

COMMUNIST REVIEW90

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THE PEOPLE AS THE SUBJECT OF HISTORY Luo Wendong

CASUAL WORK C Ritchie

A NEW STAGE IN CAPITALISM Lars Ulrik Thomsen

PIO GAMA PINTO, KENYA'S UNSUNG MARTYR Review by Cyprian Fernandes

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HAZEL ROBERTS PRINT MAKER

FASCISM IN BRITAIN

Tony Conway, John Foster, Rob Griffiths, Liz Payne



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Cover: Oswald Mosley taking the salute at a fascist Blackshirts rally, ca 1936

Above right: Newspaper cover depicting a rally of the Frontkämpfer Bund (Red Front Fighting League) Original design by John Heartfield 1927.



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MARTIN LEVY EDITORIAL

THE SEASONAL break means that this issue of *CR* will be going to press in early January. So the chances are that, by the time you read this, the House of Commons will have held its long-delayed vote on the Brexit 'deal' concocted between Theresa May and the European Commission. All the signs are that it will be rejected. Or maybe not. After all, there have been so many twists and turns so far that nothing can be guaranteed.

May's famous "Brexit means Brexit" dictum has been nothing but a piece of tautological and platitudinous jiggery-pokery. Her 'deal' isn't an agreement for leaving the EU, but one for remaining within the terms of its Single Market and Customs Union, though without a place on the Council of Ministers. For the leading circles of Britain's ruling finance and monopoly capitalist class, this was the preferred option, if the referendum result could not be overturned. But the Parliamentary representative of this class, the Tory Party, can only hope to be elected to government if it appeals to wider sections of the population. And significant parts of its base of support, both Leavers and Remainers, have seen through the fraud, and want nothing to do with it. Hence the divisions in the Tory Party in Parliament.

It's extremely unlikely, though not impossible, that the EU leaders could come up with a form of words on the Northern Ireland 'backstop' which would enable May to gain a majority, even with the support of right-wing Labour MPs. So alternatively, there is talk about building a cross-Party majority which could back a second referendum, with a loaded ballot like "Vote yes if you are in favour of crashing out of the EU without a deal, vote no if you want to remain in".

Labour's position has been to try to force a general election, and only to agree to a referendum if that fails. True to form, there are right-wing Labour MPs who seem to regard EU membership as more important than a Labour government under Jeremy Corbyn, because they have been pushing Labour to call for a referendum now. And, while Unite general secretary Len McCluskey has warned against the dangers to Labour's electoral base from supporting such a line, the TUC remains wedded to the minimal worker benefits of Single Market and Customs Union membership.

We should not be surprised at right-wing social democracy rushing to the ruling class's aid at its time of crisis - after all, that has been its historic role. But that should not be the job of the organised labour movement. Recent events within the EU - Hungary now, and before

that Greece - should wake up all trades unions to the fact that workers' rights there come a long way second to those of monopoly and finance capital.

But there is a further danger. As our lead article here points out, fascism is a ruling class strategy of last resort when finance capital faces acute economic crisis. That was the situation in the 1930s, and many of the conditions which led to the rise of fascism then are with us today. It is significant that the betrayal of working class hopes has led to the rise of the far right across Europe over the last decade. Colluding with the ruling class to flout Brexit increases the chance of a further resurgence of the far right in Britain too.

The potential for a fascist-type solution is also there when a left government is in office, and when the parties on which monopoly and finance capital relies are not strong enough to oust it by constitutional means. That was the experience of Chile in 1973. The new book, *1000 Days of Revolution*, brings together analyses by Chilean Communists in the years after the coup. In his introduction to the book, reprinted here, Kenny Coyle draws lessons about the need, in any revolutionary process, of expanding democracy, particularly into state institutions, dealing effectively with psychological warfare, and making concrete plans for a shift to armed defence as the situation deteriorates.

Continuing the theme, from previous editions of *CR*, of celebrating the bicentenary of the birth of Karl Marx, we print here Chinese Communist Luo Wendong's contribution to the MARX200 celebration in May 2018. Professor Luo stresses the continuity in China's revolutionary and socialist history of the people as the motor of social development. We follow that with C Ritchie's account of his experience of casual work in Royal Mail in the Christmas 2017 period. Then Lars Ulrik Thomsen argues that a new stage of capitalism has been reached, with the changed balance of world forces after the counter-revolutions of 1989-91 impacting on a deeper, financialised, economic crisis.

We continue this edition with reviews of three recent books – Shiraz Durrani's biography of assassinated Kenyan politician Pio Gama Pinto; Hamish MacGibbon's biography of his father James, "Stalin's super-agent in World War II"; and Ian Angus's *Facing the Anthropocene*, explaining the scale of the environmental crisis we face, and why capitalism is incapable of solving it. Then, as something of a departure, Mike Quille hands over temporarily to Peter Raynard, as guest editor for the *Soul Food* poetry column. Finally, on our back cover, we feature printmaker Hazel Roberts. Something for everyone, to start off 2019!

FASCISM IN BRITAIN PAST AND PRESENT

Tony Conway, John Foster, Rob Griffiths and Liz Payne

Contribution of the Communist Party of Britain to the
Coordinating Committee of Communist Parties in Britain
seminar 'Fascism Past and Present', London, 11 August 2018



‘... the most reactionary sections of the ruling class – including elements of the royal family, landed aristocracy and big business – not only backed fascist organisations in Britain in every possible way; they supported fascist governments in Europe, hoping that Nazi fascism and its allies would go to war against the Soviet Union.’

EXCEPT IN the Channel Islands, occupied by the Nazis in World War 2, the working class of Britain has never experienced fascist rule or faced the threat of a fascist movement that is on the road to government. But some ruling-class circles have actively supported fascist organisations in Britain, and the British state has supported or collaborated with fascist regimes in other parts of the world

Thus, the British ruling class welcomed the suppression of revolutionary movements in central and eastern Europe immediately after the First World War and a little later in Italy and Portugal. It saw Hitler as a necessary alternative to socialist revolution in Germany, and colluded in Franco's victory in Spain. After the war, it supported the establishment of fascistic military dictatorships in – among other places – Greece, Indonesia and Chile, as necessary steps to stop the advance of communism in Europe, Asia and the Americas.

But it has never yet had the need to suspend or abolish parliamentary institutions in Britain itself or turn to terroristic dictatorship to maintain capitalist rule.

As Dimitrov stressed in 1935, fascism was not something ‘over and above’ capitalism – even though that was its claim. Nor was it primarily an expression of the despair of the lower middle class – even though this composed part of its base. It was, he wrote, “the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinistic and most imperialist elements of finance capital”.¹ It was capitalist and thereby imperialist. It was a strategy of last resort when capitalist rule could be secured in no other way – when finance capital faced acute economic crisis and needed to attack the working class and seize new sources of superprofit through external aggression.

It is in this sense – as a possible tactic of last resort – that our ruling class has always understood the potential role of fascism's mass political base, mobilised around ideas of national chauvinism and racism that arise and can fester in an imperialist country.

In *Fascism and Social Revolution*, written in 1934,² the British-Indian communist Rajani Palme Dutt analysed the conditions required by fascism, in order to grow. They are: economic stagnation and crisis resulting from the domination by monopoly; the decay of any progressive elements within bourgeois culture; the collapse of economic hope among large sections of the ‘service’ class of white-collar workers; the loss of credibility by previously militant social-democratic politics; and sharpening inter-imperialist rivalries. In Britain these conditions were present in the 1930s, but not yet acute.

They were, however, sufficient to create an environment in which fascism could and did take root. The British Union of Fascists (the ‘Blackshirts’), formed in 1932 and led by former

Labour MP Oswald Mosley, held huge rallies and – protected by the police – marched through working-class communities with their nationalist and racist slogans aimed mainly at bourgeois democracy, the left and Britain's Jewish population. In this they were supported by the far-right popular press, Lord Rothermere's *Daily Mail* running a pro-fascist campaign backing the BUF under the banner headline: “Hurrah for the Blackshirts!”

Simultaneously, the most reactionary sections of the ruling class – including elements of the royal family, landed aristocracy and big business – not only backed fascist organisations in Britain in every possible way; they supported fascist governments in Europe, hoping that Nazi fascism and its allies would go to war against the Soviet Union. Their pro-Nazi Anglo-German Fellowship played a central role in the campaign to promote the image of Hitler and the Nazis and strengthen friendly relations between Britain and Germany. Prominent Nazis were received in London, and representatives of British big business were guests of the Nazi leadership in Germany. In 1939, political researcher Simon Haxey described in detail the far-right sympathies and deep fascist connections of scores of MPs on the eve of World War Two.³

At the same time, the British working class mobilised against fascism in the 1930s – both in Britain and in Spain – and did so in ways from which we can learn today. The period is covered in some detail by Noreen Branson in her *History of the Communist Party of Great Britain*, Volume 3, 1927-1941.⁴

A significant symbol of the anti-fascism of this period in Britain is the Marx Memorial Library and Workers' School, founded in 1933 on the 50th anniversary of the death of Karl Marx. In a year when the new Nazi regime was burning Marxist, left-wing and progressive books and using state power to crush all independent working class, socialist and communist organisations, it was vital to uphold the central role of political education, consciousness and theory in the fight against fascism and the struggle for socialism.

In the East End of London in 1936, Mosley's paramilitary Blackshirts and their massive police escort were routed in the ‘Battle of Cable Street’ by more than 100,000 demonstrators, mobilised by a broad alliance in which the Communist Party played the leading role. But the fascists' capacity to build a mass base in the area had already been undermined by the Communist Party's strategy outlined in the book *Our Flag Stays Red* by Phil Piratin,⁵ a local councillor who was later elected as Communist MP for Mile End in 1945. This strategy was to work in detail within the diverse – mainly the English, Jewish and Irish – working-class communities locally, building unity around the immediate economic and social issues of rents, housing and unemployment, actively involving in these campaigns those people who had been or could be influenced by racist ideas. This work

over the preceding four years meant that, by October 1936, Mosley faced a working-class population that was united against him.

Today some of the conditions listed by Palme Dutt are again with us: economic stagnation; growing inter-imperialist rivalry; resurgent militarism; the blighting of lives through the collapse of social services; and the loss of hope among many young people that they will enjoy a secure and reasonably prosperous future in terms of education, employment, housing and the environment. There is also, in Britain as well as elsewhere, the use of chauvinism and racism to sustain support for the chosen party of monopoly capital. This means that the objective conditions for the growth of fascism and the far right are as ripe in Britain as they are in other Western European countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, Austria, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium and Greece.

However, two sets of subjective factors must be taken into account when assessing the prospect for far-right and fascist advance here and how best to counter them.

The strength and potential of the far right

Firstly, there is the recent history, current strength and potential of the far-right and fascist forces themselves. The groups in existence since 2010 are:

- the British National Party (BNP)
- Britain First, less of a force but still in existence
- National Action, now proscribed as a terror organisation
- the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)
- the English Defence League (EDL)
- the Football Lads Alliance (FLA)
- the Democratic Football Lads Alliance (DFLA)
- For Britain.

The British National Party collapsed in 2014, resulting in some disarray on the far right since then. Its limited but real local and European election successes from the 1990s deepened divisions within the party and the wider fascist movement over strategy and tactics: notably, whether to abandon overt connections with fascism in the past and overseas, and with antisemitism and street violence in the present and future. An intensification of anti-fascist and anti-racist campaigning, especially by trade unionists and others in local working-class communities, maintained the political toxicity and isolation of the BNP, helping to restrict its ability to grow rapidly. With the BNP under increasing pressure on the ground and in the mass media, and infiltrated and disrupted by highly-organised anti-fascists, the low calibre of its corrupt and degenerate leadership and of its cadres and elected representatives virtually guaranteed the party's swift and total collapse.

Attempts to rebuild a post-BNP, openly fascist party of any significance in Britain have since proved a failure. The most viable attempt – Britain First – has tried and failed to combine direct action with election contests and has now been deregistered by the Electoral Commission. It maintains an active online presence.

The neo-Nazi National Action group was banned in 2016 under the Terrorism Act. Disillusioned informers working with anti-fascists have secured convictions against key leaders and activists for terrorist and other criminal offences, which could largely incapacitate the group for some years.

The terminal crisis in the BNP was accelerated by the rise of the right-wing anti-EU and anti-immigration UKIP after Nigel Farage first took the leadership in 2006. Its advances in the local, European and general elections between 2013 and 2015 finished off the BNP as the main electoral force on the far right. Not then explicitly racist, UKIP nevertheless attracted many racists to its ranks. However, internal divisions, corruption and incompetence

among its councillors, MEPs and executive members sent UKIP into steep decline after the 2016 EU referendum, with many of its voters also believing that the result had made UKIP redundant.

On the other hand, these internal divisions in UKIP led to the election of a more overtly anti-Muslim leadership who have spoken on platforms with racists and fascists such as Tommy Robinson (real name Stephen Yaxley-Lennon). The decision by current UKIP leader Gerard Batten to appoint Robinson as a special advisor on prisons and rape gangs has led to wide dissension in UKIP's ranks. The tie-up with the fantasist Robinson, who had claimed he spent 4 months in solitary – a lie according to prison authorities – and whose actions nearly resulted in the collapse of a significant trial, is a worrying development and can be seen as a further drift by UKIP to the right.

Preferring street mobilisations and violence to electoral politics, the EDL grew quickly following its formation in 2009 as a street-level movement claiming to target only Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism and – following a series of high-profile court cases involving the abuse of teenage girls by groups of Asian men – ‘grooming’ and paedophilia. In reality, this means mobilisations aimed at immigration in general and communities of Asian origin in particular. With the EDL always based to some extent on nationalist and racist football gangs, its leader Robinson sought media respectability by distancing himself from fascism, racism and antisemitism and making links with pro-Israel campaigners and non-fundamentalist Muslims.

The EDL is now unable to mobilise the numbers, and its demonstrations have been supplanted by those of the FLA and now the DFLA, which split from the FLA, again over leadership issues. Whilst the FLA and DFLA are notionally based around organised gangs which support football teams, their reach is wider, with claims of being ‘patriotic’ anti-Islamist, anti-EU and anti-immigration. They have sought to build links with other groups campaigning, eg, for protection for women. They have been able to mobilise perhaps up to 10,000 people on demonstrations. It is worth noting that, despite their initial claims, they have again moved to the right, taking a much more anti-Muslim position, eg by inviting Ann Marie Waters, failed UKIP leadership contender and founder of anti-Islam party For Britain, to speak on their platforms. This last party has stood without success in elections since its formation in 2017.

Since the imprisonment (and subsequent release and retrial) of Robinson for contempt of court in a grooming case, the FLA and DFLA (favoured by UKIP) have adopted Robinson as a ‘martyr’, although he appears to be more interested in building a new British and European network linked to Steve Bannon and the US populist far right. He was a member of the BNP from 2004 to 2005 and was also instrumental in the formation of Pegida UK. He and his supporters have been able to build support on an anti-establishment anti-Muslim platform. At his retrial in October 2018, which was referred to the Attorney General for a decision, he was welcomed into the House of Lords by UKIP former MEP Lord Pearson.

Whilst this indicates that the forces of fascism and the far right remain fractious and divided, they have some potential for growth at this time, though it would appear to be mainly via street politics.

How to ensure that the far right remains weak

Learning lessons from the past, how can we help ensure that the far right remains weak?

1. It needs to be understood that the biggest boost that the far right could receive in the immediate future would be any ruling class refusal to implement the result of the 2016 EU referendum. Most of the fascist and far-right groups oppose the EU, while the most powerful circles of the ruling

monopoly capitalist class financed and organised the campaign to remain in the neoliberal, big business EU and its Single Market. The left was and is more or less evenly divided, although the Communist Party of Britain is clear that the EU has always been and remains an anti-democratic construction which promotes the common interests of European monopoly capitals, within an anti-democratic, racist and increasingly militarised ‘Fortress Europe’.

Fascist and far-right groups oppose the EU because they are largely isolationist, xenophobic and opposed to the mass immigration from elsewhere in Europe which is permitted under EU rules. All attempts to undermine, frustrate or reverse Britain's referendum result – including keeping Britain tied to the Single Market – will be seized upon and used to appeal the 17.4 m people who voted to leave the EU. It will be the single most potentially popular appeal for the far right and fascists to use for decades, allowing them to present themselves as the only true champions of democracy, patriotism and self-government.

2. Fascist and racist ideas have to be effectively countered among the mass of the people they aim to influence, which means in working-class communities, workplaces and in social media. This is not the same as confronting fascists and racists on demonstrations. Long-term detailed work in working-class communities on the issues that concern people is the best protection against the spread of racist and fascist organisations.

3. These issues may raise questions of immigration, multiculturalism and their real or perceived impact on local communities, jobs, public services and the like. The Communist Party's view is that genuine concerns should be taken seriously, with care taken to separate facts from myths, explain the real or main causes of people's problems and propose non-racist and unifying remedies.

4. Mobilisations against racist and fascist events must be properly planned, organised and stewarded with every effort to limit their impact and explain to onlookers why racist and fascist ideas are wrong.

5. Treating everyone who attends a sizeable far-right event as a hardcore racist and fascist, who should therefore be abused or attacked, is mistaken and counter-productive. They may not realise the true character of the event or those who have organised it; they may not understand the full implications of the ideas and policies to which they are attracted. These need to be explained.

Forces against the Far Right

In all of the above, it is essential to develop the second set of subjective factors, relating to the organisations that can and must be mobilised to combat racist and fascist bodies and their ideas.

The main national anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations in Britain have their strengths and weaknesses, but disunity holds back the former and magnifies the latter. Hope Not Hate split from Searchlight magazine a few years ago, does valuable work inside fascist bodies and in working-class communities, producing very useful materials often in conjunction with the Daily Mirror. However, it tends to undervalue the role of mass counter-demonstrations and recently has come close to equating opposition to the EU with racism, while also attempting to lend credibility to the antisemitism campaign

against Jeremy Corbyn.

Stand Up to Racism and associated campaigns can mobilise an impressive array of political and celebrity figures and – not always in the numbers needed – large numbers of protestors. Like Searchlight and Hope Not Hate, it lacks any democratic structures although it is now under pressure to establish them. It also has the disadvantage of being heavily influenced by the Socialist Workers Party.

The trades unions and trades councils have a central role to play in combating racist and fascist ideas and organisations in workplaces and local communities. Most unions have excellent policies on the relevant issues, but much more needs to be done to translate this into action by officers, representatives, activists and members.

The political parties of the left have an essential part to play in initiating, guiding and helping to mobilise society against racism, fascism and the far right. The reinvigoration of the Labour Party, under a left-wing leadership that seeks to reverse the mass disillusionment caused by two decades of neoliberal, anti-working-class politics, opens up new campaigning opportunities. This is in contrast to many other countries in Europe, where traditional social-democratic parties are disintegrating as they pay the price for supporting neoliberal free market policies and the EU.

However, these new and younger Labour Party activists will only be drawn into effective anti-racist and anti-fascist activities where the right kinds of opportunity and initiative are presented. The participation of communists in such initiatives – with our emphasis on clarity of aims and tactics, left and working-class unity, mass mobilisation, disciplined planning and organisation – can so often make a qualitative and then, dialectically, a quantitative difference.

That is why the Communist Party of Britain is not only renewing its Anti-Racism & Anti-Fascism Commission (ARAF): we also want our comrades in the domiciled communist parties and associated workers' movements to participate in it fully. Together, we can make it a powerful force in the anti-racist and anti-fascist movement, working with established like-minded bodies, building strong and active links with the left and progressive allies in the Labour Party, the trades unions and community organisations.

As in the past, communists can and must be at the core of the struggle against all forms of racism and fascism here in Britain.

■ This article forms the basis of a pamphlet which is in preparation and will be published shortly by the Communist Party.

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KENNY COYLE

CHILE: THE LESSONS OF POPULAR UNITY 1970-73



‘The Chilean experience was a sustained attempt to advance to socialism through a non-armed strategy based on a constitutionally elected government.’

We print here Kenny Coyle’s Introduction to *1000 Days of Revolution*, published by Praxis Press, 2018, pb, £14.99, ISBN: 978-1899155071.

ON THE morning of 11 September 1973, British-made Hawker Hunter jets bombed La Moneda presidential palace in Santiago, Chile. Hours later, Chile’s elected head-of-state President Salvador Allende was dead. Throughout the day, soldiers raided working-class districts across the country rounding up known left-wing activists. Around 40,000 were incarcerated in Chile’s National Stadium, awaiting interrogation. Many faced torture and imprisonment, others execution. Hundreds of other militants simply “disappeared”. Allende’s government of Popular Unity was replaced by a military junta headed by General Augusto Pinochet.

The experience of the Popular Unity government and its dramatic and bloody end is dealt with in detail in *1000 Days of Revolution*. The book contains nine chapters, each one written by a prominent Chilean communist as part of their party’s attempt to self-critically analyse the errors and weaknesses of Popular Unity as well as its achievements and successes; *1000 Days of Revolution* provides a balance sheet of that fateful period.

These articles were originally published in the Prague-based monthly *World Marxist Review*, an international theoretical and discussion journal of the communist and workers’ parties, and subsequently published as a single book in 1978.

Apart from Rene Castillo’s opening chapter, which was published in 1974, the other chapters date from around 1977. There have been some minor corrections in the translation to conform more closely to the original Spanish version and some explanatory background notes have been added.

The Chilean experience was a sustained attempt to advance to socialism through a non-armed strategy based on a constitutionally elected government.

Popular Unity’s failure has often been taken by its leftist critics as definitive proof of the impossibility of any such path. Other commentators drew opposite conclusions, stressing the need for a purely ‘democratic road’ to socialism instead, one that would seek compromise and consensus between mass political forces and differing traditions rather than through the intensification of class conflict.

The conclusions reached in the book reject both these extremes. Specifically, they stress the confirmation of two fundamental insights of Marxism-Leninism. First, that the left cannot simply take over the existing machinery of government and the state inherited from and shaped by the existing ruling class. Second, that no successful revolutionary movement can hope to succeed unless it can consolidate and maintain a definite

political majority among the population at large.

Leftist critics of Popular Unity tend to heavily emphasise the first factor, reformist critics the second. In reality, they are complementary elements and are fused within all revolutionary processes. Popular Unity’s defeat was due largely to the failure to resolve these inter-related questions in time.

Defining Popular Unity as a revolutionary movement is not simply to take at face value the claims of its participants. This was also the view of its enemies, within Chile and outside. Reformist governments that simply tinker with established systems are rarely targeted for violent overthrow; on the contrary, their existence can sometimes act as a release valve to defuse potentially explosive social discontent.

Key economic changes, above all the nationalisation of the copper industry, sent shock-waves all the way to Wall Street and the White House, where the fear was that the Chilean experiment would be repeated elsewhere unless it was stopped – at any cost.

Roads to socialism

Chilean communists had always been greatly influenced by the international communist movement’s experience and theories. Two consecutive conferences held in Moscow had set out conditions for the success of the peaceful or unarmed path of revolutionary struggle. The first meeting, in 1957, was attended by 12 of the communist and workers’ parties then in power, while the 1960 event was much broader, bringing together 81 ruling and non-ruling parties from across the globe.¹

Far from envisaging a ‘parliamentary road to socialism’, as its ultra-left critics tried to suggest, the formulations used in both Moscow declarations were far more cautious and qualified. While a peaceful development of the revolutionary process was considered preferable to one involving the bloodshed of civil war, in which working people would always pay the heaviest price, it was acknowledged only as a possibility, not as a certainty.

There was a decisive shift in the international balance of forces following the defeat of Nazism in 1945 and the subsequent creation of a socialist camp stretching from the Baltic to the Pacific. This was a significant positive factor, inhibiting the potential for direct imperialist military intervention – as had happened in Russia following the October Revolution of 1917. A further positive development was the accumulated experience of the anti-fascist struggles of the peoples of Europe combined with those of the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist national liberation movements in Asia, Africa and the Americas.

In these arenas, the banner of democracy, progress and national independence had been raised by forces inspired by communist and socialist leaderships. Here the working class had cemented alliances with peasants, intellectuals and other middle

strata. On occasion, broader coalitions had been built with democratic and nationalist sections of the bourgeoisie and their followers.

However, the 1960 statement laid out clear guidelines that were considered necessary to turn the possibility of a non-armed path into reality. In each case, the ultimate criteria were to be each country's specific national and historical conditions, not universal or timeless formulae.

Conditions of success

In summary, the world communist perspective on any successful peaceful, or non-armed, road was dependent on several factors:

- 1) The need for a firm alliance between the Communist and Socialist parties, representing the united front of the working class.
- 2) Winning over a majority of the people for revolutionary change.
- 3) Smashing "the resistance of the reactionary forces".
- 4) Securing a "solid parliamentary majority" for the left.
- 5) Transforming the existing mechanisms of bourgeois parliamentary systems to make these bodies representative of progressive social forces.
- 6) Creating mass movements of political struggle outside parliamentary structures.
- 7) Implementing economic measures "to ensure the transfer of the basic means of production to the hands of the people".
- 8) Promoting a programme of "class struggle of the workers, peasant masses and the urban middle strata against big monopoly capital, against reaction".
- 9) A readiness to shift, modify or even abandon peaceful forms of struggle in the face of reactionary use of violence against the popular forces.

While some of these features were present during the Popular Unity period, a number of elements were either missing or undeveloped.

Problems of leadership

The creation of Popular Unity was a remarkable achievement, bringing together as it did Marxists, radicals, secularists and Christians.² However, as Gladys Marin pointed out:

"[O]ne of the main problems of the Chilean revolutionary process was that no solid and homogeneous revolutionary leadership was brought into being. At the same time, the gains that were made were largely due to the process of forming such a leadership. The main role in its formation and development was played, due to the very nature of the revolutionary process, by the working class, and to the extent that the working class failed in this respect, it made things easier for the enemy."

The unity of the Communist and Socialist parties was more highly advanced and longer established than in most other countries. Nonetheless differences of emphasis, pace and direction emerged; sometimes these were successfully resolved – but at other times they became a source of friction.

The nature of the Chilean revolutionary process itself was also understood differently by the forces within Popular Unity. While many in the Socialist Party and other left groups saw Chile as undergoing a fully mature socialist revolution, the Chilean communists categorised the initial stage of the revolutionary process as being national-democratic in content.

For the communists, this meant that revolutionary measures in the first instance should be directed not against private property in general but focused instead on foreign imperialism and the domestic oligarchy, whose monopolistic exploitation of the economy not only set them against the working class and

peasantry but also against the mass of the middle strata and even sections of the small and medium bourgeoisie. If not all of these forces could be successfully rallied behind Popular Unity, at least efforts had to be made to neutralise them and prise them away from the camp of the far right.

In addition, the powerful example of the Cuban Revolution of 1959 inspired some sections of the left, both inside and outside Popular Unity, to transplant the Cuban experience of armed struggle, or at least their narrow interpretation of it, to Chilean soil.

Winning a majority

Starting with little more than 36% of the vote in the 1970 presidential elections, Popular Unity faced constant challenges to win over, or at least neutralise, the sizeable middle forces that were also being courted by the far right.

This was not an arithmetical challenge but a political one, as communist theoretician Volodia Teitelboim stressed:

"We have said that the peaceful path is practicable only if the idea of the revolution wins the minds of the majority of the people and prompts it to act. When the forces favouring change have achieved overwhelming superiority no opportunities are left for a reactionary rising, let alone for its success. The idea of majority, which Lenin considered so important ('the majority of the people are for us,' he said in September 1917), retains its validity as a requisite of victory whatever the form of struggle."

A destabilising factor was the shifts within the middle strata, a significant social sector given the undeveloped level of Chilean capitalism. These strata were closely linked to the Christian Democratic Party. The Christian Democrats took over a quarter of the votes (28%) in the 1970 presidential poll. They also retained significant working-class influence, with just over a quarter of the total votes cast in the main trade union federation in 1972, but their leadership also had close ties to big business.

Initially, the Christian Democrats were temporary allies in confirming Salvador Allende's presidency and supporting the nationalisation of the copper industry. However, over the course of the 1000 days of the Popular Unity government, the Christian Democratic leadership shifted into a formal alliance with the far-right National Party, creating the Confederation of Democracy in 1972. Together this anti-Popular Unity coalition hoped to secure a two-thirds majority in parliament. This could have allowed Allende to be impeached and removed from office, and also for other constitutional changes to be pushed through to the detriment of Popular Unity. However, despite the mounting difficulties, the March 1973 elections saw Popular Unity increase its share of the popular vote to around 44%. It added to its seats in both the Senate and Chamber of Deputies at the expense of the right and centre.

The vacillation of the middle strata is also illustrated by the fact that two successive left splits from the Christian Democratic Party – the first, MAPU, in 1969 and the second, the Christian Left, in 1972 – entered the ranks of Popular Unity. Travelling in the opposite direction, the Radical Party suffered right-wing splits to the opposition.

Parliamentary and extra-parliamentary conflicts

Those who accuse Popular Unity of following a "parliamentary road", overlook the fact that at no point did President Allende command a majority, solid or otherwise, in either of the two chambers of the Chilean parliament. While the 1973 parliamentary elections denied the right wing a sufficient majority to use parliament to oust Allende, Popular Unity's minority

coalition was unable to transform parliament into a forum more representative of the class forces it represented. This was also true in other governmental and state institutions.

Orlando Millas wrote:

"[T]he Party constantly warned against the danger posed by the euphoria of those who imagined that the September 1970 election had guaranteed the development of the socialist socio-economic formation. At a time when we had won power only in part, it was essential to democratise every field of activity, to carry out far-reaching democratisation measures in economic management, extend democracy to the judiciary and the control machinery, achieve a balance of forces in favour of democracy among the military and bring the administrative system into line with genuinely democratic standards. We stopped half-way in this respect. The Popular Unity government failed to establish effective democracy in decisive fields. Its gains, while impressive and highly noteworthy, were clearly inadequate."

These weaknesses prevented Popular Unity from successfully advancing new forms of popular power. Jorge Insunza wrote:

"The main thing, then, is to see to it that people can express their will and effectively exercise power 'from below', that they take a direct part in building the new democracy. Without this, the 'power at the top' cannot carry out its revolutionary tasks in the face of the embittered opposition of the reactionaries.

In Chile, mistakes were made in this respect. There was not enough clarity and unity among the revolutionaries regarding the type of state that had to be created, or the form and content of democracy."

As we know from declassified transcripts of meetings in Washington, involving the '40 Committee', US President Richard Nixon, National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger and CIA representatives, among others, regularly met to discuss US interference in Chile long before the election of Allende.³ However, tied down in the war against the Vietnamese people, direct military intervention was not an appealing option for the US. Instead, it funded right-wing groups, sought out informers and contacts within the armed forces, and encouraged schemes to disrupt the Chilean economy.

Imperialist sabotage

Pedro Rodriguez noted:

"In Chile imperialism did its utmost to destabilise the popular government. Economically it resorted to a financial and technological blockade. With the help of Chile's financial clans it mounted desperate opposition inside the country, boycotting production, leaking currency abroad and speculating in capital. To this the imperialists and reactionaries added psychological warfare to intimidate the population, particularly the middle strata, create a black market, cause a shortage of consumer goods and food, and general economic chaos and anarchy. The imperialists and reactionaries were bent on preventing any balance of forces being established that would in any way be favourable to the popular government, and on isolating the latter."

The deployment of psychological warfare is taken up in the chapter by Rodrigo Rojas: He conceded:

"We failed to give battle to the class enemy in the field

of social psychology, nor did we use it to muster our own revolutionary forces. We are more aware now of the vast importance of taking account of the elements of the social psychology of the masses when analysing concrete situations. The founders of Marxism-Leninism always pointed out these factors as a permanent component of a scientifically grounded policy."

By mid-1973, following Popular Unity's stronger than expected showing in the parliamentary elections, there was growing frustration in Washington at the inability of the Chilean right to defeat Popular Unity through electoral means, despite generous US support.

Forms of struggle

Inside the country, the far right began to despair of blocking or ousting Allende by peaceful means. Now the counter-revolutionary forces outside and inside the country turned decisively toward military action. In these circumstances, the forces of Popular Unity were unprepared to modify their strategy.

In the view of Volodia Teitelboim, the focus on solving the many practical problems emerging from Popular Unity's non-armed choice had obscured the need to make concrete plans for a strategic shift toward armed defence as conditions deteriorated. He argued:

"Peaceful transition' is a correct term only in so far as it rules out civil war. But because of the many vicissitudes, it cannot bypass the law which says that violence is the 'midwife' of history. We should have always borne this in mind, should have remembered that the very act of changing path presupposes 'changing horses' and continuing our advance. It is hard to change horses in mid-stream. But then it is harder still when no preparations have been made beforehand."

Military failures

Repeated in differing formulations in the book, the downfall of Popular Unity was first and foremost a result of political defeats; the later military blows came only once a political atmosphere had been created that allowed the coup to succeed.

Hindsight fuses what in reality were two separate questions. Was the defeat suffered by Popular Unity on 11 September 1973 inevitable? The second issue is whether Popular Unity's chosen strategy could have successfully opened the road to socialist transformation had it survived or blocked the Pinochet coup.

The two are clearly interlinked but the first challenge was immediate and tactical, while the second was longer-term and strategic. After all, Popular Unity had previously blocked right-wing provocations, both civil and military, and had faced down the 'Tancozo' in June 1973. Why was it unable to effectively counteract the military conspiracy later the same year?

Luis Corvalan, general secretary of the Communist Party of Chile, who had been a political prisoner of fascism before he was freed in an agreement with the Soviet Union in 1976, writes:

"First, the Party did a good job in charting its political line for the whole period that led up to the partial winning of power, and for the first period of popular government. It is clear today, however, that our line for winning complete power and moving on to the next stage of the revolution, which would have enabled us to reach socialism, was not well enough worked out."

This political weakness led to vulnerability to armed action against the government, Corvalan believed, because:

“[W]e did not evolve a proper military policy. Since 1963 the Party had been giving its members military training and making efforts to acquire enough arms to defend the government that we were confident the people would set up. But this was not enough, because our activity in this direction was not accompanied by the main thing, namely persistent and sustained propaganda to give the popular movement a correct attitude to the military. This was essential to dispel the military’s incorrect, slanderously inspired notions of the working class and Popular Unity, to bring the ideas of Marxism to people’s minds in an undistorted form. It must be admitted that the enemy, on the contrary, was continuously active in the armed forces.”

Revolutionary experience

These articles were written, of course, before the varied experiences of Nicaragua’s Sandinista Revolution (1979) and Venezuela’s Bolivarian Revolution, begun in 1999. These events have added rich and complex features to Latin America’s revolutionary history. They were also written nearly 20 years before the Pinochet dictatorship, faced with mounting popular discontent and splits within Chilean ruling circles, was cast aside.

After his fall, Pinochet remained close friends with Margaret Thatcher and other leaders of the British Conservative Party, a fact that might suggest that the commitment of the British ruling class to upholding democratic forms of government is more a matter of expedience than principle. The failure of the then British Labour government in 1998 to put the dictator on trial or to extradite him to Spain for his crimes was a shameful act.

It would be wrong to take Chile’s experience in 1970-73 as illustrating each and every possible challenge that revolutionary and left governments will automatically face. There are nonetheless sufficient common and recurring features to encourage today’s generation of activists to learn lessons from the past. To do so, it is essential to study in detail the specific characteristics of each revolutionary process, situating them in their unique national and historical contexts. *1000 Days of Revolution* sets out to do precisely that.

■ Readers of *Communist Review* can order *1000 Days of Revolution* at a special price of £10 from Unity Books, 72 Waterloo Street, Glasgow G2 7DA.

Notes and References

1 The relevant section of the statement reads:

“The Communist Parties reaffirm the propositions put forward by the Declaration of 1957 with regard to the forms of transition of different countries from capitalism to socialism.

The Declaration points out that the working class and its vanguard – the Marxist-Leninist Party – seek to achieve the socialist revolution by peaceful means. This would accord with the interests of the working class and the people as a whole, with the national interests of the country.


Today in a number of capitalist countries the working class, headed by its vanguard, has the opportunity, given a united working-class and popular front or other workable forms of agreement and political co-operation between the different parties and public organisations, to unite a majority of the people, win state power without civil war and ensure the transfer of the basic means of production to the hands of the people. Relying on the majority of the people and resolutely rebuffing the opportunist elements incapable of relinquishing the policy of compromise with the capitalists and landlords, the working class can defeat the reactionary, anti-popular forces, secure a firm majority in parliament, transform parliament from an instrument serving the class interests of the bourgeoisie into an instrument serving the working people, launch an

extra-parliamentary mass struggle, smash the resistance of the reactionary forces and create the necessary conditions for peaceful realisation of the socialist revolution. All this will be possible only by broad and ceaseless development of the class struggle of the workers, peasant masses and the urban middle strata against big monopoly capital, against reaction, for profound social reforms, for peace and socialism.

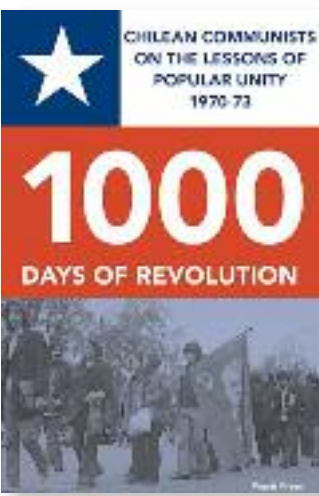
In the event of the exploiting classes resorting to violence against people, the possibility of non-peaceful transition to socialism should be borne in mind. Leninism teaches, and experience confirms, that the ruling classes never relinquish power voluntarily. In this case the degree of bitterness and the forms of the class struggle will depend not so much on the proletariat as on the resistance put up by the reactionary circles to the will of the overwhelming majority of the people, on these circles using force at one or another stage of the struggle for socialism.

The actual possibility of the one or the other way of transition to socialism in each individual country depends on the concrete historical conditions.”

- 2 The main parties of Popular Unity were: the Chilean Socialist Party (PS); the Communist Party of Chile (PCCh); the Unitary Movement of Popular Action (MAPU); the Radical Party; and the Christian Left (from 1972).
- 3 See the extensive range of documents published in *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969–1976, Vol XXI, Chile, 1969–1973*, J McElveen and J Siekmeier, eds; A Howard, general ed; United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 2014.



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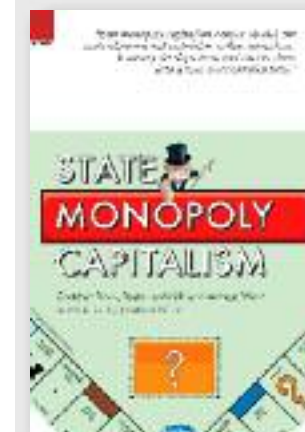
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LUO WENDONG

THE PEOPLE AS THE SUBJECT OF HISTORY

The Communist Party of China's creative application and development of the Marxist concept of the people as the subject of history



Abstract On the basis of dialectical and historical materialism, Marx revealed the principal position and decisive role of the people in social development, which destroyed the idealistic idea of history as determined by heroes, and established the view of history with the people as the subject. This view provides a powerful theoretical weapon for the proletarian revolution and the socialist movement. Since its founding, the Communist Party of China (CPC) has always taken the people's emancipation as its goal and fundamental principle. During the course of this, it has established the people-subject principle, mass viewpoint and mass line, and constantly implements them in practice. At the 19th National Congress of the CPC, the people-subject principle, and the idea that the people are masters of the country, constituted an important part in *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* and a guiding line in upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. This shows that the understanding of the CPC on the laws of governance, of socialist construction, and of the development of human society, has reached a higher level. In fact, the people-subject principle is a consistent thread running through all parts of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, and through the entire process of developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era as well. This is the CPC's creative application and development of the Marxist view about the subject of history, and is a significant contribution to Marxism in the 21st century and to contemporary Chinese Marxism.

THE PEOPLE are the creators of history and the source of strength for the socialist cause. In its more than 90 years of struggle, the CPC has always applied the Marxist doctrine, the people as the makers of history, to the Chinese revolution, construction and reform. By adhering to the mass viewpoint and mass line, it has opened up a new epoch in Chinese history, and offered bright prospects for building a strong socialist country and for realising the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. At the 19th National Congress of the CPC, Xi Jinping people-centered development philosophy and the people as the masters of the country were regarded as fundamental principles underpinning China's efforts to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. This has enriched and developed the Marxist concept of the subject of history. To implement *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, we must firmly keep in mind the people-subject principle, strengthen the principal position of the people, give full play to their initiatives,

maintain the Party's flesh-and-blood ties with the people, and work tirelessly to achieve the goals established by the 19th CPC National Congress.

I. Marx's significant discovery on the subject of history

Prior to the birth of Marxism, the idealist belief held sway, that history is determined by individuals occupying dominant positions. Such a view, regardless of its different forms of expression, exaggerates the role of heroes, and their thoughts and will, in social development. Based on the principle that social consciousness determines social existence, it holds that history is made by a few heroes, kings and princes, even legislators and thinkers, denying the decisive role of the broad masses of the people in social development. For example, in the 18th century, the French Enlightenment thinkers believed that 'reason' and 'justice' discovered by individual geniuses were the driving force of history.

On the basis of dialectical and historical materialism, Marx revealed the principal status and decisive role of the people in social development, creating the people-centered view of history, and thus provided powerful theoretical weapons for the proletarian revolution and the socialist movement. In *The Holy Family*, criticising the Young Hegelians' conception of hero-determined history, Marx and Engels expounded important views, including the ideas that historical activities are the people's cause, and that material production is the origin of history. They clearly state that

"Together with the thoroughness of the historical action, the size of the mass whose action it is will therefore increase"

and that

"... it follows that the proletariat can and must emancipate itself. But it cannot emancipate itself without abolishing the conditions of its own life."¹

The *Communist Manifesto* further states:²

"All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority."

and

“The Communists... theoretically ... have over the great mass of the proletariat the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement.”

To these important viewpoints, Lenin gave high praise:

“The chief thing in the doctrine of Marx is that it brings out the historic role of the proletariat as the builder of socialist society.”³

The reason that the proletariat can liberate itself and all mankind, and play the role of the historical subject, lies in its economic and social status and class characteristics. As the product of modern industry, the proletariat is the only class that keeps growing and developing. Its members are selfless, self-respected, brave, far-sighted, and well-organised. Therefore they are capable of leading the oppressed people in fulfilling the historical mission of overthrowing the capitalist system and eliminating classes. In *The German Ideology*, Marx and Engels pointed out insightfully that

“Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete and no longer restricted self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of productive forces and in the development of a totality of capacities entailed by this. All earlier revolutionary appropriations were restricted; individuals, whose self-activity was restricted by a crude instrument of production and a limited intercourse, appropriated this crude instrument of production, and hence merely achieved a new state of limitation.”⁴

The socialised appropriation of the means of production does away with the present artificial restrictions upon production. The extraneous objective forces that have governed history pass under the control of man himself. Only from that time will man himself, more and more consciously, make his own history – only from that time will the social causes set in movement by him have, in the main and in a constantly growing measure, the results intended by him.

“It is the ascent of man from the kingdom of necessity to the kingdom of freedom. ... To thoroughly comprehend the historical conditions and the very nature of this act, to impart to the now oppressed proletarian class a full knowledge of the conditions and of the meaning of the momentous act it is called upon to accomplish, this is the task of the theoretical expression of the proletarian movement, scientific Socialism.”⁵

The people are the makers of social history and are the protagonists of ‘performance’ on the great stage of the world. Taking the people as the subject of history is both a result of historical development and a yardstick to measure social progress. However, in a class society where private ownership dominates, social progress does not necessarily mean that the people have the principal position in the society. On the contrary, only the few who possess and control the means of production and living conditions can enjoy domination, whereas those who lose the right to the conditions of existence and development, the people, also lose their due status of subject and the right to free and well-rounded development of their abilities and personalities.

In leading the October Revolution and socialist construction

in Russia, Lenin emphasised that the spirit of socialism “rejects the mechanical bureaucratic approach; living, creative socialism is the product of the masses themselves”:⁶

“Marxism differs from all other socialist theories in the remarkable way it combines complete scientific sobriety in the analysis of the objective state of affairs and the objective course of evolution with the most emphatic recognition of the importance of the revolutionary energy, revolutionary creative genius, and revolutionary initiative of the masses – and also, of course, of individuals, groups, organisations, and parties that are able to discover and achieve contact with one or another class.”⁷

Essentially, the establishment of the concept of the people as subject, and the realisation of the people’s principal status, constitute both an inevitable requirement for the survival and development of a socialist society, and a lofty ideal for a communist society ultimately to realise.

II. The concept of the people as subject: its adherence and development in the Chinese revolution, construction and reform

Since the day it was founded, the CPC has always regarded the task of unswervingly realising the emancipation of people as its fundamental goal and principle, and has gradually formulated and practised the people-subject principle, its mass viewpoint and mass line. As the resolution adopted in the Enlarged Working Conference of the Central Executive Committee of the CPC on October 1925 pointed out, “the future destiny of China’s revolutionary movement depends entirely on whether the CPC is capable of mobilising and guiding the masses.” At the Ninth Conference of the CPC organisation of the Fourth Red Army, the Resolution, drafted by Mao Zedong, stated that the Red Army did not fight merely for the sake of fighting. Besides destroying the enemy’s military forces, it also had to shoulder such important tasks as conducting propaganda among the masses, organising them, arming them, and helping them to establish revolutionary political power.⁸

Mao Zedong again expounded the CPC’s mass viewpoint and mass line during the period of Chinese People’s War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, stressing that seeking benefits for the masses is the point of departure and ultimate aim of the revolution that Party members carried out. The opinions and experience of the masses are the basis on which the Party formulated its policies. Both authoritarianism and tailism should be rejected.⁹ “In all practical work of our Party, correct leadership can only be developed on the principle of ‘from the masses, to the masses,’” using the method of combining the general call with particular guidance.¹⁰ Moreover, at the 7th CPC National Congress, Mao Zedong pointed out that one of the hallmarks and the fine style of work distinguishing the CPC from other political parties is that it has a close ties with the broadest masses of the people.¹¹

The CPC won the Chinese revolution precisely because it creatively applied the Marxist doctrine of the people as the makers of history to the entire process of the Party leading the people, and formed its people-subject principle, the mass viewpoint, and the mass line that guide all of the Party’s work.

In his report to the Seventh CPC National Congress, Mao Zedong also said that “It is the people, and the people alone, that are the motivating force in making the history of the world.”¹² On the eve of the victory of the war against Japanese aggression in 1945, a democratic personage Huang Yanpei asked Mao Zedong whether the Chinese Communists would be

able to break out of the cycle of rapid rise followed by sudden demise that had played out throughout Chinese history. In answer, Mao Zedong confidently stated that we had found a new path, democracy, that would indeed allow us to break out. Only a government that is supervised by the people will not dare to slacken. Only when every person assumes responsibility will a government be able to outlive those that founded it.¹³

In his *On the People’s Democratic Dictatorship*, published on the eve of the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC), Mao further said:

“Our present task is to strengthen the people’s state apparatus – mainly the people’s army, the people’s police and the people’s courts – in order to consolidate national defence and protect the people’s interests.”¹⁴

This is a guarantee for China to move steadily from an agricultural country to an industrial country under the leadership of the CPC, from a new democratic society to a socialist society and a communist society, and to eliminate classes and realise the “great harmony.”

Since the founding of the PRC, the CPC has become the party that governs the country and leads the nation in its construction. Facing new circumstances and new tasks, the CPC has constantly deepened its understanding of the people-subject principle, its mass viewpoint and its mass line.

When the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union exposed the problem of Stalin’s cult of the personality, Mao Zedong, aware of lessons, said that we must pay full attention to the method of leadership of the mass line, and establish certain systems, to ensure that the mass line and collective leadership are thoroughly implemented, that self-importance and individualist heroism divorcing the CPC from the masses are avoided, and that unrealistic subjectivism and one-sidedness are reduced.¹⁵

In the process of exploring ways to safeguard the rights of the workers and to give play to people’s role as the subject, the CPC has accumulated rich experience. At the same time, it has also made mistakes, such as the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution. Now in particular, with the recovery and development of the national economy, the technological level of production and the quality of the workers have risen rapidly, so that the social division of labor and the economic and social structures have become increasingly sophisticated. In this context, the drawbacks of a highly centralised socialist system have become more prominent. As Deng Xiaoping put it, the old models “hampered the development of our productive forces, induced ideological rigidity and kept the people and grass-roots units from taking any initiative.”¹⁶

From the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, the Chinese communists represented by Deng Xiaoping revived and carried forward the fine tradition and style of work of maintaining close ties with the masses, carrying out the policy of reform and opening up, and embarking on the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which gave birth to *Deng Xiaoping Theory*. Deng stressed that:

“The masses are the source of our strength, and the mass viewpoint and the mass line are our cherished traditions”;¹⁷

“many things in reform and opening up were put forward by the masses in practice”; and

“This is the wisdom of the masses and the wisdom of the collective. My contribution is summing up these new

things and advocating them.”¹⁸

From the Fourth Plenary Session of the 13th CPC Central Committee, the Chinese communists represented by Jiang Zemin, in safeguarding and developing the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, put forward the important concept of the Three Represents. Jiang Zemin pointed out:

“The people are the main body to create advanced productive forces and culture as well as the fundamental force to realise their own interests. Ceaselessly developing the advanced productive forces and culture is, in the final analysis, aimed at meeting the growing material and cultural needs of the people and continuously realising the fundamental interests of the people.”¹⁹

From the 16th CPC National Congress, the Chinese communists represented by Hu Jintao recognised and explained major questions, such as what kind of development road to choose, and how to realise it, thus forming the *Scientific Outlook on Development*. Hu Jintao stated that

“The *Scientific Outlook on Development* takes development as its essence, putting the people first as its core, with comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development as its basic requirement, and overall consideration as its fundamental approach. ... Putting the people first reflects the rationale of Marxist historical materialism, the fundamental aim of our Party to serve the people wholeheartedly, and our fundamental goal to advance economic and social development.”²⁰

From the 18th CPC National Congress, the Chinese Communists represented by Xi Jinping have acted with courage, to confront major risks and tests facing the CPC and to address prominent problems within the Party itself; and they have answered major theoretical and practical questions, such as the kind of socialism which China must adhere to and build, and how to build it, thus giving birth to *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. In a speech delivered at the press conference given by members of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the 18th CPC Central Committee, Xi explicitly stated:

“The people are the creators of history. They are the real heroes and the source of our strength. ... The people’s wish for a better life is our mission.”²¹

He proposed the people-centered governance philosophy at the Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, showing that serving the people wholeheartedly is the fundamental purpose of the CPC, and also the view of historical materialism that the people are the driving force of development.

Over the past five years, historic achievements have been attained by the CPC in leading the Chinese people, and in promoting tremendous changes in the Party and the nation. To some extent, these are great victories achieved by the CPC under the guidance of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* – the people-centered idea is part of it – in the great struggle with distinctive new features, in advancing the great project of Party governance, and in pushing forward the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

III. The people-subject principle: a principle of guiding significance in Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era

“For whom is our development?” “On whom must we rely and who are we?” These are fundamental questions that must be answered in upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. And these are also problems most frequently and profoundly expounded by Xi Jinping. He has emphasised that “the people are the major force behind historical development and social progress.”²² The strong foundation keeping the Party invincible lies in our adhering to the people’s principal position in the country, and bringing their initiative into full play. All Party members must bear in mind the concept of people first and the mass line, putting them into practice in all governance activities, and relying on the people to create historic achievements.

At the 19th CPC National Congress, the people-subject principle and the idea of the people as the masters of the country were taken as an important part of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era* and the basic approach to upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics. This shows that the CPC’s understanding of the laws of governance, of socialist construction, and of the development of human society, has reached a higher level than ever before.

The people-subject principle is a new conscious understanding of the status, role, rights, and behaviour of the people in a new context of social relations and national life. It has revealed the inherent and natural relationship between the people, the Communist Party and the socialist state; and it has provided answers to many major questions in contemporary China, such as the starting point and ultimate goal of upholding and promoting socialism with Chinese characteristics, its source of strength, driving forces, fundamental principles, and basic approaches. In this sense, it has enriched and developed the Marxist world outlook, values and methodology.

Xi Jinping has stressed that the CPC’s close ties with the people are the embodiment of its nature and purpose, the hallmark distinguishing the CPC from other political parties, and an important factor enabling the CPC to grow strong. The fate of the Party’s undertakings relies on whether it can maintain its ties with the people. He has said that we believe that the Party’s foundation is the people, the Party’s power is from the people, so we must uphold the principal status of the people and do everything for the people and by the people while giving full play to the enthusiasm, initiative and creativity of the people, constantly pushing forward the cause of the people’s benefit.²³

At the 19th CPC National Congress, Xi Jinping emphasised that China is a socialist country of a people’s democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the working class, based on an alliance of workers and farmers; it is a country where all power of the state belongs to the people. China’s socialist democracy is the broadest, most genuine, and most effective democracy to safeguard the fundamental interests of the people; and

“The very purpose of developing socialist democracy is to give full expression to the will of the people, to protect their rights and interests, to spark their creativity, and provide systemic and institutional guarantees to ensure that the people run the country.”²⁴

In relation to the socialist cause, Xi Jinping has said that socialism with Chinese characteristics is a cause for the people in their hundreds of millions – this is reason why we must give

full play to the role of the people as the masters of the country.

“It is a dream of the entire nation as well as of every individual, and it cannot be realised without the arduous efforts of all Chinese people.”²⁵

At the Party Congress he also pointed out:

“It is clear that the principal contradiction facing Chinese society in the new era is that between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing needs for a better life. We must therefore continue our commitment to the people-centered philosophy of development, and work to promote well-rounded human development and common prosperity for everyone.”²⁴

On the issue of the fundamental principles of, and basic approaches to, upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, Xi Jinping has stressed that the supreme and final judge of the Party’s work is the people, so the fundamental starting point and ultimate goal of the Party’s work is to serve the people wholeheartedly.²⁶ Whether people support it, approve it, are happy about it or consent to it, is the basic standard for measuring the gains and losses of the Party’s work. We should mobilise people’s enthusiasm, initiative and creativity in an all-round way and create a stage and environment for workers, entrepreneurs, innovative talents and officials at all levels in various industries. At the 19th Party Congress he said:

“We must devote great energy to addressing development’s imbalances and inadequacies, and push hard to improve the quality and effect of development. With this, we will be better placed to meet the ever-growing economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological needs of our people, and to promote well-rounded human development and all-round social progress.”²⁴

The CPC should never deviate from the Marxist position, viewpoints and methodology. At the same time, we should also enrich and develop Marxism from all aspects by adapting and applying it, according to the times and our historical mission. Seeking truth from facts, the mass line and independence, the living soul of *Mao Zedong Thought*, are positions, viewpoints and methods with distinctive features of the Chinese communists, which have enriched and developed Marxism-Leninism. Likewise, the people-subject principle is also the position, viewpoint and method formed by contemporary Chinese communists in the historical process of reform and opening up and in China’s modernisation, especially in its practice of carrying out our great struggle, great project and great cause, and in realising the great dream of Chinese rejuvenation led by the CPC since the 18th CPC National Congress. It serves as a precious thread running through all parts of *Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*, and the whole process of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It is a creative application and development of the Marxist doctrine of the subject of history, as well as the CPC’s historical contribution to Marxism in the 21st century and to contemporary China.

In essence, the people-subject principle epitomises the position, viewpoints and methods of contemporary Chinese communists. It integrates not only respect for the laws governing social development with the people’s status as the subject of history, but also the struggles for lofty ideals with working in the interests of broadest masses of the people. In his speech at the ceremony marking the 95th anniversary of the founding of the

CPC, President Xi Jinping said:

“Prosperity for the people is the basic political position of the CPC, and it is the prominent feature that distinguishes Marxist parties from other parties. Our party and the people stand together through storm and stress, go through thick and thin together, and keep flesh-and-blood ties, which is the basic guarantee of the Party in overcoming all difficulties and risks.”²⁷

The *Code of Conduct for Intraparty Political Life under New Circumstances* approved at the Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee stipulates:

“All CPC members should uphold the historical materialist point of view that the people are the makers of history, stay firm on the mass standpoint, and keep close ties with the people.”

Xi Jinping has also stressed that leading officials should:

- have firm political beliefs, strong professional expertise, a good sense of responsibility and discipline, and good moral character;
 - always keep the people in their minds; and
 - make extensive investigation and study.
- He has asked that the CPC leading officials should:
- raise their level of political consciousness and working abilities;
 - broaden their horizons, working experience and abilities to combine theories with practice through genuinely learning from the people; and
 - consciously conduct self-examination, self-criticism and self-education through listening to the voices of the people and accepting the oversight by the people.

We should improve ourselves through serving the people in order to overcome formalism and bureaucratism in a persistent way, and eradicate hedonism and extravagance through hard efforts. In general, only by applying all Marxist positions, viewpoints and methods implied in the people-subject principle to the entire process and every aspect of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics, can the Chinese people overcome all the hardships and difficulties, and march courageously toward the grand goal established by the 19th CPC National Congress.

■ Based on a speech given at the ‘Marx200’ conference organised by the Marx Memorial Library and Workers’ School, London, 5 May 2018. Some endnotes have been added, or adjusted for available sources, by the CR editor.

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C RITCHIE CASUAL WORK

BEFORE Christmas 2017 I got a temporary job with Royal Mail at Gatwick and began researching the working conditions of casual and agency workers whose positions are insecure, poorly paid, and which severely limit plans for the future. Marx's *Wage Labour & Capital*, *Wages, Price & Profit* and *Capital* supplied a framework of ideas that helped identify the division of labour on the production line as well as the economic divisions between casuals, agency and permanent staff.

Introduction

The casual workers were vetted at a group interview by Angard, Royal Mail's dedicated recruitment partner, and sent to an initial training session where one third failed to show. On the first day of work, the list was even shorter. The depot processes packages, and the brief training session explained that there are several types of parcel, and that "These go into the that dumpster, and those into this one"

Contracts were given out that emphasised the casual workers' disposability: "This is not an employment contract and does not confer any employment rights on you," it said, and then told us that work hours could not be guaranteed as the company cannot "predict the exact staffing levels it will require on a day-to-day basis." The contract does not "confer any legal rights on, and in particular should not be regarded as, establishing an entitlement to regular work." Casual workers are replaceable and require or get little training: they merely need to turn up and reproduce a set of simple actions that become one part of a bigger process.

Parcels

The depot is a distribution centre that processes packages, and the job is straight manual labour. Casual workers work for people they do not know, with people they may not like, doing tasks they have no interest in. The division of labour, separation, operates in different ways. Being on a production line means that the casual worker is separated from other casual workers, as well as agency workers and full-time and part-time permanent staff.

Each task is designed as a separate activity from those before or after it so the casual workers' relationships with the rest of the production line is a blank: they only know one part of the process so have little relation to the parcels, the overall work scheme and, ultimately, the consumer of their labour. They move parcels that satisfy the needs or desires of others but not themselves; in order to live, they sell their time to satisfy other people's needs, that are external to the work place.

There is no relationship to any parcel they process as it passes through their hands: they have not made it; they do not own it; they have no idea what it is or whom it is from; they only know where it is going because the job is to put it in the right dumpster. The parcels the casual worker processes have no personal meaning at all and there is no meaningful relationship to the job because it requires few of their skills and specialisms that define them as workers, and because the work does not engage them in any way except as a means of earning money.

Casual workers exchange their labour power for wages and so their time becomes a commodity that they can sell but never buy back: their time becomes something external to them, taken away, which also applies to permanent staff although their future income and job security prospects are very different. The commodity that casual workers sell is their labour power; they process packages that are the commodities of other agencies; but, confusingly, although the packages are temporarily housed in a distribution warehouse, the commodity that Royal Mail actually sells is production of the process, although it can also be called distribution. As far as the casual workers are concerned, the package remains a package.

Others

At the depot, the separated relationship that the production line casual worker has with the parcels carries over into their relationships with others. If there is conflict between unionised permanent staff and the employer, casual workers can find that they 'belong' to neither. Our short time-tenure means that there isn't enough time to join the union at the workplace, as the job may be over, we may leave for another job, we might not be called in again and we could also be members of another union already.

The casual worker has a much weaker relationship to the depot than the full-time or part-time permanent workers who benefit from holiday pay, sick pay, maternity or paternity leave, possible promotion and higher wages, so the casual workers have no stake in the job and, by extension, in the success of a company that is unlikely to take them on permanently.

It is one thing for us to be separated from full-time workers but quite another for casual workers to be separated from other casuals in the same position: this can occur if there is any chance of permanent employment, as casual workers are now competing against each other for a more secure position at the depot.

Full-time and permanent part-time workers can be identified physically from their Royal Mail uniforms; but also their confidence, body language, visible friendships, knowledge and experience of the depot sets them apart from the short-term casual workers. However, although they may appear to casual

'Casual workers exchange their labour power for wages and so their time becomes a commodity that they can sell but never buy back: their time becomes something external to them, taken away, which also applies to permanent staff although their future income and job security prospects are very different.'

workers as more comfortable and productive on the shop floor, they have their own worries that we are not privy to.

And what is our relationship with the line managers and management? As far as the latter are concerned, absolutely none. With the line managers it can be slightly better: their job is to get casual workers to turn up and work as efficiently as possible, and it our job just to get on with it.

Socialising

Despite the various forms of separation which casual workers experience at the depot, a spatial relationship with co-workers remains, though communication is difficult due to the organisation of space and pace of work. During lunch breaks in the canteen, our conversations often include the question 'What's your real job?' The 'real job' is the one that uses the workers' skills and experience, where we have a personal impact on the work and have invested time and energy in it. The jobs we want to do, that we are good at, or that we usually do, may not be available on the job market, hence casual work in other industries.

Given the proximity of Gatwick to London, the casual workforce is very diverse but there are several noticeable factors that tend to inhibit socialisation. People have a tendency to stick with other members of their community, gender or religion, or those on the same shift, and there are cultural reasons for such separation, eg for Muslim women workers. However, for some people, work is often their only chance to socialise outside the house, especially if they have family responsibilities or face religious strictures.

Casual workers can only really chat in the short breaks and have limited opportunities to meet after work, to relax or mingle with co-workers, casual or permanent; after-work pub socialising is determined by what shift you are on as well as the proximity and opening hours of a pub or bar. It is in those few hours that workers can realise their time, where informality helps not only the development of friendships, but also solidarity and collective consciousness amongst workers.

When the job is over casual workers can quickly lose contact with each other and what could be interesting friendships disappear. This is not to say that friends cannot be made at work: of course they can but there is a difference between the type of friendship made at work, built through shared difficulties and mutual exasperation, and friends that are made despite work, that continue long term outside of the job. The latter are the hardest to make. The only reason most people work in these jobs is to earn money: the job is like other situations where people attend for a single specific purpose like prison, conscription, school, or hospital. Like work.

Agency

Agency workers are re-employed every day and, even though they may have been at the depot a while, they do not have much more security than casual staff.

One agency worker explained that he never knew if he was going to get work each day because the agency usually called him an hour before the shift started – though, as he was living locally, the commute was not too problematic. His job at the depot was supplemented by another agency job as a forklift driver and he needed both just to cover his mortgage. This meant that organising any kind of socialising was difficult and his life became increasingly dominated by work. As the length of each job remained uncertain, there was a lot of stress in his relationship and at home.

Such an uncertain situation denies the agency worker the chance to make plans for the day, for the weekend or even longer, as financial security cannot be guaranteed. If the agency worker spends long hours working, commuting and recuperating, then there is little energy left to spend on applications for a better job. Of course, all of this relates to the casual worker as well.

In general, the agency is paid by the employer to cover wage costs, and charges a fee on top of that; the agency pays the workers and charges them 15-25% commission depending on the nature of the job. The agency worker is relieved to get another day's work; the agency is happy because the employer and employee are paying it; and the employer is happy as there are no extra costs like sick pay, holiday pay or pensions.

At the parcel depot, the permanent workers get paid more than the agency workers, who in turn get paid more than the casuals for doing the same amount of work, which is a significant economic divide. The agency workers are also casual but they have the support of the agency to find them jobs whereas the casuals are on their own and have to find their own jobs. Although casual workers are at the bottom end of the company payroll, agency workers are hardly in an enviable position: they have little chance of a full-time job and many are not unionised, which keeps them in a vulnerable situation. If an agency worker complains, the line manager can sack them without reason or confrontation: the manager merely has to ring the agency to say that the worker will no longer be required and the agency knows that there are many others desperate to take the job on.

Un/Skilled

The reproduction of labour power costs less for simpler jobs and more for those with specialised knowledge. Wages are a reflection of the cost of reproducing labour power. During a recession, when jobs disappear, specialised workers can always apply down the scale for jobs whereas those at the bottom of the

labour pile cannot apply up.

At the parcel depot, casual workers are deemed unskilled labour, minimum wage: the only requirement is a working knowledge of scissors. Casuals are on zero-hour contracts: nothing is promised, no bonuses, and no future although sometimes there is overtime which is simply a supplement for poor wages.

Poorly-paid unskilled casual workers are aware of how disposable they are: the company does not value them as individual workers, and the only thing the casual workers care about is that the company keeps paying them, which also applies to agency and permanent staff but they are in a slightly better position and again have a bit more certainty about their futures. Marx indicates this disposability, the utter depersonalisation of our labour, which we sell to the capitalist as hours of labour power and which are worth “neither more nor less than sugar. The former is measured by the clock, the latter by scales.”¹

Time

“Time is the room of human development. A man who has no free time to dispose of, whose whole lifetime, apart from the mere physical interruptions by sleep, meals and so forth, is absorbed by his labour for the capitalist, is less than beast of burden.”²

We casual workers queue to sign in and we write our names and time of arrival whilst supervised by the line managers. If we are more than a few minutes late our wages will be reduced accordingly, no matter how legitimate the reason; and we are not allowed to make up time later. At the end of the shift, if we have cleared all the parcels and there is nothing else to do, we still have to wait until signing-out time before we can leave. 50 casual workers stand near the door waiting to be let out, acutely aware of the absurdity and utter waste of time. The company gains absolutely nothing by this: there is no work as it has all been done; we are being paid to stand still, watching the line manager watching the clock; and it seems like punishment for being too efficient. In material terms, it makes no difference whether we are there or not except that the company has made the decision and does not want anyone leaving early. This is doubly infuriating if we have to rely on public transport as we could get a slightly earlier train or bus and be home much quicker. Commuting is neither paid time nor leisure time and it takes up considerable hours of the day, as well as a percentage of wages, and so the job consumes more and more of our time.

At the end of the afternoon shift casual workers are either told to come in tomorrow or they have to ask, then the line manager says he will call if they are needed. The casual worker is immediately put into a state of agitation as it is impossible to tell if there will be any more work (which also puts pressure on partners and families who depend on the money to live), and the following day is spent anxiously waiting for a phone call. Waiting makes other activities difficult and it is hard to focus on anything else so casual workers may start to wonder if other workers are being called in when they are not. We cannot do much else but wait. Plans for the day or evening are on hold.

If we are offered overtime this is really our compensation for inadequate wages and is a temporary increase in pay. However tempting the offer may appear, we may not be physically able to work longer; there may be childminding issues or no public transport later to get home; and many of us are reluctant to spend more time at the job than is necessary as the work consumes enough of our time already with commuting and recuperation.

The simple repetitious tasks that casual workers carry out mean that they begin to operate automatically, without thinking. As there is no need for protracted concentration it is easy to

become distracted and dwell on how unstimulating the job is and how slowly time appears to be passing (made worse by clock watching). So the casual worker's awareness of how boring the job is intensifies the negative experience of the job, and makes it even more boring. Not only are we bored, we are aware of how bored we are and how time is passing slowly.

Gone ...

After a brief hiatus over Christmas the depot sent out a text on January 2nd at 2.58 pm saying “Can you come in at 5.15 pls?” On arrival there was no information about working hours, duration or what the terms of employment would be. Out of all the casuals at the pre-Christmas induction session there were only three men and two women left. Post-Christmas, the hours were shorter, from 5 pm to 10 pm, which was less tedious than 3.15 pm to 10.15 pm (when the last 15 minutes was paid an unnoticeable time and a half). The floor manager had a list of reliable casual workers and let them know on a day-to-day basis if there was work for them: if anyone turned down a day's work, they got bumped off the list.

A few days later at 17.20 a text arrived: “18.15 pls”, which gave 55 minutes to change, cycle to the train station, buy a ticket, catch the train, then cycle the 14 minutes to the depot which took 75 minutes and meant 15 minutes would now be docked from wages. The next couple of days were spent waiting for a phone call but by then it was obviously over and I was back to being unemployed.

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LARS ULRIK THOMSEN A NEW STAGE IN CAPITALISM

Seven theses on the economic consequences of the counter-revolution, with specific emphasis on the financial crisis in 2008

“Modern society, which, soon after its birth, pulled Plutus by the hair of his head from the bowels of the earth, greets gold as its Holy Grail, as the glittering incarnation of the very principle of its own life.”¹

Athenaeus, a Greek rhetorician

THE KEY proposal in this article is that the change in the balance of world forces between 1989 and 1991 significantly impacted on a new type of deeper, more financialised, crisis that has faced capitalism over the past decades.

The new stage of financialisation began in 1980-81, with the Reagan-Thatcher agreements on financial deregulation and the development of the City of London as the global centre for deregulated trading. State-monopoly-led marketisation in Europe moved to a new stage in 1986, with the Single European Act. The counter-revolution of 1989-91 changed the balance of class forces, making an increased rate of exploitation possible, particularly in Europe. Hence it resulted in both the progressive overaccumulation of capital and the rise in working class debt. These were indeed major factors in driving forward financialisation.

In his *Critique of Political Economy* Marx analysed the dialectics between productive forces and production relations. He wrote:

“Dialectic of the concepts productive power (means of production) and relation of production, a dialectic whose limits have to be defined and which does not abolish real difference.”²

This is the prime objective of the Seven Theses below, in understanding how the productive relations have changed in response to the scientific-technical revolutions of the 20th and 21st centuries.

The Seven Theses

I. The counter-revolution that began with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 also indicated a change in production relations. Due to scientific progress and the decline in profit rates, capitalism has been forced to involve the public sector as a means of exploitation.

Development has shown that the new production relations, with hedge funds, private equity funds, mutual funds and a general strengthening of finance capital, have meant a sharp increase in exploitation and international polarisation.³ Hedge funds feel no obligation to the workers and society in

general, but then neither does monopoly capital nor competitive capitalism. The difference lies in the character of the funds that are independent from normal banking rules. This trend in capitalism has to be seen together with the internationalisation of production, with privatisation, deregulation, tax-fraud and general austerity measures. Compared to Lenin's time, it has meant a shift from the dominance of monopolies in various branches to dominance by finance capital.⁴

II. The financial crisis in 2008 was, in fact, the reaction to this change of production relations, as the monopolies' and finance capital's control of state power meant an unprecedented speculation that pushed prices up to a level without a real basis in production. Together with the magnitude of mortgage debt, the banks were stretched to their limits.⁵ The financial crisis, and its depth, is far beyond the traditional crises appearing every 10 years or so under capitalism, and can best be compared with the deep crisis of the 1930s. It is the dialectics between the cyclical crises and the general crisis of capitalism.

III. Over the past 10 years, we have witnessed a sharp growth in criminal activities in banks.⁶ They have in many ways fused with the underworld, and launder the latter's money gained through weapons sales, prostitution, drugs and terrorist activities. This itself is nothing new in capitalism; but the extent of it, and the inclusion of massive tax fraud by corporations and individuals, is new.

IV. An important element in the counter-revolution has been the monetary system, *ie* privatisation and enhanced competition between providers of public services. This has led, on the one hand, to a general decline in the standards of social provision; and on the other to an unrestricted growth in the wealth of a tiny minority in the upper class. It represents a great challenge to the labour movement because of opaque ownership. There is often a system of offshore companies, where the final address is Cayman Islands, Panama, Luxembourg etc. This is particularly the rule in transport and other service industries, because they are not stationary companies.

V. With the election of President Trump in 2016, the effects of the financial crisis have become seriously visible. There has been the start of new trade wars and a protectionism that violates international trade agreements. This development will intensify the contradictions of capitalism and lead to a sharper struggle for markets. Inter-imperialist rivalry plays an important role in present day policy, in the context of this sharper competition. It has led

to dangerous tensions in international relations, breaches of international law and devaluation of the UN Charter, particularly by the US.

VI. As a result of US monetary policy, many countries have had difficulties with their currency and with rising inflation. This is also due to the US interest rate policy, which motivates investors to put their money into US companies and banks. The US Federal Reserve is expected to keep steadily lifting interest rates off the floor. We can already see the consequences in Argentina⁷, Brazil, Turkey, South Africa and several other countries, where the currency has fallen 30-40% in value.

VII. The changes mentioned here will affect the labour movement and lead to new poverty,⁸ on a scale that we have not known since the depression in the 1930s. Countering the sovereignty of finance capital with an overall anti-monopoly policy poses great challenges to the labour movement and the communist parties. There were many positive results in the 1970s and 1980s, but there were also negative experiences that have to be analysed, in making new progress for beginning the transition to socialism.

What conclusions can be drawn from the Seven Theses?

The scientific-technical revolution, and its impact on productive forces, demand socialist production relations. They are the only way to solve the deep contradictions in modern society. The bourgeoisie is aware of that and tries desperately to modify the existing production relations in a way that maintains its privileges and its rights to exploit and use the surplus value according to its needs. The changes in production relations can be characterised as a way of maximising profit within the existing system.

In the book *State Monopoly Capitalism* the authors define the changes in capitalism and its capital relations:

“The economic monopoly is a historical category in consequence of capital accumulation, concentration and centralisation of production and capital. It is a further developed capital relation and not just a ‘market form’, even if it is displayed as an organisation of capital in diverse, ‘oligopolistic’ forms. Such organised big businesses as corporations, cartels, banks, insurance companies, investment funds and hedge funds are well-known. In their action on the market it is a matter of development of the competitive struggle by a new order of magnitude; but principally it is a matter of how the appropriation of profit may be maximised with the help of economic and non-economic power.”⁹

The financial crisis in 2008 proved that the new production relations mentioned in the Seven Theses above were not capable of solving the contradictions – on the contrary, they deepened them. The measures taken immediately after the crisis have prepared the next one, with even deeper and more aggravating consequences for capitalism.

The next crisis will not have the same form as in 2008, as it seems to be starting from the periphery and then moving towards the centres of capitalism. But inevitably it will reach the most developed countries in the world.

For the labour movement and the communist parties it is vital to be aware of the changes in capitalism, and to know how to tackle the new type of production relations. When Marx talks about “a dialectic whose limits have to be defined” he means the contradiction between the productive

forces and the existing production relations. It is in the contradiction, between the need of capital and the needs of the people, that the production relations are changed.¹⁰

To define the limits of the dialectical connection means understanding when and how the next step in transforming society has to be taken. And our time more than ever demands materialist dialectics and its proper use, in formulating the correct strategy and tactics of the labour movement and the communist parties.

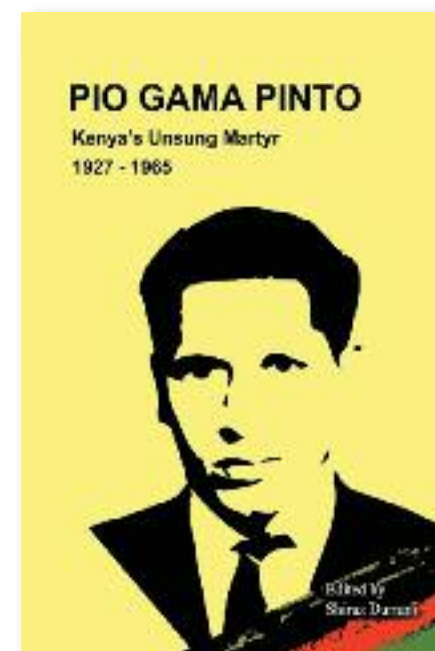
■ The author wishes to thank editorial board member John Foster for helpful advice and support.

Notes and references

- 1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Ch III, Sect 3, in K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 35, p 143. Plutus (Pluto) was the god of wealth in ancient Greece.
- 2 Marx, *Introduction to A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Sect 4, ‘Production’, in *MECW*, Vol 28, p 48.
- 3 The number of hedge funds rose from 610 in 1990 to more than 10,000 in 2017. Private equity funds rose from US \$47 bn in 1990 to about \$500 bn, distributed between 2,700 funds, in January 2007 (R Skarstein, *Overaccumulation of Productive Capital or of Finance Capital? A View from the Outskirts of a Marxist Debate*, in *Investigación Económica*, Vol 70, No 276, April-June 2011, pp 70 and 74 of pp 51-87).
- 4 This shift is already mentioned in Lenin’s *Imperialism, The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Ch III, ‘Finance capital and the financial oligarchy’: “Finance Capital, concentrated in a few hands and exercising a virtual monopoly, exacts enormous and ever-increasing profits from the floating of companies, issue of stock, state loans etc, strengthens the domination of the financial oligarchy and levies tribute upon the whole of society for the benefit of monopolists.” In Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 22, p 232.
- 5 This was one of the main problems especially of American banks in 2008.
- 6 See, for example, <http://listverse.com/2017/05/10/top-10-unforgivable-crimes-banks-have-committed/>.
- 7 In Argentina interest rates have risen to 60 % as the right-wing Macri government attempts to shore up the peso. Other countries are experiencing similar problems.
- 8 Rising interest rates usually mean mean hyperinflation, ie prices rising far beyond the normal rate.
- 9 G Binus, B Landefeld and A Wehr, *State Monopoly Capitalism*, Manifesto Press, 2017, p 10.
- 10 Marx, *Capital*, Vol 3, Ch XV, in *MECW*, Vol 35, p 249.

REVIEW

PINTO: BLOOD ON WESTERN AND KENYAN HANDS



Review by Cyprian Fernandes

Pio Gama Pinto, Kenya’s Unsung Martyr 1927-1965
 Edited by Shiraz Durrani
 [Vita Books, Kenya, 2018, 392 pp.
 Pbk, £30, ISBN 978-9966-1890-0-4;
 distributed worldwide by African Books
 Collective,
www.africanbookscollective.com]

LESS THAN two years after independence from the British, on 24 February 1965, the Kenyan nationalist Pio Gama Pinto was gunned down in the driveway of his Nairobi home. His young daughter watched helplessly in the back seat of the family car. Pinto, a Member of Parliament at the time, was Kenya’s first political martyr. One man was wrongly accused of his death, served several years in prison and was later released and

compensated. Since then no one has been charged with the murder.

Now the long-awaited book on Pio Gama Pinto is finally here, launched in Nairobi on 16 October 2018. Edited by ultra-librarian Shiraz Durrani, this tome brings together every known scrap of written or anecdotal evidence about the man, his life, and his assassination. It is simply just a word or two short of being colossal. Perhaps one flaw is that there is too much repetition.

Yet I found myself thinking about a gigantic banquet. Your tour guide is the book’s editor and he takes you on an almost never-ending safari to the events, the people, milestones, and most of all the history ... with Pinto in the starring role. Sometimes the book is taxing to read, at other times it races along. At all times Pinto is never too far from the reader’s gaze (if only in the mind).

The entrée to the banquet is about one of the key figures of the Kenyan struggle for freedom: Senior Chief Koinange. Appointed by the colonial government, he surprised them by choosing to fight for freedom. He was also a man that Pinto looked up to.

The other two big influences in Pio’s life were India and Goa. He spent five years in the latter, agitating against the Portuguese colonialists. His association with India was far longer because India chose to support the Kenyans’ fight for freedom and played an important role throughout the emancipation period.

But Goa was never too far from Pinto’s mind, as in talks on his early days there, recalled by Kenyan lawyer and former MP Fitz De Souza:

“One day during our discussions, Pio suggested that we should do something in East

Africa to assist the liberation of Goa. I was a little surprised and told him that while I was very sympathetic to the liberation of Goa, and indeed the rest of the world, I thought as we were East Africans we should confine our activities to East Africa. We might dissipate our slender resources and there was also the risk of being misunderstood, even by our friends. He explained that as a student and a young man in India he had taken part in the struggle for the liberation of Goa. He had actively assisted in the formation of the Goa National Congress and escaped from Goa only when police were searching for him with a warrant to arrest and deport him to an island of West Africa. It was our duty, he suggested, as socialists to assist all liberation fronts. Even if we did not consider ourselves Goans we had names such as De Souza, Pinto, etc. Portuguese colonialism was as bad as any other.”

The main course, naturally, is Pio Gama Pinto. Discussing whether he was in Mau Mau, Durrani notes that Pinto was arrested and detained in April 1954, the grounds including that:

- he had knowledge of illegal arms traffic;
- he had assisted Mau Mau in drafting documents and arranged for the printing of membership cards of the ‘African Liberation Army’; and
- he had given assistance to the non-military wing of the Mau Mau in planning its subversive campaign.

There is no actual evidence of Pinto having taken the oath of loyalty to the

cause of the Mau Mau, but Durrani argues that there is consummate anecdotal evidence that he worked with the Mau Mau Central Committee and therefore was an intrinsic part of the organisation.

“Pio Pinto was largely responsible for having prevented the wrath of the Mau Mau from being vented on the Indian community. Had he not been able to enter the secret conclaves of the freedom fighters unnoticed, and had he not won the trust of leaders such as Stanley Mathenge, Jomo Kenyatta, Senior Chief Koinange and Tom Mboya for his sound and clear advice, thousands of Indians may well have been murdered and their property looted.”

Quoting the claim of one former activist that he and Pinto were in the same Mau Mau cell, Durrani says that the facts do indicate that Pinto was an active supporter of the movement. He could not have been involved in the formation of the Mau Mau War Council in Nairobi nor in the procurement of arms had he not been part of the central leadership of Mau Mau. His involvement ranged from supplying weapons and other necessities to the fighters, to providing medical and other care to fighters and their families, to organising legal aid to those condemned by the colonial system to jail terms, to researching and writing documents, letters for the struggle, as well as gathering international support for the liberation struggle. Pinto in particular established contacts with the illegal South Asian gun-traders who secretly sold firearms and ammunition to the Mau Mau military wing, the Kenya Freedom Land Army.

“Pio’s work under the Central Committee of Mau Mau was especially important during the Emergency. The Committee needed money, food and arms for the fighters. Most of the leaders were in prison Despite these difficult conditions, money was collected from supporters These were carefully collected in sacks and taken to certain trusted persons. Pio was one of these. He would then take the money to wherever he was directed by the Central Committee.

“Pio’s work in support of the freedom fighters grew as the

struggle became more intense. The Emergency meant that for many Kenyans, there was military rule in the country Pio now had to help the freedom fighters in the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares.”

“Pinto became an important person in the struggle not only because of his clear ideological grasp of the situation and his total commitment to the liberation struggle but also because he linked different aspects of the struggle and ensured that all worked together to strengthen the overall anti-imperialist struggle.”

Durrani does not solve the mystery of Pio’s assassination, but through the words of the various players he takes the reader on a guided tour of the assassination and underlines what we have known for a long time: that it was a conspiracy of the British Government, especially the last Governor of Kenya, Malcolm MacDonald, and Jomo Kenyatta and his Kenya African National Union (KANU) moderates in power. We will never know exactly who ordered the assassination or who pulled the trigger. That is the other tragedy that will claw at the heart of anyone who can remember the assassinations in Kenya, because without closure, no-one can rest in peace either on earth or in the afterlife. Perhaps, there are one or two people who could offer Kenya the sacrament of closure or will they too take it to their graves? Just as Njoroge Mungai,¹ James Gichuru,² Mbiyu Koinange³ and others may have done?

“...the engineers of the neo-colonial Kenya feared him even more than the colonial authorities did and they had him assassinated.”

There are many voices in this book but few are the so-called KANU moderates, except the late Joseph Murumbi⁴ and the former Deputy Speaker of the House, Fitz De Souza. But then, they were Pinto’s personal friends.

Pinto was driven by a single ideal: Kenya’s Uhuru must not be transformed into freedom to exploit, or freedom to be hungry and live in ignorance. Uhuru must be Uhuru for the masses – Uhuru from exploitation, from ignorance, disease and poverty. The sacrifices of the hundreds of thousands of Kenya’s freedom fighters must be honoured by

the effective implementation of KANU’s policy – a democratic, African, socialist state in which the people have the rights, in the words of the KANU manifesto: “to be free from economic exploitation and social inequality”.

So there we have it: moderates on one side and Oginga Odinga and his socialist supporters on the other. Pio chose the socialists and in doing that probably signed his death warrant because the moderates feared his organisational and strategic skills would lead to revolutionary changes in Kenya unless he was stopped.

Malcolm MacDonald wrote:

“I thought if the moderates ... came to power in independent Kenya they would not only be moderate in their national policies, in economic and social and political affairs, but on the side of moderation in international affairs, and for example not go communist and not come under the influence of any other communist anti-British, anti-Western power.”

The imperialist manipulation of Kenya’s politics provided the momentum that ultimately led to the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto, according to the book. It was in the corridors of Parliament where Pinto’s fate was sealed:

“It was around Sessional Paper No 10 of 1965, *African Socialism and its implications for Planning in Kenya*, that the polarisation between Pio and KANU erupted, exacerbated by revelations of misappropriation of funds by the Kenyatta regime.

“The paper, written by an American, Edgar O Edwards, despite its claims of socialism, was a perfect articulation of how subservient capitalism would be developed in the post-independence period. It was in opposition to this text that Pio wrote a counter-proposal which, had he not been assassinated, could very well have led, some believe, to the removal of Kenyatta as president through a vote of confidence and the emergence of Odinga as the new president.”

Fitz De Souza said:

“He had a falling out with the

Powers that Be and he got into a shouting match with Kenyatta over what was perceived as land-grabbing by those in power. He refused to participate in such things as he was all for equality.”

There was also the issue about missing money which was given to Government. Pheroze Nowrojee⁵ said:

“This money was not distributed to these ex-freedom fighters and ex-detainees for whom it was intended. Instead a few powerful persons pocketed it. Pio vehemently opposed this. He spoke out against this betrayal of the freedom struggle. He said he would raise the matter in Parliament to ensure the sums be paid over to the ex-freedom fighters and ex-detainees. The powerful persons saw such an exposure as a threat to their wealth and their positions. They decided to get rid of Pio.”

The money in question was “grants and loans for development, land settlement, compensation for overseas officers and administration (£12,400,000) from Britain.”

In the final analysis, according to Durrani,

“The imperialist manipulation of Kenya’s politics provided the momentum that ultimately led to the assassination of Pio Gama Pinto. Thus, the responsibility for this death lies not only with the Government of Kenya but also with the British Government whose policy and actions supported the Western-oriented Government. It is doubtful if the moderates would ever have come to power without the Western support. While Britain was actively engaged in the internal politics of Kenya before and after independence, as shown in the MacDonald Papers, the US government and CIA supported moderate leaders like Tom Mboya, who were used to create a pro-Western trade union movement to replace the militant one set up and supported by Makhan Singh,⁶ Fred Kubai, Bildad Kaggia, Pio Gama Pinto and others.

...

The assassination was part of

the overall imperialist plot to ensure Kenya remained in the capitalist camp managed by the key imperialist powers USA and Britain.”

As I said, this is a huge banquet of Kenya’s emergent history. I hope every man, woman and child gets to read this some time in their lives. There are some important lessons to ponder, celebrating some of the men and women who lived and died in the cause of freedom and looking anew at life as we know it.

There is an interview with Pio’s widow Emma Gama Pinto by Frederick Noronha, and another by Benegal Pereira. Pio’s late brother Rosario’s memoir is also featured, as are the memories of Angelo Faria. There are also several contributions by other members of the family.

Naturally, this book is a monument to Pio Gama Pinto and his socialist ideals for a Kenya without capitalism. Shiraz Durrani, the book editor, makes no apology for that.

■ Cyprian Fernandes is a former chief reporter of *The Nation* in Kenya, and knew Pio Gama Pinto and most of the people mentioned in the book. He had to flee Kenya and now lives in Sydney, Australia. A shorter version of this review was previously published in the *Goa Herald* on 20 October 2018.

Mrs Emma Gama Pinto on Pio

(Excerpts from the book)

Pio’s detention on Manda Island:

Pio told later that he built a small shelter against the scorching sun and a simple bed. The land was destitute of vegetation and there were no facilities when he got there. A daily ration of food was barely enough to suffice for one meal. He went on a hunger strike, but after nine days realised that it would hurt the prisoners, nothing more. They would die like dogs for the all the authorities cared. The prisoners were sullen and dejected. Pio met some of his old friends there ... Achieng Oneko and others and they set about improving the morale of the 9000 men on the island prison. They organised games and tried to catch fish, turtles and the like to supplement their impoverished diet. After pleading with the

authorities, I was allowed to write to my husband once a month but the letter would be censored. His reply would be censored. I received permission to send Pio literature. He asked for the works of Shakespeare and (George Bernard) Shaw. Later Pio said the books kept him from committing suicide. Everything he had, he shared with his friends, even my letters.

Our home:

We had little finances. Pio sadly confessed that the money given by my father had been used as part-payment for a printing press which he wanted to operate as the voice of the people. The press was lost as soon as Pio was arrested. On his release from restriction in 1960, Pio asked Oginga Odinga (head of the Kenya People’s Union and arch-opponent of Jomo Kenyatta) to help him buy a house. It was more like a hotel – we had people coming and going and dropping in for a meal at all hours. Pio would have political refugees from Angola and South Africa spend a night or two and listen to their accounts of their situation.

No African who came to the house was turned away – if they needed school fees for their children, advice or just a letter written to a relative or government official, Pio lent a hand. They were his brothers, and I mean brothers. He knew the weaknesses of some of them but felt they would see reason enough if temporarily they did not put their country first. From the start of his interest in Kenya politics, Pio understood clearly that the African cause must be carried by Africans. He identified with the Africans completely and secretly suffered anguish that he was not born an African. He preferred to work behind the scenes, but he did not work in isolation. He consulted with lawyers, economists and politicians before planning his work. He chose his non-African friends carefully for what they could contribute to the cause.

Despite the fact that Pio vehemently worked against those opposed to the African freedom movement, he did not harbour rancour against any individual. I never once heard him raise his voice in anger or swear at anyone, he called them blind or stupid in their policies. He was once given a pistol for protection ... he promptly buried it in the garden. Later when he heard that one of his friends was in danger, he dug the weapon up and gave it to his friend

for protection.

On the Goans in Kenya:

Pio and I had attended a few social functions after his release from detention and even though several men came forward to hear about his “detention” there was little evidence of their sympathy for the detainees.

When the Portuguese anthem was played at the end of an occasion, Pio could guess where their allegiance lay. He had painted a sketch of Kenya’s road in the struggle for freedom and left it to them to pursue a course. Mr J M Nazareth QC and a few others were already on the road.

Later we did not attend Goan functions, so I was not aware of the view they had of Pio. Even after Pio’s assassination I did not feel that I belonged to the Goan community. I do not fault the community – it is just that we had other interests and concerns. I was happy with an Asian who understood and helped Pio’s work.

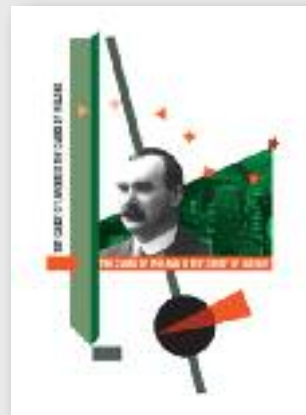
Goa:

Pio and a small group of Kenya politicians including Tom Mboya and Joe Murumbi flew to India around 1961 and met with Pandit Nehru. The agenda included the liberation of Goa as well as funds for a printing press in Kenya (to provide the African political viewpoint). Funds were granted, and Pio went on to set up the Pan African Press. Subsequently, Pio and Fitz De Souza attended Goa’s liberation celebrations. There are some Goans who applaud Pio’s small contribution for Goa.

Notes and References

- 1 Njoroge Mungai (1926-2014) was a Kenyan Cabinet Minister, Member of Parliament, doctor, businessman, farmer, politician, nationalist and one of the founding fathers of the Republic of Kenya.
- 2 James Gichuru (1914-1982) was a Kenyan politician, government minister and close associate of Jomo Kenyatta.
- 3 Mbiyu Koinange (1907-1981) was a Kenyan politician who served in Kenyatta’s cabinet for 16 years.
- 4 Joseph Murumbi (1911-1990) was Kenyan Foreign Minister from 1964 to 1966, and second Vice-President between May and December 1966.
- 5 Pheroze Nowrojee is a Kenyan writer, human rights and constitutional lawyer, and poet.
- 6 See S Durrani, *Reflections on the Revolutionary Legacy of Makhan Singh in Kenya*, in *CR73*, Autumn 2014, pp 10-17.

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Two days later the government abandoned its plans and instead backed Soviet proposals for a peace treaty with the principal aggressor, Poland. This was the first occasion on

which the leadership of the British Labour movement had formally countenanced industrial action to bring pressure to bear on a ‘constitutional’ government. Its success in doing so provided both precedent and rationale for the 1926 General Strike.

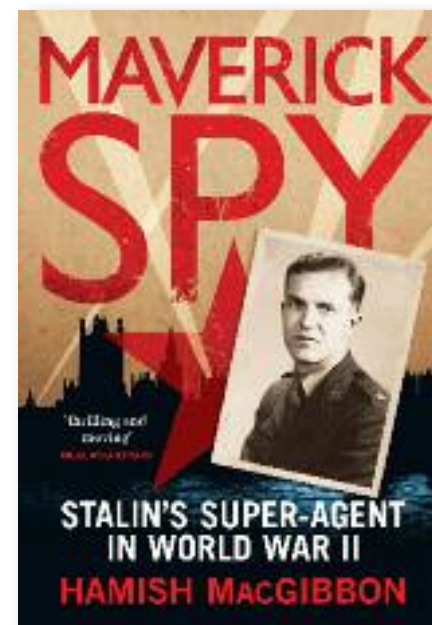
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REVIEW

“EXACTLY THE RIGHT THING TO DO” AT THE TIME



Review by Graham Stevenson

Maverick Spy: Stalin's Super-Agent in World War II

By Hamish MacGibbon
[B Tauris, London, 2017, 256 pp.
Hbk, £20, ISBN 978-1784537739;
Kindle edn £11.88]

JAMES MACGIBBON, who was born on 18 February 1912, was for most of his life a publisher. This included a spell in Germany in 1932-33, which led him to become a member of the British Communist Party for the best part of two decades, and to play a key role in wartime espionage.

He went to Berlin in 1932 as a publishing apprentice with Putnam. After his marriage to the writer Jean Howard, the pair both joined the Communist Party and James became the secretary of the Barnes branch, in Richmond upon Thames, the closest part of the borough to central London.

In 1938, he was arrested for writing “Save the Czechs” on a Whitehall pavement when Chamberlain returned from Munich.

Although James was briefly the publicity manager for a textile firm in 1938, he swiftly joined the armed forces in 1939, having parted from the CP without rancour over the ‘imperialist war’ line. He then found himself in the Intelligence Corps, probably due to his fluent German; and for most of the time that the USSR was Britain’s ally, he was able to disclose important German secrets to the Soviets, which the security services, dominated by right-wing former sympathisers with Hitler, had refused to supply.

Three weeks after the Nazi Barbarossa invasion of the Soviet Union, a Bletchley Park interception revealed a Nazi plan to surround Smolensk, the last obstacle before Moscow. MI6 would not allow Moscow to be told; but James became an agent for the Red Army’s Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), and promptly shared the information.

His astonishingly detailed reports were used by the Red Army as part of the planning of the counter-attack at Stalingrad. James was the second, corroborating, source of Ultra information, the material being “complete, unabridged, continuous, and immediate”. Another source was the now better-known John Cairncross, one of a group of former Cambridge students motivated by similar thinking to James.

Whilst these brave young men were honouring our Soviet allies, British intelligence was almost as hostile to them as the Germans. Many of the interpreters in the British military mission in Moscow were former officers of the White Army in the Russian Civil

War. Even when, during the war, Britain was allied to the USSR, over 200 MI6 officers were embedded in that country and they were not aiding the Soviets in their work to strengthen military resistance.

For many years, James was a key contact of Andrew Rothstein, described in the book as a Central Committee member (“CC”) “since the 1920s”, when that should be during the 1920s. Most of the historical errors are trivial but telling. *Labour Monthly* is loosely described as a “Party organ” (p 102) when it was formally not.

But the publicising of egregious undemocratic actions by the security forces is welcome. Because MI5 had generated a ban on the performing in Britain of the music of communist composer Alan Bush, he turned increasingly to the Soviet Union (and, after the war, Eastern Europe). This led MI5 to conclude, quite erroneously, that Bush had created the Workers Music Association (WMA) as a shadow body in case the Communist Party was banned in the event of war. To establish a key source (there would have been many) inside the WMA, MI5 sent in an undercover officer, Norman Himsforth, who had begun his career as a journalist before joining the security service.

Having passed himself off as a civil servant handling public relations in the War Office, Himsforth became secretary of the WMA, as well as a secret Communist Party member with the cover name Ian McKay. On 15 July 1942, Himsforth was summoned to see R W ‘Robbie’ Robson who bluntly asked him how many reports he had sent in to MI5, quoting one that Himsforth had submitted on 23 March 1941, unwisely writing it in the first person. Subsequent ‘Cambridge Spy’

hunters are convinced that an unknown but high-up official in MI5, who might or might not have ended up heading it, leaked this to a Soviet agency, which passed it back to the Party. Of course, Robson, or someone in WMA, may have simply been particularly observant.

Since James had access to the plans for Operation Overlord, or D-Day, so did the Soviet military. Their confidence that a second front would indeed be eventually opened was much improved by knowledge of the Allied war effort supplied by him. Arguably, he single-handedly shortened the war and saved incalculable numbers of lives in the west by comforting the Soviets enough to continue with sacrificing a whole generation of their young men on the eastern front. It was more than most of Britain's generals and politicians did.

James's transfer to Washington in the latter stages of the war was no doubt congenial but it also resulted in a change of Red Army intelligence name. Much of the documentation relating to it, though now released by the Russians, is still classified by the Americans. James eventually served as GSO2 (Ops) to the British director of planning for the combined chiefs.

At the end of the war, MI5 suspected him and interrogated him, but he did not confess. Nevertheless, they kept James, his wife Jean and their young family under close surveillance for years, regularly intercepting their mail and recording their telephone conversations. Only after his death did the true significance of what he had passed on become clear.

Back in civilian life, James rejoined Putnam and became managing director, before in 1948 starting up his own firm, MacGibbon and Kee, with his wife, his friend Robert Kee and capital of £6,000.

The MacGibbons rejoined the Communist Party in 1946. Two years later, James was secretary to the Centenary Committee set up to mark the 100th anniversary of the publication of the *Communist Manifesto*. A pageant in the Albert Hall was the main event held. The links he developed during this work with Emile Burns, described here as "DGS" of the CP, brought James to the attention of MI5 once again. The surveillance held on both men was all-encompassing. Quite wrongly, it was alleged by informants to MI5 that he was a close confidante of the loose cannon, Guy Burgess.

Although it was not by any means immediate, the events of 1956 would see James finally leave the Party. It seems that he thought Harry Pollitt had strong private reservations over Hungary, just as he did. James had also been disturbed by the Lysenko affair, when Stalin backed a wholly wrong concept in genetics, partly due to an obsession with forcing conceptions from 19th century mechanical physics into modern science, partly because of the politics of Russian agro-economics. James's close friendship with S A (Tony) Barnett (1915-2003), a communist zoologist who had debunked Lysenko, was another factor.

James was again interrogated in the 1950s and was still under constant surveillance. An MI5 plant inside the board of his own publishing firm aimed at a serious attempt at entrapment. MI5 were quite wrongly convinced that the venture was a front for Soviet intelligence. James sold his company in 1957 to Howard Samuel and went to work for literary agent Curtis Brown. Intriguingly, MacGibbon and Kee were publishers, in 1968, of Kim Philby's *My Secret War*. Later, Granada bought the company and ultimately broke it up.

James joined the Labour Party where he remained firmly on the left, being a friend of Michael Foot. Later, he worked for publishers David Charles, and was a literary agent for the rest of his career.

This book, by James's now elderly son Hamish, is perhaps a little too much 'the times of' rather than the life, whilst the myth of the British CP being at all times "tightly controlled by Moscow" is too easily accepted, perversely with more than a whiff of Cold War psychology. Nonetheless, the book benefits significantly from the many and substantial MI5 files relatively recently released on the author's father. While it is something of a family biography, there's also a lot of background that might be familiar territory for a reader grounded in communist history. At times, it veers from high diplomacy to family reminiscence.

James MacGibbon died aged 88 in the year 2000. In the view of all his children, his foray into espionage was "exactly the right thing to do". I think they probably have that right. This implies not some starry-eyed mysticism about either the Soviet or British spying community, but a practical assessment of the democratic gains of an Allied victory borne on the greater sacrifice of Soviet citizens.



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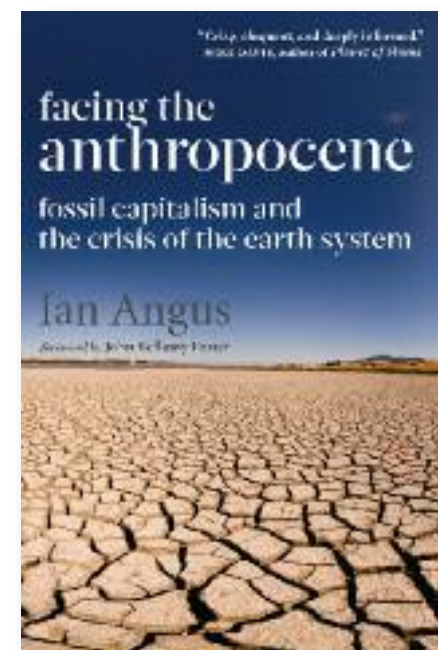
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**Return to CR, Ruskin House,
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REVIEW AN ESSENTIAL PART OF OUR PROGRAMME, THEORY AND ACTIVITY



Review by Martin Levy

Facing the Anthropocene: Fossil capitalism and the crisis of the Earth System

By Ian Angus
[Monthly Review Press, New York,
2016, 277 pp. Pbk, £15.99,
ISBN 978-1-5836760-9-7; hbk, £60,
ISBN 978-1-5836761-0-3]

IN OCTOBER 2018, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned that carbon emissions must be cut to zero by 2050, in order to limit the global average temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.¹ The current British (non-binding) target for 2050 is an 80% cut. The world has already seen 1°C warming, and the IPCC says that the impacts of a further rise – including more extreme weather already being felt, increased droughts, the spread of diseases such as malaria, economic

damage and harm to yields of maize, rice and wheat – will be much less severe if the overall figure is limited to 1.5°C than to 2°C. The IPCC calls for “fast and far-reaching” changes to power generation, industry, transport, buildings and potential shifts in lifestyle such as eating less meat.

Will this happen? Not, in my view, without a massive struggle by the labour and progressive movements throughout the world. Despite Sir David Attenborough's impassioned plea at the UN Climate Change Convention's 24th Conference of the Parties (COP24) in Katowice, Poland, in December 2018, measures are likely to fall well short of what is required. COP24 was, after all, only about preparing for the UN's 2019 Climate Change Summit, where the focus will be on driving action in 6 areas:

“transition to renewable energy; funding of climate action and carbon pricing; reducing emissions from industry; using nature as a solution; sustainable cities and local action; and climate change resilience.”²

None of this really challenges the big corporate vested interests. Yet an invited scientific background paper for the *UN Global Sustainable Development Report 2019* already pulled only a few punches when it was published in August 2019.³ Characterised in some news reports as saying that “to stop climate change, modern capitalism must die” or that “capitalism as we know it is over”, the paper is actually rather more circumspect. Nonetheless, it makes several telling points, including that:

(1) the era of cheap energy is coming to an end, with economies having to shift to energy sources that

are less energy efficient;

(2) sink costs are also rising, with economies having used up the capacity of planetary ecosystems to handle the waste generated by energy and material use – climate change being the most pronounced cost here;

(3) developing countries should focus on providing diverse nutrition for their own people rather than exporting a narrow selection of commodities and raw materials;

(4) the economic models which inform political decision-making in rich countries almost completely disregard the energetic and material dimensions of the economy, and are consequently inadequate; and

(5) rapid economic transition requires proactive governance – markets cannot accomplish the task.

The paper's weakness however is that it comes down in favour of 'Post-Keynesian' solutions instead of changing the economic system.

Ian Angus's *Facing the Anthropocene* is of exceptional value here. Noting that “ecosocialists have made huge strides in rediscovering and extending Marx's view that capitalism creates an ‘irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism’, leading inevitably to ecological crises”, he aims to show socialists that responding to the Anthropocene “must be an essential part of our programme, theory and activity”, and to show Earth System scientists and environmentalists that “ecological Marxism provides essential economic and social understanding that is too often missing.”

The book's title has two meanings: firstly, that humanity in the 21st century faces a crisis in the Earth System, *ie* in the Earth as an integrated planetary system, encompassing interlinked physical, chemical and biological

processes in the biosphere, geosphere and atmosphere (“life is a player, not a spectator”); and secondly, that survival in the Anthropocene requires radical social change, replacing “fossil capitalism” with an ecological civilisation, ecosocialism.

A ‘No-Analogue’ State

The first part of the book deals with the Anthropocene as a period without analogue in geological history. The term itself has been coined three times, first by Soviet geologist Alexei Pavlov in 1922, but most recently was reinvented in February 2000, at a meeting of the International Geosphere-Biosphere Programme (IGBP), by Paul Crutzen, who gained the 1995 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for identifying the chemicals destroying the ozone layer. The idea of the term is that the Earth System *as a whole* is being qualitatively transformed by human action.

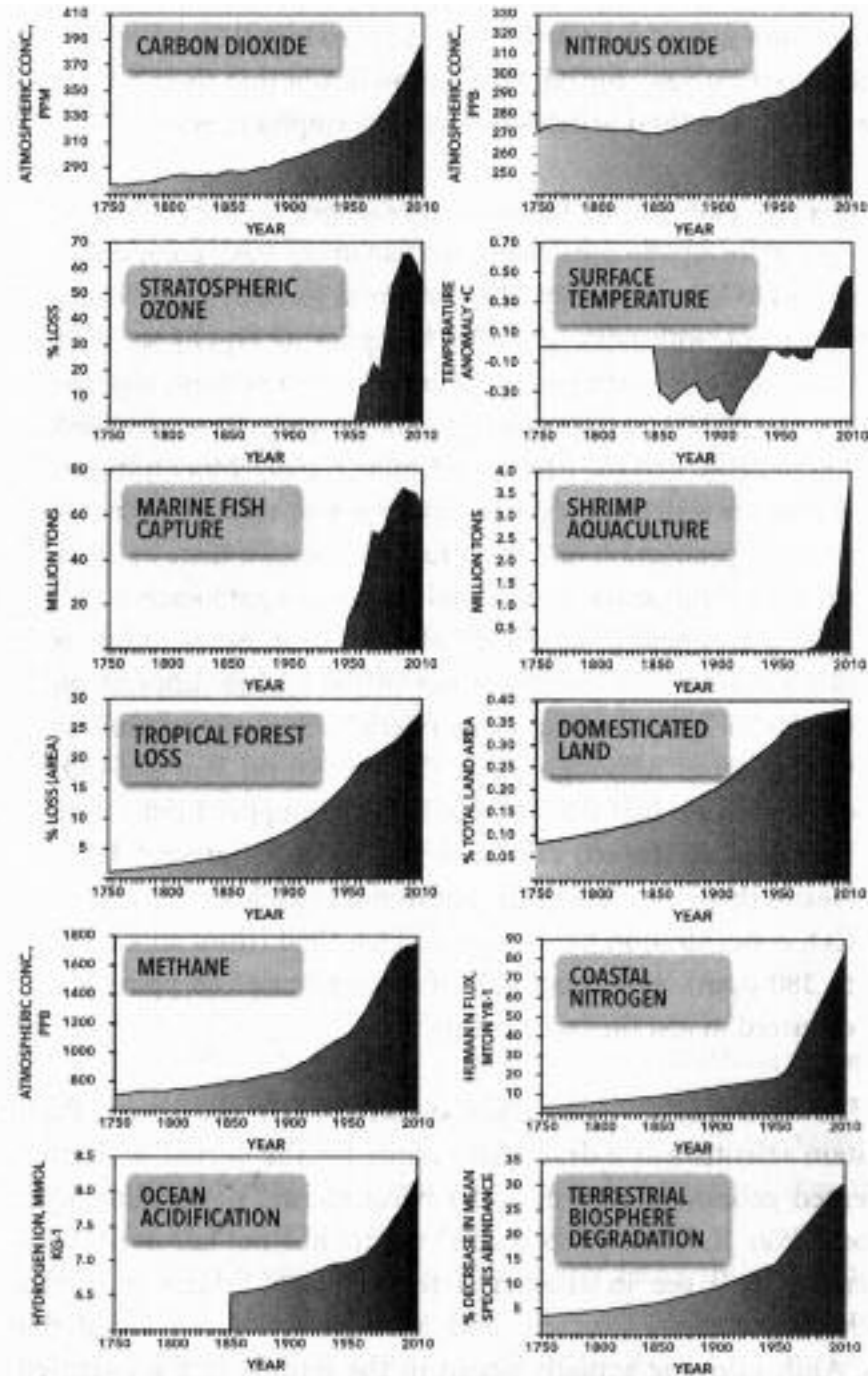
The IGBP decided to “record the trajectory of the ‘human enterprise’ through a number of indicators” from 1750 to 2000 (later updated to 2010). The result was a report, *Global Change and the Earth System*, including the 24 graphs reproduced here in Figs 1 and 2. The first set shows Earth System trends and the second, socioeconomic trends. What, in the words of the IGBP, stands out as remarkable, is that

“The second half of the twentieth century is unique in the entire history of human existence on Earth. Many human activities reached take-off points somewhere in the twentieth century and have accelerated sharply towards the end of the century.” (pp 38-9)

The impact is enormous, and most of it is due to countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, accounting for 74% of global domestic product, but only 18% of the population. IGBP team member Will Steffen coined the term “The Great Acceleration” to describe the trends in both sets of graphs.

The IGBP does not seem to have submitted the concept of the Anthropocene to geological organisations for consideration, but a group of geologists have themselves set out to determine whether a *prima facie* case can be made for defining it as a new geological period, distinct from the Holocene, the period since the last Ice Age. In a 2008 publication, the Stratigraphic Commission of the

Fig 1: Earth System Trends



Figs 1 and 2 reproduced with kind permission of Monthly Review Press from Fig 2.1 and 2.2, pp 44 and 45 respectively, of *Facing the Anthropocene*. The graphs were created by R Jamil Jonna based on data in W Steffen, W Broadgate, L Deutsch, O Gaffney and C Ludwig, ‘The Trajectory of the Anthropocene’, in *Anthropocene Review*, Vol 2, No 1, April 2015, pp 81-98.

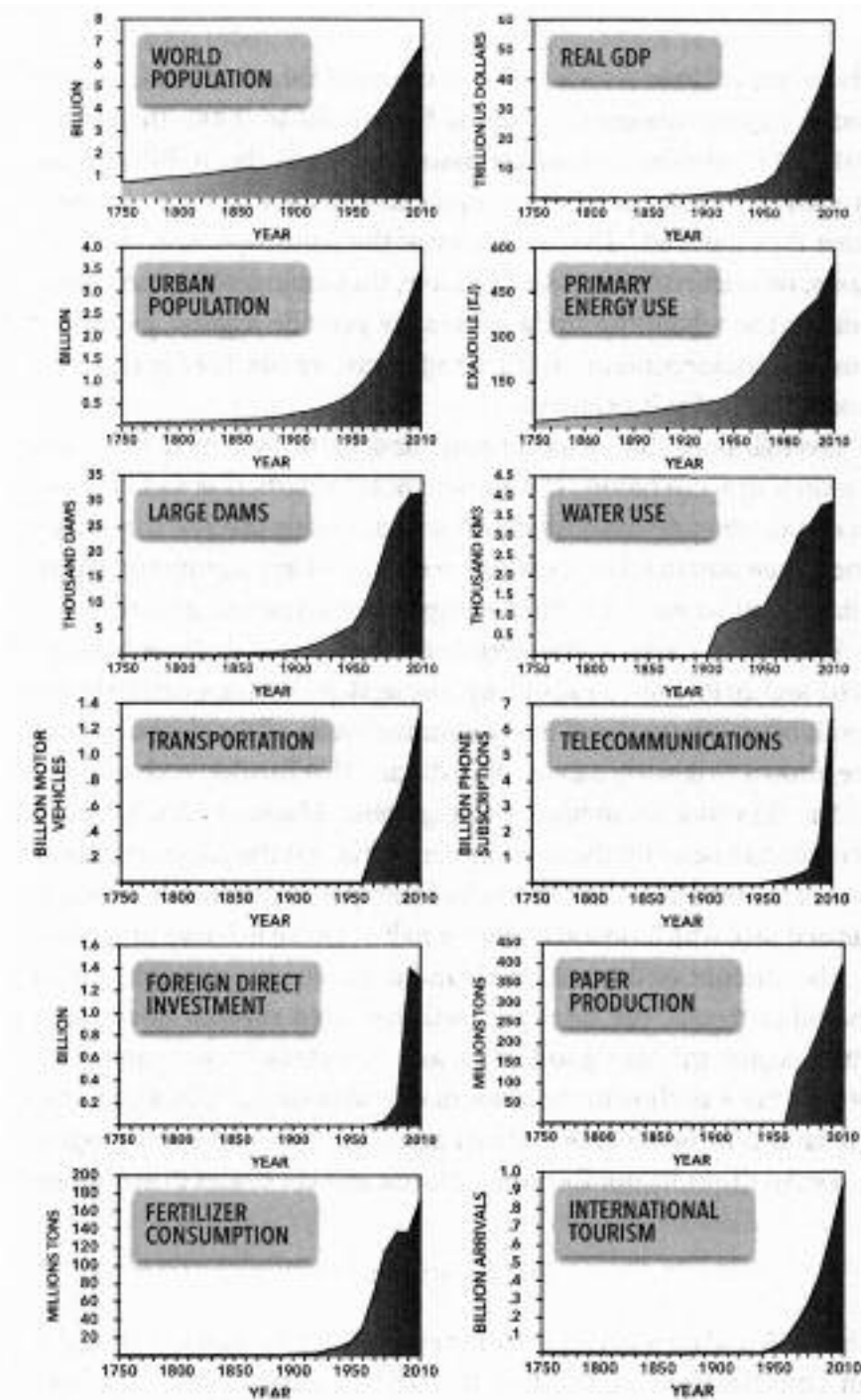
Geological Society of London focused on four areas that might leave changes for future geologists to measure:

- increased erosion, now exceeding sediment production by an order of magnitude;
- the rise in carbon dioxide (CO₂) and methane (CH₄) levels in the atmosphere;
- the changes to the nature of the biosphere due to mass extinctions, species migrations and agricultural monocultures; and
- sea level rises due to global warming, together with acidification of ocean water as a result of higher CO₂ concentrations.

The International Union of Geological Sciences asked the London Stratigraphic Commission to convene an international Anthropocene Working Group (AWG) to investigate. As of 2018, the AWG is still working,⁴ but Angus reports (p 55) that in 2015 two thirds of its members had signed up to a mid-twentieth century date for the start of the Anthropocene, evidenced by anthropogenic deposits containing new minerals and rock types, including elemental aluminium, concrete, plastics, black carbon, inorganic ash and nuclear fall-out.

The current crisis however lies not only in the data in the figures, but in

Fig 2: Socioeconomic Trends



the many linkages and interactions which they fail to capture. Also, once certain thresholds or “tipping points” are passed, rapid nonlinear changes can ensue. A 2009 paper from the Stockholm Resilience Centre identified 9 linked *planetary boundaries* as “most important to maintaining the stability of the planet as we know it” (p 71ff). Two of these (biosphere integrity and interference with the nitrogen and phosphorus cycles) are already in the high-risk zone, while two others (climate change and land-use change) are in the danger zone. Land-use changes can influence climate, and crossing the nitrogen/phosphorus boundary can reduce the ability of

marine organisms to absorb CO₂.

There has already been one near-catastrophe in recent years – the above-mentioned hole in the ozone layer, caused by the release into the atmosphere of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), used as refrigerants from the 1930s. The ban on CFC production – opposed by corporate interests – came in the nick of time, though not without 10,000-20,000 early deaths due to increased ultra-violet radiation. It will take nearly the whole of the 21st century before the ozone hole is completely repaired.

Dealing with CO₂ emissions and their impacts will take a lot longer. Much of what is being released today

will still be affecting the climate in 1000 years’ time. If business as usual continues, global average temperatures could be 4°C above preindustrial levels by 2080 – meaning 6°C or more on land and 16°C in the Arctic. The tropics and equatorial regions will go from hot to extremely hot. And the transition is already well under way: the climate pattern is skewing to heat extremes. Not only will living systems be stressed by a new temperature envelope “hotter than the hottest systems to which these systems are currently accustomed” (p 100), but there will be lost labour capacity, or else premature deaths, due to increased risk of working out of doors under conditions where the human body is unable to control its internal temperature.

Fossil Capitalism

Part 2 of the book is focused on understanding the Anthropocene as a *socio-ecological phenomenon* – a qualitative change in the relationship between human society and the rest of the natural world. The shifts in the Great Acceleration graphs were the culmination of two centuries of capitalist development.

Why, in the face of scientific evidence about the devastating effects of constant economic expansion on the global environment, do corporate executives, pundits, bureaucrats and politicians all agree that growth is good and non-growth bad? Simply because growth is essential to capitalism, whose only measure of success is *accumulation*. But capitalism’s ecologically destructive impacts result not just from its need to grow, but to *grow faster*.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, that need drove an epochal shift to a fossil-fuel based economy. However, the rift in the Earth’s carbon metabolism widened only slowly for a century, then reached a tipping point in the years following World War 2. Why did that happen? Global imperialist conflicts have been significant.

Citing Andreas Malm’s *Fossil Capital*,⁵ Angus shows how the first Industrial Revolution developed on the basis of coal and steam for production and transport. This not only transformed societies in Europe and North America, but led to the expansion of empires and the development of military-industrial complexes. Widespread petroleum use only became possible around the end of the 19th century, with the invention of

the internal combustion engine and the aeroplane; but the big military breakthrough was Winston Churchill's decision in 1912 to convert Britain's battleships from coal to oil.

In the First World War, oil-powered vehicles played a decisive role; and afterwards "automobilisation" of the US economy expanded massively, so that manufacture of cars, trucks and buses was the largest industry by 1929. In its train, the petroleum industry was transformed from a producer of lubricants into a supplier of gasoline, and the chemical industry developed entirely new products which were made either from the by-products of petroleum refining and/or which required high levels of energy that only oil could provide. Invention became big business: on the eve of World War 2, 13 US companies employed one third of all research scientists in the country. (p 133)

This expansion also resulted in a high degree of concentration: in 1930, 106 of the 200 largest US industrial corporations were in chemicals, petroleum, metals, rubber or transportation. They were thus well placed to take advantage of military contracts when World War 2 broke out. By its end, US corporations had made \$52 bn in after-tax profits, accumulated some \$85 bn in capital reserves, and added more than 50% to their productive capacity. (p 139) Plastics had grown to be the third-largest manufacturing industry in the US.

Thereafter, the US ruling class embarked on "military Keynesianism", with two objectives: to begin preparations for World War 3, and to prevent the social unrest that would occur if massive unemployment returned. This has been a fundamental feature of the US economy ever since. In the immediate postwar period, anti-union laws, the red scare campaign and strike-breaking through the use of wartime legislation led to a weakened and ideologically loyal labour movement, "which bargained for concessions without challenging basic dispositions of a business-led society". (p 145) Meanwhile the Marshall Plan was used to strengthen US corporations – especially oil companies – since most of the money had to be used for purchases from such businesses. Oil accounted for 10% of all Marshall Plan spending; but because Congress had specified that US oil should not be used, the effect was to subsidise expansion of US oil companies' then-new facility in Saudi Arabia, as well as

to reshape Europe's energy use patterns away from coal.

At the beginning of 1950, four key drivers of the long boom were in place: a powerful industrial base in the USA, concentrated in a few hundred giant corporations and dominated by the petroleum/automotive sector; a large and growing military budget; a disciplined and financially secure labour force, purged of militants; and a seemingly infinite supply of cheap energy – the price of a barrel of Saudi oil averaged less than \$2 between 1950 and 1973. This was the basis for the Great Acceleration.

The period up to 1973, often called the "Golden Age of capitalism", belonged, as Eric Hobsbawm said, essentially to the developed capitalist countries (p 154), and even then not to all workers. But the emergence of a large, relatively privileged segment of the working class played a big role in keeping the long boom going. This was expressed in mass car ownership, housing construction in the suburbs, a boom in road-building (also necessary for moving troops and military equipment), industrial agriculture (not only mechanisation but synthetic fertilisers and pesticides, so that it now takes more energy to produce food than we get from eating it), military pollution (increasing total US emissions by 5% (p 161)) and globalised production.

Today, globally, there is more capital invested in oil and gas than in any other industry – as of 2010, \$3,135 trillion, but double that if state-owned companies are included (p 170). But as well as yielding mega-profits, fossil fuels also provide food, clothing, homes, heat, transportation, communications, entertainment and much more. So can capitalism de-fossilise? Technologically, a big shift to renewable energy is feasible, but, says Angus, the energy status quo is essential for the profit system today, and that will always take precedence. Fossil fuels are not an overlay that can be peeled away from capitalism, leaving the system intact. They are embedded in every part of the system.

Yet we are not all in this together. Climate change will have "dramatically unequal impacts across regions and social classes, inflicting the greatest damage upon poor countries with the fewest resources for meaningful adaptation." (p 185) Climate refugees will be excluded by force, while the super-wealthy will always be able to create protected spaces for themselves. Indeed, in plundering the world,

capitalism has made an increasingly large proportion of the population *absolutely surplus* to capital's profit-making requirements (p 187). If this continues, the Anthropocene will be a new dark age of barbarous rule by a few and barbaric suffering for most.

The Alternative

The only way to avoid that barbaric future, says Angus, is with methods that are anathema to capitalism:

"Profit must be removed from consideration; all changes must be made as part of a democratically created and legally binding global plan that governs both the conversion to renewables and the rapid elimination of industries and activities, such as arms production, advertising and factory farming, that only produce what John Ruskin called "illth", the opposite of wealth." (p 191)

To this end he proposes ecosocialism and human solidarity, in order to build a future *ecological civilisation*, a society which according to Fred Magdoff,⁶ must:

- (1) provide a decent human existence for everyone: food, clean water, sanitation, health care, housing, clothing, education, and cultural and recreational possibilities;
- (2) eliminate the domination or control of humans by others;
- (3) develop worker and community control of factories, farms and other workplaces;
- (4) promote easy recall of elected personnel; and
- (5) recreate the unity between humans and natural systems in all aspects of life" (pp 196-7)

This society, says Magdoff, would, *inter alia*, stop growing when basic human needs are satisfied, protect natural life-support systems, and foster human characteristics and a culture of cooperation and sharing. Angus says that our generation may not see that vision fully accomplished, but that we can get to the starting point, *ie* that "in every country we need governments that break with the existing order, that are answerable only to working people, farmers, the poor, indigenous communities and immigrants" (p 197). He goes on to suggest some first measures of such governments, including:

- rapid phasing out of fossil fuels and their replacement by clean renewable energy sources;

- introducing free and efficient public transport networks, and implementing urban planning policies that radically reduce the need for private trucks and cars; and
 - placing industries under public control where necessary, and restructuring them to eliminate waste, planned obsolescence and pollution. (pp 198-200)
- To achieve this, he says, needs a movement in which socialists "unite the broadest possible range of people, socialist or not, who agree that the climate vandals must be stopped." (p 216) That movement must be:
- pluralist and open to differing views within the green left;
 - constantly extend [its] analysis and programme in the light of changing political circumstances and scientific knowledge;
 - be internationalist and anti-imperialist; and
 - actively participate in and build environmental struggles, large and small, bringing together everyone – socialists, liberals, deep greens, trades unionists, indigenous activists and more. (pp 218-221)

There is much to commend in Angus's book, over which I have only given a brief overview. I have a small number of disagreements, however. First, in correctly criticising the way in which socialism in the Soviet Union

and eastern Europe replicated the quantitative development model of capitalism (p 210), Angus ignores the capitalist encirclement which forced the Soviet Union to industrialise, which in turn enabled it to rescue itself and the world from Nazi fascism. Secondly, in my view he underestimates the need, particularly in developing countries, for a rapid rise in the standard of living and so for a supplementary non-renewable energy source in the phasing out of fossil fuels. Third, I disagree with him and Magdoff that the future ecological civilisation should ultimately *stop growing*, since humanity will always need progress – albeit that progress must be achieved in harmony with the environment. But fourth, and most seriously, I feel that Angus gives too little weight to the organised working class as the promoter of an "ecosocialist" future, and to struggles around immediate objectives which could curb the power of the fossil fuel lobby. Yes, workers in the power, oil and transportation industries see the need to protect their own jobs, just as do workers in the 'defence' industry. But without the organised working class at the head of the movement for progressive change, there is no way to challenge the power of finance capital and corporate interests. Workers need to be won for a Just Transition, which involves protecting their jobs and skills while we move to an (eco)socialist future.

Notes and References

- 1 IPCC, *Global Warming of 1.5°C*, online at <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>.
- 2 UN News, *Ambition, transformation, active citizenship: COP24 looks to next year's big UN Climate Change Summit*, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/12/1027501>.
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- 5 A Malm, *Fossil Capital: The rise of steam power and the roots of global warming*, Verso, London, 1916.
- 6 F Magdoff, *Ecological Civilization*, in *Monthly Review*, Vol 62, No 8, January 2011, pp 1-25.

CULTURE MATTERS

Culture Matters is part of our cultural struggle or 'mental fight' against class divisions, to achieve a cultural commons in a socialist society – a new Jerusalem, as William Blake called it, and not only in England, but across the world writes *Mike Quille*.

Culture Matters aims to promote a progressive political approach to the arts and all other cultural activities.

You'll find recent material on our site at www.culturematters.org.uk and every piece sent in since our launch a couple of years ago is available under the relevant topic sections in the Arts and Culture Hubs.

Everything on **Culture Matters** – articles, poems, images, editorial and technical support – has been contributed freely. We are a registered co-operative, firmly rooted in the labour movement, and we're planning to publish more books, deliver cultural education packages, run arts awards in partnership with trade unions, and develop other progressive cultural projects. If you would like to help with this work by joining the co-op and buying shares, please visit Shop & Support on the website.

You're also welcome to contribute articles, essays, poems and artworks to info@culturematters.org.uk.

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Bread and Roses Songwriting and Spoken Word Award

Culture Matters is pleased to launch the second Bread and Roses Songwriting and Spoken Word Award. It is sponsored by the Communication Workers' Union, and the Musicians' Union. There are five prizes of £100 each. The purpose of the Award is to encourage grassroots music-making on themes relevant to working-class life, communities and culture. Send your entries in the form of audio or live/pre-recorded video files (MP3/4 format or video) via email to entriesculturematters@gmail.com. See full rules and guidelines in the Music section. The deadline is March 2nd 2019.



Naomi Woodis

PETER RAYNARD *Soul Food*

THE UMBRELLA OF OUR WORDS

the poetry of working-class lives

IF YOU WERE to walk across the green and pleasant fields of contemporary poetry, you would be forgiven for thinking that the world is a green and pleasant place. It is as though it were the same green and pleasant land to which romantics such as Wordsworth first put words; he who defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings; it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility”. Flick through the pages of the UK’s flagship magazine, *The Poetry Review*,¹ and you will find such lyrical tranquility aplenty, the musings of comfortable middle class-emotion with all the power of a ‘darn it, they’ve run out of hummus at Waitrose, darling’. What angst. Rather than being a response to outside events, it chooses poetic glamping as a form of escape.

But fear not, for much like the poets John Clare (aka ‘the peasant poet’) or Shelley, there is a thriving poetry of the working class in Britain today, taking the political ruptures head on, even if it is largely overlooked by the mainstream gatekeepers. For the past 60 years at least, working class poetry has bubbled up and bubbled over. We had (and still have) the Liverpool poets of the 1960s – Roger McGough, Brian Patten, Adrien Henri. And we had the inimitable, late Adrian Mitchell (described by the critic Kenneth Tynan as “the British Mayakovsky”), who infamously said, “Most people ignore most poetry because most poetry ignores most people.”

The 1980s saw the emergence from punk of ranting poetry. Poets such as John Cooper Clarke, Linton Kwesi Johnson, Michael Smith, Seething Wells and Attila the Stockbroker became regulars on a number of ‘yoof’ shows during the 1980s. And the ranting continues apace, brought to the fore again by Thatcher’s legacy, first taken on by New Labour, then the various austerity chiefs since 2010. Much of this is chronicled by a veteran of the scene, Tim Wells, in his wonderfully named site, **Stand Up and Spit**,² which also tells of wider working-class culture such as skinheads (not the racist kind) and DIY fanzines.

An important recent offshoot of Tim’s work, has been the setting up of Poets on the Picket Line (PotPL) with poets such as Chip Hamer, Nadia Drews and Mark Coverdale; they have been supporting various strikes in London by reading poetry to the pickets, and importantly raising much needed funds (there are other branches also, such as the South Wales PotPL). **Culture Matters** has just published an anthology of their work³. As the renowned comedian Phill Jupitus (also an original ranter) says in his Foreword to the book:

“It is not merely the job of art to hold a mirror up to society from a distance; the best of it needs to engage with hearts and minds on the ground. *Poetry on the Picket Line* is a perfect manifestation of this. It’s odd to say that I wish there was no need for them. But the fact is that over the coming years they’re going to be getting busier if anything.”

Here’s one of the poems in that anthology:

The Eleventh Commandment

by Janine Booth

I’d rather go to prison or be given a huge fine
Or have cosmetic surgery from Doctor Frankenstein
Sit through a boring lecture on interior design
Yes, I’d rather do most anything than cross a picket line

I’d sooner scratch my itches with a prickly porcupine
Or spend the night in darkest woods when evil stars align
De-skin my legs with sandpaper and wade through lakes of brine
Yes, I’d rather drown in vats of rats than cross a picket line

I’d rather drink a cocktail made of sweat and turpentine
Or live beneath a spiky hedge in Lower Lichtenstein
Lie face down in the middle of an open-cast coal mine
Yes, I’d rather eat stale camels’ feet than cross a picket line

I’d rather be like Tarzan and go swinging from a vine
Or dive off that big bridge and then go swimming in the Tyne
Bathe naked with piranhas in the Hyde Park Serpentine
Yes, I’d rather lose my other eye than cross a picket line

I’d rather rub a massive turd and try to make it shine
Or dip some poo in superglue and stick it to my spine
Invest my lot in Enron stock and watch its sharp decline
Yes, I’d rather go to Hell and back than cross a picket line

I’d rather face the rising storm in 1939
Or have my photo taken standing by a TURN RIGHT sign
Pretend to have the time of day for Michael Heseltine
Yes, I’d rather have my nails pulled out than cross a picket line

I’d rather take a solemn pledge to never drink more wine
Or place my genitalia in the mouth of a dead swine
Become a Shadow Minister, then run off and resign

Yes, I’d rather scrape the barrel’s arse than cross a picket line

I’d rather turn my bedroom to a Justin Bieber shrine
Or use an Off-Peak Travelcard at twenty-five past nine
Send Iain Duncan Smith a secret, scented Valentine
But I’d never, no not ever, ever cross a picket line

There are a number of other initiatives: the Red Poets⁴ of South Wales have been active for 25 years, and have just published their annual anthology. There are also a number of female collectives, such as Vane Women⁵ in the North East, and The Octavia Collective⁶ for women of colour. **The Recusant**⁷ and **Militant Thistles**⁸, webzines run by Alan Morrison, have specialised in social and political poetry outside the poetry mainstream since 2007, specifically to champion neglected and lesser-known poets and writers, many from marginalised backgrounds.

On the spoken word scene, Burning Eye Books⁹ specifically publishes poets whose main platform is the stage rather than the page. This effectively gives voice to working-class poets, who would normally feel alienated from mainstream, page-centred poetry.

There are also publishers who explicitly publish poetry on the Left. Smokestack Books,¹⁰ run by Andy Croft, has been going for over twenty years, publishing such writers as John Berger, Michael Rosen, and Ian McMillan. A more recent publisher, of which *CR* readers will be aware, is the aforementioned *Culture Matters* (www.culturematters.org.uk), edited by the regular *Soul Food* columnist Mike Quille. Here, the emphasis is on cultural democracy as an agent of change. Taking as a point of departure Raymond Williams’ definition, “Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start,” **Culture Matters** goes on to say:

“This means that culture includes not just the arts, but much, much more. It includes all those learned human activities which give life purpose, meaning and value, and which human beings engage in for enjoyment, entertainment and enlightenment. So as well as the arts, culture includes sport, religion, eating and drinking, fashion and clothing, education, the media and many other popular activities.”

Then there is my own site, **Proletarian Poetry: poems of working class lives** (www.proletarianpoetry.com). The name is in homage to the Harlem Renaissance poets, such as Langston Hughes, who was known as the ‘laureate’ of poor African Americans during the 1920s and 30s in Harlem. He was part of a movement known as the Proletarian Poets, whose writing had a class consciousness to it and didn’t hold back in its description of the plight of working-class people during the difficult inter-war decades of the early 20th century. His poems conveyed the special hardship and discrimination facing black people during that time, and which still resonate today.

Some critics claimed that Hughes was portraying the black experience in a negative way, one that showed them as helpless, feckless even. There was said to be nothing positive in his depiction of them, and reading Hughes’ poems you can see why people took such a view. Take, for example, *Ballad for The Landlord*, which describes a man’s fight with his landlord over the state of his apartment block and his subsequent arrest for making the complaint:

Landlord, landlord,
My roof has sprung a leak.
Don’t you ’member I told you about it
Way last week?

Landlord, landlord,
These steps is broken down.
When you come up yourself
It’s a wonder you don’t fall down.

The power lies with the landlord of course, exploiting a tenant who can do nothing about his plight. In his defence, Hughes said that he didn’t know any wealthy, highly educated people (black or otherwise) and only wrote what he saw.

This is a dilemma facing writers in how they portray the working class. If there are only ever horror stories of how terrible life is, or fairy tales of how people escaped from such a life, then we are missing a great deal of the picture. More importantly, this can then lead to negative stereotyping and demonisation.

With **Proletarian Poetry**, I have tried to balance poems that show the plight facing working-class people today, without showing them as helpless, feckless, or uneducated. The site has been going for over four years and has featured around 150 contemporary poets. The themes range from background/heritage to politics, history, and culture more widely (bingo, football, pubs). The poems come in many forms, but my personal favourites are those in the vernacular, as I think this is often a big indicator of class. For example, Geoff Hattersley’s sequence of poems, in *t’ George*, are written in a Barnsley accent:

That time shi come in t’ pub
'n' put mi Sunday dinner o'er t' top o' mi 'eeud!
The' we' mashed taties darn t' back o' mi collar
The' we' carrots 'n' sprouts 'n' all soorts

Tha knows what shi reckons meks a good breakfast?
A bleedin' apple
That's all, nowt else, just a bleedin' apple
A bleedin' apple on a bleedin' little plate

But there also important female working class voices; poets such as Fran Lock,¹¹ Melissa Lee Houghton and Nadia Drews. In her poem, *Like Mother*, Nadia shows us the variety of characters that can make up a school class, looking at this from the perspective of a young woman’s rite of passage:

The flimsy, thin, sterling silver skin stinging slaps
The back of the class chatting up robbing from the stock cupboard smothered laughs
Julie, longing lashes, soft, leather wrapped in Frank Debbie, bitty little. Biting lippy, outside the chippy
Gob full of fizz bomber jacketed hands jammed in high
Up in arms, sticking out like chicken wings, flapping
Clucking fuck this and fuck that

There are also many poems from people of colour, who relate the experience of oppression and discrimination faced by relatives and themselves, and the systematic racism that still blights so-called democracies in the West. Malika Booker does this in her poem, *Lament for the Assassination of Comrade Walter Rodney*:

1: The News

The home was cold;
a mother, brother, sister, sat empty,
guts screwed with news that their father dead.

They say he body parts scatter all across Bent street,
they say like Seth scatter Osiris across black tar.

2: Procession

That day a donkey cart tote his coffin
to the graveside. There was curfew,
but who hitched lift, who walked in hot sun,
who jumped into hire-taxi or old bus,
whipped donkey, or drove car,
through tears and sweat in backra sun?

If in these febrile times of Trump, Brexit, the rise of right-wing nationalism, and the impotent inconsequential liberal middle with their *Strictly Come Bake Off* oblivion, you wish to cocoon yourself, then the steady-as-you-go hospice-type poetry seen in mainstream publications can act as your palliative care.

However, if you want to hear voices rarely heard inside the institutions of power (whether that be Parliament, the papers, or the BBC) or in the leafy pastures of middle England, then you will find in a tower block, on top of a hill, on a picket line, the compassion, anger and fight of working-class poetry, giving us some hope of a more left-wing alternative future – a future where it still may be raining heavily, but we at least have the umbrella of our own words.

“There comes a time when you realise that everything is a dream, and only those things preserved in writing have any possibility of being real.”

James Salter¹²

Notes and references

- 1 <https://poetrysociety.org.uk/publications-section/the-poetry-review/>.
- 2 <https://standupandspit.wordpress.com/>.
- 3 *Poetry on the Picket Line*, compiled and edited by Grim Chip and Mike Quille, is available from the Shop and Support section of the **Culture Matters** website, www.culturematters.org.uk.
- 4 <https://www.facebook.com/RedPosts/>.
- 5 <http://www.vanewomen.co.uk/>.
- 6 <http://africawrites.org/blog/meet-octavia-poetry-collective/>.
- 7 <http://www.therecasant.org.uk/the-recusant/4524568037>.
- 8 <http://militantthistles.moonfruit.com/>.
- 9 <https://burningeyebbooks.wordpress.com/>
- 10 <https://smokestack-books.co.uk/>.
- 11 *Culture Matters* has published two collection of Fran Lock's poetry: *Muses and Bruises* (2017) and *Ruses and Fuses* (2018). Both are highly recommended, and are available as in Note 3.
- 12 J Salter, *All That Is*, Picador, London, 2014.



HAZEL ROBERTS PRINT MAKER

Showcased on the back cover of this issue is the work of Manchester-based graphic designer and print maker Hazel Roberts. She graduated in fine art from Cardiff in the late nineties and subsequently gained a masters degree in design. Her preference is to work with traditional printing methods and technologies writes Nick Wright.

Characterised by very high production values and an elegant and innovative colour palette her prints have a very direct and wide appeal. Her distinctive posters and prints which promote the *Morning Star*-linked Pedal for Progress initiative have won her a strong following in the trade union movement and an appreciative international audience.

Her influences range from French cinema, revolutionary icons and 20th century modernism with a special place for Bauhaus and Soviet design. She is a winner of the 2018 Intaglio Printmakers prize and the 2018 Print Workshop Flourish award.

Some of her work is showcased at <https://paper-gallery.co.uk/hazel-roberts-1>.

She won the 2018 Left Bank Leeds art prize with her prints for the 150th anniversary of the Trades Union Congress. She says:

“I still can't believe I won. They are such a fantastic organisation. It is a real honour and the other artists shortlisted are unbelievably talented.

“The piece that won is the first of a series of three prints – *Organise*, *Educate* and *Agitate*. I created them earlier in the year in response to a commission for the TUC. The objective was to create a piece of work to celebrate 150 years of Congress, but there was such a wealth of stories and documents that I created three. It became so much more than a commission as it was dealing with a subject I'm passionate about. I think there are still several pieces of work still to be created.

“When looking through the archives it was difficult to decide on what events to focus on, but in the end I decided to take a constructivist approach using dynamic bold shapes interwoven with important pieces of communication.

“The piece *Organise* features a handwritten budget from the 1888 Match Girls' strike and a correspondence from the matchmakers' union. I've purposely tried to keep the work simple, but like all things that appear simple it is rather complex. The multilayered screen print took months to complete, in the end I think there were 36 different layers.”

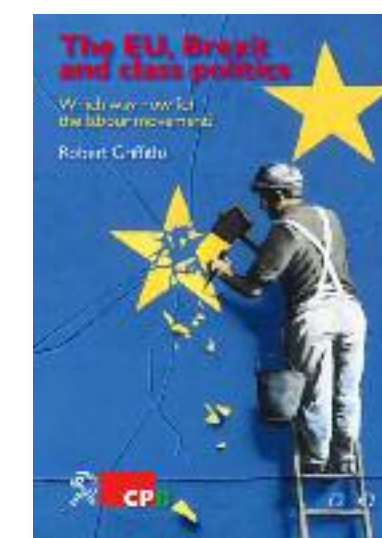
Read the full interview here:
<http://www.jennydrinkwater.co.uk/portfolio/an-interview-with-hazel-roberts/>



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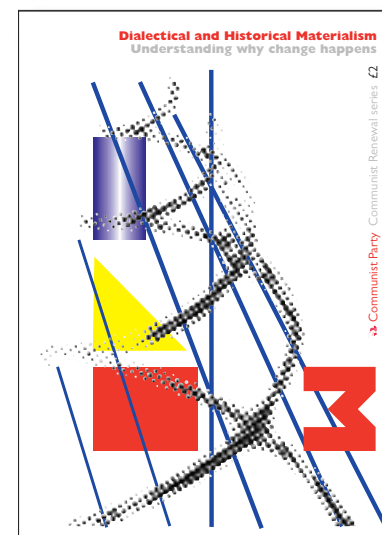
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▲ *Challenge* is the monthly magazine of Britain's Young Communist League November 2018 issue £1.50 + £1.50 P&P obtainable from www.ycl.org.uk



Unity! is the Communist Party's free newspaper issued in print, digital and online versions at www.communist-party.org.uk and at <https://issuu.com/> and communist_party/docs

