

# CR

**Women and the Russian Revolution** Mary Davis  
**19th Meeting of Communist & Workers' Parties Appeal**  
**Socialism is real freedom** Gennady Zyuganov  
**Centenary of the October Revolution** Liu Qibao  
**Build workers' power** Eugene McCartan  
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**Culture Matters**

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Cover image: **1917 revolutionary sailors on the  
Russian cruiser Aurora fired the opening salvos of  
the Great October Socialist Revolution.**

Above right: **Order of the October Revolution**



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## Martin Levy



THE CRISIS of Britain's ruling class, brought on by the referendum result of 2016, sharpened acutely in 2017. In the June general election, Labour's advance under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership not only denied the Tories an absolute majority, but put left-wing politics (albeit social-democratic) centre-stage in the political debate. Since then Theresa May's government, rocked by ministerial scandals, and caught on the horns of the dilemma of delivering a Brexit deal satisfying the City of London while retaining the Tories' own dwindling base of support, has appeared increasingly incompetent, out of touch and bereft of new ideas.

Yet the labour movement cannot afford to be complacent. Austerity is still in place, the 2016 Trade Union Act is on the statute book, and Universal Credit is being rolled out while – away from the limelight – US-style Accountable Care Organisations are being established to run the NHS. More than 300,000 people in Britain are homeless, and our schools and local government are grossly underfunded, yet £ billions are being poured into nuclear weapons and new aircraft carriers which, far from being for defence, are intended to maintain Britain's imperialist role in the world.

It's a situation crying out for change. The government is so weak that, theoretically, a further major scandal could cause it to fall. However, the parliamentary arithmetic, and the desire for Tory MPs to hold on to their seats, mean that such an outcome is unlikely, unless there is extraparliamentary pressure. A key issue for the labour movement has to be the development of mass action, to create opposition to government policies on such a broad front that a general election is forced in 2018.

The Communist Party will work to achieve such an outcome, and with it the election of a Corbyn-led Labour government. On its own, that will not bring working class power or socialism; but it will create the conditions to allow the labour movement to rebuild its strength and confidence; and out of that wider issues will come to the fore, as they did in the 1970s.

The possibility of such a government underscores, rather than minimises, the case for a much stronger Communist Party, with deep roots in the working class so that it is able to give leadership in the day-to-day struggle. Labour remains a 'broad church' party, in large areas committed to electoralism, despite the record of support for mass action by Corbyn, McDonnell and many others in the new leadership. Furthermore, although right-wing Labour is on the defensive, its ideas still carry sway among sections of the parliamentary party, particularly over Brexit. That reflects major misconceptions in the wider labour movement, which need to be overcome through the Marxist analysis that the Communist Party is able to provide.

While Jeremy Corbyn has made clear that Labour accepts the EU referendum result, and that Britain must leave the single market and the customs union too, nearly a

quarter of Labour MPs voted for a parliamentary amendment to remain in the latter. Some statements from Shadow Brexit Secretary Keir Starmer about "staying aligned" with the EU, and about the length of a transitional period for Brexit, have added to the confusion. Such positions would invalidate the implementation of many of Labour's progressive policies. Since the Irish border issue has been prominent in the Brexit negotiations, we reproduce in this issue of *CR* two important recent statements, by Britain's Communist Party, and by the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI). They are preceded by CPI general secretary Eugene McCartan's address at the recent Congress of that party, where he not only dealt with Brexit as "an important step in the struggle against ... the forces that are constructing [the EU] super-imperialist structure", but situated the current Irish and international situation in the context of the lessons from the Russian October Revolution.

And indeed, following our last special edition commemorating the centenary of Red October, we make no apology for continuing the theme in the current issue of *CR*, since the lessons are many. Our first article, by Mary Davis, underscores the important role of women in the Revolution itself, and in initiating solidarity with it in Britain. Then we carry two documents from the recent 19th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties: the joint Appeal, and the introductory address by Communist Party of the Russian Federation chair Gennady Zyuganov. These are followed by an interesting speech given in September by then Politburo member of the Chinese Communist Party (CPC) Liu Qibao, explaining the significance of the October Revolution to China, and the CPC's emphasis on Marxism as it builds socialism with Chinese characteristics. All these show that the world communist movement is alive and well, with positive visions for the future.

In 2018, a number of other notable anniversaries will take place. On January 28, it will be exactly 50 years since the start of the Tet Offensive launched by liberation forces in South Vietnam, which stunned the US military and ultimately led to the negotiations to end the war. February 2 will see the 50th anniversary of the victory of Soviet forces in the Battle of Stalingrad, which became the turning point in the war against Nazi Germany. The sacrifices made by both the Vietnamese and Soviet peoples should not be forgotten. Then May 5 will mark the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx. We expect to make more of that in our next issue, but here Robert Griffiths continues his series on the 150th anniversary of Marx's *Das Kapital*. His comments on "fictitious capital", globalisation, neoliberalism and Keynesianism should be compulsory reading for labour movement activists.

Finally, we round off as usual with *Soul Food*, this time including Part 2 of Mike Quille's 'Tomorrow, art and culture may not be the same', and then a short feature about

# Women and the Russian Revolution

Mary Davis



“Women workers acted splendidly during the revolution. Without them we should not have been victorious.” VI Lenin



THE CENTENARY of the Russian Revolution has triggered a great deal of interest, not all of which is helpful or illuminating. However, one aspect of the two revolutions of 1917 which has been almost completely disregarded is the role of women.

There are two aspects to this. The first concerns the role of women, particularly in Britain, who initiated solidarity movements in support of the October Revolution. The second is about the role of women in Russia itself.

#### Britain

In Britain, World War One (WW1) split both the labour movement and the women's movement. This split was replicated in many other European countries. Thus it was that the war divided the main suffrage organisation in Britain, the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). The Pankhurst family itself embodies this in microcosm.

This pro/anti-war split impacted upon attitudes to the Russian Revolution. Of the two revolutions in 1917, the first, in February<sup>1</sup>, was widely supported. Clearly this was an indication that it was possible to win broad unity to oppose autocracy and to support replacing it with bourgeois democracy, especially because the incoming Provisional Government in Russia under Lvov and then Kerensky supported WW1. It was much more difficult to win this kind of support for the October Socialist Revolution, especially because, alone among Russian political parties, the Bolsheviks opposed WW1.

Sylvia Pankhurst was a socialist feminist who opposed WW1 and supported the Russian Revolution. On these two issues above all she was implacably opposed to her mother (Emmeline) and older sister (Christabel) who both took the reverse position. For five years, from 1917 to 1922, Sylvia was an ardent advocate of the Russian Revolution and Soviet Russia. Her support waned thereafter. However, her early enthusiasm marks her as a pioneer in her endeavour to popularise Bolshevik ideology and policy and to initiate practical solidarity at a time when capitalist countries, especially Britain, were doing all in their power to overthrow Soviet Russia. Her indefatigable campaigning and voluminous writing throughout this period in support of socialist revolution earned the respect of many contemporaries, but have been largely unnoticed by historians.

The Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF) weekly newspaper, the *Workers' Dreadnought*, which Sylvia Pankhurst edited, was probably the first paper in Britain to carry a



Sylvia Pankhurst



Konkordiya Samoilova



Alexandra Kollontai



Nadezhda Krupskaya

sympathetic article about the October Revolution in Russia. Barely two weeks after the Revolution, as early as 17 November 1917, it published an article by Sylvia entitled *The Lenin revolution: what it means to democracy*<sup>2</sup>. As editor, she commissioned many other pro-Bolshevik articles, including a series by John Reed.

However, writing and publishing supportive articles was one thing; practical solidarity, especially for a socialist revolution, was much more difficult. Sylvia pioneered this latter work through three organisations which she founded or played a major role in establishing and running, and which were supported by working class women in London's East End.

The first was the Workers' Socialist Federation (WSF). This emerged from a suffrage organisation – the East London Federation of Suffragettes, established by Sylvia in 1912. It was anti-war and was, after 1917, pro-Bolshevik. As a result it changed its name in 1918 to the WSF. It was, from 1916, open to men, but remained led and strongly supported by working class women.

Undoubtedly it was its pro-Bolshevik activity, together with its prime location in the East End of London, which drew Harry Pollitt into close association with Sylvia Pankhurst. Pollitt had moved to London in January 1918. He lived in Poplar, the heartland of the WSF and the London docks. Pollitt joined the WSF and was very active, especially in its pro-Russia work.

There were two main strands to WSF activity at the time. Each week at least a dozen meetings were held in support of the Russian Revolution, mainly in the dock areas, but also in other parts of London. Both Sylvia and Pollitt were frequent speakers. In addition members assembled at the London docks two or three times a week (sometimes daily) to distribute pro-Soviet pamphlets, posters and leaflets. Thus the WSF and its paper the *Workers' Dreadnought* must rank among the first to support Soviet Russia; but for Sylvia Pankhurst this was not enough and thus led to a new initiative which most historians have seen fit to ignore.

In September 1918, Sylvia established the People's Russian Information Bureau (PRIB). This was a remarkable initiative which has received little attention by historians and yet it must surely rank as the first solidarity organisation in this country (a full year before Hands off Russia was formed). The PRIB was the only body in Britain to publish reliable and supportive information about Soviet Russia, much of which came from that country and was translated into English. Weekly newsletters and at least a hundred (possibly more)

pamphlets were published on different aspects of Soviet politics, economics and ideology. Its committee consisted of representatives of various labour and trade union organisations, including the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Socialist Labour Party (SLP), the British Socialist Party (BSP), the National Union of Railwaymen (NUR) and, of course, the WSF. It also included Russians who were unnamed for security reasons. The committee met above the *Workers' Dreadnought* offices.

When the Wars of Intervention were initiated by Britain against Soviet Russia a new organisation was founded by Pollitt and Pankhurst. This was Hands off Russia (HoR). Its inaugural conference, held in January 1919 at the Memorial Hall, Farringdon, London, was attended by 350 delegates from various socialist organisations. Its main purpose was to campaign for a general strike in order to force the British government to withdraw from Russia and to cease sending supplies and munitions to the White armies. Although HoR attracted widespread support, this did not include the leaderships of the Labour Party and the TUC, who both held aloof at this stage from either supporting the Revolution or opposing Allied intervention. It took them some while to change their minds on intervention; but when they did it was owing to the work of HoR and mounting pressure from below. This was the critical factor in inducing a change of attitude; and the most important trigger for this was the refusal of the London dockers and coal heavers in May 1920 to load the *Jolly George*, a munitions ship bound for Poland. The Hands off Russia movement led the dockers in their action. Pollitt notes in his autobiography that up to this point it had proved difficult to persuade trade unionists to take strike action, but:

“The strike on the *Jolly George* had won its greatest victory. It was the action which completely changed the international situation – a change that was forced on the British Government.”<sup>3</sup>

Pollitt credited the work of East End women in laying the foundations for this success.

The consequence of the *Jolly George* victory was an intensification of the anti-intervention campaign which ultimately, by August 1920, drew in official Labour Party and TUC support. The chosen means for organising such a response was the establishment of Councils of Action in August 1920.

Rabotnitsa  
1st issue  
23 February  
(8 March)  
1914  
"To train  
women  
workers  
without  
political  
education,  
to show  
their  
common  
interests  
with the rest  
of the  
working  
class, not  
only in  
Russia but  
around the  
world"



### Russia

The role of women in the Russian Revolution is seldom acknowledged. In fact they played a vital role throughout the revolutionary process, and in defending the Revolution during the civil war of 1919-20.

In order to appreciate the role of women it is necessary to go back to the 1905 revolution in Russia when the feminist movement first took off with the formation of the League for Women's Equality.

In common with many similar organisations in Europe at the time, this concentrated on women's suffrage and comprised mainly bourgeois women. However, Clara Zetkin in Germany understood that women were divided on class lines and recognised the need for working-class women to fight on their own account. As she put it in 1907 at the International Socialist Women's Conference in Stuttgart:

"Class contradictions exclude the possibility of working women becoming allies of the bourgeois feminist movement. This does not mean that they should reject bourgeois feminists if the latter, in the struggle for universal female suffrage, should stand by them in fighting the common enemy on different fronts."<sup>4</sup>

This message was taken up in Russia by Konkordiya Samoilo, Alexandra Kollontai and many other Bolshevik women who, in 1907, formed the Working Women's Mutual Assistance Centre in order to spread socialist ideas among working-class women, to encourage women to join the now legal trade unions and also to ensure that the socialist movement did not continue to ignore women's issues. Although International Women's Day was inaugurated in 1910, it was not celebrated in Russia until 1913.

Lenin actively supported campaigning among working women and was among those who advocated the publication of a new paper, *Rabotnitsa* (*The Woman Worker*), which first appeared in 1914. The outbreak of WWI in that year served



Inessa Armand



Clara Zetkin

as a major brake on labour movement activities and, as elsewhere in Europe, accentuated the left/right divisions among socialists.

This was very apparent in Russia where the Russian Social-Democratic and Labour Party (RSDLP) had already split in 1903 into Bolshevik and Menshevik factions; but the division was even more irreconcilably bitter, given the latter's support for the war, in contrast to the popular anti-war policy of the Bolsheviks.

The issue of support vs opposition to the war similarly accentuated the class divisions in the already fractured women's movement. The bourgeois feminist movement – as in Britain under Emmeline Pankhurst's leadership – supported the war, whereas working women, influenced by their Bolshevik sisters, were increasingly opposed to WWI.

By 1917 a vast number of women were working in factories, both in munitions and replacing conscripted men. On 23 February 1917 (8 March in our Gregorian calendar), International Women's Day was marked by strikes and huge demonstrations of women. The Bolshevik paper *Pravda* reported that this led to revolution:

"... the first day of the revolution was Women's Day .... The women ... decided the destiny of the troops; they went to the barracks, spoke to the soldiers and the latter joined the revolution .... Women, we salute you!"<sup>5</sup>

However, contrary to the traditional view, this was only the beginning of working women's involvement in the revolutionary process. For bourgeois feminists it marked the end. The latter steadfastly supported the new provisional government led by first Lvov and then Kerensky and, although still campaigning for the vote, their chief demand was "war to victory." It was from these pro-war women that the Women's Battalion was formed to fight both the Germans and the Bolsheviks. Emmeline Pankhurst met them in July 1917 when she visited Russia to plead with Kerensky to remain in the war.

Women workers, however, were totally opposed to the war, the government and the presumption that bourgeois women could speak on their behalf. Thus strike action continued, even among hard-to-organise service workers. For example, in March 1917 laundry workers, led by a Bolshevik, Sofia Goncharskya, struck for four weeks. In April 1917, 100,000 soldiers' wives staged a march and demonstration demanding better rations and an end to the war. Kollontai addressed their rally.

Bolsheviks were heavily engaged in agitational work among women, assisted by the reappearance of *Rabotnitsa*, which came out several times a month with a circulation of 40,000-50,000 (Nadezhda Krupskaya and Inessa Armand were among those on the editorial board). Women workers were actively involved in opposing Kornilov's attempted coup in August; they helped build barricades, and 'Red Sisters' organised medical assistance.

In September Samoilava and Krupskaya organised the first formal conference of women workers – it was reconvened after the October Revolution. It had adjourned early so that the delegates could join the Revolution. Among its achievements were resolutions for a standardised working day of eight hours and the banning of child labour. During and after the Revolution very many women were enrolled as Red Guards in a variety of roles, including as combatants. Around 80,000 women served in the Red Army, some as political officers, some in combat roles and even in positions of command. Rozalya Zemliachka was a senior military commander; the British nicknamed her 'Bloody Rosa'.

As testimony to the importance of women in the revolutionary period, one of the first decrees of the socialist government was the Code on Marriage and the Family (October 1918). This encapsulated a revolutionary vision of social relations based on women's equality. Then in 1919 the Zhenotdel was established as the women's department of the Soviet Communist Party. Its first leaders were Kollontai and Armand.

Women's role in the Russian Revolution is best summed

up by Lenin, who in conversation with Zetkin in 1920 said:

"Women workers acted splendidly during the revolution. Without them we should not have been victorious."<sup>6</sup>

Now, 100 years on, these words should be a salient reminder of women's revolutionary role.

## Notes and References

- 1 All Russian dates use the calendar then in force at the time; the switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar was made in January 1918.
- 2 Can be found online at <https://libcom.org/library/lenin-revolution-what-it-means-democracy-sylvia-pankhurst>.
- 3 H Pollitt, *Serving My Time*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1940, p 117.
- 4 C Zetkin, *Der Kampf um das Frauenwahlrecht soll die Proletarierin zum klassenbewussten politischen Leben erwecken (The fight for women's suffrage should awaken the proletarian woman to class-conscious political life)*, online at <https://sites.google.com/site/sozialistischeklassiker2punkt0/zetkin/zetkin-frauenbewegung/clara-zetkin-der-kampf-um-das-frauenwahlrecht>; a similar English translation to that given in the text appears in N M Forestell and M A Moynagh, eds, *Documenting First Wave Feminisms: Transnational Collaborations and Crosscurrents, Vol 1*, University of Toronto Press, 2011, pp 136-142.
- 5 Quoted in W M Mandel, *Soviet Women*, Anchor Books, New York, 1975, p 45.
- 6 C Zetkin, *My Recollections of Lenin* (written 1924), in S F Bezveselny and D Y Grinberg, eds, *They Knew Lenin: Reminiscences of Foreign Contemporaries*, Progress, Moscow, 1968, p 24.

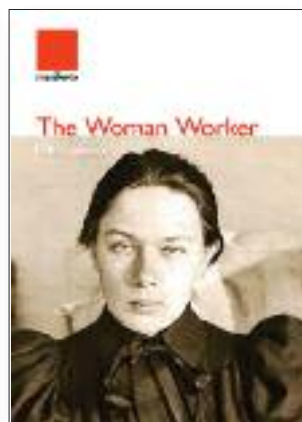
# New at [manifestopress.org.uk](http://manifestopress.org.uk)



**International Women's Day** is by Alexandra Kollontai, the only woman member of the Bolshevik central committee in 1917.

Following the Russian revolution Alexandra Kollontai served as Commissar of Welfare of the Soviet Republic and head of the Women's Section of the Bolshevik Party. She founded the Zhenotdel or 'Women's Department' in 1919 and led the campaign to improve women's living conditions, eradicate illiteracy and establish a new legal and social framework for women's liberation.

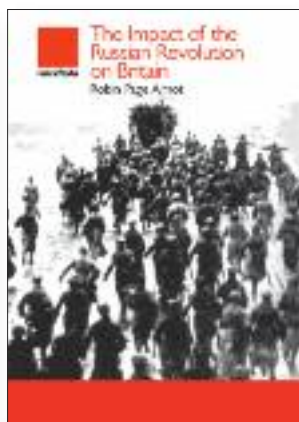
£2.50 (plus £1.50)



**The Woman Worker** was N K Krupskaya's first pamphlet, written in Siberia where she had joined Lenin, following their arrest in 1896 and sentencing to three years exile. Krupskaya wrote it in 1899 under the pseudonym 'Sablina'. It was the first written work on the situation of women in Russia.

The pamphlet was banned following the suppression of the abortive 1905 revolution. Lenin and Krupskaya came to London in April 1902 where, in what is now the Marx Memorial Library, Lenin edited the Bolshevik illegal newspaper *Iskra*.

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**The Impact of the Russian Revolution on Britain** documents the immediate and lasting effects on Britain of the events in Russia in 1917.

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£4 (plus £1.50 p&p)





# 19th International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties **APPEAL**

We, representatives of 103 communist and workers' parties from 77 countries that took part in the 19th International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties held in St Petersburg, Russian Federation, on November 2-3, 2017 under the theme of "The 100th Anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution: the ideals of the Communist Movement, revitalising the struggle against imperialistic wars, for peace, socialism":

- stressing that the year of 2017 will undoubtedly be marked as the year of the Centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution;
- being convinced that Lenin and the Bolshevik Party have been and remain the source of inspiration and priceless experience for the planet's communists and other revolutionaries;
- emphasising the historic significance of the October Revolution in 1917 which had opened a new epoch in the history of the humanity by laying down a broad foundation for the revolutionary overcoming of capitalism by socialism and communism, sustained economic and social development and progressive movement of mankind towards the building of a just society – free from exploitation of man by man, but also answering the daunting challenges of the 20th century;
- highlighting the accomplishments of the Soviet Union – the world's first State of Workers' and Peasants – which within a historically brief space of time achieved unprecedented success in all the economic, social, cultural, political, scientific and technological areas, gave a stimulus to the development of the international communist and workers' movement and to the struggle of the workers in the capitalist countries, became a guarantor of peace and made a decisive contribution to the Victory over Fascism and to the achievements of national liberation movement of oppressed and colonised nations;
- being aware that in the year of the 100th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution we face a special task of conducting research and drawing the right conclusions on the causes that led to the disintegration of the USSR;
- equipped with the Lenin's theory about socialism as a new socio-political system and rejecting the speculations that the counter-

revolutionary changes that took place in the late 20th century annul the historic significance of the October Revolution and the achievements of the USSR in the building and development of the new type of society;

- having discussed the experience and practice of the struggle for the ideals of the communist movement;
- given that the capitalist system is plunged into a deep systemic crisis, and the exploitative, aggressive essence of imperialism is a reality that confirms that socialism is the demand of the present and the future;
- saluting the struggle of the workers and peoples which take place all around the world against imperialism's offensive and for sovereignty and national independence, peace, social progress and socialism;

## **we call on all the Communist and Workers' parties to intensify coordination and take the following joint actions:**

- to give an objective assessment of the ongoing socio-political processes in the light of the need to step up the struggle against anti-communism, anti-Sovietism, and to constantly strengthen solidarity with the communist and workers' parties, with the communists and all those who face political persecution and a ban on their activities, namely with the Ukrainian people and the CP of Ukraine;
- to organise scientific research and exchange of opinions on the causes that led to the counter-revolution in the USSR, capitalist restoration and dissolution of the socialist camp;
- to organise wide-scale study of Lenin's works by party members and the population, explaining their historic significance and relevance in the modern world, and to hold events aimed at popularising the works of Lenin on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his work, *The State and Revolution*;
- to conduct a broad international campaign to mark the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, stressing his contribution to history and the significance and relevance of *The Communist Manifesto*, which was published 170 years ago, and *Das Kapital*, published 150 years ago. Particular attention should be paid to explaining *Das Kapital's*

significance to young people;

- to promote exchange of the theory and practice of the struggle against all forms of capitalism, exposing its exploitative, oppressive, aggressive, inhuman and predatory nature and ideological essence, and to broaden the theoretical background of the population, especially the youth;
- to strengthen unity, solidarity and coordination in the struggle for labour, social, trade union and democratic rights, namely by taking advantage of the mobilisation of working people on May 1;
- to build up joint efforts in protecting rights and democratic freedoms, fighting racism and fascism, using for this purpose the anniversary of the Victory over Nazi-Fascism (9 May 1945) and the 75th anniversary of the victory in the Battle of Stalingrad (2 February, 1943);
- participants of the International Meeting stress the necessity to confront Russophobia;
- to demand an end to the US blockade of Cuba, and resolutely oppose the imperialistic plans aimed against the Cuban people; to support the right of the Palestinian people to a free, sovereign and independent state; and to express solidarity with all the peoples of the Middle East, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe who face occupation, intervention, interference or blockade by imperialism, and who are opposing terrorism and religious fanatics (Syria, Iraq, Bolivarian Venezuela, Ukraine and others);
- to undertake measures aimed at environmental protection; to broaden the anti-imperialist front for strengthening peace struggle, against the aggressions and exploitation of imperialism: to organise joint actions against NATO and its expansion, against nuclear weapons and foreign military bases, against militarism and war, for disarmament and for a peaceful and just solution of international conflicts based on the principles of International Law, against the USA's intervention in the Korean Peninsula and for the peaceful reunification of Korea. Finally, the communist and workers' parties that took part in the work of the 19th IMCWP thank the Communist Party of the Russian Federation for the hospitality and excellent organisation of the Meeting.

■ This updated text first published at [www.solidnet.org](http://www.solidnet.org) on 17.11.2017.

## Socialism is genuine freedom

### Opening Speech by Gennady Zyuganov

Chair of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation

Comrades,

Dear fellow-countrymen and guests of our country,

The centenary of the Great October Socialist Revolution, the occasion that brought us together, is being marked by the whole world. Few exploits and accomplishments known in history can be compared in their grandeur and significance to the October 1917 Revolution.

Today there are people in every corner of the Earth who reflect on the significance of the Great October, people whose hearts beat faster at the words Lenin, Bolshevik Party and Soviet Power.

A hundred years ago the working people of our country raised a Red Banner over Russia. Those were the fateful “ten days that shook the world”. Concise slogans that all ordinary people understood spread across the world: “Peace to the Peoples”, “Bread to the Hungry”, “Land to the Peasants”, “Factories to the Workers”, “Power to the Soviets”. They were heard by everyone, especially those whose brains and talent create the main values on Earth. They were heard by the oppressed peoples of the colonies which capital was bleeding white and by the soldiers who were languishing in the world war trenches.

**The searchlights of the Aurora cruiser did not only put the spotlight on the Winter Palace. They pierced the darkness of capitalist slavery. They gave hope to millions of people.** They could all subscribe to the words of the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky addressed to the Revolution: “Four times glory to you, blessed.”

**But what happened in Russia was not only the greatest of all social revolutions. It gave birth to the first state that embodied the cherished dream of humankind, the dream of justice, equality and brotherhood – the dream that seemed impossible until Lenin and his comrades-in-arms roused the people to rebel against age-old oppression and humiliation.**

Therefore the October Revolution was not simply a step toward unheard-of political and social change. It is imbued with the light of great moral transformations which changed the world and influenced people’s view of the world in various parts of the planet.

We are reminded of this by the leader of the national liberation struggle and first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, who said that “The Soviet Revolution has advanced human society by a great leap and has lit a bright flame which could not be smothered, and it has laid the foundation for that new civilisation towards which the world could advance.”

As the general secretary of the CC of the Communist Party of China noted, “A hundred years ago the salvos of the October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China. The foremost brains of China found the solution to the country’s problems in the scientific theory of Marxism-Leninism. The Chinese people thus found a buttress in its quest of national independence, freedom, prosperity and happiness.”

In previous epochs even the boldest political transformations could not change the fact that big proprietors and their servants remained in power. Rulers and ruling clans changed, monarchies crumbled, borders were redrawn and constitutions were rewritten. But power invariably remained in the hands of the minority which exploited the absolute majority of people – in the hands of those who profited by the labour of millions, those who conferred the status of law on class inequality. **It was only the October Revolution that for the first time made the working people the masters of their land and turned them from a disfranchised labour force into makers of the new world, and new history.**

Until that time humanity was in the vice of exploitation and appalling injustice. Most people were born and died in this vice having no chance to break out of it. This lot and this curse passed on from generation to generation. Whatever emblems were displayed on the banners of various states, whatever slogans were inscribed on them, the stamp of injustice loomed over the world, and humanity lived according to its cruel and immoral laws. Only the Communists who took power in Russia in October of 1917 managed to break this vicious circle. Now the people, instead of being a hostage to the interests of the ruling elite, became the master of the state and its main creator.

The talented Russian poet Alexander Blok wrote, “Only one thing makes man human: awareness of social injustice.” Today, as we pay tribute to the great accomplishments of the October Revolution, we can say with confidence: only that power is genuinely people’s power and truly progressive power that seeks to overcome social inequality and is able to put this aspiration into practice.

The puny efforts of those who try to ‘cancel’ the significance of Great October are ridiculous and false. Russia suffered its way to its revolution. It covered a long and arduous road of dreaming and aspiration to arrive at socialism. This was truly a great leap. Our answer to the First World War was the *Decree on Peace*. Our answer to foreign intervention was the Red Guard units. Our answer to hunger and economic disarray was the *Decree on Land*, the New Economic Policy<sup>1</sup>



and the GOELRO plan<sup>2</sup>. Our answer to runaway inflation was the gold-backed Soviet *chervonets*<sup>3</sup>. The Soviet land responded to the fascist invasion by the heroic defense of the Brest Fortress, the heroism and courage of Leningrad and Stalingrad, the ten Stalin strikes<sup>4</sup> and the Red Banner over the Reichstag. The foundation of the 1945 victory was laid in October of 1917.

As Pablo Neruda wrote, “Lenin embodied the great dream of humankind by making it real in the Soviet land.” The October Revolution ushered in a new era. **Its main principles were labour and solidarity, equality, brotherhood and collectivism.** The course of events acquired a totally new direction. A country appeared on the world map where the working man took power in his hands. The results stunned the whole planet. **The ‘Soviet miracle’ was the Leninist-Stalinist modernisation which increased the country’s potential by 70 times within 20 years. It was thousands of the best factories, liquidation of illiteracy, advanced science, the conquest of outer space and a powerful defence shield. It was unique guarantees in the sphere of education, healthcare and social security.** It was the emergence of the New Person, the creator which was ahead of his time. It was concern about children, women and old people which the state had made its sacred duty.

The Soviet land demonstrated that socialism alone could fully unlock the people’s creative gifts. Yes, even before the Revolution Russia had produced many scientists, writers, artists and composers. But almost all of them were members of the nobility. A gifted person who did not belong to the privileged class and was born into a poor family had a next to zero chance of fulfilling his or her talent and sharing its fruits with society.

True creative freedom gave a chance to many wonderful authors from Russia and the other Union Republics to represent the 20th century in magnificent works of literature, music, theatre and cinema. Mikhail Sholokhov, Alexei Tolstoy, Leonid Leonov, Konstantin Fedin and Alexander Fadeyev are just some of the great names that came into prominence in the early post-Revolutionary decades. They were followed by Alexander Tvardovsky, Konstantin Simonov, Yuri Bondarev, Valentin Rasputin, Vasily Belov, and Fyodor Abramov. The galaxy of Soviet film-makers was no less impressive: Sergey Eisenstein, Sergey Bondarchuk, Grigory Chukhray, Georgy Danelia, Marlen Khutsiyev, Vladimir Menshov. **For the majority of them such a successful creative career would have been impossible without the social and cultural changes brought about by the Great October.**

Albert Einstein, the scientific genius, said that such creative people as Lenin renew humanity’s conscience. His work, *Why Socialism?*<sup>5</sup>, written in 1949, was the subject of a brilliant lecture about the future of the new generation, delivered at the State Duma by Nobel Prize-winning scientist Zhores Alfyorov.

One could subscribe to the words of the remarkable Soviet writer Alexei Tolstoy who said that socialism meant “the fulfilment of human genius in the conditions of the highest social freedom.” Echoing him, the famous German writer Heinrich Mann wrote, “For the Soviet Union socialism is the path to a complete liberation far greater than merely economic liberation. Through equality to freedom.”

**The freedom that socialism gave every person and enshrined in its constitution is the freedom not to be a beggar and not to be exploited. Freedom from the fear of losing one’s job tomorrow, of being unable to pay for**

**one’s housing, food, clothing and vital medicines. Of not being able to pay for the education and feeding of one’s children. Not being able to support elderly parents. A freedom to feel a full individual and not a human good sold in the labour market. A freedom that was granted to all, regardless of their background, nationality or profession. To workers, peasants, scientists and artists. Only such freedom can be recognised as true freedom. Its absence makes all the other freedoms meaningless.**

The exercise of people’s power through the soviets, the transfer of the social wealth and public property into its hands played the decisive role in the country’s development and in moulding the New Person. This was what united people during the Great Patriotic War in the face of the colossal danger that threatened the Soviet Union and the entire planet. **This terrible war could only have been won by a people which had a common cause, a common idea, a common faith, a common culture and common property. Without the victory of the October Revolution of 1917 the Great Victory over fascism in 1945 would have been impossible.** Zhukov, Rokossovsky, Konev, Vasilevsky and others would not have become great military commanders.

That victory finally proved to the world that our people followed the behests of Lenin and the ideals of socialism. It vindicates that choice today. After that victory the world socialist system, the socialist commonwealth, was formed around the USSR. Socialism won many new supporters on all continents. Its ideas inspired the freedom and independence struggles of outstanding political leaders of the new epoch, Mahatma Gandhi, Ernesto Che Guevara, Fidel Castro, Gamal Abdul Nasser, Nelson Mandela, Hugo Chavez and many other champions of people’s happiness. Occupying 26% of the Earth’ territory, the socialist world by 1985 accounted for nearly half of the world industrial output. History has vindicated the words of the French communist writer Jean Richard Bloch who said, “I consider the Russian Revolution and its accomplishments to be one of the main elements of civilisation.”

World capital would stop at nothing to preserve its dominance and to restore the absolute sway of capitalist laws in the world. It went out of its way to undermine the socialist system. The onslaught of world capital brought its ugly fruit in the later 20th century. This was facilitated by the fact that, in the 1980s, power in the Soviet Union was seized by avowed turncoats, traitors and bribe-takers who dismantled people’s power. It is our profound conviction that **this was only a temporary success of world capital. It merely delayed its inevitable collapse.**

True, capitalism now felt itself free of the competition between the two systems and proceeded to curtail the social guarantees the West had granted its citizens under the pressure of the October Revolution. Capital resorted to open and unbridled arbitrary behavior all over the world. In recent years Yugoslavia and Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya became its victims. Today world capital tries to strangle Syria and is bringing colossal pressure on Venezuela and North Korea.

**Modern globalisation is the highest form of imperialism. The onslaught of capital on workers’ rights is mounting fast. Imperialism is becoming more aggressive in the world and the threat of a new large-scale war is growing.** The financial and economic crisis is worsening with each new wave being more grievous and painful. One side-effect of the crisis is the groundswell of nationalist and separatist sentiments in contemporary Europe.

The world is witnessing growing social stratification and mass impoverishment. The ‘middle class’ is rapidly shrinking even in the most prosperous capitalist countries. Only the incomes of the super-rich continue to grow at a fabulous rate.

According to the international organisation Oxfam, today 1% of the planet’s population owns greater wealth than the remaining 99%.<sup>6</sup> The onset of liberalism constantly increases tension and social divisions in the world. The number of billionaires has grown 6-fold since 2000. Meanwhile whole countries suffer from hunger. According to UN data, the number of people suffering from hunger increased by a further 38 million in 2016.

These destructive trends are fully in evidence in Russia. Several authoritative think-tanks put our country in first place in terms of the level of social inequality. 10% of Russian citizens say they suffer from hunger. One in every three persons cannot afford to buy new clothes. Meanwhile 200 of the country’s richest people increased their fortunes by another 100 billion dollars during the past year, concentrating nine-tenths of the national wealth in their hands.

The financial-oligarchic capital ever more openly relies on the most reactionary forces. It is not above cooperating with terrorist groups in the Middle East and with avowed fascists who have seized power in Ukraine. All this shows that the world capitalist system is mortally ill. In its death throes it may destroy the whole world. This makes the current stage of world history particularly dramatic and worrisome.

In the last century two systemic crises of capitalism triggered two world wars. The great October Revolution in 1917 rescued humanity from the first war. The Great Victory of May 1945 rescued it from the second war. The current world crisis may either lead to a catastrophe in which civilisation will destroy itself, or to new massive transformations on the basis of socialism. This is the choice facing modern mankind. We are actively involved in this struggle.

In this struggle we are inspired by the example of those countries where staunch supporters of the socialist option are in power. They are China which has the world in awe of its spectacular successes in the economy and the social sphere; in Cuba, which US imperialism has vainly tried to strangle for six decades; in the dynamically developing Vietnam. These countries challenge capitalist globalisation, refuse to submit to its diktat and score successes on the socialist path. The experience of fraternal Byelorussia is highly instructive.

**Comrades, friends,**

Our main common task is to broaden resistance to the aggressive offensive of capitalism, to form a united front in support of the countries that come under imperialist pressure, to constantly expose the essence of capitalism which cannot exist without terrorism, wars, crises, destruction of nature and the suffering of millions.

Today the great achievement of the October Revolution – the Soviet Union – is no more. We have failed to preserve it. It has been treacherously destroyed. But the march of time cannot be stopped. Socialism alone offers a way out of the impasse. Being the successors to the Great October Revolution we are fighting to bring the country back to the path of justice. Like the Bolsheviks 100 years ago, the CPRF proposes a salvation strategy, a constructive “Ten Steps Towards A Decent Life” program. Together with like-thinking people we oppose fascism, nationalism and *Banderovshchina*<sup>7</sup>.

Truth is on our side. The invincible logic of history, and

the power of the ideas of Marxism-Leninism, are on our side. The centenary of the Revolution is a celebration of the future, not of the past.

The lights of October are directed toward tomorrow. New sprouts of creation and progress will grow under its life-giving rays.

We are confident that the sun of socialism will again rise over Russia and the whole world. The working people will triumph.

It is a great joy and honour for me to greet you all, those who have gathered here to celebrate the centenary of the October Revolution. Those who, in the most difficult of conditions, do not give up and continue the struggle for our common cause, the cause of socialism, justice, peace and friendship among the peoples. By your example you prove that the cause of Lenin, the cause of October has not been left in the past. It is alive. It steadfastly leads us into the future. We believe that through common effort we will manage to attain a bright, joyful and worthy future.

**I congratulate you on the holiday,  
the jubilee of the Revolution,  
Long live Great October,  
Long live Socialism,  
Long live the hard-working people,  
Long live the victorious people!**

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## Notes and References

- 1 The New Economic Policy (NEP) was initiated in 1921 as a response to the devastation caused by the wars of intervention, and initial mistakes made in socialist construction; it involved a substantial degree of capitalist restoration under working class state control (see Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 33, pp 60-79) –Ed.
- 2 The GOELRO plan of 1920 was the first-ever Soviet economic plan, calling for a major restructuring of the economy, based on total electrification of the country –Ed.
- 3 The *chervonets* was an early Soviet parallel currency to the ruble, fully convertible and backed by the gold standard –Ed.
- 4 A reference to Stalin’s speech to the Moscow Soviet on the occasion of the 27th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1944, where he described “the succession of shattering blows” which the Soviet troops had dealt to the fascist invaders ([http://radicaljournal.com/essays/speech\\_at\\_celebration\\_meeti\\_3.html](http://radicaljournal.com/essays/speech_at_celebration_meeti_3.html)) –Ed.
- 5 Originally published in the first (May 1949) issue of *Monthly Review*, and then republished in Issue 01 (May), 2009; online at <https://monthlyreview.org/2009/05/01/why-socialism/> –Ed.
- 6 Oxfam, *An Economy for the 99%*, online at [https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file\\_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf](https://www.oxfam.org/sites/www.oxfam.org/files/file_attachments/bp-economy-for-99-percent-160117-en.pdf) –Ed.
- 7 A Russian/Ukrainian term for the Ukrainian neo-Nazi trend identifying with war-time collaborator Stepan Bandera and his followers –Ed.

# Commemorating the Centenary of the October Revolution

Liu Qibao



*Liu Qibao, at the time a member of the Communist Party of China's Politburo and head of the Central Committee's Publicity Department, spoke at a symposium held on September 26 in Beijing to commemorate the centenary of the October Revolution. The full text of his speech is as follows:*

Experts and comrades,  
This year marks the 100th anniversary of the Great October Socialist Revolution in Russia, which is a landmark event in the world's history. As Vladimir Lenin said:

“The farther that great day recedes from us, the more clearly we see the significance of the proletarian revolution in Russia, and the more deeply we reflect upon the practical experience of our work as a whole.”<sup>1</sup>

Today, we hold this symposium in order to explore further the revolution's significance and influence. By absorbing power and wisdom from the past, we can better uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

Just now, a launch ceremony was held for the revised and expanded version of the second [Chinese] edition of Lenin's *Collected Works*. We chose to launch the books before the Revolution's anniversary day in order to pay our utmost respect to the Revolution. Containing extensive and definitive notes on Marxism and Leninism, the books are the most reliable documents we can refer to when studying the October Revolution.

The speeches by the comrades preceding me at the symposium were very thought-provoking, with insightful views and supported by historical details. Taking this precious chance, I'd like to share with you some of my thoughts.

From hypothesis to science, and from scientific theory to established systems, socialism has evolved for centuries. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels created the materialist conception of history and the theory of surplus value, based on which they developed the ideas of socialism. Thanks to their efforts, socialism was transformed from a hypothesis to a science, and thus was able to offer us scientific theoretical guidance, and a guide to action, for building a communist society that is free from exploitation and oppression. Scientific socialism tells us that capitalism will inevitably give way to socialism, as this is an objective law of social development.

Under the guidance of Marxism, proletarians and working people worldwide have done their utmost to build a socialist society. While the Paris Commune made the world's first major

attempt at overthrowing capitalist rule and establishing a proletarian power to allow the people to master their own affairs, the first victory in establishing a socialist state was achieved by the October Revolution. When celebrating the October Revolution's fourth anniversary, Lenin said:

“This first victory is not yet the final victory ... [but] we have made the start. When, at what date and time, and the proletarians of which nation will complete this process, is not important. The important thing is that the ice has been broken, the road is open, and the way has been shown.”<sup>2</sup>

The October Revolution has had a profound influence on the development of the human race. Acting as a beacon, it has guided following generations of proletarians towards a new era of glorious revolutions.

The October Revolution turned socialism from an ideal into reality, from theory to practice. Understanding clearly the new characteristics in the development of capitalism in the imperialist age, Vladimir Lenin integrated the basic principles of Marxism with the specific situation facing the Russian Revolution to create Leninism. He creatively put forward a series of theories on the socialist revolution and socialist construction, including the theory that socialism could be first achieved in one country or several countries, offering a powerful ideological weapon for proletarian revolution in the imperialist age.

Led by Lenin and the Bolshevik Party, the Russian people were able to convert the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a true socialist revolution. Through armed struggle and breaking up of the old bourgeois state apparatus, they achieved the earthshaking victory of the Great October Socialist Revolution and established the Soviet system dominated by the dictatorship of the proletariat. As Lenin said:

“The Soviet system is one of the most vivid proofs, or manifestations, of how one revolution develops into another.”<sup>3</sup>

Soviet Russia promulgated an instrument of a constitutionalist nature, and established, at the preliminary level, a system of economy, politics, culture and education suffused with a socialistic nature. A socialist state was established for the first time in human history, whereby socialism was translated from a theory into an actual social system. Thereafter, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union

led the people to give full play to the advantages inherent in the socialist economic, political and cultural system, and launched an unprecedentedly modern mode of governance, previously unknown in world history.

Soviet modernisation involved many fields, including industry, agriculture, education, science, the social system and daily life, which changed within several decades Russia's century-old poverty, famine and backwardness and developed the country from a small peasant economy into a powerful industrial country through industrialisation and agricultural collectivisation. During World War 2, the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics relied on its strong national strength to defeat the fascist threat posed by Germany, Italy and Japan, greatly contributing, together with its allies, to the victory in the worldwide struggle against fascism and for peace and progress of humankind.

The epoch-making historical feat of the October Revolution and the major achievements of the Soviet socialism system cannot be negated by the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The reasons behind the Soviet break-up are many, including rigidity and conservatism; yet the root cause was its turning away from Marxism-Leninism and from the socialist path created by the October Revolution.

The October Revolution ushered in a new epoch in human history. Since the time of primitive society, the evolution of social morphology and the change of social system had involved the replacement of one exploiting society by another with a new ruling exploiting class. The October Revolution put an end to the system of human exploitation and oppression and overthrew rule by exploiting classes. A society without exploitation and oppression, and a social system with the people as the masters of the country, were established. People's democracy became a reality. From then on, socialism entered an historical stage as a brand new social morphology and social system, greatly influencing the developmental direction of human society.

Under the influence of the October Revolution, socialism became an important choice for many countries to gain national independence, liberation and development. Countries embarked on the socialist road one by one; one-third of world's population once lived under the socialist system, which reinforced the socialist cause and broke the monopoly of capitalism. Socialism became the backbone for safeguarding world peace and development. The victory of the October Revolution, especially Lenin's ideology regarding national liberation of colonial and semi-colonial countries, greatly pushed the awakening of people oppressed by imperialism and colonialism, and the rise of national liberation forces in colonial and semi-colonial countries. It accelerated the worldwide disintegration of the colonial system created by imperialism, and altered the composition of international power and the world structure. Because of the increasingly manifested superiority of the world socialist movement and the socialist system, many capitalist countries had to make constant adjustments in their ruling strategy, and to seek improvement through the introduction of some measures from the socialist system, so as to mitigate the increasingly sharp basic contradictions in the capitalist system.

The October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China. After the First Opium War, China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society and the Chinese nation was plunged into deep suffering. Countless patriots and righteous people in China tested various doctrines and thoughts in order to find the right way to save the country

and its people, but all their efforts ended in vain. The success of the October Revolution tremendously shocked and inspired the progressives in China, who were wandering in the dark, at their wits' end. The October Revolution ignited a new hope for realising national independence and people's liberation. Thereafter, by using the ideals, viewpoints and methods of Marxism-Leninism, they gradually recognised the developmental trend of human society, saw clearly the reality that the imperialists were carving up the world and oppressing China, and therefore gained a clear understanding of the nature of Chinese society and the goal of the Chinese revolution. In the end, they finally sought out the fundamental solution to saving the nation in peril – the path of socialism which was opened up by the October Revolution. Comrade Mao Zedong profoundly pointed out:

“The salvos of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism. The October Revolution helped progressives in China, as throughout the world, to adopt the proletarian world outlook as the instrument for studying a nation's destiny and considering anew their own problems. Follow the path of the Russians – that was their conclusion.”<sup>4</sup>

Those Chinese progressives, during the process of combining Marxism-Leninism with the Chinese workers' movement, established the Communist Party of China (CPC). As a result, the Chinese revolution has since then taken on an entirely new look. Under the strong leadership of the CPC, the Chinese nation indestructibly gathered and united from the state of loose sand, holding steadfastly its own future and destiny. Under the leadership of the CPC, the Chinese people fought heroically for 28 years and secured the victory in the new-democratic revolution, gaining national independence and liberation of the people. Comrade Mao Zedong said:

“The people's revolution led by the Communist Party of China has always been a part of the world socialist revolution of the proletariat initiated by the October Revolution.”<sup>5</sup>

After the founding of the New China, the CPC led the Chinese people to complete the socialist revolution, establish the system of socialism, advance socialist construction, conduct reform and opening up, establish and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, and obtain an achievement that attracts worldwide attention.

Experts and comrades,

A century ago, China was poor and weak, and it was bullied by big powers. Since then, our country has gone through many setbacks and hardships before rising up and achieving glory. The Chinese nation has undergone unprecedented changes – from standing up<sup>6</sup>, to prospering and becoming powerful, and having established its position amongst nations of the world. Never in history have we been closer to the goal of the great renewal of the Chinese nation, and never in history have we had greater confidence and capability to realise this goal. This tremendous change is attributed to the fact that we have chosen the path of socialism which was opened up by the October Revolution, that the CPC has been leading the people to closely integrating the basic tenets of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete and real situation of the Chinese revolution, construction and reform, paving a broad road for the great

renewal of the Chinese nation that suits China's actual conditions. History and reality have incontrovertibly proved that only socialism can save China, only socialism with Chinese characteristics can develop China and realise the great renewal of the Chinese nation.

Today, we commemorate the October Revolution and continue to progress on the path of socialism. The most important task is to keep to and develop the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, striving for the realisation of the Two Centenary Goals<sup>7</sup> and the Chinese Dream<sup>8</sup> of the great national renewal, and in turn making more brilliant achievements and brighter prospects for socialism, and making an even greater contribution to exploring a better development path for humankind.

**First**, we must unwaveringly uphold and develop Marxism. Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, pointed out that on the fundamental issue of upholding the guiding role of Marxism, we must maintain unwavering resolve, never wavering at any time or under any circumstances, and that if we deviated from or abandoned Marxism, our Party would lose its soul and direction. Meanwhile, for Marxism to play a guiding role in practice and be enriched and developed in the process, it must be combined with the conditions of each country. The victory of the October Revolution was a brilliant example of Lenin's ingenious use of the basic tenets of Marxism in the Russian revolution. The extraordinary achievements made in China's revolution, development and reform, and the solid steps taken on the country's great journey to realise its lofty ideal, are also the results of the CPC's always adhering to Marxism as a guide to action and continuously localising Marxism in practice.

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, general secretary Xi Jinping has put forth a series of new visions, thinkings, and strategies for the governance of China in the country's great endeavors to advance reform and opening up and to develop socialist modernisation. These visions, thinkings and strategies have upheld and developed Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Three Represents<sup>9</sup> and the Scientific Outlook on Development, and they have also deepened the CPC's understanding of the laws of governance by the Communist Party, the laws of building socialism, and the laws of the development of human society. In China's historical endeavours to realise its Two Centenary Goals and fulfill national renewal, the most practical and important way of adhering to Marxism is to follow the principles from general secretary Xi Jinping's major addresses and his new visions, thinkings, and strategies for the governance of China.

There will never be an end to practice and neither will there be an end to practice-based theoretical innovation. In order to engage in the great struggle, pursue the great undertaking, push forward the great cause, and realise the great dream in the new era, we still need to preserve the theoretical character of Marxism to move forward with the times, combine it with the reform and development realities of contemporary China in a deeper way, push for theoretical innovation on the basis of new practices, strive for positive interactions between innovation in theory and innovation in practice, and open new horizons in the localisation of Marxism.

**Second**, we must be firm in strengthening socialist and communist ideals and convictions. General secretary Xi Jinping said that Chinese communists' faith in Marxism, socialism and communism is their political soul and sustains them through all tests. Over the past 90-plus years, one

generation of CPC members after another has shed their blood, laid down their lives, and continued the hard work of those preceding them with unwavering resolve, in order to achieve national independence and prosperity and bring happiness to the people. They have done this because they have faith in Marxism and are determined to fulfill the socialist and communist ideals. Only by standing firm in strengthening the ideals and principles can we refrain from being arrogant and impatient in time of victories and successes, and restrain ourselves from feeling depressed and uncertain in time of setbacks and adversities. Instead, we can remain firm in our pursuit and harden ourselves into steel.

When the socialist movement suffered serious setbacks worldwide, Comrade Deng Xiaoping, citing the restorations of monarchies in the historical process of capitalism superseding feudalism, said with full confidence:

“Some countries have suffered major setbacks, and socialism appears to have been weakened. But the people have been tempered by the setbacks and have drawn lessons from them, and that will make socialism develop in a healthier direction.”<sup>11</sup>

Facts have proven that China's huge success is precisely because of its unwavering adherence to socialist and communist ideals and principles and to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the central committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, upholding the ideological and intellectual banner, has stressed that the firm ideals and convictions should always be the fundamentals of communists, and should be placed well above all else. Wavering from ideals or lacking in convictions is the most dangerous. Communists should take enough ‘spiritual calcium’ to strengthen their minds so that they can consciously resist corruption by decadent ideas. The CPC Central Committee has also stressed that socialism with Chinese characteristics is socialism and not any other doctrine. The basic principles of scientific socialism cannot be discarded, or they would not be socialism. Our current efforts and the sustained efforts of the future generations are aimed towards the ultimate goal of the realisation of communism. The whole Party should have strong political staunchness in ideals and convictions, consciously become firm believers and faithful practitioners of the exalted ideal of communism and the shared ideal of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The socialist system has existed for 100 years since the October Revolution, and socialism has been practiced in China for more than 60 years, though the consolidation and development of the system still has a long way to go. General secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed that the consolidation and development of the socialist system, and ultimately the realisation of communism, need the effort of generations. Building socialism with Chinese characteristics is the historical mission of the CPC. Strong ideals and convictions will serve as the beacon for generations of Chinese people to strive in the course of accomplishing this great mission.

**Third**, we must unwaveringly uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics. General secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that socialism with Chinese characteristics does not just fall from the sky, and it was achieved through the toil and sacrifice of the Party and the people. Socialism with Chinese characteristics – which comes from practice, from the

people and from the truth – is rooted in the land of China, reflecting the will of the Chinese people and meeting the demand of China’s social development and the progress of the times. It is both a great cause we must continue to promote and a fundamental guarantee for a better future. The glorious achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics unarguably show that destiny is determined by the choice of the path. The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is more than just achievable, and it has proven to be a smart choice towards a better future.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, following the people-first approach, has acted in accordance with the overall plan for promoting all-round socialist economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological development and the Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy<sup>12</sup>. Through the implementation of the new development concept and the great struggle with many new historical features, China has carved out a new ambit of governance and entered a new era in the development of the Party and the country. New successes in building socialism with Chinese characteristics have been achieved, and both the Party and the people are more confident in our path, theory, system and culture.

As Lenin pointed out after the victory of the October Revolution, socialism was an unprecedented great cause and the communists had to learn to accomplish their own tasks in a new way that conformed to the reality of Russia. We must always be based on the reality of the primary stage of Chinese socialism, taking economic development as the central task, and upholding the Four Cardinal Principles<sup>13</sup> and the reform and opening-up policy in the great practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. We must further improve and develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, promote the modernisation of the state governance system and capacity in governance, all of which are aimed at continuously accomplishing, safeguarding and developing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. We must unswervingly hold high the banner of reform and opening up, and strive to promote innovations in theories, practices, systems and in other aspects of innovation, continue to liberate and develop social productive forces, emancipate and enhance social vitality, make socialism with Chinese characteristics more efficient than capitalism, make it more able to stimulate enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of all the people, more able to achieve social justice and common prosperity, and more able to gain competitive advantages on the international stage.

Socialism is not an illusory system that deviates from the general path of world civilisations, but a crystallisation of the outstanding achievements made by human civilisations. To maintain and further develop socialism with Chinese characteristics, we need to learn from all the remarkable achievements of civilisations created by human society. But to learn does not mean to copy by rote the paths and models of development followed by other countries. Instead, we need to stick to the right directions, steadfastly stay level-headed and stick to our own path.

**Fourth**, we must adhere to the Party’s strong leadership in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. As general secretary Xi Jinping said, Party leadership is the most essential feature and greatest advantage of socialism with Chinese characteristics; it is also the fundamental guarantee of the success of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Upholding the leadership by the Party is the foundation and

lifeblood of both the Party and the state, and affects the interests and well-being of all the people of China. Since the October Revolution, history has proved that, without the leadership of the Communist Party, there would be no socialism; only the Communist Party can lead people to carry out socialist revolution, building and reform.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, we have improved the Party’s methods of leadership and governance, enhanced its capacity to govern in a scientific, democratic and law-based way, and strengthened its cohesiveness, capability and leadership, as well as consolidated its core leadership status. Upholding Party leadership requires comprehensively strengthening Party discipline. The Central Committee of the CPC, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has focused on strengthening the Party’s governance capacity, advanced nature and purity. The CPC Central Committee has made all-around efforts in strengthening the Party theoretically and organisationally, improving its conduct, more vigorously fighting against corruption and improving Party rules and regulations. The Party has also closely integrated its theoretical, organisational and systematic building, carried out strict and concrete Party discipline and management, and taken a clear-cut stand to exercise political awareness. The Party has paid serious attention to intra-Party political life, Party rules and regulations – especially political rules and regulations – rectifying the Party’s working style, fighting against corruption and ensuring the implementation of the main body’s responsibility and supervisory responsibility in the work of Party discipline. The Party has hence markedly improved its capacity for self-purity, self-improvement, self-innovation and self-development.

To advance the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, we should more resolutely and consciously uphold the core status of general secretary Xi Jinping in the CPC Central Committee and the entire CPC, safeguard the authority and the central, unified leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, become more aware of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, uphold the leadership core and keep in alignment. We should more consciously uphold the Party’s ideals, direction and will, and ensure the Party to be the core that oversees the big picture and coordinates all quarters.

**Fifth**, we must unswervingly advance the noble cause of peace and development of humankind. A country’s path of development is essentially determined by its nature. Peace and development are the internal requirements and ineluctable choice of socialism. World history in the wake of the October Revolution has demonstrated that socialist countries are an important force in containing world wars and maintaining world peace.

China’s commitment to peaceful development has been gradually shaped by arduous exploration and constant practice since the founding of the state, especially since the reform and opening-up. As general secretary Xi Jinping said, China’s choice for peaceful development is by no means expediency or diplomatic rhetoric. It is a determined choice that China has made on the basis of its history, reality and future, as well as a strategic option informed by its national conditions, social systems and cultural traditions. It has been proved that China’s choice of peaceful development represents a timely response to today’s imperatives and serves the fundamental interests of China, and those of its neighbours and the rest of the world.

Since the 18th National Congress of the CPC, China has



upheld the banner of peace, development and win-win cooperation. Firmly committed to peaceful development, it has promoted the construction of a new type of international relations with mutual cooperation at the core, actively participated in global governance, and sought to forge a community of a shared future. It has also committed to upholding world peace and promoting common development to bring lasting peace, extensive safety and common prosperity to a world that is open, inclusive, clean and beautiful.

China has been a force for world peace, a contributor to global development and a defender of international order. By playing an increasingly important role in global affairs, it has won extensive praise internationally. With the continued progress of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it will definitely contribute more wisdom and solutions to peace and the development of mankind, and will work together with people in various countries to build a better world for all.

Experts and comrades,

As the world's largest socialist state, China has made remarkable achievements, and socialism in China has hence been full of vigour and vitality, and continues to open new horizons of development. General secretary Xi Jinping said firmly:

“In today's world, if we want to point out which political party, which country and which nation can be confident, the answer must be that the CPC, the People's Republic of China and the Chinese nation have the best reason to stay confident.”

We will continue to grasp the scientific nature and truth of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Based on that, we should keep confident in the path, theory, system, and culture of Chinese socialism and remain committed to ushering in a new dimension of development for socialism with Chinese characteristics.

History is the best textbook. The past 100 years have witnessed a magnificent journey of the world socialist movement since the victory of the October Revolution, giving us deep insights into upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. We should conduct research on the history of socialist development, on the history of the international communist movement as well as on contemporary world socialism. We should, from the view of world history, have a profound understanding of the historical status of the October Revolution, and fully realise that socialism with Chinese characteristics has inherited, enriched and developed scientific socialism, and that the Chinese path is consistent with the trend of world progress. We should insist on using dialectical materialism and historical materialism, to further research the 500 years of history of world socialism,<sup>14</sup> its past 100 years of development since Russia's October Revolution, as well as the history of the Chinese socialist revolution, construction and reform. We should more consciously understand the ruling law of the Communist Party, the law of socialist construction and the law of the development of human society, give a scientific interpretation of relevant important problems and major issues, and reveal the directional and fundamental trends and laws during the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics. We should pay attention to following the correct political direction and research orientation, firmly resist historical nihilism and oppose all kinds of erroneous tendencies. We should keep up

with the times and constantly make innovations in research content, forms and methods according to the development of the times. We need to promote the Party's ideological and theoretical building with more fruitful research, and make new and even greater contributions to upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Experts and comrades,

Looking back on the past 100 years since the October Revolution, we feel very proud of the outstanding achievements of overcoming obstacles during the building of socialism; looking forward to the great journey in the future, we have full confidence in the good prospects that socialism will enjoy. Let's more closely unite around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, stay true to the mission taken up by the CPC from its very beginning and forge ahead, make unremitting efforts to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects and gain the great victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and embrace the upcoming 19th National Congress of the CPC with outstanding achievements.

■ *This translation first published 11 October 2017 on the web pages of the State Council Information Service of the People's Republic of China, at [www.scio.gov.cn/32618/Document/1565639/1565639.htm](http://www.scio.gov.cn/32618/Document/1565639/1565639.htm). It has been edited here to include end-notes and to clarify the text in a small number of places.*

## Notes and References

- 1 V I Lenin, *Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 33, p 51.
- 2 *Ibid*, pp 56-7.
- 3 *Ibid*, p 54.
- 4 Mao Zedong, *On the People's Democratic Dictatorship: In Commemoration of the Twenty-Eighth Anniversary of the Communist Party of China*, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol 4, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1961, p 413; online at [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4\\_65.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-4/mswv4_65.htm) –Ed.
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- 6 A reference to Mao Zedong, *The Chinese People Have Stood Up*, opening address at the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, 21 September 1949, in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*, Vol 5, Foreign Languages Press, Peking, 1977, p 15; online at [https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5\\_01.htm](https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/selected-works/volume-5/mswv5_01.htm) –Ed.
- 7 *The Two Centenary Goals*, first articulated under then CPC general secretary and Chinese president Jiang Zemin at the 15th Party Congress in 1997, has become a major part of CPC slogans since Xi Jinping became general secretary in 2012. By the 2020 centenary of the founding of the CPC, the goal is for China to have become a 'moderately well-off' society (a doubling of 2010 per capita incomes); by 2049, the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic, China will have become, according to the People's Daily, a "strong, democratic, civilised, harmonious, and modern socialist country". See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two\\_Centenaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Centenaries) –Ed.
- 8 *The Chinese Dream*, a phrase associated with Xi Jinping, describes a set of values and requirements, based on the core ideology of socialism, at the level of the nation, society and individuals. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese\\_Dream](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Dream) –Ed.
- 9 *The Three Represents* is a guiding socio-political theory

credited to Jiang Zemin, *qv*, and ratified at the 16th Party Congress in 2002: “Our Party must always represent the requirements for developing China’s advanced productive forces, the orientation of China’s advanced culture and the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people. These are the inexorable requirements for maintaining and developing socialism, and the logical conclusion our Party has reached through hard exploration and great praxis” (Jiang Zemin, *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 2013, Vol 3, p 519). See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three\\_Represents](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_Represents) –Ed

10 *The Scientific Outlook on Development*, credited to Xi Jinping’s predecessor Hu Jintao, is one of the guiding principles of the CPC, and incorporates “scientific socialism, sustainable development, social welfare, a humanistic society, increased democracy, and, ultimately, the creation of a Socialist Harmonious Society”. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific\\_Outlook\\_on\\_Development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scientific_Outlook_on_Development) –Ed.

11 Deng Xiaoping, *Excerpts from Talks given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai And Shanghai*, January 18 - February 21,

1992, in *Selected Works*, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing, 1994, Vol 3, p 370.

12 *The Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy* is a set of political goals for China, put forward by Xi Jinping, namely: comprehensively (1) build a moderately prosperous society, (2) deepen reform, (3) govern the nation according to law, and (4) strictly govern the Party. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Comprehensives](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Comprehensives) –Ed.

13 *The Four Cardinal Principles* were stated in 1979 by then leader Deng Xiaoping, as issues over which there could be no debate in China: (1) the socialist path, (2) the people’s democratic dictatorship, (3) the leadership of the CPC, and (4) Mao Zedong Thought and Marxism-Leninism. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four\\_Cardinal\\_Principles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_Cardinal_Principles) –Ed.

14 An apparent reference to the 500th anniversary in 2016 of the publication of Thomas More’s *Utopia*; see J Hui, *World Socialism in the Twenty-First Century: New Structure, New Features and New Trends*, in *International Critical Thought*, Vol 7, No 2, 2017, pp 159-170 –Ed.



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# We are fighting for the control and ownership of the means of production

Eugene McCartan



Comrades

Just recently millions of working people across the world celebrated the centenary of the first successful anti-imperialist revolution, that took place in Russia in October 1917, opening up the path to socialist transformation. The Russian Revolution dealt a heavy blow to the forces of imperialism. Before October 1917 the world was dominated by global empires: imperialism had become the dominant economic, political, social and cultural system. Monopoly capitalism had spread across the globe, dominating all weaker existing economic systems. Commodity production smashed down historical barriers, reshaping the world, making it subservient to the strategic needs and interests of imperialism. Billions of humanity lived under colonial domination, exploitation, and oppression.

After October 1917 the oppressed and exploited masses saw the possibility of a new horizon. The Russian Revolution inspired millions into renewed struggle for freedom, to fight for a future free from domination and exploitation, to fight for a new society, one of freedom and justice.

Yes, we can talk of the transition from a world before October's victory of the anti-imperialist revolution to a world post-October: the emergence of a new world power – working-class state power – laying the foundations for a new world and a new world balance of forces.

The October Revolution created a significant change in the global balance of forces. We need also to understand the central role of women in the successful victory of the Russian Revolution, and how that also shifted the balance towards equalising the economic, political, social and cultural power relationship between men and women, not just in Russia but in many other countries – just as we are now witnessing the impact of the victory of the counter-revolution in the Soviet Union, which equally has changed the global balance of forces, but this time not in favour of the working class and the exploited masses but, temporarily, in favour of imperialism.

The working class and peasants of Russia became the vanguard of the oppressed across the world. In the metropolitan capitalist states the ruling-class forces were pushed back, forced to give back to workers a greater share of the wealth created by the workers themselves. The threat of the example of working people taking full control and ownership and running the means of production without bosses or private owners shook the system deeply.

We need to keep to the fore of our political strategy that this is our primary and ultimate goal: what we are fighting for is the control and ownership of the means of production, the

means of sustaining life. Their state will concede to us health services, education and other public services to the extent of our capacity to win these concessions through our own organised strength, public services funded from wealth already created by workers but not owned by workers. They will never cede the central factor – of ownership of the means of production, the means to sustain life – to the working class.

The state-monopoly capitalist system, imperialism, at both the national and the international level, continues to experience a deepening economic crisis. Since the near-total meltdown of the financial system in 2008-10 the political representatives of monopoly capitalism and their states have pumped billions of workers' euros and dollars into propping up failing and collapsing finance capital.

The debt burden globally placed upon the people continues to grow. Here in Ireland the working people in the 26 Counties have had a massive 42% of European banking debt imposed upon them by the European Union, with the collusion of a weak and servile comprador Irish ruling class – a banking debt that is not the people's debt but rather is a result of massive borrowing and speculation by Irish financial institutions, both nationally and globally.

They borrowed short-term and loaned long-term to the "Golden Circle"<sup>1</sup>. The Irish people have been placed in long-term debt servitude and decades of austerity. Irish workers were sacrificed in order to save the euro, to save the German and French banking systems.

The Irish ruling class, through the use of state power, are forcing working people to pay almost as much in servicing this odious debt as what we get back from the state – of our own money – what the state spends on the health system. We witness the working out of this debt crisis and debt servitude in the deepening health and housing crises impacting upon tens of thousands of our people on a daily basis: the homeless sheltering in doorways, people lying on trolleys in hospital corridors, and increasing numbers dying in those same hospital corridors.

This is not confined to workers in the South. Workers in the Six Counties are experiencing a growing crisis in the NHS, but equally cuts in education, cuts to a whole range of social services that working people rely upon.

The Irish state has reshaped and continues to reshape the economy to meet the needs of transnational capital, a strategy equally followed by the British state and imposed through the Belfast Executive upon the people in the Six Counties. Both the Irish and British states are imposing and instituting regimes



of precarious employment, zero-hour contracts and minimum working standards, with workers losing rights already won, or unable to secure rights that they are entitled to.

This is now coupled with precarious shelter, with spiralling rents, with evictions and property prices reaching pre-crisis levels: a rich feeding-ground for global vulture capital funds. Life itself has become more difficult, with precarious conditions for the older generations. Growing numbers of workers now need two jobs just to make ends meet.

While the growing crisis of the system has impacted on all workers, women in particular are unequally impacted by these harsh economic realities of contemporary monopoly capitalism.

Today our world is more divided and more unequal than ever in human history. Billions of people live in dire poverty while a small clique live opulent life styles. Today 71% of the world own 3% of global wealth, while only 8% of the global population own 85% of global wealth. As the recent report by Oxfam on global inequality<sup>2</sup> points out, just eight men own as much wealth as 3.6 bn of the poorest people on our planet, the majority of whom are women and children.

Imperialism today is pushing our planet to the edge of an environmental abyss. We have developed the scientific and technological know-how to feed, clothe and give shelter to all of humanity; but because capitalism uses technology and science solely for the pursuit of massive profits, its benefits will never be employed in the interests and to the benefit of the people or the environment. The relations of production have now become a barrier and a fetter on the use of the fruits of the scientific and technological revolution to solve the systemic problems of the people.

The institutions established under the Belfast Agreement continue to stumble from one crisis to the next, institutions which have contributed to the sharpening of sectarian divisions among the people. These division have allowed the British state to present itself as being a benign force, as a mediator between the local warring tribes. But we know from history and experience that imperialism is never neutral; imperialism is not nor can ever be a benign force. Nor does it have permanent friends: rather, experience has shown that it has only strategic interests, to be protected and advanced.

So the British are not neutral. They have a strategic view in relation to the control over the future direction of all the people of Ireland, north and south. Their strategic interests are not confined to the Six Counties.

Our people are caught in a triple lock of imperialist

interests, those of the European Union, the United States, and Britain. In this context I think we can understand the ongoing phoney war of words between the European Union and Britain over Brexit. Elements of the British state and the EU are attempting to use the question of a 'hard' or 'soft' border in Ireland to create sufficient political pressure, leverage and momentum to ensure that Britain itself remains within the single market and the customs union.

It will be the interests of the European Union and the British state that will decide where the British state and the EU connect. They are using the question of a 'hard' or 'soft' border in Ireland as the pretext to manoeuvre. The Irish establishment can pretend they are somehow players in this current chess game, as their economic and political interests are dependent upon their ongoing relationship with imperialism.

Brexit was and is an important step in the current struggle against the European Union and the forces that are constructing this super-imperialist structure, a structure that is to protect and advance the interests of state-monopoly capitalism. Everything else is window-dressing, bright tinsel to fool the gullible.

The peoples of Europe have been and are being subjected to a massive psychological war game, a war waged to ensure that no other country, state or people will follow the example of Britain. The ruling-class forces across the European Union have invested too much time and resources to allow their strategic project to unravel.

We need, as a working-class party, to continue to present the case for withdrawal from the EU – in particular, as a first step, withdrawing from the euro – in class terms. For us, the demand for national sovereignty and national democracy is class-based, from anti-imperialist understanding, and not from some narrow nationalistic position.

We understand that national sovereignty and democracy are the tools required for our class; they are the necessary tools required to take state power. Nothing is above class, but everything human is the product of class relations and is reflective of the interests of the dominant class.

We can see how forces that once opposed the European Union and deeper integration in the EU have now succumbed to the siren call, into the swamp of bourgeois parliamentarianism. Their nationalist limitations lie exposed, as is their shallow understanding of imperialism and their anti-imperialism.

We need to deepen our knowledge of the system, the economic and political relationship and dependence of the

ruling forces in Ireland, in order to develop our strategic transformative approach, in how we move beyond or transcend the limitations imposed upon our people and in particular our class by the forces of imperialism and the current imposed 'settlement'.

Our goal remains a united Ireland, centred upon the needs and interests of the Irish working class. The partitionist settlement of nearly a century ago has not served the interests of the working class. Partition has nurtured and sustained sectarian divisions. The two political institutions established by partition, under pressure from the British, have failed our class.

Comrades

We assembled at our 24th Congress under the slogan "Build the people's resistance, build the people's alternative." If we look around us today, how right our understanding was! We have witnessed – and, more importantly, we have been active fighters and mobilisers in – the campaign around water, which saw hundreds of thousands of working people take to the streets across the country under the banner of Right2Water<sup>3</sup>. We have seen our class grow in confidence and in resistance, seeing working people, in particular women, standing up to and challenging the Garda, the repressive arm of the state.

We have also seen a significant growth in political consciousness, which is reflected in the growth of the parliamentary left and the defeat of Irish labourism.

What is Right2Change<sup>4</sup> but the first tentative step to building a people's alternative politics?

Comrades

Our revolutionary working-class party has made advances since our 24th Congress. As we look around we see new faces; young activists have joined our ranks, helping to shape and grow our party, young comrades who will contribute a new chapter in the history of our anti-imperialist party. At all levels, young comrades are coming forward to take responsibility.

We have seen our influence grow among the more class-conscious workers and trade-union activists.

When we raised the slogan that "austerity is working," much of the left thought we were completely wrong. Yet, at the recent Right2Change conference, speakers spoke of how austerity worked as it was designed to do, that was to transfer wealth upwards to the ruling class and outwards to global finance capital. As we said in 2009-10, that was the reason for it.

It is the same regarding the housing crisis. The state's strategy is working: it is about the intensification of exploitation and making bloated profits for local landlords and global capital institutions.

When we put forward the demand for the establishment of a state bank and to allow the private corporate banks to go to the wall, it was a demand to protect the people's interests. What happened? The state and the Irish ruling class took ownership of the busted private banks. This was to protect their (the ruling class's) interests, not those of the people.

Our party in the North of our country has played a key role in the resistance to water charges,<sup>5</sup> has been to the fore in combating sectarianism and division. Where workers have been in struggle, our party has made every effort to develop solidarity and support.

Comrades

Due to our having stood firm and taken a clear, principled, working-class position, growing numbers of people have come to see and appreciate the role of our party and of communists

today in our country.

We are stronger now than at our 24th Congress. We have more activists involved. We have continued to deepen our class-based anti-imperialist strategy.

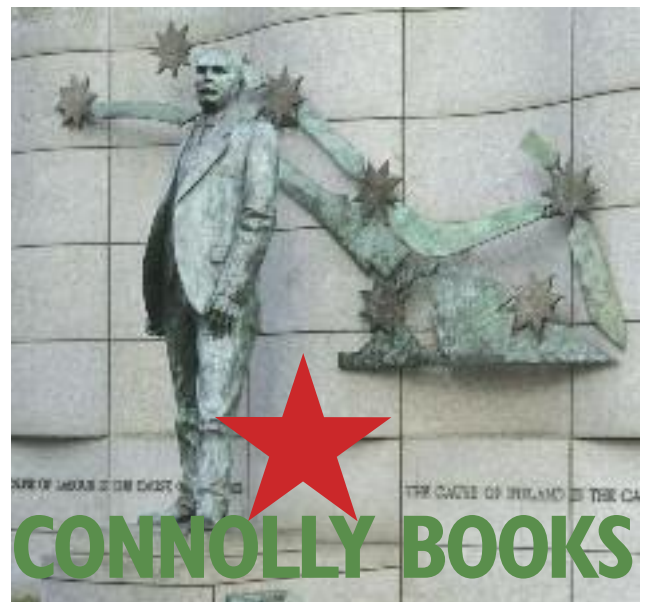
That is what makes our party different. We are unashamedly pro-working class, a working-class anti-imperialist party.

I will finish now, as this is your congress: it is you who will decide how we move forward. It is you who will sustain and build this anti-imperialist working-class party, to struggle, to educate and mobilise to bring our class to state power.

■ *This is a slightly edited version of CPI general secretary Eugene McCartan's opening speech to the Congress in Belfast, 18 November 2017.*

## Notes and References

- 1 The "Golden Circle" refers to a group of 10 wealthy businessmen, said to have received loans from the Allied Bank in return for buying shares to keep the bank afloat; it was ultimately bailed out by the Irish government –*Ed.*
- 2 Oxfam, *An Economy for the 99%*, 16 January 2017; downloadable at <https://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/an-economy-for-the-99-its-time-to-build-a-human-economy-that-benefits-everyone-620170>.
- 3 Right2Water is a protest movement in the Republic of Ireland, opposing the privatisation of water and the introduction of water charges. See [www.right2water.ie](http://www.right2water.ie) –*Ed.*
- 4 Right2Change is a political movement born out of the Right2Water campaign in the Republic of Ireland. See [www.right2change.ie](http://www.right2change.ie) –*Ed.*
- 5 A parallel issue to that in the Republic –*Ed.*



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# Brexit Phase One under fire

## Statement from the Communist Party of Ireland

### Ruling by fooling

According to the *Financial Times* (Wednesday 6 December), “Blocking a Brexit divorce deal is a high stakes game. It is in everyone’s interests to help May keep the show on the road.”

The leaking of the supposed deal regarding the “border issue” between Britain, Ireland and the EU showed that it would result in the economic border being placed in the Irish Sea (at ports of entry into the British state) and with the North of Ireland having a special relationship, called “regulatory alignment,” with the EU. This provoked an immediate tantrum from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), who fear even any apparent weakening of the union with Britain.

The British establishment and the British state knew from the outset that it was never going to be a runner with the DUP. The recent meeting between the British prime minister, Theresa May, and the president of the EU Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, almost produced an agreed text regarding the border. In double quick time this term “regulatory alignment,” now applied to the whole of the British state, which was then seized upon by those who wish for a minimalist Brexit. Equally, it infuriated the more extreme Tory Brexiters.

The *Financial Times* – representing, as always, the interests of the City of London – is anxious that the negotiations with the EU should succeed, preferably on the terms almost agreed by May and Juncker, to keep Britain and the EU as close as possible, with “regulatory alignment” negating the effect of leaving the customs union.

While the border issue is important to us, it has been used by both the British and the EU to further their shared goal of a minimalist Brexit, using the Irish people as pawns in their game to achieve the same shared ends: that is, if they can’t reverse the referendum decision – the preferred option (as we know from referendums here in the Republic as well as in France and the Netherlands) – then how do they secure the same outcome? – that is, Britain retaining the maximum economic and political relationship with the EU, leaving in words but remaining in practice, thereby frustrating the democratic decision of the British electorate. Theresa May can report back, “I was only following your instructions. This is the best deal I could get.”

The Irish state is a willing player – albeit a bit player – in this strategic game of manoeuvre by representatives of both British and EU monopoly business and financial interests. The British state is using the contesting demands and exploiting the supercharged pro-EU forces in the Republic to create enough momentum to advance its strategic goal.

Should this strategy by the British state succeed, both the Irish government and the DUP might conceivably claim a victory, though their influence has been marginal at best, both being merely made use of by the major players.

## Statement from the Communist Party of Britain

### Agreement condemned

The Communist Party of Britain has condemned the Brexit Phase One agreement between the British government and the EU Commission announced on December 8.

“This pro-big business, minority Tory regime is loyally carrying out the instructions of its EU Business Advisory Council to tie Britain to the EU single market for the foreseeable future, while paying through the nose for that dubious privilege”, Communist Party general secretary Robert Griffiths declared.

“The Irish border question is being used as the pretext for Britain’s continuing subjection to EU rules and institutions in the guise of so-called ‘regulatory alignment’”, he argued. Robert Griffiths called instead for Britain’s commercial border with the EU to be marked by the Irish Sea rather than submit to an “Ulster loyalist veto”.

Robert Griffiths recalled Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn’s warning in a BBC interview on September 24 that EU single market rules would prohibit a future Labour government from implementing its policies on public spending, state aid to industry and public ownership of the railways.

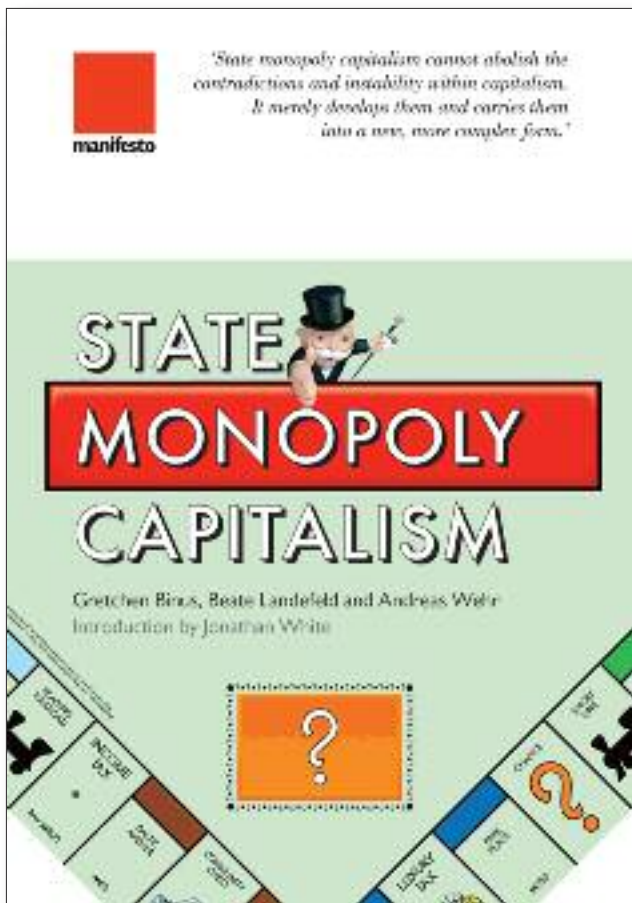
“The list is even longer than that”, Robert Griffiths claimed, insisting that Labour’s manifesto pledges to raise investment funds through central bank bonds, end the super-exploitation of ‘posted’ workers, radically restructure VAT and reform public procurement contracts would all fall foul of EU treaties and directives.

Maintaining alignment with EU single market rules would also hugely restrict the basis on which a future British government could negotiate trade deals with China, Australia, Canada and other countries.

“The labour movement in Britain must wake up to the threat posed by EU ‘regulatory alignment’ and any similar transitional arrangements to Labour’s plans to invest in public services, industry and infrastructure and to promote social justice”, the Communist Party leader urged.

He also attacked the ‘extortionate’ financial divorce settlement outlined in the Phase One agreement. “The EU Commission had originally demanded around £100bn, Prime Minister May then flew to Florence and offered £18bn – and now that has doubled to somewhere between £35bn and at least £39bn”, Robert Griffiths pointed out.

“This will come on top of Britain’s net contribution of £21bn over the next two years and will mean extra public spending cuts unless we elect a left-led Labour government that will end austerity and tax the rich and big business”, he added.



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The 2007/8 worldwide banking collapse exposed – to a new generation – the cyclical nature of modern capitalism's enduring crisis. With the collapse in bank confidence came the crisis of confidence in modern capitalism itself, and thus a resurgence of interest in Marxism.

But capitalism has moved on since Marx developed his economic analysis in *Capital*. And, although the labour theory of value may be fairly well understood within Britain's labour movement, what is not generally grasped is the extent to which capitalism has become monopolised and dominated by the financial sector, and the degree to which the state and the monopolies are intertwined in order to maintain the system.

In every advanced capitalist economy it was the state that came to the rescue in the 2007/8 crisis, reinforcing the basis of the theoretical approach of state monopoly capitalism (SMC), which was the foundation of communist, and some socialist, critiques of capitalism, before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

This monograph by Gretchen Binus, Beate Landefeld and Andreas Wehr, originally published in German, revisits the discussions on SMC theory in Germany, France, and the Soviet Union, demonstrating their contemporary relevance.

An introduction by Jonathan White considers how a better understanding of state monopoly capitalism would assist those seeking the transformation of Britain in a socialist direction.

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150th anniversary of the publication of *Das Kapital*

## Marx's *Capital* and capitalism today, Part 2

Robert Griffiths





*‘Between the late 1970s and 1996, monetarist and neoliberal policies increased the rate of exploitation by 56%.’*



In Part I of this article (CR84, Summer 2017, pp 22-31), I introduced the main findings of Volume I of Marx’s *Capital*, situating them in the context of other writings of his, such as the *Economic Manuscripts* of 1857-58, 1861-63 and 1863-65, and ‘part 1’ of *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Following Marx, I explained that the surplus value realised when a commodity is sold is created by unpaid, surplus, labour time; that economic crises are caused by overaccumulation and overproduction; and that the concentration and centralisation described by Marx had led over the course of time to monopoly and domination by finance Capital, so ably analysed by Lenin in his *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. I now want to go on to deal with a number of other topics from both Volumes I and III of *Capital*.

### ‘Unproductive’ labour

Before a commodity’s value (including its surplus value  $s$  is encashed at the point of sale, other labour power is often necessary by way of preparation: clerical and accountancy work, maintenance, storage, transport and – of far greater significance today than in Marx’s time – packaging and marketing. Whether or not this work is done in-house by employees, or by an outside contractor, the costs are incidental expenses to be borne by the capitalist producer or simply passed on to the consumer (as part of the commodity’s ‘necessary’ labour-time value  $v$  – the variable capital employed). It is not labour power engaged directly in the creation of surplus value. From the capitalist’s standpoint, therefore, it is ‘unproductive’ labour, however useful or essential, and payment to the worker for it should be kept to the minimum. For Marx, it is part of the outlay on variable capital within the capitalist economy as a whole.

In Volume I, he had taken the trouble to emphasise that the division of labour between hand and brain does not cancel the contribution made by non-manual labour to the production of a commodity in all its aspects:

“In order to labour productively, it is no longer necessary for you to do manual work yourself; enough, if you are an organ of the collective labourer, and perform one of its subordinate functions.”<sup>43</sup>

He also insisted that a teacher in a private school produces surplus value for the owner in the same respect as does a worker in a sausage factory.

In Volume III, Marx clarified matters still further.

Unproductive labour (in the capitalist sense) nonetheless involves the worker providing ‘surplus’ (*ie* unpaid) labour, working a 10-hour day for a wage that will buy means of consumption that require only, say, 5 hours of society’s labour time to produce. Although the commercial worker not directly engaged in the production process does not create surplus value for an employer (whether an industrial or a commercial one), she or he may perform significant or essential functions in the creation, conservation or realisation of surplus value. Moreover, in receiving a wage that reflects the value of their means of consumption, say 5 hours’ worth of society’s labour time, yet working for 8 hours, the worker is providing 3 hours of free, unpaid labour to their employer (who recoups the cost of wages in the price of the commercial or retail commodity). The greater the surplus labour, the less the employer of the commercial worker has to pay out in real terms.<sup>44</sup>

Hence commercial workers share the same class interests as so-called ‘productive’ workers in resisting exploitation, fighting to maximise their paid labour time and, fundamentally, putting an end to capitalism. This becomes more evident as capitalism develops, Marx argued, because advances in office work and in science, education, technology and training tend over time to devalue commercial wages in relation to the average, thereby putting an end to any higher status.

Public sector workers, too, in the non-commodity sector as well as in any commodity-producing branches (where in the latter case they thus also create surplus value), engage in surplus labour in providing necessary functions for the maintenance and perpetuation of capitalist society. They share the same class interests as other workers.

### The ‘price of production’

In a number of important respects, Volume III – supplemented extensively by Engels – draws together vital elements of Marxist political economy that are of critical significance today.

First, it resolves the seeming paradox by which capitalists in one branch of industry laying out a significantly larger share of their total capital ( $c + v$ ) on the means of production ( $c$ ) than in more labour-intensive branches, nonetheless enjoy more or less the same rate of return (*ie* profit in proportion to capital used up). Even more incongruously, Department I of the economy – that producing the means of production for sale to other capitalists – tends to show approximately the same average rate of return as Department II – that producing the necessities of life (the ‘means of subsistence’) for workers and (including luxuries) for capitalists, together with their

dependants; although some branches of Department I have a particularly high value of  $c$  in relation to  $v$ , what Marx called the “organic composition of capital” (OCC). Yet, if living labour is the only source of surplus value and therefore profit, the less labour-intensive branches and departments should receive a lower rate of return.

Marx explained that this did not occur not because the labour theory of value was wrong. Price is still formed in a definite relationship to value (*ie* average socially necessary labour time), and profit and surplus value still originate from living labour in the production process. But prices settle around what he called the “price of production”, which represents the cost of production ( $c + v$  regardless of their proportions) plus the average rate of profit  $s/(c + v)$  on the capital laid out on means of production and labour power across the economy as a whole.

In practice, this means that commodities in branches with a higher OCC tend to sell at an average price above their value; while those in more labour-intensive branches sell at an average price below their value. This enables branches with a high OCC to capture some of the surplus value that labour-intensive branches contribute to society’s total mass of  $s$  across the economy as a whole. A similar price mechanism exists for transferring surplus value within each branch of the economy, so that more mechanised and productive companies – whose units therefore contain less value than the branch average – reap higher returns as a result of selling their own lower-value (and therefore lower cost) units at the price of production for that branch as a whole.

Obviously, in real life there are other factors which also affect market prices: an excess of demand or supply, monopoly power, fashion, etc.

### Crises of disproportion

In examining the circulation of money and capital in detail in Volume II, Marx exposed capitalism’s innate susceptibility to imbalance and crisis. Mismatches of supply and demand can occur in each circuit at every stage. Within a particular branch or across the economy as a whole, there can be an excess or a deficiency of money-capital to employ all the forces of production available: costs and prices will go up or down accordingly, affecting profits to a greater or lesser degree. When most commodity production only takes place in order to make a profit, then there will be knock-on effects on further production, investment, employment, wages, demand and so on and on.

Marx attached particular significance to imbalances between Departments I and II. Many of the products of Department I require large outlays and longer production times; their deployment often necessitates substantially bigger inputs. Such ‘producer’ or ‘capital’ goods cannot be ordered, produced and deployed at short notice. Yet a glut or a shortage of Department I products can have a serious impact on capitalists, workers and the economy as a whole. Decisions about investment, production and employment are not planned in order to balance the two departments over the branch or economy as a whole – let alone to meet society’s needs. They are left to individual capitals to arrange and decide in a situation of market anarchy.

The result can be crises of disproportion, where there is a glut or a shortage of Department I products within particular branches of the economy. The result will often be cut-backs in production together with layoffs and redundancies in one or other or both departments. As demand in the economy shrinks accordingly, so it can spark a downward spiral into recession.

### The tendency of the rate of profit to fall

In *Capital* Volume I, Part VII, Marx had considered how capitalist production expands, reproducing itself on an ever more extensive scale as the amount of capital accumulates and is reinvested in means of production and labour power. In Volume III, Part III, he analysed this process in detail, setting out one of the most profound laws of Marxist political economy: the tendency of the rate of profit to fall (TRPF).

Marx explained that the means of production (plant, machinery, tools, raw materials etc) used up in the economy tends to grow in proportion to the amount of labour power employed. This is the case whether measured in terms of the OCC or of the mass of means of production in proportion to the labour force (the “technical composition of capital”). The main cause of the tendency of the OCC to rise is the onward march of mechanisation, itself driven by the competition between capitalists to produce more cheaply and capture more market share – and therefore profit – than their rivals. As a worker’s labour time can only be increased to a finite extent, Department I acquires an ever growing significance in the economy because machinery, power, tools etc can both increase labour productivity and reduce the value (and so real cost to the capitalist) of labour power, by reducing the value of its means of subsistence. Yet, at the same time, this department in particular tends to be less labour-intensive and so less productive of surplus value.

Here is why the rising OCC presents an enormous problem for capitalist economies: only the wage-capital  $v$  invested in labour power can generate fresh surplus value, yet its share in the capital employed in the economy as a whole is declining. The overall effect of  $c$  increasing in proportion to  $v$ , therefore, will be the tendency of the rate of profit to fall in the economy overall, as surplus value ( $s$ ) shrinks as a proportion of capital deployed and consumed ( $c + v$ ) in the production process.

However, countervailing measures can be taken to combat the TRPF and “paralyse its effects”.<sup>45</sup> These seek to increase the absolute or relative surplus value extracted from labour power. In *Capital* Volume III, Marx elaborates a number of them: intensifying the exploitation of labour (eg through speeding up the production process and output); depressing wages below the value of labour power; cheapening means of production; and deploying the ‘relative’ surplus population resulting from higher labour productivity in new lines of mainly labour-intensive production, notably of luxury products. Capitalists may also seek to grow the mass of profit to compensate for the falling rate of profit – although this will generate yet more surplus capital and tends, in less labour-intensive branches of production, to increase the OCC over time, thereby depressing the rate of profit still further. Raising labour productivity through the introduction of more machinery or enhanced technology usually has the same effect, notably where the rising OCC outstrips the rising rate of exploitation  $s/v$ . It should also be noted that, while there may be considerable scope for extending mechanisation and the application of new technology, there are physical limits to the rapidity and extent to which labour can be intensified and its productivity increased.

Other countervailing effects to the TRPF can be found in foreign investment and trade. In Vol I of *Capital*, Marx had noted that capital which cannot make any or sufficient profit at home might be sent abroad “because it can be employed at a higher rate of profit in a foreign country”.<sup>46</sup> As he elaborated in a section on foreign trade in Volume III, capital invested in cheap labour abroad (“slaves, coolies etc”) to produce cheap

imports into the home country may yield a higher rate of profit than the norm domestically, thereby equalising the general rate of profit. Imports generally can cheapen the means of production domestically and – by reducing the price of necessities – also cheapen the cost of labour power at home, thereby raising the domestic rate of profit. Capital invested in the home production of highly competitive exports from a more advanced economy may earn a “surplus profit”. However, insofar as these operations accelerate the accumulation of capital for investment in the home market, they will tend over the long run to increase the OCC and intensify the TRPF.<sup>47</sup>

In reality, too, mechanisation increases the proportion of  $c$  in relation to  $v$  in the production process as a whole despite the employment of extra labour in Department I to produce the additional or enhanced means of production. Does this mean that automation (including through ‘artificial intelligence’) and robotics might eventually displace a very large proportion of the workforce, proceeding – if only exponentially – towards an economy of nil employment and therefore nil production of surplus value? Marx did not believe that the accumulation of capital would reach this point. Instead, he reasoned, the price of labour power will fall and make it profitable to employ it once again, either in existing branches of the economy or in new ones if necessary.<sup>48</sup> It could be added that capitalism would be unlikely to survive as a mode of production, should a large section of society revolt against a system that could only guarantee long-term mass unemployment without the means with which to lead a tolerable and productive life.

While countervailing tendencies can slow, suspend and even reverse the falling rate of profit, they cannot abolish its tendency to fall. This tendency asserts and reasserts itself, even though the rate of exploitation  $s/v$  may be rising, as the value of labour falls and mechanisation raises productivity, requiring less living labour for each unit of output. Indeed, Marx maintained that there was a tendency for the rate of surplus value to rise although this, too, had countervailing tendencies – not least the fight of workers for higher wages, for shorter hours with no loss of pay etc – and did not outweigh the TRPF. Because the tendencies of more intensive exploitation and falling profit rates not only co-exist but reinforce one another, he insisted that “nothing is more absurd, for this reason, than to explain the fall in the rate of profit by a rise in the rate of wages”.<sup>49</sup>

In *Capital* Vol III, Marx pointed out that the “immediate purpose and compelling motive” of capitalist production is to produce surplus value, not to produce things because the capitalist class or other people will enjoy them, or because the population needs those products in order to survive.<sup>50</sup> And yet, commodities will only yield their surplus value when purchased by their intended consumers in Department I and Department II. However, the full consumption and realisation of surplus value is not guaranteed, especially for the commodities produced in Department II, which depend upon the purchasing power of workers in both departments. That power is restricted by the drive to maximise the rate of exploitation, further limiting its ability to keep up with the expansion of labour productivity and commodity production.

Here lies the link between the TRPF and cyclical crisis. Periodically, the point is reached where commodities cannot be sold at a profit; nor can labour power (itself a commodity) be employed at a profit. The result is a crisis of the overaccumulation of capital and the overproduction of commodities. When the costs of labour power and means of production have fallen sufficiently to raise the rate of exploitation, when the depreciation in capital values enables

the formation of new capital that can expect a higher rate of profit, production revives and the cycle proceeds towards growth, boom and the next recession and possibly slump.

A number of studies confirm the operation of the TRPF in Britain and other capitalist economies, in fact across the international capitalist economy in aggregate. Perhaps the best summary of calculations of Britain’s rate of profit, as Marx understood it, can be found in a paper by Michael Roberts.<sup>51</sup> He estimates that the rate has fallen from an average of 24% of capital consumption in the late 1850s and 1860s to 10% by the 2007 crash. This downward trend has been cyclical, spanning approximately 17 short cycles and 4 long ones. The biggest and sharpest drops occurred in the 1870s, in 1912-16 (just before and during the first half of the Great Imperialist War), in 1930-32 (after the Wall Street Crash) and in 1944-49 (from the end of the Second World War and into the reconstruction). Between the end of the Second World War and 1975, the rate of profit in Britain fell in cycles from almost 22% to less than 10%. This was, of course, a period in which strong shop-floor trade unionism and a hugely expanded welfare state raised both workplace and ‘social’ wages in real terms, at the expense of corporate profits, as workers successfully resisted attempts to raise the rate of exploitation.

Between the late 1970s and 1996, monetarist and neoliberal policies increased the rate of exploitation by 56%, producing a higher rate of profit (up by 20%), despite a sizeable increase (46%) in the organic composition of capital. But the impact of that higher OCC, supplemented by a further but smaller economic growth to 2008, together with an increase in real workplace and social wages (largely as the result of the first-term Labour government policies), both halted the rise in the exploitation rate and reduced the rate of profit by 14%. Roberts shows that, across the post-war period, from 1946 to 2008, the rate of surplus value rose by 8%, yet the rate of profit fell by 46% as the OCC increased by 182%. His figures demonstrate that the rate of profit declines when the OCC rises faster than the rate of exploitation, fully in keeping with Marx’s theory of value.

Esteban Maito has calculated the average rate of profit in 6 core countries (Britain, the USA, Germany, Netherlands, Japan and Sweden) between 1869 and 2009.<sup>52</sup> The difficulty of finding complete and reliable data means that he measures net profits as a proportion of the outlay on fixed constant capital alone (that part of  $c$  spent replacing and expanding machinery, plant and buildings), but not on circulating constant capital (the part of  $c$  spent on tools and inputs such as materials and power) plus variable capital  $v$  (the outlay on wages). Although this raises the rate of profit figures, the enormous preponderance of fixed capital over variable capital, and the accelerating speed with which the circulating and variable capital turn over in production, mean that his approach serves quite well as a measure of the movement in the rate of profit over time. The same pattern is replicated in Britain, albeit at a generally lower rate of profit, but with steeper falls during and immediately after the two world wars, a sharper rise in the late 1930s and an unusually heavy decline in the 1950s and 1960s (reflecting high post-war levels of capital investment, the ‘welfare state’ consensus and the strength of shop floor trade unionism and collective bargaining).

Maito finds that the average rate of profit – as he calculates it – in the 6 core countries has experienced a downward trend historically, from around 42% in 1869 to 12% in 2010. There was a sharp drop during the 1929-33 Great Depression, a prolonged and substantial decline from 1969 to 1983 (when the

working class movements in the US and Western Europe were at the peak of their strength economically and politically), and a slight recovery and semi-stabilisation to 2007. He also finds that the TRPF runs through both short (usually around 5 or 6 years) and long (40-50 years) cycles, confirming research by Minqi Li, Feng Xiao and Andong Zhu.<sup>53</sup> Calculations for the rate of return in 8 'peripheral' economies of mostly smaller, developing or Third World countries from the mid-1950s show the same downward trend – but at levels roughly twice those of the core countries.

Roberts has also calculated average rates of profit for the world and for the G7 biggest capitalist economies between 1963 and 2008, using Marx's formula. Both show an identical decline to 1975, followed by a continuous – except for the late 1970s and early 1980s – but partial recovery to a peak in 1988, followed by a fall and then recovery in the mid-1990s before the 2007 drop.<sup>54</sup>

However, Maito's estimates claim no long-term TRPF in the USA in the course of the 20th and early 21st centuries. While the short and longer cycles are evident and as pronounced as elsewhere, profit levels have been a little higher in the second half of the period than in the first. But it should also be noted that US profit levels had dropped hugely during the 1880s and were always significantly lower than in Britain (until 1945) and Germany (until the early 1960s). Other studies have calculated US surplus value and its proportionality to total capital consumption more precisely, using the most up-to-date figures available for the post-World War Two period. For instance, Peter Jones<sup>55</sup> confirms that the rate of profit has yet to recover fully from its heavy falls in the 1950s, late 1960s and 1970s. Roberts<sup>56</sup> shows that only when the organic composition of capital declined, from the very late 1950s until 1966 and then from the early 1980s to the end of the century, did the rate of profit – which he calculates in accordance with the Marxist definition – climb back upwards; he reveals the same inverse relationship between the rate of profit and the OCC in his estimates for Britain between 1855 and 1914.

Comprehensive calculations by Themistoklis Kalogerakos<sup>57</sup> show – cycles aside – a downward trend in the US corporate rate of profit between 1965 and 1980, followed by a smaller upturn and then a levelling off. His figures over a 60-year period prove conclusively that corporate profit rates in the non-financial sector rise when the OCC falls, and vice-versa, in patterns of almost perfect inverse symmetry whether for cycles or trend.

Most calculations for the British economy and internationally demonstrate that Marx's theory of the TRPF holds true, and that his whole theory of value – and within it the significance of the OCC – explains the origin and trajectory of capitalist profit.

This is very different from the dog's dinner of anti-Marxist, anti-communist and anti-Soviet liberalism served up by Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*.<sup>58</sup> He redefines 'capital' to make no distinction between capital which directly exploits labour power, rentier and fictitious capital on the one side, and 'state capital' in a socialist economy on the other. It is only the latter two (fictitious and socialist 'state' capital) that he finds objectionable; the first, because it is non-productive and captures too much of the wealth (at the expense of labour and 'productive' capital and land – a piece of classical bourgeois economic theory), the second because it offends his liberal sensibilities. His focus is on the gross and growing inequality in the distribution of wealth, before 1913 and since 1950, which he regards as a mortal threat to democracy and

productive capitalist entrepreneurship. Piketty attaches no significance to Marx's theories of value and the TRPF. Despite its title, his work has nothing in common with Marx's *Capital* and has more in common, ideologically with the radical Liberalism of David Lloyd George. Not surprisingly, therefore, it won the *Financial Times* and McKinsey 'Business Book of the Year' award in 2014.

### Theoretical controversies

Marx had already made clear his view, in the Introduction to the *Economic Manuscripts of 1857-58*, that political economy could only be understood and analysed by employing concepts such as 'labour' and 'value' in models that are abstracted from reality. This enables different things to be identified and studied dialectically, in their dynamic relations with each other and within the totality. Once definitions, assessments etc have been clarified, models and their conceptions can be applied to reality in an effort to understand that reality fully and dynamically.

In Volume III of *Capital* as elsewhere, Marx used mathematical quantities and equations to illustrate the mechanics and tendencies of capitalism's political economy. This has opened the door to schools of thought within and outside the Marxist tradition which claim to have detected mathematical inconsistencies in his theories of falling profit and the translation of values into prices of production (the so-called 'Transformation Problem'), especially in the context of capital accumulation and extended reproduction. Some of these critiques appear to rely on the contradictions within static models that bear even less relation to economic reality than they do to Marx's own models in Volume III. Some defenders of Marx's original method are associated with the Temporal Single-System Interpretation (TSSI) of his theories of surplus value and the TRPF.<sup>59</sup>

There are related conceptual controversies, for example, over questions of the quality of labour. In Volume I, Chapter I, of *Capital*, Marx contrasted average, "simple" labour to skilled (in some translations 'complex') labour.<sup>60</sup> He treated the latter as merely an intensified, multiplied quantity of the former. This has given rise to intense debate and dispute within Marxist political economy ever since, again especially when trying to convert labour values into quantities, costs and prices expressed in mathematical proportions and equations. Furthermore, there are controversies around the question of the labour power involved in housework, education and training. To what extent, if any, can it be said that domestic workers, teachers and trainers help in their different ways to produce surplus value by enhancing labour power, and so perform unpaid labour ultimately for the benefit of the capitalist class (bearing in mind that in the first case the value of the average worker's wage includes the means of subsistence for his or her dependants)?<sup>61</sup>

### 'Underconsumption' and Keynesianism

Because crises of overproduction and overaccumulation appear as crises of purchasing power and investment, schools of political economy have arisen which differ from Marx in both diagnosis and remedy. Theories of 'underconsumption' within and outside the Marxist tradition emphasise the sphere of circulation as the main source of capitalist crisis, rather than the sphere of production. This leads to the promotion of 'remedies' which increase purchasing power through higher wages and more state spending on social benefits, public services and job creation programmes.

Marx himself recognised that underconsumption can legitimately be seen as another side of the same coin. In

Volume III of *Capital*, he went so far as to assert that:

“The ultimate reason for all real crises always remains the poverty and restricted consumption of the masses as opposed to the drive of capitalist production to develop the productive forces as though only the absolute consuming power of society constituted their limit.”<sup>62</sup>

Even so, he attached primary significance to overproduction and overaccumulation as the main source of cyclical crises, as a systemic contradiction that could not be eradicated by maintaining consumption artificially, *ie* by trying permanently to inflate purchasing power above the incomes of workers, people generally, the state and the capitalist class.

In response to the 1929-32 Depression, the underconsumptionist theories of John Maynard Keynes in particular won wide support across the political spectrum in the USA (President Roosevelt's 'New Deal'), Britain (post-war Labour and Conservative governments) and Western Europe (the Marshall Plan). His *General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*<sup>63</sup> argued that capitalist markets, left to their own devices, do not naturally tend to equilibrium and full employment. Government intervention is necessary – especially during a recession – to stimulate employment and demand, notably through public works programmes funded from government borrowing, taxation or printing money. 'Left' Keynesians placed particular emphasis on nationalisation, the direction of private capital, price controls and taxes on high incomes, wealth and corporate profits to boost demand, investment and employment.

As well as producing contradictory effects such as inflationary price rises, capital flight, tax avoidance, higher interest rates, increased National Debt servicing costs and private sector investment 'strikes' – which compel governments to challenge the power of capital or surrender to it – the underconsumptionist approach postpones the recession and, if not reversed, makes it all the steeper upon arrival.

In terms of controversies of macroeconomic theory, mention should be made here of the “permanent arms economy” theory pioneered within the Marxist tradition by Tony Cliff, Duncan Hallas and, consummately, Michael Kidron.<sup>64</sup> This claimed that relatively high and stable state expenditure on armaments maintained demand in the economies of the main capitalist powers to a significant degree, helping to sustain the long post-1945 expansion. Moreover, it was argued, it did so by absorbing capital into the production process where it could bolster the rate of profit rather than stand idle or depress it. The nature of the product also ensured a high degree of 'built-in' obsolescence, requiring the constant reinvestment of capital on the basis of expanded reproduction.

There were several grave misconceptions and omissions of reality in this variant of 'military Keynesianism', an underconsumptionist theory promoted by Joan Robinson and other left Keynesians.<sup>65</sup> Not least, it did not convincingly explain why there should be any qualitative difference between state military expenditure and, say, more or less permanent and substantial state spending on infrastructure and prestige 'white elephant' projects. The theory did not take sufficient account of the fact that sustained capitalist growth also took place in countries with low levels of military spending such as Germany, Sweden and Japan. Nor could it show why capital-intensive military spending should not have accelerated the growth in the OCC, thereby ultimately depressing the rate of profit in the major arms-producing economies of the USA, Britain and

France and precipitating an earlier and deeper profits crisis in those countries than anywhere else. Furthermore, while arms exports add substantially to the profits of that particular branch of the domestic economy, they also add to the surplus capital that subsequently needs to be profitably employed. To his credit, Kidron later acknowledged these and other weaknesses in the “permanent arms economy” theory.<sup>66</sup>

### Monetarism and neoliberalism

The reaction to Keynesianism, especially to the potential challenge offered by its 'left' variants, has been the revival and adaptation of classical political economic theory and policy. Since the early 1970s, the ideas of 'monetarism' and 'neoliberalism' have risen to prominence, associated with the Economics Department of the University of Chicago, Milton Friedman and Frederick Hayek ('the Chicago School') and in Britain the Institute of Economic Affairs and the Adam Smith Institute. They defend the 'efficiency' of 'free markets' and argue that full employment is inflationary because it favours the collective power of trades unions, thereby further distorting the labour market. Their preferred policies include strict control of the money supply, lower government spending and borrowing (to the point of zero-deficit budgets), deregulation and privatisation in place of state controls and public ownership, a more regressive taxation system and an end to 'distortions' in the labour market caused by trade unions, excessive employment rights and other legislative 'red tape'. The 'market' and 'investors' should once more become sovereign, free from macro-economic planning and other impositions by the bureaucratic, interventionist and incompetent state.

Under the banner of fiscal responsibility and fighting inflation, the chief goal of neoliberalism has been to reverse the TRPF by increasing the rate of exploitation and both the rate and mass of profit.

For all its ideological propaganda against 'statism', the 'nanny state' etc, neoliberalism believes strongly in the use of capitalist state power to pursue its preferred policies, whether to repress trade unions, assist the armaments industry, secure free trade and investment agreements, bail out the banks (which some purist neoliberals reject) or remove a troublesome Third World regime. This intensely ideological and political approach has been seen most starkly in practice where governments have come to office determined to implement neoliberal policies: Chile in 1973, Britain in 1979 and the USA in 1981. In all three cases, a fierce battle of ideas was conducted against those of Keynesianism, Marxism and all forms of social collectivism. In Chile, advised by Chicago School economists, the military dictatorship of General Pinochet privatised industry and land, reduced taxes for the rich and big business, slashed social spending, abolished controls on the export of capital, brutally suppressed trade unions and the political left ... but succeeded in hugely reducing inflation and restoring profits until economic and financial crisis compelled a part-reversal of policies. In Britain, the adoption of monetarism (which some called 'Thatcherism') took a milder form in terms of tax and spending cuts, privatisation, anti-trade union laws and attempts to control the money supply. In the 1990s, politically and ideologically, the mantle of neoliberalism passed to the New Labour trend in the Labour Party which rejected social democracy as well as socialism.

In purely economic terms, neoliberalism succeeded in its immediate mission. The rate of profit – howsoever calculated by different Marxist economists – turned upwards in the early 1980s. It continued on this upward trend, albeit with cyclical

slowdowns, until the recession of the early 1990s before recovering once more. In Britain, neoliberal policies revived the rate of profit in Britain through much of the period between 1982 and 1997. New technology was introduced and trade unionism weakened in order to intensify the rate of exploitation, which at least for a time outstripped the increase in the OCC.<sup>51</sup>

### “Fictitious capital”, globalisation and financialisation

In Volume III of *Capital*, Marx traced the history and development of capital as a commodity in itself, as money lent at interest (“usury”) or used as “merchant capital” purely to buy and sell goods at a profit without expanding real value in the process. In pre-capitalist modes of production, such money-capital is largely parasitic, battenning onto and ultimately helping to dissolve the modes.<sup>67</sup>

Under capitalism, however, commercial capital performs a range of functions of varying usefulness by financing activities in the spheres of production, circulation and exchange. For example, although the operations of storing, transporting and retailing commodities do not add to their value, such deployment of commercial capital conserves the value already embedded in them and helps to realise it. In doing so, the price the commercial capitalists charge for their services or pay wholesale for goods to be retailed in effect capture a portion of the surplus value already created in the process of production. In that sense, the commercial service is itself a commodity being sold and bought above its own value, while wholesale goods are being exchanged below their value.

As loan capital invested in the production process, commercial capital captures a portion of surplus value in the form of interest on the loan. Share capital represents a legal entitlement to a future portion of surplus value without investing any new capital into the enterprise concerned.

In Chapter XXV, Marx quotes examples to show how promissory or credit notes, or “bills of exchange”, between industrial capitalists and merchants themselves form a market in which they are sold and bought.<sup>68</sup> Alongside this, the banks increasingly centralise in their own hands the reserve funds – the loanable money capital – of businesses, lend it at interest and handle domestic and international payments on behalf of their clients: “They become the general managers of money capital” and make their profits by lending at a higher rate of interest than they borrow, taking on bills at a discount and buying interest-bearing government bills, bonds and corporate stocks.<sup>69</sup> Deposits can be extended as loans to borrowers several times over because they are not likely to be drawn upon all at once at short notice by the depositors.

As these operations multiply prolifically, the opportunities for swindling and fraud multiply likewise. Money can be obtained as credit for export goods that might never be sold (or even produced). Shares can be sold that might never yield the promised dividends. Engels added an account of how railway speculation, export fraud and crop failure had created a financial crisis in England in 1847. Bills of exchange went unsold (except at huge discounts), interest rates rocketed and companies went bankrupt.<sup>70</sup>

Marx divides bank capital into, firstly, cash (money, gold or notes) and, secondly, securities (bills of exchange or government bonds, treasury bills, other stocks and shares and mortgages). Yet interest-bearing bank capital is, according to Marx, “fictitious”. Interest is being received on capital that is purely nominal: it is either a deposit that has already been received and lent out in multiple amounts, or a security that

cannot be exchanged for its nominal value, but only at its market price. The income from this “fictitious capital” represents the interest from which represents a claim on the wealth produced by society’s surplus labour, while not itself employing labour power to create any surplus value whatsoever in the production process. Moreover, these securities themselves become commodities, to be traded at prices which bear little or no relation to the capital originally laid out on them (and possibly used for investment in production); they depend, instead, on the size and reliability of the interest or dividend payable on them. Speculation then seeks a quick profit from their purchase and sale. Marx noted that:

“With the development of interest-bearing capital and the credit system, all capital seems to double itself, and sometimes treble itself, by the various modes in which the same capital, or perhaps even the same claim on a debt, appears in different forms in different hands. The greater portion of this ‘money capital’ is purely fictitious. All the deposits, with the exception of the reserve fund, are merely claims on the banker, which, however, never exist as deposits.”<sup>71</sup>

Editing this text sometime around 1893, Engels added in a footnote that

“this doubling and trebling of capital has developed considerably further in recent years, for instance, through FINANCIAL TRUSTS, which already occupy a heading of their own in the report of the London Stock Exchange.”

While loan capital grows quite independently of the accumulation of real capital, Marx noted that the expansion of capital in the production process, in its quest for surplus value, “breeds overproduction, speculation, crises, and surplus capital alongside surplus population.”<sup>72</sup> In particular, unable to find sufficiently profitable reinvestment in production, a portion of this surplus capital seeks other opportunities through its deployment as fictitious banking capital. There was a tendency for speculation in fictitious capital to grow:

“With the development of the credit system, great concentrated money markets are created, such as London, which are at the same time the main seats of trade in this paper. The bankers place huge quantities of the public’s money capital at the disposal of this unsavoury crowd of dealers, and thus this brood of gamblers multiplies.”<sup>73</sup>

But this overaccumulation and overproduction of capital cannot continue indefinitely, outstripping as it does the overproduction of commodities. Equilibrium must be restored through the withdrawal or destruction of capital in the economy. But as his notes on *Theories of Surplus Value (Economic Manuscript of 1861-63)* confirm, Marx also believed that industrial capital would tame interest-bearing capital and – with the assistance of government regulation and planning – subordinate it to the needs of the productive economy.<sup>74</sup> As we know today, that subordination certainly did not happen in the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

The collapse of the socialist economies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe opened up new opportunities for the neoliberal counter-offensive to spread and intensify. Many of the barriers to the movement of Western monopoly capital around the world were dismantled in a process dubbed

‘globalisation’. This capitalist or imperialist globalisation was presented as inevitable whereas, in reality, it required the deployment of US, British, German and French state power in order to advance. In particular, the leading imperialist powers combined together to promote it in existing international agencies (the European Union, the IMF, the World Bank etc) and new ones (the World Trade Organisation, the G7 and G20 groups of heads of government and central bank governors).

Free from any meaningful controls, especially after Britain’s ‘Big Bang’ deregulation of the City of London in 1986 and the repeal of the Glass-Steagall banking legislation in the US in the late 1990s, finance capital engaged in an orgy of fictitious accumulation. In a process known as ‘financialisation’, all kinds of financial contracts were turned into interest-bearing but also very complex ‘products’ such as collateralised debt obligations, to be traded in the liberalised financial markets, notably in the City and on Wall Street.

Speculation further boosted their exchange price so that, by 2007, the market-price ‘value’ of all financial securities on the world’s capital markets would have entitled the holders to consume the real value all the goods and services produced by all the world’s economies several times over. Global financial assets totalled \$196 trillion, compared with the world’s aggregate nominal GDP of \$56 trillion.<sup>75</sup> That proportion of 350% had grown from 109% in 1980. In the world’s biggest capitalist economy, the total value of all financial assets had risen from 5 x US GDP in 1980 to 10 x by the eve of the Great Crash. In Britain and the Eurozone, the stock of financial assets had reached around 53 x and 37 x GDP, respectively, by 2007 and still rising.<sup>76</sup>

Beginning to realise that much of the actual or potential monetary value of these financial ‘products’ was largely fictitious – much of it relying on the repayment of debt that the debtors would not be able to honour – the holders of securities of various sorts began to dump them in what became the Great Crash. Thus, in August 2007, BNP Paribas opened the first phase of the financial crisis by announcing its withdrawal from three hedge funds engaged in US mortgage debt. A crazy game of ‘pass the parcel’ began, as nobody wanted to be left holding toxic financial packages, yet none could offload them onto anyone else. The banks ceased lending to each other and to other speculators. Financial institutions began to go under, unable to meet their financial liabilities. In Britain, the Northern Rock mortgage crisis had broken out in September 2007 and the New Labour government nationalised the company in February 2008. The collapse of US investment bank Lehman Brothers in September 2008 opened a new phase in the international financial crisis, as Western governments and central banks organised takeovers of failing financial institutions or bailed them out with guarantees for their depositors or public funds to buy their toxic securities at a discount and recapitalise their reserves. Some share purchases amounted to full or partial nationalisation.

Where governments and their central banks could not bail out their own financial institutions, or raise enough money on the financial markets to fund public expenditure commitment (including the interest on state debt), they turned to the EU Commission, the European Central Bank and the IMF (the ‘Troika’). The conditions attached to loans by the Troika have been swingeing: social and welfare spending cuts, sweeping privatisations, higher state pension retirement ages and labour ‘flexibility’ reforms. Similar ‘austerity’ measures have been carried in other countries in order to fund their domestic bailout programmes. In short, the capitalist states and their

international agencies nationalised the private liabilities and privatised the public funds.

This was not how Marx thought things would turn out. As he anticipated in Volume III of *Capital*:

“In a system of production, where the entire continuity of the reproduction process rests upon credit, a crisis must obviously occur – a tremendous rush for means of payment – when credit suddenly ceases and only cash payments have validity. At first glance, therefore, the whole crisis seems to be merely a credit and money crisis. And in fact it is only a question of the convertibility of bills of exchange into money. But the majority of these bills represent actual sales and purchases, whose extension far beyond the needs of society is, after all, the basis of the whole crisis. At the same time, an enormous quantity of these bills of exchange represents plain swindle, which now reaches the light of day and collapses; furthermore, unsuccessful speculation with the capital of other people; finally, commodity capital which has depreciated or is completely unsaleable, or returns that can never more be realised again. The entire artificial system of forced expansion of the reproduction process cannot, of course, be remedied by having some bank, like the Bank of England, give to all the swindlers the deficient capital by means of its paper and having it buy up all the depreciated commodities at their old nominal values. Incidentally, everything here appears distorted, since in this paper world, the real price and its real basis appear nowhere, but only bullion, metal coin, notes, bills of exchange, securities. Particularly in centres where the entire money business of the country is concentrated, like London, does this distortion become apparent; the entire process becomes incomprehensible; it is less so in centres of production.”<sup>77</sup>

Economically, the result has been the longest and deepest capitalist recession for 80 years. But was this purely a financial crash? Or was it connected to the cyclical character of the capitalist economy, a periodic overaccumulation and overproduction? Perhaps its origins lay deeper, in the longer term tendency of the OCC to rise and the TRPF reaching a critical point, requiring the large-scale destruction of capital values, both fictitious and real?

The revival of the capitalist rate of profit in the US and Britain in the 1980s and 1990s had released much more capital for speculative purposes, emboldened by confidence that returns would continue at their higher levels. Yet the organic composition of capital had also revived and the rate of profit in the US, Britain and other G7 and G20 economies, had begun to fall and then falter from the late 1990s (as productivity gains were counteracted by stiffening competition from Third World and Chinese producers). A further downward turn began in 2005.<sup>52,54</sup>

Alan Freeman<sup>78</sup> argues that rate-of-profit calculations for capitalist economies should include all the capital deployed and profits made in the financial sector, including those derived from the expansion of fictitious capital (and which play no part in the creation of real surplus value as Marx understood it, through the exploitation of living labour). Once included, arguably on the same basis as Marx included merchant profit and rent in the general rate of profit and the TRPF, these show an uninterrupted decline in the rate of profit in the US and Britain – the home of the world’s two biggest financial markets – since the late 1960s, with no neoliberal-driven upturn from

the early 1980s. According to Freeman and adherents of the TSSI school (*qv*), this has happened, despite the huge profits made from financialisation, because the huge volume of capital employed across the whole economy (now including its financial markets) lowers the proportion of surplus value (*s*) in relation to the total capital employed (*c + v*).

This analysis appears to locate the 2007-08 crash in a classic crisis of overaccumulation and overproduction, albeit one of a particularly acute character.

Obversely, it could be argued that this analysis downplays the impact of neoliberalism and financialisation from the 1980s onwards and the impact of a financial crisis on the unfolding cyclical downturn in the productive economy. In the period leading up to the crash, working class purchasing power had been growing more slowly and, in the case of the US, had remained stagnant. Indeed, it relied increasingly upon soaring household debt that became more difficult to sustain and riskier to finance. Kalogerakos<sup>57</sup> found that the profit rate of non-financial corporations in the US began a cyclical fall in 2005. In the G7 economies, output peaked in late 2006 and early 2007. After a long period of expansion, the US economy slowed down at the end of 2007, and then shrank in real terms in the first quarter of 2008. In Britain, economic growth came to a halt in the first quarter of 2008 as it did in other areas of the international capitalist economy.<sup>79</sup>

According to Kalogerakos, the share of financial corporations in total US corporate profits had grown steadily from 8% in 1947 before slipping from peaks of 21% in the 1970s to 12% by 1984. From there, however, it more than doubled through the cycles before escalating to 40% by the year 2000. Significantly, it began its steep collapse in 2001, several years before arriving at a 10% trough in 2007. He estimates that the rate of capital accumulation (which he measures by new constant capital as a proportion of existing fixed capital) lagged well below the recovering rate of profit from 1984, and fell far more sharply than it from 2005, to zero as companies devoted a growing share of their profits to shareholder dividends rather than to new, productivity-driven investment. They also ploughed more of their undistributed profits into the financial sector, as opportunities for profitable investment in the productive economy shrank.

All this suggests that financialisation, which was promoted by the wider neoliberal agenda in favour of corporate profits, further destabilised the downturn of the productive economy. The financial crisis of 2007-08, together with the priority bailout of the financial sector and the accompanying austerity measures, then plunged the international economy from recession into depression, beginning with the most financialised economies, the US and Britain. In order to begin a recovery, it was necessary for capitalism to destroy 'fictitious capital' values on a large scale, unavoidably devaluing real capital along with them. This has been managed by the capitalist states on an enormous scale and through international coordination in the G7, IMF and European Union. Profitability has been restored at minimal expense to the monopoly corporations, but at huge cost to the working class and people generally. National state power remains an essential basis for the protection and promotion of capitalist exploitation at home and abroad, with international cooperation playing an important role when it comes to upholding the common interests of monopoly capital.

Part 3 of this article will deal with the communist mode of production.

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# SOULFOOD

with Mike Quille



‘Like any other human cultural activity, art is a site of contest and conflict, of double-sidedness, because we live in a class-divided society.’

## Tomorrow, art and culture may not be the same, Part 2

### I Saw A New World Being Assembled

In this issue’s *Soul Food* column, I continue and conclude the edited interview given to Pierre Marshall from the Young Communist League, started in the last issue of *CR*. I have added a section to it on what a left-wing cultural programme for a future progressive socialist government might look like – how we might begin to assemble a new world of art and culture, so that tomorrow may not be the same. Two poems with relevant themes are included in the text of the interview.

**PM: I suppose it depends on how widely you define art, but surely not all of it is always liberating?**

**MQ:** That’s true. It doesn’t follow of course that all art necessarily has this profound liberating effect. A great deal of it is produced and consumed as entertainment, as distractions and escapism, and it can work to cover up underlying uncomfortable truths and help legitimise unfairness, inequality and exploitation. But I’m not dismissing such art, it can still convey sensuous pleasure, make us feel better. And it would be very difficult for any of us to live without the pleasures of entertainment and escapism. In fact the harsher your real material conditions are, the more likely you may be to want to escape through fantasy or feelgood TV programmes, films, plays, paintings and poems.

Also historically a lot of art has been paid for by the rich and powerful to legitimise their wealth and power. They rarely want to pay to see themselves criticised. For example, at the recent ‘Art of Empire’ exhibition at Tate Britain, it was clear that for most of the time, most of the art associated with Britain’s imperial past was about justifying, sympathising, even glorifying what was, as we all know, a violent and cruel exploitation of other parts of the world.

Artists used their skills and abilities to support this immoral ideological project. So there were paintings of

heroic last stands by British soldiers, and grateful natives and so on, but there wasn’t any artistic representation of the slave trade there. They just weren’t commissioned, even though the slave trade was a huge source of capital to the British. Why? Because there’s just no way such a vile and violent trade could be depicted without causing massive shame.

But we have to remember that artists had to make a living, just like bricklayers have to build palaces. And it’s worth noting that the really clever ones, like Velazquez for example, can get away with showing the ugliness of powerful people and still getting paid for it by those people!

Anyway, I don’t see anything wrong with appreciating the skills and abilities of artists who have had to participate in an exploitative project. You can still appreciate the skill in drawing/poetry/music, whatever the composition and the vividness and the melody etc. But it’s still true to say that if you understand the ideological project it was commissioned to serve as well, you get a fuller and deeper sense of the meanings of the work of art.

What is objectionable is when that’s not made clear. So, most of the paintings in the National Gallery and National Portrait Gallery should be curated to show the link between the artwork and the political and economic project which generated them. Same with the statue of Rhodes at Oxford University, and all the other statues of cruel and thuggish military leaders, dishonest politicians, corrupt imperial bureaucrats and wasteful monarchs that oppress our public spaces in Whitehall, Trafalgar Square and all over the country.

They should all be pulled down. It would be better if the National Gallery wasn’t so full of paintings of and for the ruling classes. It would be so much better if, on the streets of London, Glasgow, Cardiff, Edinburgh, Manchester and our other cities we had statues of working class leaders. And not just leaders but the led: the women, the black slaves, the exploited children, those oppressed because of their sexuality or disability or forced into a rigid gender category – all the people who have actually worked hard to produce the wealth of this country. If statues and paintings of the historic ruling classes have to appear in public, let’s have a clear explanation of the background to these artworks.



**PM: So why through history have artists got more left-wing and subversive?**

**MQ:** In modern times, greater prosperity has meant there is more material support available for artists who critique the status quo, and so we're much more used to artists being critical and left-wing. The freer the artist is, the less dependent on commissions from the rich and powerful, the more oppositional and radical they tend to be.

If you just look at poetry, for example, the list is huge. You could start with some of the Romantic poets like Blake and Shelley and Clare; but the trickle then becomes a flood in the twentieth century, with not only leftist poets like Auden and the other poets of the Thirties, Randall Swingler, Dylan Thomas etc, but abroad think of all the communist poets – Aragon, Baraka, Brecht, Dalton, Eluard, Faiz, Grieg, Hikmet, Jalib, Mayakovsky, Neruda, Pavese, Ritsos and Vallejo. And similar long lists could be made for other creative writers, and in the other arts such as music and the visual arts.

But it's also true to say there have been lots of liberals and a few Tories as well! And, as I say, there are lots of artists like Damien Hirst perhaps, who seem to be quite happy pursuing a politically conventional and conformist agenda and serving the rich and powerful of this world. Like any other human cultural activity, art is a site of contest and conflict, of double-sidedness, because we live in a class-divided society.

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**as the poets write about the smell of their dead fathers' tweed jackets**

by Martin Hayes

a crust of dry bread has become the dream of millions  
 running water and one bar of electric heat  
 amenities out of reach for a quarter of the globe  
 as CEOs stand in their kitchens  
 warming their feet on underground heated slate tiles  
 while peeling an avocado  
 slate  
 ripped from the earth by people whose hands have to  
 squeeze the last drop of milk from a  
 dead breast  
 wring a sleeping bag dry  
 so they can sleep at night without freezing their guts  
 people who have jobs but still have to queue in foodbanks  
 just to feed their families

as their Prime Ministers and Presidents talk about  
 nuclear wars  
 destroy  
 whole communities with an idea they had while playing a  
 round of golf  
 people who once worked on a farm or in a call centre or  
 under the ground  
 who now have no jobs because of an agreement signed on  
 a jet  
 30,000 feet above the clouds  
 people who are moved on from country to country  
 unwanted  
 who have to live in makeshift camps for years  
 just because their God lost an election  
 and had His fingertips replaced on the trigger of a gun  
 people who can't clothe or take their children on a  
 holiday anymore  
 because the price of oil drained from the ground 5000  
 miles away shot up into the sky  
 and closed all of their factories  
 people who once worked in industries long ago shut by  
 progress  
 who once used their hands to rivet together ships haul a  
 piece of steel out of a blast furnace  
 replace  
 the heart of a 12 year old girl hand over a cup of tea to a  
 miner squeeze  
 tomato ketchup into a factory worker's bacon sandwich  
 who now sit at home with nothing to do  
 using those same hands to put together 1000 piece jigsaw  
 puzzles  
 or knit hats for their grandchildren who will grow up to be  
 a number  
 on a list of numbers who don't have any jobs

as the poets write about the smell of their dead fathers'  
 tweed jackets  
 are Forwarded £5,000 for a poem about the opening of a  
 wardrobe  
 have enough time on their hands  
 to stand in front of mirrors  
 contemplating whether they exist or not  
 and books about wizards and bondage  
 sell millions

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Left: Statue of Cecil Rhodes Oriel College Oxford

Right: Francis Hayman (1708-1776), Robert Clive and Mir Jafar after the Battle of Plassey, 1757

Although I do think that, purely to survive and develop their full potential, humans will always tend to seek to liberate themselves from oppression using all means at their disposal, including artistic ones. And surely there is something inherently social, collective, empathetic and cooperative about the way art works, particularly music, which makes it a natural opponent of societies divided into small groups of property-owners and large groups of workers labouring for those people.

**PM: So would you say that the same is true of cultural activities like sport and religion? Are they also double-sided? Is that why you include those activities on the Culture Matters website?**

**MQ:** Yes indeed. Sport, for example, is a normal, natural human activity, which helps develop various human faculties, physical, mental and moral. But it takes certain forms in capitalist society, which wants to organise everything according to the capitalist rationality of profit-making. So it becomes a site of conflict. Tony Collins, in his article on the *Culture Matters* website, on sport in capitalist society, explains this brilliantly:

“For almost 300 years [sport] has been an essential part of the capitalist leisure industry. There was never a golden age when it was pure; and the attempts to purify it by introducing amateurism led to the systematic exclusion and persecution of all those who fell outside its middle-class norms. Today it is a plaything of the rich and an instrument of control – just as it has always been.

Yet it remains a uniquely compelling form of entertainment. It is unscripted melodrama that allows the participant and the spectator to experience great emotional peaks that are rare in everyday life. It offers opportunities for physical artistry and collective endeavour that can sometimes touch the essence of what it means to be human.

Its liberation lies not in appeals to a mythical past or a morality invented by apostles of the British Empire but in the creation of a society where capitalism no longer exists and in which the full range of sporting experience can be had by all members of society. Only under socialism, in a society free of economic necessity and shorn of stifling bourgeois morality, will sport truly become a level playing field.”<sup>1</sup>

**PM: And what about religion? Institutional religion has often been an instrument of oppression, why include it on the website?**

**MQ:** Because, like sport and other cultural activities, it has the potential both to repress and to liberate the human spirit. Articles on the website by James Crossley and Roland Boer put this better than I can. A historical materialist approach to a Bible-based religion like Christianity reveals to us that it is a coded cultural expression of class conflict in human societies. Conflict between rich and poor with real, material suffering and hardship, and an imagined redemption, which is the eventual triumph of humanity over the evils of hunger and oppression and exploitation. In other words, the advent of communism.

Obviously the Bible doesn't only yield interpretations

from the point of view of the underdog, the oppressed. It is quite capable of being interpreted as support for the existing order, for the legitimacy and justice of current exploitative economic arrangements. And of course these have been historically the dominant meanings, so far, with most established churches coming to accommodations with secular powers in order to survive. This has meant them dropping, downplaying or denying radical egalitarian and communistic principles.

And they have spiritualised discontent and protest, channelling it away from revolutionary change in the here and now. But all the while the revolutionary impulse is there in the text, and can be communicated and understood as a call to revolution, and why? Because the objective economic conditions of exploitation are there, and people are always going to rebel against that, sometimes in necessarily secret and obscure ways.

And this is what Marx meant when he said religion is the opium of the people. The whole quote is this:

“Religious suffering is, at one and the same time, the expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.”<sup>2</sup>

There is clear evidence, as Roland Boer says in his series of articles,<sup>3</sup> that certainly Engels, and probably Marx as well, saw the revolutionary potential of religion.

The communist impulse, the human impulse to think and act socially, cooperatively, collectively, surfaces again and again in Christian history. It's there in the Bible, as James Crossley points out in his article.<sup>4</sup> I consider that Jesus and the disciples were what we would call revolutionary communists, radically opposed both to the Roman imperial occupiers, and to their clients, the local ruling political and religious classes. For that, they suffered persecution and death, because their values and beliefs were subversive and destabilising of the hierarchical, exploitative order. And so religions still have the potential to subvert and replace dominant economic and moral values, including those of capitalism. The cultural struggle includes religion and sport and most human activities in one way or another.

**PM: Ok, getting back to applying a historical materialist approach to art, how do you explain the appeal of art from a long time ago? How does it communicate with us so powerfully?**

**MQ:** I'm not sure I really know the whole answer to that question – but I'll have a go.

Let's not forget that, generally speaking, it feels good for us, it's like food for the senses, the mind and the soul. It's pleasing because of its sensuous beauty and intellectual stimulation and its imaginative power, something about it connects pretty directly to our neurological make-up, our sense of movement and rhythm, our sense of beauty and order, our emotions, our intellect – our soul, for want of a better word. It's soul food.

It liberates us from selfishness and narrow-minded greed for material things, and for ourselves as individuals and our own little communities and our country, it dissolves barriers, making each other feel more fully

human, more empathetic, more connected. Who hasn't felt uplifted by Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*, or filled with compassion by one of Rembrandt's self-portraits, or awed by Blake's *The Tyger*, or horrified by Euripides' *Medea*?

So for those reasons it still appeals to us. And there is something in art that seems to express unchanging, timeless truths. So we are still moved by cave paintings, old songs, epic Greek theatre, Beethoven, Shakespeare, Rembrandt. Why? Marx said this:

“But the difficulty lies not in understanding that Greek art and epic poetry are bound up with certain forms of social development. The difficulty is that they still give us aesthetic pleasure and are in certain respects regarded as a standard and unattainable model.”<sup>5</sup>

And his answer was that art from the past was the “historical childhood” of humanity; we value it like we value the never-to-return phase of childhood. So the point is that the art of other times is rooted in its time but is also a moment of humanity, still capable of communicating meaning to us. Art is able both to reflect its time and to transcend it. But I have to be honest here, I'm not quite sure how the magic of great poetry and music and paintings is easy to feel and even to describe, but very hard to explain!

#### **PM: Is there a difference between the art of primitive societies and our kind of art?**

**MQ:** The artist in a primitive, unified society which is not class-divided expresses that society's collective vision and purpose, with skill and insight (eg cave paintings), and so makes the world easier to survive in, cope with, live fully in and to enjoy, for everyone.

However, artists in a society which has become class-divided and individualised by money and property are necessarily conflicted. On the one hand, they are expected by the ruling class to suppress themes of division and conflict and the avoidable sufferings of oppression and exploitation, and instead to produce spectacle, and diversionary entertainment, and thus help shape a world which is easier for the ruling class to exploit and rule – like the artists glorifying the British Empire that I mentioned before. On the other hand, the natural and best functions of good art are to communicate equally, to unite disparate individuals into social units, to enhance and develop the social, the collective, the cooperative. Class-based conflicts of meanings are as inevitable in art and culture generally as they are in our economic and political arrangements.

Thus art and progressive, emancipatory politics share a lot of things in common. There is a political struggle, an economic struggle, and a cultural struggle to make a better society, and art is part of that cultural struggle. I don't mean a narrowly defined kind of struggle where all that art is for is to illustrate placards for street demos. I mean the struggle to liberate our imaginations, enjoy our senses, enhance our understanding, develop empathy and compassion and care for each other.

We need to learn how to resist and oppose dominant meanings, and create new ones. We need to be creative and imaginative in order to build a more democratic, equal, and socialist society, a ‘new Jerusalem’, in the green and pleasant land not only of England, and not only of Britain, but of the world.

#### **Finally, what does this approach to ‘the cultural struggle’ mean in terms of the Left-Wing Programme outlined in Britain's Road to Socialism? What would a good arts and culture policy look like?**

Firstly, it would need to be acknowledged that culture has its basis in material reality, that cultural activities are socially constructed, like economic and political arrangements. It would need to be based on the same kind of understanding as Raymond Williams', that culture is rooted in and reflects the kind of society we live in. And that it includes most ordinary human activities – not just all the arts but also sport, TV, eating and drinking, religion and science.

These are all activities which give our lives meaning, value, enjoyment, enlightenment and entertainment. The way the concept of ‘culture’ itself has acquired such loaded, class-related meanings, so that many ordinary working people are suspicious of its exclusive and elitist connotations, is part of the problem of appropriation and privatisation of our cultural commons that we have to struggle against.

Culture cannot be understood, appreciated, criticised and changed, unless we make ourselves aware of the links between cultural activities – all the arts, sport, religion, science etc – and other social and economic structures and processes. We need to understand how culture functions in a society divided into a class of owners whose interests are opposed to the working class. Throughout history, societies generate cultures whose values generally reflect, reinforce, and legitimise the economic exploitation and political domination by the ruling classes – be they slave-owning, feudal, or capitalist – over slaves, serfs and workers.

A capitalist society will tend to produce a capitalist culture, which is individualist, stratified, commodified and exclusive. In any society which relies on the exploitation of labour power by capital, and the transfer of value from worker to owner, attempts will be made to shape artistic and cultural activities to legitimise and justify that exploitation.

Generally speaking, ruling elites will tend to patronise, finance and support strands of art and culture which help sustain their fundamentally exploitative project, and which exclude ordinary working people in various ways, for example through inaccessibility caused by cost, geography, or education.

It isn't just opera, a lot of theatre and classical music which tend to be exclusive. It isn't just that funding for education in the arts and cultural activities is being gradually withdrawn from the children of working people, making it virtually impossible for them to appreciate the arts and culture properly, as creators or consumers, unless they have rich relatives able to subsidise their education, training and practice.

And it isn't just that state arts funding is overwhelmingly skewed towards well-off metropolitan elites as consumers, and to the tourists who bring big profits to those same elites as owners of big business in the hotel, retail and leisure industries.

Consider how expensive football ticket prices are, making it impossible for workers' families to go together, and compare that with the experience of those in the

corporate boxes.

Look at how the food and drink we consume has been stuffed with salt and sugar and eagerly retailed by the big supermarkets, creating major health problems of obesity and addiction in the pursuit of private profit.

And look how the Christian religion has been turned away, at least in its dominant institutional formations, from a revolutionary creed which can empower the poor and end real, material exploitation and oppression. Instead, it has been manipulated by priestly hierarchies into an individualised and purely spiritual set of beliefs and practices which serve as an ideological prop for unjust social and economic arrangements.

Consider any of the arts and other cultural activities in relation to society and the economy, and the same pattern emerges of dominant strands of cultural activities appropriated, privatised, commercialised by owners and rulers, and of our class being excluded, ignored, silenced and stereotyped.

We need to struggle to get our cultural commons back. All cultural activities are necessary, liberating, enjoyable and developmental to us as social human beings. Culture is not a luxury! It is essential for our physical, mental and spiritual happiness and well-being. We simply cannot afford to allow it to be compromised and corrupted by capitalism.

Access to the cultural commons, to good quality, affordable culture, needs to be seen by the labour movement and the Labour Party as part of the social wage, on the same basis as schools, hospitals and housing. Imagine the outcry if all the best schools or the best hospitals were located in London – yet we tolerate massively unfair distribution of state subsidies to arts institutions in London.

That's why we need a radically different approach to arts and culture policy that recognises the importance of these activities for all of us. Such a policy would tackle financial, geographic, educational and class inequalities and barriers to access. It would be specifically targeted at poorer, disadvantaged and excluded social classes and communities, in order to help grow a common culture and thus help build a more equal and fairer society.

If the Bolsheviks in the early years of the Russian Revolution could manage to send agit-trains and agit-boats across Russia, taking films, plays, art and literature out to the masses, then surely Britain now, one of the richest countries on the planet, could afford even more radical and egalitarian initiatives.

A progressive, socialist government would reverse the massive inequalities in state funding for the arts, sport and other state-subsidised cultural activities across Britain today. It would tackle the elitism, cronyism, and hierarchical oppression of women, minority ethnic groups, and the disabled and LGBT communities, which disfigures so much modern culture.

It would provide leadership and a clear focus on promoting the common good, by all our cultural institutions in sport, religion, eating and drinking etc, as well as in all of the arts.

And finally, it would deliver a properly resourced integration of arts and cultural subjects into the education system.

Such a policy would truly be a culture policy for the many, not the few.

## ***I Saw A New World Being Assembled***

by Owen Gallagher

In the tenements  
there were workers  
who built dreams for others,

singers who got drunk  
on rebel songs,  
fighters who fought

for themselves  
in the workplace  
and lost every round.

All were in revolt  
against their masters  
one way or another.

I saw a new world  
being assembled  
in a sweatshop, dreamers,

singers, fighters, unfurled  
a union flag, voices  
were bolted and welded into one.

## **Acknowledgements**

Martin Hayes' poem, *as the poets write about the smell of their dead fathers' tweed jacket*, is from the *Culture Matters* website, at [www.culturematters.org.uk](http://www.culturematters.org.uk).

Owen Gallagher's poem, *I Saw A New World Being Assembled*, is from *On Fighting On, the Bread and Roses Poetry Anthology 2017*, available via the *Culture Matters* website.

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## Supporting the cultural struggle

In 2017 we celebrated the centenary of the Russian Revolution, a revolution which liberated the Russian population politically and economically, and also gave a massive boost to the arts and culture generally.

This creative explosion occurred across all the arts, in painting, film, theatre, ballet, poetry, children's literature, music and many more popular cultural pursuits including sport and science, theatre and theology, fashion and clothing. It was accompanied by a massive improvement in the ability and willingness of working people to enjoy the arts and other cultural activities.

Progressive educational policies were linked to bold, imaginative attempts to connect the masses to culture. There has never been in human history, before or since, such a conscious and successful attempt to overthrow elite culture and replace it with cultural activities which were much more accessible, meaningful, and relevant to ordinary workers and peasants. The Revolution strengthened the capacity and confidence of art and artists, and the general public, to overcome class divisions, and creatively to imagine radically different alternatives to the world.

In the current struggles that we face to democratise culture, to make it work for the benefit of the many and not the few, the example of the Russian Revolution is like a beacon of inspiration. For a hundred years, across the globe and across all areas of human cultural and artistic activity, it has inspired visions of how the world could be made better. The most lasting positive influence of the Revolution lies in our ability to make changes in the here and now.

And that, essentially, is the mission of *Culture Matters* and we need additional human and financial support from readers of *CR*, to realise all our projects.

We believe that culture should be for the many, not the few. Class-based divisions in society constrain, prevent and spoil our enjoyment of all the cultural activities which we need to enjoy life and be fully human. Access to and enjoyment of good quality, meaningful and affordable culture is becoming increasingly difficult for working people.

Evidence of this includes:

- the large cuts to provision across the country; libraries, artistic institutions and sports and recreation facilities have all suffered from the government's austerity policies.
- cuts to the arts and humanities in primary and secondary schools and in all forms of adult education; these have lessened the chances of appreciation and enjoyment of culture by most people, either as producers or consumers.
- a huge class-based differential in state subsidy for culture, which generally benefits the better off, particularly in the London area.
- increasing costs of access for consumers of art and culture from the working class (eg ticket prices for football matches and music festivals).
- the historical and ongoing appropriation of religious and spiritual activities by ruling elites;

- decreasing chances of access to careers for aspiring artists/performers/musicians from the working class.

This situation impacts heavily and disproportionately on the lives of working people, whose 'social wage' includes the entertainment, pleasures and satisfactions available through cultural activities. Just as austerity policies are having an unequal adverse economic effect on the less well-off and working people generally, so they are having an unequal effect on arts and cultural provision.

A 'cultural struggle' – or "mental fight", as Blake called it – is necessary to go alongside our economic and political struggles, to defend and expand the cultural commons for the benefit of the many, not the few.

*Culture Matters* has therefore developed a number of operations to help contribute towards that struggle. They include:

- a web platform, [www.culturematters.org.uk](http://www.culturematters.org.uk), which publishes creative and critical material such as articles, poems, essays and images. We hope readers of *CR* visit and enjoy the site, and we welcome your contributions
- a publishing operation, which publishes political poetry and other material as booklets and ebooks. If you have publishable creative or critical material (poems, images, stories, essays etc.), which fits with our mission, please get in touch. We are particularly interested in publishing radical children's literature.
- arts awards, which we run in partnership with trades unions. Currently we run a Bread and Roses Poetry Award with Unite, and a Bread and Roses Songwriting and Spoken Word Award with the Communication Workers Union. The purpose of the Awards is to create spaces for grassroots creative expression by working people, and to nudge the arts world towards more fairness and relevance for working people
- cultural education material. We have developed and delivered educational and training materials for use in different contexts for trade union members. They cover a range of issues around politics, arts and culture, and can be delivered as standalone sessions or integrated into existing courses.

All the projects we have developed so far have been successful, which shows there is a real need and demand for the work we do. However, we are severely constrained by a lack of human and financial resources.

We need volunteers to help maintain our projects and develop new ones. Please get in touch at [info@culturematters.org.uk](mailto:info@culturematters.org.uk) if you want to join us in the "mental fight" for a socialist society.

We also need financial support, to sustain and develop our projects. Please give consideration to purchasing one or more shares, individually or as a branch of your organisation. They can be purchased online at <http://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/shop-support> or by post, using the application form available on request from [info@culturematters.org.uk](mailto:info@culturematters.org.uk)

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