnish, Georgian, Persian and Indian nationalist forces were invited to Berlin (as was Roger Casement from Ireland). The Germans hoped that a declaration of support for the Irish, Jews, Finns and others would go down well and would stir up trouble for Britain. Attempting to establish a foothold in Latin America, it even promised arms and support to the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa, further promising that a future alliance would lead to the recovery of Texas, Arizona, and New Mexico. The Kaiser, Wilhelm II, had declared the arrival of the "German Century". It all sounds so familiar today.

We know from historical experience that the national aspirations of oppressed nations have always been subordinated to imperial interests. In that period it was either Britain or Germany that would emerge victorious: in the

strategies of the great powers, all the oppressed peoples were just pawns on the imperial chessboard.

In Ireland the British state played its tactic of 'divide and rule' to the limit. On the one hand it secured the support of unionists, enrolling thousands of members of the UVF in the specially created 36th (Ulster) Division to fight in Europe, with the promise of opposing home rule for Ireland; while it equally secured the support of John Redmond and the Irish Party, together with the section of the Irish Volunteers over which they had most influence, to march off to fight in Europe in the 16th (Irish) Division with the promise of home rule on the statute book. As Connolly put it so well, "ruling by fooling is a great British art – with great Irish fools to practise on."[6]

From the viewpoint of the Communist Party of Ireland, it is essential to understand and to place the 1916 Rising and the events leading up to it, and in particular the involvement of James Connolly and the Citizen Army, in a wider European and international context and not solely as a uniquely Irish event. One of the factors that influenced Connolly was the continuing slaughter of millions of people in Europe. He was deeply angered, and somewhat demoralised, by the collaboration of the leadership of the workers' movement in Europe with their ruling classes in that mass slaughter. He was also of the belief that the defeat of Britain and a victory for Germany would create better conditions for attaining independence in Ireland.

Connolly and the Relationship between National and Socialist Struggles

It is a creative thinker and astute strategist and leader who understands that all processes and struggles have within them contradictions, that there are seldom clear-cut positions or pure social formations: bosses neatly on one side and workers on the other, ready to engage in battle. Connolly understood that one has to take into consideration and deal with the balance of forces as they are, not as we would wish them to be.

Connolly had taken up a position and developed an understanding of the nature of the war in Europe, and of the class interests for which it was being fought, that was similar to that of Lenin and other revolutionary leaders who opposed the war and advocated turning the war in Europe into a civil war and overthrowing the existing economic, social and political order.

Connolly's participation and that of the Citizen Army in the 1916 Rising reflected his deep understanding of both the links and the differences between socialism and nationalism, and the relationship between the national and socialist struggles, that there is no 'Chinese Wall' between them. In the age of colonialism and imperialism the struggle for national democracy could not be completed without confronting and defeating native capitalism and imperialism. It was imperative that the socialist and working-class movement be at the heart of the national struggle, giving leadership. Connolly drew on the historical experiences and lessons of the long struggle of the Irish people for independence and sovereignty and applied those experiences and lessons to the struggles that were emerging around him, both nationally and internationally.

Connolly understood the role played by social classes in that historic struggle of the Irish people, drawing the only conclusion possible from that experience: that "only the Irish working class remain as the incorruptible inheritors of the fight for freedom in Ireland."[7] It was in their class interests, and only they could bring about a sovereign, independent Ireland; all other classes had interests that could be satisfied by a limited form of independence or by having a subservient relationship with imperialism. History has borne this out.

Connolly understood that social struggles take place in and are shaped by real, concrete material conditions, and that the outcome of the national struggle would be determined by the balance of class forces involved. This would determine which class would be the dominant class in that national struggle and in any new state that emerged from it.

James Connolly, born of Irish parents in Scotland, grew up in a slum populated mainly by Irish emigrants in the Cowgate district of Edinburgh. He would have been well aware of the history of the Irish people as it was passed down by each generation, through songs and stories of the people. He would spend most of his political career within the Irish labour and national movements.

In his early years in the Scottish labour movement Connolly would have been aware of the discussion and divisions within the movement and the views and influence of Big John Maclean. A group of Scottish volunteers, supporters of the Irish Citizen Army, would later come to Dublin to participate in the 1916 Rising.

Connolly came to Ireland at the invitation of the Dublin Socialist Society in 1896 and founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in the same year. He lived and struggled in a country that was a colony with an unresolved national question. In those conditions his ideas were enriched and his knowledge deepened by that experience. He was aware that any socialist strategy must take into account Ireland's colonial status, and the fact that in order to advance the struggle for socialism it needed to place that struggle in an anti-colonial, anti-imperialist setting. As he stated,

> "a Socialist movement must rest upon and draw its inspiration from the historical and actual conditions of the country in which it functions and not merely lose themselves in an abstract 'internationalism' (which has no relation to the real internationalism of the Socialist movement)".[8]

These are lessons and experiences that have yet to be learnt, even today, by many in the workers' movement, not alone in Ireland but elsewhere in Europe. This can be seen in the positions adopted by many who claim to be on the left who ignore the class nature and role of the European Union, including the colonial relationship within the EU between the core and peripheral states. The continued failure to understand the dialectical relationship between the social struggle and the national struggle can leave the defence of national democracy and sovereignty to the radical right and chauvinist forces. Many British socialists, then as now (a phenomenon not confined to the British left but reflected especially in the Irish offshoots of British ultra-left parties, what might be described as contemporary utopian socialists), continue to misunderstand the relationship between socialism and the struggle for national democracy and national sovereignty, juxtaposing them against a spurious internationalism.

If we put this false internationalism in the context of the European Union, the ultra-left and social democrats (of the left and right varieties), and even some communist parties, condemn or reject the struggle for solutions to the people's problems at the national level as being at best redundant or irrelevant, asserting that socialist solutions can be found only at the EU level, and imposed from that level. This is just as anti-democratic and anti-people an approach as that of the

ruling classes throughout Europe.

You cannot have socialism without national democracy and national sovereignty. The defence of national democracy and sovereignty at this historical moment is therefore a central anti-imperialist demand.

Today, some who claim to be on the left still have difficulty understanding Connolly, who they claim lived and struggled as a socialist and internationalist but died in the cause of 'nationalism'. They see a contradiction between Connolly's ideas and his actions where none exists; they fail to understand that the 1916 Rising was a necessary step at that time, that it arose from the material conditions and circumstances of that period, that it was at the same time a revolutionary outbreak to establish a sovereign independent Ireland in which to create the new concrete conditions for opening the road to socialism and an internationalist act in opposition to the imperialist war and the slaughter in Europe and a declaration of solidarity with other oppressed and colonised peoples.

Connolly understood that to break or weaken the imperialist grip in one country would weaken and undermine the whole of the colonialist-imperialist edifice – which in fact did happen: the ripples of freedom released from the first British colony, from the heart of seething Dublin tenements, landed on the shores of distant countries labouring under colonial domination. It renewed and awakened resistance to empires; it contributed in no small way to the beginning of the end of the British empire.

Far from dying in the cause of nationalism, Connolly sought to place the labour movement and socialism at the heart of the national struggle. He understood that this was the way in which it could exercise most influence on the demands and conduct of the struggle and ensure that the interests and demands of labour were recognised and fulfilled. After 1916, however, the leadership of the labour movement chose a different course, standing aside from leadership of the national struggle and only supporting it from the sidelines. This was one of the historic failures of the Irish Labour Party and the labour movement as a whole.

Today, sections of the Irish establishment, liberal academics and pseudo-journalists have been attempting to portray the 1916 Rising as an anti-democratic event, without a democratic mandate from the people (a position equally supported by unionism). This is a strange position, as unionism itself was a minority and only enjoyed minority support in the all-Ireland election of 1909 yet demanded and tried to dictate what the majority of the Irish people could or could not do.

One has to ask: where was the democracy within the empire? Irish workers, both men and women, were denied the right to vote. All political and economic decisions were made in London, in the interests of the empire and not in the interests of the peoples of the colonised nations. The British colonisation of Ireland and later its absorption into the United Kingdom was a fundamental denial of Irish democracy: even the tenets of bourgeois democracy hold that the use of coercion, violence and oppression are incompatible with any kind of democracy.

This is equally true at the present time regarding the European Union. All economic, fiscal and political decisions rest with the institutions of the EU, administered by a technocratic elite in the service of monopoly capitalism, with decisions and social and economic priorities imposed by treaty on the member states, decisions that are determined by the needs of the major core states and the interests of European and global monopoly capitalism, not in the peoples' interests or with their consent.

Some liberal leftists have tried to present the 1916 Rising as some kind of narrow nationalist and even exclusively Catholic affair; but the reality was far different. Connolly drew on the experiences of the international workers' movement, having worked as a trade union organiser both in Ireland and in the United States. His party, the Socialist Party of Ireland, was a member of the Socialist (Second) International. Patrick Pearse had visited Belgium to study bilingualism and was a learned educator and educational theorist. Roger Casement was renowned for his work in exposing the brutality of the European corporations and colonial powers in the 'Belgian' Congo and the Putumayo region of Peru (now part of Colombia), where he is remembered to this day. Major John MacBride had fought against the British army in the Anglo-Boer War; he knew the reality of the concentration camps set up in South Africa as well as the many summary executions carried out to secure the interests of the British empire.

The 1916 Proclamation: A Democratic Challenge

The Proclamation of the Irish Republic encapsulated the most advanced democratic thinking of that time. It asserted "the right of the people of Ireland to the ownership of Ireland, and to the unfettered control of Irish destinies, to be sovereign and indefeasible."[9] When we read this alongside the writings of Connolly and Pearse, it is clear that the vision of 1916 was of a republic in which no private right to property would hold good against the public right or the common good.

Its core principles were independence, sovereignty and democracy. Sovereignty meant that the people of Ireland were to be masters in all matters and to have full control over decisions that affected their lives. Democracy must mean that all the people would share in making these decisions – not a class minority, not a single sex, nor a single religious faith. Independence meant that sovereignty and democracy would rest with and be exercised by and for the people, free from any external domination or coercion.

The 1916 Proclamation went on to declare that an Irish democracy must be inclusive, with the common good being a central principle and duty of government; that an Irish Republic would guarantee civil and religious freedom and equal rights for all its citizens, men and women alike, regardless of religious, cultural, ethnic or other differences.

Contrast this democratic, inclusive vision with what was being offered at that time, and is still being offered today to the mass of working people in Europe, where the priority was and is given to private property rights above the people's rights – or indeed with what unionism offered and delivered to the people of the north-east of Ireland from the very existence of that sectarian entity.

Another feature of the Irish democratic and revolutionary movements that is abundantly clear is that before, during and after 1916 Irish democratic forces established important contacts and relations with similar political forces in India, Egypt and other colonised countries within the British empire.

In 1918 thousands of workers and the poor of Dublin marched through the city to celebrate the Bolshevik Revolution. Working people, both urban and rural, farm labourers and small farmers, were inspired both by the heroism of the men and women of 1916 and by the vision outlined by the Proclamation, which gave expression to their desire for freedom, for a better Ireland in a more just world.

While the revolutionary forces were defeated, and the leaders put to death, that did not break the desire for

independence. The British government thought that, by decapitating the national forces, they would quell the struggle of the Irish people. What the execution of the leadership did was to weaken the radical democratic vision of that leadership, ensuring that the next crop of leaders would lack the vision and the commitment to radically transforming the material and social conditions of the majority of the people. In particular, there was a failure after 1916 to combine the social struggle with the national struggle in the way that Connolly had striven to bring about; and the social and national struggles remain uncompleted to this day. One result of the executions, however, was that they galvanised the resistance throughout the country. 'Home rule' was no longer acceptable: the people wanted to go further.

It is the responsibility of today's generation of radical activists to understand the nature of the events that led up to the 1916 Rising and the Rising itself, to face up honestly to what took place, to understand the complexity and contradictions and to understand the many strands that came together. We need to appreciate the rich tapestry of influences and forces that shaped those times and that continue to shape our lives today.

The physical-force tradition and the political establishment in Dublin have a common approach, but from different positions. Both look at the 1916 Rising as purely a military event. The physical-force tradition has attempted to use the events as a justification for their actions in the decades since the Rising. The establishment agree to have the event commemorated but not understood; nor do they wish to lay bare or to discuss the social forces that emerged, or the social and political conditions in which the Rising took place. Most of all, they fear to speak of or to address the central thrust of the Proclamation of the Irish Republic, that it was essentially a struggle to secure national independence, sovereignty and democracy in order to meet the needs and interests of the people. The Irish establishment have long since abandoned those principles.

In conclusion, we can characterise the period 1913–1923 as a 'revolutionary decade', beginning with the 1913 Dublin Lock-out, which gave birth to the Irish Citizen Army. The same year gave birth to the Irish Volunteers. The 1916 Rising itself, followed by the widespread social and political struggles and social agitations, workers' occupations of factories and creameries, and the establishment of 'workers' soviets' in Co Limerick and Co Waterford in the 1917–18 period, formed part of a continuous historical period that witnessed a number of general strikes, including one against conscription.

The War of Independence, 1918–19, culminated in what we call the War to Defend the Republic, commonly called the Civil War, 1921–22, sealing the victory by the counter-revolutionary forces, supported, aided and armed by the British state. This was a victory of those forces whose economic and political interests, in the main, depended and relied on the continuation of a subservient relationship with the British empire. Their class interests proved stronger than their desire for full national independence.

The victory of the counter-revolution, together with the partitioning of Ireland, secured Britain's strategic interests. It created two weak and dependent economic and political entities, which succeeded in separating the industrial north-east from the mainly agricultural south and reinforcing the direct colonial relationship with the north-east of Ireland, with its industrial base, completely dependent on its economic relationship with Britain itself and with the rest of the empire.

Partition also ensured that the southern state would be bound in a neocolonial relationship with Britain, as it depended on agricultural and small manufacturing exports, primarily to the British imperial market, so cementing subservience and compliance. Britain was acutely aware that the Irish ruling class on its own was not strong enough to withstand the growing social unrest and the growing struggle by the working class. The ruling class in the south also realised that they would continue to need the support of the British state to contain and suppress residual republicanism and a militant labour movement.

Some of the main organisations of the period

Irish Republican Brotherhood, 1858 ('Fenians')
Irish Land League, 1878
Ladies' Land League, 1881
Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884
Conradh na Gaeilge, 1893 (Irish language league)
Irish Trades Union Congress, 1894
Irish Socialist Republican Party, 1896 (founded by James Connolly)
Inghinidhe na hÉireann, 1900 ('daughters of Ireland')
Fianna Éireann, 1902 (republican boy scouts movement, acted as an auxiliary to the Irish Volunteers and participated in the Rising)
National Theatre, 1904 (Abbey Theatre)
Unionist Party, 1905
Sinn Féin, 1905 (played no part in the 1916 Rising)
Irish Women's Franchise League, 1908
Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, 1909
Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party, 1912 (evolved into the present day Labour Party from 1917; played no part in the 1916 Rising or the War of Independence)
Ulster Volunteer Force, 1912
Irish Volunteers, 1913
Irish Citizen Army, 1913
Cumann na mBan, 1914 (women's organisation, associated with the Irish Volunteers)

Notes and References

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Marxism versus Reformism in the 1926 General Strike

by Jack Cohen

Like wars, general strikes cannot be approached in any abstract or generalised way, regarding them as, by definition, a prelude to, or part of, revolution or as being primarily industrial struggles. Each general strike must be treated concretely in the light of the political and economic features which give rise to it.

The 1926 General Strike has, therefore, to be seen firstly in the light of the post-World War I crisis of British capitalism, its weakened position *vis-à-vis* the United States, the continuing slump after a very short-lived boom, involving large-scale unemployment, and the determination of the ruling class to place all the burdens of the crisis on the working class expressed openly in the notorious statement made by the then Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin, in 1925, that "The wages of all workers must come down".

The late Jack Cohen (1906-1982) helped to form the Young Communist League (YCL) in his native Manchester in 1923 and joined the Communist Party in 1924. He worked full time for both the YCL and Communist Party for many years and was in South Wales as YCL organiser during both the General Strike and the 1926 Miners' Lockout. This article first appeared in May 1976, for the 50th anniversary of the General Strike.

THE MINING industry, then under private ownership, became the focal point of the struggle because it was technically backward and unprofitable and its owners determined that, come what may, profits were to be squeezed out of the miners by imposing longer hours and reduced wages. They attacked first in 1921 and again in 1925, when, confronted with the threat of solidarity action by the whole trade union movement, which could have developed into a general strike ('Red Friday'), they were rescued by the government with a nine-months subsidy and with the labour movement held off by the appointment of a Royal Commission on the industry – both of which were used to make preparations for a full-scale attack on the miners and through them on the entire trade union movement.

The second feature which needs to be taken into account was the character of the leadership of the labour and trade union movement, especially its basic outlook. Although the 1914-18 war and the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 had stimulated advances by the left (the rise of the shop stewards' movement and the militant struggles it led; the big increase in trade union membership; the adoption of socialist aims – Clause 4 – in the Labour Party Constitution at its 1918 Conference; and particularly the formation of the Communist Party in August 1920), the dominant positions in the labour movement were held by right-wing leaders of the Thomas-Bevin-Cramp-Clynes-Citrine variety in the trade unions and Henderson and MacDonald in the Labour Party. This, despite the advance of left policies at the Scarborough TUC in 1925 and the winning of seats on the General Council by men who, until the 1926 General Strike, had fought for left-wing policies in the labour movement (Hicks, Purcell). The dominant ideology of these right-wing leaders was class-collaborationist, reformist, acceptance of the social and political status quo and a total devotion to parliamentarism and 'the Constitution' as the sole methods of political advance.

Two Lines in the General Strike

The implications of this situation were to be seen in their attitude to the General Strike, in the character of their leadership of it, and, above all, in the frantic haste with which they betrayed it.

Detailed accounts of the General Strike and Marxist analyses of its outcome are available (see particularly the *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain, Vol 2: The General Strike, 1925-6,* by James Klugmann, on which I have leaned heavily in this section, and *1926: The General Strike,* edited by Jeffrey Skelley, both published by Lawrence & Wishart). Here I want to contrast the two lines of Marxism and reformism in the General Strike itself, reflecting the two opposed lines in the British labour movement which have been in conflict for many decades, especially since the formation of the Communist Party in 1920.

These two opposing lines were contrasted most sharply in all phases of the 1926 General Strike – in the period leading up to it, *ie* from July 1925 to May 1926; during the Nine Days; and during the six months when the miners were left to battle on their own.

From July 1925 to May 1926

During this period the government was busy making its political, administrative and military preparations to crush any attempt by the organised labour movement to repeat the solidarity action of 'Red Friday'. The General Council, however, made no preparations whatsoever although, as the Miners' statement to the January 1927 Conference of Union Executives pointed out:

> "The miners and the other trade unionists stood together in 1925. This position was reaffirmed in February 1926."

This lack of preparation was justified by Citrine, General Secretary of the TUC at the above mentioned Conference:

> "… as far as preparation for a general strike was concerned, the General Council never attempted to do such a thing, and in my opinion they would have failed most lamentably had they attempted anything of the kind."

The reason for this was undoubtedly the hope that the Commission's report would offer the possibility of some sort of compromise which would enable them to settle the dispute and avoid a general strike.

The Communist Party, whilst greeting the victory of 'Red Friday', warned the workers not to rest on their laurels but to understand that

> "… the government, acting on behalf of the capitalist class, is certain to prepare for renewed struggle with the working class under more favourable circumstances than this time, and will endeavour to break the united front of the workers in order to make its attack successful." (*Workers' Weekly*, 7 August 1925).

All through the summer and autumn of 1925 the Communist Party made efforts to push the TUC and the Labour Party into taking action in view of the steps being taken by the government in preparation for a possible general strike.

At the end of August 1925 the National Minority Movement called a Conference of Trade Unionists under the slogan 'Prepare for the Coming Fight' which was attended by 683 delegates representing approximately three quarters of a million workers. This was followed by a consistent campaign in the *Workers' Weekly* to get pressure exerted by the labour movement on the General Council to make preparations to support the miners, and the Party leadership took special steps to mobilise the Party itself in a series of extended executive meetings and district conferences.

The Party gave every support to a special conference called by the Minority Movement on 21 March 1926 attended this time by 883 delegates representing close on one million workers. The conference warned that:

> "reformist elements in the Labour movement will concur with their recommendations (of the Royal Commission on the Mining Industry issued on 6 March 1926 –*JC*) and lose sight of the attacks upon living standards contained in the Report – which the trade unions must fight … therefore prepare at once."

The conference also issued a call for the development of all-embracing Councils of Action, based especially on the trades councils.

But despite all these efforts no real preparations were made by the time the Special Conference of Trade Union Executives met on April 29-30 and voted overwhelmingly to come out in support of the miners, locked out on April 30 by the mine owners who were demanding savage wage cuts, longer hours and district agreements.

How the Strike was Estimated

From the outset the right-wing leaders emphasised repeatedly that they regarded it simply as an industrial struggle and nothing more.

Thus, in the House of Commons debate on 3 May 1926, on the Emergency Regulations which the government had introduced, J H Thomas said that the Trade Union Congress leaders

> "... repudiate immediately and emphatically that this is a challenge to the government, they have issued instructions that anyone who invites or suggests insubordination or mutiny by troops or sailors is to be repudiated, that so far as they are concerned they want to make it an industrial dispute and nothing else."

John Bromley MP (locomotive drivers' leader) argued in the same debate that

> "any suggestion that this dispute is a challenge to constitutionalism or an endeavour to overthrow the government is wrong … the government must govern."

J H Thomas explained:

> "I have never disguised that, in a challenge to the Constitution, God help us, unless the government wins …. This is merely a plain, economic, industrial dispute."

And Ramsay MacDonald *(Socialist Review*, June 1926) wrote:

> "It was no constitutional issue at all. The TUC did not even think of the government as a party to the dispute." !!!

All this emphasises the full and total acceptance of the capitalist state and its institutions by the right-wing leaders as inviolable – 'The government must govern' even against the interests of the entire working class.

The Communist Party, on the other hand, emphasised from the very beginning that the General Strike was no 'ordinary' industrial dispute but a political confrontation of a very high order between the two major classes in British society:

> "The fact that every mass strike is a political strike was clearly revealed in spite of the denials of the General Council. The basic industries were stopped not to coerce the mine owners but to coerce the government. The General Council was objectively decreeing that no food should be transported without its permission, that no person should travel to or from work by the recognised public means. To render these prohibitions effective its local organs had to enter into conflict with the emergency organisations of the government. It had to call upon the workers to be loyal to their unions which was, in effect, to be disloyal to the government which was locked in conflict with those unions. The germs of alternative government were apparent." (From the *Thesis on the General Strik*e adopted at the 8th Congress of the CPGB, quoted in Klugmann, p 221.)

The General Council line that it was simply "a plain, economic, industrial dispute" was not merely a gross deception in view of the massive measures taken by the government to defeat the strike by every possible means, but one of the foundations on which the betrayal of the miners was built and the General Strike betrayed.

Right-wing trade union leaders had, over the years, developed a time-honoured method for settling strikes. These were regarded not as manifestations of class struggle, as conflicts between the opposed interests of hostile classes, but as differences to be settled by negotiations on the basis of a suitable 'formula' which would as far as possible be fair and agreeable to both sides since they both had 'rights'. This would normally be achieved by gentlemanly compromise, each side making concessions – the amount of a wage demand, or in other cases of a wage cut, being usually split down the middle.

This is the method they sought to use in the 1926 General Strike but this time only one side made concessions, total concessions – the General Council.

The Search for a 'Formula'

Immediately after the Conference of Executives of Trade Unions held on 29-30 April 1926 had voted overwhelmingly to come out in support of the miners, the General Council initiated negotiations in search of the traditional 'formula', despite the fact that the whole Conference had just proclaimed its readiness to support the miners in their fight against wage cuts and increases in hours.

The government initially broke off these negotiations, but agreed to 'conversations' about resuming them on 1 May and themselves came up with a 'formula'. This fixed the negotiations within the framework of discussions which

Miners' Leader AjJCook

included wage cuts and longer hours; and tied the General Council to work for them as far as the miners were concerned, since, in return for resumption of negotiations and acceptance of completely vague proposals for the reorganisation of the mining industry made in the Royal Commission's Report, the formula stated

> "… the representatives of the Trade Union Congress are confident that a settlement can be reached on the lines of the Report within a fortnight."

But "the lines of the Report" included proposals for the "adjustment of wages and hours", said to be only "temporary", but equally vague as to when and if they would ever be readjusted. And it was this formula which the TUC negotiating team accepted.

Thus J H Thomas in the House of Commons on 3 May, only a few hours before the strike actually began, said:

> "I say … that at 11 o'clock on Sunday night not a formula but the Prime Minister's own words, in his own writing were in my possession as a means of settling and I accepted it ... perhaps I had better say 'we'! We not only accepted it but we had accepted the responsibility of saying 'never mind what the miners or anyone else say' – we accept it."

And in their report to the Conference of the Executives of Trade Unions held on 25 June 1926, to discuss the outcome of the General Strike, the TUC General Council admitted that the settlement agreed with Sir Herbert Samuel involved wage cuts, longer hours, district agreement and, because the miners would not accept these terms, they called the strike off.

They described the attitude of the miners as "mere negation" and added:

> "Having regard to the impossibility of excluding the wages question from consideration in dealing with the Commission's Report and the enormous responsibility involved in carrying on the Strike, the Council felt that the position was too grave to justify their being tied to a mere slogan." (*ie* "Not a second on the day; not a penny off the pay" –*JC*).

After prolonged discussion with the miners who refused to budge on the wages question, the General Council:

> "unanimously adhered to the decision arrived at, that in the circumstances they were not justified in continuing the sacrifices and risks of the sympathetic strike … the Council accordingly proceeded to advise the unions to terminate the strike ...."

It should be added that before and during the strike the miners' demands were attacked as "dogma", "mere slogans" etc. J H Thomas on May 3 went even further. He advanced arguments expressing deeply felt ideas amongst right-wing trade union leaders about the 'rights' of employers in industrial disputes and in negotiations concerning them as well as about 'fairness' in industrial relations:

> "In 1917 Liverpool railwaymen went on strike to force an advance in wages and South Wales railwaymen went on strike and the companies intimated that they would refuse to negotiate anything with me under threat of the strike. I went down and resigned my position because I said: that is a fair theory for the employers and it is not right for an employer to have a revolver presented at his head .... I do not believe negotiations can be carried out under threats of this kind."

Thomas clearly was in sympathy with the government's and coal owners' view, of the decision of the Trade Union Congress to rally all its forces behind the miners, as a "threat".

This concept of 'fairness' was reflected also in the decision of the General Council that printers working on labour and socialist papers which supported the strike should be brought out along with those on capitalist papers which opposed it.

Pressure on the Miners to Capitulate

Every sort of pressure was brought to bear on the miners' leaders to capitulate. Some were Machiavellian and hypocritical in the extreme, others simply based on lies:

> "Every time we met the government with the General Council we were always asked to agree to a reduction in wages and when the General Council left us we were then again to face a reduction in wages." (A J Cook at the January 1927 Conference of Trade Union Executives)

That was one kind of pressure. Others were more subtle, like the argument of "solidarity". Bevin, for example,

> "appealed to us to go back with them as we came out; that will show a spirit of solidarity unequalled in any other country … Mr Purcell spoke on the same lines …." (Herbert Smith at the same Conference)

J H Thomas at this Conference admitted that he had applied the same ignominious pressure. He had said to the miners:

> "… the better plan will be to save victimisation, to save the aftermath, that you miners should ask us to declare it off. That will give confidence to the rank-and-file and we will go back a united body. *We ask you to ask us to declare it off.*" (my italics –*JC* !!!)

Ben Turner (wool textile workers' leader) combined ingenious double talk with falsehoods. Herbert Smith (in the same speech) reported:

"Mr Ben Turner also appealed to us to return to work with them and save the general strike in the future (my italics – *JC*). He pointed out that from information received … the General Strike was on the 'slippery slope' and that many unions that came out sympathetically … would return in 'driblets' and that would spell disaster."

This latter story, which was quite false, for the absolute contrary was the case, was used again and again, both as means of pressure on the miners and as justification for ending the strike.

The Party in the General Strike

The Communist Party devoted all its energies to making the strike a success. On the eve of the strike a number of members of the Executive Committee were sent out into the districts to participate in the struggle "on the spot", leaving a small working bureau in London to direct affairs.

On May 3, the eve of the strike, the day when Thomas, MacDonald and others were, on their own admission, "grovelling and pleading" with Baldwin to resume negotiations so that a 'formula' could be found to end the strike, the Party produced a *Workers Daily* in 40,000 copies. This contained a Manifesto from the Party calling for solidarity with the miners as the crucial task for the whole working class, warning against attempts to impose wage cuts, longer hours and district agreements on them and counterposing to this the miners' slogan – "Not a penny off the pay – not a second on the day". It also produced centrally a *Workers Bulletin* every day during the strike, the circulation of which rose from its original 5,000 to 20,000.

Alongside analyses of day-to-day developments in the strike and corresponding leads for action, the Party began at a very early stage to include outlines of the more long-term political implications of the strike, as for example in its statement, the *Political Meaning of the General Strike* issued in the Workers Bulletin on May 5, which emphasised as one of the most important developments of the strike that

"the fact of police, soldiers, tanks, EPA (Emergency Powers Act –*Ed*) etc, being paraded before the eyes of the workers was bound to raise before them as a practical question, the problem of the state, without their necessarily grasping all the theoretical implications."

In contrast to the shameful apologetics of the General Council who called off the strike abruptly at the very moment when enthusiasm for it amongst the workers was advancing to its highest level, and who placed the responsibility for having to end it on the alleged intransigence of the miners, the Political Committee issued the following statement to all Party organisations:

(1) The General Council had surrendered at the very moment when the workers were most enthusiastic.

(2) The surrender was a betrayal, not only of the miners, but of all workers.

(3) The left-wingers on the General Council, by their policy of cowardly silence, had left the right-wing with a free hand to pursue their active policy of treachery.

(4) The workers must step in where leaders fail.

(5) The slogans should be: Refuse to Resume Work; Repudiate the Samuel Memorandum; Keep the Councils of Action and Strike Committees in Being.

(6) The miners should appeal direct to their fellow workers over the heads of the false leaders.

The devoted work of the Communist Party and all its members during the General Strike is illustrated by the fact that over a thousand of its members were arrested on various charges connected with the strike. This amounted to approximately one fifth of the total membership at the time.

Attitudes to the General Strike as a Weapon of Struggle

The general strike topic was the object of much discussion and controversy in the international labour movement long before 1926, during the course of which right-wing, ultra-left and Marxist attitudes to it began to crystallise.

For Bakunin and the anarchists and syndicalists in the latter part of the nineteenth century, the general strike was linked directly with revolution. Rosa Luxemburg, influenced by the experiences of the 1905 Revolution in Russia, initiated a discussion in the German labour and socialist movement on the "political mass strike" which, she argued, must be accepted as a form of struggle which would accompany the fight for socialism.

Ferocious opposition to the idea of the general strike came from the right-wing leaders of the German trade unions meeting in congress at Cologne in 1905. These declared that the workers and their families would be the first to suffer; they would starve, the employers would reply with lockouts and wage cuts and that general strikes were "general nonsense".

As early as 1912, when syndicalist ideas were spreading in Britain, Ramsay MacDonald in a pamphlet entitled *Syndicalism* repeated many of these ideas, declaring that the general strike was

"purely speculative and dominated by the idea of revolution. ... It empties markets, it stifles consumption throughout the community ... it hits the poor people hardest ... the class that must surrender first is the poor ...."

In many articles and speeches, and especially at the 25 June 1926 and 20 January 1927 Conferences of Union Executives, which were called by the TUC to discuss the General Strike, right-wing leaders revealed their real attitudes to the General Strike as a weapon of struggle, and sought to justify their calling it off as a consequence.

Ramsay MacDonald, in the House of Commons debate on May 3, said:

"All my life I have been opposed to the sympathetic strike. It has no practical value, it has only one certain result – *a bitter and blinding reaction.*" (my italics –*JC*)

Again, in the *Socialist Review* of June 1926 he wrote:

"Everybody who knows the facts must come to one conclusion … the general strike is a weapon that cannot be wielded for industrial purposes. It is clumsy and ineffectual. It has no goal which when reached can be regarded as victory. If fought to a finish as a strike it would ruin the trade unions and the *government in the meantime would create a revolution* …. (my italics –*JC*) So today some critics blame the General Council, some blame the miners. The real blame is with the General Strike itself and those who preached it ... it was not (because of its nature it could not be) a help to the miners …."

In the July issue of the same journal he added:

"For the purpose of helping the miners the strike could not be more successful than it was unless the leaders were willing to lead it over the borders of revolution and this they rightly refused to do."

C T Cramp (Railwaymens' leader) said at the 1927 Conference:

"I submit that ... we cannot have a General Strike without hitting your own people first, and trying to carry it out to its logical conclusion means that you get absolutely nowhere."

J T Brownlie (Engineers' leader) said at the same Conference:

"I am not in favour of a General Strike in trade union matters. I recognised that a General Strike on behalf of the miners or anyone else was doomed to fail from the very beginning."

Strangely, Otto Bauer, the leader of the 'Austro-Marxists', wrote in almost exactly the same tone but giving it a 'Marxist' gloss, in the *Arbeiterzeitung*, the daily paper of the Austrian Social Democrats, on 16 May 1926:

"The Communists and their supporters have been quick with their verdict [that] 'The leaders betrayed the strike' … the world would have been a paradise long ago 'if the leaders' had not been weaklings, cowards, traitors. Such views stem from a bourgeois idealist conception of history, while Marxism seeks the objective causes which, in this case, could only lead to this result …. The General Strike was hopeless from the very beginning .... It is much better to avoid a struggle the prospects of which are most unfavourable than to go toward to certain defeat."

The Two Lines on the Miners' Strike

As the result of the ending of the General Strike on May 13, the miners were left to battle on alone, and this they did for the best part of six months until November, when, as the result largely of hunger and their growing sense of being abandoned by the labour movement, they were driven back to work.

During the whole of this period the Party campaigned with all its forces to assist the miners by winning the labour movement for the policy of an embargo on the movement of foreign coal into this country and for a financial levy on other unions whose members had gone back to work. The carrying out of these two slogans was vital for any hope of victory for the miners. The free movement of coal imported from abroad into this country enabled the government to sit out the strike and wait for the miners to be driven back. The absence of a levy increased the difficulties of maintaining the strike and for providing sufficient food for the miners and their families.

The right-wing trade union leaders opposed both propositions – the embargo on the grounds that it would in practice mean the resumption of the General Strike, and the levy because they stated that their funds needed to be used to assist their own unemployed and victimised members. The Labour Party Conference in September 1926 discussed an Executive resolution which did not even mention the General Strike nor the need for a levy or embargo but concentrated primarily on proposals to reorganise the mining industry. As David Kirkwood, in moving a resolution from the floor for a levy and the embargo, said:

"Was there anything in the resolution that would lead anyone to believe that the mining crisis was still in existence …? The miners were faced with starvation and yet this resolution did not say one solitary word that the great labour movement of Britain was coming to their rescue."

The resolution on the embargo and levy was, however, rejected.

Some Problems

The whole question of the efficacy of a general strike, of the unacceptable level of suffering it would cause the workers and their families, of its relation to revolution and especially to what MacDonald in the above quotation called an inevitable "blinding reaction", brought confusion and some ambivalence in the minds of some British radicals and socialists about the calling off of the strike, even though they had supported it at the beginning.

Thus Bertrand Russell in the *New Leader* (the then paper of the Independent Labour Party) of 21 May 1926, wrote:

"…. the case in favour of the TUC is the pacifist case. If the strike had continued the country would have been faced with starvation …. There would have been riots and bloodshed. To this there would have been no answer but physical force.
[It is] therefore clear that a fight to a finish … would have meant the complete ruin of the nation. Every humane person who perceived this desired a settlement. The TUC … being less indifferent to humanity than the government, came to prefer a settlement to victory."

He recognised that this approach meant that

"power must always remain in the hands of the wickedest people"

and that if this is to be avoided

"those who desire a better world are willing to resort to force in spite of the harm it may do for the time being."

H N Brailsford, then editor of the *New Leader*, wrote in the same issue:

"Much more serious was the failure to think out whether the General Strike is an appropriate weapon unless one intends in the event of success to attempt revolutionary action."

A number of confused and defeatist ideas run through all these statements. They can be summed up as stating that the mobilisation of all the forces of the working class in a General Strike in defence of the wages and working conditions of one section can never succeed, for the working class will suffer most, the struggle will lead to revolution which will only stimulate a "blinding reaction" on the part of the capitalists. The logical implications of this approach are, in effect, that each section of the working class must defend its interests alone.

True, on occasion, such separate struggles may be successful but in a period of crisis, as in 1926 and as is much

more the case today, they *cannot do so* as the heroic six-month struggle of the miners in 1926 proved. In the last analysis these statements are an argument for refusing to fight capitalist attacks because workers would suffer most. Further, this idea that the capitalists are all-powerful and that the workers can never defeat them means in the last analysis that the struggle for socialism is hopeless. The fact of the matter is that the struggle to end capitalism and establish socialism does involve sacrifice, *but the continued existence of capitalism involves even more*. Those who declare that reformist socialism, the socialism of right-wing labour leaders. offers a painless if slow road to socialism have been proved wrong. The world situation today (*ie* in 1976 –*Ed)*, the changed relation of class forces, however, makes possible an infinitely less painful advance to socialism than was possible for the Russian people in 1917.

The short answer to all the above quoted statements, however, is that in 1926 the struggle need not have resulted either in riots, bloodshed or hunger or in the defeat of the General Strike and consequently of the miners. The forces of the working class were increasing every day and there is every reason to believe that, had the strike been continued and extended, better terms for the miners could have been secured and wholesale victimisation prevented.

True, the state power was in the hands of the ruling class. True, likewise, that there were ultra-diehard elements in the government (Joynson-Hicks, Churchill) who were trying to smash the trade unions once and for all. But there was a very great risk in any attempt to try and impose a military solution by the shooting of workers, especially as the majority of the soldiers came from working class families.

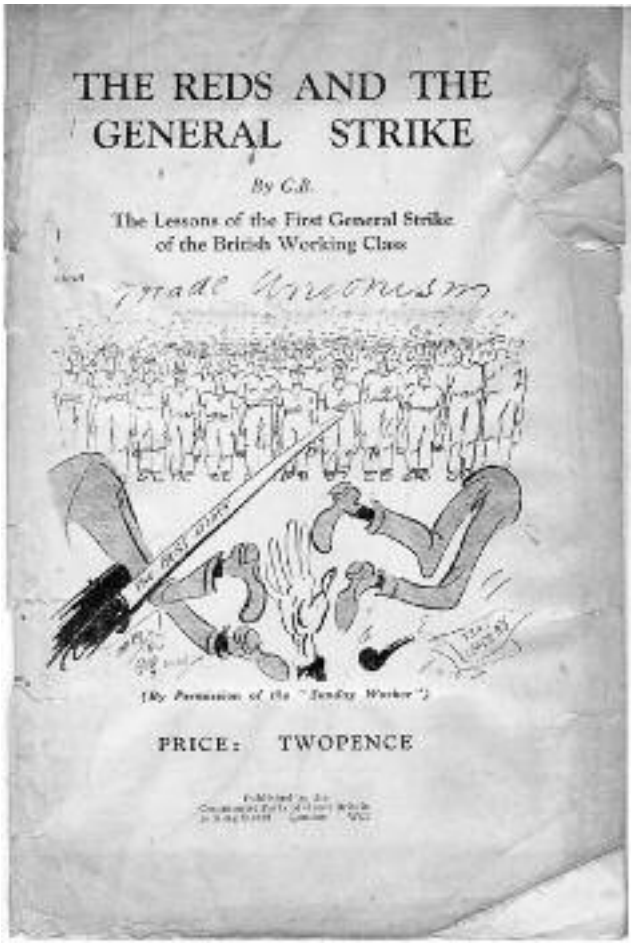
History shows that general strikes exhibit great variety in their aims and causes. Some are directly linked with a wide-ranging revolutionary process. Other general strikes have been inspired by the desire to improve wages and working conditions.

In 1926 in Britain the General Strike was not linked with any revolutionary mass struggle to overthrow the government and change the social order. It was a massive class confrontation, a struggle both of solidarity with the miners and in defence of the wages and living conditions of all workers, in the course of which the authority and the policy of the government were challenged. But though some of the strike committees and Councils of Action developed "the germs of alternative government", the subjective forces for advancing the struggle to the level of revolution did not exist. In this situation efforts by the government to crush the strike by armed force would have seriously weakened its position amongst wide sections of the British people. This they realised and, while involving the armed forces on a big scale, especially in London, on convoy duties, they were careful not to begin the "bloodshed" and relied mainly on the police. Thus there is every reason to believe that, given the correct class leadership, the General Strike could have succeeded without all the dire consequences mentioned in the statements quoted above.

Lessons of the General Strike

Although 50 years have passed (at the time this article was written –*Ed*), sections of the *Thesis on the General Strike*, adopted by the 8th Congress of our Party on 16/17 October 1926, bear repeating:

"The impulse behind the capitalist offensive is the fact of



capitalist decline which continues to make itself felt. Future mass strikes are inevitable if the workers desire to defend their standards ….

The principal lesson of the General Strike was that the class struggle has entered a new phase in which the efforts of the working class to defend itself must bring the working class movement into even sharper conflict with the capitalist class ….

The carrying out of these tasks must go hand in hand with the replacement of the existing leadership of the labour movement. A new leadership must break entirely with the right-wing policy and stand for a complete left-wing policy.... The new situation will raise in an acute form the question of the struggles of the labour movement against the capitalist state, for the socialist reconstruction of society … .

The victory of the British workers is bound up with the development of a strong Communist Party."

The situation is different and much more favourable for us today. (Editorial note – while the general sentiments in these last paragraphs remain correct, not all of the assessments are currently valid). The hold of the right wing on the labour movement, though still strong, is much weaker than it was in 1926. The trade unions are much more powerful and numerically strong and the influence of the left-wing and communist militants in them much greater. The Communist Party itself is much stronger and more experienced with a record and prestige in the labour movement much higher than it was in 1926.

The cardinal tasks of the day are to develop the unity of all the forces of the left, to undertake a great offensive on the hold of capitalist and right-wing ideas over still large sections

of the working class and to greatly strengthen the Communist Party, the Young Communist League and the circulation of the *Morning Star*.

In short, the major task is to strengthen the labour movement for the great battles ahead by working to supplement the deep sense of class solidarity, the dogged determination to struggle against attacks on wages and living standards, by increased political consciousness, a deeper understanding of the need to take part in the struggle to end capitalism and establish socialism.

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State monopoly capitalism

Chapter 2 The history of SMC theory

'The theory of monopolies, the theory of the state and questions of the relationship between the state and the monopolies stand at the centre of the argument with critics of SMC theory'

by Gretchen Binus, Beate Landefeld and Andreas Wehr

2.1 Elaboration of SMC Theory

The development of a comprehensive framework for SMC theory began at the end of the 1950s. Its impulse was the analysis of the unexpectedly rapid capitalist development after the Second World War, in contrast with the earlier predictions of a rapid decline. Marxist researchers saw in that *a caesura*, or decisive break, which they explained in terms of a general transition to state monopoly capitalism, since it displayed novel, but also stable, ways in which the state interacted with the economy, acting to accelerate capitalist development. Consequently, the question also arose of the ability of the capitalist system to adapt itself, and of the mechanisms for that. Scholars in various institutions in a number of European countries therefore started to research state monopoly capitalism. Much has been written about it – in monographs, brochures and articles – in efforts to grasp it in its entirety, development and individual crucial points.

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In the DDR, from the 1960s, there was a wide basis for scientific research and theoretical development in this area. Detailed investigations of the state monopoly development process took place at the Central Institute for Economic Sciences of the German Academy of Sciences (DAW), the Academy for Social Sciences of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) and the Institute for International Politics and Economy (IPW) of the Humboldt University in Berlin, as well in as other universities. A few of the outcomes will be briefly presented here.

In 1960 Fred Oelßner,[44] starting from the social role of monopoly, and debating with bourgeois monopoly theory, investigated the relationship of monopoly and the state. He dealt with the historical development of state legislation regarding monopolies and described the distinctive features of state monopoly capitalism and its functional mechanisms. Oelßner considered the creation of a state monopoly market, with secure profit guarantees, as one of the most important practices.

From the beginning of the 1960s, questions of state monopoly development were also widely discussed at the Institute for Social Sciences at the Central Committee of the SED, under the leadership of Otto Reinhold. Their findings were published as the monograph *Imperialismus Heute (Imperialism Today)*.[45]

Particularly worthy of note are studies at the DAW, under the aegis of Jürgen Kuczynski,[46] on the state-monopoly development of German imperialism. These led to a 3-volume publication by Helga Nussbaum, Dieter Baudis, Lotte Zumpe and Manfred Nussbaum, on the economic history of state monopoly capitalism in Germany from the end of the 19th century up to 1945.[47] Using historical and chronological methodology, and in empirical and theoretical analyses covering a long time-period, the researchers compared the interrelationship of monopolies and the state. They described state monopoly capitalism as a characteristic feature of monopoly-capitalist development, which "is expressed in the fusion of economic and state-political power positions functionally, institutionally and in the property structure."

This 'process of penetration' has not come to an end. With the growth of monopoly, 'cooperation' between the state and the monopolies develops. At the same time, volatile or step-by-step intensification of the development of relations between the state and the monopolies has been detected, as for example after the Great Crash of 1929 or after the Second World War. These had a particular character. Thus, from the start of the Great Crash up to the end of the Second World War, an "extremely intensive intertwining of the state and the monopolies" could be identified as the *fascist* form of state monopoly capitalism. It existed in the close connection between monopoly capital, the Nazi party and the fascist state – linked with the terrorist suppression of all anti-fascist forces, the smashing of working class organisations, the universal introduction of the 'Führer principle', the plundering of the occupied countries in the war as well as the forced labour of millions of foreign citizens in the armaments industry.[48]

One of the most important writings on SMC was the book *Zur Theorie des staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus (On the Theory of State Monopoly Capitalism)*.[49] Using empirically grounded analyses of selected economic areas, Rudi Gündel, Horst Heininger, Peter Hess and Kurt Zieschang investigated state monopoly capitalism with an emphasis on its economic side. They came to the conclusion that the new in capitalism exists in the establishment of state monopoly conditions, in the intervention of the state power apparatus on behalf of the monopolisation of capitalist economic relations, and that this state monopolisation affects the whole functioning of the present-day capitalist system.

The authors concretely demonstrated that point with regard to the role of the state and its budget. They showed that the state finances serve not only for securing a "pure state need" but also for "private" mobilisation and investment of capital, and thus for the whole expanded reproduction of capital.

However a prime role falls to the field of armaments, principally with the origin and development of state monopoly capitalism and its regulation mechanism. It has become an inseparable component of this system in all highly developed countries. The roots for this lie economically in the rapid advance of productive forces, research and development as well as in the resulting increasing demands on labour processes in the whole economy. This makes the militarisation of the economy an important sphere of capital investment for the monopolies of many branches of industry. That includes a close interconnection with the big banks and the government, since the role and extent of armaments production is directly determined by the policies of the state and its military objectives:

> "Armaments and war are therefore determined as no other area by the reciprocal relationship of the *economy* and *politics*."[50]

After the 1960s, with new features of capitalism, the concrete subjects of research enquiry also changed. Given the cyclical and structural processes of crisis, studies of the regulation mechanism and its instruments moved to the fore. The problems of raw materials and energy, environmental issues and the exchange rate crisis directed the research into questions of the modification of state monopoly capitalism – with the conclusion that, under state monopoly regulation, one should understand not just the regulation activity of the imperialist state, but generally the total mechanism for production and for ensuring proportionality in the economy.[51] At the same time the dynamic rise of globalisation gave an

impetus to intensive investigations of international trends and forms of state monopoly development.

In this connection the monograph *Internationaler Kapitalismus (International Capitalism)*[52] was an important building stone for further development of the theory. Its main content concerns: the multiple interconnections of monopolies and state activities at the international level; the increasing interaction and mutual dependence of national economies; and the role of interstate economic associations and organisations of the capitalist world system. However, this does not mean that the national state monopoly systems thereby disappear or are merged into a 'common' international state monopoly capitalism. The national basis of the international interconnection persists. In its economic strategy, every individual state must rather and ever more strongly take into consideration the international economic and political connections.

In this monograph the thesis is put forward that the internationalisation of capital has obtained a stable irreversible foundation through the whole process of the international division of labour. This is demonstrated in:

- the cross-border specialisation of component production;
- the rise of international production complexes;
- the consequent expansion of inter-industrial trade;
- the international division of labour for research and development, and in the field of information; and in
- the growth of a complex network of capital connections.

For the biggest monopolies, transnational expansion has thereby become a prime element of their strategies. With deeply structured international production complexes, they organise intra-group division of labour and their own sphere of circulation, with corresponding institutions for trade and credit. In the context of this internationalisation the new foundations of international finance capital, especially the establishment of independent international institutions and bodies, stand as part-elements of the international finance capitalist interrelation – without the dissolution of national forms of organisation. The rivalries between states and monopolies are in no way weakened with this trend. On the contrary, a permanent instability of cohesiveness is created by the continuing autonomy of national interests. It is expressed at the same time in continuous displacements of economic power relations and of their political consequences in the struggle for the redivision of markets.

Federal Republic of Germany (BRD)

In the BRD, Marxist research into state monopoly capitalism was primarily concentrated in the Institute for Marxist Studies and Research (IMSF) at Frankfurt am Main, as well as in research groups at the universities of Bremen and Marburg. From the middle of the 1960s, 'state monopoly capitalism' was no longer just regarded as a category of scientific analysis, but rather had also become a concept of political debate. With the publication of their manuscript, *Die Theorie des staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus und ihre Kritiker (The Theory of State Monopoly Capitalism and its Critics)*, Heinz Jung and Josef Schleifstein accounted for it and introduced the abbreviation 'SMK'.[53] They emphasised that there is no standstill in the development of the reality of capitalist society. Rather, the basic connections of the system are expressed in the new phenomena. The theory of SMC could hence be considered as a guide to the analysis of present-day capitalism. In the first place, it has

> "answers to give to the problems of the class struggle and of the debate with present-day capitalism. In this sense it is oriented towards practice and draws the main impulse of its development from practice."[54]

The theory of monopolies, the theory of the state and questions of the relationship between the state and the monopolies stand at the centre of the argument with critics of SMC theory. Jung and Schleifstein start out from the point that it is not simply a matter of 'state departments', but rather involves the characterisation of the core structure of modern-day capitalism. And that refers to questions about: the character and extent of the economic function of the state and of its economic-political regulation mechanism; the impact of class relations and the class struggle on the functioning and political measures of the state; the significance of social politics and illusions of a 'social state', democracy and its class content; and finally also the question of an anti-monopoly strategy.[55]

This research area was underpinned by a large number of detailed investigations. Particularly worthy of note here is the very comprehensive IMSF publication *Der Staat im staatsmonopolistischen Kapitalismus der Bundesrepublik (The State in State-Monopoly Capitalism of the Federal Republic)*, in two volumes, each of around 1000 pages.[56] Volume 1 deals with state issues in connection with contemporary analyses of capitalism, while Volume 2 works up a wealth of empirical analyses and facts from the reality of the BRD. A large number of the authors – including Jörg Huffschmid, Christoph Butterwege and Frank Deppe – pursued the question of the structures and areas in which the relationship of the state and the economy with respect to the monopolies is realised, what trends are shown by the relative independence of the bourgeois state in SMC, and what role the state plays in class relations.

Starting from the materialist theory of the state of the rising bourgeoisie, as well as from the Marxist theory of the state, important contemporary streams of this theme – such as those of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser and Nicos Poulantzas – are presented; and reformist conceptions – such as those of Jürgen Habermas and Claus Offe – are subjected to criticism. However, fundamental problems of the state in the SMC of the BRD form the core of the investigation. In the context of its basic structure, such sub-areas as state type and state forms in SMC, the mechanism of interconnection of the state and finance capital, and bureaucracy and self-administration are explored in detail; and theoretical insights on the shaping of the relationship of the economy and politics are derived from the crucial driving forces of the economic activities of the state, such as infrastucture, class struggle, armaments and militarisation, as well as internationalisation. We pick out, as an exemplar, just one issue here – the *thesis of interconnection* as a central component of SMC theory:

> "It concerns particularly the relations between state and non-state elements of the political superstructure of modern-day capitalism. The central relationship is thereby constituted by the connections between the monopolies, and their organisations, and the state machineries. The monopolist-controlled employer associations are a concrete point of connection. The state-monopoly intertwining is on the one hand an expression of a high degree of socialisation, but on the other hand its contents and forms are deformed in a state monopoly manner."[57]

In the time of the old Federal Republic a Marxist tendency in German social democracy was also concerned with state monopoly capitalism – often seen with the abbreviation "Stamokap". Particularly among the Young Socialists (Jusos), the Socialist University Union (SHB) and the Socialist Youth of Germany – The Falcons (SJD Die Falken), it became a battle cry of the inner-party debate. In 1980 the *Herforder Thesen (Herford Theses)*[58] emerged from a discussion over many years inside the Jusos as well as among members of the party's left wing. These 80 theses aimed at the establishment of an independent Marxist strategy; and in the first 10, where there is an exposition of fundamental crisis factors of modern capitalism, specific reference is made to the "intensive interweaving of the state and private monopolies, which is nonetheless not free of contradiction". The description of capitalism as "state monopoly capitalism" is characterised as correct, because this raises awareness about the decisive economic development trends – the "dominating role of the national and multinational monopoly businesses and the enormously increased economic significance of the state for the maintenance of production".[59] These theses were an important contribution to Stamokap theory, which at this time became an accepted basis for the antimonopoly struggle of a relatively wide social movement.

Soviet Union

The large number of works of scholars in the Soviet Union was of eminent significance for the establishment of the theory of SMC. Essential insights on the theoretical structure were contributed by the Institute of World Economics and International Relations (IMEMO) at the Moscow Academy of Sciences, and economists at Leningrad University.

The IMEMO researchers investigated state monopoly development in individual highly developed capitalist countries as well as quite specific processes, trends and structures of national and international state monopoly development. Here, reference can be made to only a few articles.

In her studies on the development of state monopoly capitalism, E L Khmel'nitskaya particularly showed an interest in the forms of state monopoly development.[60] She considered that all are effective means towards the strengthening of the monopolies, the raising of their importance in the economy and the reinforcement of their political domination. State monopoly measures strengthen the monopolies with respect to non-monopolised businesses, and protect the monopolies from risks, in that they shift them to the burden of the state. In particular, in her empirical studies on the interrelation of private and state monopolies, she pursued such phenomena as nationalisation and state property, monopoly price and forward planning as well as the tendency towards setting targets in the capitalist economy.

The analysis of Ya Pevsner particularly addressed the particularities of SMC in Japan.[61] He considered the basic contradictions which arose with the rapid economic development of Japan, and the attempts to resolve them on the basis of the connection between competition and state regulation. Starting from the historical peculiarities of the development of SMC in Japan, and in comparison with the USA and Western Europe, he investigated problems of growth, the relation of capital and the state apparatus, and state monopoly price fixing, and demonstrated the role of the state in external economic relations, for planning and programme development. Japan – a country with a stable tradition of *etatism* – serves as an influential factor in the state monopoly capitalism of this period.

Scholars at the Leningrad State University, under the leadership of S I Tulpanov, held an exposed position in Marxist researches on capitalism. In the 1970s a research group under A A Dyomin dealt with a particular form and structure of the interrelation of state and monopolies – state monopoly complexes. These were described as

> "the most important structures of the modern state monopoly system, the specific form of its concentration, centralisation and functioning, the form of combination of the monopolies into a single mechanism with the state machine and its corresponding subdivisions."[62]

The unification of the power of monopolies with the power of the state was claimed to reach its highest degree here. The essential feature of this complex is that the active participation of state capital is a necessary condition of its functioning.

The 'complex' concept primarily referred to the military-industrial complex. In addition the atomic, aerospace, research and development and agro-industrial complexes were subjected to analysis. The essence of the military-industrial complex was seen in the fact that, in imperialism with its own militarism, particular military-state monopoly partnerships, structures and groups develop, which are characterised by an ultra-reactionary, aggressive alliance of the monopolist core of the armaments industry with the military leadership of the state apparatus. This assertion led to a perception, valid up to the present-day:

> "To the extent that the military-industrial complex grows, it becomes an independent power, which generates powerful additional impulses towards the strengthening of militarism and the arms race. And such an impulse can become a fateful stream of drops, which in a world full of tension and nuclear weapons brings the beaker to the point of overflowing."[63]

France

In France, due to increasing social conflict, there developed a particular interest in elucidating new questions on the development of capitalism. An expression of this was the 1971 work *Traité marxiste d'économie politique: Le capitalisme monopoliste d'État (Marxist Treatise of Political Economy: State monopoly capitalism)*[64] by a large group of authors from the central committee of the French Communist Party and the journal *Économie et Politique*, under the leadership of the economist Paul Boccara. Starting from the tendency towards both a falling rate of profit, and over-accumulation, the authors dealt with the role of the state for monopolist capital utilisation, and problems of a democratic nationalisation. They pointed to the growing concentration of monopoly capital and the strengthening of the role of the state as the two leading questions, since they profoundly change the class relations, sharpen the exploitation of the working class, widen the field of exploitation and strengthen monopoly capital's domination over all intermediate social layers.

In historical terms, the authors assign state monopoly capitalism to monopoly capitalism or imperialism. Its traits – monopoly, the development of finance capital and the systematically operated export of capital – express the contradiction between the growth in the social character of the productive forces and the exploitation of the working masses,

as well as the plundering of the intermediate layers, as the outcome of the actions of an ever-decreasing number of capitalist monopolies.[65] Altogether, state monopoly capitalism appears as an organic totality. It encompasses not only economic and social elements, but also political, ideological, military and other aspects. In this sense SMC presents "a particular phase inside the stage of imperialism". In this phase the role of the state becomes more important. This corresponds to an objective need of the major monopoly groups, and therefore is inherently in their interest. However, there is no fusion or division between monopoly and the state. It is much more a matter of close interrelationships which are directed towards a common objective – increasing the accumulation of capital and securing monopoly profit, perpetuating the private ownership of the most important means of production and maintaining the domination of society by the monopoly bourgeoisie.

In their analysis, the French authors start from the concrete national relationships of their country. As a result, planning and nationalisations occupy an important place as particular forms of state monopoly. In its specifics *planification* was developed in France as a long-term macroeconomically institutionalised framework planning in connection with public ownership. It was regarded as the solution to the overcoming of social contradictions and was at the same time, as part of the overall state instruments, oriented towards the maintenance of private profit, and towards strengthened capitalist accumulation and the development of the monopolist structure of the French economy at the expense of the population. In the authors' opinion, the installation of a national plan in France presented a special feature in defining the general interests of monopoly capital in a particular phase of the class struggle.

Looking back, the decades of intensive research work on state monopoly capitalism present a significant further development in the Marxist theory of capitalism. The SMC theory was not out to explain the whole of capitalist society, but rather to pronounce on the relationship between the state and monopoly as the decisive instrument in the capitalist functional mechanism. With extensive factually-based analyses, the theory pointed to new structures and scopes for the development of capitalism, and continued the thesis of the adaptation of capitalist production relations to the social stage of development of the productive forces and to changed conditions of existence. SMC theory thereby presented a concept, which adheres to a specific historical continuity of capitalist development and which at the same time seeks to offer an explanatory approach for the transition to individual phases of development. Furthermore, one may conclude from its findings that state monopoly capitalism can be described as a *significant and growing form of existence of monopoly capitalism*. In no way does it present a separate phase of developed capitalism, and it is also currently not limited, as long as capitalism can adequately utilise its capacity for adaptation to new challenges via a mechanism closely linking the state and the monopolies.

2.2 Disappearance of SMC theory

Research in SMC theory was almost completely broken off with the social upheaval arising from the downfall of 'real socialism'. And, up to the present day, there has been no resumption in the overall theoretical work in this area of the critique of capitalism. On the other hand, however, there have since 1989/90 been frequent discussions of "shortcomings" in the Marxist analysis of capitalism, in order to cope with new challenges in the analysis of the system. Thus Heinz Jung wrote in 1991:

> "The Marxist analysis of post-socialist capitalism, in its domestic and international dimensions, stands in a tradition and continuity, which is not to be disavowed, but rather made productive. It has of course also to overcome the shortcomings and constrictions, which had become obvious with the old socialism. That goes at least for that direction, which was connected with the communist movement, and which grasped the developed capitalism of our era as state monopoly capitalism (SMC) and its international system as imperialism."[66]

More than two decades on, a few shortcomings of SMC theory, which were named as impacted by the lost 'real socialism', remain informative:

First, the question of the division of history. This starts with an aspect of SMC theory which arises from the relationship to Lenin's theory of imperialism and the theory of the general crisis of capitalism. It involves the interpretation of the historical place of capitalism, the characterisation of imperialism as its highest and final stage and hence, as a result, the direct transition to socialism. Consequently, the development of state monopoly capitalism was frequently interpreted, in the main, from the perspective of the influence of socialism as an alternative system, with an almost compulsory formation of stages and phases, and therefore as a 'direct preliminary stage to socialism' or as a historic level of development in the 'end-time' of capitalism. The working out of the systemic contradiction was mostly omitted. That shifted the view towards real development trends of socialism as well as of capitalism.

Secondly, the underestimation of capitalism's potential for development. The topic of scientific-technical development, of the scientific-technical revolution with its rapid bouts of development, was not addressed. There was insufficient consideration given towards the creation of conditions for the application and enlargement of the productive forces. In this context especially, the impact of the strengthened international monopoly competition on the development of new areas of capitalisation in society, and thereby also on new possibilities for making profit, was underestimated. In addition, the possibilities for development, going beyond the area of the economy, particularly those of political and social relations, and the tracing of the possibilities for state monopoly adaptation in the political and social sphere, attracted scarcely any interest.

Thirdly, the problem of nationalisation. Here, we are not concerned with state property as a flexibly applicable instrument of state monopoly regulation, but rather of its absolute supremacy as the main aim of the Marxist policy of socialisation. Because state property can be influenced by political pressure, in the interests both of businesses and the population, it came to be considered as the highest form of socialisation. The complex problematic nature of the interplay of various forms of socialisation with scientific-technological progress and an increasingly differentiated property ownership in developed capitalism was, like the existence of large sectors of small and medium-sized enterprises, left out of theoretical consideration.

Nevertheless it remains the merit of the SMC conception that it defined the interrelation of the economy and politics by

the interaction of monopolies and the state as a necessary capitalist expression of socialisation and the nucleus of the current capitalist regulation mechanism.

The above-mentioned deficits in the theory are not the only reasons for its current disappearance. There are other explanations:

- Firstly, there was the shock, triggered by the unexpected defeat of socialism, which no longer allowed researchers opportunely to make a critical analysis of capitalism and a theoretical generalisation. The background to this was shaped by a material-ideological component which was clearly recognisable at the end of the conflict of social systems. It consisted in the fact that capitalist consumerism, on the basis of the effective functional capability of developed capitalism, proved itself as superior against the socialist mode of production and consumption, and brought about the turning of a large part of the population against real existing socialism. The often portrayed picture of the crisis-proneness of declining capitalism faded against the fascination of an anticipated wide satisfaction of needs. Due to the heated ideological situation, the operation of finance capital and of its political and anti-socialist mechanism of domination, including its new expansionist targets, remained left out and was scarcely still communicable.
- Added to this – and that concerned particularly the research on capitalism in the DDR – was the fact that the annexation of the DDR to the social order in the BRD led to a rigorous destruction of scientific potential and research institutions. The 'processing' or 'transition' of researchers into a newly structured research landscape was a primarily matter of political and moral discrimination, because of their services in the DDR, as well as the seizure of positions by the Federal German competition. In the universities alone in the DDR, more than 60% of the staff were dismissed. According to information from the historian Mitchell Ash, downsizing and redundancies in the period 1989-1994 were significantly more comprehensive than with the regime changes of 1933 and 1945, taken together.[67] The closure of entire institutions was carried out, particularly of disciplines close to politics – philosophy, history, law, economics. In 1991 the institutes of the Academy of Sciences were completely disbanded. This was also the fate of the almost 500-strong Institute for International Politics and Economy (IPW), which was oriented exclusively towards the study of capitalist development and the capitalist world economy.
- The situation after the end of the confrontation of social systems was further characterised by the fact that many scholars, with the justification of a hitherto practised dogmatisation of Marxism, or the reproach of the 'straitjacket of Marxist-Leninist thought construction', completely turned their back on Marxism-Leninism, adapted themselves to the political spirit of the time or – if they were not doomed to long-term unemployment – devoted themselves to new areas of activity. That became a general aspect of the restoration of bourgeois capitalist society in all the former socialist countries.
- In the Western European states, until that time, either an apologetic or a euphoric view of the development of real socialism had often prevailed. After the collapse of socialism the question was raised, to what extent should one, given the profound uncertainty, link the still necessary critique of capitalism with social alternatives, especially as the fixed point of the opposition of systems was no longer there. The theory of SMC, with its accompanying options for action, was therefore no longer on the agenda. It was explained by a few people as 'burned out' or too 'orthodox', and the concept of Stamokap or SMC disappeared from left-wing publicity. The adherence to such terms is however not necessarily wrong, if the social relations and functioning mechanism of capitalism can thereby be explained. In fact, as a result of the changed socio-political situation, people oriented themselves mostly to new and often superficially interpreted aspects of capitalism.
- In connection with the 'revitalisation' of capitalism, the theoretical conception of 'transformation' also began to play a role again. This concept is understood to mean the turning of a society into another system of social order. According to Michael Brie,[68] the transformation is a matter of a "system change, which is marked by a close connection of management and self-organisation." It is not the place here to go into transformation research, as it is now intensively pursued.[69] The topic should also not be understood as a counterpart to SMC theory, since it rather seeks to take its own place in the critique of capitalism. It describes in a detailed way the new problems of crisis-ridden capitalism, as it functions from now on; but for social change it disregards the power structure and balance of forces arising from both the fundamental socio-economic structure and also the mechanism of interrelationship of the economy and the state. For a few years in the post-reunification period, the concept of 'transformation' played a role in bourgeois social sciences as 'postsocialist transformation' or 'catching-up modernisation', as also in the Marxist analysis of capitalism – here already as a reaction to the advance of the restoration and of market-economic ideas. In a contribution to the problems of the market economy transition in East Germany, Horst Heininger went into the topic of property conversion as the core of this transformation.[70] In this context he also critically got to grips with the role of the state in the shaping of the transformation process by the privatisation policy of the Treuhand[71]. Indeed, this transformation took place under the direct influence of West German finance capital. In the composition of its personnel as a 'management board', the Treuhand embodied the close linkage of the economy and the state, and proved its operability as a primary state monopoly instrument through the privatisation of state property.[72]

In the years since the social upheaval the situation of world capitalism has changed with utmost speed. Especially in the last decade, in the context of the 2008/9 financial crisis, a new agenda is being pioneered in the reception of Marx – initiating a new engagement with Marxist ideas, and that in a multifaceted way. A wealth of sound analyses critical of capitalism, on intricate problems of a complex and differentiatedly developing capitalist system, has been published. That also concerns the role of the state for the reproduction and conditions of investment of capital. In the most recent period there has moreover been a large number of contributions on old and new aspects of the relation between the state and the monopolies – as currently on the mushrooming of lobbying as an important instrument of state monopoly regulation, or on the extension of multifaceted institutional mechanisms. All this is not however associated with a further development of the theoretical concept of SMC.

Should there be a harking back to SMC theory today? We live in a very disturbing period – stamped by a long continuing systemic crisis of capitalism, of world-wide extent. Its

excesses, in their whole width and depth – from cuts in social services via the new imperialist resource wars right up to global problems such as the environment, poverty and climate protection – throw up questions about causes and necessary counter-strategies. Without doubt a more precise knowledge of the development of the socio-economic foundations of capitalism and its functioning mechanism is required, and SMC theory still offers essential approaches for that. With its orientation towards the dualism of the state and the monopolies, it may not grasp the whole structure of capitalism as it develops, but it does more than just concentrate on the economic activity of the state. It sets its sights, in a more far-reaching way, on the fundamental changes in the reciprocal relationship of economic, social, political and ideological processes.xxx

There are also objective reasons why this starting point for an analysis is currently scarcely pursued. On one hand, new problems have strongly moved to the foreground – problems which capitalism is not in a position to solve. They are to some extent presented in a very detailed way, but the causes and connections are never questioned. These problems include globalisation with its wide variety of widening networks, the rapid-scientific technical progress, the energy and raw materials questions, the Euro crisis, the climate and environmental questions, the problems of growth as well as world economic relations and changes in the international balance of forces.

On the other hand, however, against these new challenges the organising of a Marxist-oriented theoretical construction remains far behind. What is most lacking is a significant group of Marxist economists, capable of continuing such a scientific tradition of the twentieth century as the theory of SMC.

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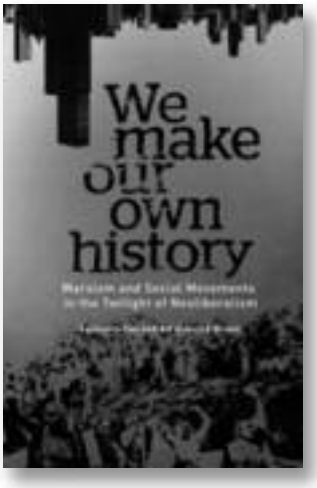
Book Review

Social theory without Marxism

by Lars Ulrik Thomsen

We make our own history – Marxism and Social Movements in the Twilight of Neoliberalism.

By Laurence Cox and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (Pluto Press, London, 272 pp, 2014: hbk, £58.50, ISBN 9780745334820; pbk, £17.00, ISBN 9780745334813)



THE ROLE OF social movements in society has expanded significantly over the last few decades, and can be seen in all parts of the world. Cox and Nilsen have a broad knowledge of such movements in many parts of the world and over a long period. They argue that, if social movements are to make further progress, then they have to develop an adequate theory, generalising earlier experiences together with Marxism.

It is the desire of the authors to develop a strategy for social movements in the 21st century, based on earlier practical experiences and social science. They define their vision in the following way:

> "From this network of movements, new visions are emerging of a future beyond neoliberalism. *We Make Our Own History* responds to these visions by reclaiming Marxism as a theory born from activist experience and practice."

The book is in five chapters in a dialectical exposition between theory and praxis. It is the aim of the authors to …

> "… mark a break both with established social movement theory, and with those forms of Marxism which treat the practice of social movement organising as an unproblematic process. [The book] shows how movements can develop from local conflicts to global struggles; how neoliberalism operates as a social movement from above, and how popular struggles can create new worlds from below."

Ideologically, their theory is based on the following concept:

> "We live in the twilight of neoliberalism: the ruling classes can no longer rule as before, and ordinary people are no longer willing to be ruled in the old way. Pursued by global elites since the 1970s, neoliberalism is defined by dispossession and ever-increasing inequality."

The book contains a great amount of wisdom and insight into advanced society and its mechanisms, trying to discover the dialectics between social movements and the ruling classes in modern capitalism. The big question is, whether the foundation of their thoughts is valuable. How do they define the concepts and categories of their thinking? The only attempt to develop Marxism is primarily in the first chapters of the book, and this is very insufficient. The problem with the book, in my view, is that it has absolutely nothing to do with Marxism.

Despite a lot of references to Marx and to other thinkers in the socialist movement, the authors treat Marxism in an eclectic way, an approach which has become very fashionable since the counter-revolution of 1989. However, first of all, Marxism is unthinkable without the working class and this is precisely where the authors meet their Waterloo. They are not able to see the dialectics between the revolutionary class and all the variety of social movements that gather around it.

The lack of social progress in the past quarter of a century is connected with the misunderstanding of this question. The authors make extensive use of *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, but without having understood the core of Marx's thinking: in order to suppress the surplus-producing classes, the fighting capitalist class develops a state machine, involving effective power in the superstructure of society – education, the mass media, religion, police and if necessary the army.

One can draw a clear line from the French revolutions of 1789 and 1848 to the aim of the great monopolies in our time of creating an effective state mechanism – national, regional or supranational. This is part of the logic of capitalism; and without understanding this the social movements will have no chance to make any genuine effort that will change society. They will only be able to strengthen capitalism by creating new lines of defence for the system.

The other hypothesis I want to question is that we live "in the twilight of neoliberalism". To this day I have not seen a scientific explanation for the term neoliberalism and I think Marx would be bursting in laughter, if he saw the term in present day political economy.

In the economic debates we rarely see the use of the concept of state monopoly capitalism (SMC). This theory, which dominated Marxist thinking throughout most of the 20th century, is absolutely absent in the book. In my opinion that goes with the reactionary currents in our society. SMC is the scientifically correct term for the present capitalist form of government in the era of imperialism. State monopoly is a factor that is associated with the largest monopoly capital and the financial bourgeoisie. Especially from the 1960s, this theory was the basis for a policy of trying to create broad anti-monopoly alliances.

State monopoly has typically evolved through three different stages: the way in which the imperial German government in the early 20th century developed it; the 1930s fascist Europe with the corporate state at the centre; and, in the post-war period, the adaptation to the new conditions of the 'scientific and technological revolution'. Part of this last development is the formation of the European Common Market in 1950s, and the European Union today, through which SMC finds its present form, the transformation into a federation of nation states.

The properties of the new form of government are: a breakdown of the national rules for the reproduction of labour; capital movements; and the creation of new supranational bodies such as the European Central Bank (ECB). This new form of state monopoly can be described as a regional monopoly state, a form to break down national sovereignty in order to succeed in inter-imperialist competition.

Summing up, the book is a highly needed contribution in the debate on the role of the social movements, but it doesn't fulfill the task it announces in the preface. The future political development of the social and democratic forces depends on a successful collaboration between the labour and social movements. Separating the two is like separating the lark from ascending in springtime.

The book contains a fine bibliography with a lot of relevant literature on the subject.

The French Anomaly

by Jimmy Jancovich

RECENT REPORTS on the situation in France show a total ignorance or misunderstanding of some of the fundamental contradictions, not to say anomalies, of the French socio-political system. The purpose of the following article is to explain and analyse these anomalies to enable a better understanding of French politics.

I WILL START with the recent regional elections and the widespread view that the 'Left' prevented the fascist National Front from taking control of two of the regions by standing down in favour of the democratic Conservatives.[1] This view embodies at least one lie: the alleged democracy of Sarkozy's party and some confusion about the nature of fascism.

We have always defined fascism as a tool of big business or monopoly capitalism for crushing the working class when it feels threatened. The fact that some fascist movements (the Nazis in particular) used racist or xenophobic propaganda to win votes is not in itself the essence of fascism. Neither Mussolini nor Pinochet used these methods, though Mussolini did use nationalist demands for neighbouring territories with Italian speaking populations, like Trieste and Istria. This is probably also true of the Argentine military dictatorship.

In the case of Sarkozy, in his election in campaigns in 2007 and 2012 he made abundant use of anti-immigrant[2] and racist propaganda, as he did in the recent regional elections. Indeed, the head of his list in the Provence Côte d'Azur region (one of the two that the Socialist Party decided not to contest) is a former National Front mayor of Nice, who switched from Le Pen to Sarkozy for purely careerist reasons. One of the

reasons the NF hate Sarko is that they feel he has poached on their private preserves and pinched their voters ….

Sarkozy's party is unquestionably the party of big business. The National Front is an example of a peculiarly French phenomenon: a petty bourgeois reactionary movement, similar to the US Tea Party Republicans – anti-tax, anti-social expenditure and defensive, originally at least, of the artisan, small shopkeeper, and peasant strata of society, who feel threatened by big business, and resent the 'feather bedding' of the working class. Le Pen's political background was the Keep Algeria French and Secret Army Organisation (OAS) movements, which had definitely fascist characteristics, and the Poujadist movement of the 50s and early 60s, when growing industrialisation (including of agriculture) was making the peasantry shrink to a fraction of its former size, artisans increasingly becoming just waged workers and supermarkets replacing small shop keepers.

Which of the two is the more dangerously fascist?

Regarding the French socio-political system, we should start with the origins of French capitalism. Until the French Revolution, French capitalism was essentially mercantile. Although serfdom had long been abolished, the countryside was still essentially feudal, whereas in England the feudal aristocracy had virtually destroyed itself with the Wars of the Roses three centuries earlier. While the English nobility remained as a bulwark of the monarchy, the dissolution of the monasteries meant that a good part of the landowning class had become wealthy merchants rather than feudal aristocrats. In consequence the England's bourgeois revolution took place in the 1640s – a century and a half before the French Revolution.

In England the enclosures virtually destroyed the peasantry, replacing it with a class of yeomen farmers – and landless rural workers. There were no enclosures in France and agriculture was carried out by peasants who did not own their land but rented it from absentee landlords. The French Revolution freed the peasants and gave them ownership of their land – thus consolidating them as a class. Without any rural proletariat, France remained an essentially peasant and agrarian country until the Liberation.

At the time of the French Revolution, Britain was going through an industrial revolution, based on a rural and urban proletariat that had been created by the enclosures. As this had not happened in France, it did not develop much industry until the middle of the 19th Century – and then lost the Lorraine coal and iron mines and their industrial potential to Germany after the 1870 war.

It is significant that the wave of fundamental scientific discoveries at the end of the 18th century was essentially made in England, and by people like Priestley (a dissident and radical preacher), Dalton (a Quaker artisan and schoolteacher) and Wedgwood (a pottery manufacturer trying discover how to make real china – and succeeding). The nearest equivalent in France was Lavoisier, an aristocratic dilettante, who was executed during the Reign of Terror by a judge who considered that "the Republic does not need scientists". It took the French universities almost a century to accept and teach Dalton's atomic theory.

In consequence, France developed only limited heavy industry until after the First World War. The Paris Communards were essentially artisans and workers in small workshops, often with semi-artisan rather than capitalist employers. Hence, too, the fact that French industry was, for a long time, dependent on immigrant workers: Italians, at first, then Polish (especially in the coalmining areas) and North Africans (especially in that bastion of French industry, the old Renault works at Boulogne-Billancourt). Even as late as the 1950s and 60s, many French industrial workers still maintained their rural links, going back 'home' for their holidays. This meant that the almost instinctive class consciousness of the British working class, the offspring of generations of workers, was not so deeply felt by French workers.

As a consequence there was never a real 'labour movement' or widespread trade union cooperation. When unions became more common and started to combine, they often reflected religious and political attitudes rather than class ones. Hence the proliferation of TU confederations (there are six of them), which spend much energy fighting one another instead combining against the employers. This is not the case in other European countries – or not to the same extent.

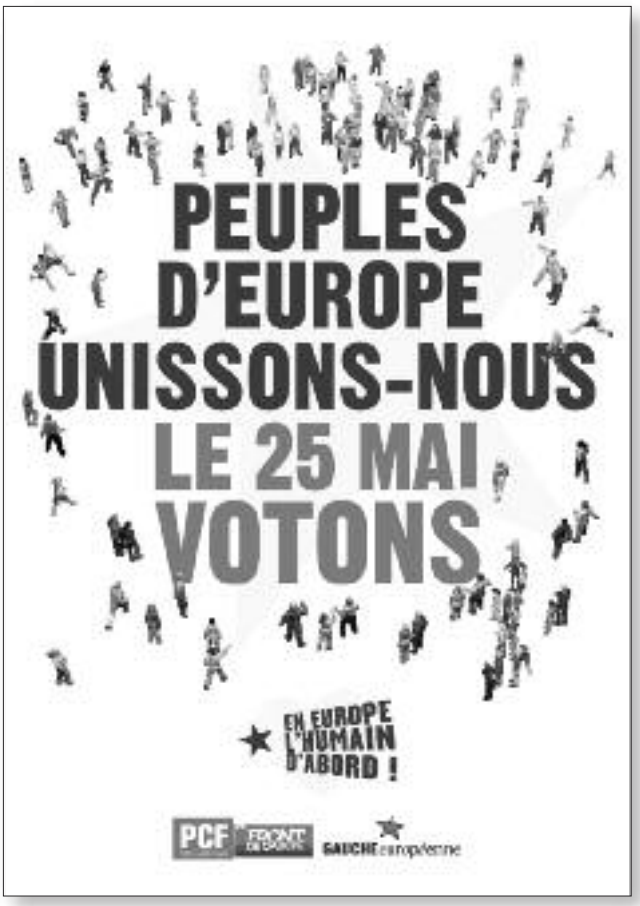
It was largely during de Gaulle's second presidency (1958-69) that France had some kind of an industrial revolution. This stimulated the growth of the Poujadist movement already referred to. De Gaulle however realised that, unless France became an industrial power, it would remain a second- or third-class power – not the first-class one that he considered was its due. Hence he encouraged big business and industrial growth, which really took off during his presidency.

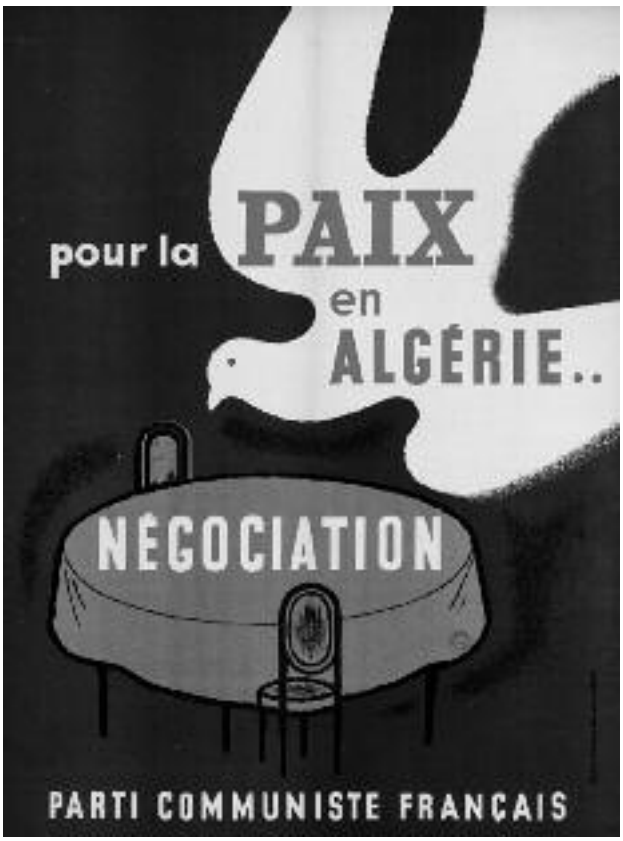
Before WWII, the electoral and class base of the French Communist Party (PCF) was largely the industrial belt of Paris's inner suburbs. This has been largely destroyed by the large-scale deindustrialisation of the middle 80s – part of the 'Socialist' President Mitterrand's 1983 about turn.[3] Hollande's about turn after his recent election is not unprecedented ….

The PCF's mass electoral base after the Liberation was due more to its role in the Liberation and in the interim government (1944-46) than to its class politics. Indeed, the whole of the post-war system of social services, and the nationalisation of key sectors, was created by the Communist ministers in de Gaulle's interim government. This is why I tend to say that the PCF is a good left-Labour Party rather than a Communist one. Extra-parliamentary politics and movements are the exception in France, which is why a Corbyn situation is unlikely to happen here.

There is yet another anomaly – only France could have produced such an abnormal political leader as de Gaulle. He was a general, brought up in a conservative Catholic family of aristocratic origins, probably tinged with monarchist feelings, as most such families were. Yet, in the 30s, he broke with his mentor, Pétain, and the monarchist clique round him to associate with republican officers and, in 1940, he disobeyed his commander-in-chief and publically called on the French people to follow his rebellious example and carry on fighting the enemy. At the height of the war he even arranged that the Free French Air Force squadrons be moved to the Russian Front to play a more active part in the struggle – alongside those 'bloody Reds'.

As the French Resistance grew increasingly bold he sent a special emissary to get the various groups to merge into a single movement. This was no easy task as they were often rivals and politically suspicious of one another, some Communist- led, some Gaullist-inspired and some more or less independent. The success of his emissary[4] was the creation of the National Resistance Council, which not only formed a united resistance militia (the FFI) but drew up a programme





for the period after the war (agreed and published under the Occupation) and formed a government-in-exile with de Gaulle as president[5] that that took over the running of the country as soon as Paris was liberated. This was contrary to the American plans to run Europe through AMGOT[6], as it did in Italy and Belgium, despite (and largely against) their respective resistance movements.

When de Gaulle was returned to office with special powers by the Socialists in 1958 (as they had done with Pétain in 1940) he did not act as a normal right-wing leader, installed undemocratically to offset an Army coup as had been the case. On the contrary he confused everyone (including many of his own supporters) by acting like the Resistance leader he had been before. He withdrew from NATO militarily, refused to accept the dollar as a reserve currency but insisted on payment in gold, recognised the Chinese People's Republic and insisted (unsuccessfully) on its being recognised as China's representative at United Nations. He tried to act as a bridge between East and West and agreed to Algerian independence – despite resistance from part of the Army and most of the French right-wing forces (including many of his own supporters) and several attempts to assassinate him by the OAS.

His shadow was still strong enough, 30 years after his death, to get President Chirac and his foreign minister de Villepin to block Bush and Blair's attempts to get UN endorsement of their invasion of Iraq.

While it is true that anti-colonialist and anti-slavery attitudes, like those of the British workers, tended to be less marked in other European countries, the extent of French pride in its colonies and its empire reflected the weakness of class attitudes in the French working class. The colonisation of Algeria (France's first colony) was for a long time a way of absorbing the younger sons of peasant families, instead of letting them form an urban proletariat. Indeed, this is the one area where indigenous peasants were driven off their land and proletarianised – to work the capitalist farms of the colonists and industry in metropolitan France.

Whereas the UK had an Anti-Imperialist League in the 30s and a Movement for Colonial Freedom (MCF) in the 50s and 60s, the PCF formed junior partners in Africa (the RDA — African Democratic Rally) but opposed independence in its African colonies to "protect them from being taken over by the US" …!

Unlike the campaign by the MCF and Britain's Communist Party against military intervention in Egypt during the 1956 Suez crisis,[7] the almost unanimous call in France was for overthrowing Nasser's 'fascist' regime in Egypt. Even recently, a "Communist historian" could write a book about 'The Year 1956'[8] that focussed on Khrushchev's speech and the events in Poland and Hungary while ignoring the much more important Suez crisis and treating the intensification of repression in Algeria as a side issue.

Whereas the Algerian Communist Party supported the FLN's call for independence, the PCF (allegedly to avoid being banned!) limited itself to calling for "Peace in Algeria" – a confusing slogan since the Socialist-led government called its repression of the independence movement "the pacification of Algeria". The illegal solidarity networks that supported the Algerians in France included a wide political range of anti-colonialists: catholics, protestants, dissident socialists and communists (who had to hand in their party cards to avoid 'compromising' the PCF) and exiled communists from other countries ….

Even today the French left and PCF are so wedded to the European Union that it is having difficulty seeing its way out of the present mess. It is obliged to continue backing Syriza, despite its betrayal of its own policies, and to act as if Varoufakis did not exist …. So it was our Jeremy who went to Portugal to congratulate the new Socialist government. No-one from France has dared to do that – the Socialists, because their line is totally pro-EU, and the left for fear that it might be a repetition of the embarrassing Greek situation.

Notes and References

1 This whole concept of 'republican solidarity' was rejected by most of the left – Communist, Left Front, Greens and many Socialist Party (SP) members. Indeed, the head of the list in the Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie region, one of the two where the Socialists withdrew, was so furious that he publicly left the SP.

2 This is particularly ironic as Sarkozy is a second-generation immigrant himself! His father was a Hungarian aristocrat who fled as the Red Army approached (probably with good reason) and eventually settled in France by marrying into a rich family.

3 A great deal of the National Front's strength in the Nord-Pas de Calais-Picardie region is the fact that, when Mitterrand closed down the coalfields, the solidly Socialist Pas de Calais coal miners were left high and dry – the local Socialists refused to fight their government. In other coalfields the PCF and the CGT did put up a fight so that, though unsuccessful, the workers did not feel abandoned and betrayed.

4 Despite the fact that he was betrayed, captured and tortured to death.

5 Despite Anglo-American efforts to foist a more reactionary general and an admiral on its provisional parliament in Algiers

6 The Allied Military Government for Occupied Territories.

7 A 10,0000-person lobbying of Parliament that obliged the Parliamentary Labour Party to do a complete about turn and oppose the Tory invasion, though previously following the extremely anti-Nasser line of the French Socialists and the Israeli Labour Party

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Women workers in trade unions

Women Workers and the Trade Unions
Sarah Boston
Lawrence & Wishart, 2015,
466 pp, £20. ISBN 978-

Book Review

still much room for improvement

"... the war sharpened the contradictions which had existed since the advent of industrial capitalism, between the private nature of reproduction and the social nature of production, geared around the needs of a male labour force'

by Mary Davis

THIS IS THE third edition of this book which was originally published in 1980. I first read it then and was impressed with its breadth and depth. This edition takes the narrative up to 2010. It contains a fitting introduction by Frances O'Grady, general secretary of the TUC.

Apart from the painstaking research undertaken by the author, Sarah Boston, this volume was probably the first to deal with a hitherto neglected subject. Hence, when it first appeared, it was read by many women who had been deprived of a knowledge of trade union women's history, generally omitted in standard labour histories which hardly mentioned women workers. This has to some extent been rectified now, but not necessarily by male labour historians even today. Thus it is fitting that Sarah Boston should have written this updated edition of her book.

Although Boston appears to commence her narrative in the 1870s, she recognises that there was early organisation of women in the textile unions long before this. In fact, in 1838, only 23% of textile factory workers were adult males. This is, of course, explained by women's persistent low pay and super-exploitation – women, as she points out, "earned on average half of what men earned" (p 14). Women were members of textile unions from the outset; indeed as Boston argues, such unions were pioneers of mixed unions and negotiated rates based on 'the rate for the job'. However, no other unions followed this example in this period "but there is no doubt that if they had, the history of women workers in the trade union movement would have been very different" (p 23).

Apart from pay inequality, the other important fact of female employment in the period of industrial capitalism was and is, as Boston points out, the phenomenon of job segregation. The existence of 'women's jobs' within the labour market must surely disprove the myth that women workers are a transitory element of the capitalist workforce, constituting some kind of industrial reserve army to be called to the colours when male labour is scarce, as in times of war.

Aside from cotton textiles and pottery, women were not to be found in large numbers in many of the other factory-based industries as they developed during the course of the 19th century. In fact, taken as a whole, women factory workers remained a small minority of the female working population. The vast majority of women workers were to be found in more 'hidden' areas of work – in domestic service, home working of various kinds, or in small 'sweated' workshops in such trades as lace making, glove making, straw plaiting and millinery.

Nonetheless, despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, it would seem that such women's involvement in trade unions as did exist up to 1850 fell away sharply thereafter and did not revive again until the 1880s (although there was a brief flurry in the 1870s). In most of the organisations formed after 1850, women were specifically excluded. With the decline of Chartism came a more exclusive preoccupation with trade unions, but the unions formed were for skilled or better-paid workers, which by definition meant male workers. These unions, modelled on the Amalgamated Society of Engineers (which was formed in 1851) represented the interests of that section of the working class which Lenin termed the 'labour aristocracy'.

The turn of lower-paid workers, including women, to reap the benefits of trade unionism (let alone political organisation) did not come until the 1880s. However, there was some activity among women workers 10 years before this due to the activities of the Women's Protective and Provident League, to whose work Boston devotes much-needed attention. This organisation was formed in 1874 by Emma Paterson in order to encourage the growth of separate unions for women. But, whether the organisations thus formed among milliners, upholstresses, umbrella makers, etc can be accurately designated as trades unions is questionable. The League's object was to promote, as they put it, an "entente cordiale" between the labourer, the employer and the consumer, hence strike action was frowned upon. The League also opposed any form of protective legislation for women workers.

As secretary of the League, Emma Paterson was the first woman to attend a TUC Congress. She argued there (and elsewhere) that, if women were to have equal rights, they must compete on the same terms as men and be free to do any work (including coal mining) without legislative interference. Although debate on this issue is still topical, the organisations formed by the philanthropic endeavours of the League were not so long-lived. However, in view of the male hostility to women at work, let alone to their organising, it is not surprising that this move was made; and, however erroneous its class-collaborationist philosophy, it was certainly no worse than that practised by the men who were the right-wing respectable leaders of craft unions.

To illustrate just how deeply capitalist ideas about women's place had seeped into labour aristocrats' thinking, here are the words of TUC secretary Henry Broadhurst at the 1875 Congress. He said that the aims of the trade union movement should be:

> "to bring about a condition where wives and daughters would be in their proper sphere at home, instead of being dragged into competition for a livelihood against

the great and strong men of the world" (quoted by Boston, p 16).

Although women made advances in the labour movement after the 1880s, it would be wrong to exaggerate their scale and importance, especially when one considers that the vast majority of women workers were occupied in trades which were not (and still are not) covered by union organisation of any kind. The trade union expansion of the 1880s was concerned with organising unskilled and lower paid workers. Women like Eleanor Marx played an active part in this campaign. She worked with Will Thorne in trying to organise women into the National Union of Gasworkers and General Labourers.

The new unions which were formed in the 1880s opened their doors to women from the outset. Women workers helped to influence, and were affected by, other developments. Some existing male unions, directly influenced by the militancy of women themselves (especially the successful match women's strike of 1889), admitted women members for the first time, eg the non-cotton textile unions (cotton unions already had women members since the 1820s) and the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives.

Most significant, as Boston clearly shows, was the work of the National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) formed in 1906. Under the presidency of Mary Macarthur, the NFWW strove to unionise women and to campaign for minimum hours for women in the sweated trades. The NFWW was rooted in the militancy especially of the Great Unrest from 1910-1914. In this context Boston devotes attention to the successful struggle of the women chain makers of Cradley Heath. Also, during the early years of the 20th century, women found a place in the newly formed trade unions for white collar workers. In numerical terms, the overall figure of women's trade union membership was still paltry, although there was a staggering increase from 37,000 in 1886 to 236,000 by 1914 (Boston's figures).

This improved trend was greatly accentuated by the massive entry of women into commodity production during the First World War. Combined with the militancy of the emergent shop stewards movement, this meant that, not only were women recruited into previously hostile male unions, but that the efforts of the government and employers to drive a wedge between male and female workers, using the weapon of dilution (*ie* lower rates for women doing skilled jobs), failed, with the rank and file mounting vigorous campaigns for the rate for the job. In the case of munitions factories, Boston shows that the 1915 Shells and Fuses Agreement demonstrated the extent of government control over this (for them) vital area of wartime production. She also demonstrates the effectiveness of Sylvia Pankhurst's persistent campaign with Lloyd George over the question of equal pay and equal war bonuses.

By 1920, women's membership of trade unions was at its peak, reaching 1,342,000 (representing 25% of the total female workforce). By 1939, the figure had dropped to half a million, despite the fact that the percentage of women in the workforce had risen.

For the years after 1918, Boston unpicks the controversial debate between the supporters of equal pay for work of equal value and those who supported the 'family wage' (paid to the male 'breadwinner'). The latter group advocated the introduction of family allowances to be paid to mothers as a means of maintaining the notion of the family wage. This left only women teachers and women civil servants supporting the demand for equal pay.

The years following the General Strike until the Second World War were bleak not only for women but for the entire labour movement, whose leadership level was politically and ideologically dominated by right-wing, class-collaborationist views. It was a period of mass unemployment and savage wage cuts. The labour of women was used as part of the cost-cutting exercise.

Despite male unemployment, the proportion of women in the workforce increased from 27% in 1923 to 30% in 1939. The response of the trade union leadership was both positive and negative. On the one hand it was recognised that the only way to prevent women being used as a source of cheap labour was to recruit them into trade unions. In fact, until 1939, this issue dominated the TUC Women's Conference (established in 1925), the TUC Women Workers' Group and its successor, the Women's Advisory Committee of the TUC (founded in 1930). However, the existence of these structures within the TUC, and the welcome concentration on recruitment, did not betoken a more enlightened attitude to women.

Within individual unions with a high proportion of women members, appallingly backward attitudes prevailed. Unions representing teachers, postal workers, boot and shoe makers and civil servants all meekly accepted wage settlements which increased the differential between men and women. The National Union of Women Teachers felt that the prevalent backward attitude to women was linked to the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy, with fascism's uncompromising view of women's place (kitchen, children and church).

The recruitment campaigns launched by the TUC Women's Committee had been greeted with almost complete apathy, so the TUC itself stepped in with its own campaigns in 1937 and 1939. As Boston shows, these campaigns were based on the assumption that trade unionism would only appeal to women if it was concerned with 'womanly' issues such as health and beauty. Apart from the fact that such male-designed campaigns were grossly insulting to women's intelligence, they did not work either, as the membership figures showed. Women workers, then as now, needed to be shown the tangible benefits of trade union action on the issues most concerning them as workers rather than as putative beauty queens.

The Second World War witnessed once again the massive entry of women into social production in non-traditional jobs, on a scale far greater than 1914-18. However, the centrality of the family and women's role within it meant that the war sharpened the contradictions which had existed since the advent of industrial capitalism, between the private nature of reproduction and the social nature of production, geared around the needs of a male labour force. These contradictions could be and were more masked when women were confined to their traditionally segregated and often hidden spheres of employment. Now that the war accorded women workers a high profile (conscription for women was introduced in 1941), and publicly acknowledged their role in social production (in the highly important munitions industry), the conflict between their dual roles burst into the public arena.

This did not mean that the state, in spite of some temporary concessions, had any intention of addressing women's 'double burden'. To do so would have undermined the social fabric of society, which remained firmly based on the centrality of the family and the ideological construct of the family wage based on the male breadwinner. Despite the logic behind the mass mobilisation of married women, public policy during the war, accepted by Labour and trade union leaders alike, did nothing to challenge the underlying causes of women's oppression and super-exploitation even though there was some discussion and tinkering with the effects of it.

An uneasy contradiction existed in the official mind between the obvious necessity to maintain wartime production on the one

hand, and on the other the desire not to destabilise women's role in the family. It manifested itself in an unwillingness to ensure any lasting or general changes to the social order in favour of meeting the needs of working wives and mothers. Even the frequently cited provision of state day-nurseries for working mothers, which was undoubtedly an historic initiative, was in itself the locus of intense ideological debate between the realists of the Ministry of Labour and the traditionalists of the Ministry of Health. Although the former appeared to win, as witnessed by the fact that 1,345 nurseries had been established by 1943 (compared with 14 existing in 1940), this did not represent a real victory for women workers. Firstly, it failed to satisfy the enormous demand or indeed to provide childcare for the duration of the mother's working day, hence the great increase in private child-minding arrangements; and, secondly, it was always clear that this was a wartime expedient only – what the state provided, the state could also easily remove.

There was discussion, although little action, on other ways to ease the double burden of women war workers. Sheer economic necessity forced such 'women's issues' as child-care facilities and maternity benefit onto the political agenda with undoubted advantages for women, albeit of a temporary nature, as the post-1945 period was to show. As it was, even during the war, projects like the provision of nurseries and other attempts to relieve the 'double burden' were ultimately regarded as far too radical and were rejected in favour of the more convenient and ideologically acceptable expedient of adjusting women to their double burden by permitting them to work part-time. Such a 'concession' was one of the few wartime changes which remains as a permanent feature of women's labour and of course helps to account for continuing low wages and lack of job opportunities. Part-time work was a consciously preferred solution to the problem of the double burden of women workers with family responsibilities at a time when, uniquely during the war, such a problem was given official recognition. Sarah Boston asks a pertinent rhetorical question of the post-war period:

> "What happened to the nurseries, the equal pay, the skills, the responsibilities, 'the shopping hour' and the status of women workers?" (p 219)

The Labour government abandoned these reforms.

Historically, the trend towards part-time work for women (which today accounts for 44% of women's labour) coincided with the social reforms implemented after the Second World War. This may seem paradoxical, but can be explained by the fact that the benefit system was based on the presupposition that everyone is a member of a family which is looked after by a male breadwinner. Women therefore should not need to go out to work, and anyway should not want to because their place is at home. It was particularly convenient to reconstruct this hoary old myth in the 1950s since it was (and still is) far cheaper to administer a system which only entitles adult males fully to its benefits. However, while ideology decreed that women's place was at home, the labour market determined otherwise. The years following World War II witnessed a labour shortage. Then as now, increasing numbers of women workers (especially married women) filled the gaps. Given the gradual closure of war-time nursery provision, the only solution to the conflict between the demand of paid work and the demands of family and home was the compromise of part-time work.

As Boston shows, women can certainly record some very real gains since the 1960s. She asserts that 1968 "was a turning point in the history of women workers" (p 278), presaged as it was by the strike of women machinists at Ford's Dagenham plant. Of the 10 unions with the highest numbers of women members, the rates of women's participation at most levels have shown an increase. This is measured, in the main, by looking at the percentage of women holding seats on their union's executive committees, or attending as delegates to union annual conferences and to the TUC. Many unions have adopted special policies to encourage women's participation, including such measures as establishing women's committees at national and regional level, running special courses for women members and women stewards, providing crèche facilities, and taking up more vigorously issues which directly affect women members at work. Some unions now have reserved places for women on their executive committees or some other device which ensures that women are represented on elected committees which reflect their proportionate membership.

Although there was a temporary halt in the growth of women's employment in the early 1980s, it is clear now that women, currently 50% of the labour force, are a vital and permanent part of social production. However, the expansion of women's jobs (indeed jobs of all kinds) is based on a much narrower range of employment, reflecting the chronic decline in British manufacturing industry. So, for women – already the victims of job segregation – the expansion of the labour market has meant more of the same: low paid and low status jobs, the majority of which will be temporary, part-time or casual. The preponderance of such contractual arrangements is frequently justified in the name of 'flexibility' and they are commended to women as being 'family friendly'.

Boston reminds us that in 1989 the TUC changed its rules for election of the General Council. One of the effects was to increase the number of places reserved for women from 6 to 12. Unions with more than 200,000 members, and which also have more than 100,000 women members, are obliged to include at least one woman among their representatives on the General Council. In addition another four women's seats are elected by a ballot of all unions with fewer than 200,000 members; and there is one reserved seat for a black woman. The overall size of the General Council has consequently been increased. However, these changes, welcome as they are, raise the broader question of the relationship between the TUC Women's Conference (and its elected Women's Committee) and the General Council, since it is by no means certain that issues relating to women trade unionists will get a higher profile as a result of the electoral changes.

Sarah Boston gives us much useful information on the progress or otherwise made by women trade unionists in the last 20 years. She looks at new areas of campaigning such as sexual harassment, zero hours contracts, trade union education for women, flexible working, maternity and child care and above all the issue of equal pay. On this latter issue Boston looks at the activities of the 'no win, no fee' lawyer, Stefan Cross.

Despite some advances, there is still clearly much room for improvement, especially since history shows that many of the advances women make can be transitory. The simple but uncomfortable fact is that trade unions are still predominantly white male organisations and as such mirror the hierarchy in the world of work. The low status of women and black people in the workplace is reflected in their continuing low status within the labour movement.

This is a book which deserves wide reading within the labour movement and beyond.

SOUL FOOD

Selected by Mike Quille

Let the Poet Lift a Hammer: The Prophetic Poetry of Fred Voss

"I want to change the world, I want to strike the spark or kick the pebble that will start the fire or the avalanche that will change the world a little." Fred Voss

WHY HAVE mortality rates amongst middle aged working class Americans suddenly increased?[1] Why is inequality increasing, so that the top 1% of the U.S. population own 35% of the wealth,[2] and why are bonuses on Wall Street more than double the total annual pay of all Americans on the federal minimum wage?[3] Why has support swollen so rapidly for a buffoon like Donald Trump? And finally, in such darkly unequal times, what can poets do about it?

Mortality rates for white working class Americans declined steadily until around the year 2000, as you might expect following the postwar years of peace and prosperity, the 'golden age of capitalism', as it is sometimes called. But in the last few years they have got worse, for the first time since records began. White working class men who never got beyond high school now have an absolutely worse mortality rate than black, Hispanic or any other demographic.

What are the causes of these early deaths? Drugs, alcohol and suicide, mostly. Basically, these men have killed themselves with drugs and drink because the rich and powerful American ruling class, running the richest and most powerful country in the history of the world, does not need or want them any more. They are on the economic scrapheap, or on their way there. There are simply not enough jobs for them, and the few jobs around are increasingly badly paid.

Those groups who have been on the margins of the capitalist USA for a long time have weathered the recession better because they have always had nasty, short, precarious lives. But white baby boomers, brought up to expect a brighter future, are discovering that they are going to be worse off than their parents. Most of their efforts to cope with, come to terms with or struggle against this legalised robbery of their labour, health, wealth and happiness are failing. They are becoming more and more desperate, and so are voting for the dangerous, delusional fantasies of Donald Trump, when they are not drinking and drugging themselves to death.

Fred Voss expresses the situation poetically as

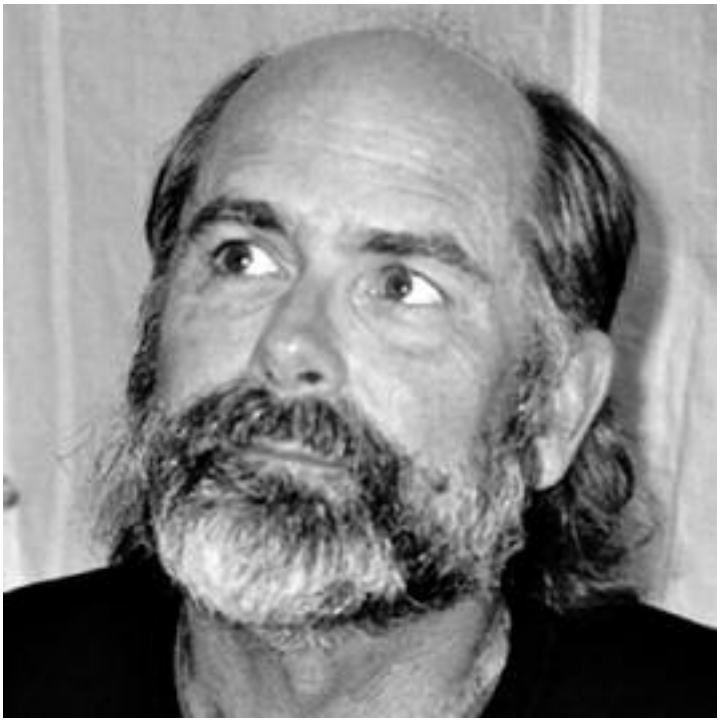
Shadows We Will Never Escape

All day as we work
we stare
out the rolled-open tin door at the 50-storey downtown LA
WELLS FARGO
and BANK OF AMERICA and CITICORP
buildings gleaming
in the sun with all their wealth and power
trying
to keep our children fed
trying to keep from losing hope
and throwing in the towel
on our low wages
riding buses
bicycles
thin
with hangovers making us teeter and hold our stomachs
over pitted concrete floors
and stumps instead of fingers
we go without glasses and teeth and hope of anything
but poverty
in old age we
stick our chests out and throw around 100-pound vises and try not
to get strung out on drugs
or pick up guns and go crazy as we work
in the shadows
of those buildings
so close
with so much wealth and power we stare
out at those towering shining buildings
from the shadows on the concrete floor
of our factory
until we truly begin to know what it feels like
to be buried alive.

At the point of production, there is no democracy, no land of freedom and opportunity, not even adequate material rewards for punishingly hard work. For growing numbers of poor working class men and women there is only naked exploitation, built on centuries of racism and violence. In this impoverishing environment, suicide, madness and prison are only

One Hair's-Breadth Away

I sit on my steel stool at work at break and read
the news article
about the genocide we Americans committed against the Red Man
for centuries
I sit
and read about the genocide
we Americans committed against the Black Man
with nooses
and butcher knives
I read



the concern
the horror
the apology in these articles
the shock
that we as Americans could ever have allowed such genocides
then look around
this factory just like so many thousands of factories in this land
at the men
who cannot afford a pair of glasses a haircut shoelaces
a meal a room
a woman
men
one hair's-breadth away
from suicide
madness
prison
the street
men
getting poorer penny by penny each hour each day each year
without hope of a raise
white men black men men from Mexico and East LA
and Guatemala and Vietnam and Russia
men
with twisted backs and tired tombstone eyes
and I wonder
where are all the articles full of concern and shock and horror
about them I wonder
why the only genocides that make our papers are the ones that are already
finished.

And where, you might wonder, are all the poems about work and the working class? The problem here is that

Only Poets With Clean Hands Win Prizes

The homeless woman pushes her little boy and girl in a shopping cart
down an alley to the trash cans
where she desperately looks for scraps of food
as the poet
writes about whether or not an ashtray on his coffee table
really exists
the man works 50 then 60 then 70 hours a week in a factory
so he can live in a tiny cheap room with another man
instead of in a car
and the poet
leans back pleased with her image
of a red teacup
sailing through a wall
the poets
are polishing lines about the shadows inside ivory bowls
and what time really means
as old people
must choose between their medicine and eating
people in agony with no health insurance spend nights sitting in chairs
waiting in crowded emergency rooms
men
go to prison for the rest of their lives for stealing
a sandwich
the poet
is writing about looking in a mirror
as a wave curls
over his shoulder and he knows it is all
an illusion
while men are thrown out onto the street
where they will pick up bottles
or needles that will ruin their lives because
there are no jobs
as the poets
work to polish words that prove the ticks of a clock
aren't real.

Voss knows the ticks of the workplace clock are horribly real signifiers of oppression and exploitation. Not because of the work itself, but because of the conditions of employment which people work under. Voss sees and expresses the actual evil of capitalist production, but also the potential for good under different arrangements. And he expresses it clearly, lyrically, without ever losing sight of the factual, material basis of life, and the equally straightforward way things could be different. As he says in *Bread and Blood*, one of the poems in his latest collection, he is making parts for attack helicopters in Iraq, when he could be making socially useful things like wheelchair wheels.

Voss's dialectical understanding of capitalist production also connects the energy of work in his machine shop to universal values. See how in the following poem we move smoothly, seamlessly, from the sweaty, oily detail of early morning machining in a metalwork shop, to some of the finest scientific and artistic accomplishments of humanity, and from there to happiness, fulfilment and liberty. By interpreting the world in this way, Voss is surely helping to change it. His poems sing out hope and possibility to us, like Whitman's poems and Kerouac's prose and Ginsberg's poems and The Doors' music did for an earlier generation, or like a

Saxophone on a Railroad Track

There is nothing greater
than the energy in a lathe man at 6:07 am throwing every muscle in his body
into the steel 100-pound tailstock of an engine lathe
digging
his steel-toed shoes into a concrete floor and leaning
into the 100-pound tailstock and flexing muscle shoving it across

the tool steel ways of the lathe
until the foot-long drill in the tailstock's mouth meets
turning brass bar and begins to chew
an inch-in-diameter hole through that brass bar's dead center
it is the energy
that raised the Eiffel Tower
pushed off
the shore in a canoe that crossed the Pacific
it is Einstein breaking through years of thinking to find time stops
at the speed of light
Galileo
daring to look through a telescope and prove the earth isn't the
center
of the universe
it is Houdini
breaking free of every lock and shooting up out of the river
gasping
the air Van Gogh breathed
the minute he brushed the last stroke of oil across his canvas full
of sunflowers
look at the smile on the lathe man's face as he turns the wheel
forcing the drill through the brass
it is the roar
of the tiger the ring
of the Liberty Bell the laugh
of that lathe man's baby girl as she sits on his shoulder and
reaches up
for a star and the lathe man puts everything he's got
into turning that wheel
and smiles
because little girls laugh and planets revolve and telephone
repairmen
climb telephone poles and train wheels carry a saxophone
toward a music shop window so a man
who has picked himself up out of a skid row gutter can blow
Charlie Parker's notes
off a green bridge again
as the butterfly wing cracks open the chrysalis and Nelson
Mandela
steps out of prison
a free man.

Do not think that the clarity of expression is artless. At first sight Voss's poems look like chopped-up prose, but read them aloud and you will hear their sinuous, resilient rhythms, winding onwards like a Whitmanesque river, developing an idea from an initial striking title and first few lines, towards an always memorable resolution.

Here's a good question:

Can Revolutions Start in Bathrooms?

I'm standing
in front of the bathroom mirror washing up after another day's
work
all my life
I've seen the working man beaten down
unions broken
wages falling
as CEO salaries skyrocket and stockbrokers get rich and
politicians
talk of "trickle down" and "the land of opportunity" and "the
American way"
and Earl on the turret lathe keeps tying and retying his shoelaces
that keep breaking
and blinks through 30-year-old glasses and finally
gives up his car to ride
the bus to work
and Ariel on the Cincinnati milling machines turns 72 heaving
80-pound vises onto steel tables
with swollen arthritic fingers and joking
about working until he drops
all my life I've wondered
why we men who've twisted chuck handles until our wrists
screamed
shoved thousands of tons of steel into white-hot blast furnaces
under midnight moons
leaned our bodies against screaming drill motors meeting cruel
deadlines until we thought
our hearts would burst
are silent
as the owners build their McMansions on hills and smoke big
cigars driving a different
$100,000 leased car to work each month
why after bailing out the banks
losing our houses
seeing our wages slashed and our workloads rise I've never heard
one word
of revolt
and Teddy the bear of a gantry mill operator walks into the
bathroom to wash
all the razor-sharp steel chips and stinking black machine grease
off
his arms and hands
he's been driving the same cheap motorcycle
for 20 years and says,
"Hey which front office person is driving that brand new Jaguar
I see parked out there now?"
and none of us can answer
as we raise our heads from the sinks
"Well, whoever it is," Teddy says,
"They're making too much money!"
After 40 years of silence
I can't help wishing his words could be like the musket shot
that set off the storming
of The Bastille.

Voss never loses the sense of what work is really for, and what the ideal communist society might look like. He lifts his poetic hammer, verbally envisioning redemptive change, helping to create the communist and compassionate political movement needed so that all of us – but especially the poor – will be able eventually to restore our health and happiness and eat

Broccoli and Salmon and Red Red Apples

Let the poet lift a hammer
let the poet break bread
with a man lying down in a bunk in a skid row midnight mission
homeless shelter
let the poet come out from behind the walls of his ivory tower
and feel the steering wheel of a downtown Long Beach bus in his
hands
as he steers it toward a 66-year-old grandmother
who rides it to work at a factory grinding wheel
let him feel the 12-hour sun the lettuce picker feels beating down
on the back
of his neck
let him pull a drill press handle
hook a steel hook through a steel pan full of motorcycle sidecar

yokes and drag it
100 feet across a gouged concrete factory floor as drop hammers pound
let him grease a gear turn a wheel
crack a locknut serve a plateful of crab
drain a panful of oil plant
a stick of dynamite hook a tuna
in the deep green sea dig bulldozer bucket teeth
into the side of a hill feel
how good the sun feels on his face Sunday morning
when he's finally gotten a day off after 72 hours behind windowless factory
tin walls
how good a tree looks
or a river sounds or a baby feels
in his arms
when he's earned his bread with the sweat on his back
how true a star
and the notes of Beethoven and the curl of a wave around the nose of his surfboard are
when he's thrown his arms around a 1-ton bar of steel
and guided it into a furnace full
of white-hot flame
how much a wildflower or a fire truck siren or a pick
in the fists of a man in the depths of a coal mine
mean
when he earns his bread by getting the dirt of this earth
on his hands
how human
we all are covered in soft skin and pulsing
with warm blood and deserving
of a roof over our head and a bed under our bones and a laugh
around a dinner table piled high
with broccoli and salmon
and red red apples.

Here is one of Voss's most complex and successful poems, weaving themes of beaten-down oppression and class division with utopian aspiration and a willed determination to achieve human – and indeed universal – reconciliation through socially useful, unalienated work. It is a vision of

The Earth and the Stars in the Palm of Our Hand

"Another day in paradise,"
a machinist says to me as he drops his time card into the time clock and the sun
rises
over the San Gabriel mountains
and we laugh
it's a pretty good job we have
considering how tough it is out there in so many other factories
in this era of the busted union and the beaten-down worker
but paradise?
and we walk away toward our machines ready for another 10 hours inside tin walls
as outside perfect blue waves roll onto black sand Hawaiian beaches
and billionaires raise martini glasses
sailing their yachts to Cancún
but I can't help thinking
why not paradise
why not a job
where I feel like I did when I was 4
out in my father's garage
joyously shaving a block of wood in his vise with his plane
as a pile of sweet-smelling wood shavings rose at my feet
and my father smiled down at me and we held
the earth and the stars in the palm of our hand
why not a job
joyous as one of these poems I write
a job where each turn of a wrench
each ring of a hammer makes my soul sing out glad for each drop of sweat
rolling down my back because the world has woken up and stopped worshiping money
and power and fame
and because presidents and kings and professors and popes and Buddhas and mystics
and watch repairmen and astrophysicists and waitresses and undertakers know
there is nothing more important than the strong grip and will of men
carving steel
like I do
nothing more important than Jorge muscling a drill through steel plate so he can send money
to his mother and sister living under a sacred mountain in Honduras
nothing more noble
than bread on the table and a steel cutter's grandson
reaching for the moon and men
dropping time cards into time clocks and stepping up to their machines
like the sun
couldn't rise
without them.

Fred Voss's poetry is rooted in factory life on the West Coast of California, but rears up and stretches our imaginations as we read it, taking us across time and space. It lives in the here and now, and works to the tick of the factory clock, but transcends the "cold competitive time" described in the final poem presented here. Like Blake's poetry, Voss sees the world in a grain of sand, tells truth to power. And like Blake, Voss combines the precision and realism born of years of skilled craftworking with a sweeping, lyrical imagination and vision arising from years of reflection on work, on the working class, and on the dreadful but alterable material realities of the world around him. Voss's sword will clearly not be sleeping in his hand, any time soon.

He writes prophetic poetry with a deep spiritual content, focused on the point of production. He connects the inherent, present harshness of class conflict under capitalism with the ultimate, future promise of communism, a "warmer way to live" as he says in the poem below. His poetry can be ironic, satirical and even angry, but it always retains its dignity, warmth and humanity. He is searingly honest in description, visionary in imagination, and is surely one of our greatest contemporary poets, tirelessly lifting his poetic hammer and striking the spark of revolution into our hearts and minds.

Let him have the last word, as well as the first. This is a poem about making

A Clock as Warm as Our Hearts

As I sit at this milling machine cranking out brass parts
at the precise rate of 21 per hour
I wait for the sun to creep its way across the sky until it shines
through the high windows
in the west wall of this factory onto the top of the blue
upside-down funnel on the workbench

beside my machine
and then my fingers
the way it always does.
There is an order to things
men in caves
before sundials and hourglasses
and clocks
knew
an order
higher than staying competitive by turning out 21 parts
per hour in this factory
or losing your job
a warmth
in the sky that always returns
to shine upon my fingers
the way the dying leaves of fall return
the way our dreams return
the tide
and the comets
and as the boss comes down the aisle cold and angry
and screaming for parts
I wait
for the soothing touch of that sun on my fingers to tell me
that someday
we may put our cold competitive time clocks and bosses
away
and find a warmer
way to live.

Acknowledgements and Sources

Thanks to Fred Voss, Bloodaxe Books and the Morning Star for permission to republish poems. Two collections of Fred's poetry are currently available from Bloodaxe, each at £8.95:

F Voss, *Carnegie Hall with Tin Walls*, 192 pp, 1998.
F Voss, *Hammers and Hearts of the Gods,* 96 pp, 2009.

Notes and References

1 A Case and A Deaton, *Rising morbidity and mortality in midlife among white non-Hispanic Americans in the 21st century,* in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol 112, No 49 (8 December 2015), pp 15078-83. This is the sharp end of the problem, and does not include rising morbidity and mortality caused by the increase of obesity and malnutrition in the developed world.
2 See http://inequality.org/99to1/facts-figures. The recent Oxfam report also found that 62 people now owned as much wealth as the poorest 50% of the world's population.
3 Like the first two trends, this is happening in Britain too. See http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-32719657 .

Letter to the Editor

From Laurence Platt

Jimmy Jancovich, in his otherwise interesting reply to Thomas Wagner (CR77, Autumn 2015), makes an all too common error in assuming grammatical gender can be used as 'evidence' in a discussion of the survival or otherwise of matriarchal forms of succession.

Grammatical gender bears no relationship whatsoever to natural gender. The terms masculine, feminine and neuter that are used by grammarians to classify different groups of nouns, according to the way that they decline, are purely arbitrary and we would all have been saved a lot of time if those early grammarians had have used categories such as 'red' and 'black' ,for example, as some grammarians did with the languages of northern India!

Just to illustrate the point, the medieval English word 'wif' ('wife') is neuter in Old English, a fully inflected language. The word for 'god' in Old English is masculine whether it is applied to a male god or a female one! Other examples are not difficult to find where grammatical gender and natural gender are at odds with each other.

Much work needs to be done by historians and others on the survival of matrilineal forms that were generally suppressed during the transition from the tribe to state, but unfortunately grammatical gender is completely irrelevant to this inquiry.

This new pamphlet from the Communist Partry, written by John Foster, ends with a warning. The EU's imposition of neo-liberal policies on all governments, including those led by the traditional parties of the Left, has resulted in the collapse of support for social democracy. In the coming referendum voters will be asked to support an even more neo-liberal and probusiness EU. Politically, such an outcome would pose an additional danger that Cameron would use it to argue that the electorate has voted in support of the EU's so-called free market policies and therefore against Labour's programme for public ownership and enhanced public spending.
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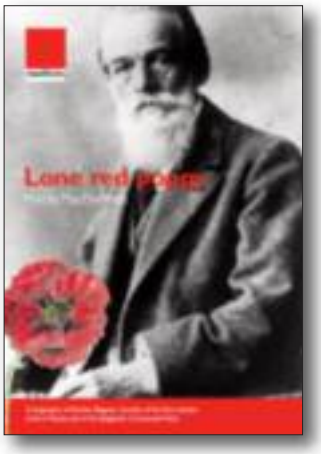

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