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BREXIT DEAL OR NO DEAL?



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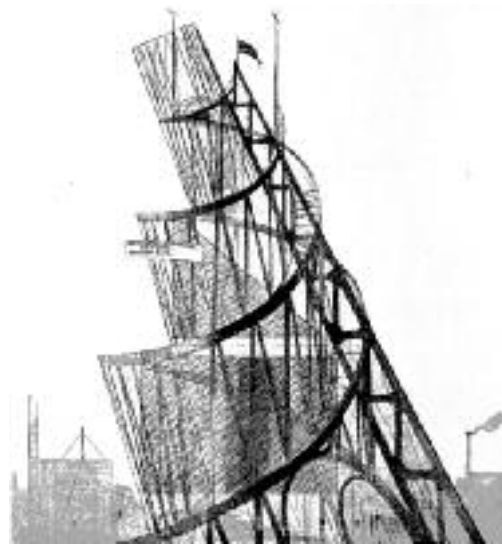
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Cover image
Proletarians of All Countries Get United!
by El Lisitsky (Lazar Lisitsky).

Above right
Vladimir Tatlin's *Monument to the Third International*



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MARTIN LEVY

EDITORIAL

15 March 2019

THERE IS a slim chance that, by the time you read this, Britain will no longer be in the EU. Slim, because, with the repeated Parliamentary defeats for May's negotiated 'deal', the chance of Brexit on the designated date of March 29 has got less and less. However, despite the non-binding Westminster vote against 'no-deal', the legal default position is that Britain will leave the EU on the due date, **unless** the EU agrees to Britain's request for a delay.

All along the strategy of the ruling monopoly capitalist classes in both Britain and the EU has been to nullify the effects of the 2016 the referendum result – either by directly overturning it, or by keeping Britain aligned/tied as closely as possible to the EU Customs Union and Single Market. As a warning to other potential leavers, the EU leaders have also wanted to make Brexit as painful as possible for Britain.

Whether they would refuse an extension point-blank is another matter, however. If things were to go wrong, it could rebound on their own popularity at home. On the other hand, it would certainly be in their interests to agree to a short extension if – against all the odds – May finally managed to cobble together a Parliamentary majority for her negotiated agreement. Failing that, the EU would want a lengthy extension, in the hope that the British public would eventually throw in the towel or that something involving even closer alignment to the EU would be the outcome.

Right now, the crisis in which the referendum result has placed Britain's ruling class is unresolved. The problem for the dominant monopoly finance capital sector is that the Tory party, its main electoral vehicle, needs to rely on a broad base of electoral support – including the DUP in Northern Ireland – much of which resents the loss of sovereignty to the EU supranational institutions. Of course part of that base is xenophobic, harking back to a lost time when Britain 'ruled the waves'. But this remains a crisis for the ruling class, which the left should be doing its utmost to exploit.

That lesson has unfortunately not been grasped across the whole of the labour movement. Having in 1988 bought in to Jacques Delors' "Social Europe" model, the TUC is now wedded to the Single Market as the guarantor not only of jobs but also of workers' rights. Such thinking also influences the Labour Party's position. However, that "social" model now barely exists, as public services across the EU are privatised, and as spending on social programmes is cut back. Furthermore, as the Communist Party's new pamphlet, *the EU and Brexit*, explains, most of

our rights and standards in Britain derive from domestic legislation, much of it won only after determined campaigning by trade unions, pressure groups and other popular movements.

Furthermore, leaving the EU – and its Single Market and Customs Union – without an agreement does not mean 'crashing out'. It means leaving under World Trade Organisation rules. As Robert Wilkinson shows in the lead article in this issue of *CR*, tariff-free trade with the EU prevents Britain from supporting its own industries, and from developing our relationships with the expanding markets outside the EU. Compared with the rest of the world, the negative trade balance in goods has widened much more rapidly with the EU, while the positive balance in services is much smaller. He says that, given the growth in world trade, it would be suicidal for Britain to remain constrained by EU-negotiated deals with other countries.

In this edition of *CR*, we also mark the centenary of the founding of the Third (Communist) International, by republishing an archive article – an abridged version of R Palme Dutt's 'Notes of the Month' in *Labour Monthly*, March 1969. It is an excellent account of the Comintern's formation and the leadership it gave to the world revolutionary movement and the fight against fascism – while not ignoring tactical shortcomings. And, despite the past setbacks and some differences in the world communist movement today, the internationalism the Comintern inspired still lives.

A more tragic centenary, in January this year, was that of the assassination of leading German communists Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. To mark that, we include here articles by Jenny Farrell and Marion Baur from the Communist Party of Ireland's journal, *Unity*. As Marion says, Rosa lived and died as 'one of us', a communist.

In *CR90* we printed a review of Shiraz Durrani's book on Kenyan martyr Pio Gama Pinto. Continuing the internationalist theme, we now publish an article *Kenya Resists* by Shiraz himself, looking particularly at how art and culture were used by the Kenyan underground to educate the people about their true anticolonial history. That article is followed by Mike Quille's *Culture matters to the Many, not the Few*, arguing for a broader definition of culture than just 'the arts' – *ie* activities which matter most to working people – and therefore for policies for which we should fight as priorities for an incoming Labour government.

We round off with two book reviews, a letter to the editor, a preview of the recent *Communist Review* pamphlet – JR Campbell's *Robert Burns the Democrat* – and the ever-excellent *Soul Food*.

ROBERT WILKINSON



BREXIT – DEAL OR NO DEAL?

A MIDST THE cacophony of apocalyptic hysteria surrounding the prospect of failing to come to an agreement with the European Union regarding the terms of UK withdrawal, it has been almost impossible to envisage what a ‘Full Brexit’ would mean.

‘Crashing out’ and ‘cliff edge’ are some of the milder scenarios that are bandied about to frighten the readers of *The Guardian* into apoplectic convulsions and campaigns to achieve a ‘Peoples Vote’ to reverse the verdict of the Referendum of June 2016.

The fact that there had been a General Election in 2017 in which those parties in Britain that campaigned to Remain in the EU all lost votes (LibDems, Greens, SNP and Plaid Cymru, down over 1.1 million between them) was blithely ignored as too embarrassing to mention. Even in Northern Ireland, where the pro-EU Sinn Fein increased its vote, what was often overlooked is that the anti-EU DUP increased its vote by a greater amount. What should also not be disregarded in the euphoria of Labour advance at the national level, is that the party lost 6 seats in which the UKIP vote in 2015 switched almost entirely to the Tories.¹ It may well be instructive to pause a while to consider just what was being placed before the electorate in the 2017 General Election.

The Conservative and Unionist Party Manifesto warned that “The negotiations will undoubtedly be tough, and there will be give and take on both sides, but we continue to believe that no deal is better than a bad deal for the UK”. It went on to proclaim that:

“We will control immigration and secure the entitlements of EU nationals in Britain and British nationals in the EU. We will maintain the Common Travel Area² and maintain as frictionless a border as possible for people, goods and services between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Workers’ rights conferred on British citizens from our membership of the EU will remain. We will pursue free trade with European markets and secure new trade agreements with other countries. ... As we leave the European Union, we will no longer be members of the single market or customs union but we will seek a deep and special partnership including a comprehensive free trade and customs agreement.”³ (*my emphases*)

The most significant feature of the 2017 General Election however was that the Conservatives lost their overall majority in the House of Commons, obliging Theresa May to secure a ‘Confidence and Supply Agreement’ with the Democratic Unionist Party of Northern Ireland.

Much has been made of the upsurge of Labour votes of over 3.5 million but it cannot be overlooked that the Conservative vote also increased by over 2.3 million, primarily because the UKIP vote collapsed by over 3 million.⁴

The Labour Manifesto, *For the Many, Not the Few*, was praised for its influence on the electorate. What most interests the argument here is the impact that Chapter 02 ‘Negotiating Brexit’ may have had on the result and the party’s policy since. It promised to:

“build a close new relationship with the EU ... with fresh negotiating priorities that have a strong emphasis on retaining the benefits of the Single Market and the Customs Union – which are essential for maintaining industries, jobs and businesses in Britain. ... We will build a close co-operative future relationship with the EU, not as members but as partners.”⁵

It argued in the section on International Trade that:

“The UK’s future prosperity depends on minimising tariff and non-tariff barriers that prevent us from exporting and creating the jobs and economic growth we need. ... As our trading relationship with the EU changes it is vital that we retain unrestricted access for our goods and services.”⁶

Free trade costs a high price

The almost universal mantra of the benefits of ‘free trade’ agreements is one that Marxists must question. As Marx and Engels argued in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the bourgeoisie in its overthrow of feudalism,

“in place of the numberless and feasible chartered freedoms, has set up that single, unconscionable freedom – Free Trade. In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation. ...

All old-established national industries have been destroyed or are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed, not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe. ...

The cheap prices of its commodities are the heavy artillery with which it batters down all Chinese walls It compels all nations, on pain of extinction, to adopt the

bourgeois mode of production; it compels them to introduce what it calls civilisation into their midst, *ie* to become bourgeois themselves. In one word, it creates a world after its own image.”⁷

Oxfam, amongst many other global charities, has exposed the impact of ‘free trade agreements’ on the developing countries.⁸

By definition a ‘free trade agreement’ enlarges the market and in so doing accelerates the inherent tendency to monopolisation by the producers. The analysis of imperialism of Hobson, Lenin and Bukharin revealed the growing link between finance capital and the monopoly manufacturers. The argument proposed by Kautsky that the separate imperialist powers would inevitably merge into a worldwide system of ‘ultra-imperialism’ was decisively rejected by the Bolshevik theorists. Kautsky had argued that “the time is not far off when those magnates of capital will unite into one world trust which would replace the rivalries and the struggle of nationally limited finance capital by an internationally united finance capital.” Lenin however countered this argument in no uncertain terms:

“He who denies the sharp tasks of today in the name of dreams about soft tasks of the future becomes an opportunist. Theoretically it means to fail to base oneself on the developments now going on in real life, to detach oneself from them in the name of dreams.”⁹

Those who continue to dream that ‘Another EU is possible’, one that exists to overcome the historic conflicts between rival imperialist powers, ignore the realities underlying their mutual support in the face of increased competition from powers outside of Europe. It is necessary for a complete understanding to reveal that beneath the superficialities of unity there continue to exist profound contradictions. Bukharin clearly saw that free trade agreements cannot disguise the reality of competition:

“The fact that in individual cases there may be a lowering of the tariffs or mutual concessions stipulated in treaties, does not alter the general rule – all such facts are only exceptions, temporary halts, an armistice in the everlasting war.”

...
 “There is nothing behind the discussions about the creation of a middle European tariff alliance but the wish to create a vast economic territory as a monopoly system allowing more successful competition on the external market. In reality this is a product of the interests and the ideology of finance capital.”

...
 “To imagine that the trusts, this embodiment of monopoly, have become the bearers of the free trade policy, of peaceful expansion, is a deeply harmful utopian fantasy.”¹⁰

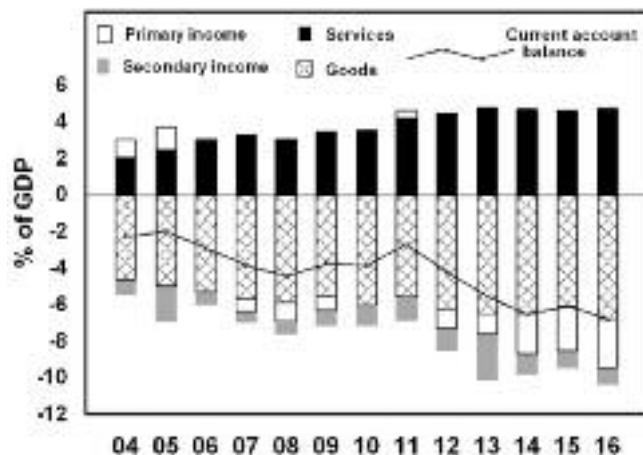
Britain’s situation

The advocacy in the Labour Manifesto of tariff-free access to the EU market cannot ignore the fact that this access would be reciprocal by belonging to ‘a’ customs union (how this would differ from ‘the’ customs union is not fully explained). Britain’s “unrestricted access” to the EU market would inevitably require the access to the UK market for EU manufacturers.

The overall situation is serious enough that, since 2011/12, the balance of payments has swung decisively against Britain, as shown in Fig 1.¹¹ This cannot be blamed on Brexit

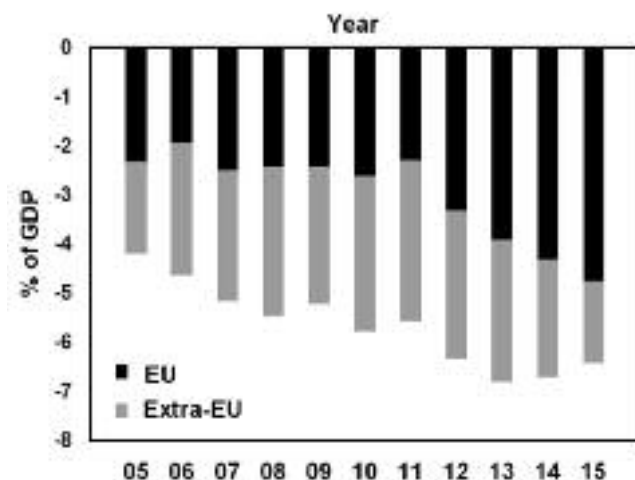
uncertainty as there was every expectation by the ruling class prior to 2016 that the Referendum would go in their favour. In 2016 the deficit widened to 5.9% of GDP, the highest on record. However, while historically a deficit balance has been largely due to the difference between exports and imports of goods and services, more recently, the primary income deficit has played a more significant role. Primary income includes income from interest, profits, dividends generated from foreign direct investment (FDI) and portfolio investment, and also migrant remittances, *ie* payments from people living and working overseas. Net secondary income includes (for the UK) the annual contributions to the EU, and spending on military aid, overseas development aid etc, so will always be negative.

FIG 1 Annual current account balance¹¹



As Fig 1 shows, since 2012 all factors of the balance of payments have been negative. In terms of economic theory this should have led to a devaluation of sterling but this would not have been in the interests of the financial sector that dominates the UK economy. The main reason for the fall in primary income is a sharp drop, from about 3.3% to 0.5% of GDP, in FDI, and a sustained negative balance of around 1% of GDP, in portfolio investment.¹² The fall in FDI largely reflects a sharp drop in the rate of return. Traditionally the UK has relied on profits from investments abroad to counterbalance the deficit on foreign trade. However, the rate of return on FDI assets had already fallen from 8.1% to 5.4% between 2011 and 2014,¹³ and this trend seems likely to have continued.

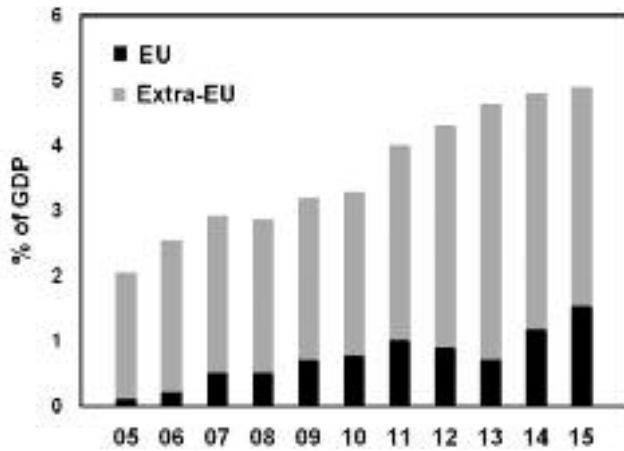
FIG 2 Annual composition of the trade balance in goods by trading partner¹⁴



The situation is significantly different when the data is broken down into the relationship between the balance with

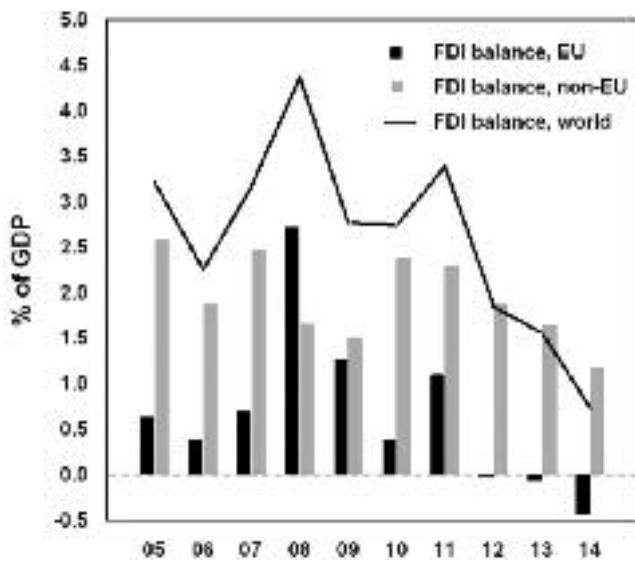
the EU and the rest of the world. As Figs 2¹⁴ and 3¹³ show, the trade balance in goods with the EU has widened significantly while the surplus in services is much smaller with the EU than with the rest of the world.

FIG 3. Annual composition of the trade balance in services by trading partner.¹³



Tariff-free relations with the EU are not necessarily in the interests of the UK as wealth is increasingly being siphoned off to the benefit of EU manufacturers and EU investors in the UK. As Fig 4¹⁵ displays, the FDI income balance with the rest of the world outside the EU is still positive; countries such as China continue to invest in Britain and UK investments abroad outside the EU are still profitable.

FIG 4. Annual FDI income balance.¹⁵



The insistence by much of the political establishment, including most Labour MPs, that the UK must remain a member of the EU Customs Union may not be the conclusion that should be reached on the basis of the information contained in the EU's own *Country Reports*. Tariff-free trade does not necessarily act in favour of a country attempting to preserve and protect its industries from undercutting by foreign competition. The Labour Manifesto in 2017 saw fit to identify the "dumping of state-subsidised goods on our markets" as a justification for advocating "duties needed to defend the British steel industry".¹⁶

There needs to be much wider application of this principle if UK manufacturing is not to continue to be devastated by EU competition. The predominance of German manufactures is highly significant – £21.3 bn, ie 32% of the net trade imbalance

with the EU, in 2017.¹⁷ It is noticeable that although imports of goods from the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands and Belgium make up a significant proportion of their Gross Domestic Product, exporting to the UK makes up far less of German GDP. It would be important to consider how easy it would be to replace these imports with domestic manufactures or imports from countries outside the EU.

The 2017 Labour Manifesto did go some way in recognition of the need to restrict absolutely open 'free trade' by the promise:

"We will ensure all future trade deals safeguard the right to regulate in the public interests and to protect public services. Labour is committed to the rules-based international trading system of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). We will rejoin the Government Procurement Agreement, whilst safeguarding the capacity for public bodies to make procurement decisions in keeping with public policy objectives."¹⁶

These objectives are likely to conflict with EU Directives making continued membership of the Single Market difficult if not impossible.

The growth in world trade has been greater for countries outside the EU. By 2003 sea freight costs had fallen to half that of 1970.¹⁸ In these circumstances it would be suicidal for Britain to remain constrained by the trading deals that the EU has negotiated with other countries rather than taking advantage of the opportunity to develop our relationships with the expanding markets outside the EU. Remaining within 'a' or 'the' customs union with the EU would effectively prevent any future government from implementing policies that would be to the benefit of our manufacturing and extractive industries, agriculture, fisheries, commercial and the expanding communication sectors.

The importance of financial services for the UK economy is consistently emphasised in the EU *Country Reports*. The 2017 Report drew attention to its role in mitigating the consequences of the growing deficit in trade in manufactured goods (see Fig 3):

"The UK continues to run a substantial trade surplus in services, the majority of which is with countries outside the EU. A large surplus in financial and pension and insurance services accounts for around half of the services surplus. The trade surplus in services with the EU, which is considerably smaller than that with the rest of the world, is dominated by a large surplus in financial services, while there is a considerable deficit in travel services. ... The UK is home to the largest financial sector in the EU and one of the largest in the world. The financial services sector accounts for around 8% of UK GDP (2014) and 3% of UK employment (September 2016). ... The surplus in financial services reflects the UK's sectoral strength in financial services and insurance and pension services, which it has retained for at least the last ten years."¹⁹

The price we pay

Much ridicule has been heaped on the claim emblazoned on the 'big red bus' that the UK sent £350m a week to Brussels. This even went so far in some arguments as to claim that in fact Britain received more from the EU than we paid in contributions. The claim by Boris Johnson and the 'Vote Leave' campaign was of the gross contribution, which did not take into account the 'rebate' negotiated by Margaret Thatcher or the EU funding of the public and

private sectors. Nevertheless, even with all these deductions, there is, according to Government statistics, a net contribution of around £7.4 bn a year.²⁰ The figure has risen steadily since accession and the receipts from EU funding have been declining since 2008.²¹

In 2016 the UK contributed over 13% of the funding for the EU, the third highest after Germany (19%) and France (17%). The loss of this funding would be considerable, especially upon those EU countries that rely most heavily upon EU grants to keep their economies afloat.²² The largest recipient of EU funding is Poland, which may well explain the hard nosed approach of EU President Donald Tusk to the Brexit negotiations.

If the rebate were ended, the UK would become the second largest contributor to the EU budget. The level of the rebate has been decided every seven years, as part of the EU's long-term budget, the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). The new round of negotiations in 2020 is likely to be extremely fraught, as at present the settlement requires unanimity of the European Council. European Budget Commissioner Gunther Oettinger has argued that the rebates should be scrapped completely:

“I want to propose a budget framework that does not only do without the mother of all rebates [the UK's] but without all of its children as well.”²³

Even if the UK were to remain a member of the EU, there is no guarantee that the rebate in its present form would continue after 2020. The current procedure of seeking unanimity (effectively giving any government a veto) may well be replaced by Qualified Majority Voting that is becoming increasingly used in the deliberations of the Council of Ministers.

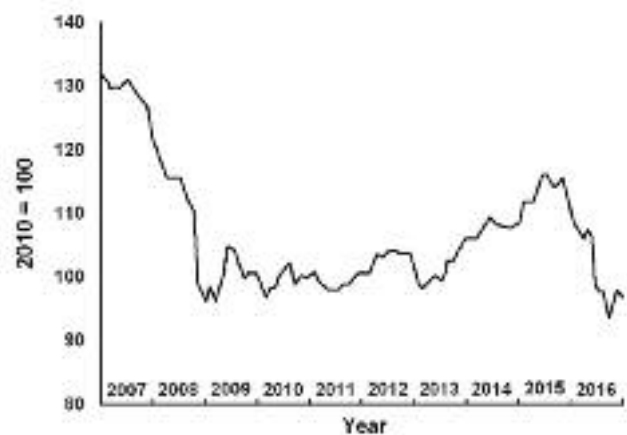
The centre-piece of Britain's trade policy after Brexit would be membership of the World Trade Organisation and trade with the EU would continue on that basis as a minimum requirement. A bespoke trade agreement could be negotiated with the EU without locking Britain into a Customs Union that would prevent the UK from making bilateral or multilateral trade agreements with other countries. Some argue for 'Norway Plus' and that Britain should revert to membership of European Free Trade Area (EFTA) as this would not require the UK to be subject to the Common Agricultural Policy, Common Fisheries Policy or the EU Foreign and Defence Policy. What is overlooked is that membership of EFTA is still subject to Article 45 of the Lisbon Treaty, on freedom of movement and residence,²⁴ and that Norway has a healthy trade surplus with the EU. These are issues that would count against what the majority of Leave voters had sought to achieve.

Another persistent argument by those who seek to retain UK membership of the EU is that the value of sterling has collapsed since the Referendum. In fact the European Commission's *Country Report* of 2016 regarded the relative depreciation of sterling as being beneficial to the UK economy:

“A depreciation of sterling is likely to act as an automatic stabiliser should investor sentiment turn against the UK. A depreciation should spur export growth and reduce import growth and thus, theoretically, reduce the current account deficit. In addition, UK assets denominated in sterling become cheaper in foreign currency terms. As a greater share of the UK's foreign liabilities is denominated in sterling than is the share in foreign assets, in the event

of a depreciation of sterling, the net foreign asset/liability position should improve as a result of valuation effects.”²⁵

FIG 5. Annual nominal effective exchange rate.²⁶



The 2017 Report showed a depreciation of sterling of around 11% on a trade-weighted basis since 23 June 2016 (Fig 5).²⁶ The decline is considerably less than that between 2007 and 2009, and from a level that was overvalued between 2013 and early 2016, damaging the export of goods and services to the benefit only of the financial sector and UK tourists and the purchase of property abroad.

The Four Freedoms

Britain's remaining in the EU Single Market would require a recognition of compliance with the 'Four Freedoms' envisaged in the original Treaty of Rome and enshrined in the subsequent Treaty of Lisbon that expand the free movement of goods in the Customs Union to the free movement of services, capital and people. Although it has been the last freedom that has agitated many who seek to remain in the EU since the verdict of the Referendum, it is the free movement of capital required by the Maastricht Treaty that is most significant for the future relationship of Britain with the EU.²⁷

The free movement of persons is defined in EU Directive 2004/38/EC²⁸ that requires European Economic Area (EEA)²⁹ citizens to be able to move freely and reside in any other country. Free movement includes employment and travel but is not absolute as the migrant must not be a "burden on the social welfare system or public safety" (public security³⁰ or public health). This means the right to working as an employee (this includes looking for work for a reasonable amount of time³¹), working as a self-employed person, studying, and being self-sufficient or retired. It is normally the case that after 5 years the right of residence becomes permanent.

Those who argue that these rights would be lost once the UK leaves the EU usually ignore the fact that these rights are those of EEA membership and not restricted to the European Union. In any case, as Switzerland shows, they can be negotiated by mutual agreement, especially where transit between one member country and another is a significant amount.³²

In addition a considerable proportion of the rights of free movement are an integral part of the European Convention on Human Rights³³ agreed by all members of the 47-member Council of Europe and subject to the legal judgements of the European Court of Human Rights. Although there are elements in the Conservative Party that would seek to withdraw from the ECHR, it is highly doubtful that there would be a House of Commons majority to do so.

Protocol No 4, Article 2 (1963) of the ECHR gives the right to choose residence within the territory of a state and the right to leave a country. It does not however give any right to enter another country except one's own, although there are restrictions on the right of any country to expel "aliens" who must be accorded the legal rights to due process of law.³⁴

The focus by campaigners on the rights of individuals is understandable and usually justified as the UK Government is often found to be in breach of Human Rights Conventions. What must be considered by Marxists is the context in which the exercise of rights occurs. Every act by every individual has social causes and social consequences. These cannot be ignored in any analysis with claims to validity.

The EU Commission is quite clear what the social effects of mass migration have been as it has sought to advocate and enable such movements of people for its own purposes. The EU Single Market Strategy³⁵ was not simply to "revive and modernise the single market in a way that improves the functioning of the markets for products and services". Its aim of "Upgrading the Single Market" was to enable "more opportunities for people and business".³⁶ It sought to "improve the functioning of the labour market by promoting mobility between member states" and "contribute to lower prices for professional services".³⁷ It argued that "the European Union should go a step further and push for deeper integration of national labour markets by facilitating geographical and professional mobility". It went on to say that "Not only does labour mobility help close skills gaps and labour shortages, it also balances demand for labour between Member States."

The 'macroeconomic' justification for this EU policy was explained in a 2015 European Commission Quarterly Report on the Euro Area, with the section title 'Labour mobility as an adjustment mechanism'.³⁸ It argued that:

"The movement of workers from one EU country to another has become an increasingly important adjustment mechanism for the European economy ... This analysis shows that labour mobility increases significantly when a country joins the EU The analysis demonstrates that real wages also become more responsive to asymmetric shocks during the same period. ... [However] cross-country mobility flows were much lower than those recorded in other highly integrated areas, particularly the US,³⁹ ... [while] the stock of migrants from within the EU is also generally much lower than from outside the EU. Nevertheless an upward trend is visible, which is not only the result of the enlargement of the EU to Eastern European countries characterised by high outward migration, but also of movements among old member states."

The EU countries hosting the largest number of EU migrants in 2010 were Germany, Spain, France, the UK and Italy. The EU countries with the largest number of people in other EU countries were Romania, Poland, Italy, Germany and the UK.⁴⁰ As Table 1⁴¹ shows, the impact upon the 'new accession countries' of eastern Europe has been profound and led to a significant loss of their young generation of skilled, healthy and enterprising men and women. Every individual is an investment for the future, not simply of their own family but of their wider community and society. Many are skilled in occupations and professions that have been trained at considerable expense and whom their countries could ill afford to lose. In total the new accession countries saw a fall in their total population of over 7m people since 1990/91. Even in the case of Poland, where the population did grow slightly by 1%, this was a substantial drop from the 21% growth in the 25 years prior to 1990/91.

There are campaigns in Britain by some well-meaning people that there should be 'open borders' to counteract the loss of rights by EU migrants.⁴² Others in the labour movement have identified that the consequences of such policies have led to a growth of support for far-right and racist attitudes not just in Britain but throughout Europe. Len McCluskey, at the 2016 Conference of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLASS), argued that:

"We are past the point where working people can be convinced that the free movement of labour has worked for them, their families, their industries and their communities. It is fine to argue values and perspectives for the middle distance but if it comes up against the reality of people's daily experience, these arguments will fail. ... It is all part of the flexible labour market model, ensuring a plentiful supply of cheap labour here for those jobs that can't be exported elsewhere."⁴³

The TUC, in its policy statement, *Managing Migration Better for Britain*, argued that:

"Voters feel alienated by the pressure that they feel poorly managed immigration has put upon wages, housing and other public services. ... The TUC has ... long called for better regulation of the labour market to prevent employers exploiting free movement rules to get cheap labour and using migrant workers to undercut other workers The TUC has always argued that migration should not be used as a long term solution to skill shortages such as in education and the 130,000 jobs in the NHS currently filled by EU migrants. These could be filled by local labour with the right training and apprenticeships"⁴⁴

Finally the Labour Manifesto itself argued that "Labour

Table 1: Changes in the Population of the EU New Accession States⁴¹

	1965/66	growth		1990/91	growth		2015/16
Poland	31,540,000	6,655,000	21%	38,195,000	417,000	1%	38,612,000
Lithuania	2,971,000	733,000	25%	3,704,000	-896,000	-24%	2,808,000
Latvia	2,266,000	385,000	17%	2,651,000	-716,000	-27%	1,935,000
Estonia	1,291,000	270,000	21%	1,561,000	-257,000	-16%	1,304,000
Bulgaria	8,204,000	514,000	6%	8,718,000	-1,573,000	-18%	7,415,000
Romania	19,030,000	4,170,000	22%	23,200,000	-3,827,000	-16%	19,373,000
Hungary	10,180,000	190,000	2%	10,370,000	-540,000	-5%	9,830,000
TOTALS	75,482,000	12,917,000	17%	88,399,000	-7,392,000	-8%	81,007,000

offers fair rules and reasonable management of migration.” It promised that:

“We will take decisive actions to end the exploitation of migrant labour undercutting workers’ pay and conditions. We will replace income thresholds with a prohibition on recourse to public funds. We will stop overseas-only recruitment practices.”⁴⁵

It remains to be seen whether these policies could be accommodated within the obligations laid down by Article 45 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.⁴⁶

Notes and References

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- 31 What is defined as ‘reasonable’ is up to the courts in each country to decide.
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FROM THE ARCHIVES



To mark the centenary of the Third (Communist) International on 2 March 1919, we present here an edited and abridged version of R Palme Dutt's Notes of the Month, which appeared 50 years ago, in the March 1969 edition of *Labour Monthly*. 17 February 1969



ABOVE *Lenin in Smolny* Isaak Brodsky (1883 1939).
Wikimedia

RIGHT Isaak Brodsky drew Lenin 1920 at the meeting of the Second Congress of the Comintern in the Kremlin. Brodsky based his *Lenin in Smolny* on the preparatory drawing



R PALME DUTT

FIFTY YEARS OF THE WORLD REVOLUTION

“Communism has travelled a hard road: of ascent followed by periods of sharp decline; successes, but also severe defeats. In spite of all, the development in essence has gone the way forecast by the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. The epoch of the last decisive battle came later than the apostles of the social revolution expected and wished. But it has come

Socialist criticism has sufficiently stigmatised the bourgeois world order. The task of the International Communist Party is now to overthrow this order and to erect in its place the structure of the socialist world order.”¹

FFIFTY YEARS ago this month the Communist International was born. In stirring words the Manifesto of the First Congress (drafted incidentally by Trotsky, that master of the spoken and written word, though not of political judgement, and signed by Lenin and the other leaders of delegations of parties and groups participating in the Congress), which came to be known as the *New Communist Manifesto* triumphantly following up the original *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of Marx and Engels seven decades earlier, proclaimed the character of the world epoch which had opened in fulfilment of the predictions of the original *Communist Manifesto*:

“The new era has begun! The era of the downfall of capitalism – its internal disintegration. The epoch of the proletarian communist revolution. In some countries, victorious proletarian revolution; increasing revolutionary ferment in other lands; uprisings in the colonies; utter incapacity of the ruling classes to control the fate of peoples any longer – that is the picture of world conditions today.”

Today half a century has passed since that proclamation of the new epoch which had opened. What is the outcome of this experience of half a century? What of the position of world capitalism? What of the position of world communism and socialism? How much has been achieved? How much remains to be achieved? What new problems clamour for solution?

Illusion of disillusion

These questions are no idle historical questions of a commemoration. They are urgent present questions. For the very success of the advance of the world socialist revolution during this half century: the advance of socialism from a

single state over one sixth of the world to fourteen states over one third of the world; the advance of national liberation and downfall of the old empires; the change of the world balance and weakening of imperialism: all this has compelled the rulers of the dying old order to change their tune nowadays, and to seek by every means at their command to conceal and disguise this success from the understanding of the younger generation who have not lived through it. Therefore they seek to proclaim through a thousand trumpets of their megaphone press, radio and television that it has all been an illusion and a colossal failure, ending in a bitter harvest of universal disillusion. Fleet Street and the snug studios of television swarm nowadays with self-announced ‘revolutionaries’ who preach, at highly lucrative rates, the modern gospel of disillusion. With gloomy gusto they explain how in their youthful days they were misled by visions of a utopia on earth, or worshipped the false idol of the Soviet Union, until now their knowledge of the hideous reality has left them no consolation save to retreat into the fleshpots of Mammon, in order from this vantage point to warn the present-day young never to be trapped by those illusions of which they had been the victims in the thirties or the twenties or whenever. Quite a flourishing profession nowadays, the ‘ex-revolutionaries’ in the modern capitalist world.

New tunes for old hymns of hate

Previously the rulers and prophets of the then self-assured capitalist world used to refer with a contemptuous sneer to the Soviet aim of building socialism in war-ravaged Russia as an ‘experiment’ of fanatical amateurs ignorant of the laws of economics, and bound to end in hopeless economic chaos and collapse. Now they describe the Soviet Union as a ‘super-power’ whose might is a menace to the world. Previously they used to describe the Marxist theory of world revolution as an empty ‘pipe-dream’ which could never be realised. Now they are busy building military alliances in every region of the world, on the basis of whatever reactionary rulers and satellite states they can knock together with the aid of financial subsidies and arms supplies, to stem the advance of the peoples everywhere advancing to end national and class oppression. Previously they used to dismiss the teachings of Lenin as a doctrinaire attempt to apply the obsolete and long exploded nineteenth century theories of Marx to the modern twentieth century world. Now they pooh-pooh Marxism-Leninism as an obsolete doctrine based on the vanished conditions of the early twentieth century, and eagerly try to resurrect instead as the latest most modern up-to-date idea an imaginary ‘Marxism’, provided it is kept clear of all

connection with Lenin or the world revolution or the organised communist movement. Indeed – for they are aware that the majority of young people today are critical of their social order and seeking for an alternative – they are ready to provide the most lavish high-powered publicity for any and every ‘left’ theory, even the most fantastic really obsolete anarchist confusions long ago fought off the battlefield by Marxism, so long as it is anti-communist and critical of the Soviet Union.

The world revolution – A historical epoch

All the bogus ‘historians’ and ‘experts’ of the capitalist world, who nowadays in ever increasing numbers specialise in the dissection of Marxism and in ‘Kremlinology’, love to expose the alleged fond illusions of Lenin and the Bolsheviks who are supposed to have expected that the victory of the October revolution in 1917 would be immediately followed by the extension of the socialist revolution to the other leading capitalist countries within the next few years. Equally the pundits who make this assertion are only revealing their ignorance of the facts and of the teachings of Marx and Lenin. Ignorance of the facts: for it was precisely Lenin who chastised most mercilessly leftist assumptions of the speedy victory of the world revolution and described such assumptions as “a blind gamble”:

“Yes, we will see the world revolution; but for the time being it is a very good fairy tale, a very beautiful fairy-tale – I quite understand children liking beautiful fairy tales. But I ask, is it proper for a serious revolutionary to believe in fairy tales?”²

Similarly in his *Letter to American Workers* on August 20, 1918, Lenin wrote:

“We are banking on the inevitability of the world revolution; but that does not mean that we are such fools as to bank on the revolution inevitably coming on some definite and early date.”³

Thus on the elementary facts the pundits proclaim the exact opposite of the truth. But even more important is their complete ignorance of the basic teachings of Marx and Lenin on this very question. For it was the consistent teaching of Marx and Lenin that the world socialist revolution could be no sudden dramatic coup transforming the world from capitalism to socialism in the twinkling of an eye, but that on the contrary the painful path of the transition from capitalism to socialism (itself the necessary precursor of the subsequent advance to communism) would constitute a prolonged historical epoch. This is the epoch in which we live.

Prolonged path to revolution

Marx as long ago as 1851 wrote that the workers must be prepared to go through “50 years of civil wars and national struggles” before they would reach the fitness to win and exercise political power:

“We say to the workers: ‘You will have to go through 15, 20, 50 years of civil wars and national struggles, not only to bring about a change in society, but also to change yourselves, and prepare yourselves for the exercise of political power.’”⁴

In contrast to the impatience of anarchism, Marx and Engels taught that in the conditions of dominant capitalism

the advance of the working class to ripeness for revolution is necessarily slow. Lenin emphasised the appropriateness of this teaching for the period of the Second International:

“In those days, after the defeat of the Paris Commune, history made slow organisational and educational work the task of the day. Nothing else was possible. The anarchists were then (as they are now) fundamentally wrong, not only theoretically, but also economically and politically. The anarchists misjudged the character of the times, for they failed to understand the world situation ...

Marx and Engels gauged the times accurately; they understood the international situation; they understood that the approach to the beginning of the social revolution must be slow.”⁵

The fault of the Second International did not lie in this peaceful educational role, but in the fact that, when history moved into the new era of the general crisis of capitalism, of wars and revolutions, with the war of 1914, its leadership abandoned all their pledges and basis of international socialism, and joined instead with their rival imperialist masters to hound on the workers to mutual slaughter. Therefore it became necessary to rally and unite all the living forces of the international socialist movement in the new International, or Third International, which replaced the bankruptcy of the Second and drew inspiration from the First, and which was, as Engels had anticipated, “directly Communist”:

“I think the next International – after Marx’s writings have been at work for some years – will be directly Communist, and will openly proclaim our principles.”⁶

As so often with the predictions of Marxism, the principle was correct, and has been proved by the practical outcome, but took longer than anticipated. It was not “the next International”, but the Third which fulfilled Engels’s anticipation of the Communist International.

Complex process of revolution

After the victory of the October Revolution Lenin repeatedly insisted, against the over-sanguine anticipation of those who expected the speedy victory of the socialist revolution in Western Europe, or who even, like Trotsky, regarded the survival of the Soviet state as dependent on the victory of the working class and socialist revolution in Western Europe, that in the advanced capitalist countries of Western Europe it would be far more difficult for the working class to begin the revolution and win political power than in Russia, but once political power had been won, far easier to carry through the tasks of reconstruction:

“A backward country can easily begin because its adversary has become rotten, because the bourgeoisie is not organised, but for it to continue demands of that country a hundred thousand times more circumspection, caution and endurance. It will be different in Western Europe; there it will be immeasurably more difficult to begin, but immeasurably easier to go on.”⁷

Therefore the world socialist revolution began, not in the most advanced capitalist countries, as originally anticipated by Marx in his earlier writings, but at the weakest link among

the imperialist powers, in Russia where at the same time the working class on the basis of Marxism had reached the highest level of political consciousness and revolutionary organisation. From there the advance extended, not at once to the capitalist countries in the West, but again first to the further weakest points in the imperialist world network, through the upsurge of the revolt of the peoples in the colonial countries, inspired to new heights by the victory of the October Revolution and the stirring example of the fulfilment of liberation of the Asiatic peoples previously subject to Tsarism.

Creative contribution of the Communist International

This was the conception which Lenin outlined in his famous last article (*Better Fewer, But Better*, in March, 1923), when, in answer to the question of the future prospect of socialism, he pointed out that “In the last analysis the upshot of the struggle will be determined by the fact that Russia, India, China etc account for the overwhelming majority of the population of the globe”, and since the mass of the colonial peoples oppressed by imperialism was now “definitely drawn into the general maelstrom of the world revolutionary movement” opened by 1917, thus also undermining the basis of the entanglement with imperialism which had delayed the advance of the Western working class, this gathering of the world majority on the side of the revolution meant that “in this respect there cannot be the slightest shadow of doubt what the final outcome of the world struggle will be”, and “In this sense the complete victory of socialism is fully and absolutely assured.”⁸ This unique and concrete analysis of the path and stages of advance of the world socialist revolution (foreshadowed in a preliminary form by Marx in his writings on India and China, and his recognition during his later years of Russia as having become the “vanguard” of the revolution⁹), leaving far behind the narrow European horizons of the theorists of the Second international, was one of the signal contributions of Lenin’s creative development of Marxism in the conditions of the modern epoch. Similarly the active and tireless championship of the theory and practice of the alliance of the working class in the imperialist countries and the national liberation movement in the countries oppressed by imperialism was an outstanding and imperishable constructive achievement of the Communist International, reaching out to ground never touched by the Second International. Lenin showed how it was precisely through this variety of forms and phases that “the transition from capitalism to socialism takes an entire historical epoch”¹⁰:

“The social revolution can come only in the form of an epoch in which are combined civil war by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie in the advanced countries and a whole series of democratic and revolutionary movements, including the national liberation movement, in the undeveloped, backward and oppressed nations. Why? Because capitalism develops unevenly”¹¹

The events of the past fifty years have abundantly confirmed this prediction of the character of the modern epoch.

First world revolutionary wave

March, 1919, the date of the founding of the Communist International, was a high point of the first world revolutionary wave which followed 1917. In that month the working class in Hungary set up their Hungarian Soviet Republic, the pioneer forerunner of the future extension of the socialist

revolution beyond the borders of the Soviet Republic, which was only to receive its subsequent fulfilment after the vanquishing of fascism at the end of the Second World War. The Hungarian Soviet Republic held power for over three months, until it was overthrown by the invasion of the Czechoslovak armies of Masaryk and the Romanian armies acting jointly under the orders of French imperialism to crush the socialist revolution, thereby clearing the way for fascism to hold Hungary in its grip for a quarter of a century. Immediately after there was established the Bavarian Soviet Republic in the heart of Central Europe, which was destroyed by the forces of German militarism under the auspices of right-wing social democracy. All over Germany there were clashes approaching civil war. In April the revolt of the sailors of the French Navy in the Black Sea expressed the solidarity of the Western workers with the Soviet Republic; and unrest spread among the British soldiers dispatched to Archangel. In Britain the soldiers’ strikes compelled speedy demobilisation; the strike movement reached to great heights alongside the Hands off Russia campaign, which presaged the Councils of Action in the following year. Mass struggles at every level dominated the world scene from Cairo to Tokyo, from Winnipeg to Dublin. Premier Lloyd George presented a memorandum to the Paris Peace Conference on March 25 declaring: “The whole of Europe is in a revolutionary mood.”

Initial conception of the international general staff

It was in these conditions of the world-wide struggle of revolution and counter-revolution that the Communist International was founded. Therefore its original constitution, fully elaborated at its Second Congress in 1920, was initially formed to combine strong centralised international leadership with its democratic basis of equality of parties and election of the Executive. This character of the constitution was not only planned in order to replace the fatal looseness of the old Second International, the laxity of whose parties in carrying out international decisions had led to its being described in derision as the ‘post-box International’, and which had finally led to its collapse and death. The purpose was also seen as a practical response to the conditions of the then existing phase of the world situation. The centralised international leadership was devised in order to fulfil the indispensable function of an international general staff of the revolution, capable of uniting the struggle against its counterpart, the Paris Supreme Council of the Western powers, which functioned as the centralised leadership of counter-revolution, dispatched Czech and Romanian troops to crush the Socialist revolution in Hungary, financed and armed the White generals in Russia, or organised the wars of intervention of fourteen states against the Soviet Republic.

Transition to the role of world guide, teacher and organiser

By 1923 the world revolutionary wave had ebbed and given place to the temporary stabilisation of capitalism which opened with the Dawes Plan in 1924. Therefore the function of the Communist International changed correspondingly to meet the new conditions. Already by December, 1921, the Executive adopted the theses on “The United Working Class Front”, which were first published in English in the issue of *Labour Monthly* for February 1922. At the 4th Congress in November 1922, Lenin made his last speech to the international movement, and gave the advice that in this period of temporary respite from the phase of war, “we must take advantage of every moment of respite from fighting, from

war, to study, and to study from scratch”; “the most important thing in the period we are now entering is to study”; and that, while the Russian comrades needed to study to fulfil the most elementary tasks of overcoming illiteracy and backwardness, the literate and “enlightened” foreign comrades needed to “study in the special sense, in order that they may really understand the organisation, structure, method and content of revolutionary work.” For those Western comrades who considered themselves too advanced to need to learn from Russia, and who dismissed the organisational conceptions of Bolshevism as appropriate only to Russian conditions, Lenin conceded in a passage of scorching irony that the correct organisational resolution of the 3rd Congress had proved a dead-letter since it was “too Russian” to be understood by any foreigner (“In the first place, it is too long, containing fifty or more paragraphs; foreigners are not usually able to read such things”); nevertheless, “the resolution must be carried out”, and the way must be found to help the non-Russian comrades to understand it and “assimilate part of the Russian experience”. Then with a characteristic penetrating foresight into the whole character of the coming period he suggested that fascism (Mussolini had just come to power only a few weeks before in Italy) might prove the instrument which would teach the Western working class the necessary lesson:

“The fascisti in Italy may render us a great service by showing the Italians that they are not yet sufficiently enlightened and that their country is not yet ensured against the Black Hundreds. Perhaps this will be very useful.”¹²

The Communist International performed a historic task in the 1920s in helping, through joint international experience and contact, to mould and train the very heterogeneous array of revolutionary forces derived from the old social-democratic movement into developing as unified and experienced revolutionary parties on the basis of Marxism-Leninism and organised to conduct effective mass activity. At the same time in the field of action the aim was set towards the united working class front.

Tactical shortcomings

Nevertheless, in the complex conditions of the next phase of the international situation, when the breakdown of the temporary stabilisation of capitalism developed into the world economic crisis of 1929-32 and the onset of the offensive of fascism, serious tactical shortcomings were revealed in the response of the International to the urgent needs of the new situation. The 6th Congress in 1928 had correctly predicted the approaching breakdown of the temporary stabilisation and its replacement by a world economic crisis opening a new “third period” in international development; and the 10th Plenum in July 1929 elaborated this economic analysis – so much so that, when the crash came in October 1929, US Senators, recalling these predictions, complained that the International must have had a hand in the world economic crisis. But the tactical conclusions drawn pointed in the wrong direction. Lenin’s final warning in his last speech to the international movement on the significances of the offensive of fascism for future development in Europe was overlooked.

Instead, the main blow was directed against social democracy as the principal enemy and twin partner of fascism. This found expression in the slogan “Class Against Class” and the presentation of the aim of the united front from below as in opposition to the united front from above.

Certainly the appalling record of the Social-Democratic governments in suppressing and shooting down the militant workers, opposing every form of united action, establishing emergency regimes, and even in some countries entering into direct treaties of alliance with fascism, made understandable the bitterness of this fight, which found extreme expression in the use of the disastrous term ‘social fascism’, intended only to describe the policy of the top leadership, but inevitably tending in practice to be applied also to the lower officials. Walter Ulbricht, who was Secretary of the Berlin Communist Party organisation at the time, has since made clear (in his report on the “Outline History of the German Working Class Movement 1863-1963” given to the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany in 1963) that this term and the line associated with it did not originate from the German Communist Party, but reflected “Stalin’s dogmatic and schematic ideas on the role of social democracy”.¹³ This line hindered the main task to devote every effort to promote a united front with the Social-Democratic Party in order to prevent fascism coming to power. Hitler came to power – a heavy blow for the working class and the peoples of the world.

Leadership in the fight against fascism and the fascist war offensive

Once Hitler had come to power the communists everywhere responded to the urgent fight which had now opened, and during those critical years of the 1930s were in the forefront of all the efforts to promote the broadest cooperation in the common fight against fascism and against the war offensive of fascism. Dimitrov in the dock defying Goering inspired the peoples of the whole world. By the following year in 1934 practical results were already being achieved with the united working-class front holding fascism at bay in France, and agreement between the Communist and Socialist Parties preparing the way for the People’s Front. The 7th Congress in 1935 sounded the clarion call which won response in every country for unity against fascism and war. As the extending fascist aggression which was the prelude of the Second World War crept forward – of Japanese fascism to conquer Manchuria, of Italian fascism against Ethiopia, of German and Italian fascism to overthrow Spanish democracy – the communists were in the forefront of the fight.

The corrupt and reactionary rulers of Britain and France connived at the extending fascist aggression, financed and rearmed Hitler, and tore up all their previous treaties banning German rearmament, in the hope that they were thus building a powerful military machine to smash the Soviet Union and communism. This policy reached its climax with the Four-Power Pact of Chamberlain, Hitler, Mussolini and Daladier at Munich to carve up and hand over Czechoslovakia to Hitler and thereby open his path to the East. But the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact smashed Munich. The British and French Governments, who had refused the alliance with the Soviet Union which their peoples had demanded, and which could have checked Hitler’s aggression and prevented the Second World War, had to learn the hard way. Within 11 days of the signing of the Pact the British and French Munichite Governments declared war on Hitler, not for the sake of Danzig (they had connived at much more), nor for the defence of Poland (no finger was stirred for the defence of Poland), but because, as the official booklet *The British Case*, with the preface by the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax, explained, Hitler had committed the supreme “apostasy” of making

peace with the Soviet Union.

Communists in the Second World War

Communists fought in the forefront in each successive phase of the extending fascist aggression which ushered in the Second World War, notably in the International Brigades, at a time when many also on the left were still supporting what was falsely called 'appeasement'. The hypocritical declaration of a phony war by the British and French Munichite Governments against Germany presented the British and French parties with a special temporary problem. They sought initially to solve it by a twofold strategy of combining the military war against Hitler with the political struggle against their reactionary governments at home. But the events of September soon showed that this line was untenable, since there was no military war against Hitler (Generals Keitel and Jodl subsequently testified at the Nuremberg trial that at the moment when all their main forces were concentrated in Poland, with only five divisions in the West, the generals had warned Hitler that if the Anglo-French command, with overwhelming military superiority, should attack, they would have no alternative save to surrender, whereupon Hitler had assured the generals that they need not worry, since the British and French would not attack). Instead, the Anglo-French military moves were all directed towards action against the Soviet Union, as over Finland, and the ardent anti-fascist feelings of the people were being exploited for very different purposes. Hence it became necessary to expose without mercy this reactionary imperialist strategy.

But after the Anglo-French passivity had opened the way to Hitler's extending aggression and conquest in Western Europe in 1940, the communists were in the forefront in organising the resistance movements in country after country. In June 1940 the French party presented its memorandum to the French Government outlining a plan for the defence of Paris, and declaring that surrender of Paris would be betrayal of France; and in July 1940 it issued the call to the French people for the resistance fight for the independence of France. In Britain the fall of the Munichites from the leadership of the Government, and their replacement by Churchill, opened a new stage.

Fulfilment of the Great Alliance

Thus by the time that Hitler, having established his domination over all Western Europe except Britain, launched his attack on the Soviet Union, the conditions had become ripe for the alliance with the Soviet Union, which had before been refused, to be welcomed by the British Government and ruling class, as well as by the entire British people and all the peoples struggling against fascism. The great alliance of the peoples for the defeat of the fascist aggressors had at last been fulfilled. In this war of liberation, drawing in the peoples in all parts of the world, which ended in the destruction of the military power of fascism and in which the Soviet armies and people bore the main burden and delivered the main blows at the enemy, the communists and their parties in all countries played an active part. The parties grew in popularity and numbers to such an extent and over so wide a range that the old forms of international organisation became outgrown. In 1943 the formal organisation of the Communist International, by consultation and agreement of all the main constituent parties, was dissolved. A new era had opened of unparalleled advance of the world revolution and the world

communist movement.

Extending range of the world revolution

On the eve of the Second World War Stalin, in his report to the 18th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in March 1939, warned the British and French Governments of the "fiasco" to which their Munichite policy would lead:

"The big and dangerous political game started by the supporters of the policy of non-intervention may end in a serious fiasco for them."¹⁴

And already at the 17th Congress in 1934 he had given a prediction of the prospective outcome of the planned anti-Soviet war:

"Let not Messieurs the bourgeoisie blame us if some of the governments so near and dear to them, which today rule happily 'by the grace of God', are missing on the morrow after such a war. ... It can hardly be doubted that a second war against the USSR will lead to the complete defeat of the aggressors, to revolution in a number of countries in Europe and Asia, and to the destruction of the bourgeois-landlord governments in these countries."¹⁵

This prediction of Marxism-Leninism has been fulfilled in the post-1945 era with notable accuracy. The military power of the Nazi aggressors was smashed. The fascist bourgeois-landlord regimes in the countries of Eastern Europe gave place to people's democracies, which advanced to the achievement of peaceful socialist revolutions. The Western colonial empires in Asia collapsed, despite all the frantic efforts of British, French, Dutch and American imperialism to rebuild their colonial regime after the departure of the Japanese invaders, with endless military expeditions and prolonged colonial wars to crush the local liberation movements. India won independence after the revolt of the armed forces. The Chinese people won their liberation battle by 1949 against the US-armed and financed forces of Chiang Kai-shek. By the 1960s the advance of independence was extending also to smaller territories in Africa, which could never have won it by their own strength alone in face of the colossal coercive might of imperialism, but were now able to win recognition of their independence (even though considerably limited by the methods of neocolonialism), thanks to the weakening of imperialism and increased strength of the socialist sector of the world.¹⁶

Internationalism lives

The ending of the particular form of organisation of the Communist International, as no longer appropriate to new conditions, did not mean the ending of the principle of internationalism. When Marx and Engels dissolved the First International (initially in the form of transferring its headquarters to the United States), it was to prevent the foetal organisation being rent by anarchist factionalism and to ensure that the true principle of working class internationalism should be carried forward, without depending on the existence of a specific form of organisation. The resolution on the dissolution of the Communist International in 1943 declared:

"Communists have never been supporters of the conservation of organisational forms that have outlived themselves. They have always subordinated forms of organisation of the working class movement and the

methods of working of such organisations to the fundamental political interest of the working class movement as a whole, to the peculiarities of the concrete historical situation and to the problems immediately resulting from this situation.”

This is all the more important today when the principle of internationalism needs to find its appropriate expression, not in the previous type of fixed forms of organisation, but in effective cooperation in the common struggle in such a way as to serve “the fundamental political interest of the working class as a whole” at the same time as taking account of “the peculiarities of the concrete historical situation” and the varying conditions in the different countries.

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- 4 Marx, *Revelations Concerning the Communist Trial at Cologne*, in Marx and Engels, *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 11, p 403.
- 5 Lenin, *The Tasks of the Proletariat in Our Revolution*, in *LCW*, Vol 24, p 86.
- 6 Engels, *Letter to Friedrich Adolph Sorge*, 12-[17] September 1874, in *MECW*, Vol 45, p 42.
- 7 Lenin, *Report on the Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government, Session of the All-Russia CEC*, 29 April 1918; in *LCW*, Vol 27, p 291.
- 8 Lenin, *Better Fewer, But Better*, in *LCW*, Vol 33, pp 499-500.
- 9 Marx and Engels, Preface to the 2nd Russian edition (1882) of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, in *MECW*, Vol 24, p 426.
- 10 Lenin, *The Proletarian Revolution and the Renegade Kautsky*, Ch 3, in *LCW*, Vol 28, p 254.
- 11 Lenin, *A Caricature of Marxism and Imperialist Economism*, in *LCW*, Vol 23, p 60.
- 12 This and preceding quotes are from Lenin, *Five Years of the Russian Revolution and the Prospects of the World Revolution*, in *LCW*, Vol 33, pp 430-2.
- 13 Editorial note: This seems too simplistic. It is certainly true that in 1924 Stalin wrote that “Social Democracy is objectively the moderate wing of fascism” and that the two organisations “are twins” (*Concerning the International Situation*, in Stalin, *Works*, Vol 6, p 294). However, within the CI, and also within the Communist Party of Germany (KPD), there were other proponents of that perception. The term “social fascism” was first openly used, not by the 6th Congress of the CI in 1928, but in the Executive Committee statement of 18 May 1929, following the brutal crushing of the communist-led May Day demonstration in Berlin. See extensive quotes in: Bay Area Study Group, *On the Roots of Revisionism*, particularly chs 4, 7 and 9, at <https://www.marxists.org/history/erol/1946-1956/roots-revisionism/> –Ed.
- 14 Stalin, *Leninism*, Lawrence & Wishart, 1940, p 628.
- 15 Stalin, *Works*, Vol 13, pp 303-4.
- 16 From this point forward the original article, in which Dutt dealt predominantly with problems of growth, China, and “Drawing the Balance”, has been truncated. To paraphrase Dutt himself: as so often with the predictions of Marxism, the principle was correct, but the outcome is taking longer than anticipated. –Ed.

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SHIRAZ DURRANI

KENYA RESISTS: ARTISTS CHALLENGE THE HAWK IN THE SKY



THE YEAR is 1976. The nation is in the iron grip of a powerful KANU (Kenya African National Union) elite which tolerates no opposition to its tyrannical rule, nor any resistance to its anti-people policies. Anyone who dares to challenge the all-powerful armed might of the minority elite in power is detained, jailed, exiled, eliminated or disappeared. Those eliminated in early years of Uhuru for opposing land grabs and stealing of national wealth had included General Baimunge and Pio Gama Pinto (both 1965, see ‘Biographies’, below). JM Kariuki suffered the same fate in 1975. An overview of that year is provided by Carol Sicherman,¹ indicating the political situation in the country:

“1975 (March): Disturbances follow assassination on 2 March of JM Kariuki; during student clashes with police, students are raped, nearly 100 students arrested, and dozens hospitalised 28 May: University of Nairobi closes following student disturbances 15 October: Martin Shikuku and Jean Marie Seroney, opposition MPs, are detained, gun being drawn on Seroney. On 16 October [President] Kenyatta warns his critics: ‘People seem to forget that a hawk is always in the sky ready to swoop on the chicken.’”

In such an oppressive situation in 1976, the mass media dared not question the dictates of the regime. The looting of peasant land by ‘legal means’ was the order of the day. Key sectors of the economy were farmed out among the ruling elite, backed by murder gangs and the GSU² paramilitary force. Starvation, landlessness, unemployment and homelessness were the reality for working people. The key demands of Mau Mau – return of land, free education, medical care, freedom and political power – became distant dreams.

All avenues of protest were blocked. No party but KANU could be registered. Peasants could not complain about their stolen lands and unfair returns; workers had no militant trade unions – like the East African Trade Union Congress under Makhhan Singh or the militants in the 1950s who introduced working class ideology to Mau Mau – which could represent their economic and political rights; professionals, civil servants, students, indeed nobody, had constitutional rights to life and liberty anymore. Life itself became a gift from the ruling class, not a right.

History books were closed, historians silenced. The regime felt threatened by the calls for socialism, justice and equality, fearing it could destroy the status quo. The aims of Mau Mau would destabilise the neocolonial ‘peace’ for the elite. Armed resistance to colonialism and capitalism could

not be mentioned. For what would happen if the same methods were used today? ‘Forgive, and forget history’ became the daily mantra from the ruling elite. We all fought for Uhuru, it claimed, even when homeguards who fought against the people and for the colonial masters were rewarded with state power. It was the time of torture, massacres and violent death. ‘Follow what you are told or face the GSU’ was the elite’s message to the restless youth seeking justice. The country was turned into a prison without walls for the working class.

But wait. All is not silence. Resistance is taking root again as it must under all repression. Underground resistance is awakening once more. A forthcoming article³ by Kimani Waweru and myself looks at the growth of this resistance:

“Most of the open spaces to express discontent were shut down In 1975 resistance regrouped and formed an underground party, the Kenya Workers’ Party⁴. The party took a leftist stand and operated in utmost secrecy. Knowing too well that the people who were to bring genuine change were workers and peasants, it endeavoured to reach them and to learn from their experiences. They were the resistance, the real workers’ party. It connected with working people through cultural activities. The most famous of their activities was theatre, and an example of this was Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s play *Ngaahika Ndeenda (I will marry when I want)*, which was performed in Limuru by peasants and workers. The play depicted the struggles of peasants and workers. Recognising its power, the government of the day banned it and detained the writer. The detention of opponents of the ruling regime was the order of the day during the seventies. Among those who were detained were Koigi wa Wamwere, a young MP at the time, deputy speaker of the National Assembly Jean Marie Seroney, another vocal MP, Martin Shikuku and George Anyona, among others.”

The December Twelve Movement (DTM), successor to the Kenya Workers’ Party, set out its ideological position. It became active in the three areas that were essential in any resistance movement: political, economic and cultural activities. It established study cells and linked its theories with practice. It was active in trade unions and started working with workers and peasants in their struggles. It radicalised professional bodies. It realised the importance of information and communications and published an underground newspaper, *Pambana*⁵. It also established a library underground, many of which books are in the Ukombozi Library today (see first box). It was actively researching and

publishing historical material. It was also active on many of the sorts of cultural front recently outlined by Len McCluskey⁶ in the British context:

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

As was the practice with all of DTM’s work, its cultural policy and practice was influenced by theories from other revolutionary situations in Africa and elsewhere, such as the Soviet Union, China, Cuba and Vietnam. Particularly important was the use in its study sessions of Mao’s *Talks at the Yenan Forum on Literature*.⁷ At the same time, it circulated underground the history of Kenya from a working-class perspective and its vision of the society it was aiming for. This

was later published as *InDependent Kenya*.⁸

DTM cells organised different types of activities, in different languages at different times. For example, they produced a children’s play, *Amaro Desh, Kenya (Our Country, Kenya)* in Gujarati with child actors and actresses. Plays it produced included *Portraits of Survival* and *Kinjikitile – MajiMaji* (see Box 1). Another activity was the showing of progressive films to workers and peasants, as I have recorded:⁹

“Among its early ventures was the showing of progressive films to workers and peasants in a semi-rural area just outside the city. The shows were organised by Sehemu [see Box 2 –SD] as part of the work of the Kabete Library serving the Faculties of Agriculture and Veterinary Science of the University of Nairobi at the Kabete Campus, about 16 km from the city centre. The film shows were held in the lecture theatre at the campus and took place in 1981. This was an important departure for the progressive

1 The Underground Libraries, and the Ukombozi (‘Liberation’) Library Today

The liberation forces of necessity had to set up their own underground liberation libraries. Perhaps the largest one was that run by Nazmi Durrani, which provided a major reference point for the December Twelve Movement. The library, in a safe house in Nairobi, contained material which was banned in Kenya and which could lead to indefinite detention if the owner was found out. This included works of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Castro, as well as publications from the USSR and the Foreign Languages Press in Beijing. The library also provided the source material for important documents in the fight against the neocolonial Moi regime, such as Mwakenya’s *Kenya, Register of Resistance* (1987), and Umoja-Kenya’s 1989 publication, *Moi’s Reign of Terror: a decade of Nyayo crimes against the people of Kenya* [Nyayo House is a government skyscraper in Nairobi, notorious for its detention chambers in the basement.] The safe house also became a centre of cyclostyling and distribution for the second issue of *Pambana*, published in July 1983. Cell members used motorbikes, cars, bicycles and public transport to distribute the newspapers to other cadres as well as to members of the public.

The Ukombozi Library was established in Nairobi by the Kenya chapter of the Progressive African Library and Information Activists’ Group (PALIAct) in partnership with Vita Books and the Mau Mau Research Centre.

PALIAct’s publicity states:

“PALIAct is an initiative of a group of progressive African librarians and information workers. We recognise that current leaders in the African information field have done little to break the colonial and imperialist policies and practices in meeting the information needs of working people in Africa, or to make the profession more relevant to the needs of African librarians and information workers.”

The Library incorporates the December Twelve Movement’s underground library. It aims to make available progressive material and to encourage reading, study and research by working people in Kenya. The need for such a library follows from the fact that progressive literature has been generally ignored by most libraries and learning institutions. Young people with a passion to bring about improvement in the country and a thirst for materials that would inspire them in their quest for social justice get disappointed as such materials are hard to come by. The Ukombozi Library has an initial collection of almost a thousand titles of progressive material, mostly books but also pamphlets, videos and photographs. A majority of these are classics which are either out of print or cannot be found in the local bookshops. Other material has been donated by the Mau Mau Research Centre, Vita Books and many progressive individuals active in the information struggle in Kenya.

2 Sehemu ya Utungaji and *Kinjikitile, MajiMaji*

Sehemu ya Utungaji (“The Creative Wing”) was a group of patriotic Kenyan librarians in the 1980s associated with the University of Nairobi Library Magazine. They felt that the information services then were a continuation of colonial practices and had not been changed to answer the needs of the people of Kenya. The Sehemu brought together all creative activities, ranging from painting, drawing, creative writing, creative awareness through film shows, plays etc, generating new ideas which they aimed to translate into action.

The Sehemu group was planning to produce books on Mau Mau leaders but came to an early end in 1984. Before that, however, it had formed a partnership with a Nairobi drama group, Takhto Arts, to produce the play *Kinjikitile, MajiMaji*. This dealt with the Tanzanian people’s war of liberation against German colonialism, 1904-1907, conducted by the MajiMaji movement and led by Kinjikitile. “Maji” is the Kiswahili term for water and was used at the time as a call for unity. The script of the play was taken from *Kinjikitile*, by Tanzanian author Ebrahim Hussein (1969), but adapted by Naila Durrani and Shiraz Durrani to reflect Kenyan reality.

librarianship movement from the conservative service in Kenya in a number of ways. The use of film shows as a way of meeting information and learning needs of local communities was one such departure. Another was the fact that the doors of a major academic institution were opened for the first time to a non-academic – worker and peasant – audience. But perhaps the most significant point was the content of the films. Three films were shown in the *Black Man's Land* trilogy: *White Man's Country*, *Mau Mau* and *Kenyatta*. These were produced and directed by Anthony Howarth and David R Koff and were written by David R Koff. The significance of showing these films was that they were frowned upon by the KANU Government at the time and even the normal showing of the films was extremely difficult, if not impossible.”

DTM also encouraged its members to write plays, short stories and poems. Some poems were carried in *Pambana*. A collection of resistance poems was circulating underground and is to be published by Vita Books in 2019 under the title *Tunakataa! (We Say No!)*. Kenyan history has failed to record not only the achievements of Mau Mau but also resistance to neocolonialism, capitalism and imperialism after independence. This includes the work of DTM in different fields. It is not surprising that the KANU-Moi government sought to eliminate DTM as it saw the real danger posed to the comprador rule, particularly as DTM mobilised thousands at its cultural activities.

Kenyan History Through Carvings

It was in this climate that a group of Wakamba wood carver artists, with the support of DTM activists, began to study Kenyan history. This was not easy, as few books on Mau Mau and the struggle against colonialism and imperialism were available. DTM's underground library filled the gap. The carvers' deep research revealed Mau Mau's real history and contribution to the war of independence. They then told Kenya's history by carving key scenes onto wood carvings. There were 36 carvings in all. The artists created multiple copies of the complete set which soon became collectors' items among DTM members and supporters. The entire collection was on exhibition for a month at the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) Cottage Crafts, Nairobi in 1976 and attracted thousands of students and workers.

As the exhibition did not attract mainstream politicians' attention, it was not banned. However, many of the carvings are currently lost as activists who had collected them faced increasing repression and had to distribute them among supporters. They are likely to be in the homes of workers and peasants today, but as far as is known, no library, archive or museum in Kenya has the collection – another reflection of the neocolonial control over people's culture. Settler and foreign artwork is easy to find in Kenya today, but sadly the same does not apply to Kenya's artwork. The accompanying images reproduce some of the ones rescued from imperialist claws.

What thus emerged on the art and historical fronts was truly remarkable. At one level, the carvings demolished the ruling classes' embargo on protest and resistance – here was the real history of Kenya which had been silenced since independence. At another level, they used a form where no words were written, no embargoes broken – yet history was there for all to see. It mattered not whether one had reading skills or not, whether one was fluent in English or not. The form and content were in perfect harmony, to give visual evidence of the heroic struggle. The neocolonial embargo on



▲ Women in Struggle: Armed Mau Mau women fighters marching into action.



▲ Manufacture: Mau Mau inventors and technicians in a gun factory in a cave.



▲ War of Independence: British fighter jets are powerless to stop resistance.



▲ Multi-nationality Mau Mau forces: senior chief Mukudi of Samia and Bunyala with Mau Mau fighters.



▲ Mau Mau activists continue their resistance while homeguards look for them in vain.

history, on information, on communications was totally broken. While historians could not do research or disseminate the results of their research to the people whose history they were working on, this group of artist-scholars created the history of the hidden aspects of Mau Mau. They highlighted the key vision of the movement which challenged the colonial and imperialist-induced social values. They explained their position on burning issues of the day and threw light on the historical approaches to resolving social contradictions.

Resistance Art

The neocolonial setup in Kenya in 1976 had ensured that people's art and culture served only tourist markets, divorcing them from lives of working classes. The wood art of the Kamba nationality had been one of the victims of the attacks on people's customs and cultures. It was gradually depoliticised by market forces, which became the new rulers under capitalism and imperialism. Tourists do not want politics, just items of what they consider 'beauty', and the Wakamba artists began producing wood carving of animals which satisfied the tourist and overseas markets. The needs of the Kenyan people remained ignored. Until, that is, the youthful group of the activist carvers broke the embargo imposed by the market economy. They pioneered a new art form with relevant content in their revolutionary wood carvings. They put politics in command once more in art.

For all their achievements, the artists remain almost unknown in Kenyan history today. They were Mule wa Musembi, Kitonyi wa Kyongo, Kitaka wa Mutua and Mutunga wa Musembi. The exhibition was curated by Sultan Somjee from the University of Nairobi.

Little was known in Kenya about the history of Mau Mau in 1976 as research and publication on it had been suppressed by the government. It is therefore interesting to see the carvings dig out key aspects of Mau Mau. These include their ideology, their strategies and tactics, their actions, development of technologies, record keeping and communications, leadership as well as their attitude to women, nationalities and their class perspective. The write-up accompanying the exhibition contained historical facts not commonly known except to Mau Mau activists. For example, a team of two or more Mau Mau activists would carry messages from the Mau Mau High Command in the heart of Nyandarua to different Mau Mau centres, and to its armies, or to the progressive workers and peasants throughout the country. The carving project brought such facts to the public. The text accompanying Carving No 1 (unfortunately not included here) records the tactics of Mau Mau in communication when confronted by enemy soldiers.¹⁰

"Two couriers carrying orders from the Kenya Defence Council are caught in the enemy ambush. One courier rushes at the enemy so that the other may escape and deliver the orders. The dying fighter digs deep the soil and exhorts his companion to continue. The courier crosses many ridges and valleys across Kenya."

With works like these, Kenyan artists became trendsetters in resistance art.

■ This article is a much extended version of the author's 'Mau Mau Wood Carvings Narrative', which appeared in *Awaaz* magazine Kenya, Vol 15, issue 3, 2018, pp 16-17. Fig 1 is reproduced with kind permission from *Awaaz*; Figs 1, 2, 4 and 5 are © Shiraz Durrani.

Biographies of cited Kenyan political activists

GENERAL BAIMUNGE (19??-1965) was a Mau Mau general, and deputy to Dedan Kimathi. He refused to leave the forest at independence in 1963, demanding that the government give free land, jobs and assistance to Mau Mau. He was killed on 26 January 1965 "at the hands of the Uhuru (independent) government" of Jomo Kenyatta.¹¹

PIO GAMA PINTO (1927-1965) was a trade unionist, journalist and nationalist. He was an anti-colonial activist in Goa (then under Portuguese rule) and Kenya and was active in the Mau Mau liberation movement. After independence in Kenya, he continued his anti-imperialist struggle and supported socialism. He was assassinated on 24 February 1965.¹²

JOSIAH MWANGI KARIUKI (1929-1975) was a Mau Mau detainee, later a Member of Parliament. "In later years he became a widely popular spokesman for the peasantry and the poor, claiming that 'we do not want a Kenya of ten millionaires and ten million beggars' ... he was brutally murdered on 2 March 1975. When he was killed he was campaigning against corruption and actively opposing the political leadership ... 'there was no doubt whatever that high authorities in Kenya were responsible for his murder'".¹³

MARTIN SHIKUKU (1963-2012) was a Kenyan Member of Parliament from 1963 to 1988. "Seen as a radical, he early declared himself 'President of the Poor'. He paid for his prolonged opposition with detention in October 1975. He was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. He was released in December 1978."¹⁴ "In KANU, Shikuku gained a reputation as an outspoken backbencher, critical of corruption and abuses of power, and a defender of parliamentary privileges."¹⁵

JEAN MARIE SERONEY (1925-1982) was Deputy Speaker of the Kenyan Parliament in 1975, when his support of Shikuku's declaration that "KANU has been killed" led to his detention; he was adopted by Amnesty International as a prisoner of conscience. He was released in December 1978.¹⁶

MAKHAN SINGH (1913-1973) has previously been profiled in this journal.¹⁷ He was, according to Carol Sicherman, a "Pre-eminent trade union leader. Secretary of the Labour Trade Union of Kenya when he organised a two-month strike in Nairobi (1937). Interned in India for five years (1940-1945). In 1949, he founded the East African Trade Union Congress with Fred Kubai. He was arrested in 1950 and restricted until 1961. His attempt to enter the trade union movement [after his release] was banned by the new leaders (after independence) 'suspicious of his socialist' leanings. He spent his final years writing a two-volume history of the [trade union] movement."¹⁸ While in India, 1939-47, he was a member of the Communist Party and edited its newspaper. His son Hindpal Jabbal says:

“My father, Makhan Singh ... shall always be remembered as the father of the labour movement in Kenya. And since the labour movement was closely interwoven with the political movement in the colonial period, my father was also a great nationalist. He was amongst the first ones to use the slogan ‘Uhuru sasa’, meaning ‘Freedom Now’, in his famous speech in April 1950, at Kaloleni Hall, just a few days before his arrest and long detention by the Colonial Government in remote parts of Kenya, for more than eleven years.”¹⁹

NGŪGĪ WA THIONG’O is an award-winning, world-renowned Kenyan writer and academic who writes primarily in Gikuyu. His work includes novels, plays, short stories, and essays, ranging from literary and social criticism to children's literature. He is the founder and editor of the Gikuyu-language journal *Mũtiiri*. In 1977, Ngũgĩ embarked upon a novel form of theatre in his native Kenya that sought to liberate the theatrical process from what he held to be “the general bourgeois education system”, by encouraging spontaneity and audience participation in the performances. His project sought to “demystify” the theatrical process, and to avoid the “process of alienation [that] produces a gallery of active stars and an undifferentiated mass of grateful admirers” which, according to Ngũgĩ, encourages passivity in “ordinary people”. Although his landmark play, *Ngaahika Ndeenda*, co-written with Ngũgĩ wa Mirii, was a commercial success, it was shut down by the authoritarian Kenyan regime six weeks after its opening. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o was subsequently imprisoned for over a year. Adopted as an Amnesty International prisoner of conscience, he was released from prison, and fled Kenya.²⁰ For further information see Carol Sicherman’s book.²¹

KOIGI WA WAMWERE (1949-) is a Kenyan politician, human rights activist, journalist and writer. He became famous for opposing both the Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel arap Moi regimes, both of which sent him to detention.²²

GEORGE ANYONA (1945-2003) was elected an MP in 1977, but later that year was detained without trial by then President Jomo Kenyatta. Although released in 1978 by President Daniel arap Moi, he was arrested again in 1982, along with his longtime friend and veteran politician Jaramogi Oginga Odinga. The two were detained without trial for attempting to form a political party, the Kenya African Socialist Alliance (KASA), to challenge the ruling party KANU. Shortly after their arrest, KANU pushed through a constitutional amendment, making Kenya a de facto one-party state. Released from detention in 1984, Anyona made a political comeback in 1990 during the clamour for multi-party democracy in Kenya. However, he was then arrested with several others on a charge of sedition. After a marathon trial, the defendants were jailed for seven years. It was later revealed by an assistant minister in the Office of the President, John Keen, that the allegations were nothing but government fabrications, and in 1992 the defendants were released on bail and then had their sentences quashed.²³

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- 3 S Durrani and K Waweru, *Kenya: Repression and Resistance: From Colony to Neo-Colony, 1948-1990*, in *Palgrave Encyclopedia of Imperialism and Anti-Imperialism*, 2nd edn, I Ness and Z Cope, eds, forthcoming (1st edn was 2016).
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CENTENARY OF THE ASSASSINATION OF ROSA LUXEMBURG AND KARL LIEBKNECHT



JENNY FARRELL ROSA AND KARL

ROZALIA LUKSENBURG (Rosa Luxemburg) was born 5 March 1871 in Zamo, Poland. From the age of 15, she was involved with the Polish Workers Party and had to flee Poland in 1889. Luxemburg went to study in Switzerland, and continued to be politically active. She entered into a marriage of convenience in order to secure German citizenship and facilitate her participation in the German labour movement.

In 1898, she moved to Berlin, where she met Clara Zetkin. Luxemburg began publishing newspaper articles on the social and economic problems in Europe, and forcefully attacking German militarism. Immediately after the outbreak of WW1 in 1914, Luxemburg founded the Internationale group, which Karl Liebknecht joined, and from which the Spartacus League later emerged (1 January 1916). Together, they travelled the country calling on people to oppose the war and funding of the war.

The anti-war struggle was central to Luxemburg's political life:

“When the majority of working people realise ... that wars are barbaric, deeply immoral, reactionary, and anti-people, then wars will have become impossible”

Liebknecht was the ONLY GERMAN MP in 1914 to vote against allocating funds for war, stating:

“None of the peoples involved in this war wanted it, and it did not break out to promote their welfare – not in Germany or anywhere else. It is an imperialist war, a war to dominate the capitalist world market and secure for industrial and financial capital the possession of important territories for settlement.”

Their party leadership accused Luxemburg and Liebknecht of high treason and betrayal of the party.

In order to minimise his influence, Liebknecht was drafted into the army. Following his appearance at a Berlin anti-war rally, he was imprisoned from November 1916 to October 1918.

Luxemburg was imprisoned for “attempted treason” in June 1916, first in the women’s prison in Berlin, later in Vronke Fortress in the Polish province of Poznan, and finally in Wrocław in “protective custody” until November 1918.

In November 1918, the sailors of Kiel mutinied. This revolt triggered the German Revolution, which swept away the monarchy. It spread quickly, and on 9 November, Liebknecht proclaimed a “Free Socialist Republic of Germany” in Berlin. On the same day, he and Luxemburg founded the newspaper *Die Rote Fahne* (*The Red Flag*). They founded the German Communist Party in December 1918/January 1919 and were murdered on 15 January 1919. Their murderer, Waldemar Pabst, was never charged and led a long life in post-war West Germany as a far-right weapons lobbyist.

Such are the bare details of their political lives. However, in order to get closer to them as people, and to Rosa Luxemburg in particular, we publish here a few extracts from her letter to the Russian-born Sophie Liebknecht, wife of Karl Liebknecht. This letter from Vronke Fortress highlights among other things, that our struggle for a humane existence is not an end in itself, but ultimately envisages a life at peace, and in harmony with nature.

Vronke, 2 May 1917

My dearest little Sonyusha!

Your dear letter arrived here in perfect time yesterday, 1 May. It and two days of sunshine have done much to cheer me up. ... I am outside almost all day, strolling around in the bushes, searching every corner of my garden and finding all kinds of treasures.

... Yesterday, May 1st, I met – guess who? – a radiant common brimstone! I was so happy that my whole heart pounded. It flew up to my sleeve – I wear a purple jacket, and the colour probably attracted it – then it bobbed up and down the wall. In the afternoon, I found three different beautiful feathers: a dark grey one from a redstart, a golden one from a yellowhammer and a greyish-yellow one from a nightingale. I put the feathers in a lovely blue box for my small collection

This morning I discovered a hidden violet right next to the wall I was walking past! The only one in my whole garden. How does Goethe put it?

*A violet in the meadow stood,
With humble brow, demure and good,
It was the sweetest violet.*

I was so happy! I am sending you it here, with a kiss pressed lightly on it, may it bring you my love and my greeting. ... Then this afternoon I met the first bumblebee! A very big one in the new shimmering black fur jacket with golden yellow belt. It hummed in a deep bass and flew first to my jacket, then in a big arc high above the yard. The buds of the chestnuts are so big, rosy and swelling, shiny with juice, in a few days they will probably pop out their leaves, which look like little green hands.

...
Just yesterday I read about the causes of songbirds disappearing in Germany: it is due to increased rational forestry, horticulture and agriculture, slowly destroying all their natural nesting and feeding habitats: hollow trees, wasteland, scrub, and withered foliage in gardens. It was so painful to read this. I'm not worried about their singing for people, but the image of the silent, unstoppable demise of these defenceless little creatures hurt me so much, I had to weep. It reminded me of a Russian book by Prof Siber about the destruction of the Redskins in North America, which I read in Zurich: slowly but surely, civilised people drive them off their land and submit them to silent, cruel annihilation.

...
In Südende I used to stroll the street around this time in the evening; it is so beautiful when even in the last violet rays of daylight the rosy gas flames suddenly flicker in the lanterns and look so strange in the dusk, as if they were a little ashamed of themselves.

Then the indistinct shape of a porter's wife or a maid scurries through the street, quickly running to the baker's or grocer's to fetch something. The shoemaker's children, with whom I am friends, used to play in the street in the dark until they were robustly summoned home from the corner. At this hour there always used to be some blackbird that couldn't find rest and suddenly screeched or babbled like a naughty child, startled from sleep and flying noisily from tree to tree. And I stood there in the middle of the street, counting the first stars, reluctant to go home, leaving the balmy air and the twilight in which day and night nestled so softly together. ...

Put your mind at ease and be cheerful, everything will be fine, even with Karl. ... I embrace you.

Your Rosa

MARION BAUR TAKES MORE THAN GUNS TO KILL A WOMAN

THE EAGLE of the Revolution, as Lenin called Rosa Luxemburg, lives on in our hearts and particularly in our minds. Rosa and her huge political legacy have been and are being 'claimed' by many: social democrats of all shades and the world over, people who see their roots in Trotsky's theories, liberals even.

They rightly praise her courage and relentless struggle for the working class, they love her 'theory of spontaneity', they admire her deep respect for the opinion of an opponent, they pay tribute to her dignity which shines from the letters she wrote when imprisoned.

I think it is safe to say that no revolutionary in Europe has as many people visiting her grave year after year as Rosa (and her fellow comrade in life and in death Karl Liebknecht).

January 2019 saw 20,000 men and women flocking to the Friedhof der Sozialisten (graveyard of the socialists) in Berlin to pay respect, knowing that the 'grave' is only a plaque as the Nazis destroyed what was left of the bodies.

Many of the admirers of Rosa do not know (are not being told, unless we do so ...) the most important aspect of her life.

She was rebellious against the system of capitalism from a very young age. She was a militant anti-war fighter.

She broke away from the Social Democrats (SPD) with the Independents (USPD) in bitter opposition against their support of the Imperialist World War.

This political biography brought her bans from parliament-meetings, court cases, arrests, imprisonment. But all this became secondary on 1 January 1919: Rosa and Karl stood outside the building of the Prussian state parliament and declared that the Communist Party of Germany (KPD) had been founded. Rosa described the revolutionary step: "We are back with Marx, back under his banner!"

This was her and Karl's death sentence!

Only 15 days later, both revolutionaries were killed; another KPD founder, member, Leo Jogiches, was murdered shortly afterwards.

It is very encouraging to see so many young working-class people being fascinated by Rosa though it's a bit disturbing sometimes when 'false prophets' sail on the back of that. But the truth will prevail: Rosa lived and died as 'one of us', a communist, her programme lives on in our programme!

As Lenin said:

"Eagles may at times fly lower than hens but hens can never rise to the height of eagles. Rosa Luxemburg was – and remains for us – an eagle. And not only will communists all over the world cherish her memory, but her biography and her complete works will serve as useful manuals for training many generations of communists all over the world."

■ The above articles have been adapted with permission from the 'Rosa Luxemburg' supplement, January 2019, to the Communist Party of Ireland's journal, *Unity*. The originals, including the complete letter, are online at <http://www.communistpartyofireland.ie/Rosa.pdf>.



MIKE QUILLE

CULTURE MATTERS TO THE MANY, NOT THE FEW

“The central socialist case in matters of culture is that the lives of the great majority of people have been, and still are, almost wholly disregarded”

THIS ARTICLE sets out the case for theoretical and practical development of the Party’s approach to culture, by expanding the references to culture in our strategic programme, *Britain’s Road to Socialism*. It seeks to apply to that document the ideas presented in various columns and reviews I have written in the *Morning Star* over the last few years;¹ in articles on the **Culture Matters** website;² and in recent articles published by *Scottish Left Review*³ and *New Socialist*⁴.

The Communist Party has a long history of understanding and appreciating the power and importance of culture, and the way it accompanies and expresses progressive political ideas. Early socialist movements and parties, particularly in the North of England, recognised the importance of integrating the cultural struggle into their economic and political struggles. There were many examples of successful challenges to existing cultural institutions and practices and of developing more democratic, socialist alternatives for working people.⁵

These traditions were carried forward into the Communist Party when it was founded. The explanatory power of Marxist, historical materialist analysis enabled the Party to strengthen and develop the intuitive insights of early socialists into the importance of culture, in theory and in practice, throughout the twentieth century.

The Party’s position on culture was also informed and strengthened by developments in countries around the world which embarked on socialist projects. The Soviet Union developed and implemented an outstanding range of cultural policies covering the arts, sport, religion, the media and other cultural issues. These policies stimulated and influenced a host of similar initiatives, not only in countries like East Germany, China and Cuba, but in the United States, Britain and other European countries, India, South America and Africa.

As a result of all these factors, *Britain’s Road to Socialism* contains a much more sophisticated analysis and appreciation of cultural issues than any other comparable policy document by political parties. In recent years, both the Conservative and Liberal Democrat election manifestos have adopted an almost exclusively economic, instrumental approach to culture, stressing merely the alleged economic benefits – eg economic regeneration – for cultural interventions. Labour manifestos, especially in the Blair years, also showed a very

limited understanding of the central value of cultural issues in most people’s lives, although the 2017 manifesto clearly showed Jeremy Corbyn’s commitment to the arts, for example in its commitment to improving the status of arts education in the national curriculum.⁶

Here are some of the most outstanding relevant quotes from the current draft updated 8th edition of *Britain’s Road to Socialism*:

Chapter 1:

“Capitalism increasingly produces ‘culture’ as it does other commodities: for sale and for profit or not at all, regardless of social need or the social good. ‘Popular culture’ is thereby turned into a commercial, conservative force that promotes ideas of selfishness, greed and individualism There is little in capitalist mass-produced ‘culture’ which reflects the real experience, collectiveness and creativity of the working class, past or present.”

Chapter 5:

“The ruling capitalist class wages its political class struggle on three main, distinct but inter-connected fronts: the economic, the political and the ideological and cultural.”

“On the ideological front, the left and labour and progressive movements have to engage consistently, creatively and rigorously in the battle of ideas against those of the ruling class. ... The value of art and culture as a liberating force that can stimulate as well as stifle human development has to be fully appreciated. It is an important medium through which the values, notions, prejudices and thought processes that serve the interests of capitalism must be challenged.”

“Cultural policies should aim to encourage people’s participation, creativity and self-organisation. This is the alternative to passive consumption of the mass, trite, individualistic ‘culture’ propagated by the capitalist monopolies and the state-licensed broadcasting media. It would require greater support for all kinds of local facilities and initiatives in the arts and physical culture, including in radio, television and film production, publishing and sport.”

These statements show a sound dialectical and materialist understanding of culture, built on an understanding and appreciation not only of the theoretical contributions of Marx, Engels and Lenin, but also of Antonio Gramsci,⁷ Walter Benjamin⁸ and Raymond Williams.⁹

However, the importance of cultural issues, broadly defined, and the cultural struggle has grown significantly over recent years. There are far more people engaged as employees or as active participants in some form of culture-related product, activity, or event, than there were say 50 years ago. Similarly, there is far more consumption of culture by working people than there was 50 years ago – in the shape of the internet, broadcasting and social media, for example.

There is therefore a clear need to develop and clarify the theoretical framework from past editions of *Britain's Road to Socialism*, and to update and add to the practical policy proposals contained in the Left Wing Programme (LWP).

The challenge for us is to develop and articulate a democratic and socialist approach to all cultural activities, which goes beyond the narrow, elitist and top-down approach manifest in Britain today, which typically debars access to a whole range of cultural activities for ordinary people because of geography, low incomes and classism. We need shared ownership and democratic control of all of our cultural activities.

So let us step back for a moment and think about

- what culture means and why it is so important;
- the links between cultural activities and politics, and current examples of the way cultural activities function in class-divided societies like our own;
- why we need a democratic and socialist approach to all cultural activities;
- specific measures which might form part of our LWP or a more elaborated Party cultural policy, or part of a programme for an incoming Labour government.

The real meaning of culture

For a large part of our lives, particularly in leisure time, we make choices – or choices are made for us – on what to do with our time. Whether to watch television, and if so what to watch. Whether to surf the internet, go on Facebook, or read a newspaper or magazine. Whether to visit an art gallery or concert hall, go to the pub or out for a meal, listen to some music, buy some clothes, make some clothes, play an instrument, go to the opera, play football, watch football, go to church, sing in a choir, paint a picture or play computer games.

All these activities, and many more, have a cultural dimension. They help entertain, educate and enlighten us, and help us to enjoy life by giving it meaning, purpose and value. And the choices we make are socially determined. Their accessibility, cost and their very meanings are conditioned and constrained by the choices made by the owners, controllers, and gatekeepers of culture – the rich and the powerful, the politically dominant social classes in capitalist societies. To paraphrase Marx, we make our own culture, but we do not make it as we please, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past.

Raymond Williams¹⁰ was a Welsh Marxist media critic and one of the founding thinkers behind the popular field of cultural studies. He joined the Communist Party at Cambridge University in the 1930s but drifted out during the Second World War. One of his key sayings is: “Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start”.¹¹ This means that

culture includes not just the arts, but all those learned human activities which give life purpose, meaning and value, and which human beings engage in for enjoyment, entertainment and enlightenment. To restrict the term, and political discussion of it, to a selected menu of arts-based activities is to devalue and exclude the majority of cultural activities as practised by the majority of the population.

So, as well as the arts, let us adopt a more accurate and inclusive definition of culture, to include sport, TV and the media generally, eating and drinking, fashion and clothing, education, religion and many other popular activities. This makes for a looser and more varied set of concerns to think about, integrate into political manifestos and campaign about. But it is fairer, more inclusive and more accurate, and is far more relevant and appealing to the labour movement and most working people. Going to art galleries simply does not appeal to as many people as watching television, going to a football or rugby match, or using Facebook.

It is important to note that human cultural activities are social, unifying and egalitarian. They tend to express and assert our common humanity and solidarity against divisions of class, gender, race and other social divisions caused by unequal economic arrangements such as the capitalist system. And cultural activities such as art, music and religion can directly inspire and support radical change in the real world, both personally and politically.

Taking part in this wide range of cultural activities, as consumers and as performers/actors, is not some optional extra for us. It sustains our health, well-being and happiness, promotes our freedom from oppressive political systems and exploitative economic arrangements, and is absolutely essential to our development, liberation and flourishing as human beings. Culture is integral to the socialist project of transforming society for the benefit of working people – the many.

As workers, we're well aware of the economic struggle, the struggle for a fair return for our labour and for food, shelter, and other material necessities. In these days of austerity economics and flatlining wages, it's a constant struggle to make ends meet on low incomes and inadequate benefits. The chaos and cruelty around the introduction of Universal Credit is the worst but not the only example of deliberate attacks on the poor by the Tory government.

As voters and political activists, we're also aware of the political struggle. This is the struggle to change the terms and conditions of our existence for the better – to liberate our social selves and prioritise social justice and the common good across all areas of state power and policy. So we struggle for various forms of social rather than private ownership of the land, farms, factories, offices, shops, utilities and banks. And we struggle to gain democratic control of all social institutions, so that we all have an equal say in what happens in our lives.

Communists, however, have always recognised that there is another struggle, which accompanies, expresses and supports the economic and political struggles. This is the ideological and cultural struggle, which must include the struggle for cultural democracy, to apply fundamental socialist principles of shared ownership and democratic control to everyday and ordinary cultural activities.

Culture, politics and class

Class-based divisions in society, based on unequal property ownership, constrain or prevent this kind of full and free enjoyment of culture. Cultural activities may be

fundamentally liberating and social activities, but in societies divided by class they are limited, appropriated and privatised.

Throughout history, tiny minorities of dominant social classes have tried – and often succeeded – in turning cultural activities into circuses, to go with the breadcrumbs thrown from the tables of the rich and powerful. In these class-divided societies, culture tends to become inaccessible, costly, irrelevant and of poor quality. It tends to be owned and organised in undemocratic ways. It tends to legitimise, conceal or ignore the ongoing, systematic oppression and exploitation of working people. And it is used to promote diversionary and reactionary political messages and values, in order to prevent the development of radical, anti-capitalist ideas such as cultural democracy.

So a continual struggle goes on to develop and sustain a cultural commons for the many, not the few. We face a cultural struggle against the co-option, misuse and appropriation of cultural activities, just like our economic and political struggles for better wages and for ownership and control of essential goods and services like our schools, our railways and our health service.

Just as neoliberal capitalism has shown itself to be incapable of providing adequate public services in these areas, so too it cannot sustain cultural production, delivery and consumption. We are witnessing the insidious and often hidden growth of corporate influence and control over cultural institutions – not only Arts Council England (ACE) and all kinds of arts institutions run by cliques of trustees, directors, curators, investors – but also social media platforms, broadcasters, sports clubs, pubs and clubs, and supermarkets.

All these cultural institutions, which are of immense importance to our everyday, ordinary lives, are a major challenge for a socialist cultural policy seeking to implement shared ownership and democratic accountability into the cultural landscape.

What's wrong with current culture?

For the many, massive problems flow from the unequal and undemocratic ownership and control of cultural activities.

In sport, owners and management bodies are failing to make sport accessible, affordable and enjoyable for everyone, through sky-high ticket prices, undemocratic, ineffective regulatory authorities, and subsidies for elite sport at the expense of school sports and grassroots sports. Commercial pressures mean that capitalist ideologies of individual excellence and competitiveness – rather than the social and co-operative nature of most sport which is its most essential and appealing characteristic – cause regular scandals in most sports, involving drug-taking, cheating and corruption.

In the media, private ownership of large swathes of the means of communication by gigantic corporations like Amazon, Google, Apple and Facebook prevent us enjoying human interaction without being watched, manipulated and influenced by commercial capitalist interests. We face privately owned media companies like Sky, Netflix, Disney and Fox, dedicated to making profits rather than meeting human need. And we face state-controlled media like the BBC, designed to support and legitimise the economic and political status quo, and institutionally biased against radical politicians, newspapers and ideas.

Our daily activities of eating and drinking are also cultural activities, as well as biological necessities. We do so in company with family and friends, for pleasure and to express and enhance our common and social natures. Yet

corporations produce and sell us food and drink loaded with too much sugar, salt, and fat, and we are pressurised into consuming unhealthy amounts and types of alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Children and other vulnerable, poorer members of society are particularly at risk. Corporate profits depend on persuading people to over-consume food and drink, and capitalist profit-seeking thereby is a major factor in causing obesity and drunkenness.

Religious institutions own and control huge resources – land, buildings, capital – which do not always meet and serve the needs of many people for collective gatherings to express and strengthen shared beliefs and a commitment to the common good, and for refreshment, comfort and inspiration. Most religions have a powerful strand of concern for the poor, the vulnerable, the oppressed and exploited, yet their vicars, priests, bishops and other leaders often fail to call for and to practise social justice.

In the arts, the situation is not much better than when Raymond Williams said, in a *Guardian* Lecture in 1985:

“The central socialist case, in matters of culture, is that the lives of the great majority of people have been, and still are, almost wholly disregarded”¹²

Problems with cultural institutions mean that we face inaccessibility, obscurity, and vapid spectacle, as well as the fact that state funding is so unequal. Money that comes from our taxes and our Lottery tickets is overwhelmingly focused on cultural provision in the London area, which benefits mainly the already well off, and tourists.

The continuing, monumental failure of ACE to develop and sustain fair allocation of the massive increase in resources it has received from the taxpayer and from Lottery funds over the last 20 years or so is truly appalling. Imagine the outcry if there were far more hospitals per person in the London area than elsewhere, or far more schools for the better off than for the poor, everywhere. Yet this is broadly the situation in the arts in England, and one which ACE is not even planning to tackle.

For working-class people wishing to have an arts career, it is getting harder to become a musician or actor or writer without rich relatives to support you. Cuts and curriculum changes in education mean our children are being deprived of the chance to learn how to appreciate and participate in artistic, sporting and other cultural activities at both primary and secondary school stages, as well as facing exclusion and discrimination when they attempt a career as writer, performer, musician, actor or artist.

The Government's politically-driven austerity policies have led to huge cuts in cultural facilities, including libraries, community centres, youth facilities and sports facilities. These cuts are set to continue for years to come; and have been knowingly targeted at the least well-off sections of society.

We also face the possibility of an expansion in leisure time in the next few decades, as labour-saving technology generates more unemployment, underemployment and free time. Again, this will impact more on the working class generally, and in particular on less skilled workers, younger people trying to build careers, and people who are already socially excluded and discriminated against for various reasons. Over time there will thus be an increasing need for accessible, relevant cultural activities for large numbers of people who are currently excluded from participation.

A better culture policy

To tackle these problems, what sort of policy do we need?

Firstly, one which accepts that culture is ordinary and everyday, and that it is essential and not marginal to working people's lives. Both spectatorship and engagement in cultural production and consumption are fundamental to human fulfilment and flourishing, and therefore central to any progressive political programme. It is not just an aid to 'economic regeneration', still less a sticking plaster to mask the deindustrialisation, decay and worsening health of many working-class communities, particularly in the North of England.

Secondly, we need a more inclusive approach to culture and culture policy, covering cultural activities which matter to most working people, and which can attract the support of the labour movement. We need to start promoting culture as part of the 'social wage' for everyone, like health, education and welfare benefits, not an exclusive extra for the better off. We need to break down long-established hierarchies between different kinds of cultural activities and practices, which often reflect and perpetuate class divisions, and which again point to the importance of integrating the economic, political and cultural struggles in our attempts to build a classless society.

Thirdly, we need to develop democratic, inclusive and bottom-up cultural policies in which communities of practitioners and audiences are empowered, through various structures of shared, social ownership and democratic control, to direct culture towards their own defined ends. Those could be entertainment, personal fulfilment, self-expression or as a contribution to the struggle for a better world.

We need to think about ways of facilitating and encouraging grassroots cultural formations and activities. There are some very good examples of people working together at various forms of cultural activity – whether learning to play a musical instrument, paint, write poetry, cook, play football or make films – for enjoyment, education or the value generated by doing things in a social environment.

These activities may not be explicitly political, linked to any defined progressive thinking or located in the trade union and labour movement. But by providing platforms for people to share their work and ideas, and by encouraging people to do things socially and collaboratively, such activities build confidence, promote learning and open the doors to deeper levels of cultural and political engagement.

Specific policy proposals – some examples

It would be inappropriate to construct a detailed blueprint for culture policies, as there is a prior need to consult, discuss, and democratically decide on priorities, in line with the commitment to grassroots ownership and local empowerment. But there would surely be a consensus on the left about the following priorities for an incoming Labour government:

Dismantling the barriers of class, cost and geography that stop working people from accessing culture as consumers and as practitioners.

Embedding cultural education – both appreciation and practice – into the national curriculum.

Reclaiming the media – newspapers, online platforms, TV and radio – by reforming its funding, ownership and control and providing space for working-class voices and truly diverse, community-based providers. Facebook, Google, Amazon, broadcasters and newspaper publishers all require radical reformation, taxation and regulation, to lessen and ultimately abolish the influence of billionaire private owners.

Expansion of public spending on the arts and sport, involving a radical shift towards more support for grassroots participation, working-class communities and for equal provision outside London.

Increasing the representation of the working class in all cultural institutions, especially the arts, sports, and the media, in terms of content, audiences and practitioners.

Developing partnerships between secular and religious authorities, so that as congregations dwindle and resources lie unused, local communities – particularly the poorest and most oppressed sections of those communities – can be empowered to access and benefit from their material and non-material resources.

Regulating, taxing, and democratising other relevant cultural institutions, including food and drink corporations, breweries and pubs, supermarkets, arts facilities and sports clubs. All these institutions have potential to be specialist hubs in a common socialist project to meet need (rather than make profit) across the whole span of cultural activities. Various kinds of social ownership models and democratic management arrangements need to be applied to cultural institutions including ownership by the state, local authorities and local community co-operatives.

Cultural activities tend to reflect and serve the needs of the dominant class, in a class-divided society such as ours. At the same time they can also provide the space to resist the status quo and overcome alienation and oppression. They can help people envision better, fairer ways of organising our society, as well as promoting our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

The Labour manifesto of 1945 contained these words:

“We desire to assure to our people full access to the great heritage of culture in this nation.”

Cultural democracy was promised in 1945 and is long overdue. Now is the time for the Communist Party to inspire the labour movement by updating its historically progressive and comprehensive approach to culture, and to develop and support local, co-ordinated cultural campaigns involving CLPs, trade unions, and cultural and political activists.

Why? Because culture matters to the many, not the few.

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MARTIN LEVY

ROBERT BURNS: FOR SCOTLAND, BRITAIN AND THE WORLD



his songs were set to dance tunes. But, as Hugh MacDiarmid wrote, back in 1926:

No' wan in fifty kens a wurd Burns
wrote
But misapplied is a'body's property,
And gin there was his like alive the day
They'd be the last a kennin' haund to
gi'e –

Excepting *Auld Lang Syne*, which was collected, rather than written, by Burns, that argument remains true today – and it was true in 1945 when JR Campbell, setting the record straight, wrote *Burns the Democrat* for the Scottish Committee of the Communist Party. At the time Campbell was assistant editor of the *Daily Worker*, the predecessor of the *Morning Star*.

In 1959 Campbell revised his pamphlet as *Robert Burns the Democrat*. It was republished in 1985, but has been out of print since then. Now *Communist Review* has reprinted it, with a new foreword by Communist Party Scottish Committee chair Keith Stoddart, explanatory notes and – for those unfamiliar with Lowland Scots – a glossary.

As the foreword points out, Campbell skilfully examines Robert Burns' life and work in light of the economic, social and political circumstances of the time. He places the poet firmly where he belongs – in the forefront of the literary, religious, social and political thought of his day.

Burns' achievements were vast, says Campbell. He was the forerunner of the English romantic poets of the early 19th century; he rescued hundreds of folk tunes from impending oblivion and “fitted them with his immortal words”; his satires are among the most powerful ever written; and “he made the life of the common man, his fears and hopes, the theme of poetry in a way that remains unsurpassed.”

Burns lived through turbulent times: the 1745 Jacobite rebellion was still recent history; Scotland, now helped by

JANUARY 25 this year marked the 260th anniversary of the birth of the great Robert Burns. In Scotland, he was as usual celebrated with traditional Burns Suppers, centring – as the Visit Scotland web site tells us – around haggis eating, whisky toasts, poetry readings and songs, ceilidh dancing, good company and “loads of fun!”

Over the border there were Burns Nights too – more often than not with the key elements being the “loads of fun” and loads of liquor profits.

One has to ask if this is what Robert Burns was really about – even in Scotland.

Yes, Burns was fond of a drink, he did write an *Address to the Haggis*, and many of

superprofits from Britain's American colonies, was beginning to recover economically from the 1707 Act of Union with England; there was intense intellectual and scientific development, including the likes of Adam Smith, David Hume and James Watt; there were two great revolutions overseas – the American War of Independence and the French Revolution; and, if factory capitalism was only slightly developed in Scotland, a revolution was taking place in agriculture.

Burns was by no means a 'heaven-inspired peasant' born with a miraculous gift of poetry. He was a member, if poor, of the new class of tenant farmers. His bosom friends were of the rising middle class – lawyers, doctors, schoolmasters and progressive clergymen. He was a well-educated man, but that education was dearly bought, after strenuous days of work on the farm.

He had to work hard to earn every penny, and the real miracle is that he achieved so much under such conditions.

He had a sharp eye for the injustices suffered by poor people at the hands of the landed gentry:

They, an be damn'd! what right hae they
To meat, or sleep, or light o' day?
Far less to riches, pow'r, or freedom,
But what your lordship likes to gie
them?

Though not blind to the progressive role that the Kirk had played in Scots history, he threw his weight behind the New Lights, who wanted modification of the strict Calvinist doctrine. In *Holy Willie's Prayer* he ridicules one William Fisher, who was leading the Kirk's pursuit of Burns' friend Gavin Hamilton for unorthodox behaviour. Fisher is found instructing the Deity on how to run the universe but having to admit his own lurches from the path of virtue:

O Lord! yestreen, Thou kens, wi Meg –
Thy pardon I sincerely beg –
O may't ne'er be a livin plague
To my dishonour!
An I'll ne'er lift a lawless leg
Again upon her.

Burns was certainly a Scottish patriot, excoriating those Scottish politicians who had passed the Act of Union:

'We're bought and sold for English
gold' –
Such a parcel of rogues in a nation.

But he supported political and social reform in Britain as a whole. He read Tom

Paine's *Rights of Man*; and at the very moment when the Government was preparing to prosecute Paine for "seditious libel", Burns had published the following lines:

Here's freedom to him that wad read,
Here's freedom to them that wad
write!
There's nane ever fear'd that the truth
should be heard,
But they whom the truth would indite!

He also wrote a prologue entitled *The Rights of Woman*:

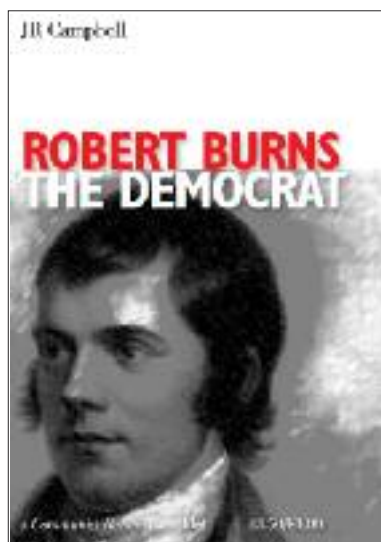
Amid this mighty fuss just let me
mention,
The Rights of Woman merit some
attention.

After Paine's conviction (in absentia) the Government cracked down on anyone supposed to be promoting his book, so Burns felt forced to moderate his verse for a time. But his views did not change; and Campbell shows that in *A Man's A Man For A' That* – not intended for publication at the time – Burns had pretty well set Paine's prose into poetry:

For a' that, an a' that,
It's comin yet for a' that,
That man to man the world o'er
Shall brithers be for a' that.

Burns was a real democrat. His political and social views deserves to be known more widely. As Keith Stoddart says, his heritage is for Scotland, Britain and the world.

Robert Burns the Democrat is available at £3.50 + p&p from www.comunist-party.org.uk and is also downloadable at <http://tinyurl.com/yxczz57l>



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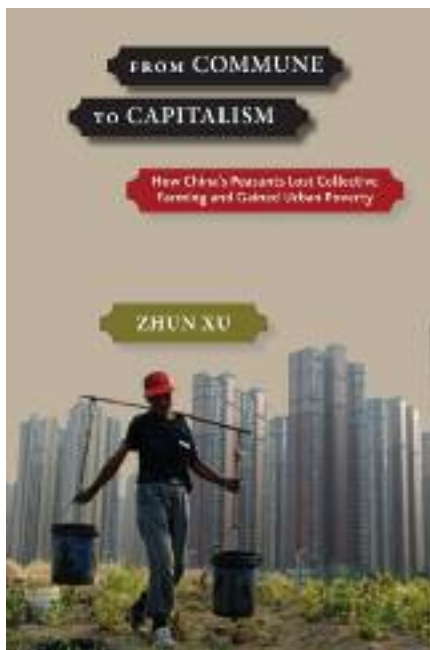


Imperialism's crisis is the labour movement's opportunity

The Communist Party held its 55th Congress in Croydon on November 17-18, 2018. This pamphlet features the main resolution as presented by the outgoing Executive Committee and amended by delegates in the course of debate. £1 + P&P

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A WELCOME BUT FLAWED PERSPECTIVE ON CHINESE ECONOMIC POLICIES



Review by Kenny Coyle

**From Commune to Capitalism:
How China's Peasants Lost
Collective Farming and Gained
Urban Poverty**

By Zhun Xu

[Monthly Review Press, New York, 2018, 154 pp. Pbk/hbk, RRP \$20/£70, ISBN 978-1-58367-698-1/-699-8. Ebook, ISBN 978-1-58367-700-1, available from publisher at \$25.]

CHINA'S social transformations since 1949 have never been anything less than immense. While the main focus of attention these days is on the four decades of reform since 1978, the earlier Mao period is often unjustly overlooked as a source of China's later growth.

In this sense, Zhun Xu's analysis is very welcome. He correctly shows the achievements during the "Maoist era" and stresses that a great deal of

the rural infrastructure, such as dams, reservoirs, irrigation systems, roads and bridges built before 1978, continues to play an important role in contemporary agricultural life.

The author's overall perspective is one associated with the Chinese New Left – an umbrella term that covers a variety of left and ultra-left positions critical of the post-1978 reform period, ranging from anarchist and syndicalist currents, Marxists of various hues, through to self-defined Maoists. His sympathies appear to belong to the latter. Xu contrasts the Maoist or "socialist" period to that of the current Chinese leadership, which he identifies as capitalist and more specifically as "neoliberal".

This outlook gives the book both its strengths and weaknesses. On the one hand, he acknowledges the tremendous achievements of the 1949-76 period and correctly identifies this period as the launchpad for China's later economic growth. For example, during the early 1970s the production of mechanised farming equipment increased by 400% and, during the same time, chemical fertilisers were introduced on a wide scale. Together, these raised agricultural productivity for years to come.

As a result, the author downplays the significance of the household responsibility system (HRS), which replaced collectives with family-run farms, as a factor in the sharp upturn in agricultural production in the decade after 1978. He suggests this was largely due to the previous Mao-era innovations coming into play and he also points to the fact that the HRS did not fully take root in many parts of China until the mid to late 1980s.

Surprisingly Xu doesn't deal with the importance of the Township and Village Enterprise reforms, which created clusters of small industries in the Chinese countryside and which for many rural Chinese marked their first steps in the transition from peasant to worker. Ironically this might have strengthened Zhun Xu's arguments as several of the most successful TVEs eventually became privately owned companies.

While Zhun Xu asserts that the post-1978 Communist Party of China leadership spearheaded a transition to capitalism, his focus on agriculture means he is unable to make a convincing case for it. Social stratification in the countryside has certainly increased but the division between rich and poor has not – at least not yet – created a firm division into a landowning rural bourgeoisie and landless agricultural working class, which is surely what any form of rural capitalism would look like.

It is also difficult to accept Xu's thesis that China's turn is not merely to capitalism but to "neoliberalism" a term rendered almost meaningless given China's vast state-led investments and hugely successful poverty reduction programmes – the latter calling into question the book's own subtitle. In fact, Xu notes that "The urban-rural income ratio (defined as the urban per capita disposable income divided by the counterpart in rural areas) increased from 2.2 in 1984 to 3.1 in 2011."

Urban areas are almost uniformly more prosperous than the rural areas surrounding them. It is the lure of urban prosperity, higher wages, better housing and the like that have driven China's urbanisation.

Another objection to Xu's

arguments is that he largely focuses on grain (rice and other cereals) production, suggesting that rice yields and overall production figures show a much weaker rural economy than the official picture. In the past, grain production, primarily rice, could be taken as a proxy for the state of the rural economy and, in earlier times, even the national economy. For several centuries, the staple diet for 90% of the population, depending on region, consisted of rice, noodles or dumplings, with some vegetables but only occasionally with meat or seafood.

This is no longer the case.

Since 1978, per capita consumption of dairy products and vegetables and fruits increased more than 10 times, meat 8.3 times and cereals 3.2 times. Farmers have diversified their crops to meet this dietary revolution, so that by 2014 China accounted for more than 27% of the world's meat production.

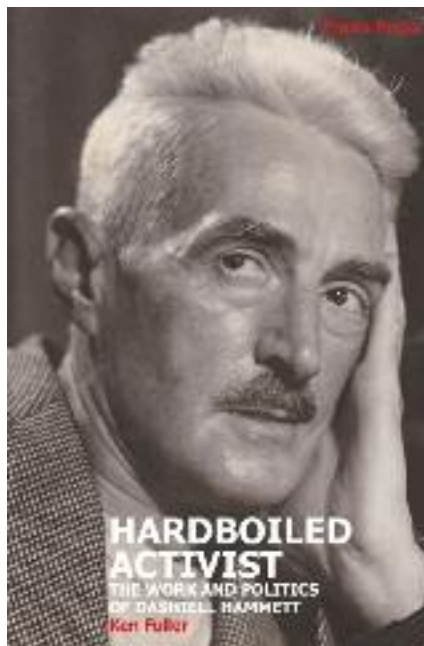
FAO statistics show that Chinese seafood consumption has risen by 50% in the past decade alone, reaching 41 kg per person in 2015 compared with an average elsewhere of 15 kg. This is expected to rise to 50 kg per capita in the next decade. China has developed an enormous aquaculture sector to meet, at least partially, these demands.

Among Chinese healthcare bodies the current concern is no longer about child malnutrition – although still a reality in the least developed areas – but childhood obesity. Government health programmes are now advising people to cut down on meat consumption; and among young people in the urban areas there is a growing trend toward vegetarianism and veganism. The number of vegetarian restaurants in Shanghai has doubled in the past five years alone.

It is impossible to square the all-round evidence for the gradually growing prosperity of the Chinese people, especially their liberation from absolute poverty and malnutrition, with Xu's claim of neoliberal capitalism.

While it's refreshing to see a critique of Chinese economic policies from the left, there are nonetheless fundamental flaws in Xu's perspective and conclusions.

ALIENATED CYNIC TO LATENT OPTIMIST



Review by John Rathbone Taylor

Hardboiled Activist: The Work and Politics of Dashiell Hammett

By Ken Fuller

[Praxis Press, Glasgow, 2017. Pbk, £19.99, 335 pp, ISBN 978-1-899155-06-4]

THIS COMPREHENSIVE account of “the work and politics” of Dashiell Hammett is preceded by more than a dozen other biographies and studies of the famous detective fiction writer. The distinctiveness – and for me, the recommendation – of this particular publication is that it is written from a political activist's informed perspective. Ken Fuller is not only an accomplished writer-historian, political essayist and sometime comedy novelist, he is also an experienced and informed voice of the Left. His political background includes 20 years as a trade union official in London, penning a 100-year history of London bus workers,

authorship of a three-volume history of communism in the Philippines (where he now lives), plus a critical study of the 9-year presidency of the Philippines by Gloria Macapagal Arroyo. Fuller knows his politics. He demonstrates so in numerous places throughout this text on Hammett by helpfully setting and evaluating his subject's activism in the context of what was happening in local US politics and on the international stage. Fuller's explanation of the diplomatic jockeying between countries in the run up to the Second World War is a bonus for readers in itself!

The pertinence of these observations about Fuller follows from the common contention that Dashiell Hammett is not only the author of the legendary book-film *The Maltese Falcon* (which introduced to the world Humphrey Bogart as Sam Spade, the “hard-boiled” private detective), plus 4 other novels and 50 short stories that helped define the genre. He was also seen, notoriously in his day, to be an active communist. Exactly when and why Hammett took up communism, whether roots of his Marxist thinking can be found in his fiction writings, and if and when he actually became a card-carrying member of the American Communist Party (the CPUSA), are the main questions Fuller's account focuses on. He delivers evidence here that Hammett did take up formal CP membership, though after he had ceased his writing.

The particular bone Fuller chews on is the propensity of certain other biographers of Hammett to condemn him for eschewing anti-Stalinist views of events in the late 1930s. In 1938, for example, Hammett added his signature to a public petition declaring the verdicts of the Moscow Trials to be legitimate. In 1939 and 1941

respectively, he expressed his support for the Soviet-German Non-Aggression Pact, then, as a member of the CPUSA, switched to supporting the war when Nazi troops invaded the Soviet Union. Such positionings incline these commentators to portray Hammett as a naive dupe to communism, and to infer from this that there must have been communist messages at least subliminally present in his earlier fiction writings (all produced between 1922 and 1936). Fuller decries these views as an underestimate of Hammett's political intelligence and as misrepresenting when and how he had come to communism. He tackles this first through literary analysis and then by constructing his account of Hammett's activism.

After sketching out Hammett's life story in the first chapter, Fuller spends the next four chapters (about 170 pages) synopsising, deconstructing and forensically searching through all Hammett's novels and short stories for evidence of Marxist messages or leanings – but he finds none. As a catalogue of tall stories and twisting plots – full of cheap hoods, dangerous dames and sinister kingpins; double crosses and dead bodies; and of course, hard-skinned private detectives with hidden soft spots – working through this half of the book might prove somewhat brain-addling for all but creative-writing buffs or devout Hammett story-telling fans. However, it clearly illustrates the thoroughness Fuller has brought to this work, and it convincingly underscores his refutations of the other biographers' imputations and insinuations toward Hammett.

In the second half of the book (chapters 6 to 9, but in 7 and 8 particularly), Fuller's narrative truly takes off. He presents a thoroughly interesting and conclusive account of Hammett's turn to communism and his related, active work in civil rights.

While acknowledging that Hammett may have been brought closer to left-wing thinking around 1930 – when he started his long-term relationship with the playwright and politically radical Lillian Hellman – Fuller puts Hammett's substantive politicisation rather later. In part this is because Fuller is drilling down on the issue of timing in this book. He cites Hellman's various observations on Hammett's political journey but is wary of her reliability as evidence-

giver. Hellman's accounts even of her own radicalism often changed (in some cases, were invented) in her tellings of it, or have been factually contradicted or disproven by other researchers. Fuller prefers to see the emergence of the Popular Front policy, the beginning of the Spanish Civil War in 1936, and Hammett's circulation around Hollywood – where a collective of communist writers, directors and actors existed – as the probable impetus to ideas that were already in Hammett's mind. There is evidence from around 1936 and 1937 that Hammett was researching labour matters; reading Marx, Lenin and Engels; leading Marxist study groups; meeting socially with CPUSA members; adding content about communism in private letters, and so on. Fuller writes that "It is indisputable that both Hammett and Hellman had become radicalised by 1936-7" but he asks "... did Hammett join the CPUSA?" The answer comes a few pages later when Fuller reports that he personally obtained verification from Hammett's daughter Jo, that her father showed her his CP membership card when she was about 10 years of age. For Fuller, this puts the date probably in 1937 and "settles it".

If Hammett was studying and sharing Marxist theory and Popular Front thinking before the war started, the practical side of his activism expanded considerably after the war. This included several years teaching at the Jefferson School of Social Science (set up in 1944 by the CPUSA), but most of his time he devoted to the Civil Rights Congress (a communist-led organisation formed in 1946 by the amalgamation of the National Negro Congress, the International Labor Defense and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties) for which he was the New York president. The CRC mainly concerned itself with defending the civil rights of African-Americans and spearheaded the most noteworthy civil rights cases of its time, including the campaigns to free Willie McGee, the Martinsville Seven, and the Trenton Six.

But the war that intervened had become one Hammett could support, and from 1941, a conflict in which his country was involved. Aged 48, Hammett overcame the Army's initial medical objections and re-enlisted. He was posted to the remote Aleutian island of Adak where he edited the

camp newspaper and apparently read Lenin and Marx (again). In 1945 he and others were denounced by the *Chicago Tribune* for allegedly being communist propagandists in the Army, but that same year he was honourably discharged. While he had been away, the CPUSA had come under attack from what became known as 'McCarthyism'. The House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) had been formed in 1938 and that year issued a report claiming communism was widespread in Hollywood. This led to a trade union lockout, the infamous 'Blacklist', and in 1947 the indictment for contempt of Congress of the 'Hollywood Ten' writers, producers and directors who refused to divulge their political or trade union affiliations. Fuller again demonstrates his ability to explain and illuminate the wider goings-on around Hammett's story with the aid of well-martialled detail here. His portrayal of the controversy that the HUAC precipitated, and examples of the condemnations and indignations, fines and imprisonments, ruined careers and the like, makes for compulsive reading. Specifically, he reveals to us the information the FBI was compiling on Hammett's political involvements, and yet the unphased, clever and rather spirited reactions Hammett was showing to all the McCarthyist surveillance and attacks from officialdom. When, in 1951, Hammett was summoned to court to explain his dealings with the CRC bail fund, who was being assisted from it, where these individuals (mostly freed strikers who had subsequently gone into hiding) were, and would he produce the bail fund records and name who were the bail fund donors – he refused to answer or comply, even under threat. He was sentenced to six months imprisonment, with immediate effect.

No review can do justice to the fascinating story and depth of material Fuller brings to this biography. But the very effectiveness of Fuller's narrative examination of Hammett's evolution – from anti-labour union activities as a Pinkerton agent to union-supporting, rights-campaigning, communist activist – brings with it the need for Fuller to offer the reader an explanation of the contradiction apparent in that journey. Hammett's readiness to go to prison rather than betray friends, the considerable contribution he made to anti-fascism, civil rights and teaching, the support

he gave to progressive organisations and the patriotism of his army enlistments – all demonstrate camaraderie, a sense of duty, and commitment of purpose. Yet Fuller does not shy away from describing the unlikeable side of Hammett. We are told of a man who made a great deal of money from his books and screenplays but who frittered it away, drinking, whoring and gambling, and while he could, on lavish living. He evaded responsibilities to provide for his former wife and two daughters. He could be witheringly cruel in his criticism to fellow writers. He is known to have hit a woman on more than one occasion. Particularly in his early writing he used racist language and stereotypes. And for much of his life he was a drunkard.

Fuller's explanation for this puzzle is that Hammett had developed a dark outlook on life from early on. He was an avid reader and already an avowed atheist by the time he joined the army in 1918, at the age of 24. He had to leave it that same year when he was found to have tuberculosis. He had periodic bouts of poor health for the rest of his days. Fuller opines that Hammett became further alienated by what appeared to be a corrupt society, and believed in nothing that might give his life meaning. "If Hammett had any ideological belief during his period as a writer," he says, "then he was a nihilist." It was thus that "his embrace of progressive political causes and a Marxist outlook ... saved his soul, overcoming the bleak, nihilistic outlook with which he was cursed." Once Hammett got to grips with Marxist thought, Fuller reckons, he found it intellectually satisfying and, finally, something to hang on to.

Surely Fuller is right in saying Hammett found meaning and purpose in communism. But does that make him the nihilist of before – a believer in nothing? Could he as easily have been described as a fatalist? Or a cynic, maybe? Surely a complete no-hoper wouldn't have written creative stories and sent them off to literary magazine publishers as Hammett did. Tellingly, Hammett's full name was Sam Dashiell Hammett. It is 'Sam' Spade in *The Maltese Falcon* who doesn't like Miles Archer, his own detective partner, and who falls in love with the female fake-client who, it turns out, murdered Archer; but Sam still hands her in to the police! Hammett the author doesn't plum for

nihilistic amorality. Was it GK Chesterton who said he knew he was an optimist because he was only a razor's edge away from being a pessimist? Can we see a younger, intelligent but sickly Hammett, disillusioned by his knowledge of World War One and then by what he participated in as a Pinkerton on the mean streets of bosses' law and poor folks' criminality – see him navigating the hard knocks of life along that razor's edge? Likewise, do we see the later middle-aged and worldly-wiser Hammett finally finding a cause to draw out his latent optimism? In 1955, Hammett was called to testify before the New York Joint Legislative Committee, a McCarthyite body. The Committee wanted to know whether there were communists in the Civil Rights Congress. The 61 years-old piercingly yet optimistically replied: "Communism to me is not a dirty word. When you are working for the advance of mankind it never occurs to you whether a guy is a communist."

● *Hardboiled Activist* can be ordered, probably at a discounted price for CR readers, from Unity Books Glasgow (enquiries@unitybooks.co.uk) and Clarion Books Newcastle (info@northerncommunists.org.uk).

LETTER

Fascism in Britain

In the last edition of *Communist Review* (CR90) there was an interesting article, *Fascism in Britain*, by Tony Conway, John Foster, Rob Griffiths and Liz Payne. The article gives a fine impression of the role of fascism in the 1930s. The problem arises when the authors exclusively use the definition of fascism by Georgi Dimitrov at the 7th World Congress of the Comintern in 1935.

Of course we should study and learn from the experiences in the 1930s, but when it comes to making a definition of fascism today, the conditions have completely changed.¹

In philosophical terms logic is the movement of reality in abstract forms independent of the individual consciousness, but how could the reality of the 1930s be the reality of the 21st

century?²

A new definition should be based on the changes in State Monopoly Capitalism (SMC) because fascism cannot be seen outside of this context. SMC has gone through several stages and, while it shows many resemblances to the corporatism of the 1930s,³ the present forms are different.

In my view the most important changes are:

- 1) The general demolition of bourgeois democracy and its replacement by an elite of experts in the media and public assemblies.
- 2) The possibilities of controlling public views through the media, the internet and the secret services.
- 3) The rising nationalism and the campaigns against supranational institutions, eg the EU, and against international law, ie the UN charter.
- 4) The replacement of Jews by Muslims, as targets of public campaigns against migrants from overseas countries.
- 5) The changes in the productive forces and production relations.

With slight variations these are the same tendencies in all European countries and in North America. So, in my view, a new definition of fascism should comprehend both the relevant historical content of the concept, but also the new that has emerged through the changes in capitalism, ie the productive forces and production relations.

A true definition of fascism should build on socially valid forms of thought, meaning that the concept should be treated separately from the concrete analysis. This is also in accordance with the progress made by Hegel in his *Science of Logic*, although in an idealistic way.⁴

Apart from this criticism it is very valuable that CR is raising the debate on fascism, which also includes the article *Chile: Lessons of Popular Unity 1970-73* by Kenny Coyle.⁵

Lars Ulrik Thomsen

Notes and References

- 1 L U Thomsen, *Dialectics of History*, in CR75, Spring 2015, pp 24-26.
- 2 G W F Hegel, *Sämtliche Werke (Collected Works)*, Vol 8, pp 42-44, Stuttgart, 1929.
- 3 The most important likeness is the dominance of the monopolies over the labour movement, both politically and economically.
- 4 Hegel, Vol 8, *op cit*, p 125.
- 5 CR90, Winter 2019, pp 6-11.



IT IS HOPE THAT WE MAKE GROW

IN THREE short years the poets who came forward with collections of political poetry have succeeded in establishing **Culture Matters** as a new, lively and well-respected publishing house. Their poems are great examples of what I had in mind when I wrote, in the article on culture and politics elsewhere in this issue, of how cultural activities like art and music can directly inspire and support radical change in the real world.

Often people think of political poetry as straightforward propagandistic verse. It can do this very well, but it can also take many other, subtler forms, as you will see from the poems I am going to present from recent publications from **Culture Matters**.

Poetry on the Picket Line

Culture Matters' most obviously political recent collection is probably an anthology called *Poetry on the Picket Line*. The direct connection with politics is twofold, because most of the poems are on topical political themes, and because it is used by the poets on actual picket lines, with all proceeds of sale going to strike funds.

Here are two poems from the collection:

Not in my ballot box

by Michelle Madsen

When did you last see the leaves turn?
Watch green leach to yellow in the wind?
Vote for life, mark the holes in the path.
The seasons change. Sometimes we don't see it.
The deserts bloom, glaciers melt or freeze.
The earth turns, regardless.

Regardless the earth turns, blind to the tar
grubbing its lungs or apes switching tools for
limbs, busy with the business of eliminating.
I watch the leaves crisp.
Their veins burst in exhaustion, hurtling to an end.
One day empathy will flow

Easily for trees. We'll lay memorials to the mess
On the path, plastic candles keep vigil
til batteries die, illuminating notes pinned to melting
bodies.
After the leaves go,
we quiz the bare branches, asking
how they will cover their nakedness.

They are empty now. Regardless
the world turns. When will it be
spring again, we wonder?
We bombed the trees, their
sap stains the street. They hid our
enemies. Nameless, faceless.

Glued to screens, we wonder how this came to be.
Cold metal kisses the needles of the Christmas tree,
tickles hope's frozen toes.
I heard that this year the escapees asked for
lessons from Houdini. How to unpick a lock.
Hold your breath underwater. Disappear.

I heard they got lace underwear,
well-meaning thongs,
the odd sock.
I hear others coming now
Precision whining
tipped for an unknown target.

Eyeless travellers blast through borders
We never asked for them
to come, but let them.
They don't knock.

Not Entitled

by Nadia Drews

You are not entitled,
Your claim has been suspended,
You did not attend,
You were informed,
You do not qualify,
You did not submit,
You did not declare,
You are not entitled.

You are not entitled,
Your mother wore curlers in the street,
Your claim has been suspended,
You did not attend,
Your dad was redundant,
You were informed,
You did not submit,
You were seen bending down,
You did not declare.

If you want to appeal
You can seek advice,
A decision has been made.
You are not entitled.

You can seek further advice

Culture Matters is fortunate to have support from the labour movement – the anthology is sponsored by PCS, RMT and SERTUC. Poetry on the Picket Line is a squad of writers prepared to turn up on picket lines and read poetry. Something a bit different, and it usually goes down well.

The poets do what it says on the tin. They turn up at pickets and demos and read poems – with a mic, without a mic, through a loudhailer, whatever. Pickets are generally pretty pleased and surprised to see them. They appreciate the support, and some of them even appreciate the poetry! As Billy Bragg says about the anthology, it's "Poetry with principles. Poetry with a point. Poetry on the picket line. That's where it should be."

One of These Dead Places

One of the voices rarely heard in modern poetry is that of working-class women, in terms of both the impact of major historical events on their identity, health and happiness, as well as their day-to-day experiences of work, men and motherhood.

In *One of These Dead Places*, Jane Burn – who is a supermarket cashier for half the week – has told her story and more, in a series of poems which are both personal and political. She has also illustrated the poems with a beautifully imaginative series of illustrations, which add depth and detail to the collection. Here are three of them:

Who do you sponge off?

by Jane Burn

Do you work in a strip club?
You're not wearing mink knickers, are you?
Do you have any knickers in that material?
Just take the fucking picture. I know nothing.
Are you running away from something? Kill a cat
and save a bird. You look like you're ready for bed!
Ghastly. He looks as if he is on drugs. Do you still
throw spears? No wonder you are deaf. Cowboys.
All I get is fancy stuff. It looks like a tart's bedroom.
Vast waste of space. They're complaining
they're unemployed. Every time someone sets off
a gun. Provided you don't travel in something
called economy class. Aren't most of you descended
from pirates? You are a woman, aren't you?
It took a lot of killing. I might catch some ghastly
disease.

Just get me a beer! The Cantonese will eat it.
I don't know where they are going to integrate
in places like Glasgow and Sheffield.
So this is feminist corner. You'll go home
with slitty eyes. Melt them down. You all look
like Dracula's daughters. Do people trip up
over you? I shall have to give up polo.

Most Excellent Order of the British Empire

By Jane Burn

Most excellent imperialism, possession and
rule Britannia! Britannia rules the colonies,

rules the territories and remember Britons
never, never, never shall be slaves – only take slaves,
sell slaves, kill slaves. Britain first, at heaven's
command –

for God and the Bengal Famine. No need to feed
Bangladeshi people. After all, like Churchie said,
there was a war on. Beastly people, beastly religious
habits,

breeding like rabbits, For God and the Empire,
one thousand Amritsar dead. The Empire on which
the sun never sets decided famine was God's way
of punishing lazy Paddies. Blest isle and their Boer
and Kenyan gulags – all those stolen lives – this
pleasant

sceptered land was using concentration camps
long before the Nazis. Still more majestic shall you rise,
rubbing pepper into Cypriot children's eyes –
Pax Britannica. Historical amnesia. Airbrush the past.
Not war crimes. No trials. Manly hearts to guard the fair!
Hunger, fear, torture, they imprisoned all the peasants in
Malay –

Most Excellent Order of massacres. Tie a medal
to a pretty ribbon – wear a fancy hat, receive your pat
on the head from the Queen, smile for the camera,
forget what these honours actually mean. The truth
shall never be on England's pleasant pastures seen –
tread carefully upon England's mountains green!

Milk Snatchers

by Jane Burn

You can spot the poor kids – they
are the ones who don't say no. Drink
an extra bottle, thrill at the top inch
of settled cream. They take

an extra bottle. Don't say *eeeew*,
pierce the foil lids with little blue straws,
pay no heed to the sun-warmth,
soaked through the glass.

One of These Dead Places is a vital collection for our time. Are things worse than the 80s? Have a read, then decide – you won't be disappointed by the vivid, imaginative writing.

From Aberfan t Grenfell

This collection from Mike Jenkins shows that his skills in dialect poetry continue to shine as brightly as ever, as he evokes a bravura array of voices from his Merthyr Tydfil *bro*. Using his work to give speech to people without power, Jenkins dramatises in his poetry the characters and struggles of a community – but also a community's surviving capacity to raise its voices against the power-structures which cause it to suffer. Compassionate and incisive in equal measure, *From Aberfan t Grenfell* is required reading in an era of austerity. Here are two poems from the collection:

Idden smog

by Mike Jenkins

I aften get out of this town,
carn see beyond ower valley,
even if I stand on a mountain
it jest makes me wanna leave.

It's like there's pollution
on'y I can feel,
cloggin up my throat
so I can breathe.

See the Taff in flood
as it's rushin for the sea,
I wanna be like that river
urryin away so quickly.

Ev'rythin's appenin somewhere else,
always lookin towards the city.
I wanna get proper grades
an study for a degree.

The same ol streets,
same endless talk o the weather,
sound o voices dronin on,
gnats at the 'eight of summer.

The fewture's a ticket, no return:
people talk about communittee,
but wha's the point without work,
with an idden smog inside me?

From Aberfan t Grenfell

by Mike Jenkins

When I seen tha fire
blazin through-a flats
like they woz wax,
I thought o Pantglas
children an teachers,
graves of rubble an sludge.

When I seen ow
the Tories didn wanna know,
I thought o Lord Robens
an George Bloody Thomas,
of ower Council oo'd bin tol
of the tip movin long ago.

When I seen them people
come from all over
with clothes an food,
I thought of rescuers
from all over-a Valleys,
come t search
f life in-a ruins.

When I seen tha block,
a ewge charred remains
a dark memorial t the pooer
kept there like battree ens,
I thought of-a tip come down:
ow ev'ry sum an song
never knew an answer or endin.

Superbly illuminated by Alan Perry's artwork, this book shows that, in Mike Jenkins' hands, poetry is not only an unflinching mirror but also a righteous hammer.

The Trouble with Monsters

This collection, by Christopher Norris, takes aim at some monsters of our present bad times – among them Donald

Trump, Boris Johnson, Jacob Rees-Mogg, Theresa May, George Osborne, Benjamin Netanyahu, and assorted hangers-on.

They are held to account here in verse-forms that are tight and sharply focused despite the intense pressure of feeling behind them. The satire is unsparing and the dominant tone is one of anger mixed with sorrow, mixed with a vivid sense of the evils and suffering brought about by the corruptions of political office. Here is a poem from the collection:

To the Wrong-Siders

by Chris Norris

You've got the dosh, you bankers, but we've got
The hands-on savvy, things we've learned
The tough way, both by catching up with what
Marx had to say, and by hard-earned
Experience; stuff you do, you banker lot,
But seem routinely unconcerned
To figure out because the master-plot
You bank on might be overturned
If word got round and we were primed to spot
The hedge-fund hikes, the bridges burned.

You politicians, you with lots of clout
Who fix things, line your pockets, lie
To save your skins, boss everyone about
Except the boss-class; by-and-by
We're going to kick you scheming bastards out
Because we've figured how and why
You came to pull that con-trick off without
Sufficient brain-power to apply
For any sort of job save lobby-tout
Or weapons salesman on the sly.

Then there's all the arms-business CEOs
In league with you who'll trade
With any blood-crazed tyrant (lots of those
Around just now) or any renegade
Regime so long as it's a deal that goes
To further swell the pile you've made
From conflicts stoked and armed by devil knows
What back-hand bribes, and with the aid
Of ministers not anxious to disclose
How life-style so outstrips pay-grade.

We'll hunt you down and then we'll make you pay,
All you sharp-suited types who kill
Or maim kids by the dozen every day
When missiles miss, as missiles will,
Yet put your own kids off the scent when they,
As children do, attempt to fill
The day-job details in: you'll hardly say
'Well, kids, I have this special skill
At mechanized mass-murder, so hooray,
There's always lots more blood to spill!'

And then you tabloid journalists, you scum
Who thrive, dung-beetle-like, on fare
Most readers puke at; one day soon we'll drum
You out, announce you've done your share
Of harm already with your drive to dumb
The issues down, so best prepare
To keep the peace, keep noses clean, keep mum,
Or maybe even show you care

By blowing Murdoch Inc to kingdom come
With inside knowledge if you dare!

And what's to say of you, you Eton-bred
And Oxbridge-educated thick
Rich heirs of rank or privilege who head
For a safe seat, then take your pick
Of cabinet posts, and then go off to bed
With racist nut-jobs keen to kick
The migrants out, deport all Muslims, shred
The social contract, and – to tick
Your last box – have the tabloids seeing red
Should broadsheets ridicule your schtick.

You academics, don't imagine you'll
'Scape whipping or get off the hook,
No matter if you did some out-of-school
Campaigning stuff, or sometimes took
Time off 'research' to join a march, retool
Your own self-image, cock a snook
At campus activists or, height of cool,
Now dedicate your latest book
'To all those comrades, past and present, who'll
Find faults they'll kindly overlook'.

And lastly you, the mischief-making clan
Of old New Labour types who've had
A spell in office, sold out, and now plan
Your comeback with some tips to add,
Like 'send the unions packing when you can',
'Keep business sweet', 'be quick to glad-
Hand CBI chaps', and 'make sure to pan
Those Trots or Corbynistas mad
Enough to still keep faith with what began
When have-nots twigged why times were bad'.

So you're the bunch lined up to get the boot
First off when crunch-time comes, when it's
A case no longer of which lies best suit
Your purpose, or which scam best fits
Your game-plan, but of finding out a route
From what's long kept us in the pits
Of hope betrayed where slogans substitute
For action to what finally permits
The struggles of the past to bear late fruit
Before the fascist backlash hits.

You'll need some help, so here's a few quick tips:
Get out more, change friends, get street-wise,
Read Marx, keep watching politicians' lips
(They move? You'll know they're telling lies),
Learn dialectics, note stock-market dips,
Ignore what trusty guides advise,
Stay tuned, forget old maxims, get to grips
With false ideas, and analyze
Your preconceptions lest they should eclipse
The light that newly strikes your eyes.

Of course we offer no firm guarantees
You'll make the grade: you may just lack
The brains, or stamina, or want to please
Your latest boss, or soon head back
To old thought-habits, or mislay the keys
Marx gave you, or just fail to crack
The codes that let our class-oppressors seize

Their chance to cultivate the knack
Of catching us in weaknesses like these
That throw us constantly off track.

Yet, not to be excluded, there's the small
But crucial room for choice by grace
Of which you chronic loiterers might haul
Yourself out of the limbo-space
Where you've so long consented to play ball
With fools and rogues. So learn to face
This simple truth: that when the empires fall,
From Rome to Wall Street, there's no place
For those who hang on till the curtain-call,
With options open just in case.

Ruses and Fuses

In this follow-up collection to *Muses and Bruises*, Fran Lock takes us to the rebellious, inspiring heart of English dissent with her portrayals of Levellers and Diggers such as Gerard Winstanley, and their fight with the authorities over property rights. Here is one of her poems:

turning earth

by Fran Lock

i.m. Gerrard Winstanley

god holds us all in the hollow of his hand, costing
our melt-weight. from boy to man. stripling into
ingot. i see it now, we are more precious, we are
not less base. our swords, they are not morphing
into ploughshares, and every cutting blade insists
upon its own utopian intercourse. god is not found,
but made. these yeomen, apprentice lads. oh, we
have smithied his kingdom, reckoned it level with
hot, dull force. they call this treason. we'd turn
the stifled earth and let it breathe. the ground, not
broke, but opened after all. god holds us close.
they only see what we tear down. but god will
know, will know us for waywardens of the soil.
the soul. brothers, i dream of a spring without
omission, rising blue and green from winter's
cryptic jinx. sisters, i dream of a spring without
remission; a love that shrugs the slog of mongrel
toil. god holds, god knows. man is not made
for minting open mouths. man is not made for
driving stakes into the frozen ground. they skim
the fat, we till a trough of stones. man should
be held, man should be known by what he
grows: the shoot, the word, the human good.
we planted christ. came capsized and aspiring,
sweated our tenure in stockades, and stung
into hunger, ate grass. we planted christ. not
christ as a bright dividing line, but christ, an
immovable root that binds the chalky earth
together. crisis ripens a fist like a snail in beer.
we rage and are imperfect, yet we know, we
are vouchsafed, and all are saved. for it is hope
that we make grow.

As with her first collection, Fran's *Ruses and Fuses* is adorned with the wonderful collages of Steev Burgess. Together they rail powerfully against today's right-wing global threat to the livelihoods of working-class people.

Power Play

The gentlest, most indirect expression of political poetry in the current **Culture Matters** catalogue is to be found in *Power Play* by Mair De-Gare Pitt, with images by Jill Powell. Here is a poem from it:

A Minister of Health

by Mair De-Gare Pitt

His grammar deconstructs
when he is lying
Sentence-structure disintegrates
when he is lying.
He stutters out evasions
ah-ah-ah
when he is misleading the public.
Lying to us, that is.
We could fall about laughing
but he holds the more-than-purse strings
on us when we are weak

ill
mind-dark
lost.

He can snip the strings
and watch us tumble.
He is IDIOT FATE
the blind SCISSORS-MAN
the lying AXE-MAN.
He stammers like a GENTLEMAN.
Sssnake-head.
“Angels and ministers of grace defend us.”

From the very first poem this collection focuses on the human, and through its brilliant lyricism elevates the experiences it describes into something like beauty. The collection understands that the real way to political change is by moving people, by getting hold of their hearts, and by writing insightfully and memorably, which the poems do again and again.

As with all **Culture Matters** publications, there are some beautiful accompanying images, in this case by Jill Powell, which widen and deepen the meanings of the poems. Mair and Jill, as well as Mike Jenkins and Alan Perry, have gone on tour with their poetry books, organising readings by the poet and an exhibition of the original artworks by the artist.

Shabbigentile

Finally, our latest publication is *Shabbigentile*, by Alan Morrison. Here's one of the poems:

Kipling Buildings

by Alan Morrison

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are spy cameras, a deliberate delay
Of the appointment time in an attempt
To break your spirit, a protracted wait
In a claustrophobic, clinical-looking room,
A neutrally decorated purgatory
Silent except for the rumbling water cooler,
Being observed by unseen deciders
Prolonging your agony in a pot-plant garden ...

If you can keep your head during a gruelling
Interrogation at Independent Assessment
Services (formerly Atos Solutions),
Being asked trick questions, being observed,
Recorded, monitored, not listened to,
Only heard, not being respected or
Empathised with, but being judged
In an unacknowledged kangaroo court
Of icy stares and sporadic mouse-clicks
For each of the ticks in the boxes on
The assessor's screen turned away from you
So you can't see – while being observed
Just as a troubled adolescent by
A cryptic psychiatrist's invisible observers
Behind two-way glass; these desk-perched
Harpies who prey on the sick and disabled
For sport, will pick off your weak points
And press all your buttons to get the most
Pool-muddying responses to cloud your claim ...

If you can keep your PIP when all about you
Are losing theirs, it'll only be a pyrrhic
Victory, a temporary reprieve, just putting off
The inevitable sting of a future trap-sprung
Reassessment, opportunity for symptom-
Tampering and a spot of goalpost-changing
To ensure next time you're lower scoring ...

If you can keep your nerve at Independent
Assessment Services nestled deep
In the grey, mauve and periwinkle plush
Of Kipling Buildings poorly disguised
As a clinic but whose commercial shape
And façade indicate that a bank once
Operated there, on the nondescript corner
Of a pigeon-grey street in an unexplored
Part of Portsmouth, then you will be damned,
My son, damned with a disability,
But worse, an invisible one, and the points
You'll score will be in binary numbers –
The price for their bounties, their thirty pieces

It's a very fine collection. As Peter Raynard writes in the Introduction:

“The state of the nation we are in, with all its uncertainty, chaos, and sheer pork-barrel stomach-churning venal governance, is covered in this collection of searing poems. They are poems that will make you burn with anger but also with hope. Hope, that the richness of working-class culture, with its ability to get beyond conservative notions of a lost Olde Englande, has always had to adapt, so will always be revolutionary in ways the powerful will never be able to overcome.”

You can buy these poetry books on the 'Shop and Support' section of the **Culture Matters** website. You can also buy a share in **Culture Matters**. Please do both! We need all the help we can get to keep us afloat, and maintain our mission to promote a progressive political approach to the arts and all other cultural activities, particularly within the labour movement.

Finally, thanks to all the poets for permission to republish their poems.

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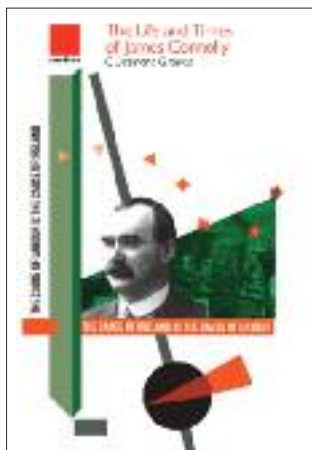




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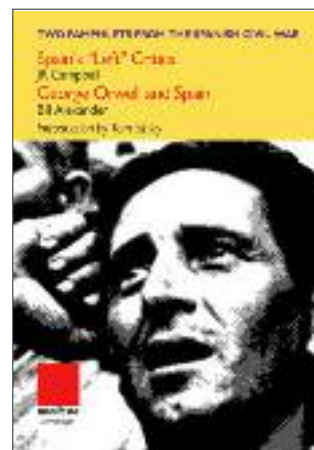


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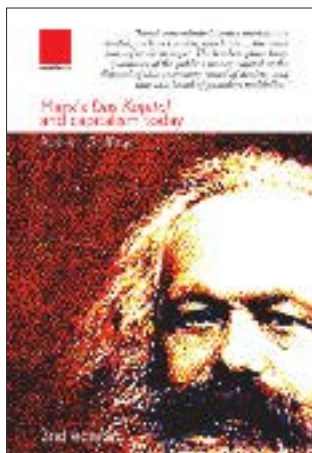
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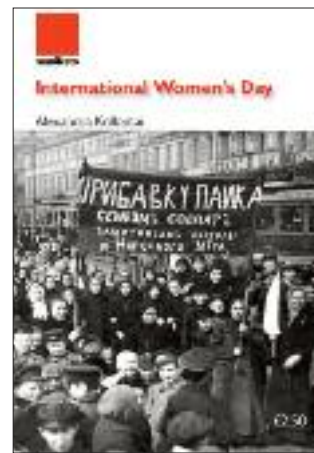
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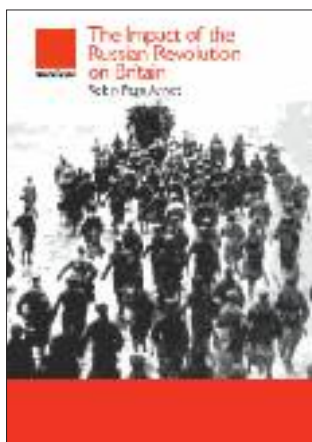


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