CR

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Editorial Martin Levy

THESE ARE times of great opportunity, but also danger. In its draft resolution for the Communist Party's 54th Congress, this November, the Party's Executive Committee makes the point clearly:

> "Britain is seeing dramatic political change as the ruling class offensive is increasingly and more confidently challenged …. This struggle has now reached the stage in which each side, out of necessity, must either inflict a major defeat on the other or itself be defeated. The outcome will determine the nature of society in Britain for decades to come …."[1]

The success of the 'Brexit' vote was a severe setback for the dominant finance capitalist sector of the ruling class. They suffered a further blow with Jeremy Corbyn's re-election as Labour Party leader. But the labour movement, hampered by its former majority support for the EU, and by the divisions exemplified in the Labour leadership contest, was unable to capitalise on the Tories' disarray following the referendum. Indeed the Tories were given breathing space to rebuild unity around a new reactionary, xenophobic strategy, presenting themselves, mind-bogglingly, as "the party of the NHS, the party of the workers, the party of public servants."[2]

On the EU, there has been a welcome recognition from both the TUC and Jeremy Corbyn that the vote should stand, and that the marginalisation experienced by many working people was a major cause of the 'Leave' victory. The demand that workers should not pay the price for 'Brexit', and the progressive policies announced at Labour's conference, provide opportunities for broad-based campaigning – which indeed will be essential to counter the vehement attacks likely to be forthcoming from the right-wing media, aiming to ensure that Labour really is unelectable. Dirty tricks, and jibes of anti-semitism, will continue to be used. Much depends on mobilisation of Labour's hundreds and thousands of new members, to win the arguments at community, street and workplace level.

Yet we need to be clear that Labour's new policies are only a start. Welcome as they are, they are limited in scope, and weak on key issues such as class struggle, monopoly, the state and particularly imperialism. In short they are social-democratic policies, and not always of the left variety. Indeed, despite Corbyn's long anti-imperialist record, Clive Lewis, then Shadow Defence Secretary, was able to pledge continued support for Trident renewal and to tell the Labour conference that:

> "when I look at our key military alliance – NATO – I see an organisation that springs directly from our values: collectivism, internationalism and the strong defending the weak. Its founding charter – a progressive charter – includes standing up for democracy and defending human rights. These are values that I believe go to the core of our political identity."[3]

NATO was never about that. It has always been about advancing imperialist interests.

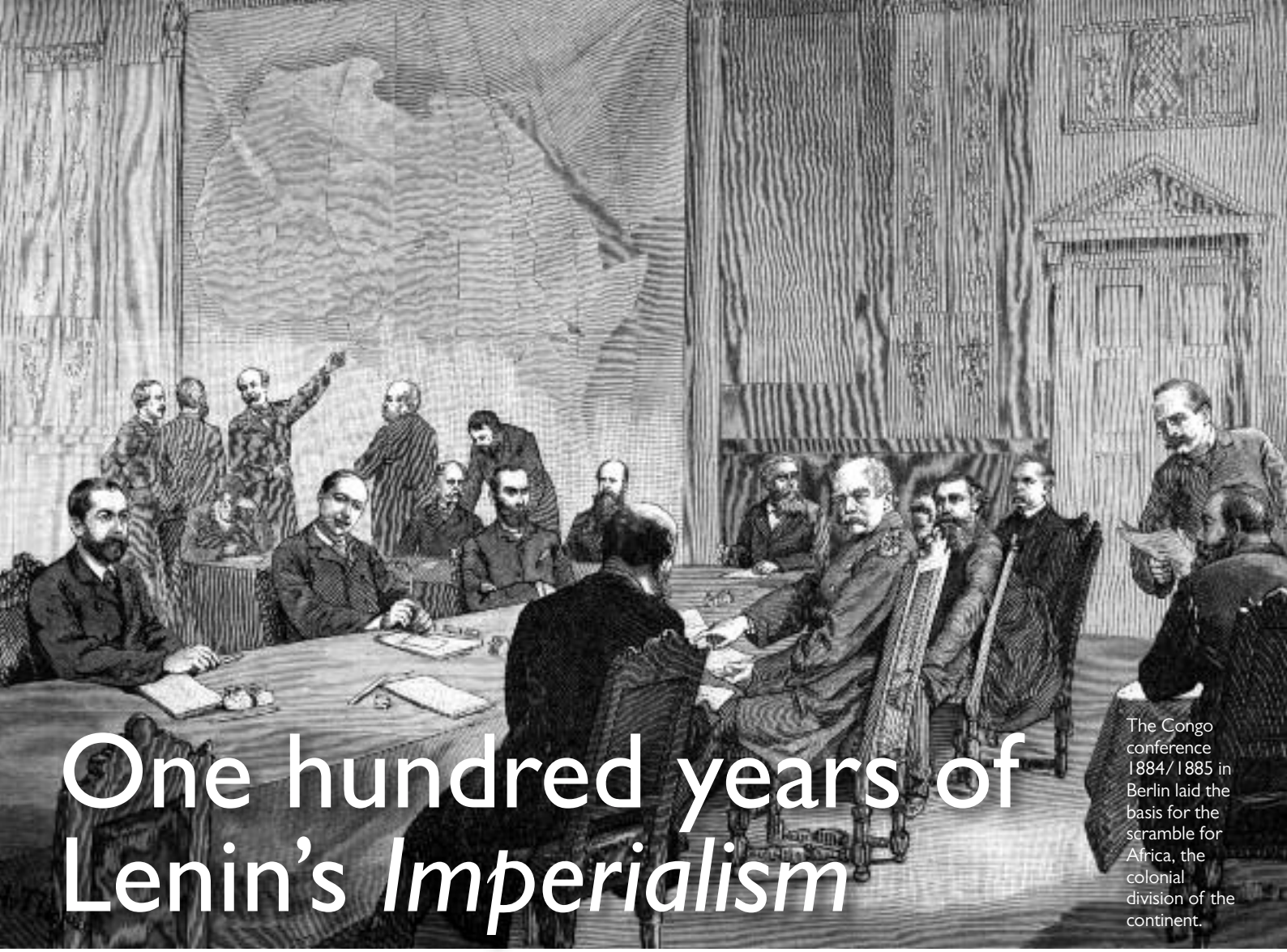
A clear understanding of imperialism is essential for the labour movement today. So it is timely that our lead article in this issue of *CR* is Andrew Murray's recent Marx Memorial Library lecture, celebrating the centenary of Lenin's *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Andrew sets Lenin's work in the context of his objectives at the time, and looks at the contemporary relevance today of Lenin's five basic features of imperialism. He argues that the division of the world between rival monopolies, and the territorial division among the biggest capitalist powers, are not the factors that they were in Lenin's time, and that "Capital is [now] exported across the world by an incipient pan-national oligarchy centred on London, New York, Hong Kong etc … with fantastic rewards distributed across the ruling classes of many countries." The key issues, however, remain "The control of the concentration of capital, and the political intervention to sustain the extraction of super-profit", in the context of a world power structure that has features of an ultra-imperialism that "depends in the end on a US super-imperialism." This ultra-imperialism is not the world of peace envisaged by Kautsky, against whom Lenin polemicised, but one of continual wars and continued inter-imperialist rivalry.

Arguments about Kautsky, ultra-imperialism and the European Union were already taken up in *CR*80, in chapter 3 of *State Monopoly Capitalism*, by Gretchen Binus, Beate Landefeld and Andreas Wehr. In this issue we publish the final chapter, which looks at strategies for revolutionary transformation, building on Lenin's advice to Western European communists to concentrate efforts on "the next step" and to seek "forms of transition or approach to the socialist revolution". Such a strategy was taken up by both Antonio Gramsci (in his *Prison Notebooks*) and the Communist International (at its 7th World Congress), in terms of seeking the broadest possible support for short-term objectives, as part of a process of transforming the fight for democracy into one for socialist revolution. Reviewing the experience of popular front governments in Chile, France and Portugal, discussions in Federal Germany, and developments in Latin America, the authors conclude that, as a result of the world economic crisis of 2007-8, there are now new possibilities in the centres of capitalism "for developing the consciousness for overcoming the system."

From economics and politics we move to philosophy, with part 2 of this writer's series on *Space, Time – and Dialectics*, and *The New Life*, an interesting lecture given in 2001 by the late Hans Heinz Holz, relating his early development as a philosopher and the influence of Jean-Paul Sartre in the period after the Second World War. We finish with a piece by Evan Pritchard recalling *The Battle of Bexley Square* in 1931, and the ever-excellent *Soul Food*, which this time includes additional moving poems (in Spanish and English) from the Spanish Civil War, and class-conscious extracts from some upcoming poetry publications by the **Culture Matters** web site.

Notes and References

1 https://issuu.com/communist_party/docs/54_cp_congress_executive_resolution.
2 Theresa May, http://press.conservatives.com/post/151378268295/prime-minister-the-good-that-government-can-do.
3 http://www.ukpol.co.uk/2016/09/26/clive-lewis-2016-speech-at-labour-party-conference/



One hundred years of Lenin's *Imperialism*

The Congo conference 1884/1885 in Berlin laid the basis for the scramble for Africa, the colonial division of the continent.

Illustration by Adalbert von Rößler (†1922) - *Allgemeine Illustrierte Zeitung*, 1884, p 308

by Andrew Murray

The 100th anniversary of the writing – but not the publication – of Lenin's *Imperialism* is an opportunity for a two-fold reflection – on Leninism, and on the capitalist world economy (or imperialism itself).

No political work stands outside its context, and this is particularly true of the writings of Lenin. There is scarcely a significant work amongst his writings which was not immediately directed towards a political objective. While Marx and Engels, in most of their major writings, and above all in *Capital*, could be said to be working for the general ideological edification of the developing working-class movement, to signposting its future, Lenin regarded this work as in the main accomplished by his great teachers.

'Lenin saw social revolution as not just the product of the confrontation of workers and capitalists in the developed countries, but as the outcome of a sequence of upheavals including democratic revolutionary movements against imperialism.'

Andrew Murray

■ Article based on the author's lecture at the Marx Memorial Library on 16 June 2016

LENIN NEVER saw his mission as being deliberately refining – let alone revising – Marxism, but applying its principles to the political situation he was fighting in. His goal was proletarian revolution, an event he expected to live to see, and there is nothing he wrote or did which was not directly and often quite immediately connected to that end.

There used to be a standard refrain in parts of the world communist movement that "Leninism was Marxism applied to Russian conditions." This could be an arguably justifiable position if we considered only Lenin's work prior to the First World War, when his aim undoubtedly was to introduce the general positions of the Second International into Russia insofar as the conditions of Tsarism allowed. But if Lenin's work had ended in 1914 we would not speak of Leninism today anyway. Thereafter, and this of course is the period in which *Imperialism* was written, he was consciously charting a way forward for the international working-class movement as a whole, in ways which still resonate to this day.

Imperialism is, alongside *Left-Wing Communism* and *State and Revolution*, the most widely-read and celebrated of Lenin's works. This article aims, firstly, to set it in the context of Lenin's objectives at the time he wrote it; second, to locate it in the analysis of imperialism then current in the workers' movement; and thirdly, to look at the relevance of its propositions today and finally to assess contemporary imperialism.

It is widely acknowledged that August 1914 was a point of inflexion, a turning point, in Lenin's thinking and his political orientation. Prior to the outbreak of war, and I admit that this polarisation is a schematic one, he had been first of all the leader of the Russian Social Democrats, or a faction among them, seeking the best way to apply the experience of international, and above all German, socialism to the very different conditions of Tsarist Russia. Thereafter, driven both by the collapse of the Second International and his sense of the immediacy of socialist revolution, he began to apply himself to fashioning a new outlook for world socialism – he emerged as an international leader, in fact.

Imperialism was written not only amidst a slaughter of dimensions that still retains its power to horrify but amidst the still-potent reverberations of the collapse of international socialism occasioned by the outbreak of war. There is no doubt that the alignment of the German SPD in the war and, above all, the position taken by Karl Kautsky, the greatest theoretician of the Second International, had the most profound effect on Lenin.

Kautsky, let us recall, did not really support the Kaiser. Instead, he effectively declared the class struggle over for the duration, said that the International was only an instrument for peacetime, for the gradual accumulation of forces ready to assume power when capitalism reached its inevitable point of breakdown, and that the war was therefore, far from being a revolutionary opportunity, a tragic diversion from this ineluctable onward march of history. Moreover, he argued that imperialism itself was a policy followed by misguided capitalists, rather than integral to capitalism, and it could be succeeded by a new phase of "ultra-imperialism" which might restore peace without the need for revolution. Kautsky never recovered politically from these misjudgements, because all the hitherto-concealed ambiguities and illusions in his pre-war "orthodoxy" were now, like the Emperor of fable, shown to have no clothes. He spent the rest of his political life railing against Leninism above all else.

The abuse which Lenin invariably directed at Kautsky – and which marks *Imperialism* too – reads as extraordinary in its intensity today, but can only be explained by, firstly, the immense prestige which Kautsky and his orthodox Marxism had had before 1914, including the influence which he had had, despite accumulating reservations, on Lenin himself; and second, Lenin's sense of the immediacy of the revolutionary situation, which made diplomatic niceties a luxury.

Nothing was more important than taking down Kautsky, and this is central to *Imperialism*. Lenin could think of no worse insult in his pamphlet *The Collapse of the Second International* than to compare Kautsky to the leader of Marxism in Britain:

> "… when, before the war, Hyndman turned towards a defence of imperialism, all respectable socialists considered him an unbalanced crank, of whom nobody spoke otherwise than in a tone of disdain. Today the most prominent Social-Democratic leaders of all countries have sunk entirely to Hyndman's position, differing from one another only in shades of opinion and in temperament.
> "If you are convinced that Hyndman's chauvinism is false and destructive, does it not follow that you should direct your criticism and attacks against Kautsky, the more influential and more dangerous defender of such views?"[1]

Imperialism needs first of all to be understood as a polemic aimed at undermining the theoretical props of Kautskyism, and at reformulating the political base for world revolution in

a new situation, in which the international working-class movement was split, on the one hand; but in which a host of democratic and national movements were coming to the fore in struggle against world capitalism, on the other. It shares that in common with nearly everything Lenin wrote in the period 1914-1917. Along with his speeches and writings around the early congresses of the Communist International, these works represent the pinnacle of his endeavour to chart a new politics for the international socialist movement.

In the 1914-17 period, running from the start of the war to the outbreak of the February revolution in Russia, Lenin took three clear and novel positions which defined Leninism and command our attention today. All three, unsurprisingly, have a bearing on imperialism. Two of them I can reference only briefly in this article.

First, he advocated, with that remarkable vehemence which admitted of no nuance, the need for socialists to effect a complete rupture with opportunism within their movement, for a break with the chauvinists who supported their own governments in the war, and with the centrists like Kautsky. *In The Collapse of the Second International* he wrote:

> "Social-chauvinism is an opportunism which has matured to such a degree, grown so strong and brazen during the long period of comparatively 'peaceful' capitalism, so definite in its political ideology, and so closely associated with the bourgeoisie and the governments, that the existence of such a trend within the Social-Democratic workers' parties cannot be tolerated." [2]

This opportunist and chauvinist trend he attributed to the development of imperialism. In another contemporary pamphlet, *Imperialism and the Split in Socialism*, he wrote:

> "why does England's monopoly explain the (temporary) victory of opportunism in England? Because monopoly yields superprofits, *ie* a surplus of profits over and above the capitalist profits that are normal and customary all over the world. The capitalists can devote a part (and not a small one at that!) of these superprofits to bribe their own workers, to create something like an alliance … between the workers of the given nation and their capitalists against the other countries. England's industrial monopoly was already destroyed by the end of the nineteenth century. That is beyond dispute. But … did all monopoly disappear?" [3]

In fact, vast colonial holdings remained. Lenin makes the same connection towards the end of *Imperialism*. Alas, as we know all too well today, the victory of opportunism proved to be far from 'temporary'.

In taking this 'rupture' position, Lenin had to confront powerful 'unity' arguments and attitudes which, even among anti-war socialists, looked to the restoration of the old parties after the war. But Lenin grasped that an epoch in the history of socialism had passed. He also identified imperialism as the issue on which what became the opposed camps of communists and social-democrats were most sharply distinguished from each other. This was the real foundation of the international communist movement. Ever since, the difference over imperialism has remained the key demarcation between communists, on the one hand, and social-democrats or liberals, on the other.

The second novelty in Lenin's post-1914 approach was his stress on democratic questions, polemicising against those of his comrades, like Bukharin or Pyatakov, who dismissed the relevance or significance of the struggle for national independence. These views are most clearly expressed in his pamphlet *The Nascent Trend of Imperialist Economism*, where he wrote that

> "all 'democracy' consists in the proclamation and realisation of 'rights' which under capitalism are realisable only to a very small degree and only relatively. But without the proclamation of these rights, without a struggle to introduce them now, immediately, without training the masses in the spirit of this struggle, socialism is impossible." [4]

He further argues that national independence struggles contribute to the undermining of imperialism and ought to engage the support of the working-class movement. A commonplace today, but while one could find condemnations of colonial policy aplenty in the pre-war Second International, one would search almost in vain for a view representing such struggles as an organic part of the movement for socialism, in the great powers included. In *The Socialist Revolution and the Right to Self-Determination* he wrote:

> "In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, *ie* their freedom to secede.
> "Socialists must not only demand the unconditional and immediate liberation of the colonies without compensation … they must also render determined support to the more revolutionary elements in the bourgeois-democratic movements for national liberation in these countries and assist their uprising – or revolutionary wars, in the event of one – against the imperialist powers that oppress them." [5]

In this year of anniversaries, it is not irrelevant to point out that this insight of Lenin's was applied to the assessment of the Easter Rising in Dublin. When the great James Connolly told his daughter shortly before his execution that "the socialists will not understand why I am here" he was not wrong. Most British socialists either cheered the suppression of the rising or ignored it as an embarrassment; and Radek and Trotsky among Lenin's comrades dismissed it as an echo of an archaic past.

Lenin was the outstanding exception. He dismissed the socialist critics of the Rising as "monstrous pedants" and warned that no-one would ever live to see a pure revolution, pitting socialism against imperialism. He wrote:

> "To imagine that social revolution is conceivable without revolts by small nations in the colonies and in Europe, without revolutionary outbursts by a section of the petty bourgeoisie with all its prejudices, without a movement of the politically non-conscious proletarian and semi-proletarian masses against oppression by the landowners, the church, and the monarchy, against national oppression, etc – to imagine all this is to repudiate social revolution …. Only those who hold a ridiculously pedantic view could vilify the Irish rebellion by calling it a 'putsch'. Whoever expects a 'pure' social revolution will never live

to see it. Such a person pays lip-service to revolution without understanding what revolution is .... Capitalism is not so harmoniously built that the various sources of rebellion can immediately merge of their own accord, without reverses and defeats." [6]

I dwell on these points because they represented a challenge by Lenin not just to the predominant social-chauvinists, but also to many on the left of the movement, including Luxemburg, Radek and Trotsky. The latter still to some extent envisaged social revolution in the same terms as Kautsky, as the product of the maturing of the productive forces, the growth of the working-class and the inevitability of capitalist crisis.

Lenin saw social revolution as not just the product of the confrontation of workers and capitalists in the developed countries, but as the outcome of a sequence of upheavals including democratic revolutionary movements against imperialism. This was the first real conceptualisation of world revolution as more than a very general and abstract slogan. It gave a central role to the masses of peasants in Asia, the Middle East and the colonies generally, and it conceived of the overthrow of imperialism as a joint work of the working-class and the mass of oppressed peoples and nations. In this ideological crucible, the concept of world revolution was born.

This leads to Lenin's third point of wartime departure, the formulation of a new understanding of world capitalist economy. In a way, this was the least novel. Much of the research and analytical spadework had already been done by others. Lenin's *Imperialism* was about translating that work into a programme for socialist revolution, not in the future in general, but in the here and now, in contradistinction to Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism which looked to give opportunism a fresh coat of paint through envisaging a further stage of capitalism merging beyond the war.

Ultra-imperialism is, as even Lenin reluctantly conceded, a perfectly feasible line of capitalist development in the abstract, anticipating the tendency to monopoly extending still further to a fusion of the major capitalist powers. Trying to dismiss the possibility, at one point Lenin argued that ultra-imperialism was no more likely than developing food in a laboratory – something which has long since occurred, of course. The passion with which he opposed it was because it threatened to create a new post-war basis of Kautskyism, for the postponement of working-class power, for a reconciliation with opportunists after the war and its associated unpleasantness were over and for a denial of the urgency for revolutionary action in the present crisis. This is clear from Lenin's foreword to Bukharin's book on world economy, published shortly before his own. [7]

I believe that any attempt to read Lenin's *Imperialism* today out of this context, to read it as an attempt at an economic analysis of contemporary capitalism outside his project of imminent socialist and democratic world revolution, and breaking with opportunism, is flawed.

Lenin's *Imperialism* drew very heavily on the radical and socialist critique of imperialism which developed over the fifteen or so years before his pamphlet. Indeed, if one could summarise Lenin's *Imperialism* mathematically, it would be about 50% Rudolf Hilferding, 20% J A Hobson and the balance revolutionary dialectics directed against the international socialist establishment.

From Hobson, an English radical, Lenin obviously and explicitly took the idea of parasitism, of the decay of capitalist industry in its heartlands and the formation of a rentier class dependent on imperialist super-exploitation as a result of the export of capital. Hobson's eminence, while to some extent merited, is down to the fact that Marxist anti-imperialism was all-but non-existent in Britain at the time he was writing, which left the field clear for his own radical ideas to gain an advanced position in the emerging labour movement, as radicalism did on all issues in the British workers' movement at the time.

Hobson did not see the new imperialism as an inevitable development of a capitalism driven by the internal logic of accumulation to leave free enterprise behind, but rather as the product of the pressure of "the vested interests which … are shown to be the chief prompters of an imperialist policy … seeking their private commercial and financial gains at the expense and peril of the commonwealth." [8]

This was, as Marxist historian Victor Kiernan has put it, "capitalism … led astray by the self-interest of dealers in arms, war contractors, financiers and stock-jobbers", almost empire-by-conspiracy. [9]

Hobson believed therefore that the whole drive of imperialism could be obstructed by a return to a more democratic and enlightened capitalism. Expropriating the bourgeoisie, or seeing the capitalist class, as a whole, as the social sponsor of imperialism, formed no part of his perspective. Additionally, the emphasis on the financier sometimes led Hobson and some of his co-thinkers into the shallows of anti-Semitism, although he later resiled from such an attitude.

That racial trope aside, Hobson's presentation of the new phase in economic and political life clearly offered something for almost everyone – a basis for trade union redistributive demands; a summons to defence of democracy and a 'healthy' British nationalism; the promotion of domestic consumption and, hence, local industry; and the advance of social reform without the need for the socialisation of the means of production. The subsequent development of the theory of the 'anti-monopoly alliance' by sections of the world communist movement owes him a debt which is seldom acknowledged.

The German Rudolf Hilferding was the most important single source of the analysis in *Imperialism* – arguably too much so in that Lenin's work clearly better describes the German imperialism of the time than it does any other. Nevertheless, Hilferding's book *Finance Capital*, published in 1910, was the first thoroughgoing attempt to look at the changes in capitalism since Marx's work, other than the revisionism of Eduard Bernstein. It had a big and mostly favourable impact on the socialist movement when first published; and, when Lenin was looking to outline his own views in popular form, he leaned heavily on Hilferding's work, while updating many of the statistics and examples.

All of Lenin's famous five points which signified the development of imperialism out of free-enterprise capitalism can be found in Hilferding. The latter outlined the emergence of finance capital from a merger of banking and industrial capital, the significance of the export of capital and the division of the world between monopolies and between imperialist powers. All these are Hilferding-ist rather than Leninist insights in their original form.

Hilferding, however, was describing finance capital but not 'imperialism', a term which he only seems to have added to the last chapter of his work in order to give it some additional polemical punch. But he nevertheless came close to grasping the essence of the new era in passages like the following:

"Violent methods are of the essence of colonial policy, without which it would lose its capitalist rationale. They are just as much an integral part of it as the existence of a propertyless proletariat is a condition *sine qua non* of capitalism in general. The idea of pursuing a colonial policy without having to resort to its violent methods is an illusion to be taken no more seriously than that of abolishing the proletariat while maintaining capitalism in existence.

"The demand for an expansionist policy revolutionises the whole world view of the bourgeoisie; it ceases to be peace-loving and humanitarian. The old free traders believed in free trade not only as the best economic policy but also as the beginning of an era of peace. Finance capital … has not faith in the harmony of capitalist interests, and knows well that competition is becoming increasingly a political power struggle. The ideal of peace has lost its lustre, and in place of the idea of humanity there emerges a glorification of the greatness and power of the state …. The ideal now is to secure for one's own nation the domination of the world, an aspiration which is as unbounded as the capitalist lust for profit from which it springs …. Since the subjection of foreign nations takes place by force … it appears to the ruling nation that this domination is due to some special natural qualities, in short to its racial characteristics. Thus there emerges in racist ideology, cloaked in the garb of natural science, a justification for finance capital's lust for power …. An oligarchic ideal of domination has replaced the democratic ideal of equality." [10]

Here he foreshadows much of the analysis of the Communist movement, and Lenin's own declaration in *Imperialism* that "politically, imperialism is a striving towards violence and reaction." Hilferding did not himself develop these ideas in their revolutionary potential – he went on to serve as a social-democratic minister in the Weimar Republic, went into exile after Hitler came to power and was eventually murdered by the Gestapo in Paris. He seemed at several points to come close to a world-revolutionary conclusion, as when he wrote that the independence movement of the subjected people "threatens European capital precisely in its most valuable and promising areas of exploitation" but he did not develop the argument in terms of revolutionary solidarity between the labour and national liberation movements.

So, to sum up on this point, it is far from the case that, before Lenin's *Imperialism*, the international socialist movement had not impressively analysed the new phase of capitalism, nor that it had ignored its political implications. What it had not done, as 1914 proved, was develop a new programme of world revolution which reflected these changed conditions; nor of course was it able to respond except by capitulation to the outbreak of the war it had foreseen, and wanting to put Humpty back together as soon as possible. Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism, whatever abstract merit it had (and it had some) had the effect of prolonging the half-life of the passive inevitably of socialist advance which was the hallmark of the Second International.

From the scientific point of view, Lenin did not intend his pamphlet to constitute the last word on the subject. We know this in part because he told us so. In *The Collapse of the Second International* he wrote:

"… a comprehensive scientific analysis of imperialism is one thing – that analysis is only under way and, in essence, is as infinite as science itself …. Capitalism will never be completely and exhaustively studied in all the manifestations of its predatory nature, and in all the minute ramifications of its historical development and national features." [11]

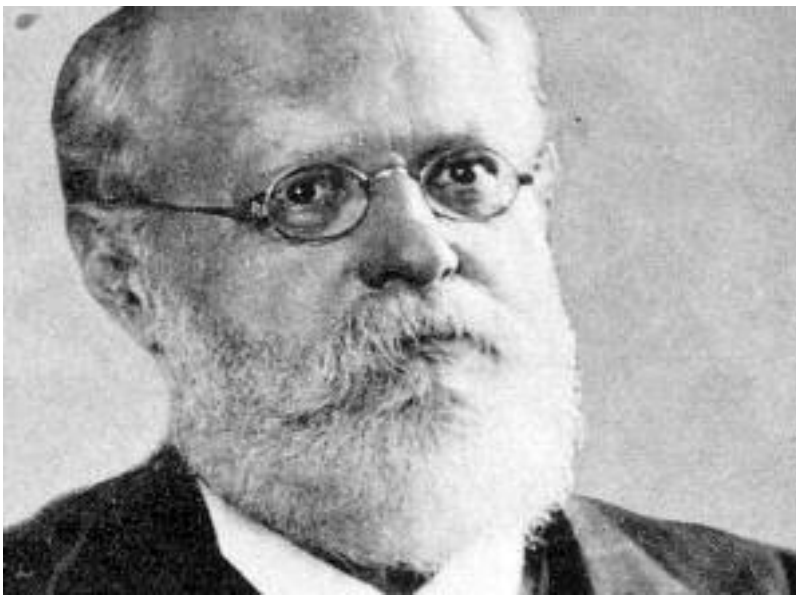
▲ V I Lenin

Indeed, he further acknowledged himself that his analysis of imperialism could not be a one-size-fits-all doctrine. In 1916 in several places he wrote that Russian imperialism had a "military-feudal" nature, and noted in *Imperialism* that it was "enmeshed … in a particularly close network of pre-capitalist relations." The same analysis should surely apply to some degree to Austro-Hungarian imperialism (the power which started the war), a ramshackle semi-feudal structure in which monopoly capital was hardly the decisive element. Even French imperialism did not have the same relationship between banks and industry, due to the weakness of industrial capital.

So, out of the principal combatants in 1916, Lenin himself really only saw his thesis as closely fitting German and British capitalism; and the structure of those two imperialisms was hardly identical either, since Britain's long-standing domination of the world market had lessened competitive pressures and hence the concentration of capital to some extent. It can be seen in his pamphlet that the first chapters on the role of banks and the formation of monopolies draw very heavily on Germany, while those on the export of capital and parasitism dwell much more on Britain. This underlines the political and contingent, as well as synthetic, nature of his analysis.

I have avoided so far giving Lenin's pamphlet its full title, which is of course *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Interestingly, it may have been given a weight that Lenin never fully intended it to bear. Moira Donald, in her study of the relationship of the Russian revolutionaries to Kautsky, points out that it was first published as *Imperialism, the Most Recent Stage of Capitalism*, and that "a very high stage of capitalism" would be an equally acceptable translation. Indeed, Lenin was ready to call it *Special Features of Recent Capitalism* if that would help get it past the censor; although on balance, given his desire to foreclose Kautsky's ultra-imperialist option, he most likely did indeed mean "highest" and final. [12]

Indeed, there was one way in which Lenin did



▲ K Kautsky

unambiguously mean the imperialist stage of capitalism to be the final one – several times in *Imperialism* he argues, to quote,

> "capitalism in its imperialist stage leads right up to the most comprehensive socialisation of production; it…drags the capitalists, against their will and consciousness, into some sort of new social order." [13]

He famously wrote in the preface to the German edition, published in 1920, that imperialism was the eve of proletarian revolution. Now this was immediately and urgently true then, but even if one takes a long view of history, it remains true today only as a sort of comforting abstraction. Imperialism has itself gone through several metamorphoses both in terms of its inner structure and its political expression since, sufficient to make the whole "highest stage" argument pointless. The 'even higher stage' which Lenin was eager to foreclose in 1916 – that is, ultra-imperialism – cannot be so easily dismissed today.

Lenin also states that imperialism is monopoly capitalism, although on the same page he describes this formula as "inadequate". Now, Marx wrote in *The Poverty of Philosophy:*

> "In practical life we find not only competition, monopoly and the antagonism between them, but also the synthesis of the two, which is not a formula, but a movement. Monopoly produces competition, competition produces monopoly. Monopolists compete among themselves; competitors become monopolists." [14]

Lenin acknowledged this point, albeit rather weakly. In a world today where many of the biggest monopolies – Google, Microsoft, Amazon – did not exist twenty years ago, Marx's position is evidently more accurate than any argument that monopoly is simply decaying, parasitic capitalism, unless one understands the latter as simply a general statement that capitalism can no longer do anything which socialism could not do better.

Lenin's main innovation was to foreground uneven development, to take Marx's description of capitalism's cyclical growth, with its continuous unevenness between different branches of industry, into a global formula for the uneven development of the world system as a whole and hence for war, amongst other depredations. From this comes the famous 'weak link' theory, which Lenin saw as the point of departure for a new era of revolution and which he deployed to good effect in Russia itself of course.

And the real objective of *Imperialism* flowed from this – the refutation of Kautsky's theory of ultra-imperialism, or the idea that capitalism could resolve its problems not just without socialism, but without world revolution and now. It is this political objective that sits at the heart of the work. Imperialism is the bridge from *The Collapse of the Second International* to the *April Theses* of 1917.

So what is left today from a century of sweeping changes, advances and reverses, but in a world which is still dominated entirely by the capitalist system? Too often, comrades at this point whip out Lenin's five criteria characterising the new epoch of a century ago, find data, which is not lacking, to prove that they are still operative, and then declare Lenin's theory as relevant as ever, and consider their analytical work done.

In my opinion such an approach is the approach of a Kautsky, not a Lenin. It ignores the new, and it underpins threadbare political strategies. It does not address the issue of what weight should be given today to those factors, extant though they surely are.

For example, in a recent interview a leader of a major communist party says Lenin's analysis is simply truer than ever. He describes a very large number of states as imperialist, including Denmark, Belgium and Brazil, as if the actual international role played by such countries, and their autonomous power, was an immaterial consideration. This is a curiously apolitical analysis which could only be a 'Leninist' position in the sense that, if monopoly capitalism equals imperialism and monopoly indeed dominates these countries, then they are all imperialist. However, that reduces Leninism to political sterility. It leaves out the actual global political struggle and power alignments, which was at the heart of Lenin's outlook. He always identified the main enemy clearly – in 1916, the three or four great powers dominating the world and driving to war. It is a mistake to dissolve the actual hierarchies of modern imperialism into a general soup of monopoly capitalist states, as if they all played an equivalent role. The USA is a source of new war dangers. So are Britain, France, Japan and Russia. Denmark and Belgium are not.

A broader assessment of the contemporary vitality of Lenin's analysis must instead start where he himself started from – the structures and rhythms of capital accumulation. The control of the concentration of capital, and the political intervention to sustain the extraction of super-profit, remain the key issues to address. In that light, some of the criteria focussed on by Hilferding and Lenin need considering from a fresh perspective.

For example, take the export of capital – this is now a ubiquitous feature of world economy and represents different movements of capital in the world today, reflecting new centres of accumulation.

Even at the time Lenin wrote it was a determining factor possibly only in Britain. Much capital in all the great powers was anyway circulated between developed countries, where it played the part of equalising the rate of profit, not as a source of super-profit. But there is no doubt that it played a large part in the politics of imperialism, not just in 1916 but down to the end of World War Two, with significant echoes thereafter.

The export of capital is no longer simply a matter of surplus value extracted in British factory production being exported to less developed parts of the world where the rate of return will be higher, enriching the rentiers while starving the domestic productive economy of necessary reinvestment. Capital is circulated across the world by an incipient pan-national financial oligarchy centred on London, New York,

Hong Kong etc – this is the core of globalisation – with fantastic rewards distributed across the ruling classes of many countries. All this is protected by a world power structure that depends in the end on a US super-imperialism.

Today, does the fact that Chinese companies, themselves indistinguishable from monopolies, have invested $40 billion in Africa in the last ten years, mainly in resource extraction, mean that China is imperialist, even though Chinese state intervention in African countries is very limited?

Or does the investment in Britain by the kleptocracies of the Gulf, now exceeding £100 billion as they have appropriated much of the value of oil production, invert the classical imperial relationship, or does their continuing reliance on western military power to protect them (including from their own people) mean they remain dependent?

The formation of new circuits of capital, new projects for extracting super-profit across borders, and new political alliances behind the formalities of states at least requires that the political significance of the export of capital (not the fact of its pervasive nature, which is undisputed) be looked at afresh.

Neither is the division of the world between rival monopolies, mainly through the use of tariff barriers, the factor today that it was in Lenin's time. It exists, and there are still occasions when the big capitalist states intervene to advance their own national monopolies against their rivals, but often this is subordinated under neoliberalism to collaboration between the main imperialist powers to impose joint market access open to all in most of the globe.

The struggle for spheres of influence does not, for the most part, take the same form of unabashed and exclusive hegemony over particular regions. Even the struggles over Ukraine or in the Far East (while undoubtedly great power conflicts) do not bear comparison, from that point of view, with the colonial position before 1914 (or 1945 for that matter). So it seems hard to deny that the imperialist world order has mutated in many of its key features, while retaining in full force its violent and exploitative essence.

Some features of the new order remain remarkably familiar, to be sure. Lenin wrote:

> "... the development of capitalism has arrived at a stage when, although commodity production still 'reigns' and continues to be regarded as the basis of economic life, it has in reality been undermined and the bulk of the profits go to the 'geniuses' of financial manipulation. At the basis of these manipulations and swindles lies socialised production; but the immense progress of mankind which achieved this socialisation, goes to benefit … the speculators." [15]

This has not always been true since then. It was curbed somewhat in the thirty years after World War Two, but it is of course true again today with a vengeance. No-one can doubt that the insight into the development of a parasitic rentier class based in the countries towards the apex of the world hierarchy remains a key feature of capitalism today.

The neoliberal phase is monopoly capitalist imperialism's third major period of development. First, monopoly led to the period of inter-imperialist competition of Lenin's time, a period marked politically by the division and redivision of the world between the great powers and, of course, war. After 1945, in a world divided between social systems and dominated by a super-imperialism in its capitalist part with inter-imperialist rivalries abated, there was the first development of a pan-imperialist bloc, using common institutions alongside conventional methods to confront socialism and exploit the rest of the world.

And third, we have the present neoliberal, globalised world order with powerful elements of ultra-imperialism. Lenin used 'ultra-imperialism' and 'super-imperialism' interchangeably. Now it can be used to differentiate between the domination by a sole imperial power – super-imperialism, the USA – and the architecture that Kautsky spoke of, an ultra-imperialism fusing all the rival great powers into one bloc with its own machinery etc. These two concepts are not opposites, of course, and are entwined in their own development. Indeed, the development of any form of ultra-imperialism depends in the first place on the strength of US super-imperialism, the only state able to enforce such a project.

So imperialism, highest stage or not, is a protean phenomenon. What special features should we note today?

First, wage-labour is now a nearly universal condition: the destruction of the USSR, the incorporation of eastern Europe into the imperialist system, the shift to capitalism in China and the changes in India have all drawn billions into wage-labour, something that was a long way off in Lenin's time. This has of course given capitalism an extended lease on life, at the same time as complicating the search for super-profit in the longer term in the face of trends, moving very slowly admittedly, towards the equalisation of the value of labour power. [16]

Secondly, with the integration of the world system and its mediation through NATO, the IMF, the EU, the WTO and so on, the world has clearly advanced further in the direction of ultra-imperialism than anyone could reasonably have anticipated in 1916. This has of course not meant the world of peace that Kautsky seemed to anticipate. It has created a dystopia instead, with continual wars designed ultimately to create and re-create in an endless cycle, the conditions for global, friction-free process of capital accumulation without any people anywhere being able to put sand in the gears for any reason. The attempt by the USA to extend its super-imperialist hegemony in the capitalist part of the world before 1991 into a truly global hegemony afterwards has surely failed, although its reverberations live on, and either Clinton or Trump may yet decide to attempt to shape ultra-imperialism more to specific US interests.

Third, within this ultra-imperialism based on a super-imperialism, new rivalries emerge: elements of ultra-imperialism, inter-imperialist rivalry and super-imperialist US hegemony interact but in a new balance which changes continually. New centres of war are arising: the Middle East, where Russian imperialist interests collide with those of the USA and its allies; in eastern Europe, where the eastward expansion of the US world order meets the revival of Russian power; and in the Pacific, where the US and its allies seek to defend the existing hegemonic relations against the assertion of Chinese power and sovereignty.

You can call these conflicts inter-imperialist or something else (the left is generally reluctant to acknowledge the relevance of Lenin's formulae in relation to contemporary Russia and China), but there is no doubt that they all embody the danger of enormous wars, and that none of the powers involved can plausibly claim to be driven by socialism, as opposed to great-power nationalism.

The definition of imperialism offered by Victor Kiernan is a good one:

> "Imperialism today may be said to display itself in

coercion exerted abroad, by one means or another, to extort profits above what simple commercial exchange can procure." [17]

The connecting of state violence with the pursuit of super-profit surely gets close to the heart of the matter.

Or, take Tony Corfield's recent book *The City*, which locates contemporary finance in the analysis of imperialism, and a British imperialism moreover. He writes:

"Today, imperialism is characterised by economic privileges in the world economy, reinforced by monopolistic control of industry, commerce and finance, and backed up by powerful states, directly or indirectly." [18]

This speaks rightly to the emergence of a global hierarchy of power, under which a very wide range of economic actors can prosper, from all parts of the globe, but with power actually exercised through a world-hegemonic system headed by the USA. This system operates in the spirit of the early post-1991 US strategic analysts who spoke of the US creating a world system which could provide for the interests of others, not just the US itself, provided the central hegemonic principle was not challenged.

That system is of course now indeed being challenged – by Russia and China. They are half-in, arguing for more favourable terms of integration but with no objections in principle, and half-out, pressing against the system, toying with creating alternative centres of accumulation and power or with integrating with it.

It is also being challenged by the masses in a diversity of ways, rebelling against the global imperial elite, its wars and its crises. The historic election of an avowed anti-imperialist as leader of the British Labour Party, for a hundred years in the vanguard of social imperialism, is one measure of this.

The world working-class, itself in the process of formation, now faces a world-imperial system, based on a new level of global monopoly capital integration and on the power of one state above all, but with many of the attributes of an ultra-imperialism. We need to support all struggles of peoples against that system, and to find weak links as the system disintegrates in situations of economic crisis, but to avoid aligning the working class with one imperial power or another.

To conclude: how would Lenin meet this world? What would *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* look like in this world of undivided capitalist power, universal wage labour and new hegemonic structures generating small but globalised wars, threatening much larger conflicts?

Lenin would emphasise the democratic question, and the need to support all struggles against imperialism under whatever banner; he would expose any illusions – and there have been plenty, – that this new world order could be one of peace and harmony while it rests upon monopoly capitalism; and he would stress the need to rupture ideologically with those sections of the labour movement which argued for support for the new order.

He would look for the way to reconceptualise the need for world revolution in the light of the recent very heavy defeats and the emergence of globalisation, and he would demand the most severe scrutiny of all programmes and principles which corresponded to the previous epoch of capitalism.

In short, he would urge international labour to settle accounts with its inner Kautsky, the clinging to the formulas of the past phase and the cosy assumptions of legality and peaceful development, before things gets worse.

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16 The role of the super-exploitation of Labour is a principal theme in the recently-published and excellent *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century* by John Smith, New York, 2016.
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State monopoly capitalism
Chapter 4
Strategy discussion against the background of SMC theory

by Gretchen Binus, Beate Landefeld and Andreas Wehr

The step-by-step development of SMC has been the subject of reflection in the strategic discussions of the labour movement and of other left forces. Questions of strategy were already part of the discussion on imperialism at the beginning of the 20th century.

4.1 Imperialism and SMC – New Conditions for Struggle

For Rudolf Hilferding, finance capital signified "not freedom, but rather domination".[155] For Lenin, monopolies strengthened the tendency towards dismantling of democracy and warlike expansion, towards reaction internally and aggression externally. Indeed these tendencies hostile to democracy engendered the opposing tendency of "democratic aspirations in the masses" and sharpened "the antagonism between imperialism's denial of democracy and the mass striving for democracy."[156]

Right to self-determination as part of the struggle for democracy

Consequently the question of the dialectics of the struggle for democracy and socialism takes centre stage. An aspect of that is the right of nations to self-determination. Was such a watchword timely at the "eve of the socialist revolution"[157], which the left in the socialist movement took as its departure point? Was it internationalist? Rosa Luxemburg saw "bourgeois nationalism" in the demand for Polish national self-determination.[158] She feared that a disintegration of the big states would promote the splitting of the international proletariat. In Poland it would strengthen bourgeois nationalism.

Lenin on the other hand considered that the denial of Polish self-determination would strengthen Russian chauvinism and the reactionaries of the oppressed nation. The "slightest support to the privileges of its 'own' national bourgeoisie" by "the proletariat of any nation" would weaken international class solidarity. The right to self-determination was only to be defined negatively, as denial of tyranny and privileges. Just as the recognition of the right of divorce does not signify that every marriage pair must be divorced, so the right to self-determination was not directed against every sort of state union.[159]

Opposing those Marxists who considered the right to self-determination as illusionary, on account of strong economic interconnections between Poland and Russia or also between Ireland and England, Lenin emphasised the distinction between economics and politics, and their interaction. The right to self-determination, he said, is related to political power.[160] An imperialism based simply on economic arguments ignores the fact that political tutelage by big powers would restrict both the potential for development of the dependent countries and the unfolding of the class struggle within them.

Transition of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into the socialist revolution

As well as self-determination, the question of stages in the transition to a socialist form of society was at the centre of the strategic discussion. During the 1905 Revolution in Russia, the big bourgeoisie and the big landowners reached a compromise, in order to protect their privileges against the interests of the proletariat and the peasant masses. Consequently, an agrarian reform as a core element of the bourgeois-democratic revolution could only be achieved in opposition to the bourgeoisie, so that the peasant masses needed an alliance with the proletariat. From this array of forces Lenin developed the strategy of the transition of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into the socialist revolution. In contrast to economism, which ceded the bourgeois-democratic revolution to the bourgeoisie, Lenin developed the concept of proletarian hegemony in the bourgeois-democratic stage of the revolution.

At the same time he saw in monopoly capitalism "characteristics of a transition society", since the high level of socialisation reached provided a material preparation for socialism. Indeed, the right-wing social-democrat Scheidemann called the state direction of the war economy at that time "war-time socialism". Lenin saw in it nonetheless "war-time penal servitude for the workers".[161] On the other hand he regarded public enterprises like the German Imperial Post as places for "'training and disciplining' millions of workers",[162] who themselves learned there how to manage particular state functions.

In September 1917 Lenin castigated the war economy of the Russian Kerensky government. In the struggle against hunger, want, corruption and mismanagement, he demanded the nationalisation of the big banks and big businesses and their democratic control by the mass organisations. The Mensheviks and right-wing Socialist Revolutionaries, who did not want to go beyond the bourgeois-democratic character of the revolution, recoiled from that demand. However Lenin saw that, in the consequent revolutionary democracy, "state monopoly capitalism inevitably and unavoidably implies a step, and more than one step, towards socialism!"[163]

Chapter 1, *'The Origin of State Monopoly Capitalism'*, **Chapter 2**, *'The History of SMC Theory'* and **Chapter 3**, *'Topicality of the SMC Analysis'*, were published in *CR*78, pp 12-19, *CR*79, pp 16-23 and *CR*80, pp 8-20 respectively.

This chapter completes the series.

Forms of approach

After the defeat of the revolutions of 1918/19 in Germany, Austria, Hungary and Italy, it was clear that socialist revolutions in the economically more highly developed countries would be difficult. Lenin advised the communists in Western Europe that

> "all efforts and all attention should now be concentrated on the *next* step, which may seem … less fundamental, but on the other hand is actually closer to a practical accomplishment of the task … the search after forms of *transition* or the approach to the proletarian revolution."[164]

Through the accomplishment of *practical* tasks in diverse areas, he said, "branch after branch, and sphere after sphere" must be won *"from the bourgeoisie."*

The 4th World Congress of the Comintern in 1922 adopted *Theses on Tactics* oriented towards united front governments of the workers' parties, including:

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> "In the period between the present domination of open bourgeois reaction and the complete victory of the revolutionary proletariat over the bourgeoisie, there will be various stages and the possibility of various short-lived episodes".[165]

In 1930 Gramsci noted:

> "In my view Ilyich understood the need for a shift from the war of manoeuvre ... to a war of position .... This, I believe, is the meaning of the term 'united front' ...."[166]

Also, as Engels said, in "the democratic republic … wealth exercises its power indirectly, but all the more surely."[167] For its own social liberation the working class must therefore win political power and go forwards from bourgeois to socialist democracy. Rudolf Hilferding's position at the end of the 1920s, according to which the bourgeois democracy of "organised capitalism" may be extended to "economic democracy" without the solution of the power question,[168] had already turned out to be an illusion before the rise of Hitler. Indeed the fascist danger was underestimated in the whole labour movement.

At the 7th World Congress of the Comintern, fascism was defined as the "open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital."[169] Hence it was not just another bourgeois government. Rather, fascism and bourgeois democracy are qualitatively different ruling forms of the bourgeoisie. Now there was an orientation towards the defence of bourgeois-democratic rights, the overcoming of the split in the labour movement and broad anti-fascist alliances.

The intermediate goal of the prevention of fascism, or of its overthrow, where it was in power, connected the 7th World Congress with Lenin's concept of developing "forms of transition or approach to the revolution". The first popular front governments were in Spain, France and Chile. There the basic strategic idea was to carry over the mass struggle for the defence against reaction and fascism into an offensive which aimed at restricting the power of the monopolies, from which the tendency towards reaction originated.

The Allende government in Chile, 1970-73

After the Second World War, in the areas of Europe occupied by the Red Army, and in many colonial countries, a range of popular democratic revolutions followed from the anti-fascist and anti-colonial liberation struggles. In this context the victory of the People's Liberation Army in China was of enormous significance. In the capitalist countries of the West, conceptions of 'anti-monopoly democracy' were in turn developed from the experiences of the anti-fascist struggles. The best-known practical attempts were in the 1970s. These were: the Popular Unity government in Chile, 1970-73; the April Revolution in Portugal, 1974-75; and the 'Common Programme'[170] and Union of the Left in France, 1972-78.

In Chile in 1970, an alliance of the Communist, Socialist and Radical Parties, christian left and other lefts was elected to government. Actions followed aiming at the rapid raising of workers' living standards, and the nationalisation of the banks, copper mines and big industrial and foreign trade businesses, as well as anti-imperialist and anti-oligarchic transformations. These were intended to limit the power of the big landowners and internal and external monopoly capital, and to open the road to socialism. At no time did the parties of Popular Unity have a majority in the parliament; rather, they depended on compromises with bourgeois forces, principally the Christian Democrats.

There was only partial unity between the Socialists and Communists over the necessity of expanding the unity of action of the working class towards an alliance with the middle strata. In the course of the revolutionary process, which from the beginning faced the most bitter resistance, defamation, sabotage, terrorist acts and imperialist interference, the counter-revolutionary forces succeeded in isolating the working class and drawing the predominant part of the middle strata to their side. In the parliament this was reflected in the Christian Democrats' complete going-over to the right. The relation of forces in the army also developed towards the right wing.

In 1970, shortly before the inauguration of Salvador Allende, an attempted coup, initiated by the USA, was frustrated by the vigilance of the popular masses and the refusal by the constitutionalists in the army. A further attempted overthrow in June 1973 still remained isolated. However, a few months later, the power relationships in the army, parts of the state apparatus and the bourgeois camp had fundamentally changed in favour of the counter-revolution. Pinochet's putsch was victorious. Due to lack of preparation for such a situation, the progressive forces did not have resources at their disposal for putting up a fight against the coup.

The April Revolution in Portugal, 1974

In 1974 a revolt in Portugal by the Movimento das Forças Armadas (MFA, Armed Forces Movement), to whose aid the popular masses came, resulted in the overthrow of the Salazar/Caetano regime. The April Revolution brought the independence of the Portuguese colonies. It led in 1975 to the nationalisation of 245 businesses and banks; while 1.14 million hectares of the latifundia were occupied by agricultural workers, leading to the establishment of 550 cooperatives. Rightist military forces repeatedly attempted a putsch against the revolutionary process, but they failed in the face of popular mobilisation. The forward movement in this phase was sustained by unity of action of the Communist (PCP) and Socialist (PS) parties, effected through the mass struggle, as well as by the alliance of the people and the MFA.

The Socialist Party, founded only in 1973, adapted itself to the movement in order to push back the influence of the communists. It rejected the building of trade union unity, because the communist influence there would have been too great. During the elections to the constitutional assembly in 1975 it organised an anti-communist campaign, around which the whole of Portuguese reaction gathered. In northern Portugal, offices of the PCP were set on fire. At the election the PS got 38%, the PCP only 12%. The PS left the joint government.[171] The MFA split into PS-aligned, ultra-left and revolutionary-democratic tendencies.

In the following period first the PCP and later the PS itself were pushed out of the government. Many of the anti-monopoly and anti-oligarchic gains won in the two years after the April Revolution were reversed in the course of the 20 years of counter-revolution and in the process of integration into the EU. A few gains could however be defended. Thus the Portuguese constitution foresees in future the opening of the road to socialism. When, between 2010 and 2013, the masses defended their rights against the dictatorship of the EU Troika, they were able to support themselves on the constitution: the constitutional court invalidated parts of the 'Memorandum'.

Today the PCP orients itself towards a "progressive democracy" as a stage in the struggle for socialism. The road of the April Revolution, which is characterised as an "unfinished revolution", is to be taken anew. That includes the attainment of Portugal's national sovereignty, which today is under the dictatorship of domestic and foreign monopolies and a directorate of major capitalist powers. The restored power of the monopolies and the big landowners is to be broken, and the road to socialism opened. The break with capitalist integration in the form of the EU is thereby considered to be absolutely necessary.[172]

The 'Common Programme' in France

In postwar France, the Communist Party (PCF) was initially the strongest force in the labour movement. After 1968 the current Socialist Party (PS) developed. The PCF, the PS and the radical left party, the Parti radical de gauche (PRG), were signatories in 1972 to the 'Common Government Programme', which served as both an electoral platform and an action programme for extra-parliamentary struggles of the trade union and political left, and youth and student organisations. In 1974 the left union only marginally failed to gain electoral victory at the national level. In 1978 the PS overtook the PCF in the parliamentary voting, which occasioned the latter to leave the left alliance.

Not until 1981, after the election of François Mitterand as president, was a Socialist-Communist government established. At this time the transition to the neoliberal type of regulation had already begun in many countries. Under Mitterand, the first measures were the raising of the minimum wage and pensions, shortening of the working week, nationalisation of big companies and big banks, and other reforms. The coalition, under stress from the beginning, not least because of the armaments policy, ran aground when the Socialist economics minister began to deal with the French current account deficit by means of a programme of austerity. The PCF left the government.

For the Mitterand government, the 'Common Programme' no longer played any role. It was the last attempt so far at formulating a revolutionary strategy for France which, at least from the perspective of the PCF at that time, aimed at opening the road to socialism through the project of anti-monopoly democracy. Later participation of the PCF in so-called centre-left governments no longer had any relationship to a revolutionary strategy, but rather pursued only the aim of a political change from the neoliberal to a progressive variant of capitalist regulation.

Discussions in the Federal Republic of Germany (BRD)

In the BRD the German Communist Party (DKP), established in 1968, pursued the strategy of anti-monopoly struggle. Its declaration of principle appraised the BRD society as state monopoly capitalism. As a strategic stage goal the DKP demanded the "limiting of the power of monopoly capital and its ultimate overcoming, the transformation of the BRD into a real, progressive democracy."[173] On this basis the DKP worked out partial programmes in the 1970s, such as an education reform programme, a cultural programme and an agricultural programme. Also, its sister organisations such as the Marxist student league Spartakus and the German Socialist Working Youth (Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterjugend, SDAJ) pursued the anti-monopoly thrust with their own programmes.

At the end of the 1960s, after the left turns in the Young Socialists (Jusos) and the social-democratic student league (Sozialistischen Hochschulbund, SHB), a left tendency also developed in the Social-Democratic Party (SPD), oriented towards the central tenets of SMC theory. The first elaborations, which started from SMC theory, were strategy papers in 1971 from the state organisations of the Jusos in Hamburg and Berlin. The 'Stamokap Fraction', organised in the 'Hanover Circle', played an important role in the internal debates of the Jusos in the 1970s and 1980s and was indeed temporarily able to dominate the federal association. From 1978 this tendency has published the *Zeitschrift für Sozialistische Politik und Wirtschaft*, *spw (Journal for Socialist Politics and Economics)*.

The Jusos in the Hanover Circle and the left in the SPD produced in 1978 a first, and in 1980 a second, version of the *Herforder Thesen - Zur Arbeit von Marxisten in der SPD (Herford Theses – On the work of Marxists in the SPD)*, in which, on the basis of SMC theory, an independent position was taken inside social democracy. In the strategically central Section III, 'The Democratic Road to Socialism in the Developed Capitalist Countries', there is the following statement:

> "From all developments, objective structural changes as well as historical experiences, a large part of the West European left have drawn the conclusion that the democratic road to socialism, supported on a broad social majority, is more than ever before the central political task of a socialist strategy. It makes it possible, continually to extend democratic rights in the process of class struggles and to achieve a support, extending beyond the labour movement, for the necessary social changes, in order to isolate the reactionary circles and to cut off their resort to use of force up to and including civil war."[174]

At a conference discussing the *Herford Theses* in Bielefeld in 1980, Wolfgang Abendroth explained that the Theses "have largely realised ... a strategic concept to offer." At the same time he warned that

"whether or not the road to socialism can be peacefully

followed [does] not [lie] in the arbitrariness of the working class, Marxists and socialists. That – whether it can be followed peacefully – is decided by the opposing class ... which we can force, most of all through our strength and strategy, to respect democracy and the rule of law. But we cannot guarantee our success. If we are too weak ... then in an economic crisis (unavoidable in capitalism) monopoly capitalism will once again succeed in finding the way out in fascism and war, and then we would be facing totally different perspectives. From this it follows that it is considered wrong and un-Marxist to maintain that there is only the legal and democratic road to socialism, one avoiding violent conflicts."[175]

For all on the left, the failure of the left governments in Chile and France destroyed illusions of rapid progress. In the BRD the working class appeared to be integrated into the capitalist system and no longer to be playing any forward-driving role. As a consequence of the 1974-75 crisis a long-continuing development to the right began. In opposition to the reactionary solution to the crisis, the DKP proposed in its new programme of 1978 a turn to democratic and social progress. It was desirable that the struggle for that would lead into "an anti-monopoly democracy".

The DKP programmes of 1978 and 2006 see "the anti-monopoly and socialist revolutions as connected stages of development in the unitary process of the transition from capitalism to socialism." In that context it is a matter of stages of struggle, not of an "intermediate stage" between capitalism and socialism.[176] "It involves a period of revolutionary struggle, in which elements of capitalism are still present, but also embryonic forms of socialism are also already there", *ie* it involves "relations of transition"[177]. With reference to the power of the state, it is a matter in this period of the weakening of its repressive apparatus, the widening of popular democratic control, and the use of devices regulating the economy in the interests of the majority.

In the process a democratic government would have to support itself on the mobilised and organised masses. Wide-ranging forms of the political organisation of the anti-monopoly democratic forces would have to contribute to the construction of a new state power. Once capital saw its power and privileges threatened, it would continually threaten "to halt the social progress through economic sabotage and political diversion, through terror and bloody violence against the people." Hence "the unavoidable resistance of big business" would have to be overcome in sharp class and mass struggles, "and such a preponderance of the forces striving for socialism would have to be achieved, making it possible to prevent reaction from resorting to bloody counter-revolutionary violence."[178]

In the 1980s it became more and more clear that working class struggles for redistribution and for collective shortening of the working week were for the time being coming to an end, and that the labour movement was losing its fighting strength through structural changes, mass unemployment and increasing flexibilisation and casualisation. With the movement against nuclear weapons and the women's movement, new social movements appeared and the party of the Greens entered the German federal and state parliaments. In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev emphasised "human rights" and promoted cross-class alliances. With the support of Gorbachevists in the Soviet Communist Party and in the Socialist Unity Party of the German Democratic Republic (DDR), a 'renewal tendency' in the DKP came forward for a programmatic reorientation in the form of the so-called 'Reform Alternative'.

The 'Reform Alternative' aimed at the carrying through of a progressive, domestically focused and environmental-social variant of state monopoly capitalism. Inroads into monopoly capitalist property were not supposed to be a taboo in this context, but however were "not conceptual components of the Reform Alternative". In it, rather, "the anti-monopoly orientation, as it was decisive for the Marxist strategy of the past", receded "into the background".[179] At its basis lay a reappraisal of the international relation of forces, with the argument that, while the revolutionary process was stagnating, capitalism had proved itself more adaptable and innovative than anticipated. The epoch was, it claimed, not marked by the worldwide transition to socialism, but rather by a long continuing coexistence of the evolving social systems, between which intermediate forms developed. Later Gorbachev classified Sweden as a socialist country.

The major part of the DKP rejected the 'Reform Alternative'. Heinz Jung, one of its authors, was of the opinion, after the break-up of the DDR, that for the eastern advocates of this change of course, "the preference for a reform orientation" was

"already the reaction to the advance of restoration and of market economic thought. ... The leave-taking expressions for socialism were hidden in the sophisticated debates over the character of the epoch. ... Our ambitions were however different. Our axiom was still the bipolarity of the world and the internal social antagonisms in capitalism."[180]

4.2 Reform – Revolution – Transformation

The 'double transformation' concept of the social scientist Dieter Klein is related to the Reform Alternative. He wants to connect social-environmental and democratic reforms with a "big transformation". Capitalism is to be overcome, in which "all values, elements, institutions and practices", which in bourgeois society already contain a logic opposed to capital, are "torn away from being offside, and are developed."[181] Klein speaks of "transformation as the transcendence of reform and revolution", defines revolution as a selective, risky to incalculable "substitution" of one social system by another, and reform as necessary but remaining within the limits of capitalism. The "transcendence" is supposed to preserve the good aspects of both poles and to overcome the bad aspects.

Rosa Luxemburg criticised precisely this procedure in Bernstein's case: his "weighing minutely the good and bad sides" of reform and revolution recalls the "manner in which cinnamon or pepper is weighed out in a consumers' co-operative store". In fact, she wrote, reform and revolution function historically "in accordance with influences that are much more profound than the consideration of the advantages or inconveniences of one method another". That is to say:

"In the history of bourgeois society, legislative reform served to strengthen progressively the rising class, till the latter was sufficiently strong to seize political power, to suppress the existing juridical system of laws, and to construct itself a new one".[182]

Revolutionary situations are not artificially brought about. They arise objectively from the interplay of class forces, principally through the behaviour of the ruling classes.

Dialectics of reform and revolution

The Marxist theory of revolution hence never starts from mechanical confrontation, but rather from the *dialectics of reform and revolution*. They are, as Rosa Luxemburg said,

> "*different* factors in the development of class society. They condition and complement each other, and are at the same time reciprocally exclusive, as are the north and south poles, bourgeoisie and proletariat."[182]

In Klein's concept of transformation the dialectical interrelation is replaced by the sum of "quantitative and qualitative changes", of "reforms and breaks", of "reforms and reforms of revolutionary profundity" – without criteria for the qualitative change. In addition the new quality of class power and other system qualities, which distinguish socialism from capitalism, would have to be designated.

However, with Klein socialism is not a new social order but rather

> "to be understood as an aim, a movement and an orienting system of values, as a continuous democratic process. ... Socialism is a process in which the domination of profit is overcome by the domination of the development of the personality of the individuals in solidarity with others."[183]

Socialism is separated from its objective conditions and displaced into the realm of subjective behaviour and values. It is correct that, in the struggle for socialism, individual qualities develop, such as solidarity, sympathy, collectivity, perseverance and discipline, and a consciousness of one's own history and culture. Thus far, as the title of Klein's book promises, can "tomorrow" already dance "today".

However, that cannot do away with the distinction between capitalism and socialism, in terms of the quality of the system. Marx, Engels, Luxemburg and Lenin inferred specific characteristic features of socialism from the fundamental capitalist contradiction between production and private property. Accordingly the political power of the working class is necessary, in order to transfer the decisive means of production into common property and to plan production in the interests of society. These can be realised in multiple national and historical-specific ways. There can, however, be no talk of socialism without these basic principles.

Dieter Klein cites the high level of socialisation, in order to warn against the risks of a "compaction" of the necessary decisive points into a "temporally shortened major event of the revolutionary upheaval":

> "If the comprehensive revolutionary event should take the place of longer processes of molecular change ... then the danger would be ultra-large for developed capitalist countries, that such a revolution would be over-strained … [and] that the revolutionary process [would become] of necessity seriously disrupted, with severe social losses for large parts of the population, and unmanageable."[184]

Against that Klein appears to trust in the crisis management of competing private monopolies and the capitalist states involved with them. How little justified this trust is, however, was shown at the beginning of 2012, when German Chancellor Merkel, in consultation with the heads of corporations and trade associations, genuinely considered allowing Greece to go bankrupt. Klein can evidently not imagine situations in which it is only possible to cope with chaos through the degree of organisation of the revolutionary subject.

In fact, the level of socialisation argues for a political isolation, as far-reaching as possible, of the state monopoly centre of power through a broad anti-monopoly front. It argues for a high degree of organisation and discipline of the "social collective labourer"[185] and his/her allies. In the struggle for reform, such a countervailing power can be formed. There is no bypass to sharp confrontation with the ruling class. What is to be striven for is good advance work so that the unavoidable confrontation is made as short and bloodless as possible.

Klein, who regards the innovation potential of capitalism as starkly inexhaustible, would object that a system change in the not too distant future is not on the agenda in any case. Yet, in the struggle for social-environmental reforms, for the overcoming of neoliberalism, the question is raised: which class forces are to push those through? The most important successes of the labour movement were achieved in revolutionary situations such as the German 'November Revolution' of 1918-19 or in the period of competition of the two social systems. The increasingly narrow scope for concessions by capital means that even small, commonplace, reforms can only win through in the course of the toughest class struggle.

Gramsci on the shift of power relations

Along with a repressive state apparatus, the ruling class has at its command institutions and organisations of civil society, with which it directs, interests, binds and leads those dominated. Because of this, Gramsci saw in the West the necessity of a "war of position" in distinction from a "war of manoeuvre", which led to the success of the revolution in Russia in 1917. In a war of position the opponent is not conquered in one assault, but rather must – on the basis of the hinterland frequently attached to the opponent – be worn down in protracted trench warfare, before a breakthrough at specific places becomes possible. The "massive structures" of the hinterland resemble the trenches and permanent fortifications of the front in the war of position: "they render merely 'partial' the element of movement, which before used to be 'the whole' of the war".[186]

Gramsci distinguishes three levels or moments in the relation of forces: social, political and military. The *social level* is closely linked to the economic base (structure). It is a matter of class relations on the basis of the level of development of productive forces. The moment of the *relation of political forces* is reflected in "the degree of homogeneity, self-awareness and organisation attained by the various social classes." It can be narrowed to the representation of economic or particular collective interests, but can also include the consciousness,

> "that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate interests of the purely economic class, and can and must become the interests of other subordinate groups too."[187]

Here for the first time the struggle for hegemony breaks out.

Finally, the *military moment* also belongs always to the relations of force, and "from time to time is directly decisive." It consists of a military-technical and a politico-military

component. The second can weaken the military prowess of the first. According to Gramsci,

> "the decisive element in every situation is the permanently organised and long-prepared force which can be put into the field when it is judged that a situation is favourable (and it can be favourable only in so far as such a force exists, and is full of fighting spirit). Therefore the essential task is that of systematically and patiently ensuring that this force is formed, developed, and rendered ever more homogeneous, compact and self-aware."[188]

The formation of the force aims in the final analysis at the conquest of political power by the "protagonist class", which sets "the spirit of cleavage" against "the formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the ruling class" and is anxious to extend this spirit to its allies.[189] If an alliance from below, a popular initiative, does not occur, then the ruling class retains time and space to deal with its crises from above, through a 'passive revolution', through solutions which do not endanger its rule. Mostly these are reactionary solutions. Progressive elements are then taken up if the balance of power forces this.

The ruling class will always seek to tie in parts of its opponent and to incorporate them into the ruling bloc. Gramsci described this incorporation, which he studied on the basis of the Italian Risorgimento, as "transformism"[190]. As long as transformation concepts exclude the aim of a change in class power, they focus on such a 'passive revolution'. For the way out of the current crisis, Klein describes five possible scenarios, which extend from the neoliberal 'carry on' via the Green New Deal to the environmentally and socially supportive society. According to the pressure from below, and the effectiveness of calls on the rationality of the rulers, the 'lower layers' come off sometimes better and sometimes less well.

Only a better management of capitalism?

The Communist Party of Greece (KKE) orients itself "towards the strategic aim of overthrowing capitalist barbarism" and rejects "a system management from above in conjunction with social democracy and opportunism". It is for alliances of the working class with "other poor strata of the population", such as small peasants and "rural and urban petty-bourgeois layers", but under no circumstances with parts of the bourgeoisie "who are described as anti-monopoly strata". It argues against stages on the road to socialism, and that there is "no socio-economic intermediate system" and no "form of rule lying in between".[191] The distinction between stages of struggle, which mark the political power relations, and the level of the social structure is absent here.

With anti-monopoly democracy it is a matter of the introduction of a revolutionary process under conditions of a political crisis of the state monopoly system of rule, of the rebellion of the masses against reaction and monopoly capital, and the preparedness of a large part of the working class to united action, in order to carry through measures against the monopolies, without the masses at the same time already wanting the socialist revolution.[192] From a contemporary point of view, such a relationship of forces is at least in the BRD the most probable road of approach to the socialist revolution.

It is clear that an anti-monopoly alliance would not be a homogeneous block. In it there would still be antagonistic contradictions. Also, it will only selectively succeed in involving medium-sized capitalists. The working class, intellectuals, employed middle strata and small traders would provide the mass. After all, it cannot simply be ignored that, of the 3 million businesses of the BRD, only 0.3% generate over 62% of turnover, and the remaining 99.7% only 38%.

If we seriously want to attack monopoly capital as an economic power centre then, in order to isolate the main enemy, we must differentiate between the monopolies and the 99.7% of small and medium-sized enterprises; and also, if only a fraction of the owners of small and medium-sized businesses can be drawn to the side of democracy, then a broader part can eventually be neutralised. The monopolies already do everything today, in order to maintain their mass basis among small and medium-sized businesses as well as among their adherents. In revolutionary situations they will attempt to incorporate them for sabotage and counter-revolutionary activities.

Anti-imperialist developments in Latin America

In Venezuela, at the end of 2013 – more than a decade after the introduction of revolutionary transformations – there were over 7,000 private businesses alongside 462 state enterprises. The greater part of the media was in the hands of the bourgeoisie. Unity of the trade unions had not been achieved. Venezuela was, in the words of a leading Venezuelan communist, "in the anti-imperialist stage" and at the same time was "still deeply embedded in capitalism". In order to secure stability and supplies, under the given power relations, the left government is approaching the employer camp in a differentiated way, is utilising contradictions and must often tack.[193]

In the current stage it is a matter of gaining full political, economic and cultural sovereignty, and control over the country's resources, in order to employ them in the interests of the majority of the population. That requires the transformation of external economic relations, the control or nationalisation of transnationally active corporations, the cancellation of inherited military and secret service links with the USA, and the destruction of the potential for disruption. Anti-imperialism and the removal of the remnants of colonialism are part of the conditions for change.

Internally, it is a matter of overcoming poverty, raising the living standards of wide layers of the population, providing healthcare and free education, and investing in the infrastructure, urban development and the creation of jobs. Land reform in the interests of the small peasants and cooperatives, the removal of the monopoly over land of the big landowners and the improvement of the food situation are all essential. There is also the matter of equal rights and respect for cultural differences in the construction of a plurinational state.

Alongside Bolivia and Nicaragua, Venezuela belongs to the Latin American countries whose government and the majority of whose population want socialism. In the anti-imperialist/democratic stage, forces are formed which are able to be the bearers of the socialist revolution:

> "Not only parties, but also social movements and trade unions, belong in the collective leadership of the revolution. The most important task is the further development of the communal councils and of the workers' councils in private businesses. For us, these are the two supports of the revolution."[194]

Left governments, as perhaps in Venezuela and Bolivia, are legitimated by elections, have taken over bourgeois state apparatuses and have begun to reshape them, in part on the basis of new constitutions. To the extent that the changes increasingly gain revolutionary-democratic character, it can be said with Lenin that these societies "are no longer capitalist, but not yet socialist", and can become transition societies. According to the balance of forces, not least with the armed forces, the direction of development is however still open and must always be decided again anew through struggles.

In other countries of Latin America, like Brazil, Argentina and Chile, centre-left governments are pursuing more or less anti-neoliberal reform policies within the framework of capitalism. Despite big contradictions and sharp disagreements in these countries, there has also been progress on the way to combating poverty. Their contribution towards overcoming the isolation of Cuba, and their preparedness for cooperating in anti-imperialist Latin American integration projects, is of significance for the progress of the whole continent.[195, 196]

A provisional result

In the 20th and 21st centuries, the strategy of anti-monopoly struggle has played a role in many fights in a whole range of countries. Only a few of these struggles have been successful, yet history since 1917 has not produced other, shorter, roads to socialism. Like every strategy, the anti-monopoly strategy must not be understood as a rigid schema. Its stage aims, the electoral alliances and forms of struggle must always be redefined corresponding to the changing balance of forces. Historical processes do not run according to a single plan, but follow from the mutual interaction of different classes and strata, with interests which are in part common, and in part contradictory and antagonistic. Every strategy must therefore be linked to flexible tactics.

Previous attempts at revolutionary change did not take place in the old centres of capitalism, but overwhelmingly in the periphery. In the centres, on the contrary, the bourgeoisie succeeded, by means of concessions, in integrating a large part of the working class into the system. The downfall of socialism in Europe, the transition to neoliberalism by the Social-Democratic and Green Parties, and the changes in the structure of the working class in the course of scientific-technological progress, have resulted in the widespread massive weakening of the revolutionary parts of the labour movement. Today the revolutionary forces are almost everywhere on the defensive and the neoliberal counter-reform has taken over the concept of 'reform'. The concept of 'revolution' is appropriated for 'colour' and reactionary counter-revolutions.

However, the sweeping capitalist crisis – which started in 2007 in the USA, led to the Euro crisis and which is described today as the second world economic crisis – offers at the same time new possibilities for developing the consciousness of the necessity of overcoming the system. Taking centre stage here is the criticism of the banks, which an indignant general public blames for this crisis, since the banks are seen as having caused it with foolhardy financial transactions and unbridled speculation. Even if it is misunderstood that the actual cause of the crisis was capitalist overproduction and that its outbreak was merely delayed by reckless credit transactions, this criticism of banks, shadow banks[197], hedge funds and private equity funds offers a new starting point for the development of anti-monopoly consciousness. Today, the demand for nationalisation of the banks is already being raised by broad sections of the public, and this brings them into opposition to the bourgeoisie of finance capital. Consequently, anti-capitalist forces have the task of further developing the still-diffuse criticism of the 'greed of the bankers' into a fundamental criticism. If this is successful, then in the centres of capitalism new possibilities for developing anti-monopoly alliances, as well as for leading anti-monopoly struggles, will result.

■ Translated by Martin Levy from *Staatsmonopolistische Kapitalismus*, PapyRossa, Köln, 2015, and published by permission.

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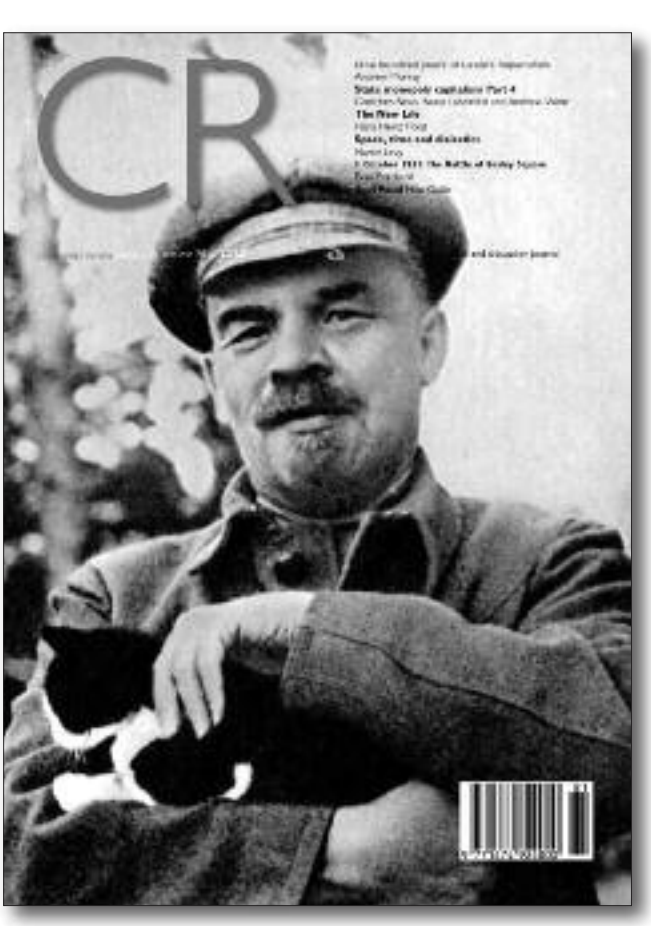
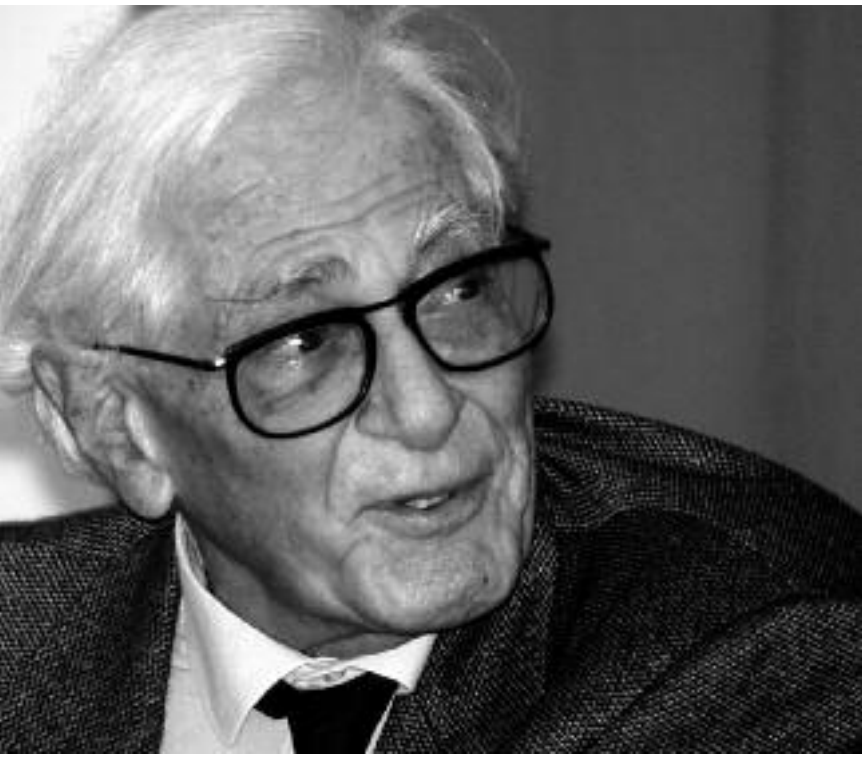


The New Life

by Hans Heinz Holz



The University of Girona, in Catalonia, Spain, has developed a fine tradition. Every year a notable scholar, most often a philosopher, is invited to present at a five-day long summer lecture session. The guest is required to lecture on the connection between their life and their research.

In 2001 Hans Heinz Holz was honoured in this way. His ten lectures have now been translated from Spanish into German and published by Aesthesis Verlag. The book offers an introduction to the philosophy of Holz the communist and dialectician, who died in 2011, in which his whole activity is developed from the central point of a fundamental political experience.

The English translation of the first session of the lecture programme is reproduced here.

8 May 1945. The day of capitulation of the German army, the end of tyranny, the day of liberation. The defeat of fascism, and the end of the terrible war, signified at that time *incipit vita nova* – a new life begins. In his *Tübinger Einleitung in Philosophie (The Tübingen Introduction to Philosophy)* Ernst Bloch[1] spoke of the "*formula incipit vita nova*", which so to speak was the "logo" of the utopian expectation that the realm of freedom, the realisation of humanity, the world as "home" would begin.[2] Many people in Germany experienced 1945 in that way – certainly not quite in such a principled way nor with the eschatological tone sounded by Bloch, but nonetheless with great emotion, that a society free from war and oppression would be created. Amidst the ruins of the destroyed cities there was an awakened will to do things better.

To a special degree we anti-fascists, who had been freed from the prisons and concentration camps, were seized by the impulse of constructing a new world. In these lectures I shall

report on my own experiences of philosophising, and therefore I must sometimes – and principally at this point of the beginning – become quite personal. Later on the personal will be merged with the objective configuration of thought (and of political activity). However, here at the beginning the personal appears in its naked subjectivity; and precisely in this way does this subjectivity, in its conditionality, become one which is objectively mediated, and understandably imposed, by the socio-historical situation.

Victory over Fascism

In 1945 I was 18 years old. When Hitler seized power in Germany, in 1933, I was only 6. Among the young people of these age groups, there was seldom any resistance to fascism. Under no circumstances did such resistance have a clear political focus. Where any opposition at all arose, it grew as a moral outrage over wrongs which the Nazis committed and which were visible to those who had eyes.

One of my most important experiences of childhood was the *Kristallnacht* ('Crystal Night') of 9 November 1938, when the synagogues were set on fire and Jewish businesses demolished. A good friend of my parents, a Jewish doctor (who had also treated me) was shot dead on the street after a visit to a patient. From this point on, I was gripped by a deep hatred towards the Nazis. When I went to bed at night, I said (as others said an evening prayer), "Down with Hitler!"

Then the War came. For me, it signified that Nazi rule could now only be combatted through a military defeat. The German victories over Poland, France and Yugoslavia, and the conquest of Europe from Norway to Crete, were bitter disappointments, but they did not affect my strong belief in the final defeat of Germany. Evil was not to be permitted to win. It was as simple as that in the thoughts of a young boy between 12 and 14 years old. The invasion of the USSR and the declaration of war against the USA strengthened this belief. Now three of the world's empires – the British Empire, the Soviet Union and the USA – stood together against the Nazis.

At this time I began my illegal activity. With a few friends from my school class, I formed a group which listened in to British and American radio stations, produced leaflets with the news about the actual course of the war and the fascist terror, and posted them during the night in Frankfurt letterboxes. The resistance motive was moral indignation, not an alternative political idea – from where should 16-year old young people in Germany have got such an idea, after 10 years of Hitler domination? Also, there was no relationship to organised anti-fascism, rather simply youthful feelings of justice and injustice. It was only when I was arrested, and held in a Gestapo prison cell with a young communist worker from a resistance group, that my emotional anti-fascism was, through conversations with him, structured by concepts of political thought. Capitalism, imperialism, class struggle and socialism now became theoretical coordinates, in whose network my own decisions found their place and a more than subjective justification.

In Germany the year 1945 has been spoken of as 'zero hour', as if a totally new epoch of German history began then. That is without doubt false. With the restitution of German capitalism, the reconstruction of a military great power arrangement in NATO, and the return of Nazi officials into German politics, the continuity of German imperialism was very soon restored. That occurred on the basis of the 'Cold War', of the geopolitical opposition between the USA and the Soviet Union. From 1947 there were the first signs of restorative tendencies in western Germany and in 1949, with the establishment of the Federal Republic, they had already gained the upper hand.

However, for a small engaged minority of young people, 1945 was an exceptional opportunity to prove themselves. I name a few examples: Rudolf Augstein[3] was 23 years old when he was tasked by the British occupation administration with the editorship of *Der Spiegel*. Wolfgang Harich[4] was, at 25, one of the most influential cultural functionaries of the Soviet occupation zone. Emil Carlebach[5], who had been arrested in 1933 at the age of 19, spending 12 years in prisons and concentration camps, was made editor-in-chief of the *Frankfurter Rundschau* by the American control authority, although he had no preparatory training nor journalistic experience. Whoever was ready and capable of facing a task, got an opportunity. From this situation it can be explained how, at the age of 20, I was appointed to the scientific editorial board of the *Philosphischer Literaturanzeiger (Philosophical Literary Gazette)*, was alongside my studies accredited as a journalist with the government and parliament of the united American and British zone of occupation, and belonged to the

organising committee of the Second German Philosophy Congress in Mainz in 1948.

Shallow US Philosophy

Naturally this entry into scientific and journalistic life had a prehistory. Already, at the age of 14, I had begun to occupy myself with philosophy, and had read Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and numerous works on Indian philosophy. It was my mother who promoted this interest with great understanding and tolerance, and who also supported my youthful anti-fascism. Alongside that, I must think of my teachers, who entered into my particular intellectual inclinations and encouraged them; also, after my arrest by the Nazis, they stood up for me. Thus, even after the liberation in 1945, I did not arrive unprepared for becoming active in the eventful cultural and political life of this first post-war phase.

This biographical excursion was indispensable in order to make understandable the situation of experience from which the philosophical sensibility and receptivity of the first post-war years received their impulse. The first contact with the thinking of the free world occurred under the influence of the occupation powers, the USA, Great Britain, France and the Soviet Union, who each pursued in their own occupation zone, from their national traditions and ideologies, a cultural politics for the democratic upbringing of the German people.[6] At the centre of this cultural politics in the Soviet zone of occupation stood the revolutionary and democratic German literature and philosophy of the 18th and 19th centuries, with the emphasis on Marx and Engels, as well as on the democratic Russian literature of the 19th century, Belinsky, Herzen, Chernyshevsky, Dobrolyubov[7] and of course Lenin and Stalin. In the American occupation zone the connection to the constitutional ideology of the War of Independence – Jefferson, Paine – and the philosophical pragmatism of John Dewey[8] predominated. After the experiences of the political extreme, which lay behind us, the shallow understanding of life of American 'common sense', and the lack of historical-philosophical perspectives, was unable to satisfy young people in the years after 1945.[9]

The Existentialist Wave

However, then there came from France the philosophical concepts which made it possible to fill the vacuum in Germany: the Hegel interpretations of Jean Hyppolite, Alexandre Kojève and Eric Weil;[10] and the existentialist interpretations of existence of Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus and Gabriel Marcel[11] – with, as the great systematic design, Sartre's first major work, *L'être et le néant (Being and Nothingness)*. The numerous German cultural journals were full of presentations of existentialism. The high point of the first post-war German Philosophy Congress in Garmisch-Partenkirchen in 1947, in which I participated, were the papers on the philosophy of existence by Otto Friedrich Bollnow and Fritz-Joachim von Rintelen[12].

The focus of this ideological movement, which gripped not only philosophy but also literature, and dominated the feature sections of the newspapers, was Jean-Paul Sartre. What young people were looking for, in terms of their need for orientation, was found united in his person: a philosophical thinking, which set the political experiences of the present in relation to the great classical figures of philosophy – Descartes and Kant, Fichte and Hegel, Feuerbach and Marx; a literary production, which showed plainly the test of philosophical thoughts in concrete situations of conflict – plays like *Les Mouches (The Flies), Les morts sans sépulture (The Unburied Dead*[13]), *Huis clos (No Exit)* were everywhere performed and discussed; his political engagement in the anti-fascist resistance and then in the struggle for a new socialist society. Sartre embodied a philosophy which was not reduced, as a pure theory in academic cloisters, to the abstract schematicisms of reality, but fought out its debates in the market-place, to clarify people's consciousness, with which they could take a responsible attitude in life and society. In 1945, whoever understood philosophising as an active mission in life, and found there the centre of their existence, could not escape from Sartre's influence. Sartre was the paradigm of the reflection of this historical moment.

We had experienced how people were sucked up by the institutions of the state and robbed of their humanity. Those who had burned down Oradour, and had taken in hand the mass executions of prisoners in Russia and Yugoslavia, were indeed not monsters. Adolf Eichmann was a bureaucrat, not a gunman. But on account of the disclosure of this criminality it was evident that there was an obligation to say no, and that people could only maintain and confirm their humanity in negation. In the experience of freedom as negativity and of helplessness regarding the heteronomy[14] of the positive, Sartre reached us with his philosophy and literary works.

Sartre's Man: Free, but Solitary

This was indeed the motive which determined Sartre's philosophy from early on, which had also become the content of his novels and plays: man[15] is himself alienated by the world into which he is born and interconnected; he is no longer the pure unadulterated Ego, which can put itself in harmony with a situation and make its choice. Rather, he is reified into an object, which in its essence is determined by others and by relationships.

In the novel *La nausée (Nausea)*, Antoine Roquentin experiences this reification as the content of his loathing. In the drama *The Flies* a whole city suffers by accepting a fate which is forced upon it from outside; and Orestes, who liberates it, rebels against the institutions which perpetuate this fate. But indeed the rebel is, like Mathieu in *L'âge de raison (The Age of Reason)*, still determined by the order against which he/she revolts. What is presented in these works from Sartre's early period is, with the means of philosophical hermeneutics[16], studied and documented to the smallest detail in the *chef d'œuvre* of existentialism, *Being and Nothingness.*

In the institutions of society the person becomes a function of an anonymous mechanism. The capitalist is also no longer the free entrepreneur, by the authority of his own ingenuity, audacity and plan, as he would like to understand himself in the liberalism of the 19th century; it was shown long ago that he is only the executor of the law of capital accumulation, and is just as much subject to the system as are the exploited workers – the 'wage-earners' – with his precedence existing only in the better placing in the hierarchy, in the greater proportion of the profit. However, what makes people into people, the freedom of ethical decisions, applies equally to all. Kant had formulated the categorical imperative: "Act as if the maxims of your action were to become through your will a universal law of nature";[17] or, in another variant, "Act only according to that maxim whereby you can, at the same time, will that it should become a universal law". Sartre says correspondingly the same:

"In fact, in creating the man that we want to be, there is

not a single one of our acts which does not at the same time create an image of man as we think he ought to be."[18]

Ernst Bloch in this context pointed out that the categorical imperative in class society is basically unattainable:

"This is a sentence without all exploitation against all exploitation. … However, in the sentence there is a feature of that human tendency, which … wants to overturn all conditions in which 'man is a debased, enslaved, forsaken, despicable being'[19]. As long as these conditions exist, Kant is suspended in them, his immortality stands not at the side, where he is celebrated, but is realised."[20]

That is the consciousness in which Sartre formulated the protest against dehumanisation, against the alienation of man.

To be sure, the existentialist concept of freedom also remained nothing other than the Kantian concept, initially formal. If Sartre started from the thesis that man is the sole being for whom existence precedes essence, and that therefore he creates himself, he (Sartre) remained as a consequence in the area of Kantian and Fichtean idealism, which saw the active Ego, the moral person independent of the objective conditions of the material world. *Being and Nothingness*, this great design for a philosophy of freedom, developed an anthropology of the "solitary man"; occasionally the closeness to Stirner[21] and his hypertrophy of the "sole person" is noticeable.

Sartre's influence – it must now be said to be reducing – gripped the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the labour movement, where a highly developed Marxist ideological culture existed in philosophy, science and literature at that time, existentialism never played a role. On the contrary, Sartre, who as one of the existentialists stood closest to the political left, was sharply attacked because of his 'petty bourgeois individualistic' concept of freedom. In 1956 Roger Garaudy – in those years a leading theoretician of the French Communist Party – partially took back this critique:

"In our first criticisms of Sartre 10 years ago we rejected his theses on freedom *en bloc*. However, I now think that it would have been necessary to go further and to show that the Marxist interpretation comprises and includes Sartre's emphasised aspects as 'factors'."[22]

Inner Inconsistency

However, what was the basis of Sartre's strong effect in the first post-war years? If I think back to my own student years (when I was already active in the field of communist journalism and cultural work), I find various motives for it.

The thesis of the senselessness of existence reflected an attitude towards life, which corresponded to the crisis of bourgeois society (manifest in the war), and which expressed the rootlessness of the individual, the sense of teetering over an abyss; that was the nihilistic aspect of existentialism.

The affirmation that man was his own designer and that he created himself from nothing gave a positive, activist turn to the despair of senselessness. In a time when we had to rebuild our living environment from material, spiritual and moral ruins, this turn from nihilism into engagement, from paralysis into an act of will, awoke the power which we needed for mastering this task; that was the activist factor.

The fact that the design was supposed to follow entirely from our own individual objectives, would be our own responsibility and would be able to defy the given external conditions, indeed would have to, gave us the feeling of a boundless freedom with respect to the senseless world; that was the spontaneous character of existentialism. At that moment, the *incipit vita nova* was supposed to be able to enter. Given that the bourgeois philosophies had failed and had not prevented the destruction of the world, indeed they were not once able to explain it, this relocation of interpretation into individual decision-making opened the way to a new beginning.

This tendency towards irrationalist elements of existentialism – pessimistic nihilism, decisionist activism, individualist spontaneity – is underscored by a layer of philosophical rationality, whose construction principles are found in the systematics of Descartes, Kant and Hegel, in the critical thinking of the Enlightenment, in the descriptive precision of Husserl[23]. That elevated Sartre far above the level of the German existence philosophy in the style of Jaspers[24] and his imitators. Sartre could not only be understood from the great classical bourgeois philosophy of the past, he could also trace back to it. The verdict of the "destruction of reason"[25] was not readily to be applied to him.

The architecture of *Being and Nothingness* connects with the configuration of modern thinking. From Descartes, Kant and Fichte, Sartre took over the ontological foundation of the world in the subject, and he radicalised this subjectivism in a Young Hegelian manner, in that he allowed the transcendental subject to go over into the empirical subject, and sometimes both to merge; that is subjectivism as the main feature of existentialism. Thereby Sartre fits into a dominant line of contemporary philosophising, which he exceeded insofar as he also took up, with Hegel and Marx, the other distinctive line, that of an objectifying dialectical ontology, and attempted to establish intermediations between both lines.[26]

This compiling of the series of motives, which favoured the reception of existentialism, already permitted the inner inconsistency of this philosophy to be recognised. It goes without saying that existentialism was a transit station, a "gate" which had to be passed through (as Bollnow then formulated it), if there were to be an advance from the historical-political experiences of the time to a new philosophical systematics.

I jump forward now in the chronology, because I won't be returning to Sartre later in this lecture series. Sartre did not remain in his Young Hegelian subjectivism. The unresolved problems of socio-historical reality remaining in subjectivism also continued to drive him on. I think it expresses something about the potential capacities of his first, of the existentialist, philosophy, that he himself continued on from it to a second systematic project, the *Critique de la raison dialectique – the Critique of Dialectical Reason.*

■ First published in German online at http://www.aisthesis.de/WebRoot/Store20/Shops/63645342/MediaGallery/leseproben/9783849811341.pdf, and in *junge Welt* on 7 October 2015.

Translated with additional notes here by Martin Levy, with acknowledgements to Wikipedia for the bulk of those. Hans Heinz Holz's book, *Freiheit und Vernunft: Mein philosophischer Weg nach 1945 (Freedom and Reason: my philosophical road after 1945)*, was published by Aisthesis Verlag, Bielefeld, in 2015.

Notes and References

1 Ernst Bloch (8.7.1885-4.9.1977) was a German Marxist philosopher. He fled abroad when the Nazis came to power but returned to the German Democratic Republic (DDR) in 1949, where he obtained a chair in philosophy at the University of Leipzig. However, he was retired in 1957 for political reasons; and, after the construction of the Berlin Wall in 1961, he did not return to the DDR, but went to Tübingen, where he was awarded an honorary chair in philosophy. *The Tubinger Einleitung in Philosophie* was published by Suhrkamp in 1970 and again in 1996 –*Ed.*

2 "Homeland" as a political perspective is the final word of Ernst Bloch's *magnum opus The Principle of Hope*, MIT Press, 3 vols, 1986: "The root of history is man, working, creating and reshaping and overhauling the conditions. If he takes hold of himself and grounds his being without disempowerment and alienation, in real democracy, there arises in the world something which appears to all in childhood and where nobody has ever been: home".

3 Rudolf Augstein (5.11.1923-7.11.2002) was one of the most influential West German journalists, founder and partowner of *Der Spiegel* magazine. He was briefly a member of the West German Parliament, for the Free Democrats –*Ed.*

4 Wolfgang Harich (3.12.1923-15.3.1995) was a philosopher and journalist, and member of the Socialist Unity Party in the DDR. He had deserted from the German Army, and joined an anti-Nazi group, during the Second World War –*Ed.*

5 Emil Carlebach (10.7.1914-9.4.2001) was a lifelong German communist. Among other things, he was active in the illegal resistance organisation of Buchenwald concentration camp, then later was one of the 7 original licensees of the *Frankfurter Rundschau* (his license was cancelled without explanation by the Americans in 1947), a city council member in Frankfurt and a member of the Hessian Parliament. After the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) was banned in 1956, he went to the DDR, where he worked for German Free Radio 904. He later returned to West Germany, where he became active in the German Communist Party (DKP) –*Ed.*

6 cf H H Holz, *Philosophie und burgerliche Weltanschauung. Umerziehung und Restauration – westdeutsche Philosophie im ersten Nachkriegsjahrzehnt (Philosophy and Bourgeois Ideology: Reeducation and Restoration – West German philosophy in the first post-war decade)*, in *Dialektik* 11, Köln 1986, p 45.

7 Vissarion Belinsky (11.6.1811-7.6.1848) was a Russian literary critic of the Westernising tendency; Alexander Herzen (6.4.1812-21.1.1870) was a Russian writer and thinker known as the 'father of Russian socialism'; Nikolay Chernyshevsky (12.07.1828-17.10.1889) was a Russian revolutionary democrat, materialist philosopher, critic, and socialist; Nikolay Dobrolyubov (5.2.1836-29.11.1861) was a Russian literary critic, journalist, poet and revolutionary democrat –*Ed.*

8 John Dewey (20.10.1859-1.6.1952) was an American philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer associated with the philosophy of pragmatism –*Ed.*

9 The shallowness of the American educational program is evident from the fact that, in addition to the (excellent and reputable) *Amerikanischer Rundschau*, only a German edition of *Reader's Digest* was offered as access to democratic cultural understanding.

10 Jean Hyppolite (8.1. 1907-26.10.1968) was a French philosopher known for championing the work of Hegel and other German philosophers; Alexandre Kojève (28.4.1902-4.6.1968) was a Russian-born French philosopher and statesman who had an immense influence on 20th-century French philosophy and who was instrumental in the creation of the European Union; Eric Weil (8.6.1904-1.2.1977) was a French philosopher, an emigrant from Germany when the Nazis came to power –*Ed.*

11 Gabriel Marcel (7.12.1889-8.10.1973) was a French philosopher, playwright, music critic and a leading Christian existentialist –*Ed.*

12 Otto Friedrich Bollnow (14.031903-7.2.1991) was a German philosopher and teacher; in 1933 he signed the *Loyalty Oath of German Professors to Adolf Hitler and the National Socialist State*. Fritz-Joachim von Rintelen (16.5.1898- 23.2.1979) was a German philosopher and a university teacher –*Ed.*

13 English title *The Victors* –*Ed.*

14 Action that is influenced by a force outside the individual –*Ed.*

15 Translator's apology for the use of the masculine term, but it has proved impossible to find a gender-neutral equivalent which can be used consistently –*Ed.*

16 The branch of knowledge that deals with interpretation, eg of Biblical texts –*Ed.*

17 I Kant, *Grounding for the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785), transl J W Ellington, Hackett Publishing Co, 3rd edn, 1993, p 30.

18 J-P Sartre, *Existentialism and Human Emotion*, online at http://www.philosophymagazine.com/others/MO_Sartre_Existentialism.html.

19 K Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, 'Introduction'*, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works*, Vol 3, p 182.

20 E Bloch, *Philosophische Aufsätze, Gesamtausgabe (Philosophical Papers, Collected Works)*, Vol X, Frankfurt am Main, 1969, p 444.

21 Max Stirner (25.10.1806-26.6.1856) was a German philosopher, one of the Young Hegelians; he was devastatingly criticised by Marx in *The German Ideology* –*Ed.*

22 R Garaudy, in Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Sektion Philosophie, *Das Problem der Freiheit im Lichte des wissenschaftlichen Sozialismus (The Problem of Freedom in the Light of Scientific Socialism),* conference record, Berlin, 1956; also *La Liberté,* Éditions Sociales, Paris, 1955.

23 Edmund Husserl (8.4.1859-27.4.1938) was a German philosopher who established the school of phenomenology. He redefined it as a transcendental-idealist philosophy, and his thought profoundly influenced the landscape of twentieth century philosophy –*Ed.*

24 Karl Jaspers (23.2.1883-26.2.1969) was a German-Swiss psychiatrist and philosopher who had a strong influence on modern theology, psychiatry, and philosophy. He was often viewed as a major exponent of existentialism in Germany, though he did not accept this label. Under the Nazis, he was forced out of teaching in 1937, as his wife was Jewish –*Ed.*

25 Title of a 1954 work by György Lukàcs, *Die Zerstörung der Vernunft*, in *Werke* (Works), Vol 9, Luchterhand, Darmstadt and Neuwied, 1974.

26 In 1951 I reconstructed the existentialist systematics in a monograph, *Jean Paul Sartre: Darstellung und Kritik seiner Philosophie (Jean-Paul Sartre: Dialectics and Critique of his Philosophy)*, Hain, Meisenhem/Glan (a book which was displayed in the German pavilion at the World Expo in 1958, as one of the thousand books which should belong in "the library of an educated German"). When the book appeared, the existentialist fad had already abated. I wrote in the foreword, "Sartre's philosophy is currently unchanged, but it may in the meantime also have moved away from the focal point of fashionable literary discussion. It remains an outstanding symptom of the ideological situation in a world whose social basis is disintegrating, since it truly reflects this disintegration". In 1958, with regard to the political implications, I dealt with "Sartre's road and change" in a small booklet, *Der französische Existentialismus (French Existentialism)*, Speyer/München. Finally in 1976, in *Die abenteuerliche Revolution (The Risky Revolution)*, Darmstadt/Neuwied, I situated Sartre in connection with the bourgeois protest movements in philosophy. Thus my engagement with Sartre continued for more than 30 years. It included, in addition to the three named books, numerous essays and radio features, and in 1962 the translation of Sartre's obituary of the French phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Merleau-Ponty vivant*.

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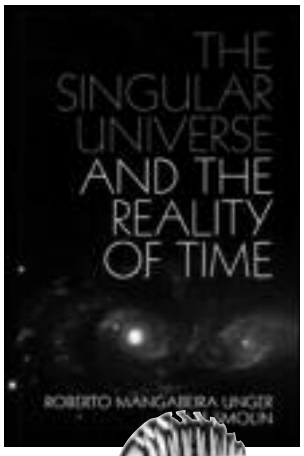

EXTENDED CRITIQUE

Space, Time – and Dialectics, Part 2

by Martin Levy

The Singular Universe and the Reality of Time
By Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Lee Smolin
[Cambridge University Press, 2015, 564 pp, hbk, £19.99. ISBN 978-1-107-07406-4]

IN THE first part of this critique, I highlighted some major philosophical issues for Marxists in physics and cosmology today: whether time is real or an illusion; whether there are many universes or just a single one; and the place of mathematics in nature and its representation. In introducing the authors of this book, Lee Smolin and Roberto Mangabeira Unger, I noted a strong resonance in their writings with Marxist ideas, but also pointed to inconsistency in their application of materialism and dialectics. I criticised Unger for lack of understanding of contradiction as the essential basis for development, both in society and in physics/cosmology. I now want to examine in detail his contribution to the collaboration, nearly two thirds of the book.

'The Science of One Universe at a Time'

In his first chapter, Unger sets out the issues and main ideas, which he then develops in subsequent chapters. His contribution overall is a long, often repetitive and sometimes laborious read (possibly a philosophers' tradition?), but the main insights of interest to Marxists can be gained from the first chapter.

There Unger points out that recognising the reality of time leads to a conundrum about causation. If time is not real, he says, then there can be no causal relations because there is no 'before' and 'after'. But, on the other hand, if the laws and constants of nature change with time, then there can be no timeless regularities supporting causal judgements. We do know, he says, that the laws we have today in what he calls the "cooled-down" universe could not have existed in the very early universe just after the Big Bang, but how then did they come about?

Unger rejects the idea that higher-order or meta-laws govern the way that laws and constants change, since this just pushes the problem to another level; but he points out that, if such meta-laws do not exist, then there is no causal explanation for changing the laws. He acknowledges that there is

> "what I call here the *facticity* of the universe: that it just happens to be what it is rather than something else" (p 11).

However, he says, that is not a basis for prematurely narrowing the field open to causal enquiry. His and Smolin's conclusion is that the laws and natural constants change along with the phenomena which they seek to explain. He cites parallels here in the life sciences and social sciences, as described in more detail below; natural selection, for example,

could not exist before there were competing species (p 13).

Unger then goes on to define "two cosmological fallacies" (p 19ff):

1. The fallacy of applying to the whole universe what is called the Newtonian paradigm – " a configuration space within which changeless laws apply to changing phenomena". Here "The observer stands, both in principle and fact, outside the configuration space" – just like God to the world.
2. The fallacy of universal anachronism – of seeing "the entire history of the universe from the standpoint of ideas that may be pertinent only to part of that history".

In fact Smolin considers that there is really only one fallacy, *ie* the first. But his and Unger's point there is not new, certainly for Marxists. In *The Crisis in Physics* Christopher Caudwell wrote of Newton's universe as a self-running machine, one which, according to the bourgeois, "obey[s] deterministic laws so designed as to satisfy his wants and create use-value. ... Man, as it were, stands outside Nature .... His relation to Nature is God-like."[1]

Martin Levy

However, it is Unger's arguments in support of the second fallacy which for me display the most significant deviation from a dialectical approach. Yes, current categories may well not be appropriate to the early universe, but the essence of the problem is indicated by his argument (p 27) that, at such times,

> "the structural distinctions among elementary constituents of nature have broken down or not yet taken shape. The parameters of temperature and energy are extreme but they are not infinite …."

If there are no structural distinctions, then what drives change? And how indeed can temperature or energy be measured without packets of energy (photons) and rapidly moving particles (ie matter), of some type? Indeed, how can the universe start to expand without some initial measurement of space? As the authors themselves say (p 16, already cited, Part 1), "space and time as orderings of events or phenomena"; without time and space there cannot be events, and space cannot be defined unless there are discrete entities to be in a spatial relation.

Fundamentally, the universe is dialectical. It is infinite; everything is interconnected; everything is in a constant flux of motion and change; and that change is driven by contradiction between 'opposites' – forces and particles, for example. That is the way the universe is and how it evolves: that is its real facticity. But Unger cannot see this because, in rejecting "meta-laws", he only accepts a part of materialist dialectics. He ignores the role of contradiction.

'The Context and Consequences of the Argument'

In his second chapter, Unger considers the context in four areas:

Firstly, he argues (pp 46-7) that string theory in particle physics, and the multiverse idea in cosmology, do not meet "the traditional and exacting standards of either deterministic or probabilistic causality. ... [T]he actual observed world ... becomes less real so that [other unobservable worlds] can become more real." In both these areas, some scientists have invoked the 'anthropic principle' – the idea that the world that we can observe is as it is because it has been 'fine-tuned' for the development of life. Unger however correctly notes that such an approach weakens the rigorous standards of natural science.

Secondly (pp 49-53), he argues that in physics we now need to go beyond quantum mechanics and Einstein's relativity theory, and cast aside the ideas that the universal laws, symmetries and elementary constituents of nature are invariant, and that there is any place outside "this one real world" from which to deliver the initial conditions leading to the universe today. We'll return to this point below, in dealing with Unger's fifth chapter. However, it is worth noting here that Unger denotes two lines in physics. In the "main line", dominated by quantum mechanics and relativity, time is treated as "the absolute backdrop" to physical events, and in fact has no unique direction in the mathematical representation; but in the "side line", based on thermodynamics, the forward march of time is reflected by increasing entropy in the universe [crudely the degree of randomisation of matter and energy –*ML*]. Unger finds "inspiration for a historical way of thinking about the universe" in the latter approach. "The analysis of microscopic structure is no substitute for the explanation of macroscopic history," he says; "on the contrary, the former can only be understood in the light of the latter." However, he offers no further insight on this significant point. We shall return to the issue of entropy in Part 3.

Thirdly, with regard to natural history and geology, Unger cites (pp 58-67) three explanatory principles that have "wide-ranging use": path dependence; mutability of types; and the co-evolution of laws and phenomena. The first of these affirms that

> "a present state of affairs is decisively shaped by a history made of chains of events that may be only loosely connected. ... The more independent [the causal chains] are of each other, the more does their outcome appear to us to be marked by chance or contingency."

The second principle, mutability of types, is clearly seen in the evolution of species and in the geological cycles involving plate tectonics, volcanism, erosion of rocks and sedimentation. But "It reaches as well into the microscopic world": DNA is subject to mutation; and the Periodic Table of the elements, and the elementary particles described by the Standard Model, have histories "going back to the very early moments of the present universe. Nevertheless ... they too have not existed forever." Indeed, Unger does not say it, but the processes of radioactive decay and nuclear fusion demonstrate straightforwardly the mutability of types with regard to the elements; and we know that the elements have not existed forever since most were formed in stellar supernovae.

The third principle, the coevolution of laws and phenomena, is expressed in the fact that

> "The methods of change, which we express as explanatory laws, change with the appearance of life. They change again with the emergence of multicellular organisms. And then again with sexual reproduction and the Mendelian mechanisms. They change with the emergence of consciousness and its equipment by language. These are ... changes in the way in which phenomena change as well as in the distinctions between them ...."

This all shows significant insight, and indeed Marxists will warm to it as a reflection of dialectics in nature: the mutual interconnectedness of everything, and the struggle of 'opposites' (organisms and the environment, or species with one another); and the transformation of quantity into quality, reflected by

sudden breaks in development. What is perhaps missing is the negation of the negation – the retention of elements of an earlier stage when a contradiction is resolved at a higher level. But two out of three classic dialectical principles isn't bad. And we can certainly agree with Unger that:

- "if path dependence can operate at the ... scale of earth science, it can in principle also work at the cosmic scale of the universe" (p 61);
- "the mutability of types is … in the first instance a cosmological principle" (p 63); and that
- "the specificity of life on Earth is only a special case of a pervasive phenomenon in the history of the universe – the appearance of the new, manifest in the mutability of types and the co-evolution of phenomena and of laws" (p 66).

However, Unger does not want to use the term 'dialectical materialism' and almost seems to pull back from universal interconnectedness by his statement (p 58) that "we have no good reason to reject out of hand" the application of these three principles in thinking about the universe and its history. This is not the same as concluding that these are general principles. And we find a stronger example of this reticence in his next section, 'The Argument and Social and Historical Study', where, as I pointed out in Part 1, he argues against the laws of historical materialism as "meta-laws", on the basis that, if they existed, history would have a pre-written script.

Of course, that's a nonsense, and the social-democrat Unger is simply setting up a caricature of Marxism, in order to demolish it. No serious Marxist would argue that the laws of historical materialism are prescriptive – it would be like saying that we have to wait for socialism, until the interaction between the forces and relations of production is just right. Why then bother to form communist parties, and adopt a revolutionary strategy? Yet, despite this misrepresentation, Unger comes close to Marxism in a number of passages:

> "The ideas that everything changes ... that stable and recurrent relations that our causal explanations ordinarily invoke cannot be constant or eternal but rather must co-evolve together; that there may be causality without laws; and that, more generally, no particular organisation of reality lasts for ever ...." (p 67)

> "the structures of society are made and imagined" (p 69)

> "We must reestablish the indispensable link, in social and historical study, between insight into the actual and exploration of the adjacent possible. ... Such a project provides no model for a cosmology that does justice to the singular existence of the universe as well as to the inclusive reality of time. It nevertheless has an affinity to such a cosmology. It is connected to it by its commitment to a practice of causal explanation that dispenses with the invocation of timeless laws governing events in time. ... The institutional and ideological regimes break down, periodically in those incandescent moments, of practical and visionary strife, and become, at such times, more available to reshaping. So, too, nature passes through times in which its arrangements break down and its regularities undergo accelerated change. A difference is that we can hope to change forever the character of the structures and their relation to our structure-defying freedom. Nature, so far as we know, enjoys no such escape." (p 74)

But Unger's dialectics is limited because he fails to explain what is behind "those incandescent moments, of practical and visionary strife" in society, *ie* the contradiction between 'opposites' as the motor of development. Furthermore, the structures of society can only really be "made and imagined" within a framework of ideas and class relations arising from, and interacting with, the forces and relations of production.

Unger then makes claims (pp 75-89) to be reinventing "Natural Philosophy", which is intended (p 76) to "question the present agenda or the established methods in particular sciences – from a distance", and to "deal with problems that are both basic and general ... without depending on metaphysical ideas outside or above science". The strategies that it should apply are:

1. "to identify and exploit the distinction that exists in any ambitious scientific theory between its hard core of empirically validated insight ... and the supra-empirical ontology with which this hard core is ordinarily combined" (p 83).
2. "to confront the practices followed in one branch of science with those that are preferred in another - to undermine belief in a necessary relation between method and subject matter. ... the best prospect for advance may be to begin by jumbling up the relation of subject matter and methods across a range of distinct scientific disciplines (p 85).
3. "to attempt to establish a direct connection between speculative conceptions and opportunities for empirical and experimental discovery ... without passing ... through an intermediate stage of systematic theory. Natural philosophy can and should ... foreshadow theory" (pp 86-7).
4. "the refusal to take mathematics as more than an indispensable tool of cosmology and physics" (p 88).

This is something of a curate's egg. The first and fourth strategies are admirable, but "jumbling up the relation of subject matter and methods" and "foreshadowing theory" are simply the basis for eclecticism and voluntarism, unless there is some principled framework for choice – and by that I mean materialist dialectics. Bourgeois critics of Marxism in science say that dialectical materialism provides an unjustified straitjacket; and, like the capitalist, Unger wants freedom of choice. But, as Engels said, quoting Hegel, "Freedom is the insight into necessity. *'Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood.'*"[2]

'The Singular Existence of the Universe'

In this chapter, Unger argues that what distinguishes a universe is causal connection over time, even if parts of the universe have subsequently become causally disjoint. There is then (p 101)

> "no clear distinction between the idea of causally disjoint parts of the one real universe and the notion of branching, bubbling or domain universes that may arise in the course of the history of the universe." This contrasts with the idea of a multiverse, a multitude of distinct universes neither now nor ever in causal contact, except for the conjecture of collisions between them, which might leave 'ripples' in the cosmic microwave background. Such ripples have however never been observed (p 106).

For Unger, the most promising version of the idea of a singular universe is one whose history "extends backwards before the formation of the present cooled-down universe to earlier universes or to earlier periods in the history of our

universe" (p 105). This is not saying, as Eric J Lerner did, that *The Big Bang Never Happened* – the title of a book[3] in which Lerner provides some cogent arguments against "the cosmological juggernaut", as Hyman Frankel later called it.[4] Unger ignores such considerations, preferring instead to talk of what he calls succession, either cyclic and non-cyclic. In the former, which typically involves a collapse ('Big Crunch') following the expansion stage of the universe, the basic regularities of nature remain unchanged. In the latter, "there is no unchanging feature of nature, other than its susceptibility to changing change, which we call time" (p 112).

However, as Unger acknowledges, the proposal for the singular existence of the universe leads immediately to what he calls "the antinomy of cosmogenesis" (p 102), which parallels Immanuel Kant's first antinomy of pure reason in his *Critique of Pure Reason*: either, at some moment in the past, the universe, and, with it, time, emerged out of nothing; or the universe may be eternal. With regard to the former, Unger correctly states, quoting Shakespeare, that "Nothing will come of nothing."[5] Even the unstable vacuum state, which has been postulated to give rise to the Big Bang, is not nothing. But Unger also argues that the universe cannot be eternal because "Eternity is infinity in time", and nothing in nature can be infinite. "The infinite is a mathematical contrivance," he says, claiming that "There is an infinite difference between an indefinitely long history and eternity."

I find this argument unconvincing. It is one thing to argue that the field equations of general relativity could not apply in the highly compressed early stage of our universe because they yield mathematical solutions of infinity. It is quite another to argue against infinity as a physical concept. As Ifor Torbe has pointed out, everyone encounters infinity in early childhood without realising it. Infinity is the name for the number of integers: as far as you go, there will always be more. The same with the universe – it is infinite in space and time.[6]

Unger simply gets round the antinomy by a cop-out: "placing the confrontation with [it] in a remote and inaccessible past", far beyond what we call the Big Bang, so that the "work of empirical enquiry and causal investigation" can proceed as far back as our equipment and ingenuity will allow (p 103). Without admitting it, this *de facto* accepts the Marxist position, but it again reflects Unger's failure to understand the role of contradiction. As Engels said, "The whole of nature ... has its existence in eternal coming into being and passing away, in ceaseless flux, in unresting motion and change."[7]

Unger then introduces a number of arguments in favour of the singular non-cyclic existence of the universe (p 116-141), which can be briefly summarised as follows:

- There is no experimental means of observing the postulated multiple universes.
- The idea of a singular universe makes it possible to answer the question: Where do the laws and initial conditions of our universe come from? In Unger's terms they can be explained historically – providing we accept the non-cyclic view. I feel this is a major advantage over Lerner's approach, whatever the evidence or not for the Big Bang.
- It allows the avoidance of the first cosmological fallacy, ie of applying changeless laws to changing phenomena.
- The associated ideas of the singular existence of the universe and of non-cyclic succession are compatible with cosmological inflation – postulated to have occurred in the period from 10^{-36} to 10^{-32} seconds after the Big Bang, as an explanation of how the universe is flat, homogeneous and isotropic (see Part 1) – rather than 'eternal inflation', in which an infinite number of universes is born from a primordial eternally inflating medium. Unger admits (as Lerner says) that there has been no direct evidence for inflation, and says that both cyclic and non-cyclic theories offer an explanation for the flatness, homogeneity and isotropy of the universe "by extending back the time horizon for setting [these] pertinent features" (p 128). But he argues that, if evidence for inflation should mount, then non-cyclic succession would have the edge because it does not presuppose immutable laws that would generate the same initial conditions.
- The singular existence of the universe avoids the second cosmological fallacy – *ie* of judging the Big Bang only in terms of ideas applicable to the "cooled-down" universe.
- The ideas of the singular existence of the universe, the inclusive reality of time (see below) and the selective realism of mathematics (see Part 3) reciprocally support each other.

With regard to the laws of nature, Unger accepts (p 147) that there may be "only a difference of degree, although a substantial one" between their mutability "during that formative trauma" and their mutability before and after it. Furthermore:

> "a previous state of the world must have left some trace of itself in a later state. If the difference between the cooling universe, organised as a differentiated structure, and its superhot and conflating initial state is finite rather than infinite, no absolute barrier exists to the survival of such traces. Among them may be, for example, the seemingly arbitrary but precise values of some of the constants of nature, unexplained by the laws of the post-traumatic universe."

This almost seems to be saying that the values of the natural constants are fixed, in contrast to Unger's earlier claims! But perhaps he means that there is mechanism for limiting the degree of variability in the values.

Unger goes on to ask (p 153) "whether such an understanding of the initial conditions of the universe is a mere speculative conjecture, or whether it can be developed ... in a fashion that lays it open to empirical inquiry." However, he leaves Lee Smolin to address the matter directly and systematically, while addressing it himself only in an indirect and fragmentary way. One approach, he says, would be (p 154) "to persist in the experimental radicalisation of certain physical processes to observe whether there is ever a sign in nature of anything that fails to lend itself to finitistic characterisation and explanation." Alternatively, experiments could be designed to address the physics of the causal connections "between the events prior and subsequent to the extreme changes that lie at the beginnings of the present state of the universe." That might include, he says, a series of increasingly powerful particle colliders; but how feasible that might be is not addressed. Currently, the ultimate goal of the Large Hadron Collider at CERN is to reach an energy of [15] trillion electron volts, equivalent to the estimated temperature of the universe when it was 3 x 10-15 seconds old. This is still many many orders of magnitude bigger than the time during which cosmological inflation is claimed to have operated, *qv*.

'The Inclusive Reality of Time'

In his fourth chapter, Unger points out correctly (p 173) that:

"… both the laws and the elementary constituents or structure of the Universe must have been very different at the beginning. This inference suggests that the laws and elementary structure of nature may change sometimes quickly and at other times slowly or not at all – a concept as familiar as the punctuated equilibrium of neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory."

For Marxists, this is also a concept as familiar as changes of quantity into quality. But then Unger departs into a flight of fancy (pp 177-8):

"The view that the universe has a history, amplified by the conjecture that everything in the universe … changes sooner or later … can be stated radically and comprehensively only if we accept that *there is a preferred cosmic or global time* [my emphasis –*ML*]. … [E]verything that has happened or that will ever happen in the universe, or in the history of universes that may have preceded the present universe, can in principle be placed on a single time line. ... These reasons can be summarised as follows. "First, if there is no cosmic time, there can be no overall history of the universe, only a series of local or fragmentary histories. … Moreover, if even events that are causally connected cannot be lined up in unique temporal succession, the link between causality and time is broken or substantially modified. It becomes hard to see how time can be fundamental or non-emergent. ….

"Second, … [either] there may have been a unified time at the very beginning, … [which] fell apart, giving way to many-fingered time, … [or] cosmic time never existed even at the beginning, … so it becomes unclear in what sense we can say that the present universe has a history at all … [and] senseless to state, as cosmologists generally do, that it is about 13.8 billion years old.

"Third, if the reason for the non-existence of a preferred time is the inseparability of time from space, … then the non-existence of global time results in a substantial qualification to the reality of time altogether."

Accepting that a preferred cosmic time is not directly observable, Unger then argues (pp 180-1) that it may figure in theories generating results which can be tested experimentally, asking in particular whether:

"the concept of a preferred cosmic time can be translated into the idea of a preferred state of rest of the universe, but only at a cosmic rather than a local scale."

He then claims that there would be evidence for such a state of rest from observations of uniformity with direction in the cosmic microwave background and in the range of speeds at which the galaxies recede, ie features which apply on Earth (apart from the Earth's movement around the Sun, and the Sun's around the centre of our galaxy), hence the Earth is close to that preferred state of rest.

Unger is simply wrong here. The observations simply reflect the fact that the universe is infinite. And, as Caudwell says:

"That Time and Space are not characteristics of the Universe, *ie* that there is no universal Time and Space, but that each particle has Time-like and Space-like relations with the rest of the Universe, is part of the deductions of relativity physics. It also follows that Time cannot be separate ultimately from Space, because unlikeness is necessary to make possible a like connection. ... Time involves change – the emergence of unlike – hence change is a mode of existence. ... It is easy to understand how a particle can imagine there is universal Time and Space, for all other particles can only be given an existence, a movement, in its time and space. …

"Absolute space and time is one of the characteristics of mechanism. ... S*pace and time are sweated out of the activity of particles among themselves* [my emphasis –*ML*]. But since no particle has exactly the same set of relations with other particles as any other particle, there is no independent space and time, but only individual sets."[8]

Caudwell's position is the complete antithesis of the block universe model, which effectively assumes absolute space and time, a single space-time. It is inevitable that there will be Unger's "fragmentary histories" because the Universe is so large that parts of it have not yet had – and may never have – the time to influence each other. And Unger's argument for a preferred cosmic time is also fallacious: in the first place, no observer anywhere in the universe can observe the whole; and, secondly, how do we know that Unger's criteria would not apply universally? In fact, he seems to fall into the pitfalls of the two cosmological fallacies which he describes (*qv*).

Why this preference for a preferred cosmic time? Because Unger wants (p 183) to provide justification for *shape dynamics*, an approach preferred by Smolin, in which relativity theory is reworked so that time is universal and space is relative – *ie* the size of objects can differ across the universe. This, Unger says, allows singularities such as the Big Bang to be eliminated. But, in the absence of means of measuring such size differences, this seems to me to be another flight of fancy, quite apart from the fact that Julian Barbour, the originator of shape dynamics, considers that time is ultimately an illusion.[9]

The remainder of the chapter reads like a long philosophical justification of the reality of time. Some of this is almost Marxist, for example (p 205):

"Time is the fundamental aspect of reality – of all nature – by virtue of which everything changes. Because everything is connected, directly or indirectly, with everything else and … is the sum of such relations, to say that everything changes is to say that it changes with regard to these other things.
"Such an understanding of reality conforms to three minimalist postulates. The first is the postulate of reality. The second is the postulate of plurality: there is more than one phenomenon or being. The third is the postulate of connection: the plural things that exist are connected."

and (p 207):

"Time ... is an integral part of the way in which everything is what it is. Everything is what it is because it can become something else. Only because it can become something else can we hope to understand what it now is or was. ... Like causality, ... temporality is a primitive feature of nature and how it works."

However, Marxists would say that space, matter and energy are also "fundamental aspects of reality", along with time.

The Changing Laws of Nature

In chapter 5, 'The Mutability of the Laws of Nature', Unger comes back to the point that, if there is only one universe, then the laws and fundamental constants which we experience must have been generated via a process of historical change, and that "Such change may be discontinuous" (p 263). The idea that the laws of physics may change with time is not unknown to Marxists.[10] However, Unger and Smolin deserve credit for exploring this matter in some detail. As Unger says:

> "The universe is so constituted that it undergoes moments of radical reformation in which the distinction between the laws and governed phenomena diminishes or even vanishes. Causal connections may even cease to exhibit the recurrent and general regularities and symmetries that are their hall-mark in the cooled-down universe. These are the same moments in which change changes more rapidly .... The phenomena may change more easily than the regularities: laws, symmetries and supposed constants. The regularities that appear to underwrite our causal explanations but that are in fact only a codification of causal connections in their current form ... change less readily and more rarely. The principles that these laws seem to obey, such as conservation of energy and least action, may change only at the limit of the most radical transformations in the history of the universe." (p 264)

> "[T]here was a time, of extreme density and temperature, when the distinction between states of affairs and regularities was unclear (a time that can be described alternately as one of law-giving or of lawlessness), when the present division of nature into well-defined constituents was not yet established, and when the phenomena were excited to much higher degrees of freedom ..... [At such times, N]ature does not assume the form of a sharply differentiated structure: the distinctions among the elementary constituents of nature break down. … [T]he contrast between laws of nature and phenomena they govern ceases to hold. … [N]ew and massive degrees of freedom may be turned on. ... The introduction of the new is not, however, a free-for-all. It is not the spontaneous generation of uncaused effects. It takes place under the influence of what came before – of prior universes, or of the states of the universe prior to the formative events. … Causality exists without laws, which is a way of saying that causal connections have not acquired, or have lost, the repetitious form, over a differentiated range of nature, that makes it possible to distinguish phenomena from laws." (pp 267-270)

There are insights, but also some problems, here. As noted above, in the absence of differentiation, there can be no contradiction and hence no change. There is also no means of defining temperature (which requires multiple matter units in motion) and density (which implies particles – more than one as there needs to be differentiation.) But, in addition, the "influence of what came before" seems to be skating closely to "meta-laws". So maybe they exist after all?

Christopher Caudwell had the following to say about causality and laws:

> "Causality is simply matter, the thing-in-itself becoming the thing for us. … Seeing novelties emerge in the world, we explain them by causal relations between existents. ... This conception of activity ... is fundamental to physics, because it marks the difference between a logical determinism and a scientific causality. ... [I]n practice, causality is seen to be a very different conception from that of determinism; it is determinism full of a history of practically experienced causal relations. …

> "Everything in the Universe is a 'cause', ie a determining factor in this sense, not merely now, but in the whole past. But the [causal] selection, because it is impregnated with activity, does stand out as an organised 'whole' from the background of the Universe. Something is 'happening' against a background of not-happening. ... [C]ausality is inner activity and the production of a new quality against the relatively unchanging background." [11]

Using integers as an analogy for particles or events, Caudwell argued that number by itself brings new qualities and leads to the formation of domains as modes of togetherness, with the repetition of old qualities at higher levels:

> "It is this universal interweaving of domains, and not the concept of strict causality as such, which enables us to speak of laws and the universal reign of laws. A law is a domain system. ... It does not mean that any one law ingathers all reality. … Each ... elementary particle ... cannot however exist for itself, but only by causal interaction with other elementary particles. It is therefore forced to form part of domains or systems or wholes which in fact its activity evolves."[12]

To talk about laws in the earliest stages of the current universe is therefore simply a nonsense. For us to speak of laws there must be domain systems and relatively unchanging backgrounds.

In Part 3 of this article, we'll look at Smolin's contribution to the book, and compare his and Unger's approaches to the place of mathematics in physics.

Notes and References

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1 October 1931
The Battle of Bexley Square

by Evan Pritchard

IN JULY this year a recently created amateur theatrical company produced a play version of *Love on the Dole*, Walter Greenwood's classic depiction of poverty, working class life and struggle in 1930s Salford. The production opened just a few months before the 85th anniversary of the piece of local history described in the novel, and re-enacted in the play – the attack by police on an unemployed workers' march.

The play partly takes the form of a promenade through the streets of Salford up to the scene of the violence, where police beat protestors mercilessly and performed many arrests. Red flags are flown, and cast and audience chant the slogans of the day:

> "DOWN! DOWN! DOWN! WITH THE NATIONAL STARVATION GOVERNMENT!"
> "DOWN! DOWN! DOWN! WITH THE CUTS!"
> "DOWN! DOWN! DOWN! WITH THE MEANS TEST!"

The background historically was that the National (coalition) Government was attempting to deal with the economic crisis by waging war on the poor in a bid to cut the welfare bill (sounds familiar?). Specific parts of this attack were the introduction of means testing of those seeking to claim unemployment benefit and severe cuts to the dole itself as well as other benefits.

Already, in response to the postwar rise in unemployment, the National Unemployed Workers' Movement had been formed in 1921 under the influence, and largely the leadership, of the then fledgling Communist Party. By 1931, regular open air meetings were being held in working class communities all over the country, including in Salford and other parts of Greater Manchester. Incidentally, this area also provided the working class youth who (again with the benefit of communist leadership and organisation) took the law into their own hands, and fought for the right to roam in the mass trespass at Kinder Scout.

While similar disturbances happened in other parts of the country around that time, the events at Bexley Square, their causes and aftermath, have been described in a number of publications, including by participants such as singer Ewan McColl and local Young Communist League member Eddie Frow.

There was frustration and anger in particular at the means test and those locally administering the dole, which led to an NUWM-organised march of 10,000 men and women to what was then the town hall, and now has a blue plaque commemorating the battle. The presence of large numbers of police, including many mounted, inflamed the situation as did plain clothes officers who snatched placards from peoples' hands. The ensuing violence was intense. According to Ewan McColl,

> "A note of fierce hatred, deep and vengeful, was heard as the marchers broke through the barricades. Alex Armstrong passed by holding his large brass bell above his head like a town crier. There was a lull for a few moments and then, from behind the Town Hall dozens of mounted police suddenly appeared, followed by foot police brandishing their clubs. They charged and the first engagement was fierce. But when the police tasted blood, they started lashing out at anyone in their path."[1]

One week after the events, a protest march in Manchester was re-routed with the agreement of the organisers, in spite of which the fire brigade turned their hoses on the marchers near Piccadilly Station.

Eddie Frow, like many others, was beaten severely by the police at Bexley Square, arrested and then sentenced to five months in jail following a trial where only police officers gave evidence against him and his fellow defendants, and where the magistrate could not have been more biased against the

protestors. Eddie represented himself and used the trial to put forward the NUWM case.

It was not entirely unusual for Communists and their allies to find themselves in jail at that time. CP founder member Wal Hannington, who was NUWM national organiser, was imprisoned on five occasions while holding that position. And a year after the Bexley Square events, a similar battle occurred in Birkenhead, at the other end of the East Lancs Road:

> "In a three-day battle in which the unemployed turned on unemployment authorities and police alike, over 100 people were hospitalised and 45 were arrested, including the local NUWM committee, several of whom subsequently received gaol sentences of up to six years …."[2]

In the 1980s, in the wake of years of work compiling books, newspapers and other documents, Eddie and his wife Ruth established the Working Class Movement Library in Salford, not far from the scene of the Bexley Square battle. This is a truly remarkable source of local and national progressive history and culture including paintings and drawings by now deceased Manchester communist and International Brigade veteran Syd Booth. Incidentally, Alex Armstrong, referred to above, was killed in Spain fighting for the Republic.

As the Second World war began, a film was produced based on Walter Greenwood's novel. Before then, the official censors had blocked it as "a very sordid story in a very sordid surrounding".[3] Although the film is, in this writer's opinion, generally a great work, it is flawed by its depiction of the events at Bexley Square with its suggestion that the violence was due to a peaceful march being hijacked by the communists, and against the vain cries of the main hero. This distortion of the actual events as well as the book was not repeated in the recent play. This reflects the fact that, as Phil Katz points out, the NUWM,

> "… long ostracised by Labour officialdom, did so much to change public perceptions of unemployment and, thereby contributed generously to the groundswell of opinion that brought Labour to power in 1945…"[4]

History is always of interest in terms both of events themselves and for examining the extent to which those events replicate themselves or not, and the effect they have on the future. Much has been written on the subject of the NUWM. Suffice to say, it was a creation that communists have every reason to be proud of. It played a significant role in fighting for democratic rights and is credited with the establishment of the National Council for Civil Liberties. In its own terms, it helped to keep the issue of unemployment in the public eye:

> "One of the great achievements of the NUWM is placing the unemployment issue in the political arena so that it could not be ignored. It helped to force those who for so long blamed the unemployed, including the unemployed themselves, who thought their predicament was of their own making, to think again..."4

It provided organisation and helped create a means of social inclusion for people who, by the very nature of their existence, were then, as now, often marginalised.

> "That it was national and collective, when so much of the experience of unemployment was local and personal, is an achievement in itself …."[5]

The NUWM was spurned by most of the TUC, and the Labour Party, particularly after the General Strike. The Hunger Marches organised by the NUWM, including those to London, were boycotted by the bulk of the 'official' labour movement. The famous Jarrow march, associated with Ellen Wilkinson, was one of the few tolerated by the labour establishment as it was intended to be 'non-political' – but it was actually one of the smallest.

Due primarily to their work in the NUWM, the communists were growing in influence if not size at the time, in spite (or some would argue because) of their adoption of what is referred variously as the 'Class Against Class' or 'Third Period' line. But even before the adoption of this policy, attempts to affiliate the NUWM to the TUC were rejected; and the position did not improve significantly after the CPGB adopted the united front and then popular front policy.

How does this compare with today?

The scale of attacks on the unemployed and those in receipt of various disability and sickness benefits is well documented. Conditionality, with the penalty of sanctions, is wielded with a vengeance against recipients of both Job Seekers Allowance and Employment and Support Allowance. To make matters worse, through Universal Credit in-work benefits are now subject to conditionality. At the same time thousands of unemployed people are forced onto workfare schemes, amounting in effect to slave labour.

Under its progressive leadership, the largest TUC affiliate, Unite, has over the last four years organised unemployed people, carers, pensioners and others into community branches, which in some areas play a leading role in the local labour and progressive movement, and has held national days of action against benefit sanctions. There have been moves inside the Public and Commercial Servants' union (PCS), which organises Jobcentre staff, to try to ameliorate the effects of today's war on the poor, including giving official union approval to leaflets advising claimants of their rights. It is inconceivable that the FBU or its members nowadays would condone turning hoses on unemployed marchers. And a militant and increasingly effective disabled rights movement has found growing support and respect in labour and trade union movement circles, particularly centred on Disabled People Against Cuts, which provides further advice, assistance and a focus for resistance against attacks on benefits.

However, encouraging those under attack to organise to defend themselves is hard, partly due to the sense of marginalisation and despair, but also because of the climate of fear created by the sanctions regime. Those involved in this struggle could do well to study and learn from the lessons of the NUWM, adapting their lessons to the realities of the early 21st Century.

Notes and References

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2 P Katz, *The Long Weekend: Combating Unemployment During the Inter-war Years*, Hetherington Press, 2001, p 127.
3 J Harris, *Rereading: 'Love on the Dole' by Walter Greenwood*, in *The Guardian*, 7 Augsut 2010; online at https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/aug/07/rereading-love-dole-walter-greenwood.
4 Katz, *op cit*, p 167.
5 *Ibid*, p 13.

SOUL FOOD

by Mike Quille

"Expressing in my voice the lung of the whole people."

THERE ARE two topics in *Soul Food* this time. First, we'll have a follow-up to the Spanish anti-fascist war focus of the last column, where I presented several poems by International Brigaders. After publication of that issue of *CR*, I received some poems by the Spanish communist and poet Rafael Alberti, and their translations, from John Manson of Castle Douglas, Scotland. So they will form the first part of the column here. Secondly, readers will probably be aware that Chris Guiton and I co-edit a new website called **Culture Matters,** at www.culturematters.org.uk. It aims to present and promote a left-wing perspective on the arts and cultural activities generally. From that initiative we have now developed some publishing projects. Currently we are producing three new poetry pamphlets by established poets who have contributed to **Culture Matters**, so I thought I would give *Soul Food* readers a preview of the pamphlets – along with a request to support us, of course!

ONE Rafael Alberti

Rafael Alberti (1902-1999) was the longest lived of the 1923-27 group of eleven Spanish poets, sometimes known as the 'Generation of '27'. They included Federico Garcia Lorca, Jorge Guillen, Pedro Salinas, Luis Cernuda, Vicente Aleixandre, and Rafael Alberti himself, who outlived all of them to reach the ripe age of 96 (Lorca was executed by the fascists in August 1936).

Born in Cadiz, Alberti moved with his family to Madrid in 1917, where he studied painting. He had an exhibition in Madrid in 1922 and, although he continued to paint throughout his life, it was poetry that was to be his main creative pursuit, and he gradually developed a reputation, both in Spain and abroad, as a great political poet.

Alberti joined the Communist Party in 1931 and wrote a series of twenty-four poems, *Capital de la Gloria,* which were published at the time of the Spanish Civil War. He was vociferously committed to the Republican side in that war; and, in the Soviet tradition, channelled his art to the service of the people by reading these explicitly political and propagandist poems to Republican forces at the time.

With the fall of the Republic in 1939, Alberti fled to Buenos Aires, Argentina, where he worked for the publishing company, Losado, as well as continuing his experiments in art and design. In 1961 he moved to Italy where he stayed, with some periods spent in other countries, until 1977 when he finally and permanently returned to Spain after the death of Franco. He again became active in politics, taking a seat in parliament for the Communist Party.

The poems reproduced here were all, apart from *Monte de El Pardo*, written in 1938. They express Alberti's intense feelings about the savagery of the war and the peacefulness of nature. I am presenting them in both the original Spanish and translation, because some of the assonance, rhymes and rhythms, both internal and at line endings, can be retrieved by reading the poems in Spanish. This is particularly important for *Monte de El Pardo,* where the surreal, dialectical meanings are reproduced sonically. The location described is a forested area to the north of Madrid.

Monte de El Pardo

Tanto sol en la guerra, de pronto, tanta lumber
desparramada a carros por valles y colinas;
tan rabioso silencio, tan fiera mansedumbre
bajando como un crimen del cielo a las encinas;

este desentenderse de la muerte que intenta,
de acuerdo con el campo, tanta luz deslumbrada;
la nieve que a lo lejos en extasis se ausenta,
las horas que pasando no les preocupa nada;

todo esto me remuerde, me socava, me quita
ligereza a los ojos, me los nuubla y me pone
la conciencia cargada de llanto y dinamita.
La soledad retumba y el sol se descompone.

El Pardo Mountain

So much sun on the war, suddenly, so much light
diffused in cartloads over valleys and hills;
such furious silence, such ferocious mildness
descending like a crime from the sky to the holm oaks;

this disinterestedness in death which attempts,
in accord with the fields, so much dazzling light;
the snow that in the distance in ecstasy absents,
the hours that in passing are unconcerned;

all this disturbs me, undermines me, takes away
lightness from my eyes, clouds them over and imposes
a consciousness weighted with weeping and dynamite.
Solitude resounds and the sun changes.

The second poem is about the battle of the Ebro, the longest and bloodiest battle of the war. It is made up of classic 12-syllable alexandrines, complete with rhymes and caesuras, a common form which thereby roots the poem in the life of the common people. Even the autumn gloom, the fatalistic sense of doom around the season and the progress of the Republican campaign, does not dim the elemental, undying sense of collective struggle, which will ultimately triumph. It is also worth noting how traces of the surrealism of *El Pardo Mountain* are still in evidence, but are ultimately working to strengthen the materialist philosophy which grounds the poem.

Our third poem is a lament of how words are replaced by bullets in times of war.

El otono y el Ebro

A Enrique Lister

El otono, una vez. Sique la Guerra, fria,
insensible al periodico descenso de las hojas.
Como el hombre del Ebro bajo la artilleria,
los despoblados troncos junta a las aguas rojas.

Resistencia del arbo, tan dura, tan humana,
como la del soldado que entre los vendavales
de la muerte noctura ve crecer la manana,
florida nuevamente de lauros inmortales.

Miro las hojas, miro cuan provisionalmente
Se desnuda la tierra del bosque mas querido
Y de que modo el hombre de esta Espana se siente,
Como los troncos, firme, ya desnudo o vestido.

El otono, otra vez. Luego, el invierno. Sea.
Caiga el traje del arbol, el sol no nos reuerde.
Pero como los troncos, el hombre en la pelea,
seco, amarillo, frio, mas por debajo, verde.

Autumn and the Ebro

To Enrique Lister

Autumn, once. The war drags on, unconcerned,
insensible to the occasional falling of the leaves.
Like the man on the Ebro under the artillery,
the leafless trunks beside the red waters.

Endurance of the tree, so hardy, so human,
like that of the soldier who between the gales
of death at night sees the morning creep in,
flowery again with autumn laurels.

I watch the leaves, I observe how for the time being
the land lays itself bare of the most beloved forest
and in what way the man of this Spain feels,
like the trunks, steadfast, now bare or clothed.

Autumn, once more. Next, winter. So.
The dress of the tree may fall, the sun may not remember us.
But like the trunks, the man in the struggle,
lean, pale, cold, but underneath, green.

The fourth and final poem in this part of the column is a tribute to the soldiers of the Red Army, on its twentieth anniversary in 1938.

Nocturno

Cuando tanto se sufre sin sueno y por la sangre
se escucha que transita solamente la rabia,
que en los tuetanos tiembla despabilado el odio
y en las medullas arde continua la venganza,
las palabras entonces no sirven: son palabras.

Balas. Balas.

Manifiestos, articulos, comentarios, discursos,
humaredas perdidas, neblinas estampadas,
que dolor de papeles que ha de barrer el viento,
que tristeza de tinta que ha de borrar el agua!

Balas. Balas.

Ahora sufro lo pobre, lo mezquino, lo triste,
lo desgraciado y muerto que tiene una garganta
cuando desde el abismo de su idioma quisiera
gritar lo que no puede por imposible, y calla.

Balas. Balas.

Siento esta noche heridas de muerte las palabras.

Nocturne

When one suffers so much without sleep and in the blood
one hears that only violent anger stalks abroad,
so that in the marrow hatred quivers awake
and in the marrow incessant vengeance burns,
words do not serve them: they are only words.

Bullets. Bullets.

Manifestos, articles, commentaries, speeches,
wasted breath, printed mists,
what anguish of papers the wind has to sweep away,
what sadness of ink the water has to wash away!

Bullets. Bullets.

Now I endure the poor, the needy, the unhappy,
the unfortunate and dead who has a throat
when from the abyss of his language he might want
to cry what he cannot because it is impossible, and is silent.

Bullets. Bullets.

This night I feel the wounded words of death.

Aniversario

A los soldados del Ejercito Rojo

Siempre, siempre os recuerdo, y ahora mas que nunca,
como nunca, esta noche despiadada de Espana,
con nieve inocentisima de la sierra cerrando
los tristes agujeros de sangre, escombro y muerte.

Siempre os recuerdo, siempre, soldados entranables,
Soldados como estos que ahora siento en mi patria
Brotar de los terrones partidos de la tierra
Con la misma razon sencilla de los trigos.

Yo quisiera esta noche, presentes y lejanos
guardas de las pacificas labores de los hombres,
haciendo de mi voz pulmon de todo un pueblo,
en vuestro aniversario de orden y luz deciros:
Que el Corazon de Espana viva siempre en vosostros.

(noche del 14 febrero, 1938)

Anniversary

To the soldiers of the Red Army

Always, always I remember you, and now more than ever,
as never, this pitliless night of Spain,
with the most innocent snow of the sierra stopping
the sad holes of blood, debris and death.

Always I remember you, always, dear soldiers,
soldiers like these whom now I feel in my country
burgeoning from the divided lands of the nation
with the same uncomplicated reason as the wheat.

I might want this night, present and faraway
guards of the peaceful labours of men,
expressing in my voice the lung of a whole people,
on your anniversary of order and light to say to you:
May the heart of Spain live always in you.

(Night of 14 February, 1938)

That heartfelt phrase, "expressing in my voice the lung of a whole people" expresses Alberti's commitment to using his individual poetic voice to strengthen the collective struggle.

The Spanish texts of all the poems appear in the fourth section, 'Capital de la Gloria (1936-38)' of Rafael Alberti, *De un momento a otro (From One Moment to Another)*, Biblioteca Alberti, Alianza Editorial, 2002. *Monte de El Pardo* is on p 82; *El otono y el Ebro* is on p 112; N*octurno* is on pp 108-9; *Aniversario* is on p 100.

TWO: Culture Matters

As mentioned at the start of the column, three poetry pamphlets are currently under production by **Culture Matters**. They are all by published poets: Fred Voss, Kevin Higgins and David Betteridge.

Fred Voss

Fred Voss was the subject of a recent *Soul Food* column, in *CR*79. Following that, the poet offered **Culture Matters** some poems, for us to make a pamphlet of them. Len McCluskey of Unite the Union will hopefully be writing the foreword to the collection, which is called *The Earth and the Stars in the Palm of Our Hand* – it is worth buying for that alone. Here is one of the poems from the pamphlet:

Carrying our babies and our crankcases in our arms

Why do we kneel before a king sitting on a throne with nothing
to do
why are our magazine covers full of celebrities
why is the billionaire born to his wealth leaning on the railing of a
cruise ship sailing
around the world high class
why do we worship his satin hands and the silver spoon in his
mouth
men
who go down into mines
crawl under houses
carry our garbage clean our chimneys rivet together our airplanes
carve
our engine blocks stamp out our bed springs serve our meals oil
our gears blast holes
through hills lay pipe lift loads carry
water heave crankcases buff aircraft skins polish
shoes stir soup
drive trucks across the country through thousands of desolate
midnights
calibrate scales cut jewels
mend socks drill
holes down through miles of rock to save miners trapped
in cave-ins bail
the radioactive water out of melted-down
nuclear reactors clean the bed sheets
steer the ship crack the nut
what is the crown of a king compared to the callouses
on their hands the aches
in their backs the muscles
in their wrists and forearms and thighs and thumbs they
charge our batteries
slip rings on the fingers
of brides crawl under cars touch their fingertips
to 440 volts hold
dying soldiers in their medic arms fix mainsprings grip
needle-nosed files jackhammer handles crucifixes
before they storm Normandy Beach what is fame
when you can talk a suicide away from the ledge
over the phone
carry the baby out of the flames
cut out the bolts that hold our cities
up
why should a trumpet blare a fanfare for a king
when it can blow a Miles Davis solo
so beautifully
it saves a thousand lives?

Fred Voss won the Joe Hill Labor Poetry Award this year, given during the foundation's annual Great Labor Arts Exchange festival, to honour an individual for a body of work in the field of labour culture.

Here's his account of his recital at the festival.

"It was quite an experience, thousands of labor people, hundreds of unions represented, met a lot of great people. I was going to kick off the whole thing, but before I could do it (after the Star Spangled Banner was sung powerfully) the Mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, hopped on the stage and introduced about 30 of his fellow LA-Long Beach politicians along with a dog that had wings and political buttons all over him and the politicians all hugged and the press/TV photographers went crazy for the little dog and then ...

I STEP UP, and did a good forceful reading but it took about a third of the poem before I noticed the people becoming engrossed, but at least I read well and they seemed to really get into it and the union leader on stage got them to give me a big round of applause and said it was a TRUE LABOR poem, a great labor poem."

Kevin Higgins

Kevin Higgins is an Irish poet, a brilliant political poet who is satirist-in-residence with the alternative literature website **The Bogman's Cannon**. *The Stinging Fly* magazine recently described Kevin as "likely the most widely read living poet in Ireland". His pamphlet for **Culture Matters** is called *The Minister for Poetry has Decreed,* and here is one of the poems:

After The Big Vote Intellectual Begins To Decompose

You sit minding that cup
as if it contained, post-Brexit,
the last frothy coffee in all of Brighton.
You've the look of
a pretend Elvis Costello,
or the rejected fourth member
of Bananarama.
Your claim to notoriety
that one of the Sex Pistols
once failed to cross the road
to avoid you. Your opinions
what it said in all
yesterday's editorials.
Your new secret hate
the ghastly Adidas tracksuits of Gateshead,
the sweatpants of Merthyr Tydfil,
for daring to go against your wishes.
Your sneer is a threatened Doberman
with the charming personality removed.
Scientists are currently trying
to bottle your lime-green bile
and make it available on the NHS
as a homeopathic remedy for psychotic
former Guardian columnists.
Your words are the gusts that come out
immediately before
a terrible bowel movement.
Even in the face of bitten
finger nails, the broken hinge
on the upstairs window, and my own
sack load of mistakes,
to be you would be
a fate worse than life.

David Betteridge and Bob Starrett

Finally, David Betteridge (poet) and Bob Starrett (visual artist-in-residence at the Upper Clyde Shipbuilders work-in of 1972) are two contributors to **Culture Matters** who have put together an illustrated book of poetry, called S*lave Songs and Symphonies.*

It's an ambitious, wide-ranging but beautifully unified collection of poems, drawings, collages, epigraphs and notes. It's about human history, progressive art and music, campaigns for political independence, social justice and peace. Above all it's about the class and cultural struggle of workers "by hand and by brain" as David insists (rather than 'by hand or by brain') to regain control and ownership of the fruits of their labour.

David's poems are leftist, lyrical, and learned. They are infused with sadness and compassion for the sufferings of our class, the working class. But they are also inspired by visionary hope, and a strong belief that our currently class-divided society and culture can be transformed by radical politics and good art – and by radical art

and good politics. His themes develop and recur as thesis, antithesis and synthesis, growing in strength and confidence as the collection progresses.

Bob's accompanying drawings (see book cover over page) are more than illustrations. They dance with the poems, commenting on them as well as illustrating them, extending, enhancing and even challenging the poems' verbal meanings with powerful visual expressions of their themes and contexts. They are independent ideograms, emblems, portrayals, carrying both abstract and representational meanings. Sometimes they seem Goya-esque in their dark, ink-black truthfulness, their intimate knowledge of suffering and 'mental fight'. But then, just like the poems, they resolve the struggles they depict: they help make the slave songs become symphonies.

This booklet is thus not only about class and cultural struggle, it is class and cultural struggle, in exactly the same way that Blake's poems and images expressed and resolved, intellectually, emotionally and aesthetically, the struggles he depicted. It not only tells the story of how slave songs become symphonies – it helps makes it happen.

Here is a poem from the pamphlet:

Only in a Commonweal

A Chorus of Labour against Capital

"Where the chains of capitalism are forged, there they must be broken" – Rosa Luxemburg

We are the nothings you walk past.
Your lowest and least,
we live in the margins of your power.
Expendable, we fight your many wars.
Your triumphs we pay for, but have none.

Unheeded and unnamed,
we make your schemes come true.

Every ton and inch and cubic yard and chisel-cut
of every building you command is ours.
Every furrow ploughed and filled with seed is ours.
Your wealth-producing factories, your cities – ours!

Day in, day out, we do your work and will.
We pipe the water that you need
from reservoir to tap; we stitch the clothes
that cover up your nakedness;
we bake the bread (and cake) you eat.
We are your numerous and essential kin.
Suffering most, we learn most.
Our slave-songs make symphonies;
our longings, creeds.
We dig your graves.

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Acknowledgements
Grateful thanks are due to John Manson, Fred Voss, Kevin Higgins, David Betteridge and Bob Starrett.

John Manson's principal publications are *Hugh MacDiarmid: Selected Poems* (with David Craig), Penguin 1970, 1977; *Hugh MacDiarmid: Revolutionary Art of the Future* (with Dorian Grieve and Alan Riach), Carcanet, 2003; *Dear Grieve: Letters to Hugh MacDiarmid,* Kennedy and Boyd, 2011.

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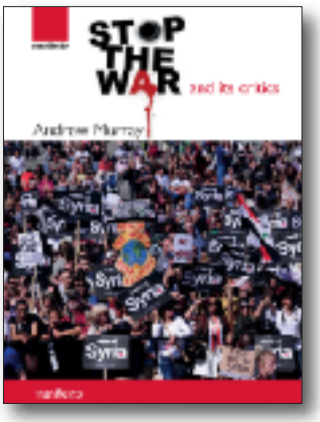

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Culture Matters is a new website about art, culture and politics, edited by Mike Quille and Chris Guiton. The site, at www.culturematters.org.uk, carries a wide range of creative and critical material on the arts (poetry, films, theatre, visual art etc.) and other cultural activities (sport, religion, eating and drinking etc.) Comments and contributions are welcome at info@culturematters.org.uk

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