

SEX, GENDER, CLASS AND IDENTITY

Mary Davis | Trish Lavelle | Susan Michie
| Jo Stevenson | Deirdre O'Neill

TWO BLOGS ON KEYNESIAN ECONOMICS

Michael Roberts

KARL MARX'S ECOSOCIALISM

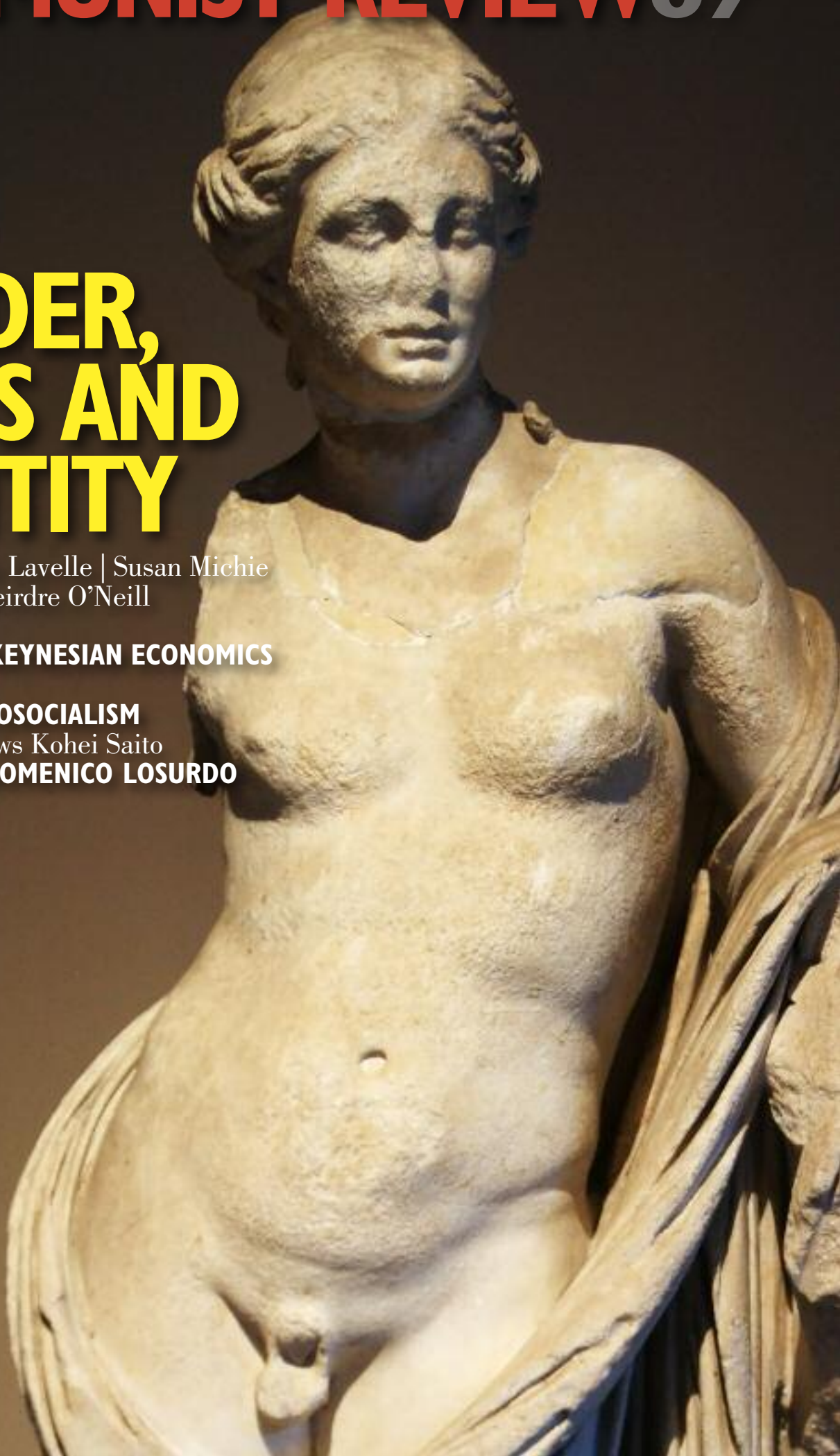
Martin Levy reviews Kohei Saito

REMEMBERING DOMENICO LOSURDO

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Statue of Hermaphroditus, Marble, Pergamum, Hellenistic style, 3rd ct. BC. Istanbul Archaeological Museums
Wikimedia

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MARTIN LEVY

EDITORIAL



KARL MARX'S favourite motto, "Question everything", was found in his "Confession", a family parlour game that was very popular in mid-nineteenth century Britain. Less well-known is his favourite maxim, from the same source: "I consider that nothing human is alien to me."¹

While the "Confession" was intended to be entertaining, there is no basis for believing that Marx was not serious with these statements. From the wide range of his reading, he would have been familiar with the origin of both. The first is generally ascribed to the French philosopher, physicist and materialist René Descartes, about whom Marx wrote in *The Holy Family*; while the latter, originally from the Roman playwright Terence, was adopted by Feuerbach for his *Principles of the Philosophy of the Future*.²

It is worth bearing in mind these perspectives of Marx when considering the current debate on sex, gender and identity - commonly called the 'trans' debate. 'Trans' can mean transgender, transsexual or both. Transgender people have a gender identity that differs from their assigned sex, based on their anatomy; transsexual people desire permanently to transition to the gender with which they identify, often seeking medical assistance; intersex people are born with sex characteristics that do not fit the simple binary notion of male and female bodies.³ All have habitually been subjected to terrible bigotry, abuse, bullying and discrimination, and commonly suffer mental health problems.

Given the state of scientific knowledge, and of social mores, in the nineteenth century, Marx and Engels cannot be blamed for not having discussed 'trans' issues. But it is certainly within the framework of historical materialism, and in particular of Engels' *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, that gendered roles and behaviours are a social construct; while a dialectical approach to both gender and sex allows for the 'interpenetration of opposites', ie for people who are transgender, transsexual or intersex.

The current public debate arises from the Government's plan to amend the provisions of the Gender Equality Act. Feelings have run high, and the debate has not always been conducted with civility and respect.

Why does the issue matter for communists, the left and the labour movement? Because it is class, not identity, which is at the heart of the contradictions in capitalist society, and working class unity is essential if the struggle for socialism is to be successful. However, that unity can't be built if any section of the working class is subjected to

prejudice and discrimination, or indeed oppression. It has long been recognised by Marxists that women and black people are oppressed under capitalism, and need to self-organise. One of the theoretical questions is whether trans people are oppressed as well as discriminated against.

Our mini-feature here follows a discussion at the Communist Party's Executive Committee in May. The articles by Mary Davis and Trish Lavelle were among those considered by the Executive. The contributions by Susan Michie and Jo Stevenson were subsequently invited, and the article by Deirdre O'Neill appeared on *Medium* at just the right time for us to be able to request its inclusion in *CR*.

A second focus of this issue of *CR* is political economy. In the first of two republished blogs, Michael Roberts raises concerns about the preference for Keynesian solutions among advisors to the Labour leadership. Although that's an improvement over neoliberalism, Michael argues that Keynes's ideas were far from radical and would not prevent another global financial crisis. In the second blog, he takes apart claims that China's weathering of the Great Recession starting in 2008 has been due to Keynesian policies. No, he says, it was actually socialised state investment in the economy.

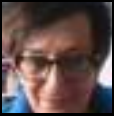
In the following article, part of the Marx bicentenary theme, I deal at length with Kohei Saito's recent book, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism*. Saito maintains that it is not possible to comprehend the full scope of Marx's critique of political economy if the ecological dimension is ignored.

Our last edition published extracts from a recent book by Italian communist philosopher Domenico Losurdo. The tragic news of his passing reached us just as the journal had gone to press. To pay an adequate tribute, we print here a translation of the eulogy given not long after his death, at the Congress of the Italian Communist Party.

CR89 is completed by a letter to the editor, Mike Quille's Soul Food column, and a new artistic feature on the back page, this time presenting graphics by designer and activist Chris Bird.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1865/04/01.htm>.
- 2 I Fraser and L Wilde, *The Marx Dictionary*, Continuum, London, 2011, p 116.
- 3 United Nations Human Rights Commission, *Free & Equal: Intersex Fact Sheet*, 2015; online at https://unfe.org/system/unfe-65-Intersex_Factsheet_ENGLISH.pdf.



Mary Davis



Susan Michie



Trish Lavelle

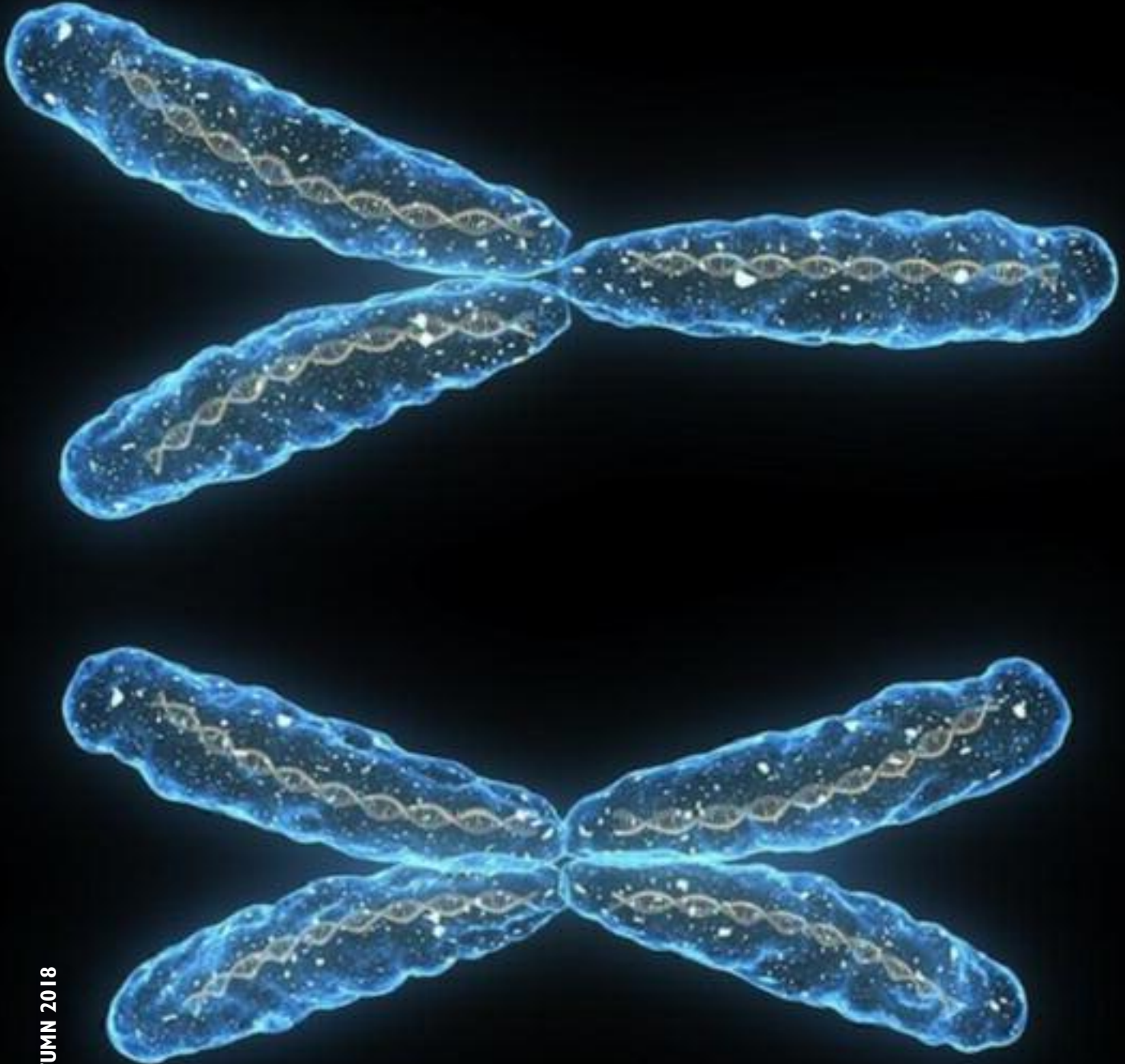


Jo Stevenson



Deirdre O'Neill

SEX, GENDER, CLASS AND IDENTITY



‘Oppression is the most important means of maintaining the class relations which support class exploitation; and, as such, oppression is a function of class society as well as being a product of it. This is because oppression, unlike discrimination, is linked materially to the process of class exploitation as well as operating at “superstructural” level through oppressive ideologies which serve to maintain class rule by dividing the exploited.’

MARY DAVIS THE GENDER IDENTITY DEBATE

THE GENDER identity question is a fractious and controversial issue. Clearly there are different sides and many nuances within this debate, one which is often beset by a wave of intolerance that not only clouds the subject but, from a Marxist perspective, diverts us from objective substantive analysis. Within the Labour Party and most trade unions, an uncritical stance on ‘self-identity’ has been adopted with little or no democratic debate whatsoever. This continues to have profound repercussions on the status of women, for example the challenge to all-women shortlists, the position of women officers in CLPs, the criticism of women-only spaces and the general undermining of the basic reality of women as a sex ‘per se’. We are now denoted as ‘cis’ or AFAB (assigned female at birth). This approach is not challenged by many with leading positions in the labour movement – their support for the ‘self-identity’ cause is based on moralism, certainly not rationalism, much less Marxist class analysis. Apparently, in a belated act of contrition atoning for the labour movement’s tardiness in acknowledging many other forms of discrimination, our movement has now jumped on the Tory-inspired transgender ‘self-identity’ bandwagon. There is nothing wrong with self-identity in principle, provided it does not impinge on the rights of others; in this case women. Moralism aside, as communists we need to analyse the question more fundamentally and, based on such an analysis, the Communist Party must formulate policy for which the movement eagerly awaits.

The essence of the problem is a failure to understand two underlying issues. Firstly there is a confusion between biological sex and gender; and secondly, more fundamentally, there is failure to understand the difference between oppression and discrimination. I want to concentrate on the latter. But first, some thoughts on sex and gender.

There are those who argue that the sex/gender divide is just a socio-political construct. Certainly this is not true for those individuals with gender dysphoria where there is a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender identity. It is also the case that class society has nurtured

an ideology of femininity and masculinity which nurtures gender stereotypes and thus fits the profit motive rather than peoples’ lived experience. But all of this does not invalidate the fact that the vast majority of humans (unhelpfully labelled ‘cis’) do not experience a mismatch between their biological sex and their gender. This does not mean that all is well for women who are, by virtue of both sex and gender, historically and currently oppressed in patriarchal class societies.

Oppression is the most important means of maintaining the class relations which support class exploitation; and, as such, oppression is a function of class society as well as being a product of it. This is because oppression, unlike discrimination, is linked materially to the process of class exploitation as well as operating at ‘superstructural’ level through oppressive ideologies which serve to maintain class rule by dividing the exploited.

Thus oppression operates at two levels. Firstly, at the material level, the fact of oppression is responsible for the superexploitation of the oppressed at the point of production. Historically, an inbuilt inequality within the labour force, expressing itself through low wages and job segregation, has reproduced itself as the normal process when workers sell their labour power. Its victims are the most easily identifiable workers – women and black people. All indices of wage rates nationally and internationally show that the wages of women and black people are lower than those of white males. This fact operates to the material advantage of the owners of the means of production – the capitalists – for whom any increase in profit is dependent on an increase in the rate of exploitation.

The fact of class exploitation (and superexploitation in the case of the oppressed) as the central pillar of the capitalist mode of production does not in itself explain how the relations of production are maintained and reproduced. This can only be understood by examining factors which exist outside the economic relations of production through the operations of ideologies – racism and sexism. These ideologies can be seen to have a direct material connection to the maintenance of capitalist relations of production in two important ways. Firstly, they are connected to the necessity of capital to maintain profit by pushing the value of labour power to its lowest possible limit. Secondly, the ideologies of racism and sexism are the chief non-coercive means of preventing the unity of the working class and thereby facilitating the perpetuation of the domination of the minority class over

the majority. So, oppression in its material and ideological form is a fundamental prerequisite of capitalist society because it is the most important means of maintaining the relations of production. Thus it remains an integral function of capitalism to oppress women and black people in order to maintain its existence by dividing the working class, exploiting all, but superexploiting the oppressed.

Discrimination, which is undoubtedly experienced by, among others, transgender people, stands in a different relation to capitalism. Discrimination is not a function of capitalism in the same way as oppression, but it is certainly a by-product of an unequal and intolerant society and as such must be challenged.

Challenging all forms of discrimination is vitally important. However, this cannot be accomplished by rejecting the theories and movements which have enabled the oppressed to fight back – feminism and anti-racism. To dismiss these struggles serves only to perpetuate disunity and generates further division within the working class. Unfortunately there is a small section of the transgender movement which does precisely this. They castigate and harass feminists as ‘TERFs’ (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminists) and seek to both oppose and invade women’s ‘spaces’. This is inimical, presumptive and insulting. In seeking to deny women’s rights as women, such action by a small transgender minority wilfully fails to recognise the long history of the battle for women’s equality and the fact that this battle continues today. Communists should understand that women’s oppression persists – manifesting itself in unequal pay, pensions, representation etc. We must oppose those who abandon the fight for women’s rights, impelled as they are, by their misplaced rejection of the very notion of womanhood – the lived experience of being a woman. To go down this path plays into the hands of those who rule and thereby undermines our potential collective strength as women and men.

In this respect we should not be fooled by the Tory advocacy of the forthcoming amendment to the Gender Recognition Act, which now has all-party support. Once passed it will enact the principle of gender ‘self-identity’ (*ie* you are the gender you say you are). The Tories are championing this not because they care about equality or this issue as such, but because it gives a pseudo-progressive spin to their long cherished goal of undermining class politics. Self-identity is the ideological extension of identity politics, which, by definition is the enemy of collective action based on group or class collective struggle. Despite its limitations (as compared to class politics), the now rejected concept of equal rights did at least recognise collective rather than individual solutions. Identity politics encourages the opposite: it assumes that individual differences outweigh any group identity, and in doing so it masks and rejects the reality of centuries of discrimination and oppression based on our most noticeable differences – our sex and our skin colour. We, however, in rejecting a theory which poses no real solution to prejudice, much less oppression, should show our hostility to transgender discrimination, not by using Tory divide and rule ideology, but by building unity and fighting collectively, against all forms of intolerance, injustice and downright bigotry.

TRISH LAVELLE

GENDER IS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT

OVER THE past six months we have witnessed an explosion in liberal identity politics influencing political opinion across the left and particularly within parts of Momentum and the Labour Party. In August 2017 the Tory Government commenced a consultation on the Gender Recognition Act and in particular outlined the intention of relaxing the current rules around gender ‘self-ID’ for transsexual people to make it an easier and less invasive process than the current ‘medical’ model that many trans people find challenging and excluding.

As communists dealing with material realities, we recognise that gender is of course a social construct. It is biological sex and class which is at the root of the oppression of women. And working class women are oppressed, discriminated against and disadvantaged as a result of their sex and class, not their gender.

However, identity politics decrees that gender is a feeling, a state of mind and that merely saying that you are a woman is all that is required for society to recognise and treat you as such. Indeed any deviation from the mantra, ‘Trans women are women’, will at the very least result in the ‘offender’ being publicly branded a transphobe or a TERF (Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist). At worst it can (and has) resulted in individuals being reported to their political party, the police, their trade union or their employer and accused of hate speech or bigotry for stating a material biological fact.

The impact of this modern day McCarthyism has been increasingly to drive this important debate underground and to create a climate of toxicity, fear and suspicion. Informed debate and respectful disagreement are part of the lifeblood of our movement; and the right to disagree profoundly with your comrades and to offer a counter-view in a well-run debate is what makes our Party vibrant and progressive. Therefore the silencing of large numbers of (mostly) women is not an acceptable way to conduct this debate. Nor is it the best way to address the very real issues of how society can better accept, support and include trans people.

Communists have on occasion in the past been perceived to be slow to adapt to changes in social attitudes towards the LGBT community, and have at times been considered less than accepting of the introduction of rights and protections for LGBT people. However, it remains important that the instinct to support a very disadvantaged and vulnerable group does not cause us to neglect a complete and thorough class-based and critical analysis of the situation. Other parties of the left and some trade unions have rushed to adopt pro-‘self-ID’ policies, which are very well-meaning, and based on compassion for a group of people who suffer disadvantages and who clearly need support and protection. However, this has not been done with any real examination of the impact of ‘self-ID’ on women and girls, on our ability to collect meaningful data on women and girls, on their protections and rights and crucially on their access to women-only spaces. Instead we have a deeply complex issue with significant potential consequences for society, and

SUSAN MICHIE

IDENTITY POLITICS AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIALISM

A COMMENTARY ON THE DEBATE ABOUT PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE GENDER RECOGNITION ACT

THIS ARTICLE examines the current debate about changes to the Gender Recognition Act 2004 (GRA) from two personal perspectives: as a Marxist feminist and as a clinical psychologist with many years' experience working with transgender people. My aim is to promote a better understanding of the substantive issues and reasons for differences of opinion, and to help find a more unified way forward.

From the outset, I hope everyone can agree that the sometimes intemperate manner in which views have been expressed on all sides is counterproductive. It weakens the cause of achieving equality, diversity and inclusion for all in our class-divided society, undermines the power of the socialist, labour and feminist movements to challenge discrimination and exploitation that is fuelled by the capitalist system, and causes unnecessary distress and alienation.

This article will consider issues around sex and gender. Then it will summarise the proposed changes to the GRA, examine controversial aspects of the proposed changes and outline a way forward aimed at unifying diverse interests and strengthening the hands of those of us who want to end discrimination and oppression in our society. It will draw on dialectical materialism, a Marxist tool for analysing phenomena. This includes looking below the surface to seek to understand complexity and contradictions. A tenet of Marxist philosophy is that everything exists within a complex system of changing and interacting factors, so that any change may give rise to unintended, as well as intended, consequences. Things that may appear contradictory at one level may not be so at a deeper level, and vice versa. Attempting to consider 'the whole' by jointly considering different perspectives and interests helps in a rich analysis that is a sound basis for pointing the desirable direction of travel to shared ends of justice, equality and humanity.

SEX AND GENDER

Both biological sex and gender identity are complex. There are many dimensions and layers to both that interact with each other and the social and material world around them; these interactions change over time and are expressed in each individual's experience, comprising their thoughts, emotions and behaviours.

Biological sex is not binary. There are many people with a chromosomal make-up that is neither XX (female) nor XY (male). There are forms of genitalia that cannot be characterised as female or male (in these situations, the sex recorded on birth certificates may be arbitrary); neonatal surgeons are often called upon to 'decide' on the sex of intersex babies on the spot, and this is often

one which requires serious thought and consideration, reduced to an over-simplified emotive confrontation, conducted largely (and unhelpfully) on social media. How then do we as communists ensure that, where people have serious and important questions to pose about the impact on women of possible changes to the Gender Recognition Act, they can feel that their concerns are heard, understood and not dismissed out of hand?

Firstly, it is unarguably a fact that trans people suffer high levels of discrimination and disadvantage in society; and secondly, it is also an unarguable fact that women remain superexploited, discriminated against, disadvantaged and under-represented in society. Logically we can therefore accept that both require and are entitled to specific protections and support to counter the conditions and circumstances that lead to this situation. Defining what those protections and support should look like can surely be our starting point. And those definitions can only be achieved through a considered and inclusive discussion with representatives of both sides of the debate. Crucially we need to consider very carefully whether a measure that is designed to support one person may have an unintended consequence that potentially disadvantages the other. And we should be prepared to accept that changing the way we define half the population should not be driven through without a proper examination of its impact. Perhaps we also have to consider that women have rights and trans people have rights and that sometimes those rights will be the same, sometimes they will diverge and sometimes they may even conflict. Only by applying this logic can we begin to influence good, workable policy solutions that win the support of all concerned as well as wider society. Certainly, there is a potential for conflict, but there will always be conflicts of interest during times of change and the Party has had to consider potential conflicts in the past between young and old people, different groups of workers, and religious belief and freedoms versus LGBT and women's rights.

It has to be said that this bitter and damaging row has all the hallmarks of an orchestrated attempt to divide the left of the labour movement. We should question who benefits most from this division, which is being well publicised by the capitalist media and certainly used to undermine the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn. It is incumbent on policy-makers on the left, in trade unions and the Labour Party to work to resolve these potential conflicts without resorting to 'no platforming', name-calling and the silencing of debate. No-one should be fearful of speaking up, offering an opinion and asking questions or feel the need to meet in secret.

So, as communists we are very clear that this cannot be presented as a choice between women's rights or trans rights. We recognise that both groups require specific legal support, recognition and protections, which may be different and separate. We support the introduction of appropriate rights and protections for trans people. We call on the labour movement to carry out a full and proper analysis of how trans rights can be extended whilst maintaining the separate and vital rights and protections for women and girls. We condemn unreservedly the 'no-platforming', abuse and silencing of women activists in this debate. We support and encourage informed and respectful debate based firmly on class solidarity and critical analysis and the development of a workable legal framework of rights and protections for all. We reject the class divisions that arise from liberal identity politics and call instead for Marxist analysis to underpin our struggle against capitalism.

gender-biased, eg small ‘penises’ were labelled clitori. Those who are chromosomally XX or XY show a wide range of expression of their DNA content (turning on and off the appropriate genes as tissues and organs develop), and in that sense we are all mosaics. The development of both male and female characteristics is not only dependent on the combination of X and Y chromosomes that people receive from their parents (eg XX, XY, XXY, XYY), but also on the interactions of these chromosomes with a host of genes on other chromosomes. The ways that XX and XY express themselves hormonally varies enormously.

Intersex people are born with a wide range of variations in sex characteristics, including chromosomes, gonads, sex hormones, or genitals that, according to the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, “do not fit the typical definitions for male or female bodies”. Even those of us who do fit the typical definitions of male or female bodies are mixtures of chromosomes, genes and hormones that put us anywhere along a distribution from biologically definitely male to biologically definitely female.

Gender identity is no less complex, with some people ‘feeling’ themselves to be a woman or a man despite this being inconsistent with the sex recorded on their birth certificate. Lucky are those whose gender identity coincides with their birth certificate record. For others, there is often a childhood, adolescence and even adulthood of turmoil, unhappiness, shame and confusion whilst people try to come to terms with feeling different from the identity assigned to them.

A trans man I knew in my professional role told me that his first memory was of being asked by his aunt what he wanted for his 5th birthday, and saying that he wanted never to wear a dress again. Whilst it is not uncommon for women and girls to dislike wearing dresses, his visceral reaction was just one small part of a much deeper disconnect between his biological sex and gender identity. He had almost 30 years of depression and suicidality before he saw a clinical psychologist to help deal with accumulated traumas.

THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE GENDER RECOGNITION ACT

There is broad agreement within the labour and progressive movement that the current GRA enabling transgender people to change their sex/gender on their birth certificate is inhumane because of its medicalised, quasi-judicial application process, and that it needs to be changed. The Act requires people to submit intrusive psychiatric evidence to a tribunal panel, reinforcing the assumption that being trans is a mental illness. This may be required years after they have transitioned, with no right of appeal if their application is rejected. The process of changing the birth certificate is expensive, long and complex.

It should be noted that this only applies to birth certificates – currently all UK identity documents can already be changed on a self-declaration basis when a trans person starts living permanently in their gender identity. This includes passports, driving licences, medical records, bank accounts and employment records. The proposed change is to bring birth certificates into line with other records.

The current situation results in many trans people not

applying for gender recognition which means their birth certificate does not match their other identity documents, which can cause a host of problems around pensions, insurance and prejudice and discrimination from employers and service providers.

What is being proposed is to replace the psychiatric diagnosis requirement with a self-declaration procedure, as already applies to identity documents such as passports and driving licences. This would not involve a court or tribunal decision and would not require a trans person to prove they have already lived a long time in their gender identity. It should be noted that self-declaration procedures for changing gender have been working smoothly for over 40 years, with no evidence of misuse for other identity documents – there is no reason to believe that this would be any different if the procedure for changing birth certificates was brought into line with all other identity documents.

THE CONTROVERSIAL ASPECTS OF THE PROPOSED CHANGES TO THE GRA

Controversies amongst feminist circles and within the progressive and labour movement have reflected several deep concerns.

One is that transgender people self-identifying – ‘only having to fill out a form’ – might mean that they chop and change as it suits them. However, the proposed GRA reform would not permit anyone to ‘flip-flop’ legal genders across different situations or days. The self-declaration process is a statutory declaration of the intention to live permanently in their gender identity.

A second concern is the perceived danger of trans women being in women-only spaces. However, trans people, regardless of stage of transition, have always been legally able to use whichever toilet they wish in the UK without showing any identity, birth certificate or other. Women-only shelters and safe spaces have risk-management and safeguarding policies in place which are applied to all users. Possession of a gender recognition certificate does not circumvent these risk-management procedures. Case-by-case assessments and individualised safeguarding plans are already commonplace in such spaces; and the acceptance of trans women in these spaces is as vital to their safety as it is for all women. In the case of post-traumatic stress, it is better to treat triggers individually, and make allowances for sufferers whose condition might be triggered by the presence of a trans woman, than to make a blanket ban on trans women who are just as deserving of a safe space. It is already the standard to cater to individual triggers on case-by-case bases.

A third issue of concern is all-women shortlists, which were created by the labour movement in recognition that men have an advantage over women within our capitalist, patriarchal society, and that the playing field is far from even when it comes to elections, as in other areas of our society. Sex is not the only protected characteristic that disadvantages women in the political arena – so does class, ethnicity, gender reassignment and disability. There are no transgender Members of Parliament and there are only two transgender Labour councillors in the UK. Just as we should support measures to increase ethnic minority and working class political representation, so too we should support the inclusion of trans women on all-women

shortlists. To argue that there be an automatic exclusion of trans women from all-women shortlists is to misgender trans people and invalidate their identity and experiences.

Generally, we need to recognise that a change designed to support one social group may have unintended consequence that potentially disadvantages another. This recognition allows disadvantages to be predicted and considered, and measures put into place to mitigate them. Having said this, the countries with self-declaration procedures for gender recognition (Argentina, Denmark, Ireland, Malta, Norway and Colombia) have reported no negative consequences of implementation, neither in terms of single-sex service providers nor in terms of criminal justice. Both sex and gender reassignment are protected characteristics enshrined by the Equality Act (2010), and the proposed reforms to the GRA do not undermine the protections afforded by that legislation.

Suggestions that trans people's rights and women's rights are opposed to each other and that trans equality puts women's safety at risk are not supported by evidence. However unintended, they contribute to discrimination and prejudice against trans people, and weaken the struggle for their rights. It also diverts time, attention and energy away from other urgent debates and campaigns facing working people across the UK and the world.

As in many areas, Scotland has shown unity and leadership on the question of the GRA reform. In a joint statement, Scotland's seven national women's equality organisations – Close the Gap, Engender, Equate Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, Women 50:50 and Zero Tolerance – have said:

“We do not regard trans equality and women's equality to be in competition or contradiction with each other. We support the Equal Recognition campaign and welcome the reform of the Gender Recognition Act. Rape Crisis and Women's Aid in Scotland provide trans inclusive services on the basis of self-identification.”¹

Likewise, trade unions such as Unite, Unison, GMB and PCS have all passed resolutions reaffirming their support for both trans rights and women's rights.

A SUGGESTED WAY FORWARD

Much of the opposition to the proposed GRA seems arise from viewing the issue through the lens of one disadvantaged group rather than having a class-based approach that can appreciate where groups' interests and rights fit in with the overall picture of securing gains for working people, across sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnic group, religion and age. This strain of what some have called 'identity politics' seeks to create a competitive “hierarchy of oppression” rather than being a political outlook based on mutual solidarity between groups who are discriminated against and/or oppressed. Suggesting or fearing that trans rights and women's rights come into conflict is not logical. Transgender women want the rights afforded to women; transgender men want the rights afforded to men. Suggesting they are in conflict is to imply that transgender women aren't real women – a view that surely no-one on the left would want to be associated

with. It is an echo of the past discourse that gay and lesbian people wanted some unspecified 'special' extra rights, when all they wanted were the rights afforded to heterosexuals.

Those who benefit from divisions are those seeking to further divide-and-rule, one of the age-old weapons of the capitalist class to prevent unity amongst those challenging its power. Just as we should reject playing off women vs men, black vs white, straight vs gay, we should reject the narrative of women's rights being in conflict with trans people's rights, whilst recognising legitimate anxieties that need to be addressed. However, solutions that support the rights of all and foster unity will most speedily and effectively be achieved by informed, analytic, and respectful debate. Marxists have historically understood the risks of dividing class consciousness by liberal identity politics, whilst recognising the importance of identity in the transformation of society. It is important that this approach be applied to the GRA debate.

My four propositions are as follows. We should:

1. Strongly affirm our support, solidarity and commitment to tackle discrimination and harassment of women and all other victimised and/or marginalised groups in society, including trans people.
2. Welcome calls for the Gender Recognition Act 2004 to be updated in line with international human rights best practice. This would base the legal process of gender recognition on the declaration of the individual concerned, rather than a person's gender being 'judged' by a panel of medical and legal 'experts', as it is now. This would bring the process for updating birth certificates in line with the current process for updating every other UK identity document.
3. Ensure that any potential problems arising from the changes, for transgender people or for others, are monitored and reviewed.
4. Support respectful debate and a class analysis in discussing this and other issues of social justice in our society which can be used by the Establishment to sow divisions and prevent us showing the humanity and strategic thinking that lie at the heart of our movement.

I would like to conclude by stressing the need for unity, recognising the tendency of the socialist, Left and progressive movements throughout history of paving the way on issues of social justice. Just as a London group of lesbian and gay people joined forces with a Welsh pit village to support the miner's strike, the Left is at its strongest when it overcomes identity-based divisions to focus on our shared class struggle. We should approach the question of fighting for the rights of trans people in the same way that we have done for other excluded groups throughout history. Maximisation of human potential, equality for minorities and celebration of diversity are socialist principles. We must continue to lead the way, opening the road for human progress, so that future generations can thank us for building a more tolerant, inclusive and equal society.

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JO STEVENSON

WHAT ARE SOCIALISTS TO MAKE ABOUT THE RADICAL FEMINIST DEBATE ABOUT GENDER SELF-IDENTITY?

INTRODUCTION

GENDER RECOGNITION has been with us since the first UK Act of Parliament in 2004, and recent high-profile controversy has seemed focused mainly on the rights contained in these existing laws. Yet only this summer the Government launched a wide civil society consultation, which is to look at everything, in a favourable assessment of the essential nature of self-definition instead of medical determination.

But this does not lean one way or another and, in opening-up the debate in the manner it has been, the Tories aim to serve capitalism. The mainstream media have collaborated by exacerbating fears, all the better to reinforce hard-line neo-liberal politics. Our enemy hasn't adopted a soft stance on this issue but their vagueness furthers capitalism's categorisation of workers by race, age, or gender. In all this, what is gender? One thing is sure – it's not class.

Nor are we talking about a significant number of people. A Home Office-funded study estimated the number of trans people in the UK to be 300,000-500,000, defined as “a large reservoir of transgender people who experience some degree of gender variance”.¹ One study found that only 0.1 percent of the UK population was transgender, defined as those individuals who underwent a sex change, as opposed to those who merely identified as trans. This is out of a total of 31 million men and 32.2 million women in the UK.

Let's ask ourselves why this is an issue; when did it arise? The campaign to elect Donald Trump suddenly saw the trans issue pushed into the limelight. Radical feminists and the religious right found common ground in the US, pushing the argument that access to women's toilets by trans women should not be permitted. Trump retreated to the argument about trans service persons but by this time the 'restroom' argument had been exported to Britain. The British mainstream media are now spinning this for all it is worth. We should not allow this divisive and imported tool to separate us, especially if it cuts the women's movement off from the LGBT community.

THEORETICAL ARGUMENTS

When labour exploitation has discrimination added to it, it becomes oppression. When discrimination has no labour exploitation it is discrimination. Arguments that women and blacks are not just discriminated but

oppressed, or superexploited, have been brought into the debate. Discrimination is obviously morally unjust but being oppressed via your labour power being more greatly exploited because of your identity transforms discrimination into oppression. Capitalism will exploit anything, whether nationality, ethnicity, religion, bodily shape, blue eyes versus brown eyes, if it provides a profit and can help entrench division in the working class.

There are also arguments that individual personal consciousness may be related to this in the same way that the core economic structures underlying our society can be ignored at the expense of diversions related to ideological, religious, or moral notions.

But personal views about biology count for little in a world where genetics determines the weird and wonderful operation of the gender spectrum. It is now certain that genes have a major influence on shaping sex identity and gender identity, which are not the same thing. The consensus in medical science is that humans – and that includes children – should be assigned to their chromosomal sex regardless of anatomical variations and differences, whilst the option of switching later in life should be kept. Yet this is still largely not happening, it being a case more of what the infant sexual organs look like on the outside.

WHAT IS A WOMAN?

What is the core part of the identity of being a woman? Breasts have come into the picture but women can lose them, and heterosexual men can acquire them due to alteration in the balance of hormones in the body, whether natural or artificial. It's the sexualising of breasts, arguably a by-product of the advertising world, especially to small girls, and the commodification of breast implants, that changes the mere notion that breasts are a human condition, not strictly a gender condition.

Do we say to a woman who has undergone a double mastectomy, “You don't have boobs, you don't look like a woman, therefore you are not a woman”? Or, no, we don't because she was born with ovaries? So, what about a woman who is genetically female and who was not born with ovaries but has undergone full physical gender reassignment? What about one who hasn't? Female reproductive organs include the vagina, ovaries, uterus, and cervix; it is possible to be born with or without any of these features yet be accepted as genetically a girl.

Do people also judge trans women as being 'proper' women by degrees of how their physique matches society's accepted parameters for body 'curviness' or gracile faces? The impact is the same, if not worse. It's still sexist, even if you are a woman.

Hermaphroditism, known by medical science as ovotesticular disorder of sex development, is a medical term for an intersex condition in which an individual is born with ovarian and testicular tissue, whereby commonly one or both gonads contains both types of tissue. Boy or girl? What about the removal of ovaries, even if the menopause doesn't apply, which requires hormone replacement therapy (HRT) to stabilise the balance? Actually, HRT for trans people uses cross-sex hormones to cause the development of secondary sex characteristics of the desired sex. Physical changes occur within a few months, and they become increasingly difficult to reverse, the longer the treatment is continued.

Trans people can stay on HRT indefinitely to maintain their hormone levels in the target range for their acquired gender.

The argument that a definition of being a woman is having ‘women’s bits’ from birth is clearly misplaced and rather ignores the fact that nature moulds human sex organs from a common ‘clay’ and that apart from the core ‘mechanical’ function, array, and disposition, male and female organs are at the core remarkably similar in structure. The fact that science is now beginning to be able to resolve some of these conditions where it is needed to ease psychological pain by restructuring the ‘clay’ more easily means that gender assignment has become available to be used as a political football.

EASTERN DIVERSITY

Humanity has always had terms for third genders – today they come from India, Thailand, Polynesia, Melanesia, Native America, western Africa and elsewhere. It was in fact concern over a variation from the binary sex system that set the Western world during the 19th century down the path of making male homosexuality illegal. And it was ‘Christian’ imperialism that insisted on eliminating the very notion of a third sex. Paintings and carvings in ancient Indian temples revolted Victorian Britain, which could not grasp ideas about the relationship between spirituality and sexuality.

India’s trans women community, or Hijra, has been a part of the subcontinent for about as long as civilisation has. With a recorded history of over 4,000 years and being mentioned in ancient texts, the Hijra community is a testament to the sexual diversity that is integral yet often forgotten in history.

Fa’afafine are people who identify themselves as a third gender in traditional Samoan society. Though assigned male at birth, they explicitly embody both masculine and feminine gender traits, in the manner these are expressed locally, often in a spectrum of presentations, and adopt various forms of sexual relationships with both men and women.

Modern indigenous North Americans describe gay, lesbian, bisexual and gender-variant individuals as ‘Two Spirits’. The most usual spectrum that has been documented is that of four genders: feminine woman, masculine woman, feminine man, masculine man.

To the indigenous Mahu of Hawaii, an intermediate state between man and woman is a clear option.

In Africa, a woman can be recognised as a ‘female husband’ who enjoys all of the privileges of men and is recognised as such. Whilst her femininity is not openly acknowledged, it is not hidden.

‘SAFE SPACES’

A need for safe spaces necessarily comes from a perception of an imbalance of power, the concern stemming from an ideological argument that men are naturally more aggressive than women. Whilst some validity exists here, the balance of oestrogen and testosterone in all of us affects not only physical appearance but also mental aggression rates. Hormones enhance normal feelings.

The trans community will be very familiar with the effect hormonal medication has physically, as well as on mental outlook, but prescribed hormone therapy can simply return people to their typical expected state.

The argument that trans women are more aggressive because they were born as men fails.

One concern is the assumption that widespread attempts by men to claim to be women will begin, for the purposes of sexual predation. Apart from any actual proof of a shift in this direction – in 17 states and 200 cities of the USA that allow transgender people to use whatever toilet facility they want, there has been no increase in sexual assault of any kind – the legal system is not without experience in cases involving women who claim to be men. Indeed, historically, such impersonations were more frequent when women were barred from professions.

But at times you’d think that, over toilets, this is an issue of ‘clean’ girls versus ‘mucky’ boys. In itself, that is an example of social conditioning. Society’s attitude over toilets is fast changing: young girls are now often taken by dads to the toilet and mothers have always taken non-pubertal boys into the ladies. A gradual desexualising of toilets (outside of nightclubs!) is already under way.

But is there a situation when men feel uncomfortable when a trans man enters a male toilet? Not so long ago, many men felt uncomfortable when gay men used their toilets. Why? Because “They could look at my dick”! The she-wee was created initially for transitional women to enter a male toilet.

The answer to toilets is very simple: we should be moving towards communal facilities regardless of gender, making them safe places for everyone. There are many males who find unsupervised places intimidating and there is increasing acceptance of ungendered spaces in for example hospitals, schools, and the voluntary sector. Gender-neutral toilets, in full individual cubicle style, is the way forward.

What about refuge centres? They do not allow any men currently. Lesbian women do also suffer abuse, but the overwhelming abuse is by males to women. That does mean that insecurity over a trans woman being on site is understandable. Yet, all refuge centres already have policy, accompanied by appropriate legislation, to help them to tackle any problems. No major issues have arisen under the existing legal framework; new laws on self-definition wouldn’t affect this.

PERSONAL ABUSE

Quite apart from the trans debates there has been a growing tendency within social media of personal verbal abuse. Society has been slow to deal with these issues, but the reality is that that we are now developing mechanisms, which need to be improved, to stop cyber-bullying. Everyone should feel free to seek prosecutions since it is against the law. But it should not be used as a political point-scoring tactic.

Those who project the term TERF, either pejoratively or in hostility to its use, don’t help debate. An acronym for Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminist, it has been coined by trans activists, effectively to mean a transphobic bigot. The unpleasant bandying of the term sounds extreme, but on the other hand radical feminists, including the writer, Chimamanda Adichie, have denied that transgender women could be women because they had “experienced male privilege”. Jenni Murray, host of BBC Radio 4 *Woman’s Hour*, wrote in her column for the *Sunday Times Magazine*: “Be trans, be proud – but don’t

call yourself a ‘real woman.’”

I am not a trans person, but a young, disabled woman. I have to say that I feel this disparaging stance aids a discriminatory message which aims to deny trans women their sense of identity on the basis that provisions for women should be reserved for ‘real women’. This is deliberately offensive.

It is unfortunate that the term ‘cisgender’ (usually abbreviated to simply ‘cis’) has now become a term of automatic abuse. It is a term for people whose gender identity matches the sex that they were assigned at birth and is considered the opposite of the term transgender. But be clear – trans activists did not originate this word, it is one used by scientists. Related terms include cis-sexism and cis-normativity; though it is much easier to understand how offence can be taken at ‘non-men’, ‘non-trans women’, ‘vagina owners’, ‘menstruators’, or ‘non-prostate owners’. These are plainly wrong.

Both ‘teams’ in the argument have used language that is not acceptable or helpful, but assigning gender qualities to such exchanges is not instructive. The trans community has certainly been acting out of anger. Anger is not an emotion restricted to heavy testosterone users, whatever their ‘bits’ look like. Some on both sides are acting out of fear and ignorance; although this is understandable, each is equally unacceptable. Everyone needs to be wary of the words used and the impact they will have. I don’t think that it is correct to say that all discussion and debate on the proposed change in law is transphobic. But I have seen articles that are, whilst selectivity has come to dominate some media presentation.

How the debate is processed is vital, and a responsibility for the media and politicians to control. Of course, winning people to a common and sensible position is important but the democratic process does involve effective public consultation. I’ve yet to see anything like this, anywhere. The argument that widening self-definition of gender under the Equality Act would weaken women’s rights is not well-evidenced. We have not seen many claims by men, for example against a woman boss, because the Act has widened chances for claiming gender inequality. This is an argument to rewrite the legislation to mean only discrimination against women.

A WAY FORWARD?

Ejecting people from the women’s movement shouldn’t be a way to preserve our identity as women. We do need, as a people and a society, to embrace unity – there’s more that unites us than divides us. If science sees gender as three sexes, including ‘other’, we can’t simply dismiss their existence. As a woman who was born a woman, I find it offensive to dismiss the dilemmas of other women because they are ‘outsiders’.

A 2009 review conducted for the Equality and Human Rights Commission reminds us that

“it is only in the last decade that trans people have been accorded rights and given protection in law from discrimination. There is growing recognition of the discrimination, inequalities and social exclusion that trans people face by policy-makers and the public.”²

The evidence is overwhelming that trans people experience “severe discrimination and frequent

infringements of their rights across a broad spectrum of areas of life”.³ All the evidence is that trans people are badly affected by transphobia, in a wide range of forms. In 2016, a recruitment agency survey found that 60% of respondents had experienced discrimination in the workplace because they were trans, and 36% had left a job because the environment was so unwelcoming.⁴

Trans people, like disabled people, may not have always been historically oppressed by capitalism in the way that women and blacks have. That doesn’t mean that the possibility of being oppressed today does not exist. As is very evident, trans people are being isolated in the workplace and from the working class. They find it more difficult to gain employment footholds, and widening divisions make it difficult to bring about unity among oppressed groups. The glass ceiling is certainly not being broken by trans women. Black trans are more exploited as trans women than they were as black men.

Clearly, tackling transphobia must be a priority but, equally, the struggle against it cannot be an excuse to denigrate others. Nor can the legitimate struggles of women or BAME persons be used as some excuse to minimise the problems of the trans population.

You do not choose to be gay nor do you choose to be a woman. I pose this question to those who are adamant that being a woman means having a uterus at birth: who would choose to be a woman, since it is so hard to be a woman in a patriarchal society? A gender dysmorphic person goes through their entire life feeling like there’s something wrong with them, which is why depression and suicide is so predominant.

Male and female identities change over generations and they are all constructs. Capitalism places everything in boxes that are easily identifiable. The argument that you either ignore identity or force us into a box determined by the majority and accept the outcome is incorrect. I would say let people feel comfortable in whatever identity they want. But identity is influenced by the material world around them, coming out of the blue. We should be tolerant of differing senses of identity. I don’t think being a woman means being more empathetic, good with babies – necessarily. Capitalism uses discrimination to superexploit and that is oppression. Consider this – as communists we do not exercise group exclusionary rights, whereby determining if someone is sufficiently black, LGB, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Sikh or disabled is a test to qualify.

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DEIRDRE O'NEILL

ON NOT BEING ALLOWED INTO LEFTIST SPACES

IT IS BECOMING quite acceptable for certain sections of the left to declare that people like me – women who are ‘gender critical’ – should not be allowed in leftist or anarchist spaces. Leaving aside the arrogance and implicit authoritarianism of this claim, its lack of critical engagement with the stance of ‘gender critical’ women is the thing that astounds the most. I have been involved in radical politics all my life so I find it incredible (and that’s putting it politely) that people I do not know, who have no knowledge of me or my personal and political trajectory, think they have the right to declare me not welcome in ‘leftist spaces’.

The issue here is that significant parts of the left have accepted without question and without debate the fundamental claim of trans activists that trans women are women. And they have internalised trans activism’s immunisation from rational dialogue by denouncing everyone who does not agree with this claim, as ‘bigot’, ‘terf’, full of ‘bile’ and ‘hatred’. The idea that trans rights, as currently formulated, may clash with women’s rights seems inconceivable to those who have accepted what seems to me a pre-Enlightenment dogma, that trans women are women. Is it too much to enquire, without being called a ‘bigot’, that maybe, just maybe, trans rights can be guaranteed on a different basis, without making the claim, trans women are women (or trans men are men)? But first a little more about me – that someone who does not belong in left spaces apparently.

I am a Marxist. I was brought up a Marxist by my Irish Republican dad who left Belfast at the age of 16 to work here in England so he could send money home to his mother. As we, his children, grew up he told us many stories about the houses with rooms to rent where the windows had signs in them saying ‘no blacks, no dogs, no Irish’. He suffered racism all his life, from being called ‘paddy’ by people he did not know, to being the butt of jokes about how stupid the Irish are, to being labelled a terrorist and stopped by the police when ‘The Troubles’ were on in the 1970s, for the crime of having an Irish accent.

Both my parents were manual workers; my dad worked on building sites and my mum was a cleaner and then a school dinner lady. I left school at 16 with no qualifications and brought my daughter up on a council estate while claiming benefits and cleaning the houses of the middle classes to make sure we could eat. I know what it is to be vilified, looked down on and wonder where the next meal is coming from. Consequentially I interpret the world through the perspective of class.

I went to university at thirty-five, now have a PhD and have been teaching in the university sector for the last 20 or so years, so I also know what it is like to inhabit the world of the middle classes. I have never

been or ever wanted to be fully accepted into that world. I have written about class, made films about class, my politics are class-based, I am acutely aware of the everyday injuries (and rewards) of being working class. As a working-class woman I long ago rejected middle-class feminism as an offshoot of capitalism, where privileged women argued for the right to be treated the same and paid the same as middle-class men –but whose feminism did nothing to overthrow the structural inequalities that meant their success would still be dependent on the labour of the working-class women who clean their houses and look after their children.

I have sketched in these biographical details because I want to make it clear that I have direct experience of oppression and exploitation on many fronts, mostly because of my class but also my Irishness and lately my sex. I do not write the following from a privileged position.

My aim as a working-class woman has always been to overthrow capitalism (not on my own, obviously), not adapt myself to fit more easily into it. Therefore the concept of a universal sisterhood where I joined with other women on the basis we were all women appeared to me idealistic in the extreme. I considered it nothing more than an abstraction that ignored the very real differences of income, educational achievement, occupational status and life choices of working class women like me.

In fact I have always found I have more in common with working-class men than I could ever have with middle-class women. We share experiences of hardship, exploitation and struggle. As far as I was concerned, the only thing I had in common with middle-class women was my biology – the experiences we share are biological ones – menstruation, childbirth, miscarriages, lactation, abortions, the menopause etc (even though not all women experience all of these).

But it is precisely on these biological grounds that I now find myself aligning with all women who are gender critical.

It is important to realise how gender relations have always played a role in the reproduction of capitalist society, and capitalist reproduction has always depended on the oppression and exploitation of women. But for working class women that oppression and exploitation has manifested itself differently from the privileged lives of middle- and upper-class women. Understanding how patriarchy manifests itself in class-specific ways has always informed my feminism. The essentialism I witnessed in the middle-class version of feminism was simply a strategy that worked to denigrate or ignore the experiences and knowledge of working-class women and exclude them from the public sphere.

Although not a class in the way that Marx proposed it, women are, as a biological category, different from men for all the reasons I have just stated but also because of the way in which gendered expectations construct a (classed) version of women – call it femininity – that fits well into the needs of a capitalist society for unpaid labour.

But biological sex allows us to make distinctions based on biological needs as well as recognising

biologically determined capacities. Recognising this in a positive rather than discriminatory way allows society to give women rights over their bodies and needs – a struggle which, as the recent Irish referendum on the Eighth Amendment shows, is still ongoing.

Sex is the scaffolding upon which gender roles are constructed. It depends upon both the conscious and unconscious wielding of power reinforced by cultural norms that are both personal and institutional. The idea that one can individually and on the basis of feelings opt out of these realities is an extraordinary basis for left politics as far as I am concerned.

Biological women have certain gendered expectations imposed on them – in just the same way that men have gendered expectations imposed upon them. And while I would argue that it is impossible to change sex, it is possible to feel uncomfortable with the imposition of gendered expectations. The imposition of rigid gender roles is never completely and unquestionably successful because variables such as personality, family dynamics and societal influences exert a greater or lesser influence on their development. Boys and men who do not conform to rigid gender expectations of toughness, rationality etc are not the opposite sex; they are men who do not conform to gendered expectations.

Gender stereotypes of women occur when biological attributes are transformed into ‘female traits’. Mimicking these ‘traits’ does not mean it is possible to change your biological make up – it simply means that you have learned and accepted some very specific and selective ways in which women are constrained to behave so that they can both please and be dominated by men – that is how gender is produced. People are not born gendered, gender is something they learn – therefore it is possible for men to learn to act like women, to ‘perform’ femininity – but they can never be women.

But rather than define and defend their own rights, as gays and lesbians did, as people of colour have had to do, the trans movement makes an extraordinary and unprecedented move in the history of human rights: they want to claim not the universal rights that all people should have access to, but the rights of another group (women) by claiming and appropriating their identities. This means appropriating those rights that have been put in place specifically to advantage or simply protect biological women such as, for example, all-women shortlists. This then is a question of power – and for an oppressed minority trans women have demonstrated amazing definitional power, persuading politicians, trade unionists, educationalists and even the medical profession that biological sex is a matter of self-identification by conflating and confusing sex with gender.

The transgender movement is neither progressive nor radical because it has no wish to transcend the limitations of capitalism but rather to isolate the signifiers of a socially constructed femininity in order to reinforce and reproduce them. Therefore the potential for a radical rejection of a patriarchal capitalist society is impossible within trans ideology, which works to maintain the divisions that contribute to its continuing existence. Instead of working towards a more androgynous society in which there are not female

qualities and male qualities separate and imposed on each gender, the trans movement wishes to sustain the divisions that reinforce the oppression of women, and places unrealistic demands on men in relation to the concept of masculinity.

As someone who was a teenager in the 1970s, when there was a real and sustained attempt to break down the socially constructed roles associated with gender, I have been genuinely shocked by the reemergence of old-established and – I thought – discredited ideas related to how men and women should dress and behave, and the talk of such essentialist concepts as ‘lady brains’.

In a hierarchal capitalist society questions of power are essential: the wielding of power means access to advantages, privileges and – most importantly – profits, that those without power are denied. Historically speaking, it has been men who have wielded the most power between the sexes, therefore I would argue what we are witnessing with the trans movement is a group of men who wish to be treated as women exhibiting the traditional socialised behavioural dominance of the male sex. The acceptance of the trans narrative as a given has resulted in the systemic validation of one group of people at the expense of another. It is only by including the experiences of all groups that we can understand fully the broader social and political ramifications of the trans movement.

It is important to acknowledge that sexism is an historical process that manifests itself differently in different historical epochs. This latest manifestation of the social relations between men and women has much in common with previous ones, concerned as it is with the subjugation of biological females, their disciplining and the insistence they conform to the needs of men. It is to all intents and purposes yet another patriarchal strategy designed to keep women subservient to the demands of men by actually erasing the category of women as a meaningful one. Why else would this particular movement demand the removal of sex-based safeguards designed to protect women based on their biology? Why would they wish to remove the strategies that have been put in place to ensure biological women are represented within the public political sphere? Why would children who exhibit gender nonconformity be railroaded into socially constructed gender positions and encouraged to begin medicalisation to align their gender (now conceived as fixed) with a sex different to the one they are born with? Why else would they demand a change in the language we use to describe women’s bodily functions such as childbirth and breast-feeding? And why would any nuanced discussion of these things be dismissed with accusations of bigotry and hate speech? Gender relations cannot be transformed while the objective realities of sex and sex-based oppression are ignored.

Far from abolishing gender distinctions the trans movement has actually entrenched them further and allowed women who disagree with them to be shouted down by men and other women. The insistence on men being accepted as women does nothing to change the conditions of the vast majority of women – particularly working-class women, how could it? What we have is the ideological legitimisation of men illustrating quite starkly that ‘gender’ relations are not simply about the

attitudes men and women have towards each other but the part those relations play in society. The multiple subject positions of left identity politics have fractured the left and allowed the existing social relations of capitalism to remain in place. That is why the trans movement must be situated within the wider context of social, institutional and structural relations and considered from the standpoint of the lived social relations of capitalism. Feminism to be truly effective must be part and parcel of the fight against capitalism.

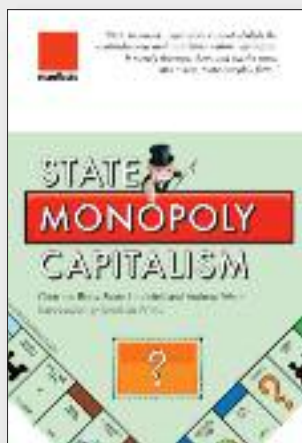
The deregulation of society that began with Thatcherism and accelerated under Blair has meant that the cultural, social, economic and moral barriers to individual gratification have gradually been eroded. Rewriting the script of sexed power dynamics not only trivialises the objective reality of the lives of women but also instills liberal banalities celebrating individualism as the ultimate in progressive politics. This as we are witnessing allows for a move away from analysis towards an emphasis on feelings and self-validation.

The rise of individualism and the centering of individual wants as human rights at the expense of collective needs represent both the extension of a consumer society and the guarantee of its reproduction. It means nothing is safe if anything can be appropriated, if anything can be claimed to belong to those who simply want it or feel it, without situating that want within the social relations within which it is embedded.

I began this by talking about my identity and background – but only to underscore that I know all about discrimination, not to play top trumps with my working-class Irish identity. We have to get the question of rights, right, for women and for trans people. Non-pathological engagement with objective realities (such as not pursuing practices that make the planet uninhabitable) requires the extension of democracy, including the extension, not the contraction, of democratic debate. If the left allows the trans militants to silence women, shut us down, make violent threats, nod approvingly every time they pressure venues to close their doors to our meetings, employers to sack them, organisations such as the Labour Party which they are members of, to expel them, then we are heading for very dark times indeed.

● This article was originally published on 27 August 2018 on Medium, https://medium.com/@deirdreoneill_40170/on-not-being-allowed-into-leftist-spaces-28a502add7a5, and is reproduced here with the author's kind permission.

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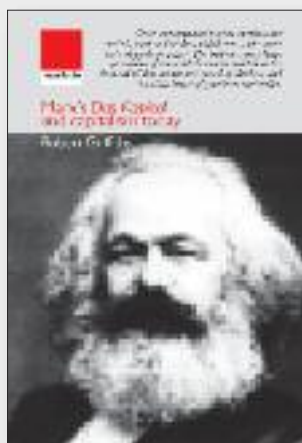
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MICHAEL ROBERTS

TWO BLOGS

I RETHINKING ‘RETHINKING ECONOMICS’

CAN ECONOMICS ever become ‘pluralist’? Namely, will the universities and research institutes in the major capitalist economies expand their teaching and ideas to cover not just mainstream neoclassical and Keynesian theories but also more radical heterodox themes (post-Keynesian, Austrian and Marxian)? If you look at the list of study courses¹ that are considered heterodox by *Heterodox News*, there are not many in the UK and the US, and they are concentrated in a just few colleges – with the big names having no such courses at all.

Rethinking Economics,² a pressure group of academics and students, was launched over four years ago to turn this round. Now in July, Rethinking Economics said that Britain’s universities were failing to equip economics students with the skills that businesses and the government say they need. Following extensive interviews with employers, including organisations such as the Bank of England, they found that universities were producing

“a cohort of economic practitioners who struggle to provide innovative ideas to overcome economic challenges or use economic tools on real-world problems.”

Moreover, the group said,

“when political decisions are backed by economics reasoning, as they so often are, economists are unable to communicate ideas to the public, resulting in a large democratic deficit.”

There are efforts among some academics to broaden the outlook of economics graduates. The CORE project³ was adopted by 13 UK universities last September and has won £3.7m from the Economic and Social Research Council. As *The Guardian* put it:⁴

“The developers of the programme also claim it has freed itself from neoliberal thinking, which judges markets to be self-adjusting and consumers and businesses to be operating with the same information. The world is full of asymmetric power and information relationships, and Core reflects this.”

The CORE project has produced an antagonistic reaction from right-wing commentators. The prolific right-wing British political blogger, ‘Guido Fawkes’, tweeted:

“The left in the universities are trying to rehabilitate

Marxist economics to poison the future. Very concerning that they got £3.7 million of taxpayers’ money to do it”.

One strong promoter of CORE and Rethinking Economics, the leftist economist Jonathan Portes,⁵ responded to Fawkes that he was sure that none of the contributors to the CORE programme were Marxist and “I’m obviously not a “Marxist”. And that is true.⁶

The reality is that Rethinking Economics and CORE are dominated by Keynesian ideas with hardly any look-in for Marxist ones. It’s true that Sam Bowles is one of the main coordinators of the CORE textbook project⁷ and he considered himself a (neo?) Marxist in the past – but his recent comments on Marx’s theories at the 200th anniversary suggest otherwise now.⁸

I am reminded of that first London conference of Rethinking Economics.⁹ At that meeting, leading radical economists Victoria Chick and Sheila Dow told us that reform of society would be impossible until we can change the ‘closed mind-set’ of mainstream economics. As if the issue was a psychological one. Mainstream economics is closed to alternatives because there a material interest involved. But Chick and Dow seemed to think that it’s just a question of changing the mind-set of other economists that support the market – for their own good because austerity and neoliberal policies are actually bad for capitalism itself.

More recently, leading leftist economists in the UK held a seminar on the state of mainstream economics, as taught in the universities. They kicked this off by nailing a poster with 33 theses critiquing mainstream economics¹⁰ to the door of the London School of Economics. This publicity gesture attempted to remind us that it was the 500th anniversary of when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses¹¹ to the Castle Church, Wittenberg, and provoked the beginning of the Protestant reformation against the ‘one true religion’ of Catholicism.

The economists were purporting to tell us that mainstream economics was like Catholicism and must be protested against, just as Luther did back in 1517. But, as I commented then,¹² is a revolution against the mainstream really to be painted as similar to Luther’s protestant revolt? The history of the reformation tells us that the protestant version of Christianity did not lead to a new pluralistic order and freedom to worship. On the contrary, Luther was a bigot who worked with the authorities to crush more radical movements based on the peasants, led by Thomas Münzer.¹³

Don’t get me wrong: attempts to expand economic ideas beyond the mainstream can only be good news and the

‘Keynes’s ideas were far from radical, let alone revolutionary. And they certainly would not avoid another global crisis. And thinking they would do so would be a step back for the labour movement and its leaders.’

content of the CORE project¹⁴ is really stimulating and educational. But it seems that, for Rethinking Economics and CORE, the mainstream economic ‘religion’ is just neoclassical theory and that it is neoliberal economics that must be overthrown. They have nothing to say against Keynesian economics – indeed variants of Keynes are actually the way forward for them.

Take the new course at University College London for undergraduates. It’s called Rethinking Capitalism – a new elective module for UCL undergraduates.¹⁵ Run by Mariana Mazzucato, the director of the Institute of Innovation and Public Purpose (IIPP)¹⁶ and author of *The Value of Everything*,¹⁷ it’s a great initiative, with guest lecturers including Branco Milanovic¹⁸. The module aims to

“help students develop their critical thinking and make the connections between economic theory and real world policy issues. It will provide an introduction to a range of different economics perspectives, including neoclassical, post-Keynesian, ecological, evolutionary, Marxist and institutional economics theories and how their different assumptions link to different public policies.”

But looking at BASC0037 Rethinking Capitalism, I am sceptical that students will hear much about Marxist economic theory within its ‘heterodox’ approach.

Keynesian theory dominates in Rethinking Economics and so do the policy conclusions arising from Keynesian ideas in wider left circles. Take the recent seminar organised by the IIPP in the UK’s House of Lords¹⁹ to discuss the financing of innovation (badly needed given the poor performance of the British capitalist sector in productivity growth²⁰). But whom did the IIPP line up to discuss with Mazzucato the very limited proposal for a UK national investment bank to replace the European Investment Bank when the UK leaves the EU next year? It was Tory Lord David Willetts and, as keynote speaker, Liberal leader Sir Vince Cable! Cable was quoted approvingly to say that “The current enthusiasm for ‘selling the family silver’ (*ie* privatisation) has its roots in bizarre Treasury accounting conventions.” This was very rich hypocrisy coming from Cable, who, when in coalition with the Conservatives, presided over the privatisation of Royal Mail, Britain’s state-owned postal service, selling it off for a price at least £1bn below market value – yes, selling the ‘family silver’. I’m not sure that the IIPP will get far with its laudable aim of increasing the state role in innovation and investment by relying on these people for support.

And Keynesian ideas are central to the opinions of key advisers for the leftist Labour leaders in Britain. In a recent article,²¹ Ann Pettifor, director of Prime Economics²², blamed the economic crisis in Turkey and other “emerging economies” on “orthodox economics”, in particular the move by central banks to hike interest rates and “normalise” monetary policy. I’ll be debating with Ann Pettifor on what to do about finance at this year’s Momentum conference taking place during the Labour Party conference in Liverpool in late September. I too have pointed out the risk that this policy entails²³ for the world economy when profitability is still low and debt is high.

Pettifor’s conclusion was that “it was time to ditch economic orthodoxy” and “revive the radical and revolutionary monetary theory and policies of John Maynard Keynes” as the way to avoid another global crisis. But regular readers of this blog will know that I have shown Keynes’s ideas were far from radical, let alone revolutionary.²⁴ And they certainly would not avoid another global crisis. And thinking they would do so would be a step back for the labour movement and its leaders.²⁵

One key point is that capitalism is not just a monetary economy as Keynesians think; it is a money-making economy. You can print money indefinitely, but you cannot turn it into value under capitalism without the exploitation of human labour. When you sift through the body of ideas in CORE, one thing stands out: the failure to analyse modern economies with a law of value and a theory of exploitation for profit. Profit and exploitation do not appear in the body of CORE work (except for fleeting references to Marx). And yet this is at the heart of capitalism and is the soul of Marxist theory.

Are there textbooks that do offer a Marxist alternative to neoclassical and Keynesian schools? My favourite is *Competing Schools of Economic Thought*²⁶ by Lefteris Tsoulfidis. Then there is *Contending Economic Theories*²⁷ by Richard Wolff and Stephen Resnick. There is the new two-book textbook on Microeconomics²⁸ and Macroeconomics²⁹ by Ben Fine and Ourania Dimakou. And of course, there is Anwar Shaikh’s monumental *Capitalism*³⁰ (which the dedicated can dip into if they have their brains working!). These should be on the curriculum of CORE and Rethinking Economics courses. Maybe they will be. But it may require a rethink.

● This blog was first published on 14 August 2018 at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2018/08/14/rethinking-rethinking-economics/> and is reproduced here with kind permission from the author.

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2 CHINA'S 'KEYNESIAN' POLICIES

CHINA'S REACTION to Donald Trump's trade war has been to retaliate with its own tariffs on US exports to China, particularly agricultural/food exports like soybeans. Also the government has allowed the Chinese currency, the yuan, to depreciate towards the bottom of its controlled range against the dollar. This makes Chinese exports cheaper in dollar terms and so defeats the purpose of Trump's tariff increases on Chinese goods coming into the US.

But there is a third move: a considered expansion in government investment in and funding of construction projects to boost domestic output to compensate for any decline in exports. The policy of government investment was hugely successful in helping the Chinese economy avoid the consequences of the Great Recession back in 2008-9. While all the major capitalist economies suffered a contraction in national output and investment, China continued to grow. In 2009, when GDP in the advanced countries fell by 3.4%, Chinese growth was 9.1%. Only one capitalist economy also grew – Australia – an economy increasingly dependent on exports of its raw material resources to its fast-growing Asian giant neighbour.

Simon Wren-Lewis, leading British Keynesian economist and blogger, claims¹ that China's success in the Great Recession demonstrated two things: 1) that it was

austerity that caused the Great Recession and the weak economic recovery afterwards in the major capitalist economies and 2) it was Keynesian policies (*ie* more government spending and running budget deficits) that enabled China to avoid the slump.

Well, it is no doubt true that after a massive slump in investment and production in the capitalist sector of the major economies in 2008-9, cutting back further on government spending would make the situation worse. In that sense, 'austerity' was a wrong-headed policy for governments to adopt. But as I have argued in many previous posts,² austerity was not some insanity in economic terms for capitalism, as the Keynesians think. It has a rational base: namely that with profitability in the capitalist sector very low, costs must be reduced and that includes reducing taxation of the capitalist sector. Also the financial sector had to be bailed out. It was much better to pay for that by reducing government spending and investment rather than raising taxes. And the huge increase in public debt that resulted anyway would require controlling down the road.

But what about getting economies out of the slump with more government spending? Wren-Lewis comments:

"China is a good example of that idea in action. What about all the naysayers who predicted financial

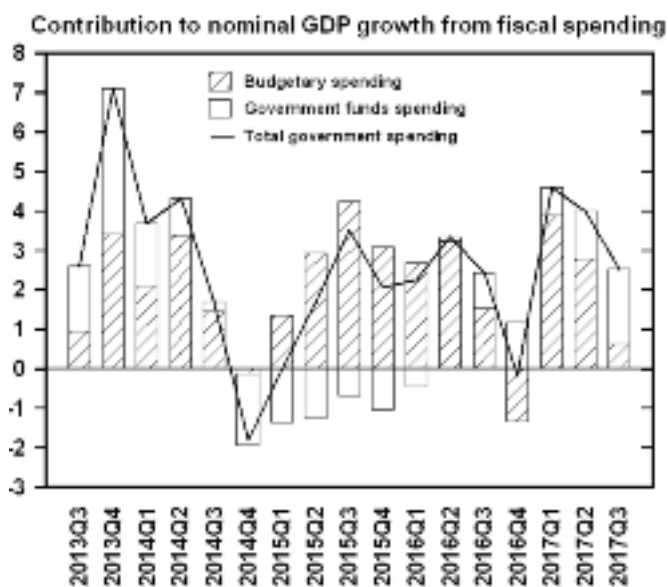


Fig 1: Contribution to nominal GDP growth in China from fiscal spending; adapted from a Deutsche Bank report by Zhiwei Zhang and Yi Xiong, January 2018.

disaster if this was done? Well there was a mini-crisis in China half a dozen years later, but it is hard to connect it back to stimulus spending and it had little impact on Chinese growth. What about the huge burden on future generations that such stimulus spending would create? Thanks to that programme, China now has a high speed rail network and is a global leader in railway construction.”

So you see, Keynesian policies work, as China shows, says Wren-Lewis. But were China’s policies really Keynesian? Strictly speaking, Keynesian macro management policies are increased government spending of any type (digging holes and filling them up again) in order ‘stimulate’ the capitalist sector to start investing and households to spend, not save, all through the effect of the ‘multiplier’.³

Sure, Keynes talked about going further, with the ‘socialisation of investment’ as the last resort.⁴ But no government of Keynesian persuasion has ever adopted that policy (if it meant taking over capitalist investment with state investment). Indeed, the Wren-Lewis’s of this world never advocate or even mention the idea of the nationalisation or socialisation of capitalist sectors. For them, Keynesian policy is government spending to ‘stimulate demand’.

China’s policy in the Great Recession was not just ‘fiscal stimulus’ in the Keynesian sense, but outright government or state investment in the economy. It actually was ‘socialised investment’. Investment is the key here – as I have argued in many posts⁵ – not consumption or any form of spending by government. The Great Recession in the US economy was led and driven by a fall in capitalist investment, not in personal consumption or caused by ‘austerity’. In Europe, 100% of the decline in GDP was due to a fall in fixed investment.

As John Ross said on his blog at the time,⁶

“China is evidently the mirror image of the US ... If the Great Recession in the US was caused by a precipitate fall in fixed investment, China’s avoidance of recession,

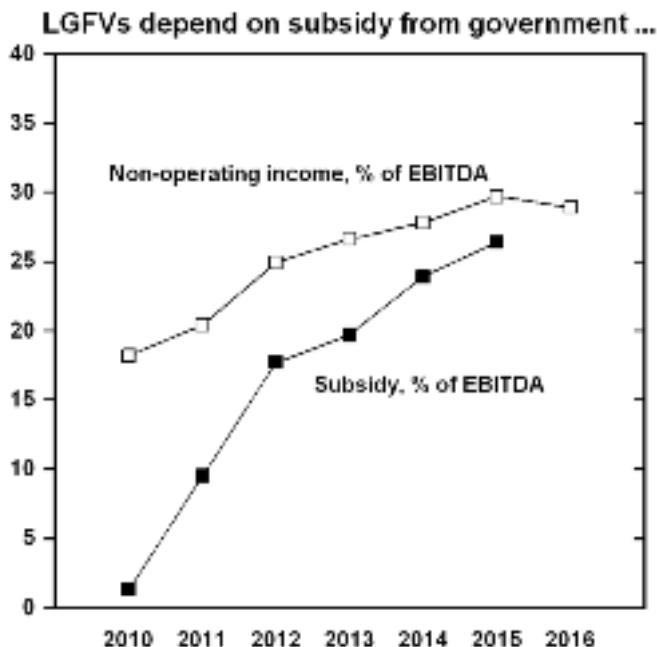


Fig 2: Local government funding in China; adapted from a Deutsche Bank report by Zhiwei Zhang and Yi Xiong, January 2018. LGFV = local government funding vehicles; EBITDA = earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation and amortisation.]

and its rapid economic growth, was driven by the rise in fixed investment. Given this contrast, the reason for the difference in performance between the US and Chinese economies during the financial crisis is evident.”

Wren-Lewis thinks that Keynesian measures would have done the trick and it was “a failure of imagination” by the governments of major economies not to act, but instead impose ‘austerity’.

It’s true that the governments of the major capitalist economies did not follow China’s example, partly because they were ideologically opposed to state investment – indeed, their first measure of ‘austerity’ was to cut government investment projects – the quickest way to cut spending.

But the main issue was not ideology or a “lack of imagination”. It is that Keynesian stimulus policies do not work in a predominantly capitalist economy where the profitability of capitalist investment is very low and so investment is falling. With government investment in advanced capitalist economies only around 3% of GDP compared to capitalist sector investment of 15%-plus, it would take a massive switch to the public sector to have an effect. ‘Stimulating’ capitalist investment with low interest rates and welfare spending would not be enough. Capitalist investment would have to be replaced by state ‘socialised’ investment. That only has happened (temporarily) in war economies (as 1940-45). In the last ten years, in the US, Europe and Japan, it has been capitalists who made the decisions on investment and employment and they did so on the basis of profit, not economic recovery. Quantitative easing and fiscal stimulus – the two Keynesian policy planks – were ineffective as a result. In contrast, China’s fixed investment increased rapidly because it was driven by a programme of both direct state investment and use of state-owned banks to rapidly expand company financing.

This difference between Keynesian measures in capitalist economies and China’s state-directed investment is about to be tested again. Most mainstream economists are predicting that China will take a hit from any trade war with Trump’s

America and economic growth is set to slow – indeed, there is a growing risk of a huge debt-induced slump. But the Chinese authorities are already reacting. Ordinary budget deficits (fiscal ‘stimulus’) are being supplemented with outright state funding of investment projects (see Figure 1).

Most of this government investment funding is coming from sales of land by local authorities. Through local government funding vehicles (LGFV), they build roads, homes, cities by selling land to developers. But funds also come directly from the national government (80%), see Figure 2.

We can expect such funding to rise and investment projects to expand if China’s exports drop back from a trade war with the US. State investment will keep China’s economy motoring, while the major capitalist economies flounder.

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PRIVATISATION

THE NHS crisis is upon us. Ministers were warned that without extra cash and resources the winter would bring an avalanche of fatalities and a hospital-beds crisis.

The Royal College of Emergency Medicine warned that A&E departments would reach 2,000 more beds, and even before the latest crisis its waiting lists had topped four million.

Yet the government is doing further cuts in beds while urging hospitals to divert patients into alternative services which barely exist.

Social care is also enduring a cash-driven crisis but in Thames Valley families cannot rely on the hospital's social care to help arrange and usually incorporate health services Jeremy Hunt.

Hospital A&E admissions in the first week of 2017 were nearly double the number seen in 2015 during the winter flu epidemic. After thousands of operations were cancelled Jeremy Hunt has tried to have the "most extensive preparations ever" for the winter period.

More than 33,000 nurses left the NHS in 2017 - a rise of 20 per cent since 2012-13.

A Commons health select committee inquiry

into the winter warnings showed that NHS staff are struggling with pay arrears to continuing professional development, low pay and "a general sense of not being valued".

Nurses are paid less than 14 per cent in real terms since 2010, while last year's abolition of NHS bursaries means nursing students are forced to pay £2,000 in tuition fee loans.

The NHS in England is facing a new Tory assault involving drastic cuts, privatisation and yet another reorganisation.

The Sustainability and Transformation Plans (STPs) combined with the Five Year Forward View (FV) will speed up privatisation, while driving through £22 billion in cuts.

The Tory plan is widely based on the US model where so-called Accountable Care Organisations (ACOs) control health services and award contracts to profit-making private sector health and fitness firms.

Even the Tory MP who chairs the Commons select committee has called for a delay to the new contract for Accountable Care Organisations. The model contracts propose using the notorious Special Purpose Vehicles - the mechanism which spearheaded private finance initiatives (PFI) schemes.

It was the European Union model of privatised public services - driven by the Thatcher and Labour treaties - which led to Blair's 'New Labour' only expanding PFI.

As usual the latest plans are being hatched in secrecy with no consultation of patients or staff. There is no attempt to base the schemes on clinical evidence.

Driven by cuts, the plans will 'rationalise' and centralise services and are already leading to closures.

Our patients the plans mean worsened healthcare, longer waiting lists, delayed operations and a black shortage which leaves the NHS unable to meet the inevitable winter crisis.

Health unions warn that the winter plan will blur professional roles while staff recruitment is frozen. "Shouldn't we be working full-time from staff doing more?"

Our NHS is not for sale or profit. The Communist Party believes that our NHS must be publicly accountable, publicly funded and publicly run. Communists agree with health professionals that change should always be fully funded, clinically driven and evidence led.

#StopPFI #SaveOurNHS

Carillon and Capita signify a new crisis

CAPITALISM

AFTER THE 2008 banking crash and now the Carillon collapse, who can blame multinational like Carillon are the product of an invidious alliance between the Tory Party and 'New Labour' which saw the banks deregulated, public services privatised and private PFI replace public investment in infrastructure projects. Public spending cuts and wage freezes led to a decade of austerity.

Carillon grew out of the business of construction firms to bid for public private partnerships. The firm thrived as a giant PFI scheme depended on a stream of contracts underwritten by the tax payer. But with tight profit margins in construction and projects like railways, hospitals and roads taking years to complete the firm looked increasingly at risk.

However despite the firm's finances were sound, its shareholders were not to be fooled. Now thousands of workers face losing their jobs and their pension funds at risk.

Complete the cover up of Carillon's crisis, including its pension regulations and KPMG and Pricewaterhouse Coopers is investigating profit warnings made by the company last year. The Treasury regulator next asks about the fact that Carillon paid out £50m in dividends and only paid £7m into its pension scheme, in spite of an £80m deficit.

Carillon's shares are held by profit hungry investment banks, asset management funds and private equity firms. These sharks brought on cuts in shares by looking at its revenue and the amount of cash on its balance book. Executive pay and bonuses were linked to the ability to generate cash and support the share price.

So Carillon had to bid to do more contracts and keep expanding into more risky areas.

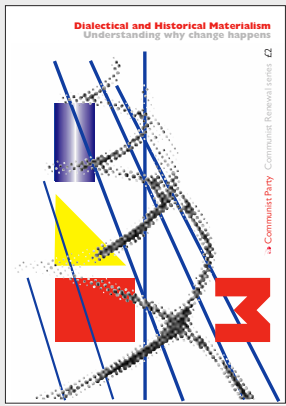
The government cannot rescue the firm because of the neoliberal "austerity" borrowing rules it follows and because state aid would fall foul of the free market EU rules.

The deepening capitalist crisis shows that popular protest and union struggle to force social measures are needed to rebuild Britain's productive economy and break free from the EU big business club.

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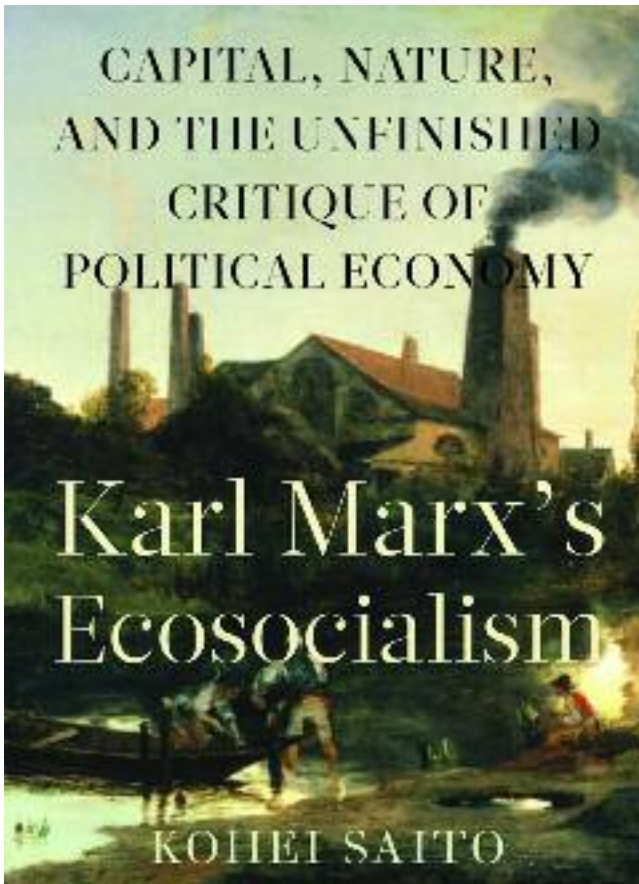


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MARX BICENTENARY

MARX, THE ENVIRONMENT AND POLITICAL ECONOMY



Review by Martin Levy

Karl Marx's Ecosocialism

by Kohei Saito

[Monthly Review Press, New York, 2017, 308 pp. Pbk, £25, ISBN 978-1-58367640-0; hbk, £65, ISBN 978-1-58367641-7]

IN OUR Spring 2018 issue (CR87, pp 14-17), we published an interview with American Marxist John Bellamy Foster about his new book, *Marx and the Earth: An anti-critique*, co-authored with Paul Burkett. As Foster makes clear in the interview, the book is the culmination of an intense discussion between the two generations of ecosocialists. The first generation, he says, combined Marxist ideas with green theories, producing a hybrid analysis and accusing Marx and Engels of having blind-spots in their conception or of having taken anti-environmental positions. A few even claimed that ecosocialism had superseded classical socialism as a paradigm. On the other hand, the second generation had

made a U-turn back to classical historical materialism, in order to investigate the role of environmental analysis in the deep structure of Marx's and Engels' critique of political economy. Burkett and Foster were the initiators of this development, with their respective books, *Marx and Nature* (1999) and *Marx's Ecology* (2000).

A review of *Marx and the Earth* was promised in CR87, but is unfortunately still not ready. That is largely because of the publication of the present, very recent, title. The relevance of Saito's book to the interpretation of Marx's *Capital*, 150 years after the publication of Volume I, and his challenge to deepen our understanding of Marx's project, meant that other matters had to be put aside. By the same token, something more than a simple overview of Saito's book was required – hence the length of this article, which should be considered more as a guide/summary than a review. It should be read alongside Rob Griffiths' excellent series on *Marx's Capital and Capitalism Today* (CR84/86/87), which is now published as a single volume by Manifesto Press.

Saito is 31 years old and is currently at Osaka City University. The book is his own English version of the original German title, which in turn was based on his PhD thesis gained at the Humboldt University in Berlin. The depth of his investigations is astounding in one so young.

The subtitle, *Capital, Nature and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy*, is a straightforward summary of Saito's argument. He challenges the repeated criticism, since the 1970s, of Marx for "Prometheanism", or "hyperindustrialism", an alleged naïve acceptance of the common 19th century idea advocating the complete human domination of nature. Marx's critics claim that he thereby neglected the destructive character immanent in modern industry and technology, and that in any case discussions of 19th century problems are of little relevance today – at best, Marx's "metabolic rift between society and nature", of which Foster spoke in his interview, means that capitalism is bad for the environment.

Saito's book aims at a more systematic and complete reconstruction of Marx's ecological critique of capitalism. Foster and Burkett, he says, sometimes give a false impression that Marx did not deal with the topic in a systematic way. In Part I of his book, the first 3 chapters, Saito seeks to reveal a clear continuity of Marx's ecology with his critique of political economy; while in Part II, the last 3 chapters, he offers a more complete examination of

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Marx’s ecology than in the earlier literature, scrutinising the natural science notebooks that will be published for the first time in the Marx-Engels-Gesamtausgabe (MEGA²).

These notebooks, Saito says, display just how seriously and laboriously Marx studied the rich field of 19th century ecological theory and integrated new insights into his own dissection of capitalist society. He shows how Marx consciously departed from any forms of naïve Prometheanism, and claims that **he came to regard ecological crises as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production**, with *Stoffwechsel* = metabolism as the key concept. This is an extraordinary claim for any Marxist, and we shall see to what extent it is justified.

Saito also says that Marx’s ecological critique is systematic and constitutes an essential moment within the totality of his project for *Capital*. He maintains that **it is not possible to comprehend the full scope of Marx’s critique of political economy if the ecological dimension is ignored**. To ground this, he explores Marx’s theory of “value” and “reification”, because these concepts reveal that Marx deals with the whole of nature as a place of resistance to capital, where the contradictions of capitalism are displayed most clearly.

‘ALIENATION OF NATURE AS THE EMERGENCE OF THE MODERN’

The key ecological motive, says Saito, is already present in Marx’s *Paris Notebooks of 1844*, from which the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844 (EPM)* – never intended for publication – were abstracted. But it was only after a long, arduous process of developing the sophistication of his political economy, that Marx became fully conscious of the need to deal with environmental disaster as a limitation imposed on the valorisation process of capital.

In chapter 1, Saito examines these *Paris Notebooks*, now available in MEGA² I/2 (*EPM*) and IV/2. He remarks on Marx’s early recognition of a conscious “unity” between humans and nature as a central task of communist society, and stresses Marx’s economic critique that the fundamental cause of alienation under capitalist production lies in the specific modern relations of the producers to their objective conditions of production, *ie* the historical dissolution of the original unity between humans and the earth. Itemising several types of alienation or estrangement which Marx discusses, still under the influence of Feuerbach’s abstract philosophical concept,

Saito argues that the “emergence of a theory” in Marx’s notebooks must be understood in a close relation to Marx’s analysis of political economy, because his original theory of alienation is formulated in the process of a critique of it.

In an important paragraph in the *Paris Notebooks*, Marx discusses the total commodification of landed property as the completion of capitalist relations. Although he has no romantic illusions about feudalism – “the earth which is estranged from man and confronts him in the shape of a few great lords” (p 34) – Marx remarks that the feudal social relations are grounded on “personal” and “political” domination, which prevents capital from penetrating as an autonomous power. The fundamental characteristic of feudal production remains the unity of the producers with the land. With capitalism, the producers lose any direct connection with the earth and come to be separated from the original means of production. Saito identifies the beginning of Marx’s ecological critique of capitalism in the statement that

“*Communism, as the positive transcendence of private property as human self-estrangement ... is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and nature and man*” (p 43)

Saito shows that Marx did not significantly alter this original fundamental insight, until *Capital*. There is a continuity through the *Poverty of Philosophy* (1847), the *Grundrisse* (1857-8), *The Original Text of A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1858) and even in the *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*, the draft text for Volume III of *Capital*:

“[T]he capitalist mode of production ... completely separates the land as a condition of labour from landed property and the landowners” (p 46)

Marx, says Saito, never gave up on his view of the original unity of humans and nature, and regarded the negation of the negation here as the essential task of future society. He did, however, quickly abandon the *philosophical* conception of alienation, criticising in the *German Ideology* Feuerbach’s treatment of “nature as such” as a pure fantastic construction. Feuerbach, says Marx, abstracts nature from existing social relations and so overlooks the historical formation of nature through the human activity of production, in which both humans and nature work upon and constitute each other.

‘THE METABOLISM OF POLITICAL ECONOMY’

Saito’s chapter 2 traces the formation of Marx’s concept of *metabolism*. This term, meaning the constant interaction of all living creatures with the environment, had been applied in physiology from the beginning of the 19th century; but the first formal treatise on the subject is often attributed to Justus von Liebig, in his *Organic Chemistry in its Application to Agriculture and Physiology* (1st edition 1837; usually called *Agricultural Chemistry*) and *Organic Chemistry in its Application to Physiology and Pathology* (1842; usually called *Animal Chemistry*). Liebig depicted the constant interactive process of formation, transformation and excretion of various components within an organic body; and under his influence the concept of metabolism soon went wider, to analyse interactions within a certain environment. This found reception and became employed beyond natural science, in philosophy and political economy, where it was used to describe a social metabolism by way of analogy.

This was the case with Marx. He first uses the term three times, in a March 1851 *London Notebook* entitled *Reflection (MEGA², IV/8)*, to deal with the transhistorical character of the necessity to organise social production. However, because Marx wrote this before his first reading of *Agricultural Chemistry*, Saito ascribes the source of the term to a manuscript from Marx’s friend Roland Daniels, an “excellent scientifically educated doctor”, a member of the Communist League, and to whom Marx had dedicated *The Poverty of Philosophy*. Daniels, who tragically died in 1855 after suffering terrible conditions in prison, uses “organic metabolism” many times in his manuscript, to mean “simultaneous destruction and regeneration, through which ... bodies maintain their individuality.”

Subsequently, during the process of writing the *Grundrisse*, Marx’s usage of “metabolism” becomes more general and systematic, in three ways:

(1) to deal with the incessant interaction between humans and nature, treating nature as the inorganic body of humanity and discussing the labour process as “metabolic interaction with nature”;

(2) as “metabolism of society”, in which he contrasts “changes of material” (*Stoffwechsel*), having to do with constant changes among use values in capitalist society, with “changes of form” (*Formwechsel*), signifying exchanges of economic forms between money and commodity during circulation;

(3) to describe the “metabolism of nature”, denoting the modification of substances through oxidation and decomposition. This usage appears again in *Capital*, Vol I:

“A machine which is not active in the labour process is useless. In addition it falls prey to the destructive power of natural metabolism.” (p 78)

In the *Grundrisse*, Marx also uses physiological concepts to distinguish between “fixed” and “floating” capital:

“In the human body, as with capital, the different elements are not exchanged at the same rate of reproduction, blood renews itself more rapidly than muscle, muscle than bone, which in this respect may be regarded as the fixed capital of the human body.” (p 92)

In society, the difference in the period of reproduction for capital is conditioned by the natural properties of each

material, whether machinery, natural inputs or products. Marx later discusses this material limitation on the valorisation of capital with regard to the fact that circulating capital must be provided and replaced faster than fixed capital to continue the production process without interruption. The bigger the forces of production become, and the bigger the quantity of raw materials needed, the more unstable the entire production process becomes because it is more and more dependent on natural conditions. Here Marx points to the possibility of an economic crisis, partly due to natural conditions and partly due to the unregulated desire of capital for accumulation.

However, Marx also notes that capital has elastic powers, “allowing it, within certain limits, a field of action independent of its own magnitude”, and it constantly seeks to overcome natural limits by exploiting the whole world – and science – in search of new useful and cheap raw materials, new technologies, new use values and new markets. But this transcendence of limits can only be achieved “ideally”:

“[F]rom the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets ideally beyond it, it does not by any means follow that it has really overcome it; and since every such barrier contradicts its character, its production moves in contradictions which are constantly overcome but just as constantly posited.” (p 96)

Marx calls this the unity of opposing tendencies which are part of capitalism’s “living contradiction”, and it seems to me that this may be what Saito means when he claims that Marx came to regard ecological crises as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. Despite various creative innovations and rapid technological progress, capital brings more and more disturbances in the metabolic interaction between humans and nature. Yet, as Paul Burkett remarked in his *Marx and Nature*, quoted by Saito:

“To put it bluntly, capital can in principle continue to accumulate under any natural conditions, however degraded, as long as there is not complete extinction of human life.” (p 97)

As we see, therefore, Marx’s analysis in terms of “metabolism” not only allowed him to understand the transhistorical universal natural conditions of human production but also to reveal the limits of appropriation of nature through its subsumption by capital. It was, says Saito, an ongoing project which cost Marx time and energy, and prevented him from completing his magnum opus. But in his excerpt notebooks there are highly significant hints for his further theoretical development.

‘CAPITAL AS A THEORY OF METABOLISM’

Chapter 3 is quite difficult, requiring detailed reading as Saito attempts a systematic reconstruction of Marx’s ecology, as developed in *Capital*. Taking up Marx’s definition of labour (p 101) as a transhistorical process “by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature” (with nature as the “mother” of material wealth), Saito argues that Marx demonstrates that under capitalism the process can only be mediated in a one-sided manner. This arises from commodities having both use value and

exchange value (by Saito, just called “value”), with the latter being determined largely by the quantity of abstract human labour involved. Here a physiological property of matter applicable to any society, namely abstract labour, becomes objectified as value, a purely social property of matter.

This leads Saito into Marx’s theory of reification, where the social relations between the producers’ private labours appear under capitalism as “material relations between persons and social relations between things”. This inversion causes not only alien, reified domination of the actions of individuals – “reification of persons” – but also the modification of human needs and rationality, ie “personification of things”. People gradually internalise a new subjectivity, on the basis of which they consciously come to obey the bourgeois utilitarian ideals of “freedom”, “equality” and “property”; while capitalists are forced by the logic of the system to reduce any ‘unnecessary’ costs, hence pressuring the labour force as much as possible, and constantly seeking to increase productivity without thinking of the sustainable reproduction of natural resources.

Modifications are not, however, limited to the human side, because Marx analysed capitalist transformations of the material world in various spheres, often neglected in discussions of his political economy. In the *Grundrisse*, he criticises the “fetishistic” misunderstanding that comes from identifying social characteristics with natural properties of things, pointing out that it is necessary to analyse as economic categories not only the “form” but the material itself, because natural properties can play a specific economic role in capitalism, eg the difference between “fixed” and “floating” capital. Noting that examination of the material side of a commodity, its use value, lies outside political economy, Marx however remarks that

“Use value falls within the realm of political economy as soon as it becomes modified by the modern relations of production, or ... intervenes to modify them” (p 114),

and also that

“In many cases use value itself plays a role as an economic category. It is a ‘bearer’ *par excellence*, whose material properties are penetrated by economic relations.” (p 116)

Marx’s point is that capitalist modifications of material characteristics are not limited to people’s desires and behaviours, but extend to properties of the things themselves. His analyses of material and form point to the historical specificity characteristic to capitalist relations and even their contradictions. The process of transformation must be analysed not only from the perspective of capital but from the material side, especially in terms of the entire metabolic interaction between humans and nature.

Discussing the material character of abstract labour is thus not a diversion from the theme of Marx’s ecology, because considering the concept as a purely social category makes it much harder to explain why capitalist domination destroys various dimensions of the universal metabolism of nature more devastatingly than ever. The strict opposition between “nature” and “society” excludes

the influence of economic determinations over the material dimensions. An analysis of Marx’s project thus needs to include, says Saito, the material world as a **central object of study**. This analysis is primarily about how capitalist production, by the logic of reification, organises a social practice increasingly hostile to nature, finally destroying the metabolic interaction with humans.

The fact that humans work upon nature under the primacy of value might not at first seem so ecologically unfriendly. However, the problem of this reified mediation appears more distinctively with the emergence of fully developed capital, as value now becomes the goal of production. Since both labour power and nature are important for capital only as ‘bearers’ of value, capital neglects various aspects of these, often leading to their exhaustion. In chapters of *Capital* Volume I on ‘The Working Day’ and ‘Machinery and Large-Scale Industry’, Marx carefully illustrates the destructive uniqueness of capitalist production, as it affects the labourers, but at the same time illustrates the possibility and necessity of regulating the formal logic of capital’s valorisation *from a perspective of the material side of labour power* – eg shortening the working day, providing the labourers with technological education.

In illustrating the labour process, Marx does not neglect the fact that nature is working together with humans – the two “original factors” of the metabolic interaction. Thus, if production is organised under the primacy of abstract labour in a one-sided manner, we can infer that it leads to exhaustion of natural power as well as labour power. In various places in *Capital*, Marx points to the connection between the two original factors as he considered the wasteful use of both, even if he does not consider the waste of natural resources in as much detail as labour power. This is understandable, says Saito, because Marx planned to deal with the problem of natural powers in the chapter on ‘ground rent’ in Volume III of *Capital*, but the manuscript remained unfinished. He talked about this plan explicitly in his *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*:

“[T]he whole investigation of the extent to which *natural conditions* influence the productivity of labour independently of the development of social forces in production, and often in opposition to them, belongs to our consideration of *ground-rent*.” (p 130)

In his *Manuscripts of 1861-63* Marx explains why capitalist production inevitably and boundlessly exploits nature. Here the differentiation between the “formal” and material aspects becomes decisive:

“[A]ll those productive forces which cost *nothing* ... as well as the forces of nature whose application does not give rise to any costs ... enter into the labour process without entering into the valorisation process.” (pp 130-1)

Science is appropriated by capital. New materials and auxiliary materials can reduce the constant part of circulating capital and increase productivity with lower costs. Hence there emerges a tendency of capital towards brutal exploitation of the free forces of nature, and a global competitive race after cheaper natural resources.

Capital attempts to compensate for the tendency of the rate of profit to fall with mass production of cheaper commodities and use of cheaper natural resources.

However, these countermeasures only impose more burdens on nature, and clearly cannot last for ever. In a post-1868 economic manuscript (*MEGA*² II/4.3 – a volume dealing with various manuscripts for *Capital* Volumes II and III), Marx writes:

“[The] increase of labour’s productive force serves only as compensation of decreasing natural conditions of productivity – and even this compensation may be insufficient” (p 134)

Hence it is clear that, in his theory of value, Marx is far from optimistic about sustainable capitalist development, and criticises how the one-sided mediation by abstract labour of the metabolic interaction between humans and labour exhausts and desolates the forces of labour and nature.

‘LIEBIG AND CAPITAL’

But, asks Saito, why did Marx so intensively study natural sciences? We can surmise, he says, that this was in order to analyse the contradictions of the material world as a result of its modification by capital. In the second half of the book, Saito explores the development of Marx’s views throughout his life, examining the *MEGA*² materials in particular. These include all 8 original manuscripts for Volume II of *Capital*, and the original manuscript for Volume III, revealing some important differences between Marx and Engels. The fourth section of *MEGA*², when complete, will publish Marx’s excerpts, memos and comments in personal notebooks, often the only source that allows us to trace Marx’s theoretical development after 1868. During the last 15 years of his life Marx produced one third of his notebooks, of which more than half deal with natural sciences.

Saito’s chapter 4 examines the development of Marx’s theory of ground-rent, which he defined in *Capital* Volume III as payment from the capitalist farmer to the landowner. However, the term had a long prehistory before that, going back to Ricardo, who assumed that, if plenty of land was available, then the best would be cultivated first, with less favourable land having to be farmed as the population increased. Agricultural prices would then rise, with the owner of the best land receiving the benefit as differential rent. But, abstracting from concrete reality, Ricardo developed his law of diminishing returns, that not only would there be a constant retreat to less fertile soils, but that there would be diminishing production from successive capital investments on the same land.

Marx struggled with this problem for a long time. In the *Poverty of Philosophy*, he accepts Ricardo’s theory of differential rent, but not the supposition of diminishing returns, pointing to a possibility of great improvement in soil productivity by instalments of capital. In a letter to Engels in 1851, he still refutes the “diminishing returns”, worrying that, if Ricardo is right, then Malthus’s theory of absolute overpopulation will prove correct too.

In the *Economic Manuscripts of 1861-63*, Marx again intensively engages with Ricardo’s ground-rent theory. He carefully goes into concrete calculations of differential rent so that it can be flexibly extended and generalised to include cases that start with fertile soils and proceed to less fertile ones with increasing productivity of labour. He also formulates, in contrast to Ricardo, the possibility of absolute ground-rent. The organic composition of capital

(c/v , the ratio of constant to varying capital) is lower in agriculture than in industrial branches, due to the lower degree of mechanisation, so by selling agricultural products it is possible to attain higher profit than the social average. The surplus profit that arises from the difference of value and production price constitutes the source of absolute rent.

In Marx’s plan of 1861-63 for Volume III, the theory of differential rent is subordinated to absolute rent. At this point he still has a theoretical blind spot on soil exhaustion, attributing its cause to the lack of application of both machinery and natural sciences, which can come with capitalist development. But the *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65* (the draft adapted by Engels for Volume III of *Capital*) is different: differential rent comes first and has a more important position than absolute rent. Marx includes a new discussion of the law of diminishing returns, and a new treatment of natural fertility, due to his reception of Liebig’s theory.

In Volume I of *Capital*, Marx criticises Liebig for supporting the law of diminishing returns. However, in the *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*, Marx writes:

“On the declining productivity of the soil when successive capital investments are made. Liebig should be consulted on this question.” (p 152)

Did Marx change his view between Volumes I and III? No, says Saito, because Marx worked again on Volume I after writing the manuscript of Volume III.

Until at least the 1850s, Liebig shared the popular optimistic idea of the rapid and boundless progress of agriculture. However, in the 7th edition of his *Agricultural Chemistry*, in 1862, he recognises that there are natural limits to agricultural improvements, particularly the finite amount of available mineral nutrients in the soil and the finite absorption ability of roots and leaves.

Marx in fact changed his *understanding* in 1865-66 through his study of Liebig’s 7th edition, as discussed below. Saito refers to a notebook of Marx’s in the Marx-Engels Archive at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (*MEA*, Section B 106), where Marx made notes on Liebig’s book, remarking on Liebig’s recognition of limits, and demonstrating Marx’s interest in the results of experiments that report a *non-proportional* increase in soil productivity. But, says Saito, what Marx is criticising in Volume I is not Liebig’s scientific deductions, but his belief in an affinity with James Mill’s dogmatic vulgarisation of Ricardo’s law of diminishing returns. Liebig’s discoveries allowed Marx to treat the problem of diminishing productivity in agriculture without falling into Malthusianism.

Saito says that Marx in 1865 deepened his own insight that nature cannot be arbitrarily subordinated and manipulated through technological development, and that instead social production must be radically reorganised. In the chapter on ‘Large-Scale Industry and Agriculture’ in *Capital* Volume I, Marx points to the disturbance of natural metabolism in the sense of robbery of soil fertility, and disturbance of social metabolism in the sense of destruction of the urban and rural worker. That was not just an aside. In the *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*, Marx writes:

“Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not the owners of the earth. They are simply its *occupiers*, its

beneficiaries, and they have to bequeath it in any improved state to succeeding generations as *boni patres familias*.”

This paragraph is also quoted by John Bellamy Foster in his interview in *CR87*.

‘FERTILISER AGAINST ROBBERY AGRICULTURE’

Saito’s chapter 5 aims to trace the development of Marx’s critique of political economy more precisely up to 1867, as a prelude for revealing his project thereafter. We learn that, already in his *Manchester Notebooks* of 1845, Marx had written about the possibility of advancing natural fertility of soils, based on his reading of James Anderson’s 1801 book, *A Calm Investigation of the Circumstances That Have Led to the Present Scarcity of Grain in Britain*. This Scottish agronomist and practical farmer problematised the “great waste of manure”, and unmistakably criticised Malthus. In his 1851 *London Notebooks* Marx made extracts from an earlier book by Anderson, and later cited passages from it in his *Manuscripts of 1861-63*: in opposition to Ricardo and Malthus, Marx continued to value Anderson’s ideas about using drainage and manures.

The *London Notebooks* in fact contain research from various agronomic science books, with an emphasis that only a conscious management of the soil could realise a great advance in agricultural productivity. Marx makes no serious critique of the rapid decrease in soil fertility then occurring in capitalist agriculture, seeming to ascribe the problem to precapitalist and primitive societies. His optimism continues in excerpts from Liebig and from review articles in *The Economist* about James F W Johnston’s book, *Notes on North America*.

By careful experiments, Liebig had debunked the so-called “humus theory”, which wrongly assumed the direct contribution of well-decomposed plant residue as the source of plant food, absorbed through roots. His “mineral theory” by contrast emphasised the essential role of soil inorganic materials, which can be exhausted by cultivation, and so must be restored as much as possible by such methods as fallowing, crop rotation, clover and adding manure, bones or manufactured fertiliser. Johnston, a Scottish chemist and geologist, also argued that the farmer can change the character of the land itself, preventing exhaustion by putting in the proper substances at the right times.

Liebig originally considered that ammonia salts were among the minerals which needed to be added to attain a larger crop yield. However, in the 5th edition of his *Agricultural Chemistry*, he reversed that opinion, prompting a fierce debate with English agronomists John Bennet Lawes and Joseph Henry Gilbert. In a document also in the Marx-Engels Archive (Section B 93), Marx notes Liebig’s response that addition of ammonia does indeed increase yields, but only temporarily, as it leads to the more rapid exhaustion of other minerals. In fact, Saito says, Liebig was keen to emphasise the merits of his own mineral fertiliser, so it is not surprising that he did not develop a critique of robbery agriculture until the late 1850s.

Marx’s view only changed with *Capital*, reflecting his reading of the 7th edition of Liebig’s *Agricultural Chemistry*. His excerpts (*MEA*, Section B 106, see above) trace Liebig’s changed view, notably his criticism of the widespread neglect of the “law of replenishment”, and the argument that short-sighted increase in production is nothing but robbery of the soil:

“Each land”, says Liebig, will inevitably become “more infertile not only by continuously exporting its crops, but also by uselessly wasting the products of metabolism that accumulate in large cities. ... It is clear to everyone that labour as such gradually but constantly makes the soil poorer and exhausts it in the end.” (p 198)

Marx’s critique, in *Capital* Volume I, of the disturbance of the metabolic interaction between humanity and nature is clearly based on the above passage.

Liebig also goes on to criticise Great Britain for robbing all countries of their fertility (like modern imperialists, we could say):

“She has already ransacked the battlefields of Leipzig, Waterloo and the Crimea for bones. She has ploughed up and used the skeletons of many generations accumulated in the catacombs of Sicily. And she still destroys yearly the food for a future generation of three and a half million people.” (p 198)

Liebig warns against diminishing returns, but now separates himself from Ricardo by identifying the problem as a specifically modern one, which is the reason why Marx found the theory so attractive. He was thus prompted to read again Johnston’s *Notes on North America*, concentrating this time on the passages describing soil exhaustion due to robbery agriculture (*MEGA*² II/4.3; *MEA* Section B 106). In *Capital* Volume I, he characterises North America as the manifestation of the destructive dimension of capitalist production:

“Capitalist production, therefore, only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker.”

In his manuscript for Volume III of *Capital*, Marx also writes that the “metabolic rift” between society and nature results in “a squandering of the vitality of the soil, and *trade carries this devastation far beyond the bounds of a single country*” (p 206). He may have had in mind Liebig’s criticism of the robbery of guano, for fertiliser, from South American islands, but he may also have been thinking of imports of North American, Irish and Indian products. In *Capital* Volume I he comments that:

“[I]t must not be forgotten that for a century and a half England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil.” (p 207)

While, in his *Economic Manuscript of 1864-65*, he writes that:

“Insofar as English trade has had a revolutionary effect on the mode of production in India, this is simply to the extent that it has destroyed spinning and weaving, which form an age-old and integral part of [the] unity of industrial and agricultural production, through the cheapness (and the underselling) of English commodities.”

By integrating Liebig's critique of robbery agriculture, Marx therefore deepened his ecological critique of capitalism (and, we may say, colonialism). Saito accepts that Marx hardly wrote again on this theme after Volume I of *Capital*. But he argues that, given the intensive study on such matters, it is inconceivable that Marx suddenly abandoned further research on ecological questions.

'MARX'S ECOLOGY AFTER 1868'

Saito's chapter 6 is devoted to an analysis of Marx's notebooks from 1868 alone, as later notebooks must wait for full publication of section IV of *MEGA*². Yet even in that year, Marx continued to study natural science books, including some highly critical of Liebig's theory of soil exhaustion. From the titles which he was reading, it is clear that he was aware of a sharp debate which had been generated over Liebig's thesis of the neglect of the "law of replenishment". Furthermore, he may well have been concerned that Liebig was getting close to Malthus's position, in his pessimism that a dark future was in store for European society once the supplies of guano were exhausted. It is noteworthy that for the 2nd edition of *Capital* in 1872-73, Marx deleted his statement that Liebig was more insightful "than all the works of modern political economists put together", replacing it with "His historical overview of the history of agriculture, although not free from gross errors, *contains flashes of insight*" (p 219).

Of particular importance in Marx's studies was Carl Nikolaus Fraas, an agricultural physicist who emphasised "climatic influences" on vegetation and human civilisation. A heated controversy developed between Fraas and Liebig after 1864, with Fraas arguing that climatic conditions must be taken into account: when they are favourable, cultivation can take place without exhaustion of the soil even if minerals are not returned by humans – which is why traditional agriculture under tropical or subtropical conditions is often sustainable. He offers an image of sustainable agriculture in Europe where the power of nature itself takes care of the replenishment of soil nutrients.

At the end of his 1857 book *The Nature of Agriculture*, Fraas directly criticises Liebig, arguing that: (1) there were ancient civilised societies such as Greece and Asia Minor, where people conducted sustainable agriculture *without* any manure; (2) even if farmers sell their products in the market, they also receive various materials useful for soil replenishment from "brewery, distillation and limekiln"; (3) robbery practice does not exist in forestry; (4) Liebig underestimates the importance of fallow, which is a state of weathering and thus allows more plant nutrients to be available; and (5), regarding Chinese agriculture, even Liebig admits the possibility of increasing agricultural productivity together with an increase of population.

Fraas argues that replenishment of soil minerals takes place naturally and artificially in various places. He does not negate the possibility of soil exhaustion, nor the usefulness of mineral fertiliser, but he regards Liebig's position as exaggerated. There are other ways, he says, in nature itself to replenish the soils, namely "through weathering, alluvion, irrigation, meteorous materials in rain and meteoric dust, and usage of refuse in manure and excrements." Alluvion consists of a silt that contains a rich amount of mineral substances, and Fraas suggests

constructing canals and water gates so that silt in river water is regulated to cover the fields. Chemical fertiliser, he says, is not a panacea, but only a "climatic adjustment".

Marx read several of Fraas's books, making excerpts (*MEA* Section B, 107 & 111) and commenting positively in a letter to Engels on 25 March 1868. Saito says that Marx realised another vision of sustainable agriculture, pointing to the possibility of using the power of nature to enable a rational arrangement of the metabolism between humans and nature. This, suggests Saito, is the probable reason why Marx in 1868 saw the acute necessity for more study of natural sciences.

But Marx was interested in Fraas not only for his critique of Liebig. In the letter to Engels he writes of Fraas's "unconscious socialist tendency", referring to the latter's 1847 book, *Climate and the Plant World Over Time*. While Liebig argued that robbery cultivation led to the downfall of ancient civilisations through desertification, Fraas says that climatic influence is much more important for vegetation than soil composition, which is essentially determined by humidity, temperature and rain. Using various botanical examples, Fraas tries to show that slow accumulating changes in local climate have a significant impact on human civilisation, because the increasing temperature and dryness of the air are unfavourable for local plants. He sees a significant role for human societies here:

"Great damage to natural vegetation in a region results in a deep transformation of its entire character, and this modified new state of nature is never so favourable to the region and its population as before ..."

Native plants become extinct or migrate, the flora changes, and gradually steppes or deserts are formed. As summarised in Marx's letter to Engels, and as documented in Marx's 1867 notebook (*MEA*, Section B, 112), Fraas argues that deforestation is the most significant cause of desertification, in that it generates rising temperatures and lower humidity, whereas

"The forested areas covered by vegetation retain moisture more firmly and are less heated up by sunlight than infertile areas. [As a result], they also attract more rainfall, and thus these areas are not just cool but also distribute refreshing cool airstream to hot surrounding areas." (p 243)

Saito notes that today's scholars do not necessarily agree with Fraas's claim of the link between climate and civilisation, but he makes the point that it was Fraas's work which enabled Marx to widen his theory of metabolism, leading him to study natural sciences more intensively in the 1870s. Reading Fraas's work, Marx rightly thinks it necessary to investigate much more thoroughly the negative aspect of the development of productive forces and technology, and their disruption of natural metabolism with regard to other factors of production.

Although Marx makes no direct reference to Fraas in his later economic manuscripts, he continued to read about deforestation, and the influence of those studies are visible in the second manuscript for *Capital* Volume II.

He was conscious of the danger not only of a wood shortage but of a changing climate. In the same manuscript he also analyses the problem of material limits in the shortening of capital's turnover in stock farming, with calves being sold at "a week and ten days old", *ie* before they reach "the economic normal ages", because the farmers don't want to pay to rear on milk.

CONCLUSIONS

At the outset I said that Saito aims to show that Marx, in the course of his theoretical development, consciously departed from any forms of naïve Prometheism, and came to regard ecological crises as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production; and that one cannot comprehend the full scope of Marx's critique of political economy if the ecological dimension is ignored.

In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* Marx and Engels write that

"The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, have created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together. Subjection of Nature's forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam-navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground"¹

They go on to talk of the proletariat, having become the ruling class, centralising "all instruments of production in the hands of the state, ...and to increase the total of productive forces as rapidly as possible."²

It is clear that Marx, as a result of his studies, did depart from this early simple optimism about subjugating nature, although in his *Paris Notebooks* he had already described communism as "the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature and nature and man". Furthermore, there are elements of an ecological approach among the ten immediate communist measures in the *Manifesto*:

"7. ... the bringing into cultivation of waste lands, and the improvement of the soil generally in accordance with a common plan.

8. ... Establishment of industrial armies, especially for agriculture.

9. Combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; gradual abolition of the distinction between town and country, by a more equitable distribution of the population over the country."³

However, these are just elements, and, taken in the context of the totality of Marx's writings at the time, it is clear that it took him many years of study before he fully appreciated the depth of capitalism's disruption of the metabolism between humanity and nature.

For me, Saito does indeed demonstrate that one cannot comprehend the full scope of Marx's critique of political economy if the ecological dimension is ignored. But I am unconvinced by Saito's claim that it was as a result of getting to grips with environmental issues that Marx was ultimately unable to complete his magnum opus. Saito certainly provides evidence for the wide range of Marx's natural science reading which was related to his project.

But after 1867 Marx was of course also engaged in many other areas – the International Working Men's Association, defence of the Paris Commune, attempting to give leadership to the German Social-Democrats etc – as well as undertaking historical studies as part of the development of his political economy, all of which interfered with his ability to complete *Capital*.⁴

I am likewise sceptical of the claim that Marx came to regard ecological crises as the fundamental contradiction of the capitalist mode of production. The unity of opposing tendencies, which is part of capitalism's "living contradiction", includes not only that between capital and nature, but between capital and wage-labour. And while capital always has to seek new ways to overcome natural limitations, the resistance of nature is passive and necessarily unconscious. The resistance of wage-labour, initially unconscious, can become increasingly conscious until capitalism is overthrown.

It is this part of capitalism's "living tradition" which is ignored by first-generation ecosocialists and their supporters. And just as legal measures in the interests of workers' health require a conscious labour movement to carry them forward, and cannot be secure until the rule of capital is overthrown, so too must it require the organised power of the working class to challenge capital's unbridled destruction of the environment. Both aspects are essential for the working class because they limit capital's ability for expansion and so strengthen the working class's own relative position.

It goes without saying that the specific environmental issues faced by Marx could in no way be expected to be the same as today. In particular, while John Tyndall in 1859 had established the experimental basis for the idea that carbon dioxide (CO₂) helped regulate climate through the 'greenhouse effect', it was only in 1896 that Svante Arrhenius proposed (and somewhat favourably!) that CO₂ from fossil fuel combustion could lead to global warming.⁵ Nonetheless, Saito does show that Marx was aware of the potential risks of damaging climate change from unconstrained human activities.

All in all, Saito's book is a valuable asset for understanding that it is capitalism which is the main danger to the environment, through capital's drive for expansion that regards both labour power and nature as resources to be exploited without consideration of the consequences.

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ALEX HÖBEL

REMEMBERING DOMENICO LOSURDO



**AT THE OPENING SESSION OF THE CONGRESS OF THE
PARTITO COMUNISTA ITALIANO
PALAZZO DEL POPOLO DI ORVIETO 9 JULY 2018**

We open our congress with our hearts full of grief over the death of comrade Domenico Losurdo, which occurred just a few days ago, on June 28, at his home in Colbordolo, not far from the University of Urbino, where Domenico taught for many years, educating generations of students and numerous scholars.

Born in Sannicandro di Bari in 1941, and maintaining a lifelong strong bond with his land of origin, Losurdo moved at a very young age to the Marches, graduating in philosophy at Urbino in 1963, then – thanks to various scholarships – completing his studies in Tübingen, Germany, and thus starting on his academic career.

However, from his early years Domenico – “Mimmo” to his friends and comrades – was also a militant communist,

holding fast to this until the end of his life. In the 1970s, fascinated by Maoism and the Chinese experience, he played an active part in the Marxist-Leninist patchwork of parties, adhering in particular to the Communist Party of Italy (Marxist-Leninist) led by Fosco Dinucci.

From the 1980s, Losurdo focused his efforts above all on study and research. In this period he wrote his first books, dedicated to the classical authors of Western thought, from Kant to Hegel, in order then to investigate the relationship between Marx’s ideas and the preceding philosophical tradition: a dialectical relationship, of course, through which the father of historical materialism connected himself with the highest points of bourgeois thought, in order to make them his own and to transcend them, opening a new chapter in the cultural and political history of the world. Losurdo also confronted the ideas of thinkers like Heidegger, who focused on the “ideology of war” so central in the history of Western ‘civilisation’. At the same time he began to deepen the

particular tradition of Italian Marxism, starting from the “critical communism” at which the young Gramsci had arrived.

Soon Domenico was recognised as a scholar at an international level. From 1988 he presided over the International Hegel-Marx Society for Dialectical Thought. But it was above all in the 1990s, after the collapse of the USSR and the socialist camp, that his research became more intense, starting to confront all the theoretical, historical and political problems posed by that event; engaging, that is, in an alternative reading of the twentieth century, and in general of modernity, to the dominant one, accepted also by so many ‘on the left’. In 1993 he produced the important volume *Marx e il bilancio storico del Novecento (Marx and the Historical Balance of the Twentieth Century)*, but also his first organic reflection on the parable of representative democracy, *Democrazia o bonapartismo: Trionfo e decadenza del suffragio universale (Democracy or Bonapartism: Triumph and decadence of universal suffrage)*, published by Bollati Boringhieri.

Losurdo realised at the time how the ebb of democracy, beginning in the 1970s but powerfully accelerated by the collapse of the USSR, had an Italian specificity as well as being an international phenomenon; and he reflected on this in his book *La seconda Repubblica: Liberismo, federalismo, postfascismo (The Second Republic: Free trade, federalism, post-fascism)*, published in 1994. It was in that year, after the dissolution of the mass parties of the “First Republic” and the ingenious majoritarian reforms¹ wanted by Occhetto², Segni³ and Pannella⁴, that it took just five months for Silvio Berlusconi, with his corporate party, to take over the country's government.

Losurdo realised that this political drift had an essential component in the hegemony that the adversaries – the ruling classes and their most backward sectors – were building. And he tried to oppose it at the level of historical-political reflection, dedicating an important book to historical revisionism (published by Laterza), but also starting an organic reflection on the history of twentieth-century communism. Within five years Mimmo had published *Utopia e stato d'eccezione: Sull'esperienza storica del socialismo reale (Utopia and State of Exception: On the historical experience of real socialism)*, *Il peccato originale del Novecento (The Original Sin of the Twentieth Century)* and *Fuga dalla storia? Il movimento comunista tra autocritica e autofobia (Flight from History? The communist movement between self-criticism and fear of itself)*. These are central stages in his elaboration, and their political significance is evident. Losurdo was convinced, rightly, that it is not possible to relaunch the communist identity and the perspective of socialism, nor more generally to delineate any alternative to the domination of capitalism, unless the communists come to terms with their own history and do the analytical work of interpreting twentieth-century communism with the tools of Marxism; so that they can oppose the liquidationist approaches and the criminalisation of communist history, which have become the generally accepted narrative, but which risk being inflicted upon and assimilated by communists themselves. Into this picture came his book *Stalin: Storia e critica di una leggenda nera (Stalin: History and critique of a black legend)*, in which he reinterpreted the Soviet turn of events and the Stalin figure in the context of the dramatic battle between the forces of progress and reaction that characterised the twentieth century.

On the other hand, Mimmo worked on a critical

reinterpretation of liberalism, placing the colonial question in the foreground and surpassing the Eurocentric vision, also so widespread on the left. He based himself on the assumption that, in order to judge a country or a civilisation, it is necessary to see how it acts in its colonies. If we widen the horizon from the centre of the capitalist system to the peripheries, then the sugar-coated history of liberal democracy takes on other colours: slavery, racism, massacres and mass-murder of the colonial peoples – dehumanised, deprived of all rights and exterminated. In this picture Mimmo proposed a reading of modernity in which liberalism is linked not so much to democracy as to the rigid division of society into classes and to the sharp split between enslaved peoples and the “Herrenvolk democracy”,⁵ for whom alone democracy is in force, with a division between human beings and “sub-humans” that Nazism carried to its extreme limits. It is a strong interpretation, for many even scandalous, which completely reverses the dominant conceptual picture. The fable of a democracy undermined by communism and fascism, and the “promised bride” of liberal capitalism – a metaphor that Mimmo often used – is counterposed by a reading in which the relationship between capitalism and democracy is much more conflictual; and on the contrary it is precisely the labour movement, the communist movement and the liberation movements which put forward the theme of effective human emancipation and make the greatest progress in the field of democracy, as well as equality and social progress.

This approach was developed by Losurdo in his important book, *La lotta di classe: Una storia politica e filosofica (Laterza 2013; Class Struggle: A political and philosophical history)*, in which he identified “the different forms of the class struggle”, intertwining the battle against exploitation conducted by the working class with that for the emancipation of oppressed peoples and the liberation of women: three forms of struggle of the “subordinates” that the communists must know how to read and hold together.

Thus, Losurdo's studies remained basically a political contribution to the end. But alongside his books there is also his most direct militant commitment: joining Rifondazione comunista (PRC, Communist Refoundation), in which he supported the internal battle over the content of the theoretical journal *L'Ernesto*; then the struggle for the unity of the communists; the presidency of the Marx XXI Association; membership of the Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (PdCI) and finally of the new Partito Comunista Italiano (PCI), which we established together in Bologna two years ago. And in this framework, not only did Domenico take on hundreds of conferences, seminars and debates, speaking at scores of meetings, going round Italy as well as the world, but he was also present in the internal party dynamics, without losing touch. Indeed his grasp of position, his contribution to clarification and the ‘clearing up’ of the debate, was never lacking; and he always had unity as a compass, fighting against every example of sectarianism, albeit in clear reaffirmation of the communist identity. In this sense Mimmo taught us that it is precisely when you have a strong and clear identity, on solid foundations, that you can go to confront and meet others with calmness and security, strong in your own arguments and your own political culture.

In recent years Losurdo insisted a lot on the theme of war and the need for a new struggle for peace and against the warmongering militarism of the United States and NATO. At the same time, forming valued relationships, he took great

interest in the new course of the People's Republic of China: for the extraordinary results obtained in terms of lifting millions of people out of poverty, as an example of a road towards socialism based in Marxist terms on the development of productive forces; but also as a fundamental counterbalance to the Atlantic block and its aggressive tendencies, to which China contrasts the idea of a harmonious development and a multipolar world, based on cooperation rather than war.

As for the Italian context, Mimmo continued to emphasise the need to keep theoretical and cultural work and political and mass organisation together: this is why he supported projects such as the political training school of our party, the rebirth of *Marxismo Oggi* (*Marxism Today*) in online version, or the digital magazine *Materialismo storico* (*Historical Materialism*) edited by his pupil Stefano Azzarà; but he also engaged in initiatives against NATO, on international issues, on China, and finally took a position on the occasion of the last political elections.

And yet Domenico was increasingly concerned over the state of the communists and the whole left in Italy. He dedicated one of his last books to the theme of the “absent left”, squeezed between the meshes of the “society of spectacle” and the tendencies to war.⁶ In the same way he was also worried by the emergence of so-called “red-brown” positions in sectors of the patchwork of “communist” parties; and up to the last he underlined how the centrality of the national question and the just struggle for the defence of national and popular sovereignty should not degenerate into forms of exclusiveness and cultural regression incompatible with proletarian and communist internationalism.

The recovery of a global perspective (that perspective that Losurdo charged Marxism with having lost); the placing of the socialist alternative at the level of contradictions and current challenges, which are those of the unification of mankind, achieved on the basis of an interdependent world market; the ability to give back to the communist project that universal breath that has always characterised it; these are precisely the tasks and challenges that Mimmo leaves us as his legacy, together with the great insights generated in his life as a scholar – to which it will be necessary to return in more detail – and the precious teachings that come from his working style, from his way of relating to politics and his companions, from his entire life as a militant communist.

Thank you for everything, dear comrade Losurdo, we will not forget you!

● Originally published in Italian on the PCI web site <https://www.ilpartitocomunistaitaliano.it/2018/07/09/il-congresso-del-pci-apre-ricordando-domenico-losurdo/> and translated here, with added endnotes, by the CR editor.

NOTES

- ¹ *ie* abolishing proportional representation.
- ² Acchille Occhetto (b 1936) was the last general secretary of the Italian Communist Party between 1988 and 1991, and the first leader of its parliamentary successor, the Democratic Party of the Left.
- ³ Mariotto Segni (b 1939) was a Christian Democrat politician, who founded Popolars for Reform as a split in 1992, and then the Pact of National Rebirth (Segni Pact) in 1993.
- ⁴ Marco Pannella (1930-2016) was a European federalist and long-time leader of the Radical Party.
- ⁵ *ie* a democracy of the ‘master race’; see D Losurdo, *Liberalism: A counter-history*, Verso, London, 2011, p 54.
- ⁶ See D Losurdo, ‘There is no society only individuals’, in *CR88*, Summer 2018, pp 18-22.

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LETTER

CAPITALISM AND ITS PRIMARY CONCEPTS

In books and media one of the most prevalent concepts is neoliberalism, and this is not limited to bourgeois media. The concept is also frequently used among leftists. Is the Wikipedia definition, which follows, thorough and acceptable?

“Neoliberalism refers primarily to the 20th-century resurgence of 19th-century ideas associated with laissez-fair economic liberalism. Those ideas include economic liberalisation policies such as privatisation, austerity, deregulation, free trade and reductions in government spending in order to increase the role of the private sector in the economy and society. These market-based ideas and the policies they inspired constitute a paradigm shift away from the post-war Keynesian consensus which lasted from 1945 to 1980.”¹

Originally neoliberalism was invented by a group of economists and philosophers at a conference in Paris, 1938, to counter the progress of socialism in Europe: “They wished to found an international liberal organisation to fight the planned economy.”²

The term has been commonly used to explain the economic changes which have occurred since the counter-revolution began in the 1980s. However, in my view it gives a false explanation, because it doesn't coincide with the general trends in capitalism. Understanding capitalism and imperialism means reflecting the actual developments in the base and superstructure.

The foregoing definition of neoliberalism gives the false view that opportunities are open, and that it's just a matter of using them. For example, one of the main trends in the media is the topic of innovation, whereby people are encouraged to set up their own companies, often on their own. However, after some years they come to realise that ideas like theirs are already being adopted by bigger firms, with better opportunities for commerce and trade. So these youngsters waste several years trying to realise their dreams on false premises.

But it isn't just a matter of people being cheated. It's important to give scientifically correct explanations, or correct concepts correlating with reality. The factual development in capitalism is concentration of capital and monopolisation of industry. This was a trend already visible in Marx's *Capital*.³ But, 150 years later, we are still subject to misinformation and the wrong use of concepts in the bourgeois media.

Another concept used in many areas is globalisation. Is this the correct definition of capitalism in the 21st century?

Capitalism is a society characterised by widespread production of commodities, including labour power, whose use determines exchange value. The superstructure of capitalism in its present stage is corporate capitalism in its state monopolistic phase (SMC). This structure has been extended to supranational institutions such as the EU, IMF, World Bank and others, but still with the national states as the basis.

Marx already showed how capital chases sources of profit all over the globe. So again, 150 years later, globalisation is not a satisfactory definition of the rise in the internationalisation of production and finance.⁴ The

correct definition is to build on Lenin's analysis in *Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917), where he defines the function of finance capital in generating profits from imperialist colonialism as the final stage of capitalist development to ensure greater profits.⁵

This is not just a game with words and concepts. My objection to the concepts of neoliberalism and globalisation is also that they are without class content. It is characteristic of bourgeois ideologists to deliberately conceal reality. Marxism must show the true content, ie logic as a picture of reality.

Lars Ulrik Thomsen

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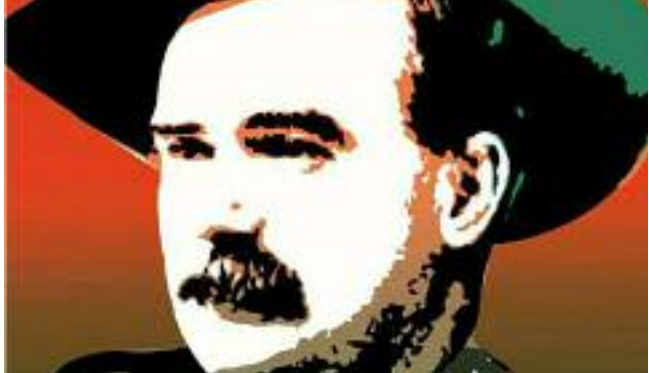
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DEEP, UNVOICED FEELINGS FROM THOSE HARDEST HIT

THIS TIME, Soul Food consists of a procession of poems from the 2018 Bread and Roses Poetry Award. In 2017, **Culture Matters** ran the first Poetry Award. It was free to enter, and the main idea was to encourage more good writing by and about working-class people.

Poetry, like all the arts, has suffered for far too long from the restrictions which are placed on cultural activities in class-divided societies. Historically, there have always been attempts by dominant classes to appropriate and privatise an essentially shared and social art form. Through various means – eg preventing popular enjoyment through restricting arts education, and promoting and rewarding individualist, obscure and apolitical poets – poetry has been made inaccessible, unintelligible and uninteresting to working people.

It is part of the mission of this column, and the **Culture Matters Co-operative** which I chair, to challenge and try to change that situation. The Award is one of the ways we are trying to do that. It is part of the cultural struggle for socialism that needs to run alongside our economic and political struggles.

Unite sponsored the Award, and Len McCluskey wrote an article about it in the *Morning Star*, as well as the introduction to the published anthology, *On Fighting On!*, that resulted from the 1000+ poems that were submitted. This is what he said in the *Morning Star*:

“As working-class people, we know all about economic struggle. It’s a constant struggle for many people nowadays to make ends meet on low incomes and inadequate benefits, because these have been deliberately frozen and even cut by governments of the rich and powerful.

It’s hard work just to keep your job these days – let alone get more pay, win better terms and conditions, and get some satisfaction out of work. The trade union movement, which is by far the largest voluntary movement in Britain, is vital to protecting working people’s economic interests, but it has been limited and obstructed by successive governments.

That is why political struggle is so important for us in the labour movement. It’s why we need to campaign politically as well as economically. It’s why we need to vote for political parties which will genuinely try and change a system which is so obviously rigged against us.

There is another struggle, though – the cultural struggle. And culture is not just the arts, it is all the things we do to entertain, educate and enlighten ourselves, usually with others. It includes the arts like music, films,

theatre and poetry. But it also includes sport, television, eating and drinking, the internet, religion – all those activities which bring meaning, purpose, enjoyment and happiness into our lives.

In each and every one of those activities, working people face a struggle. It’s getting harder to become a musician or actor or writer without rich relatives to support you. The ticket prices for football games exclude families on tight budgets from attending together. Cuts and curriculum changes mean our children are being deprived of good arts, sporting and other cultural educational activities, at primary and secondary schools.

Libraries and other cheap or free cultural facilities are being cut back, part of the deliberate class war being waged by the rich and powerful on working people. State funding for the arts – money that comes from our taxes and our Lottery tickets – is overwhelmingly focused on the London area, benefiting mainly the already well off, and tourists.

Unite, Britain’s biggest trade union, believes that our members, and working people generally, have an equal right to join in and enjoy all the arts and cultural activities. We believe we should be able to afford them, be near to them, and be able to enjoy them.

Most of all, we believe artists and leaders of cultural institutions – not only theatres, art galleries, concert halls and poetry publishers, but sports clubs, churches, and broadcasting and media corporations – should seek to engage with all sections of the community, particularly the least well off.

That’s why we sponsored the first Bread and Roses Poetry Award. ... This is the kind of democratising, energetic exercise that we see behind so much of the support for Jeremy Corbyn. His message of hope and the possibility of real change has inspired new generations to look afresh at politics and express their support creatively.

Let’s build on that – and work to keep our cultural activities open to the many, not the few.”¹

Unite also sponsored the 2018 Bread and Roses Poetry Award. It was judged by Andy Croft from Smokestack Books and Mary Sayer from Unite. Mary said this of the competition:

“This is my second year judging this much-needed and extraordinary competition. Again, I was struck by the passion, the urgency and the sheer hard work driving people to write these poems. So many of the entries were beautifully put together, often with a story that demanded

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to be told and with artfully refreshing humour.

The poems reflected the fact that we find ourselves in such bleak and alienating times – making this type of competition more crucial than ever. And this year we had a particularly healthy number of entries from women and from young people – again, a reflection of deep, unvoiced feelings from those hardest hit by today’s increasingly rampant inequality.

So, thanks to all of you passionate poets out there – keep them coming! If I had my way, it would be like Alice in Wonderland: ‘All are winners and all should have prizes.’”

And Andy Croft said this:

“At a time when the British poetry world is sinking under the weight of so many self-promoting vanity projects, it was a pleasure and a privilege to be able to read so many moving, witty and well-written entries to the Bread and Roses competition. While the poems ranged in subject-matter, voices and styles, they shared a radical common sense that social inequality is worse than ever, that government is remote and hostile, and that only in collective work and struggle can we begin to imagine another way of living.”

The judges awarded £100 each to five poems, sent in by Helen Burke, Martin Hayes, Fran Lock, Alan Morrison and Steve Pottinger. Their poems are all on the **Culture Matters** website, <http://www.culturematters.org.uk/>, so I’m going to present some of the other submissions.

Way back, what did I think I would be?

by Jane Burns

We thought we would be mummies, pushing cheap little pushchairs, fussing our dolls. Eighteen and married. A mum. Stay home, make flaccid salads, liver and onions, bangers and mash. There’d be some fellow – a miner prob’ly. Sometimes he’d go

down the pub. I washed toy clothes in the sink, made a show of being a grown-up, pegging them out. A miniature wardrobe of ideas. I knew nothing. We knew we could work in the factories – sewing, or steel. Shop-worker, maybe a typist be. I was afraid of the loud girls, magnificent in lacquered perms –

tabards over batwings, skintight jeans. Bananarama on their lunch break, living for the weekend, smoking their lungs up for now. What did we even do at school save wait for the three-thirty bell? No career path,

no plan. I loved to read – it’s all I ever wanted to do. Stacks of *Reader’s Digests* someone gave us – *Life’s Like That!* Ruby Ferguson’s Jill, jumping her ponies, bossing folk about and never a clip for her cheek. She knew what she wanted and I wanted to be her – every summer,

gymkhanas and ice cream, adventures that turned out rosy, in the end. My mother would turf me out – reading would just make me fatter. What am I supposed to be? Let’s face it – it won’t be a wife. Too ugly and strange for that. Too clueless to know that I could have been anything.

Thick as pigshit, I curse my young self. I knew nothing.

Thi Unoffishal Toorist Guide Ooutside Glesca Central

by Owen Gallagher

“Ah’ll show yoo anuther Glesca, wan wi heid bangers sportin chibs tae stick in ribs an folk who hiv woke tae find thair milk n meter munny nicked. Ir greetid everi Friday wi a q it thi door: loan sharks, rent arrears men, priests an spivs. Where stray gulls n cats ir scoffd like Mars Bars n weans scalps hiv bin mauled by nits. Don’t bi connd bi cafs n galleries there’s sods here who wipe thair gobs wi fivers n widnae think twice o payin someone’s ma wi lefters an claes unfit fir charity. Folk here hiv nae mair holes in thair belts tae tighten tae fit sum right hoorable’s stratigy. Firget thi toorist hype, ‘Glesca’s great!’ Ah’ll tell yoo about thi Clydeside thit made thi English Government pipe thit thi Revolooshon wid start here n planked tanks n gangs o strike breakers. Dae yi want a bleached version o Glesca? Wan thit’s bin writtin oot o thi history books? Ah’ve git three weans tae feed. Ah’ll dae it fir a couple a quid!”

The Song Of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist

by Graeme Darling

I've been working my arse off for years,
So that parasites can sit on theirs,
Counting all the money they have stolen from me.
These venal cannibals are legal criminals,
Cloaking their immorality in the joke of respectability.
It's the same story in every capitalist trap;
The most essential employees (exploitees) are treated like
crap.
Decent folk on scrimping wages strain, scrub and mop,
While bloodsucking turds ride on their backs to the
top.
You don't need to know the *Communist Manifesto*
To recognise injustice that's manifestly so.
This situation blights every organisation, I'm telling
you true;
The higher the pay, the less work they do!
I'm sick and tired of being trod into the ground,
I'd turn this crazy pyramid the right way round.
The bosses in armchairs should clean toilets and
stairs,
And experience an existence of struggling for
subsistence.
Along with a decent minimum, I'd have a wage
maximum.
Four to one should be the widest disparity;
Anything more is an utter obscenity.
This economic system of domination wreaks global
exploitation;
Our training shoes are made by kids in sweatshops,
The Earth is ravaged for our phones and laptops.
We must side with the oppressed of every form and
nation;
The universal kinship should be our motivation.

My Father Never Got Over Being Voted Off the Allotments

by Catherine Graham

He pictured them sitting around the table
like a green-fingered séance: the committee.
Well-pruned men and women, women who
step out of the bath to break wind and men
who wash and polish their cars every Sunday.
"That's how they live in them leafy suburbs,"
he used to say, "that's their Sunday dinner."
He hadn't time for committees; hadn't time
for smarmy men or gaffers who play the game
of "If it was up to me lads." He hadn't time for
the way pitmen were portrayed in the media,
"Miners wouldn't swear like that in front of bairns."

I remember how we would sit, Sunday nights
around the small table by the fire, how Da could
take seven dominoes and hold them in one hand,
how he'd smile at my mother and say so much,
so much without saying a word. They broke him
when the factory found him "light duties" until
at fifty they gave him his cards. That weekend
was a scorcher, I see him still, in his pale green
shirt, sleeves rolled up to his elbows, his frayed
seventeen inch open collar. He came home from

the allotment with the letter, the smell of panhaggerty
in the oven, the taste of a final Sunday on his tongue.

The Long Days

by Nadia Drews

We marked days off with a stick
Each one wandering, hours
Time passed by us in wonky lines
Winding up, climbing through bust, rusty railings
The tick, tick, tick of a wrenched skinny whip
Little rips from a council quota of green
Pale, pure, sappy inside poked in dirt
Drawn out whopping switches
Laying down lines to skip over, entwined
Bent double against themselves into new shapes
Snapping back still intact

We walked tyres miles
Free, wheedling out of chores
Stealing cigs wriggling out of handbags behind back
doors
Blowing jaw-clicking rings, getting nettled stinging off
with dock leaves
Wiping smiles with snotty sleeves, holy pumps,
flapping lips, skidding slip-ons
Running loose, unlaced with no grips
Catching up, letting go, watching clocks escape
gaping, all over the place
Tongue wagging baby teeth falling out
Thieving what we found flopping down, ear-piercing,
Ice, screams
Pricks scrubbing ground in circles,
Skinny limbed spokes in the very centre,
Empty petrol cans abandoned all around,
hit with bricks made a gulping sound,
Grasping fists of grass, blowing through blades,
Playing sharp shrieks, bleeding, cut deep.
We left impressions, lying silhouettes of scrap
In the flattened wet.

We walked the back fields up and down,
Discovering suspicious bumps, swelling dips,
Blown, parting coarse undergrowth, making a path,
Laughing, wide open hollow holes,
Probing, soiled, oily digging with jammed, sticky
fingers
Making a space in spite,
Out of sight of squinting windows.
Frightened, counting down, wanting to be found,
Hiding from danger under jagged-edged garage doors
That could cut you off
If you didn't watch out.

We talked telly and took the piss,
Keks down quick slashing, not wanting to miss out,
We burned... anything we could get to catch,
Sometimes a gassy, plastic flash of flame,
Sometimes snidey, snatched household boxes,
Sparking matches then chucked spent, blackened tips.
We tore up whores
Tossing, glossy strips of dicks and nips
And saw gory gashed wanking flasher's stashes in
bushes, with taches
We left a trail, we went too far to run and tell tales.

Millennials

by Olivia Olphin

We are the avocado snackers, hackers of your information.
Snowflakes who complain too much,
about feminism, race, or being green,
but unlike my dad I could never move out when I was eighteen.

I am old enough to speak but too young to be heard.

You say we're reckless, we drink too much,
but we're the ones who refill your coffee cups
as we try to build a life on debt.
Nine thousand two hundred and fifty pounds a year.
You say you hear,
You say you know,
I say I've nowhere else to go.

I am old enough to speak but too young to be heard.

You say be proud of yourself, have some self esteem,
be strong, work hard, and then you'll achieve.
But then you growl, "your skirt's too short, put your tits
away,
I weep for your generation, you're all being led astray."

I am old enough to speak but too young to be heard.

We walk like cyber ghosts through the streets,
eyes down, fingers poised,
using our thumbs to make noise, to shout as loudly as we
know how.
The virtual world of our making, a place to start what
we're undertaking.

I am old enough to speak but too young to be heard.

So when we have something to say,
you better listen,
maybe we just need to be more insistent.
We want affordable housing.
We want diversity.
We want a say in our future.
We want a life worth working hard for.

I am old enough to speak, and will be heard.

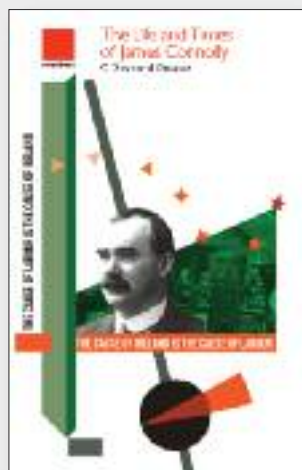
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NOTE

- 1 L McCluskey, *Culture is a potent force in the struggle for change*, in *Morning Star*, 7 November 2017, online at <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/culture-potent-force-struggle-change>.

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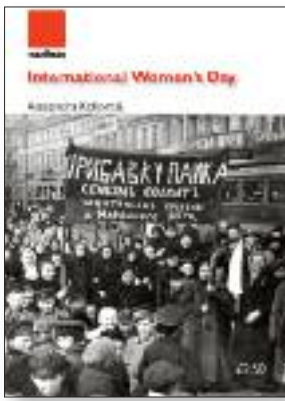
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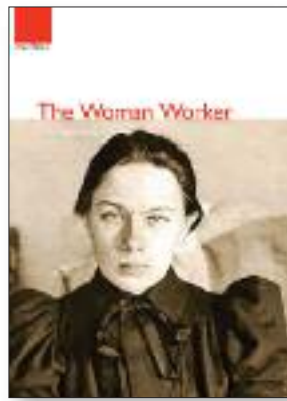
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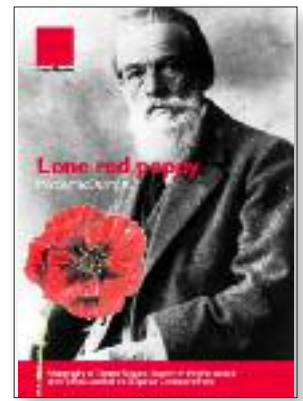
International Women's Day is by Alexandra Kollontai, the only woman member of the Bolshevik central committee in 1917. Following the Russian revolution she served as Commissar of Welfare of the Soviet Republic and head of the Women's Section of the Bolshevik Party. She founded the Zhenotdel or 'Women's 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)



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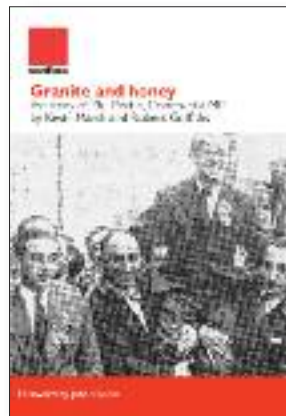
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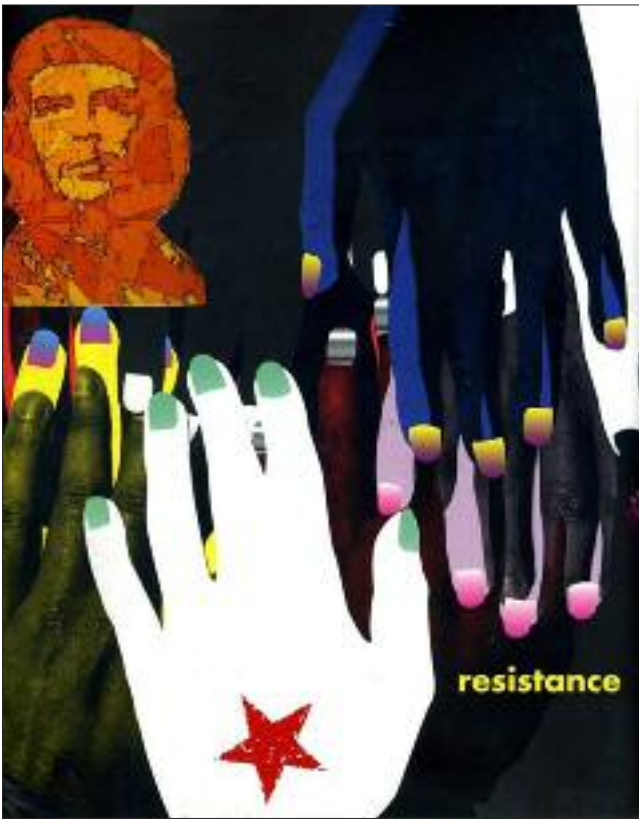
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Chris Bird is a north London designer and activist who produces artwork that stands firmly on the side of the marginalised and oppressed.

He contributes cartoons and designs to the *Morning Star* and other progressive publications. A supporter of Cuba Solidarity and the People's Assembly he attempts to connect creativity with the reality of the class struggle.

He has organised an exhibitions at The Marx Memorial Library, Bishopgate Institute, Freedom Bookshop and St Pancras Conference gallery.
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