

# COMMUNISTREVIEW94



**Women and austerity** Mollie Brown

**The British catering industry** C Ritchie

**Approaches to current imperialism** Isabel Monal

**China will shake the whole world** Marc Vandepitte and Ng Sauw Tjhoi

**John Heartfield: photo monteur and revolutionary** Nick Wright

**Reviews** Graham Stevenson Kenny Coyle Martin Levy

**Soul Food** Mike Quille

## WOMEN AND AUSTERITY





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Picture above right: **John Heartfield**

Rote Frontkämpferbund emblem

Front Cover: Women and austerity: Hayley Squires as struggling single mother Katie in Ken Loach's acclaimed 2016 film, *I, Daniel Blake* (available at Amazon and HMV).



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# MARTIN LEVY

## EDITORIAL

I January 2020

“... Engels is most explicit in calling universal suffrage an instrument of bourgeois rule. Universal suffrage, he says, obviously taking account of the long experience of German Social-Democracy, is ‘the gauge of the maturity of the working class. It cannot and never will be anything more in the present-day state.’”<sup>1</sup>

THE ABOVE quotation from Engels’ *Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, cited by Lenin, is particularly apposite for taking stock of the outcome of the recent British general election. When millions of working class voters abstain, or vote for a party, the Conservatives, which represents the very antithesis of their own class interests, rather than vote for their own class party, the Labour Party, then that indicates a low level of maturity, *ie* educated class consciousness, on the part of the working class. As the Communist Party’s Political Committee has pointed out, the politics of identity have in this case triumphed over those of class.<sup>2</sup>

Why did Engels make that statement, and Lenin reaffirm it? Because democracy in capitalist society is always limited by the power of the ruling class, which controls not only the levers of the state, but the mass media and institutions through which opinions are formed and massaged. In modern-day Britain, it’s not just a matter of giving positive publicity about the Conservatives, Liberal Democrats and nationalists, and negative publicity – even downright lies – about Labour, but of the promoting the false idea that class doesn’t much matter any more, an idea which is also deeply rooted in the Parliamentary Labour Party itself.

Since the Labour Party was founded in 1906, it has been the sole governing party for around 30 years *in toto*. Despite providing some important advances for the working class, its administrations have always sought to manage capitalism in the interests of monopoly and finance capital, and to sustain British imperialism. Consequently they have always ultimately foundered, through disillusioning large numbers of working-class supporters.

Labour’s 2019 manifesto was a distinct shift away from such commitments, and would, if implemented, have benefited the working class through important social reforms and improved opportunities for developing struggle. While it still represented concessions to imperialism – particularly over NATO, Trident and the EU – and did not challenge capitalist rule, it was sufficient of a threat to ruling-class economic interests for Labour and Jeremy Corbyn to be demonised in the BBC and the billionaire mass media. On top of that, the disillusionment from the Blair-Brown years was still present, compounded with further working-class disillusionment over what was seen as a reversal of the commitment to respect the outcome of the EU referendum.

What we are dealing with here is not only the direct influence of the ruling class on working people, but the indirect influence, through the penetration of capitalist ideology into ranks of the labour movement, including its leading circles. The only means by which such influence can be countered is the development of class struggle, working from the bottom upwards,

seeking to draw in the widest ranks of working people, and at the same time educating those in struggle about the interconnections between different issues, and their origin in the basic structure of capitalist society. A key issue has to be organising the unorganised, particularly in the private sector, where the trade union movement is relatively weak.

These are the themes taken up in the second part of the Political Committee’s statement, relating to the immediate tasks for the labour movement;<sup>3</sup> and indeed they form an essential part of the Communist Party’s strategic programme, *Britain’s Road to Socialism*, an updated version of which is about to be released. The Party places this programme before the labour movement to show that the fight for reforms under capitalism must not be an end in itself, but rather an important staging post in a process which will lead to the revolutionary replacement of capitalism by socialism. That does not mean that we abjure elections; but rather that, in the absence of mass democratic working class mobilisation, they cannot lead to the construction of socialism.

100 years ago this year, Britain’s Communist Party was founded. As featured in previous issues of this journal, there will be a whole series of initiatives throughout Britain in 2020 to celebrate the Centenary, including major events in London on July 31 and August 1, the date of the founding congress in 1920. Though never a mass party like the Labour Party, the Communist Party has kept the flame of revolutionary transformation alive, together with: leading the fights against unemployment, colonialism, racism, fascism, NATO and nuclear weapons; seeking to give leadership to workers in struggle, and to win solidarity for them; building solidarity with the socialist countries and national liberation movements; and engaging in the battle of ideas, including through cultural work. A key vehicle in building solidarity and fighting the battle of ideas has been the daily *Morning Star*, founded on this very day 90 years ago as the *Daily Worker*, and providing unparalleled support to the labour and progressive movement. Its £90,000 Appeal deserves full support.

*Communist Review* was refounded in 1988 specifically to engage in the battle of ideas. In 2020 we shall be publishing a number of articles relating to the Centenary, but we shall not neglect key current issues. Here we address just a few of those: the effect of austerity on women (hence the front cover image from Ken Loach’s film); working conditions in the catering industry; the nature of modern imperialism; and the truth about People’s China’s development, encircled as it is by US military bases. Cultural matters are represented by a review of the current John Heartfield exhibition, and by *Soul Food*’s focus on a collection of working class poetry from Ireland. Finally we have three book/magazine reviews, on communism internationally, the British Communist Party and race, and the new *Kenya Socialist*.

### Notes and References

- 1 VI Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, in *Collected Works*, Vol 25, p 384.
- 2 ‘Politics of identity – British, Scottish or European – rather than class win the day’, in *Morning Star*, 21/22 December 2019.
- 3 ‘In the coming period, resisting racism and attacks on workers will be key’, in *Morning Star*, 23 December 2019.



# MOLLIE BROWN WOMEN AND AUSTERITY



“Baby dies in UK prison after inmate gives birth alone in cell.”<sup>i</sup>

**T**HE ABOVE is a headline, not from a Victorian era news rag, but from 4 October 2019. Let's put that into perspective: in 21st century Britain, the 4th richest country in the world – where is the duty of care? How has this tragic event occurred? The answer is simple: austerity.

The Con-Dem coalition government of 2010 started the biggest implementation of cutbacks in public service provision the country has faced since before the Second World War. But it was only the beginning. The harsh measures forced on the people over the past 9 years have destroyed families, adults, children, communities, opportunities and worst of all hope, and there is one group in society that has suffered in just about every aspect of their lives. Irrespective of class and employment status, law-abiding or not, young or old, it is without a doubt that ALL WOMEN are vulnerable to at least one effect of austerity, with many plunged into some of the most unequal, abhorrent situations that we could imagine.

Women in a class-divided society face two struggles, relating to their class, and their sex. I want to examine the surreptitious ways that all women are suffering. The effects of the austerity-driven changes are not always self-evident, even to the victims. But the effects are certainly real and can be felt by practically all women in so many different ways.

### **Universal Credit and policy changes**

The WASPI<sup>2</sup> women are still bravely and relentlessly fighting their battle against the government and the shameless theft of their pensions, resulting in women way past their expected retirement age having to go back into work. On top of that, they are being faced with the prospect of dealing with the cruel gig economy and the arduous benefits system.

Many are aware of the abhorrent changes to the so called 'welfare' system, the introduction of Universal Credit and the benefits cap, because the ramifications are faced daily. Most UC claimants are women in low-paid work, in precarious employment such as zero-hours contracts, or working in the public sector, where they have faced pay cuts and freezes since 2010. The introduction of the two-child rule, payments to the higher earner only, the six-week initial assessment period, and the cap on frontline benefits such as housing benefits, together with the costs of council tax, have all compounded this.

There is a fairly widespread awareness of the catastrophic circumstances women encounter during these 'transition' periods. Workers at the Manchester Action on Street Health (MASH) charity have reported that more

women are turning to sex work in a bid to survive low payments and the assessment time, or to repay government advance loans.<sup>3</sup> This is only part of a much wider problem and is by no means an isolated report.

The gig economy has an impact on everyone – yet statistics tell us time and again that women make up the majority of single parents. It is claimed we live in a meritocratic society and those that strive and work hard succeed, but this simply isn't the case for women who choose to return to education. A society claiming to deliver full equality for women should surely uphold a woman's right to choose the order in which she lives her life. At a younger age, many women could not or chose not to continue education, build a career or set up successful self-employment. For whatever reason, a woman may decide to take such a step later in life. She should be supported, and her efforts applauded. It is after all a laborious task.

The system in which women live now not only fails to celebrate and support these choices. It is purposefully designed to frustrate them, but to what ends?

The new and complicated UC system considers all student finance as 'unearned' income. This is deducted 100% from any UC awarded. The previous system recognised that a loan is a loan that had to be repaid, but also that many elements of welfare benefits – such as the child element in housing benefit or child tax credit – were designed to keep children out of poverty regardless of the parental circumstances. Therefore, these elements always remained fully intact when considering student finance income. The change is already having an impact on single-parent students and is systematically excluding women with children from the higher education system. The DWP claims that this policy change is to make 'work' pay.<sup>4</sup> In reality, it is a direct attack on women who are trying to enter the higher education system, and it would be dangerous and naïve to consider it to be merely an error or mistake. For the Tories, there is a reason not to educate the working-class: education after all, is power.

Self-employment paints just as grim a picture. Although there is full UC entitlement for the first 12 months of self-employment, it is widely recognised that it can take two or even four years for a business to turn a profit. To be considered 'gainfully' self-employed, an applicant must meet a requirement called the 'Minimum Income Floor' (MIF).<sup>5</sup> Anything over that is deducted from any UC award. If the MIF is not reached, then the applicant is not considered to be in gainful employment and must seek alternative work to increase income. This is assessed by monthly inspection of accounts.

This has unleashed a myriad of problems. Firstly, those who have chosen self-employment are often paid sporadically. Many will not even present an invoice until a work project is completed; this could be months down the line, which is precisely why the previous system allowed projection of earnings on a yearly basis and amendment on completion of a tax return. These new procedures are forcing women back into the cycle of insecure work involving bogus self-employment and zero-hours contracts. Women can find themselves juggling 2-3 different jobs for sometimes upwards of 60 hours a week, unable to get union support, at the same time struggling with childcare arrangements and having to attend monthly UC assessments where failure to comply will lead to sanctions.

Compare this situation with that of the massive companies – often paying the minimum wage, employing workers on zero-hours contracts or the ‘self-employed’ – which are able to systematically avoid paying the tax due on their massive profits. It is becoming clearer for whom this system works and it isn’t us.

Problems such as those above are the bread and butter issues women face on a daily basis – the things that we don’t talk about nearly enough but are clearly evident. Just about everyone will have a story to tell. This is just the tip of the iceberg, the visible symptoms of a far more dangerous epidemic that is lurks beneath the surface.

### **Women and domestic abuse (DA)**

Any discussion of the still subordinate position of women must take into account systems of power that keep them there, and the question of why society in the 21st century is still based on patriarchy, a systematic promotion of men’s superiority over women. Even now, not all men in our society share the concept that women are their equal, that a woman’s voice is just as important as theirs. I have experienced first-hand, in emotionally driven situations, be it a political debate or a disagreement of another kind, when a man has said to my partner, “You need to get your lass under control.” Or when I have got emotional about something that a man considers irrational, I’ve been asked, “What’s wrong with you, are you on your period?” Even in political meetings, when a woman speaks the men have been known to look at their watches and start shuffling papers as if to suggest that women go on for too long. What’s worse is that these actions and remarks have come mainly from men that consider themselves ‘modern’ men, feminists even. If the men that are aware of the inequalities that women face still fail to recognise their own shortcomings, then, evidently, there is still a long road ahead.

Let’s be clear that domestic abuse (DA) in any form is not acceptable or excusable anywhere in the 21st century, but the society we live in still has patriarchy deeply embedded. Gender roles are assigned and instilled into us from a very young age. We witness this every day from clothing designs, career paths at school, job advertisements and how we should look and behave. I know men, even within my family, who still hold the archaic belief that if a young man shows his emotions, he is letting himself down. Depression and failure are for the weak. This presents a whole set of fears and anxieties for young men today.

Up until quite recently the benefits system had provided some amelioration but since the onset of austerity this has gone, resulting in increasing numbers of men resorting to maintaining their sense of identity and worth through stereotypically masculine behaviour, which can have

negative or even deadly consequences for women. Although it would be wrong to attach the blame for DA solely to societal pressures such as financial strain, unemployment and substance abuse, it clearly does exacerbate an already toxic situation.

One of the consequences of UC is the normalisation of the patriarchal society, the assumption that one person should hold control over finances. This is putting women in further subordinate positions, designating the main earner, predominantly men (and don’t forget the gender pay gap still exists), the award of the full benefits payment. On talking about her experiences of interactions with men incarcerated for killing an intimate partner, Davina James-Hanman said:

“[T]he root causes of abuse ... permeate a society in which ‘wife beating’ is viewed as an inevitability, even a punchline. In the early days I used to have paranoid fantasies that there was some kind of secret abuser’s handbook, so similar were the stories victims brought to refuges. Eventually I realised that there is, and it’s not secret at all – it’s called mainstream culture.”<sup>6</sup>

In 2017, 105 women were killed by a person they knew – 64 of them by their current or former intimate partner, and 17 by a male family member. For the first time, a study has been carried out which revealed that 58 of these cases were ‘overkill’, where the force or method used was greater than required to kill.<sup>7</sup>

### **Police and funding**

It is very difficult to obtain accurate figures when it comes to DA; indeed, it is one of the most unreported crimes in Britain. Even the Crime Survey of England and Wales, which is a victimisation survey, still has shortcomings, if a victim is unaware of the abuse or too afraid to discuss it. But these statistics do indicate that, in the year ending March 2018, an estimated 1.3m women experienced some form of DA, although only 18% who had experienced partner abuse in the previous 12 months had reported it to the police.<sup>8</sup> Even so, the police were receiving an average of 100 calls an hour relating to DA.

Police numbers have been slashed by over 20,000 officers since 2009, taking us back to numbers in the 1980s.<sup>9</sup> These cutbacks have consequences. Inevitably, response times have become slower, in some cases longer than 24 hours, depending on the nature of the report. One of Boris Johnson’s first pledges as PM was to put 20,000 new police officers on the streets. But this was to be over 3 years, and since the police can’t even handle the calls they already receive, how could they deal with potentially more than five times as many calls that women could make if they felt adequately supported?

When women are systematically failed by the systems in place to protect them, they may well end up being forced to stay in abusive relationships. The few women that do find themselves in a position to escape are left with nothing but the clothes on their backs and absolutely no access to support.

Since 2010 funding for women’s refuges in England, Scotland and Wales has been cut by nearly £7m, down two-thirds.<sup>10</sup> In 2018, the May government announced plans to remove women’s welfare provision from the benefits system, but after mass campaigning backtracked on what would have meant women fleeing DA no longer being able to use housing benefit to pay for refuge. This is a clear indication of the

Tory government's ignorance of the crisis that affects so many women; and, despite the fact the cut did not go ahead, the funding is still a fraction of what is so desperately needed. Women's Aid reported that, in 2017, on one day alone 94 women and 92 children were turned away from refuge services in England. The situation is only getting worse.<sup>11</sup> These women end up back in abusive relationships and no doubt some of them make up the figures for murder at the hands of a partner or ex-partner.

It is often wrongly assumed that women who suffer DA are exclusively working-class. We visualise a stereotypical image of a quiet, timid woman with bruises, often from urban economically deprived and heavily populated areas. This isn't strictly the case.<sup>12</sup> Financial control is one of the more common types of abuse. Financial pressure is one of the main triggers, but not limited to lack of financial security. It was reported that, during the financial crash, DA rates among professional women soared. This again can be related to financial changes and an inferiority complex, which comes back to the patriarchal mentality of culture: a man, unable to accept a woman being the main earner in the household, seeking other ways to assert his power. Even women that are high earners don't necessarily have control over the domestic finances. So, although the economic dynamics are different, the reasons of entrapment are the same: manipulation, fear, stigma, or the victim is in denial that the dispute is taking place.

It is not unheard of for a woman to hold court in the boardroom and then spend the evening at home on the floor in a crumpled mess after yet another abusive attack from a partner. Moreover, substance and alcohol abuse in the more wealthy classes of society are as much problems as they are in working-class communities, perhaps worse as money is no object. The figures of DA in professional women are on the increase, where previously it was a very under-reported crime. This could be the outcome of capitalist society, individual and isolated lifestyles: less community cohesion, fragmented communities, enables DA to go undetected.

Rural communities are not exempted from austerity: public services have been scraped back to a minimum; public transport is poor; the police service has become inadequate, and has little or no DA training; and there is a lack of police stations, health centres and community centres. A National Rural Crime Network recent report<sup>13</sup> claims that DA victims in rural areas are lacking support that could be the difference between life and death, and that victims are likely to stay with partners for 25% longer than in urban areas. Rural communities are often extremely patriarchal, following ancient unwritten rules that men hold the positions of power. This enables the control and coercion of women to take place without question and behind 'closed doors'.<sup>14</sup>

### **Criminalisation of women**

It doesn't end there. A further symptom of austerity is the worrying increase in women being introduced to the prison system. This is more evident in the 'North' as austerity widens the north-south divide. The Prison Reform Trust reported that Cleveland in the North-East of England has the highest imprisonment rate of women across England and Wales.<sup>15</sup> Many of the young women that go to prison see their children removed and taken into care. Tracey McMahon, who set up the SHE Project (Support & Housing East Lancashire), a service which houses female ex-prisoners, commented:

"Austerity has included cuts in youth services which have contributed to young people ending up in the criminal justice system. ...

"It is linked to social economic factors. Large areas in the north east and north west were former industrial areas. We are now seeing third-generation problems because of deindustrialisation in the early '80s when mining, steel, manufacturing, fishing, coal and the car industry closed down.

"It is almost like we have swapped manufacturing for poverty, crime and drugs. Our young people are marginalised and forgotten. People up north have financial, social, and health-based inequalities. The study's findings are also linked to cuts to legal aid which have been more directed at women."<sup>16</sup>

A further issue of the criminalisation of women is the attendance system in our schools. Until 2013 a parent could take a child out of school for a short period of time for occasions such as family holidays. However, this policy has changed in recent years, and it is now down to the discretion of the school to give such authorisation. It is evident that not all schools use the same measures in deciding whether leave is authorised. Many factors can be considered such as previous attendance and attainment. If the school fails to give authorisation, then the parent is issued with a fine. If this is not paid, then the local authority decides if it is to be withdrawn or the case proceed to a magistrate's court. The outcome, if the parent is found guilty, can be a fine of up to £2500 and 3 months imprisonment,<sup>17</sup> and certainly a criminal record.

But how does this link to austerity? The most prominent inequality is that private schools are exempt from this, the law only applying to those who go to state-funded schools. Secondly, a mother being summoned to court for taking a child on holiday no longer has access to legal aid. To fight her case, she would have to be able to afford a solicitor. Let's be honest, if she could afford a solicitor, she could probably afford the fine, and furthermore, she could probably afford the ridiculous prices charged for a holiday outside term times. So here we are again back to the question of who is being punished? The multi-billion-pound holiday industry or the parent that wants her child to enjoy the same opportunity afforded by others? The archaic justice system, created mainly by ruling class men, discriminates against people who don't have the financial backing to fight their case, incentivising them to plead guilty in the hope of getting a lesser sentence. What alternative is there for those who have no access to representation? What then for a mother with a criminal record? That record will follow her around like a bad smell and hinder so many aspirations for the future, not to mention the fine that could set her back thousands of pounds she simply doesn't have. Then there's the fear of a custodial sentence ....

### **Women in prison**

Once in the prison environment women are extremely vulnerable. They are often victims of far worse crime in prison – theft and violence – than the crime they have committed. Although they are generally imprisoned to carry out short sentences, many under one month, the effect can be disruptive enough for women to lose their homes, families and jobs. Statistics show that prison is not a deterrent for women's reoffending but increases the rate.<sup>18</sup>

Over the last 10 years prisons have not escaped the cuts

that have devastated public services all over Britain. Since 2011 the Prison Service has lost net 7,000 members of staff; yet the prison population is rising, and is expected to reach close to 90,000 by 2020. This is putting already stretched prisons in dangerous situations with the levels of violence, neglect, self-harm and drug abuse. In England and Scotland 14 prisons are now run privately by G4S, Serco or Sodexo. Despite numerous reports and footage providing mounting evidence that prison privatisation is failing, the recent announcement by the Tory government of plans to build more prisons and increase sentences will surely lead to further failing prisons and more reoffending.

## Conclusions

In this article I have attempted to highlight how there is far more to women being disproportionately affected by austerity than meets the eye. It is clear that, although it is working-class women that bear the brunt of these policies, they are by no means the only victims.

We live in a society where a front-page news article appears that a woman who has been systematically failed by society has had to endure the pain and tragedy of delivering her baby alone in a prison cell. But why is there no outrage? Where is the anger?

Researcher and criminologist Pat Carlen tells us that crimes committed by women are “crimes of the powerless.”<sup>19</sup> They have all been mistreated, failed and abused either by men or the society we live in. It’s hard to argue against that point.

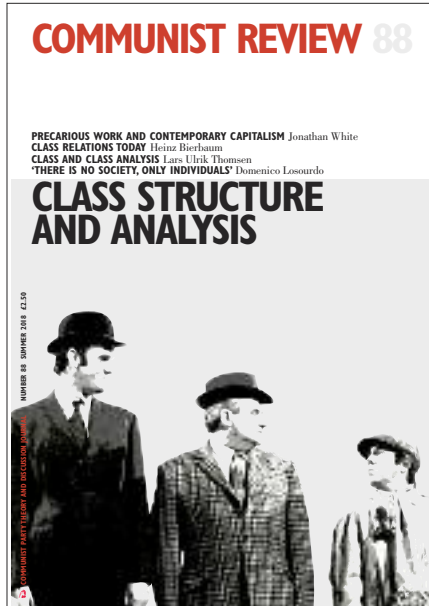
We must refute the dangerous notion that we have reached full equality because there are women in powerful positions. When the real issues that UC presented to women started to come to the fore, the Labour Party tabled a motion in Parliament to pause the roll-out until the problems were fixed. Not only did the majority of Conservative MPs not even turn up to vote, but out of 70 female Tory MPs, only one voted to halt the devastating policy of their own government. 70 female Tory MPs were complicit in allowing the stripping back of legal aid, complicit in the cuts to women’s welfare, complicit in trapping women in abusive relationships and so on. Austerity was never a necessity; it was a political choice. Therefore, these Tory women are not championing feminism; they are champions of capitalism. We cannot assume that individual women in power are the solution, when clearly, many of them are part of the problem. To ensure full equality and emancipation for women, we have to change the system, we have to shift the power to the working-class women in our society. It is essential that we start educating women to challenge and question these attacks. Women must realise that the problems many of us are facing are direct results of austerity, that the issues are not just personal or individual and that, in one way or another, at one time or another, we can all fall victim. As Rosa Luxemburg is reported<sup>20</sup> to have said, “Those who do not move, do not notice their chains” – so let’s move, let’s build the biggest movement of women to fight once again for full liberation and equality. Let’s make sure that the struggle for women’s emancipation continues in full force until we succeed.

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- 20 NB Although this apposite quote is very often attributed to Rosa Luxemburg, no source has ever been found. The earliest definite reference to it seems to be a banner on an opposition demonstration in the GDR on 17 January 1989 (ie on the 70th anniversary of her murder) – see <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/pipermail/ads-l/2015-June/137418.html>.



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# C RITCHIE THE BRITISH CATERING INDUSTRY



The following article describes the general conditions in pub kitchens and high street restaurants where the writer has worked. Working conditions in Chinese, Asian or other minority ethnic restaurants or family-run restaurants may well be different.

**T**HE UK CATERING industry is growing and lucrative, although much of the workforce is poorly paid, employed in unpleasant conditions, with many working semi-legally if not illegally. In this large industry employment is stressful, often tenuous, and with little in the way of pensions, paid holidays, promotion or union representation. Zero-hours ‘contracts’ are often no more than a verbal arrangement and mean insecure short-term work, with no possibility of building any kind of future. The evolution of mobile phones alongside such contracts means that management can sack staff much more easily, although this is not exclusive to the catering trade. Some chefs are given their hours via text message; but if there is tension between the chef and management the hours can be reduced until the text messages abruptly stop. This means that managers can now sack people by not saying anything.

### Some statistics

A cursory look at figures relating to the catering industry shows a fairly strong sector. In 2016, the agricultural and food sector was valued at £113bn.<sup>1</sup> In 2017:

- there were 988,000 catering workers;
- the value of food and drink exports was £22bn;
- the total of consumer expenditure on food, drink and catering was £219bn;
- 3.9m people were employed in the agri-food sector, 13% of national employment.<sup>2</sup>

Other surveys found that the catering industry is ‘labour intensive not capital-intensive’, *ie* manpower not money, but there are problems sustaining a relatively unmechanised industry that is heavily reliant on employees. The difficulties that management have in finding and retaining staff is apocryphal amongst chefs who know it is rarely hard to find a new gig in such a large scale industry.

In 2018 one survey found that the main concerns of “600 UK catering industry professionals ... [were] reduced footfall, finding staff, and increased business rates and competition.”<sup>3</sup> Another found that 18% of managers would be prepared to “cut staff in a bid to absorb extra costs, and although 42% of professionals have no difficulty with recruitment, a quarter find it hard to source and take on chefs.”<sup>4</sup>

### How chefs are made

The catering industry operates hierarchically, like so much else is in Britain. For punters, there is the relative degree of exclusivity, food quality and service. At the top of the restaurant hierarchy are the expensive restaurants run, although not necessarily owned, by celebrity chefs like Ramsay at the Savoy and elsewhere; restaurants run by individuals such as Heston

Blumenthal or Hugh Fearnley Whittingstall; the celebrity chain restaurants like those organised by Rick Stein or Jamie Oliver; then the lesser known local restaurants with long-established reputations. White Euro-chefs with media presence on TV shows *Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares* or *Masterchef* sit at the top of the hierarchy, and punters can bask in the radiance of their celebrity. At the ‘lower end’ of the catering industry, gastro-pubs and bistros are above chain restaurants; whilst bakeries, coffee shops, fast-food chains, local cafés and takeaways, pie and mash shops and chicken shops compete on the high street or retail parks. The top end of this hierarchy is reinforced by mainstream media food critics who manage the expectations of upper-class punters whilst remaining firmly stuck in London and the south-east. The punters’ choice is based on venue, menu, drinks and chefs, combined with a style of service that they feel comfortable with. No-one wants to be self-conscious or feel awkward whilst eating.

There is also the ‘non-commercial’ aspect of caterers working in the NHS, elderly care homes, prisons, respite and hospices, delivering larger-scale food products of modest standards whose competition is with other suppliers rather than neighbouring restaurants.

The quality of training that chefs get is determined by the quality of the institution, the teaching staff, resources, and how they align with the aspirations of the students themselves. Their aspirations are also determined by the possibility of subsequent employment in their local restaurants: if the catering course is in a larger and more cosmopolitan city or town, they are more likely to get a job as there will be more restaurants, cafés and pubs that serve food and more punters to eat there.

Colleges can offer three levels of training for chefs. The first is basic kitchen training for those who want to cook but have relatively few skills or professional experience; these courses are mainly populated by school leavers and 18+. The second level is for those with work experience, in kitchens or elsewhere, who are older or retraining for a new career now that their children are at school. The third level specialises in specific skills like baking, patisserie, or meat; for those who excel here there are elite schools that take on chefs with specialisms and specific skills who will end up in fine-dining and top-end restaurants.

The City & Guilds course book for Level 2 remains biased towards a 1970s Cordon Bleu French bourgeois style of cooking, but is also a good anthology of European recipes, regularly updated to include an increasing list of allergens and intolerances. The training involves specific techniques rather than specific recipes – beating, paring, boning, filleting – knife

skills, an appreciation of exact timing, and practicalities such as food hygiene, cross contamination and health and safety. Although it is only two days a week, the training is intensive and most tutors will inevitably have their own specialisms. To qualify, students have to prepare a four-course dinner, *ie* an *amuse bouche*, and soup, fish, and meat courses, and are given several practice runs as, after all, colleges do not want students to fail and neither do students.

The training is aimed at general skills that all kitchens require. Although the trainee might want to specialise in soups, stocks and sauces, the chances of finding a kitchen where these skills are needed are few. Many pub and restaurant menus do not have *soup du jour*, and stock and *demi-glace* sauces are commercially available. High-end restaurants have large-scale kitchen brigades but most of these are based in the largest cities where a saucier or potager could be part of the crew. Getting into these will be difficult.

This is where economic and geographical issues become apparent: the further towards the south-east a chef is, the more likely there will be employment opportunities and punters with disposable cash to spend. The high turnover of staff in the catering industry means that an unemployed, experienced chef can get another gig fairly quickly, depending on the town or city.

During training or after qualifying, the only way a chef can show an employer they can handle the work is to do a trial shift which is unpaid, although some places will pay if the chef is eventually taken on. This usually takes place on one of the quieter shifts, Tuesday evening or Thursday lunch, and also lets try-outs see how the kitchen operates and who works there. It is like the first day in a new job minus the certainty of coming back tomorrow and where everything is awkward. Try-out sessions expose the social dynamics of the kitchen staff: who is really running things here, the head chef or the manager? Who decides the menu? Who is feuding with whom? Who is gossiping and what can they tell us?

Try-outs will be given tasks depending on their experience and the job requirements: preparing starters, salads, side dishes, sandwiches or desserts. During the breaks, if there are any, it is possible to speak with other staff about how the place is organised, how the head chef treats them, and what, or whom, to look out for.

After the try-out session, chefs wait to be contacted, which is stressful, and two days is considered to be a decent length of time before ringing up and asking for any news. If the response is “The manager is out, can we take your number?” for the third time, he or she is definitely in and you are not. It is hard waiting for news and humiliating when unsuccessful, which is obviously not exclusive to the catering industry.

Despite the stressful glamour of television master cheffing, new chefs quickly learn two things: there is a lot of washing up to do and work conditions are unpleasant. Chefs sweat, steam and overheat (and overeat, weight problems are rife) and there are greasy floor, sharp knives, flames, hot surfaces, boiling pans and deep fat fryers. The refrigerator motors also increase the heat. Burns, cuts, scabs, blisters, bruising, aching muscles, hand injuries and infectious wounds are a continuous problem as well as slipping, being splashed by smoking oil and saucepans or being scalded by steam.

The work surfaces, benches and shelving are all made of metal, as are the pans, utensils and most of the containers, so the noise is continuous and resonates through the kitchen. Pan lids drop and spin under workplaces; the extractors are on full but just rattle and mutter; chefs and waiting staff shout orders or abuse at anyone or anytime, and spleen is vented and

countered. Double sinks fill quickly with mixing bowls, saucepans of gravy, cheese or chocolate sauce, burnt frying pans, knives, jugs, platters and salvers. The tap water is very hot and at high pressure to enable cleaning pans and utensils. If there is a kitchen porter, they will deal with it; if not then the 2nd chef or commis chef wears the Marigolds.

### Shift work

On arrival, chefs change into checks and whites, then clean down work surfaces, then set up their workstation, arranging herbs, spices, seasoning, condiments, oils, vinegars, garlic and butter; then spatulas, fish slices, metal or wooden spoons, tasting spoons in hot water, side towels, dishcloths and latex gloves. And knives: large chef knife for general use, knives for carving, boning out meat, skinning fish, and vegetable paring. Sets of knives are colour coded with the chopping boards – red for meat, blue for fish, brown for veg, green for salad – but many chefs prefer to use their own.

The head chef usually decides what music to play and – although this may seem trivial – for the rest, having to listen to dismal CDs or local FM radio for several hours can be depressing. Music is important because it is difficult to talk whilst chopping so it fills the gaps; it distracts us from repetitious chores; it creates ambience; and many chefs sing along, which can be amusing but only for so long. Then orders start coming in, via the ticket machine or waiting staff with notepads (although self-order iPads are being used in some places). The tickets are given to the head chef who cooks or supervises the entrées and gives the starters and side orders to the other chef/s. If the kitchen has staff to cope with the menu and the amount of orders, if they have been there for a while, and if they can all move around each other easily, then the shift can be a good one. Beating the rush, getting all the dishes out on time, in the right order, and avoiding any comebacks or complaints is the main aim.

Returns, criticisms, too many punters and not enough staff – or too many staff and not enough punters – muddled orders, badly assembled dishes, arguments, threats and resentments coming to aggressive fruition all mean a bad shift. It is on these that chefs who have been under pressure, overworked and underpaid, come out with variations of the ‘YOU CAN STICK YOUR JOB UP YOUR ...’ rage before exiting mid-shift.

Many potential young chefs are put off by the hours: working on Friday and Saturday nights, then the Sunday lunch shift, means that most of their social life is happening without them. With friends out celebrating the weekend, why would anyone work in a kitchen seething with heat and aggression, sorting out sides and salads, before heading off home at 11 for a much needed shower? Chefs work the hours their friends spend being served in bars, restaurants or takeaways.

After closing the kitchen, the head chef or the sous chef may cook supper for the crew, or the staff may cool off at the bar once the punters have gone, or go home to clean up.

During the week, hours are less of an issue and the shifts are much easier: the lunch and dinner shifts are manageable socially but the split shift, working 11-3 then 5-10, is frustrating. Those two or three hours between shifts are unpaid, unclaimed time. Those who live nearby can go home and relax; but if chefs have to commute, going home for one hour or less then coming back to work is pointless. Two hours are too short to do much although tablets and smart phones mean that we can pay bills, sort out problems online, or chat with friends. The split shift means time is too short to realise in any productive or creative way.

## Bullying

“It didn't matter how hard I worked, bollockings were still part of the job. The bollockings from Chef. Bollockings from the older chefs .... Being bollocked was no big deal.”<sup>5</sup>

At peak times, the kitchen is a very unpleasant place to work: the heat and sweat; the smoke and grease from fryers and stoves; the cramped conditions; the lack of clean side-towels, bowls or utensils, that make preparation harder; and the pressure to get everything ready to be shipped out at the same time. Conditions like these are universal in the catering industry and create a stressful environment but one additional unpleasant factor in some kitchens is verbal abuse.

The bullying culture has been perpetuated by celebrity chefs like Marco-Pierre White, Gordon Ramsay and Antony Bourdain who, in books or on television, have romanticised the chef as a volatile genius whose goal must not be impeded by inadequate, inexperienced staff who are expected to take vicious personal insults as part of the job.

When Ramsay and White were starting their careers in the 1980s this kind of abuse was normal but they have carried it over into the 21st century where workers' expectations have changed, even if Ramsay and White have not. Kitchens are regulated by health and safety officials from the local government bodies. Hygiene standards, workplace hazards and slack practice are now subject to legal scrutiny, yet the abusive modes of communication, which impact on working standards and the workers sense of self-worth, are not. TV programmes like *Ramsay's Kitchen Nightmares* and *Hell's Kitchens* normalise the abuse of power, turning belittlement into entertainment.

The profits, egos and reputations of top chefs are dependent on approving, and returning, punters and (mainly London-based) reviewers so, for them, much is at stake. For a commis chef reviews whether good or bad have little effect on their income or reputation, and their work has little effect on reviews. Chefs' pay and conditions are bad enough without added abuse from some stressed-out head chef who clearly cannot stand the heat themselves; and when television programmes on the catering industry show metropolitan celebrities acting like maniacs it is a wonder that young chefs sign up for catering courses at all.

This is not being 'soft', or not being able to 'take the heat', it is that many other industries see verbal abuse as unacceptable. Abuse, being humiliated in front of co-workers, makes chefs feel vulnerable, angry and preoccupied, and does nothing to create a productive, positive work environment. No worker anywhere should be subject to public humiliation. But how do kitchen workers organise to ensure conditions are fair? How do they speak as a collective? What legal protection do they have? Can chefs on zero-hours contracts complain to management about the behaviour of their head chef? How long will they last in that kitchen? These are questions that remain stifled and openly unexpressed, despite many kitchen workers expressing them privately.

## After work

Chefs accept the hazards of kitchen work but hazards can occur outside the kitchen and extend beyond the restaurant. Once the Friday or Saturday evening shifts are finished, getting home can be unpredictable: pedestrians or passengers on public transport will have been drinking and can be aggressive, which for women is particularly intimidating; but there are other problems that occur whatever day it may be. For those who commute on public transport, buses may be

infrequent or require a late night walk to and from the bus stop or station, and taxis are expensive. Many younger chefs cannot afford a car on minimum wage, and if they can, there is still petrol, insurance, MOT, and tax to cover. Not only this, but parking in city centres like London, Brighton or Manchester is especially difficult.

Commuting is time neither spent profitably nor at leisure, but takes up significant hours of the week as well as a significant percentage of the chef's wages. Time spent commuting is neutral time that cannot be realised as leisure time and is, like everyone else's, unsubsidised. If you are surviving on the minimum wage or just above, every ticket or fare matters and soon adds up, diminishing an already small wage packet. Although a couple of quid might not seem much, when converted into a percentage of low wages it impacts on the ability to realise free time. Commuting to work means the job consumes more and more of our time and money: work, even when part-time, absorbs much of the day around it.

## Towards A Conclusion ...

Organising politically across the catering industry has numerous problems because of the staff dynamic: there is a high turnover, many staff are part-time or short-term, young, in education or are looking for a better job. Also, restaurants are not concentrated in one place, chefs have little contact with other kitchen workers apart from those they work beside, and many restaurants are independent so if workers did go on strike it would not impact on the whole industry in the way a transport strike would.

Chefs need to be encouraged to join a union as individuals but this requires a lot of outreach work and it is unlikely that management in small restaurants would welcome union reps riling up the workforce. However, the recent unionisation of workers at McDonalds was a big win for them and an inspiration for like-minded kitchen staff. It is ironic that those working at what is seen as the lowest category of food production, who assemble and serve ready-made ingredients for burgers, and whom chefs and bourgeois food critics have long derided, are at the front of what could be a minor revolution in the UK catering industry. Further reflection may suggest that those working at the bottom of the industry are the ones who need unionisation the most. With McDonalds as a precedent, could other major brand outlets like Burger King or KFC be forced to countenance the union representation of their workers? And could this extend to workers in smaller non-chain restaurants? Unionisation, fair wages, paid holidays, promotion and job security would mean a much more stable workforce and reduce the stress and uncertainty under which many kitchen workers labour.

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# ISABEL MONAL APPROACHES TO CURRENT IMPERIALISM\*

\* The present article, originally published in 2017, was based on and synthesised previous scattered analyses by the author, principally from 1999 and 2001. Although much of what is written here refers to the United States' administration of George W Bush, and to a lesser extent that of Obama's, the analysis remains highly relevant today –*Ed.*

**I**N THE 1990s the mythology of globalisation and neoliberalism was implanted, with wide support by the United States' establishment and its allies. At the same time the myth arose and was propagated that, in the new world conditions, it was no longer sensible to speak of imperialism and that a new, different, situation had left it behind. Among others, sectors of the left from all the corners of the world fell into this trap, and any allusion to a supposed existence of imperialism came to be denounced as backward or dogmatic.

Without doubt globalisation – or the internationalisation of capital, to use Karl Marx's words – is a real historical process; and the current owners of the world, and principal beneficiaries of globalisation, have woven a mythology about it, which seeks to impose a specific type of economic globalisation in favour of the transnational corporations and the oligopolies. In reality economic globalisation, or the internationalisation of capital, is not strictly a new phenomenon, but an intrinsic characteristic of the capitalist system itself; *ie* it follows from capitalism's own logic of the necessity of expansion.

Scholars have identified two other periods of economic globalisation in the 20th century, at least: firstly, from the end of the 19th century up to the First World War; and then the so-called 'thirty glorious years' after the Second World War. The current globalisation phase is characterised, among other important elements, by deregulation of the financial markets, involving extreme and parasitic financialisation of capital within a neoliberal framework. In general, it can be said that globalisation has never previously reached such a climax of universalisation. The mythologising ideologies seek to make people forget that this stage of globalisation is accompanied – in reality they are one and the same thing – by a new imperialist phase. Hence, if we are to understand the globalisation phenomenon (composed of multiple globalisations, and not just economic life), we need to see it in the context of how we characterise contemporary imperialism.

### **New imperialist phase**

The present-day world finds itself in the presence of a new, extremely aggressive, phase of imperialism, which tended to be particularly expansionist in the George W Bush years. Without doubt he and his hawks put their particular stamp on imperialist action; but the imperialism of our epoch is not the simple result of an extremely conservative group aiming to maintain itself in power in the USA. Rather, imperialism obeys the very dynamics of capitalist development, which implies imperialist deployment as a necessity inherent to the system itself, guided by its bipartisan ruling class. But the Bush team certainly imposed its style and its arrogant, fundamentalist and extremely aggressive imprint.

As in the past, this moment of wide ambitions of the dominant power of world capital is based on the economy; the imperialist calling is born from the very nature of capitalism and its constant need of expansion. Its tendency is to appropriate for itself the surplus product of labour realised in territories outside the imperialist states' own frontiers; a tendency of capitalism which Marx himself would have identified from the *Grundrisse*. The imperialist states need, and seek, to control and increasingly appropriate natural resources and raw materials, and to conquer new markets etc. Capitalism is pushed to expansion and development of the imperialist type.

In the framework of the Marxist tradition and judgment, we have to understand imperialism as a complex and coherent system, in which the economy, politics, militarism and propaganda form a systemic unity. The propaganda element has gained a vital importance in the new phase, whereas the classic imperialism of the end of the 19th century and the beginning of

the 20th did not have such a powerful support machinery of ideological control and propaganda as do the big monopolies today.

With the new socioeconomic developments of world interactions, imperialism is unfolding into a new phase in which it has undergone significant qualitative transformations without modifying its natural essence. As several authors have pointed out, today it is no longer characterised by possession of colonies, as was so-called classical imperialism. In this new phase it does not need direct colonial control of territories, but rather control of the world economy and global markets. To do this, imperialism needs a domination which is equally political as military, and an exercise of power which is as unipolar as possible. However, as several specialists have observed, remoteness from colonial-type domination does not exclude the occasional emergence of some of its features. Thus, for example, the war on Yugoslavia was inserted into an ethnic-tribal conflict in progress, using one of the parties against the other; likewise, the distribution of the booty and the issue of what should be the government of the defeated country was decided outside of it.

In another vein, we also do not find, as characteristic, the predominance of monopoly finance capital that Lenin, basing himself on Hilferding, so correctly characterised in *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*. On the other hand, due to the uneven development of capitalism, imperialism is still characterised by the existence of a metropolitan centre and a periphery, and by a limited group of countries which constitute this dominant centre.

Since the end of the Second World War the imperialist centre has been comprised of the Triad, *ie* the European Union, Japan and the USA, of which the last, in my judgment, is now identifiable as a 'centre of the centre'. Differently from the previous period, with the great inter-imperialist contradictions which produced two terrible world wars, these states – as Samir Amin has correctly pointed out<sup>1</sup> – have functioned as allies, and continue to do so. But after the Soviet Thermidor and the fall of that state, the bipolarity which had characterised the world in those decades was liquidated, and the USA was left as a single world superpower. That greatly favoured the process that converted it into a centre of the centre with a power never before seen in the history of the planet.

The new circumstances indicate clearly that in this phase of imperialism an extremely predominant centre of the centre has developed, above all at the political (relations between states) and military levels. In the imperialist period at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, there was no equality of might or power between the various imperialist countries. For a long time Britain occupied a pre-eminent position inside the imperialist centre of that period; but it did not strictly constitute a centre of the centre, since the other imperialist powers of that time were not in a position of dependence upon it. Today, instead, the enormous gap in power and influence which separates the United States from Britain has converted the other states into what I identify as a species of subordinate imperialism.<sup>2</sup> It appears to me opportune to characterise this subordinate imperialism as the acceptance on the part of the other members of the Triad, which make up the centre, of their dependence on the USA, that is to say, the preponderant centre of the centre. And in the period of Bush conservatism, of the arrogance of the fundamentalist hawks, this centre of the centre continually demanded their submission and tended to make them political and military vassals.

The contradictions between the different developed capitalist states which constitute the imperialist centre were of particular importance in earlier periods, particularly in the so-called classical period, through their effort and struggle to achieve the

best part of the division of the peripheral world. In the current period this characteristic is still present, but major changes and modifications have taken place with a significant imprint. On the one hand, we have the expression of the imperialism of the Triad, that is to say, with common interests, where the USA holds absolute primacy. However, at the same time contradictions are manifested, in particular when the centre of the centre demands a subordination and extreme subjugation of its partners. Likewise the world situation of the Triad has been modified since the Soviet Thermidor and the collapse of the Eastern European socialist camp; in these conditions the road was widely cleared for the emergence of, and gradual replacement by, a new world order, with the increased weight of the Triad as the imperialist centre, and in which the USA was left as a great and single superpower which became the hegemonic dominant unipolar power. The First Gulf War of 1991, the military intervention in Somalia, the aggression against Yugoslavia and the subsequent occupation of the province of Kosovo by NATO (under the cover of the UN) constitute reference milestones of that process; the terrorism of Al-Qaida, served, for its part, as a pretext for the war on and later occupation of Afghanistan; and, finally, the most recent episode experienced has been the war on and occupation of Iraq. All of these are fundamental moments of the current project of imperialist global domination on the part of the USA, with the support – bar nuances of exception – of the other members of the Triad.

As in the times of the old imperialism, the military component has been a necessary constant of that expansion; but in the current period its enormous pre-eminence is outstanding and has actually been converted into a factor of constructing and consolidating the new world order which imperialism is seeking to impose. That military push has as one of its components the deployment of an important network of military bases around the whole world, with the objective of imposing and defending the imperial control and US hegemony; this network constitutes, without doubt, a key and essential piece of the system of world domination of the “indispensable nation” – described this way by some of the ideologues of the new imperialism.<sup>3</sup> The military imperative has also played an essential role in relation to other plans that equally form an integral part of the current system of multiple global domination.

Without doubt the existence of rivalries and contradictions between the various powers making up the centre is a characteristic of the imperialist system at world level; it is a matter of what Lenin correctly called inter-imperialist contradictions, which at points gave rise to the two destructive wars of the last century for redistribution of the world. In the current debates inside the Marxist and Leninist tradition the question of whether those contradictions are still present in the new imperialist phase is being discussed. We should rather consider a dialectics with rivalries and confrontations, at the same time as a certain coordination and alliance between those powers of the centre, as was formed from the end of the Second World War. A dialectical approach would allow us to account for relative inter-imperialist contradictions which do not reach the degree of antagonism of yesteryear, combined with the tendency, as predominant feature, of driving the imperialist powers of the metropolitan centre to function in harmony and alliance.

The sure understanding and cooperation between the Triad powers, typical of the Cold War period, was maintained even after the collapse of the Eastern European socialist camp and the end of the Soviet Union. The USA remained as the unique superpower, and, as is known, enjoyed, for a good part of the 1990s, an economic boom superior to that of Europe or Japan, its allies in the Triad. But this situation, as is also known, has been

modified, and the US economy, as well as its competitive capacity in the market, has deteriorated. All appears to indicate that, in these conditions, the great imperialist power needs to resort to formulae somewhat external to the supposed healthy and peaceful struggle of the market, *ie* to turn to more expeditious and aggressive methods which extend and guarantee the domination achieved. Apparently, the already famous invisible hand of the market does not work so favourably to the US's advantage – against both the rest of the Triad and other economically thriving countries. Hence, in its eyes, it appears most convenient to resort with greater force and frequency to the very visible hand of interference and intervention, including armed intervention if it becomes necessary. Once again methods and pathways outside economics have been necessary to settle the results of economic competitiveness.

In a somewhat systematic and significant way, numerous documents and declarations expressed by representatives of the US establishment confirm that one of the priorities of foreign policy consists in preventing at all costs the emergence and development of new powers which can reach or surpass US power. This objective not only refers to its traditional allies in the Triad but also to Russia and China, in particular the latter. The issue then is of preserving US dominance in all the fields which shape the systemic economic, political and military domination, and the domination of the control of public opinion, especially the domination of the United States itself.

As has been seen, the remaining members (subordinates) of the centre do not behave identically towards the centre of the centre. Their degree of submission and, even at times, of political subjugation, varies and also becomes somewhat volatile. For example, the degree of submission of Tony Blair, and his willingness to accept vassalage with little compensation, has attracted particular attention. But in these cases it is important to try to identify the motives or factors which produce this conduct, in order to understand the historical process more clearly.

Blair, in countless interventions (speeches in 2003 in Poland and at the United States Congress), considered that the multipolarity of then French president Chirac was a grave error which would put all of the members of the centre in danger; in fact the then British prime minister referred to the indisputable position of privilege which the Europeans (understood as members of the Triad) were enjoying with respect to the rest of the world, and considered implicitly that it would be wisest to accept the predominance of the USA as a guarantee of the existing international order. In that sense it can be said that he concurred with many ideologues and the US hawks (including the liberal hawks), in that a world situation had been created since the end of the Cold War, but above all since the attack on the Twin Towers, which had facilitated the consolidation and extension of the current system of domination and international relations for an approximate duration, according to him, of some 20 years, of which maximum advantage must be taken. Blair did not say it expressly, but in his words the acceptance of the condition of subordinate imperialism, with political and military vassalage, was implied.

One of the traits of the present imperialist moment consists in the modifications of the international relations between developed countries, relations which, without ceasing to be competitive and in opposition, make the inter-imperialist contradictions relative, and make the reinforcement of the relation of a (very predominant) centre of the centre prevail, *ie* the hegemony which tends to reaffirm the domination of the United States, as the only possible way to preserve and augment the existing state of affairs.



In another vein, the innumerable contradictions which traverse the capitalist system as such are becoming active and vigorous. Imperial ambition and aggressiveness risk making the world a more chaotic and explosive place, driving it towards ungovernability and barbarism. In contrast to Blair's desires – longed-for governance which the North American superpower would bring for the comfortable enjoyment of a subsidiary and vassal imperialism – the result could be precisely its opposite.

If we take up the question of the nation states, then we have to establish the nexus between that point and the themes which are developing. Imperialist globalisation appears to boost the dynamics which could lead to the end of nation states, in a process which attempts to accelerate, or even initiate, the evolution of the decline of their power and attributes, and of the state in general. The state institutions are definitely historical and their strength and stock themselves depend on functional needs that historical development itself may gradually make obsolete. But imperialism attempts to speed up the 'natural' rhythm and to produce the anticipated end of nation states; or at least to speed up the loss of the greatest possible mass of functions of the nation states of the periphery that are not necessary for realising the mediating function for domination and exploitation.

At the same time, the imperialist centres are striving to reinforce the foreign policy functions of their own states and of the employment of military force with the aim of reaching their objectives. It is important to underline that the thesis of 'failed states' is applied above all to countries of the periphery. At the same time it remains true that capital is becoming more and more transnational and that the oligopolies are multiplying.

In earlier periods the domination of monopoly finance capital corresponded to a particular nation state; today, by contrast, there exists no international political entity which corresponds in equivalent manner with the transnationals, although they almost always have a base in one of the imperialist countries. In that context, therefore, the United States seeks to provide the necessary state functions for the forward march of imperialist globalisation. Thus one nation state in particular aims to function as a world state, above all through providing its own political and military functions for the good functioning of the world system. In this way the central state of the imperialist system attempts to award itself functions of a political global state in the conditions of the current world. And in this task it demands and expects the support of the remaining members of the Triad. However, that expectation is not always met; and indeed support for the USA was somewhat lacking in the adventure against Iraq. On the other hand, we should not ignore the fact that, when countries like France, Germany or the Spanish government of Zapatero dare to resist and even oppose excessive political vassalage, these same powers rush to offer compensation, to calm the anger of the arrogant empire; the intervention in Haiti or the behaviour towards the Cuban revolution are only two examples among several.

These ambitions of filling in for the absence of a corresponding political entity do not exclude the creation and use of international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (in addition to the World Trade Organisation and others), through whose facades the exercise of multiple hegemony is sought and likewise achieved. It is a matter of a different option for exercising hegemony. In fact, through those international organisations the functions of control and domination by the imperialist states, especially the United States, over the periphery have been expanded and reinforced. And although the hawks don't respect the United Nations, and even despise it or ignore it (as in the case of Iraq), they try whenever possible – and frequently achieve – the submission of the biggest

international organisation and its secretary-general; there is the recent case of the Millennium Summit where only Venezuela's Chavez and Cuba raised high their voices of protest. In the United States' ruling class there are some who prefer to act under the concealing veil of the United Nations and of the hijacked concept of the 'international community'. Consequently, there are nuances and changing attitudes which we must not belittle: the Empire's ruling class can be unified in its designs and essential interests, but the styles and the degree of arrogance and pushiness towards allies and enemies can vary. It is therefore natural that there will be different uses of diplomacy; but of course diplomacy, even in those cases, logically demands paybacks, related to subordination and vassalage. Madeleine Albright's deceptive formula of "assertive multilateralism"<sup>4</sup> appears to fit that frame.

Among other reasons, it may be due to this vocation of exercising an excessive leading role that the United States is considered, in the eyes of the advocates of the new imperial order, as the previously-mentioned "indispensable nation".

### **Refunctionalisation of the state**

Without doubt the present stage of globalisation has had a strong and natural impact on the question of the nation states and the crisis in which they appear to be submerged, starting in particular from the last decade of the last century. We need to remember that the nation state is a product institution of its own socioeconomic historical evolution and of the modes of production. It is therefore unexceptional that will undergo profound modifications throughout its existence; and hence it is not a matter of denying these transformations, nor the modification of the nature of various of its functions, nor the tendency – determined by the globalisation processes – of reducing the importance of some of those functions. However, a serious analysis appears to indicate better the ideological tendency to accelerate that process beyond the real historical requirements, with a view that the dominant imperialist classes can more easily carry forward their hegemonic and exploitative designs.

The question of the evolution of the traditional prerogatives of the nation states in the framework of the new conditions created by the multiple globalisations leads to the complex and mythologised problematics of the relation between the economy and politics in the conditions of the new imperialism, particularly those at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one.

Contrary to what politics wants to make us believe – and which lamentably has succeeded in penetrating left-wing characteristics – it does not remain helpless in the face of economics, nor does the nation state remain marginalised by the current process of capitalist globalisation. Without doubt, some of the nation state's important prerogatives are being diminished; but other new functions and tasks are emerging, and some of the old ones can increase or enlarge the ambit of their objectives. One of those functions, certainly very important, is that the realisation of globalisation requires the mediating action of the state, particularly in Third World countries; and another consists in stimulating or facilitating that process, or, on the contrary, in finding and putting into practice forms of opposition to neoliberal globalisation, and opting for alternatives. The myth of globalisation, as basically helpless before the new circumstances, is without doubt a significant ideological factor of penetration and imposition of transnationalisation. Globalisation is in fact realised with the competition of nation states and on occasions inclusively with their active collaboration. And to contribute to that objective, the states of the periphery comply with the function of

fomenting the consensus of approval or, where necessary, by increasing their coercive functions.

In the process of globalisation the system of relations between the multiple and diverse nation states is very important. It is not rigorously appropriate to speak of the powers and functions of the state, and of the nation states, as always a general and uniform phenomenon, since what predominates is precisely the asymmetric relation between states. Identifying the place which a particular state occupies in that system of asymmetric powers is therefore decisive in clarifying the roles of the nation states in the new conditions, since it will at the same time determine specific functions and capacities of power, depending on the actual power of each state in relation to the others. The big imperialist nations are obliged, and indeed act, to demand the support of their respective states in all the external scenarios intrinsic to their own developments, and in the promotion – including the imposition – of their transnationals, as well as measures to facilitate the process of globalisation. The nation states of the Third World are not able to exercise those same powers, as they do not possess them, but conversely they need them, for mediation purposes.

It is not the first time in history that the bourgeoisie has utilised such state powers to lend weight to its doctrine of *laissez faire*; the nascent bourgeoisie, as Marx noted in *Capital*, could not have done without the constant intervention of the state and did not hesitate to use it, to regulate such questions as hours of work and wages. It is therefore unexceptional that at this stage of acceleration of capitalist globalisation, in a global economy, the bourgeoisie needs the state to assert competitiveness and flexibility, and that it also uses it to regulate and decide on loans, global agreements etc, necessary for the good functioning and deepening of globalisation.

Let us not forget, on the other hand, that the current neoliberal process demands, in general, the non-intervention of the state. Before this neoliberal predominance, other conceptions like Keynesianism had promoted a certain regulatory role of the state. Effectively, given the fear of crisis (especially after the Great Crash of 1929), and pressure from the popular movement and social struggles, the bourgeois state was obliged to intervene in economic regulation, granting social benefits to the population, particularly in the developed countries with strong popular class movements.

Therefore we must take into account that neoliberal globalisation demands, on one hand, the least possible role of the state (in order to leave maximum freedom to the market); but, on the other hand, globalisation also needs promotion by the nation states. Analyses which do not take into account the above state asymmetries, and consequently the fundamental role of the imperialist states in promoting and imposing globalisation, are wrong, since the role of the state is not the same for some as for others. What is being sought is the greatest compliance by the states of the periphery, as well as, oppositely, domination on the part of the centre. The role of the state in neoliberal globalisation cannot be understood in depth at an abstract and general level, but only in the relations of domination and in contradictory interests.

It is true that the neoliberal credo has promoted or imposed the idea and the practice of a reduction in the power of the state as such: the minimal state. It is equally true that the international organisations such the IMF or the World Bank impose policies on the nation states, particularly on those of the Third World. It is true that the tendency towards weakening of the state and of the nation state in general is very evident. But other clearly distinct – and no less true – realities are hiding behind these phenomena.

It is appropriate to record, in the first place, that many countries have participated in the process of reducing the powers and internal functions of their states; their enthusiasm for globalisation and the free market has been an element present in this dynamics. Latin America is the obvious case.

But the relations of the different nation states in face of the powers of the transnationals are not the same everywhere. At the same time the transnationals often need the international power of their own nation states to obtain certain advantages in competency, in the conquest of markets and in the displacement of other competitors. That was the case, for example, of the United States' defence of the interests of North American banana transnationals in Central America, to the detriment of the countries of Africa and the Caribbean.

Capitalist globalisation also needs, and hence has created, a set of international institutions and organisations for the realisation of the process; some of these organisations, starting from situations of crisis and impoverishment of the nations of the periphery, are able to impose neoliberal recipes which contribute to the realisation of imperialism's globalisation project. In fact they constitute supranational entities of power or of governorship which are in reality handled by the imperialist states (above all the USA) and where they have a decisive weight. A significant example of this is the predominance of the big imperialist powers, like the United States, in the IMF. In the new conditions of the world today, the imperialist state will prefer to utilise, if possible, supranational organisations for carrying forward its own politics and imposing its interests. Of course, its interference in the countries of the periphery becomes less obvious in those cases – including for the populations who end up being the victims – and frequently facilitates the consensus of a good part of the so-called 'international community'. In these cases the collusion and unity of action between one nation state – the USA – and a regional or international organisation is evident and essential, both acting fundamentally in the same direction.

It is therefore palpable – it does not hurt to reiterate this point – that the relation of the state to the globalisation process must be treated in a concrete manner, in the logic of the internal relations of the imperialist system and within the perspective of the asymmetries of the imperialist order; and not in the abstract manner which we frequently meet in literature on this topic, including that of the left. Dictates can only be confronted with consistent anti-imperialist politics.

The states, then, have various possibilities of resistance and struggle on which they can act. But it is above all by exercising pressure through popular struggles that the greater part of the states would be stimulated or pressed into action. In other cases, where, for example, several nation states possess a strong or definite vocation of sovereignty or prefer different development alternatives, they would be able to act in conjunction with other states and with the support of their populations to resist or oppose the imposition of the policies of the great dominant powers and of the transnationals. We have to underline that the pretended absolute impotency of the nation states of the periphery today is a myth, a weapon of imperialist globalisation, since it hides precisely the imperial hegemony of the United States and deactivates the struggle and opposition, and flows into passive and resigned acceptance. It is a matter for us of making this weapon fail: the struggle against capitalist globalisation and in favour of other alternatives goes through this effort. And the struggle for the idea of social justice (that victim of globalisation) also implies the struggle against the neoliberal socioeconomic system which is globalised today, with the support and imposition of the states which serve it as instrument.

## Refoundation of interventionism

One of the conceptions which can be met in this imperialist period is the thesis of the right of intervention. We need to bear in mind that, although aggression and military intervention is a fact of long history and is consubstantial with imperialism, we are faced today with a phenomenon which presents, at the same time, new and unparalleled features, variations in its traditional expressions, and above all, that we are confronting a moment of great aggressiveness in the current phase of imperialism.

There exists, of course, a relation between the new interventionist configurations and the changes which have arisen in imperialism. With the multiple globalisations and the transnationalisation of capital, imperialism has entered, as has been developing up to now, a new phase. With these new developments, and without modifying its essential nature, imperialism has also undergone qualitative transformations when it comes to interventionism. The unipolar power needs to break free from those barriers (economic, political, military) which prevent it from exercising its domination at the global scale, including such obstacles as respect for frontiers and national sovereignty, especially of Third World states or of states which are not its own allies or servants. All of this does not mean that there is no need for the use of force; on the contrary, force continues to play a fundamental role. But in the current circumstances, the exercise of force demands conditions of great flexibility and which can be carried forward with the greatest possible speed. These strategic objectives demand, at the same time, varied forms complementary to economic globalisation, such as military and political interventions, in order for the internationalisation of capital to be successful and to be capable of being permanent. It is a matter of a necessary combination for imperialist expansion and reinforcement, so that the unipolar power can be established more strongly and completely. Military supremacy is a condition for the maintenance and extension of political and economic supremacy, able to break resistance and take the place of other competing influences. In the present phase of imperialism the importance of military bases neither disappears nor is diminished, not least because they must fulfil functions that new military technologies cannot fully implement; the burning cases of Afghanistan and, above all, Iraq are a reliable confirmation of that, since the intense and prolonged bombardments demanded close proximity of airbases to the theatres of operations.

The wars and interventions of the last 15 years form part of the common logic and strategic objectives of expansion and maintenance of United States' imperialist domination and hegemony. As previously indicated, the arc of imposing the new world order covers the period from the Gulf War and Somalia, passing through Yugoslavia up to the recent wars of Afghanistan and Iraq; not to forget Panama, Haiti and Colombia.

But the wars and the colonial and imperialist military interventions have always needed an argument which justifies, either politically or morally (or relying on international law), the military actions and attacks. It is customarily a matter of making it lawful for certain powerful states, when it suits their interests, to exercise the function of gendarme or of intervening for the most varied motives. In fact all interventionism seeks to legitimise itself, and aggressive interventionism is no exception. But that legitimisation is also necessary, to convince public opinion of the interventionist countries themselves.

The legitimisation of colonisation, intervention and vassalage has old antecedents and roots. In the history of ideas, arguments have been put forward, claiming to sustain the advocated 'right to intervention'. Modern colonialism, from the 16th century, developed a wide and cogent set of fundamentals for colonialist

action, conveniently based on an arsenal of positive values such as 'progress' and 'civilisation'. Since then the right of conquest and colonisation has almost always been sustained on the supposed deficiencies and inferiorities of those overcome and on the search for noble objectives and progress on the part of the aggressors. In Latin America throughout the 20th century the interventions of the Empire were endorsed through the supposed struggle in favour of freedom; and the magic formula was forged through which, in the name of freedom, democracy was liquidated and justice prevented. Of course, the bloody tyrannies promoted or supported by the United States in Latin America always acted in the name of those legitimising values of the Empire.

In current times the new interventionist doctrine has modernised and upgraded the arguments. Democracy, human rights, humanitarian reasons etc come to fulfil new mobilising and legitimising demands. Some arguments do not hide their claim to the right to impose the values of the West – an ambiguous and dangerous weapon of domination which has, however, the merit of making clear that the right of imposing values only applies to one system and one culture.

But the legitimising argumentation of the new interventionism has resulted in a situation which is to some extent unprecedented and very dangerous in diverse senses. The champions of the right of intervention and of limited sovereignty established, during the Kosovo war, the so-called 'ethical war', in their global hegemonic crusade. A universalised and abstract moralism numbs noble spirits since they carry out 'just wars' of imperial intervention. Others will speak of 'a fight for civilisation', and Blair, the high priest of the so-called 'ethical war', wants to convince us that "Good has triumphed over evil, justice has overcome barbarism" and the values of civilisation have also triumphed.<sup>5</sup> The reactionary messianism of Bush and his hawks led this language and argumentation to paroxysm over Afghanistan and Iraq.

We are, then, facing a legitimacy which claims to be of steel, of superior order (superior to politics), sustained by an almost imperative Kantian ethics<sup>6</sup>. It is a crusade of the 'good' in the service of neoliberal globalisation and its concomitant necessity of exercising its planetary dominion. It has sought to dilute politics and make it fade into secular morality, and largely achieved this objective. Without doubt the new imperialist order needed, for the achievement of its designs, this fading of politics in favour of a universalising and abstract moralism, which would have us believe that it is not a matter of politics which directs the steps of real and concrete history towards disaster, since the universalist foundations justify everything, the 'just and humanitarian war' from an 'ethics without natural brotherly appeal' – as much in practice as conceptually and theoretically – with interventionism without frontiers from the (imperialist) 'humanitarianism without frontiers'.

This type of ideological strategy (relying on abstract universals) is intended to serve as a preferred instrument for implanting this new interventionism without frontiers and without limitations. We need to consider what appears to be another difference of greater importance between this interventionism and the one which we experienced throughout the 20th century. In general, up to now, there was legitimisation of the violation by the powerful of the principles of the right to self-determination of the peoples, of sovereignty and of equality between states; what is sought and implanted today is the legitimisation of official liquidation, and at global level, of those principles (because obsolete), and the legitimisation, in a permanent manner and not occasionally (as in the case of the violation of the principle), of the right to imperial interventionist action on the part of a handful of powerful states entrusted with being the guardians and with executing superior designs.

On the one hand we have three proposed axes of the new right to unlimited intervention and without frontiers: so-called humanitarian interventions, global threats (drugs, terrorism, possession of weapons of mass destruction, massive violations of human rights), and the above-mentioned defence of Western values. Since the attack on the Twin Towers, terrorism has been converted into an essential reference point for justifying wars, blockades, ‘legitimate’ interventions, joint military occupations, and every form deemed pertinent of pressure on, and overthrow of, governments.

But this crusade against sovereignty has not been only by the powerful states. Several nongovernmental European organisations have been at the vanguard of the promotion of the right of interference and the right of ‘humanitarian’ intervention. With that, they have become converted into key pieces of the new gearing mechanism of imperialist domination. Their work of interference is protected by the deceptive mantle of presenting themselves in the service of superior values and ideals, beyond politics and international law.

The 9/11 attacks have allowed, for their part, several leaders and representatives of imperialist interests to ratify the idea, already expressed in the Kosovo war, that efforts are being made ethically, and in the name of God, against evil. They are inspired, it seems, by the might of the United States as the nation predestined by God to do ‘good’, and with a Manichean vision of reality.

Accessory mystifications are not lacking. Thus, among others, that old argument of colonialism, about the struggle between civilisation and barbarism, is being revived. It is all about ensuring that the face of imperial objectives is not recognised.

In recent years the US establishment (politicians, intellectuals, leaders etc) has started not only to accept that it is imperial or imperialist, but to proclaim this condition proudly, converting it at the same time into a new mission, a sort of benign or benevolent imperialism (or imperial responsibility) which would perform a benevolent work for humanity. And that includes the right of the USA to lead warmongering and interventionist crusades.

For the aggression against Iraq, Bush and his hawks developed new facets to the right of intervention and the legitimate loss of sovereignty of certain nation states. Interventionism, as a key instrument of the great project of world domination, with the use of military force, has forged new justificatory elements. This new conceptual logic is based on the idea of so-called rogue (or gangster or villain) states, which have arrived at this dangerous category for their ‘unfortunate’ condition of being failed or deficient. The thesis that weak or failed states (a good part of the Third World) signify danger for the United States constituted a cornerstone of the Bush doctrine of national security. For example, failed states were, in Bush’s eyes, dangerous owing to the incapacity of their governments to exercise due control over their own territory; and to their incompetence and ungovernability, which among other results can facilitate the use of their territory for terrorists, and in some cases to suppress their people. The conditions of weakness cause these states to lose the right to their own sovereignty, with which the way is open for the so-called international community, particularly for those of them catalogued as democratic states, to intervene, including militarily. Thus sovereignty is neither an absolute nor a permanent condition, neither is it inherent to the country, but should only be respected if it is not a ‘failing state’. Without doubt, these states form part of those ‘dark corners of the world’, over which the Northern power has proclaimed its right of attack.

But imperialism is not all-powerful nor invulnerable, and can only reach its objectives if the subject and dependent peoples,

its victims, do not counter with iron resistance and opposition. In the present times, the struggle against imperialism, which has never ceased to be a necessity, has taken on particular urgency and returned to the foreground of the international arena. In Latin America, more specifically, an anti-neoliberal awareness has developed which has gradually been maturing to become, without abandoning the fight against neoliberalism, increasingly anti-imperialist.

The alternatives, with respect not only to the objectives but also to the future and the individual dynamics of each process, are multiple. Each process will have its particularities and – as history has shown so many times – none will be exactly the same as any other.

In those efforts the essential international dimension of the struggle must be stressed. The social forums, the protagonism of many social movements, the incorporation of new forces into the struggle, open the perspectives of developing new and varied forms of internationalism – but it is not necessary to renounce the previous rich internationalist heritage which is a valuable legacy by which the current revolutionary movements can be nourished and inspired.

The road of imperialism is that of destruction and barbarism, and threatens to plunge the world into unspeakable entanglements. Against it, the most thorough option is socialism. In other words, we again face Rosa Luxemburg’s premonition, inspired by Engels, of “socialism or barbarism”.

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### Notes and References

- 1 S Amin, *Capitalismo, Imperialism, Mundialización* (Capitalism, Imperialism, Globalisation). From the same collection as the present article (*qv*), pp 39-57.
- 2 This characteristic is manifested with nuances and diverse strengths according to the changing situations. Obama resorts to his ‘smart power’, but a new period appears to be projected with the future entry of Trump – *IM*, note of 2016.
- 3 “But if we have to use force, it is because we are America; we are the indispensable nation. We stand tall and we see further than other countries into the future, and we see the danger here to all of us.” – Madeline Albright, US Secretary of State, TV interview, 1998 – see <https://americanaffairsjournal.org/2019/08/indispensable-nation-nostalgia/> – *Ed*.
- 4 A term used by Albright to describe the Clinton administration’s practice of joining forces with UN troops, see <https://edition.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/1997/gen/resources/playrs/albright/> – *Ed*.
- 5 K Sengupta, *Balkan Agreement: Serbs start the bitter retreat*, in the *Independent*, 11 June 1999; online at <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/balkan-agreement-serbs-start-the-bitter-retreat-1099277.html> – *Ed*.
- 6 *ie* a moral law whose “categorical imperative” acts on all people, regardless of their interests or desires; see [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kantian\\_ethics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kantian_ethics) – *Ed*.

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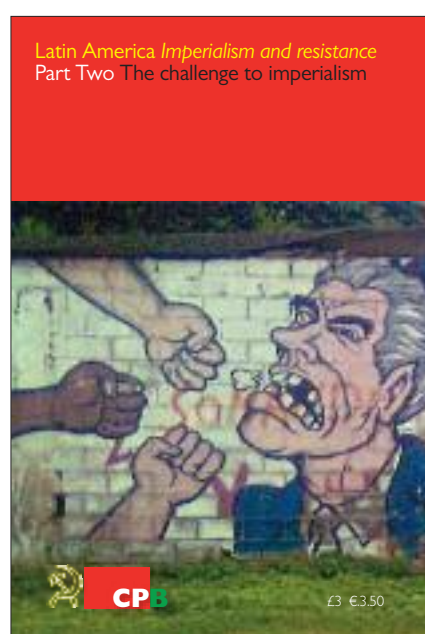


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### Back on the world map

For centuries, China exerted a cultural attraction and was, together with India, a leading player on the world stage.<sup>1</sup> After a century of harrowing colonisation, humiliation and internal civil wars, Mao Zedong put his country back on the world map in 1949. The Chinese regained their dignity. It was the start of a ‘development marathon at a great pace’ that would shake up global relations. And, as Bonaparte predicted earlier, “China is a sleeping giant. When it awakens, the whole world will shake.”

### Economic miracle

At the time of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the country was one of the poorest and most backward in the world. The vast majority of the Chinese were employed in (often primitive) agriculture. Per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was half that of Africa and one sixth of that of Latin America.<sup>2</sup> To give the revolutionary ideals of equality a chance in a highly hostile world environment, it was necessary to achieve rapid economic and technological growth. This was to take place over the next 70 years through a process of trial and error.

After an extremely introverted and turbulent period under Mao Zedong, in which controversial mass campaigns were launched, such as ‘The Great Leap Forward’ and ‘The Cultural Revolution’, Deng Xiaoping took up the torch in 1978. Almost immediately but cautiously, he launched economic reforms and established relations with numerous countries, including, remarkably, the United States.

In comparison with Western Europe, China’s industrialisation went 4 times as fast, and with a population 5 times as large.<sup>3</sup> 70 years ago, the Chinese economy was insignificant on a global level. In 2014, China surpassed the US as the largest economy (in terms of volume) and it also became the largest exporting country. Today there are 35 Chinese cities with a GDP equal to that of countries such as Norway, Switzerland or Angola. The Chinese GDP has meanwhile become larger than the combined GDP of 154 countries. In 2011-12, China produced more cement than the US did during the entire 20th century. It has built ten new airports each year and has the world’s most extensive network of motorways and high-speed train lines. At present, the country exports as much in 6 hours as it did in 1978 on an annual basis.<sup>4</sup>

## Technological leap forward

China is not only surprising in terms of quantitative evolution. In terms of quality, the Chinese economy has also made huge leaps forward, technological development being the prime example. Millions of engineers, scientists and technicians have graduated from Chinese universities in recent decades. Until recently, China was seen as an imitator of technology, but today it is a leading innovator: it currently has the fastest supercomputer and is building the world’s most advanced research centre to develop even faster quantum computers. In recent years, the country has achieved impressive results in the field of hypersonic missiles, human gene editing trials and quantum satellites, and perhaps most importantly, artificial intelligence.<sup>5</sup> The ‘Made in China 2025’ project aims to strengthen that technological innovation in vital socio-economic sectors.

Does China owe part of its technological progress to the stealing of intellectual property? Undoubtedly so, as is the case with countries such as Brazil, India and Mexico. In the past, the US, too, has only been able to develop its economic growth at the level of a superpower thanks to the large-scale theft of technology from Great Britain and Europe.<sup>6</sup> As *The Economist* puts it, “The transfer of know-how from rich countries to poorer ones, by hook or crook, is an integral part of economic development.”<sup>7</sup>

The success of the Chinese modernisation sprint is based on various pillars:

- 1** The key sectors of the economy are in the hands of the government, which also indirectly controls most of the other sectors, *inter alia* through the controlling presence of the Communist Party (CPC) in most medium-sized and large companies.
- 2** The financial sector is under strict government control.
- 3** The economy is planned, not in all details but in general, both in the short term and in the longer term.
- 4** There is room for (quite a lot of) private initiative within a well-delineated market mechanism that is dynamically developed in various economic domains; the market mechanism is tolerated as long as it does not interfere with economic and social objectives (of the overall planning).
- 5** Compared with other emerging countries, there is a high degree of openness to foreign investment and foreign trade, provided that it is in line with China’s global economic objectives.
- 6** A great deal of effort is being put into developing infrastructure and research and development.
- 7** Wages largely follow the increase in productivity, which has created a large and dynamic internal market.
- 8** A relatively large amount is invested in education, health care and social security.
- 9** The country has enjoyed peace for decades and there is a

relatively high level of social peace in the workplace.

**10** The distribution of agricultural land to farmers at the start of the revolution and the system of individual household registration (Hukou) have made it relatively possible to avoid the typical chaotic rural exodus in most Third World countries, where it has resulted in massive informal and unproductive work.

**11** Unlike the Soviet Union, China has not embarked on a very expensive arms race with the US.

This approach contrasts with the recipe of capitalist countries where financial capital and multinationals are in charge, where short-term profit is the overriding goal and where governments are fixated on eliminating budget deficits through savings. The spectacular way in which China tackled the 2008 financial crisis is typical: the government launched a stimulus program of 12.5% of GDP, probably the largest peace-time programme ever. The Chinese economy plummeted a little but then picked up quickly, while the European economy has been teetering for 10 years.

### New growth model

Due to rapid changes in the internal labour market, wages and foreign markets, the Chinese government developed a different growth model. When President Xi Jinping took office in 2012, he stated that ‘growth for growth’s sake’ should no longer be the goal.<sup>8</sup> The old model was based on exports and on investments in heavy industry, construction and the manufacturing industry. In the new model, the driving force is mass consumption (domestic market), the services sector and higher added-value activities by climbing the technological ladder. This transformation, the ‘12th pillar’ of the Chinese recipe, illustrates the flexibility with which the Chinese leadership implements economic policy. This flexibility stands out from the way in which the Soviet Union dealt with such challenges in its later period.

Can this successful growth continue for a while now? Without doubt the economy is struggling with a high level of debt, shadow banks, over-investment in infrastructure, a real estate bubble, an ageing population, an increasing trade war with the US, and so on. Yet most observers still see China as a resilient economy, with analyses showing that there is still substantial room to allow for error and setbacks and a lot of room to grow at a rapid pace for a long time to come.<sup>9</sup>

### The largest poverty reduction in world history

In 1949, at the start of the Chinese revolution, life expectancy was 35 years. 30 years on, it had already doubled to 68 years.<sup>10</sup> Today, the life expectancy of the Chinese is 76 years. Infant mortality has improved fairly well: if, for example, India offered the same medical care and social support to its inhabitants as China does, 830,000 fewer Indian babies would die each year.<sup>11</sup>

Between 1978 and 2018 China succeeded in lifting a record number of people out of poverty: 770 million.<sup>12</sup> This amounts to the total population of sub-Saharan Africa during that period. At the current pace, extreme poverty will be eradicated by 2020. According to Robert Zoellick, former President of the World Bank:

“This is certainly the greatest leap to overcome poverty in history. China’s efforts alone have ensured that the world’s Millennium Development Goal on poverty reduction will be met. We and the world have much to learn from this.”<sup>13</sup>

As Table 1<sup>14</sup> shows, while wages are stagnating or declining in many countries, they have tripled in China over the last decade. 15 years ago, Western multinationals flocked to China because of low wages. The reverse movement is now starting to take hold. The average wages in the Chinese industry are currently only 20% lower than in Portugal. Countries such as Bulgaria,

Macedonia, Romania, Moldova and Ukraine already had lower minimum wages than China in 2013.<sup>15</sup>

**Table 1: Hourly wage in \$, Manufacturing Industry**

Country	Year	
	2005	2016
China	1.2	3.6
Thailand	1.4	2.0
Argentina	2.1	2.5
Mexico	2.2	2.1
Brazil	2.9	2.7
Portugal	6.3	4.5

### Dark sides

This success story also has its drawbacks. The faster increase in productivity in industry and services, compared with agriculture, has led to a big gap between urban and rural areas, between poorer regions and the richer eastern coastal provinces. The strict Hukou system (*qv*, determining social status) has created a huge group of hundreds of millions of internal migrants who have fewer social rights and are often being discriminated against. The one-child policy (since 1978) has led – apart from its binding character – to numerous selective abortions and a male surplus of more than 30m.

### Democracy: input and output

The Western political system usually regards itself as superior and as the only valid model. This doesn’t demonstrate much historical insight, considering that almost all fascist regimes were born in the womb of Western parliamentary democracy. An unbiased observer will also observe that Western democracy mainly serves the interests of the super-wealthy 1%, lacks both a long-term vision and an effective policy for tackling social and ecological problems, and has been the breeding ground for increasingly ludicrous, unpredictable and dangerous figures such as Trump, Johnson, Bolsonaro and Duterte.

When it comes to democracy, the emphasis in the West is on the input side, on the question of how and by whom decision-making takes place. What are the procedures for choosing the political leadership and is the will of the citizens voiced by the elected representatives? Elections are the most important element in this.

In China, the emphasis is on the output side, ie on the consequences of the decision: is the decision successful and who benefits? The result is paramount, good and fair governance being the most important criterion. In this respect, the Chinese attach more importance to the quality of their politicians than to the procedures for choosing their leaders.<sup>16</sup>

### Political decision-making with Chinese characteristics

According to Daniel Bell,<sup>17</sup> expert on the Chinese model, China’s political system is a combination of meritocracy at the top, democracy at the base and room for experimentation at the intermediate levels. The political leaders are selected on the basis of their merits; and, before they reach the top, they go through a severe process of training, practice and evaluation. There are direct elections at the municipal level and for the provincial party congresses. Political, social or economic innovations are first tried out on a smaller scale (a few cities or provinces); and after thorough evaluation and adjustment are introduced on a large scale. Bell says that this combination “comes close to the best formula for governing a large country.”

In addition, the central government organises opinion polls on a very regular basis, which assess the government’s

performance in the areas of social security, public health, employment and the environment. The popularity of local leaders is also the subject of the surveys. Based on this, policies are frequently adjusted.<sup>18</sup>

The Chinese decision-making system has proved its worth. Francis Fukuyama, who can hardly be suspected of left-wing or Chinese sympathies, has said:

“The most important strength of the Chinese political system is its ability to make large, complex decisions quickly, and to make them relatively well, at least in economic policy. China adapts quickly, making difficult decisions and implementing them effectively.”<sup>19</sup>

For example, in just two years, China has extended the pension system to 240 million rural residents, which exceeds drastically the total number of people covered by the US state pension system.<sup>20</sup>

It should therefore come as no surprise that the Chinese government can count on great support from the population. Around 90% say their country is heading in the right direction. In Western Europe, the figure is 12-37% (the global average).<sup>21</sup>

### The Communist Party

The CPC is the backbone of the Chinese model. With more than 90m members, it is by far the largest political organisation in the world. That such a backbone is useful or even necessary is shown by the gigantic proportions of the country. China is as big as a continent: it is 17 times the size of France and has as many inhabitants as Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Arab countries, Russia and Central Asia combined. Translating this into the European situation would mean that Egypt or Kyrgyzstan would have to be governed from Brussels. Given these proportions, the large differences between the regions and the huge challenges facing the country, a strong cohesive force is needed to keep the country governable and to implement a solid policy. According to *The Economist*:

“China’s rulers believe the country cannot hold together without one-party rule as firm as an emperor’s (and they may be right).”<sup>22</sup>

The Party recruits the most skilled people. The selection process for the promotion of top leaders is objective and rigorous. Kishore Mahbubani, a top Asia expert, has written:

“Far from being an arbitrary dictatorial system, the CPC may have succeeded in creating a rule-bound system that is strong and durable, not fragile and vulnerable. Even more impressive, this rule-bound system has thrown up possibly the best set of leaders that China could produce.”<sup>23</sup>

Nearly three quarters of the population say they support the one-party system.<sup>24</sup>

### International relations

China's economy has been largely self-sufficient in the past. It has been able to afford to live in isolation from the outside world and has often done so. Even at the height of its imperial power, China spread its culture by diplomatic and economic relations rather than by (military) conquests.<sup>25</sup> This approach to foreign policy has also been maintained in recent history. China strives for a multipolar world, characterised by equality between all countries. It regards sovereignty as the cornerstone of the international order and rejects any

interference in the internal affairs of another country, for whatever reason. This often makes China subject to the reproach that it does too little against human rights violations in other countries. In any case, China is the only permanent member of the UN Security Council that has not fired a single shot outside its own borders in the last 30 years.<sup>26</sup>

### Globalisation in Chinese style

Today, China is no longer self-sufficient. With 18% of the world’s population, it has only 7% of the global arable farmland, and imports 5% of the world’s oil. In addition, the country produces far more goods than it consumes. For all these reasons, China today is highly dependent on world markets.

China’s dependence on world trade and the military ‘encirclement’ (in essence) of the US (see below) has prompted the country to take the initiative of a New Silk Road. 2,000 years ago, during the Han Dynasty, the world-renowned Silk Road connected China to the Mediterranean Sea via Eurasia. Like that historic trade route, today’s project has become a vast network of sea and land routes, launched in 2013 under the name of ‘One Belt, One Road’.

Currently, more than 1,600 projects are in place, dealing with construction and infrastructure works, transport, air and other ports, but also cultural exchange initiatives. Hundreds of investments, loans and trade agreements, and dozens of Special Economic Zones, worth \$900bn, are spread over 72 countries, representing a population of approximately 5bn people or 65% of the world’s population. ‘One Belt, One Road’ is by far the largest development programme since the Marshall Plan for post-World War II reconstruction in Europe.

The ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative is strongly reminiscent of the Netherlands’ trade strategy 400 years ago. British and French colonialisms were literally on the hunt for conquered land. They organised military conquests to subdue societies and to steal wealth. Amsterdam, on the other hand, was striving for an ‘empire of trade and credit’. It was not about territory but about business. The Dutch built a gigantic fleet, installed trading posts on the major routes and then tried to secure them. Like the Dutch in the 17th century, China currently has the largest merchant fleet. The Special Economic Zones are “commercial garrisons of a supply chain world, enabling China to secure resources without the messy politics of colonial subjugation,” says *Stratfor*, a prestigious think tank.<sup>27</sup>

### Tilting North-South relations

China’s enormous growth in the heart of Asia has acted as a catalyst for the entire continent. The world’s economic centre of gravity is shifting rapidly towards the poorer economies of Asia. It also dramatically increases the demand for raw materials, to the benefit of many countries in Latin America and Africa.

The industrialisation of East Asia shows the pattern of ‘flying geese’. As a country upgrades economically, wages rise and less sophisticated production tasks shift to poorer regions with lower labour costs. This first happened in Japan, then in South Korea and Taiwan, and today this process is in full swing in China. Because of the higher wages, Chinese companies are now relocating their production to countries such as Vietnam and Bangladesh, but also increasingly to Africa. If this trend continues, it can help to build an industrial base on the African continent.

### Confronting the US

The socialist revolutions did not break out in the heart of capitalism but in its weakest links, the poorest and most underdeveloped countries. An advanced social system then had



to be built on a weak material basis, which has given rise to many handicaps and contradictions.<sup>28</sup> 70 years later, that situation has changed radically. China's great leap forward in technology and its spectacular economic growth have laid solid foundations for building a socialist society.

Of course, Washington is not amused by this. But even worse is the fact, illustrated in Figs 1 and 2,<sup>29,30</sup> that China threatens to surpass the US economically. These two phenomena feed the 'new Cold War' between the US and China and the threat of a 'hot war'.

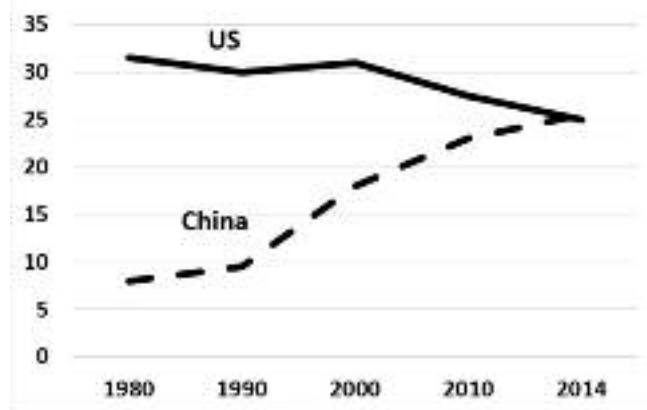


Fig. 1 GDP of the US and China as % of world GDP.

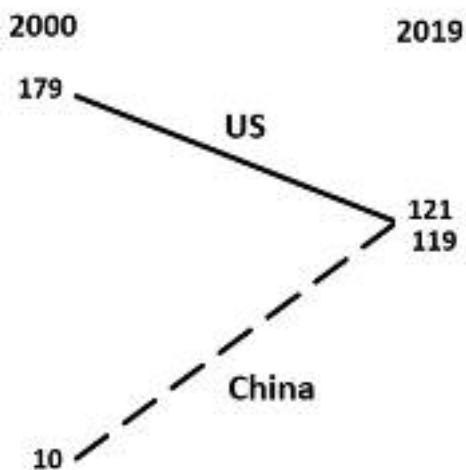


Fig. 2 Number of US and Chinese companies in the top 500 companies in the world.

In the context of the 2019 budget discussions, the US Congress stated that "long-term strategic competition with China is a principal priority for the US". It is not only about economic aspects, but about an overall strategy that must be conducted on several fronts. The aim is to maintain dominance in three areas: technology; the industries of the future; and armaments.<sup>31</sup>

Trump is aiming for a full reset of the economic relations between the US and China. The growing trade war is the most striking, but it is only the leading edge of a larger strategy that includes investment, both Chinese investment in the US and US investment in China. In the first place the strategic sectors are targeted with the aim of disrupting China's technological advance. In this respect, the roll-out of the 5G network is crucial. It is no coincidence that the Huawei, which is far ahead in the development of 5G technology, has become a central target.

The Trump government is also trying to extend this economic war with China to other countries by having clauses signed in trade agreements or by simply putting pressure on them. The aim is to create a kind of 'economic iron curtain' around the country.

## US military strategy

The military strategy towards China has two tracks: an arms race and an encirclement of the country.<sup>32</sup> The arms race is in full swing. The US spends \$650bn a year on weapons, or more than 1/3 of the world total. That is 2.6 times as much as China and 11 times as much per capita. The US also spends \$150bn a year on military research, 5 times as much as China. The Pentagon is feverishly working on a new generation of highly sophisticated weapons, drones and all kinds of robots, which a future enemy will not be able to cope with. A pre-emptive war is not excluded.<sup>33</sup>

The second track is the military encirclement. 90% of China's foreign trade depends on maritime transport. More than 80% of the oil supply has to pass through the Straits of Malacca, near Singapore, whose military bases the US can use by treaty. Washington could easily cut off oil flows to China, and currently the country has no defence against it. As Fig 3 shows, around China the US has more than 30 military bases, facilities or training centres.<sup>34</sup> 60% of the total US fleet is stationed in the region. It is no exaggeration to say that China is encircled and squeezed. You cannot imagine what would happen if China were to install even one military facility, let alone a base, near the US.

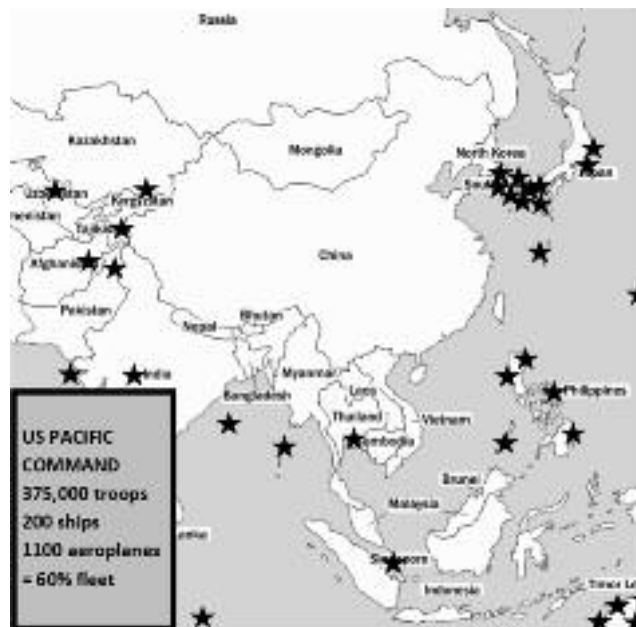


Fig 3. Map showing US military bases (as stars) around China.

It is in this context that China's militarisation of small islands in the South China Sea should be seen, as well as its claim to a large part of this maritime area. Controlling the shipping routes along which its energy and industrial goods are transported is of vital importance to Beijing. It is in that same context that the New Silk Route must be seen.

## Champion of pollution and greening

Since the end of the 1980s, China has entered a phase of development that has caused great environmental pollution. As the 'workplace of the world', it is one of the biggest polluters on the planet. At present the country is also – by far – the largest emitter of CO<sub>2</sub>, albeit that the emissions per person are less than half of those of the US and about the same size as those of Europe. China is also responsible for only 11% of cumulative emissions, compared with more than 70% for industrialised countries.<sup>35</sup>

Anyhow, the situation is untenable. At the current rate, between 1990 and 2050, China will have produced as much carbon dioxide as the whole world did between the beginning of the Industrial Revolution and 1970, and that is catastrophic for global warming.

10 years ago, the Chinese leadership changed course and the ecological issues were given high priority. In 2014 the “War on Pollution” was declared by Prime Minister Li Keqiang. A battery of measures is being drawn up, including trend-setting legislation on the environment, but its application is not always self-evident.

The results follow quickly. In no time, China has become No 1 in the field of solar panels and wind energy. Currently, 33% of the electricity is generated by green energy, compared with less than 17% in the US. China today invests about as much in green technology as the rest of the world combined. It wants to capture and store millions of tons of CO<sub>2</sub> underground in the near future.<sup>36</sup>

The country is a pioneer in the long-distance transmission of large amounts of energy (eg from distant solar panel fields), which is very important for green energy supply of cities. According to NASA, China’s sustained reforestation efforts have made an important contribution to global forestation, which is essential to keep emissions under control. On the other hand, Chinese companies still have a large share of illegal logging.<sup>37</sup>

### Patron saint of the Paris Climate Agreement

China is called the ‘patron saint of the Paris Climate Accord’ (COP 21, 2015; focus, limiting global warming to a maximum of 2 degrees, with 1.5 degrees as a target value). When Trump withdrew from the agreement in 2017, Beijing declared that it would do everything in its power to achieve the goals of COP21, together with others – including the EU.

China also acts as a mediator between rich industrialised countries and developing countries, stressing that global warming is essentially a historical responsibility of the industrialised countries, and therefore arguing that rich countries should make financial resources and technology available to developing countries in order to combat climate change. Thanks to China, the large majority of developing countries have aligned themselves with the objectives of COP21 and submitted climate plans to the UN General Assembly in recent months.<sup>38</sup>

There is obviously still a long way to go in China, but it is going in the right direction. Witness to this is the report in mid-2017 that China has achieved its climate targets two years before the agreed date of 2020. China is also on track to comply with the agreements of the Paris Climate Agreement to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 65% by 2030.<sup>39</sup>

### Errors

Many mistakes have been made over the past 70 years. Initially, the CPC tried to introduce socialism hastily with the Great Leap Forward (1958-1961), with catastrophic consequences. The left-wing extremism of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) left deep scars and led to a right-wing reaction. The introduction of market elements from 1978 onwards has given capitalist exploitation a controlled rein. The consequences were far-reaching: a deeper gap between rich and poor, and the creation of a top layer of capitalists. The margin for personal enrichment has been widened and has caused rampant corruption and abuse of power. Nevertheless, this policy of ‘capitalist bird in the cage’ has made the Chinese economy grow spectacularly and has dramatically reduced extreme poverty. Whether this controlled market-oriented dynamic can be kept in check will remain to be determined by the future.

The Chinese leadership has succeeded in keeping the vast and very heterogeneous country together, but this was and is done by keeping certain minorities tightly in line. Tibetans and Uighurs feel treated like second-class citizens, even though there have been many formal efforts by the Chinese authorities to improve their situation. Quite a few questions remain about the unorthodox and muscular approach to ethnic tensions.

An advantage here is that the Chinese leadership is not in the habit of hiding or concealing weaknesses and problem issues. They are usually explicitly recognised and addressed. For example, before and during the 18th Party Congress, the country’s main problems were listed one by one and discussed and translated, each with action points assigned.<sup>40</sup> Such a rational political attitude makes it possible to learn from the mistakes and, if necessary, to adjust the course.

### Stability of the planet

For the first time in recent history, a poor, underdeveloped country has rapidly developed into an economic superpower, with a major impact on world affairs. China, and in its wake India, is rapidly changing the balance of powers and transforming the world in an unprecedented way.

The more China follows an independent course, the more it deviates from the West and the more it holds up a mirror to ‘the Western system’, the more the country is criticised and attacked. It seems to be very difficult for us to look at this new world player in an open-minded way. According to Mahhubani, “the reluctance of Western leaders to acknowledge that Western world domination cannot continue is a major threat”.<sup>41</sup>

Yet we will have to learn to live with the realisation that we are no longer the centre and benchmark of the world. In fact, with the rise of populism in more and more countries, unpredictable and irresponsible people like Trump, Bolsonaro and Johnson are taking the reins. The stability and liveability of this planet will increasingly depend on people like Xi Jinping and other decent leaders.

■ This article also appears at [www.globalresearch.ca](http://www.globalresearch.ca).

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# NICK WRIGHT

# JOHN HEARTFIELD: PHOTO MONTEUR AND REVOLUTIONARY

Heartfield: One Man's War until 1 February 2020  
Four Corners Gallery, 121 Roman Road, Bethnal Green,  
London E2 0QN. 020 8981 6111 info@fourcornersfilm.co.uk

*"Heartfield's first – Dadaist – photomontages are still marked by their abstract nature. Scraps of photograph and printed text are arranged not so much to meaning but according to the aesthetic mood of the artist.*

*The Dadaist period in Heartfield's work did not continue for long. He soon ceased to waste his artistic talents in abstract fireworks. His works became aimed shots ... Soon no line could be drawn between his montages and his party work."*<sup>1</sup>

Sergei Tretyakov, 1936

*"Whenever I have the task of designing a title page or cover for a book or brochure of our political front, I try to do it in such a way that it appeals irresistibly to the public at large, that is to say, guarantees the widest possible promulgation of revolutionary literature, is a faithful reflection of the contents, and furthermore, is an autonomous paper that promotes our aims ... every scrap of printed paper, every line of print, every book cover must be a help in the great struggle, for the only way that can save us is the way shown us by the Communist Party."*<sup>2</sup>

John Heartfield, 1932

THE German artist John Heartfield was born Helmut Herzfeld in Berlin in 1891. Conscripted into the German army in 1914, he anglicised his name in protest at the national chauvinism to which German social democracy had succumbed. Discharged from the army he, his brother Wieland and the artist Georg Grosz, played with the printed ephemera of newspapers and commercial advertising to subvert the wartime *verbot* on subversive opinion.

In an adroit move to avoid the military control of new publishing Wieland bought up the title of a defunct school magazine, *Neue Jugend* (New Youth). Despite newsprint rationing and a shortage of funds, the paper made an impact with its subversive message, radically innovative typography and unconventional graphic design.

The Dadaists not only effected a rupture with the aesthetic sensibilities of bourgeois society but, in conceiving of their own activity as productive labour in a world of industrial mass production, refashioned the image of the engaged artist. Heartfield's designation of his work as the creation of the 'Dada-Monteur' drew upon the visual language of urban society and industrial production.

As an artistic movement Dadaism was born out of disgust



John Heartfield 1928 KPD Election Poster

*The hand has five fingers/With these 5 fingers seize the enemy/  
Vote List 5/ Communist Party*

at the imperialist mindset and into a political crisis which followed Germany's defeat and the abdication of the Kaiser. The revolutionary wave, in which the workers' revolt and the Spartacist uprising were crushed by an alliance of right-wing Social Democratic politicians and the proto-fascist *Frei Korps*, found the Dadaists engaged in a visual and ideological subversion of good taste and manners, visual and literary conventions and the disintegrating political order.

The First Dada Fair in 1920 was suppressed by the police. Heartfield, along with Wieland, Bertolt Brecht and Erwin Piscator, was part of a new and politically committed cultural movement which was closely aligned with the newly formed *Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands* (Communist Party of Germany, KPD).

Malik Verlag was the publishing house most closely associated with them while Heartfield's work with the immensely popular illustrated weekly *Arbeiter Illustrierte*

*Zeitung* (Workers' Illustrated Journal) pioneered a new and tententious visual style.

Around the KPD and its many publications there developed a highly committed group of politically engaged artists, connected by personal relations and aesthetic sensibility to a very wide circle of the avant-garde but deeply involved in the mass class politics of the revolutionary workers' movement. *Die Rote Fahne* (The Red Flag), the KPD daily, and *Die Knüppel* (The Cudgel), the party's satirical magazine, carried a wide range of work and criticism from this "Red Group". The weekly illustrated *AIZ* – conceived and published by Willi Münzenberg, the Communist International's entrepreneurial propaganda chief – was the vehicle for Heartfield's most effective and renowned photomontages from the highly charged period when the German bourgeoisie began to position the Nazis as a reserve ,

methods. His visit followed the publication in the Soviet art magazine *Brigada Khudozhnikov* (Artists' Brigade) of an interview with Egon Erwin Kisch under the title *Your Opinion on Comrade Heartfield, Comrade Kisch*.

Kisch, a Czech/Austrian reporter, revolutionary writer and Comintern publicist, drew a picture of Heartfield as an artist successfully mobilising the visual rhetoric and techniques of Dadaism with the revolutionary purpose of depicting social reality in the service of "revolutionary necessity".<sup>3</sup>

Thus Heartfield's practice became a factor in the controversies arising from the Central Committee resolution.

As a result of the shortcomings in propaganda work detailed in the resolution, poster production was centralised in the State Press for Art (IZOGIS) and thus was more rigorously invigilated not least by its Workers' Council. In their first inspection of the poster work produced at the press the



**John Heartfield 1931** Cover for *USSR im Bau* (German language edition of *USSR in Construction*), No 12 December 1931.

force for the defence of crisis-ridden capitalism.

The *AIZ* was immensely successful with a circulation that topped half a million and for most of the period – firstly in Germany and then as an exiled title – it carried, often as the front cover lead – his relentlessly anti-capitalist, antifascist photomontages.

In 1931, during Heartfield's visit to Moscow and his highly productive encounter with the Soviet avant-garde in and around the magazine *USSR in Construction*, he conducted workshops with Red Army commanders and students and spent a period working with an artists' brigade in the Baku oil industry. Much of this collaborative material was published in *USSR in Construction*.

Heartfield had arrived in Russia in the middle of an intensive period of reflection and criticism following the 1931 resolution of the Soviet Central Committee on propaganda

Council favoured *We Must Become Specialists Ourselves* by the painter Alexandr Deyneka, and Gustav Klucis' *The USSR is the Shock Brigade of the World's Proletariat*. These two were both adherents of the OKTYABR group which gave an organisational platform for the leading Constructivists in the Soviet Union and a focus to their controversies with the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia (AKhRR).

The encounter between the styles and methods represented by Heartfield and Klucis arose in the form of a criticism of Klucis' work in that it was deemed as "mechanistic and overladen" with the worker depicted in an "impersonal manner" rather than as an emotionally charged figure capable of mobilising the masses. This approach refashioned criticism of the formal features of Klucis' work as in essence ideological. Klucis' response was typically robust in its defence of the formal properties his work exemplifies:



**John Heartfield 1929** John Heartfield depicted with Police Commissioner Zörgiebel in *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung*, No 37, 1929.

“Personally, I am quite familiar with Heartfield’s work and value it highly, but I believe we can learn very little from him ... What Heartfield says about the imperialist war doesn’t say anything about photomontage itself.”<sup>4</sup>

In 1930 OKTYABR organised its first exhibition in Moscow and swiftly followed this with a Berlin show.

The Berlin exhibition focussed on architecture, print and graphic design in which photography and montage were central.

Heartfield adhered to the Association of Revolutionary Artists of Germany ARBKD, in which the initiative was held by the more ideologically engaged avant garde. He was an active participant in the controversies which surrounded the exhibition. Something of the Dadaist sensibility is evident in the political theatre carried out by his Soviet associate A Gutnov who had studied at the Arts and Crafts school in Berlin in the preceding years. The pair tethered two sheep to the Brandenburg gate with the slogan “We are Voting for the National Socialists.”

In an interview conducted by Alfred Durus, the art critic of *Rote Fahne*, Gutnov described “a new type of artist”:

“The artist has become an industrial worker who works with other industrial workers in a factory. . . . The artists must either work industrially-collectively or as an agitator and propagandist. In the OKTYABR group, only six artists still work in studios, 240 artists are already out in factories and plants.”<sup>5</sup>

This concept, designated by Tretyakov as *operativism* distinguished – in literature – between different kinds of activity;

“To put it simply: to invent and important theme is



**Gustav Klucis** Poster *The USSR is the Shock Brigade of the World’s Proletariat*, State Press for Art IZOGIS, 1931.

novelistic *belles lettres*: to discover an important theme is *reportage*: to contribute constructively to a important theme is *operativism*.”<sup>6</sup>

Tretyakov argued that in the future, “Writing will cease to be an unusual individual skill and will become part of communal education.”

Such a profound challenge to the prevailing conventions of creative activity was bound to find an opposition in a society in which the shock of revolutionary proletarian self-activity had already produced a reflexively defensive counter-revolution among the bourgeois and petit bourgeois strata. Among the alternative pole of thought in revolutionary circles the repudiation of the traditional form in literature, the visual arts and theatre naturally became an active ingredient in wider political and ideological controversies.

Heartfield’s practical work in the ensuing period exemplified the *operative* approach.

### Heartfield in London today

The present exhibition at Four Corners gallery in London consists of images originally published in the *AIZ* and as party propaganda and reproduced in the German Democratic Republic. It was widely exhibited there and in the socialist countries. A complete set was donated to Liverpool School of Art by Heartfield’s widow Gertrud in 1976 to mark a 1967 visit by the artist. The set remained unexhibited until 2018.

This material is already widely circulated in reproduction and much discussed but the quality of these exhibition images, many directly drawn from original artworks created for the *AIZ*, and their assembly into a coherent whole, introduces a new audience to the striking power and political relevance of this work.

Heartfield devoted himself completely to his creative work in the service of the revolutionary movement without



**John Heartfield 1932** *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute. Millions Stand Behind Me* *Arbeiter Illustrierte Zeitung* No 42, 16 October 1932.

any sense that this was distinguished from his significance as a cultural personality or his identity as an artist. In his work we can see a complete fusion of form, didactic purpose and content.

The photographer W (Janos) Reissmann who worked with Heartfield gave a revealing picture of Heartfield's approach and his working methods:

"Heartfield the painter threw away his brush and took up the scissors; but he did not do this as the result of an artistic whim or the playful snobbery of being different at all costs. His aim was to utilise, in the interests of the revolutionary working class, the power of photography to convince; he wanted to utilise the irresistible effectiveness of photography against those who had hitherto misused it, against the exploiters.

"The photographs I made for Heartfield, in accordance with an exact pencil sketch and always under his personal supervision, often took hours, many hours. He insisted on nuances which I could no longer perceive."<sup>7</sup>

Both as a student and as an advertising commercial artist – Heartfield produced work for the cheese and sparkling wine firm Edelweiss – Heartfield was immersed in the visual language of the mass media. With one foot in German and European high culture and the other in the brash, fast-moving and technologically innovative world of commercial print and photography, his artistic method drew powerfully on both classical themes and contemporary techniques.

There is a constant use of the crucifixion motif as an exemplar of suffering and martyrdom alongside a rigorous and at times classical compositional discipline. The conscious assembly of disparate images and type inevitably disrupts the conventions of representational painting, dispensing with formal conventions of perspective in an echo

of the 20th century rupture in visual culture.

His brother Wieland Herzfelde said:

"Heartfield's works do not reproduce his portrait but they bear the stamp of his aesthetic and political commitment. His fantasy is almost always reinforced, made more precise, supplemented by the idea and the text."<sup>8</sup>

This emphasis on the dialectical interplay of image and text, the ideological function of the caption in anchoring the meaning of the image thus transformed, is what lifts Heartfield's work above conventional propaganda, which roots his art in reality, which makes explicit his tendentious purpose. Hans Hess described the method thus:

"The dialectics of Marx are the key to understanding Heartfield. In essence it is the same principle as wit, where, out of the juxtaposition of two facts a new meaning, a new truth arises. Heartfield's work is based on the principle: thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and thus the revelation of truth."<sup>9</sup>

Hans Hess, who knew Heartfield, was interned with him and collaborated with him in the Free German League of Culture in wartime London, placed Heartfield's significance in the mid-20th century cultural milieu as the foremost practitioner of photography as realist art.

"What Heartfield realised, as one of the first artists to do so, was the changed nature of man's experience of reality. With the invention of photography, that new secondary image of an event takes on its own life and as such becomes a new reality. Thus art is made of a series of secondary realities which reveal in Heartfield's work the true character of the realities to which they are secondary . . . Art is now made of those images which society has informed with meaning, those images which are everybody's substitute for 'experience'. His imagery, his symbols, his allegories are all of this world. In fact, they are mostly photographs of this world and yet, his completed work is a didactic, informative, emotional work of art which can stand in fullness and meaning next to that of any master.

"His work fulfils exactly those functions which a work of art has always fulfilled. Heartfield is a revolutionary artist and therefore he has to make the invisible social relations visible. When Heartfield takes visual reality to pieces, he does so to put it right."<sup>10</sup>

## Notes

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# REVIEWS INTERNATIONAL COMMUNISM STARTS HERE



*Red Star over the Third World*

By Vijay Prashad

[Pluto Press, London, 2019, pbk, 131 pp, £12.99, ISBN 978-0-7453-3966-5]

Review by Kenny Coyle

The author describes his work as “a small book with a large hope”, the wish being that new generations will come to see the October Revolution of 1917 in Russia as the Vietnamese revolutionary leader Ho Chi Minh did, when he likened it to “a brilliant sun” awaking the world’s oppressed and exploited.

Vijay Prashad is a talented and prolific writer, as well as being engaging and amazingly concise, given the breadth and complexity of the material covered. Although based in the United States, he is a member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). As a result, the combination of Prashad’s familiarity with Marxist-Leninist concepts and his clear sympathies with the October Revolution’s participants brings this book alive.

One of Lenin’s strengths, compared to many Marxists of the Second International, was the seriousness with which he approached the agrarian question and his subsequent arguments for the potentially revolutionary role of the peasantry. This was essential for communist work in the colonial and semi-colonial countries, where the industrial working class was weak and in some cases practically non-existent. It is a question of continuing, rather than simply historical interest, given the still considerable rural populations in much of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

A second strength lay in Lenin’s opinion that the reality of national oppression affected wide sections of the population in colonial and semi-colonial countries that went far beyond the workers and peasants. Intellectuals and the middle strata were obvious allies. However, under specific circumstances and in certain conditions, sections of the local bourgeoisie could be brought into national anti-imperialist coalitions. The debate over which tactics communists should employ in relation to their indigenous bourgeois nationalists was one that remained alive in the Comintern throughout its existence.

The problems this raised, in countries such as China, India and Indonesia in particular, proved more complex to resolve in practice rather than theory, and in these cases the early communist parties encountered numerous problems of alliances and rivalries that affected their own independent development.

The Russian Revolution also set as one of its goals the liberation of women from the ‘despotism of men’ as well as the ‘despotism of capital’. This was no easy task given that patriarchy seemed even more deeply embedded in pre-capitalist societies than in economically developed ones. The burden of religious superstition and misogynistic cultural practices prevented women from developing themselves in broader society, reinforcing social backwardness. The Russian Communist Party’s women’s department, Zhenotdel, had undertaken the unequal task of pushing for the fullest possible liberation of women in the new Soviet republic, often against the indifference or even obstruction of otherwise exemplary male communists.

Setting these basic parameters, Prashad proceeds to mine a mountain of historical experience across Asia, Africa and Latin America of how workers and peasants organised themselves to replicate the October Revolution.

If we refer casually to the ‘Russian Revolution’, this is true to the extent that it was a revolution in a Russian-dominated empire, ‘the prison house of nations’ as it was often referred to.

Prashad devotes an entire chapter to the role of non-Russian peoples, specifically those of Central Asia. Here the Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz and hundreds of other nationalities and national minorities belonged to pre-capitalist and even pre-feudal social structures, speaking dozens of non-European languages and dialects, embracing non-Western religions and bringing a mosaic of cultural elements that

connected these peoples with the East rather than the West.

Prashad also shifts the focus away from the Moscow-centric histories of the Comintern in a chapter (somewhat misleadingly) entitled ‘Eastern Marxism.’ He also recovers names such as Aimé Césaire, a communist and poet from the French colony of Martinique, and Peru’s José Carlos Mariátegui from undeserved obscurity in the English-speaking world. There is space too for one of Prashad’s intellectual heroes, the remarkable Indian theoretician and activist EMS Namboodiripad, in his pioneering work on the inter-relationship between class and caste in India.

In the chapter ‘Polycentric Communism’, Prashad takes this further, looking at the practices of the mass Indonesian Communist Party and his own CPI(M). He is open about the defeats suffered by the communists, such as Indonesia in 1965 when the powerful PKI and its related mass organisations were drowned in blood by a right-wing military coup, assisted by local Islamist militias with the blessing and direct assistance from Western imperialist agencies.

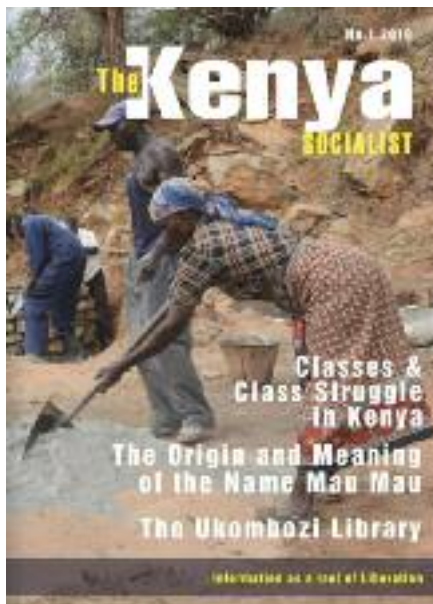
In the chapter ‘Colonial Fascism’, Prashad brings out a theme elaborated by the late Italian communist Domenico Losurdo, namely the common features of colonialism and fascism. The outright racism of white supremacy that permeated colonialism, rising to extermination of entire tribes and peoples in some cases, was to an extent a precursor of the Nazi programme. However, Prashad correctly does not equate the unique event of the Holocaust with colonialism *per se*.

A final chapter, ‘Memories of Communism’ offers a useful and concise account of the collapse of the Soviet Union and its disastrous effects, not only on the peoples of the former Soviet republics but on communist parties and national liberation movements worldwide.

To keep the book as readable as possible, Prashad’s arguments flow without footnotes or detailed references – although these are available from the author. However, the lack of an index is disappointing as readers will pick this book up again and again, diving into its pages for Prashad’s insightful commentary. These minor points aside, this is a brilliant and thought-provoking book, an essential starting point for understanding the complexities of international communism over the past century. Buying directly from the publisher’s website also entitles the buyer to a free ebook version.



# A SIGNIFICANT STEP FORWARD FOR KENYA SOCIALISTS



The Kenya Socialist, No 1, September 2019 Edited by Shiraz Durrani and Kimami Waweru [36 pp: Vita Books, Nairobi, Kenya, ISBN 978-9966-131-81-6. Downloadable free as a pdf from <http://vitabooks.co.uk/the-kenya-socialist/>. Paper copies obtainable for £12 from African Books Collective, PO Box 721, Oxford OX1 9EN, <http://www.africanbookscollective.com/books/the-kenya-socialist.>]

Review by Martin Levy

Over the past few years *CR* has published a number of articles on colonial and postcolonial Kenya: a 3-part series by Shiraz Durrani on ‘Mau Mau: The Revolutionary Force from Kenya’ (*CR*67-69, 2013); a further article by the same author on the legacy of Makhan Singh, trade union leader and independence fighter (*CR*73, 2014); and reviews by Cyprian Fernandes of Shiraz’s book on assassinated Kenyan socialist, Pio Gama Pinto (*CR*90, Winter 2018-19), and of the memoirs of Pinto’s friend Fitz de Souza, giving further background to why, and by whom, Pinto was killed (*CR*93). In between those last two articles, we also published, in *CR*91, Shiraz’s ‘Kenya Resists; Artists Challenge the Hawk in the Sky’, describing the harsh conditions for left-wing activists under postcolonial repression, but at the same time the use of culture, underground libraries and more recently the establishment of the Ukombozi (‘Liberation’) Library to keep the revolutionary flame alive.

The repression forced both Shiraz and

Cyprian into exile. But Kenyan government changes have now allowed new opportunities for socialist activities. The Ukombozi Library – which has become a partner of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Germany – and the 2016 move of Vita Books from London to Kenya are two examples of this. Vita Books’ latest venture, *The Kenya Socialist*, edited by Shiraz Durrani and Kimami Waweru, and intended as a quarterly journal, is a significant step forward.

The editorial in the first issue sets out the aims, announcing that “socialism is the way ahead”. The starting point is a quotation from Lenin’s article, To the Rural Poor:

“We want to achieve a new and better order of society [where] ... there must be neither rich nor poor; all will have to work. Not a handful of rich people, but all the working people must enjoy the fruits of their common labour. Machines and other improvements must serve to ease the work of all and not to enable a few to grow rich at the expense of millions and tens of millions of people. This new and better society is called socialist society.”<sup>1</sup>

This, the editors say, matches what Pio Gama Pinto summed up as the aims of Kenya’s war of independence. They go on to state that the journal will:

- promote socialist ideas, experiences and world outlook;
- increase awareness of classes, class contradictions and class struggles in Kenya, both historical and current;
- expose the damage done by capitalism and imperialism in Kenya and Africa;
- offer solidarity to working class, peasants and other working people and communities in their struggles for equality and justice;
- promote internationalism and work in solidarity with people in Africa and around the world in their resistance to imperialism;
- make explicit the politics of information and communication as tools of repression and also of resistance in Kenya.

The lead article, by Kimami Waweru, is on ‘Classes and Class Struggles in Kenya’. He counters Kenyan ruling circles’ claims that the development of classes is a European idea, analysing Kenyan society in terms of comprador bourgeois, national bourgeois, peasants, pastoralists, semi-proletarians, the proletariat, the petty bourgeois and lumpen proletarians. He divides the peasants into rich and poor, and the petty bourgeois into lower (teachers, nurses

etc), middle (doctors, professors etc) and upper (senior people in local and national government). Of these classes only the proletariat is reliable; the lower petty bourgeois are always indecisive; the middle petty bourgeois have comfortable conditions and rarely protest, except for themselves; the lumpen proletariat can be both enemies and friends of change; the poor peasants can be won for change but are generally conservative; the semi-proletarians can only be won for change when they understand that the capitalist system is responsible for their predicament.

In the following article, Nicholas Mwangi demonstrates that the term Mau Mau originated as a deliberate attempt by the colonialists to denigrate the anti-imperialist resistance; the freedom fighters only ever referred to themselves as the Land and Freedom Army. His article is followed by the above-mentioned ‘Kenya Resists’, although by an oversight the prior publication in *CR*91 is missing. Then Kimami Waweru writes on ‘Ideology – Ideas that can Oppress or Liberate’, Njokol Wamal writes about the Ukombozi Library (a speech to the 2018 All African People’s Conference), and Shiraz Durrani is interviewed on ‘Information as a Tool of Liberation’.

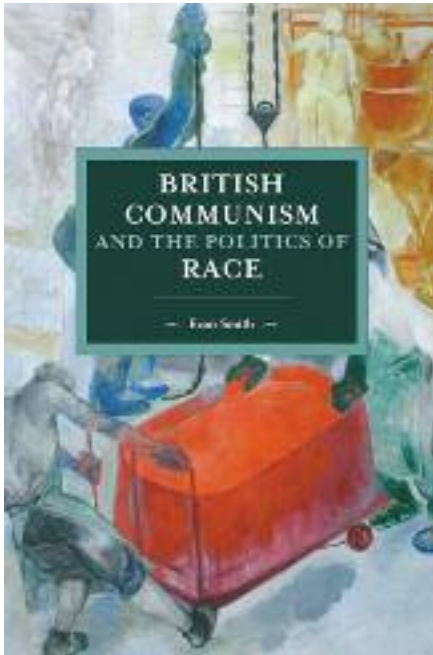
The journal is professionally designed, illustrated by colour photographs, and with references to, or quotations from, Lenin, Marx and Engels, Mao Zedong, Maurice Cornforth, Rosa Luxemburg, Kwame Nkrumah, Amilcar Cabral and a number of other African writers who may not be known to British readers. Given the parallels in class structure between Kenya today and pre-revolutionary China, Mao’s writings of that period are arguably of some relevance. However, Kimame Waweru’s statement (p 7) that China “is now an imperialist country” may be disputed by *CR* readers, although this needs to be understood in terms of the Kenyan context which he cites.

Communists in Britain may not agree with all assessments made, but we need to respect them. As anti-imperialists and revolutionaries within the former colonial metropolis we have a duty to give what solidarity we can to those fighting for socialism in Kenya. Supporting and publicising *The Kenyan Socialist* is a start – and in the process we educate ourselves about the realities of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

## Notes and References

- 1 Lenin, *Collected Works*, Vol 6, p 366.

# REVIEWS AN ECLECTIC WELDING OF 'MENSHEVISM', EURO-COMMUNISM AND ULTRA-LEFTISM



*British Communism and the Politics of Race* by Evan Smith  
[2018, 275 pp: hbk/ebook, Brill, Leiden, ISBN 978-90-04-29713-5/-35236-0, €110, \$127; pbk, Haymarket Books, £24.99 (now £11.99 from Blackwells)]

Review by Graham Stevenson

Evan Smith's *British Communism and the Politics of Race* is another in the Brill/Haymarket Books' Historical Materialism series. Haymarket grew out of the recently deceased *International Socialist Review*, the theoretical journal of the Socialist Workers Party USA. This and other projects are now identified as part of the 'Center for Economic Research and Social Change', a charitable foundation.

Smith's book is really a rendition of, first, a PhD thesis, and then a postdoctoral fellowship. It shows. Though my name is bracketed with Martin Jacques (and many others), as those who provided material, Smith displays rather more inclination towards the approach of the former editor of *Marxism Today*.

It is, to my mind, an eclectic welding of 'Menshevik', Euro-communist, and ultra-leftist ideas, but I would say that, wouldn't I? It is said that it is always best to write about the things you love. I found this a hard book to read, I think largely because it began to dawn on me that Dr Smith doesn't even like his subject! And then the wholly academic genesis of it celebrates that irritating style that insists on telling you what's going to be said, then saying it, and then repeating what's just been said – over and over again, added to by much repetition of stray phrases.

There is no doubt that a book needs to be written about the approach of British Communism towards the politics of race, but this is not it. Race in Britain cannot be distinguished from the role of imperialism, of which there is no study here; though apparently, demanding that the state acts against fascism illustrates the 'reformism' of the Communist Party. The book's special vocabulary, in emulation of the veritable cottage industry that CPGB study has become for publishable academic research, has revisionists as 'reformers' and Marxists as 'traditionalists'.

Smith only really addresses the period from 1947 to the mid-80s, trailing a little to the end, but starting with what seems a grudging acceptance that the Communist Party did play a significant role in single-handedly opposing what were euphemistically called 'colour bars' – racist exclusions from work or leisure – and in initiating, guiding and connecting up activists and movements seeking liberation from the Empire. But there's little detail about any of this, which is a precursor to the main argument.

And this is that, despite its pioneering role, the CPGB had rejected revolutionism by the time the Empire was facing its last legs; and that, while it played a valiant role against the tide of racism and fascism that then emerged with 'immigration', it was hidebound to the politics of the United Front. Since the Labour Party and the TUC pursued a largely consensual approach with the Tories, and the Communist Party held to a class-based analysis of racism, it needed to perform a balancing act to bring its allies to the table. But second-generation black people were suspicious of the white left, and the serious BAME profile the Communist Party had from the war to the 1970s began to recede heavily.

Of course, there is something in this; but Smith does not give enough credence to how the issue of race was a much-contested left-right controversy in many unions, long before the term BAME was invented. I'm not sure he's much aware of it, since his account of black trade union struggles follows standard internet memes and is restricted to ultra-leftist sources.

Take the infamous Wolf Rubber dispute in 1965 in Southall, not covered by Smith, involving the IWA-organised mainly Punjabi workers in the TGWU, a union then still transitioning from solidly right-wing to solidly left-wing. Months of internal special enquiries led by the then Acting Assistant General Secretary, Jack Jones, saw a complete reform of the mechanism for making unofficial strikes official. The right-wing, in the shape of one Bert Fry, the London and Eastern regional secretary, was horrified. Ken Livingstone would later write of Fry's perverse "moderance" in his dealings with the London Labour Party at a time when Black Sections were being pressed for.

The TGWU became transformed from a union that negotiated colour quotas for employment in the late 1940s/1950s to one that supported black workers' militancy in the 1970s. Smith's profound lack of knowledge of the labour movement transposes Imperial Typewriters from Leicester, where it really was, to Birmingham, where some archives about the dispute can be found (though most of his research was conducted in the CPGB archive in Manchester). Charitably, I suppose, I should forgive an Australian university fellow for ignorance of the geography of an English region, but did he really study the material?

There's not a word of the following in this book: allies of Bert Fry could be found in the Midlands TGWU of the 1970s where, in Leicester, the application of secret race-based bonuses and rates negotiated by a white shop steward and a white officer were at the basis of a powerful dispute, retrospectively given official support. Midlands Communists in the union fought hard for solidarity and, after a left-led executive enquiry, the union would never be the same again. It was Birmingham communists who had already ensured that black shop steward Bill Morris was elected a lay executive member in 1972. He was then propelled into the East Midlands on the first ladder of the full time

official route, directly leading to his election as Deputy General Secretary in 1986 and General Secretary in 1992, the first black person in Britain to attain such an exalted position. Subsequently, the face of the union was substantially changed down to the grassroots, with communists playing a leading role in this.

Seemingly, the Communist Party was now outflanked by ultra-leftists (the SWP is heavily mentioned in despatches). The issue of “inter-sectionality” now emerges at the core of Smith’s thesis. Only as the ‘reformers’ battle with the ‘traditionalists’, he says, does the Communist Party begin to connect with communities at a local level. This argument has always mystified me. I’ve never understood why it’s so hard to grasp that a Punjabi foundry worker from Bilston could identify as both that and as a Sikh, an Indian, a member of the IWA, TGWU, one of the many alternative communist forces in India, and as a native of the Black Country. Nowadays, third and fourth generation ‘immigrants’, who speak south Asian languages often with a Yam-Yam or Brummie accent, understand both the politics of identity and also take official strike action, as a visit to increasing numbers of picket lines today will show.

There is much reviewing of the ‘scholarship’ of this field, possibly of interest to someone doing a thesis, but it clutters a story that could have been edited to half the length. After about 40 pages of methodology, nomenclature, and structure, and a potted but very standard version of the Comintern’s interventions on race, we get to Windrush.

If it’s all the fault of the Communist Party not being able to stop racism, maybe that explains why I couldn’t find anything here of the new research opportunities available from the archiving of the broader labour movement. Emulating the state, the Labour Party’s International Department, in between its Herculean labours on the anti-communist front, no doubt learnt a little from US intelligence agencies about race relations.

Also not mentioned is the Labour Party’s ‘Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions’ paper No 320, *The Colour Problem in Britain and its Treatment*, which as early as July 1948 noted that it was “much more difficult for a person of colour to obtain lodgings or accommodation in a boarding,

lodging house or hotel than for a white person ... coloured persons are also refused admission to dance halls and denied service in a cafe, a restaurant or a public house ... it is quite often impossible for a coloured person, qua his colour, to obtain the lease of a house”, and so on. The widespread refusal of white employees to work alongside black workers was also noted in a TUC briefing that followed. Assimilation and dilution were the consensus – apart from communists.

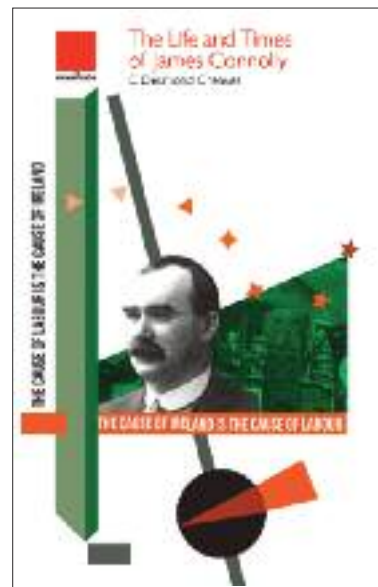
But the centrality of Smith’s thesis is obvious sympathy for one interpretation of the 1978 edition of the Party’s programme, seeking a broad democratic alliance, promoted by the increasingly factional leadership of the Party. This was based on a vague formulation at best, with impenetrable literature emerging that obscured what degree of priority should be assigned to what, and which baby should be thrown out with the bathwater. The conception was much clouded by contradictory passages amidst the construction of an alliance by the bulk of the salariat of the Party with the Young Turks of the day, who became increasingly hostile to even the Young Marx. The atomisation of the Communist Party’s membership, says Smith, meant that little or nothing could be done to move anti-racist work forward – but one might say, any work. That two-thirds simply left the Party in a handful of years, is put down to factionalism.

Smith’s blog, New Historical Express (formerly Hatful of History), may be known to some. It is marked by cheeky asides, such as a picture of the front page of the *Morning Star* during the period when the Berlin Wall came down. Mainly it’s a puff for the books and many short papers written by this academic, but there’s a very useful link to online archives of leftist material. Notably, neither the Communist Party Archive Trust/Microform CPGP archives nor the *Daily Worker/Morning Star* back numbers are linked to. Perhaps he forgot? Searches are free and a limited subscription is available at a very reasonable price, with academics getting access to the very expensive university library subscriptions at will. Here are the links that so elude Mr Smith. Check for yourself rather than buying the book:

<https://www.ukpressonline.co.uk/ukpressonline/?sf=DWMS>.

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# Manifesto



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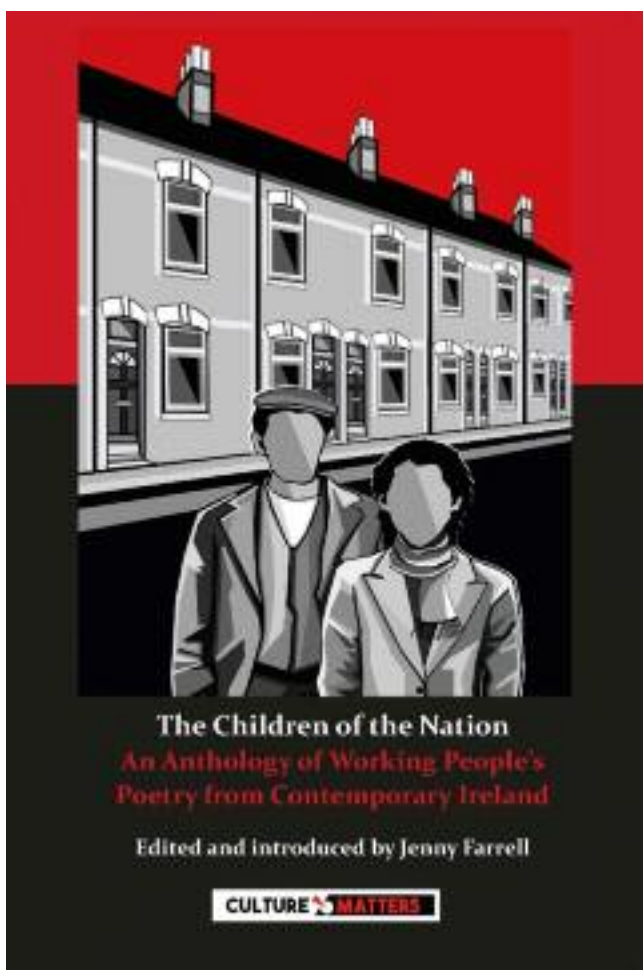
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# MIKE QUILLE SOUL FOOD THE CHILDREN OF THE NATION



declares its resolve to pursue the happiness and prosperity of the whole nation and of all its parts, cherishing all of the children of the nation equally, and oblivious of the differences carefully fostered by an alien Government, which have divided a minority from the majority in the past.”

The equal cherishing of all of the children of the whole Irish nation has not happened, any more than it has in Britain or Europe. It is a class-divided society, scarred by economic exploitation and political corruption. It is still following the dominant neoliberal capitalist model of unregulated markets, unplanned, speculative investment, political corruption and the unsustainable, destructive extraction of natural resources. This has resulted in yawning inequality, long hospital and housing waiting lists, stagnant wages and widespread poverty, homelessness, and addiction problems.

Against this background, **Culture Matters** recently commissioned and published an anthology of poetry, the first anthology of working people’s poetry in contemporary Ireland. Referencing the Proclamation, it’s called *Children of the Nation*, and is edited by Jenny Farrell.

Recent academic research by Dave O’Brien and colleagues<sup>1</sup> shows that only around 10% of British writers are from working-class backgrounds; and only slightly more working-class people, around 12%, get jobs in the publishing industry. So it’s no surprise that it’s easy to find books reflecting comfortable middle-class lives, experiences and sensibilities, and much harder to find books, poems and plays about those whose lives are a struggle.

*Children of the Nation* seeks to redress that for Ireland, highlighting other kinds of identity and experience – the marginalised, whose concerns are not sufficiently heard; people in precarious employment, the unemployed and the homeless. A non-standard biography for each contributor highlights their connection with the working class, demonstrating that poetry is not an elusive and exclusive domain.

Homelessness is a major theme, expressed in many various, vivid ways. One of these is an overarching feeling of alienation from mainstream society. The title of this first poem refers to ‘Black 47’, the worst year (1847) of Ireland’s Great Potato Famine, while “17” means 2017:

**T**HE PROCLAMATION of the Irish Republic, written by Pádraig Pearse and James Connolly, started the Easter Rising in Dublin in 1916.

It was ahead of its time in many ways. It announced a republic, at a time when most of Europe was ruled by emperors or kings. It also called for a new Irish government “representative of the whole people of Ireland and elected by the suffrages of all her men and women”. Apart from Sweden, women in most other European countries weren’t allowed to vote at that time.

Amongst other things, the Proclamation stated that:

“The Republic guarantees religious and civil liberty, equal rights and equal opportunities to all its citizens, and

## **Black 47 to 17**

by Ross J Walsh

Ain't no home.  
Not on these quiet streets  
where the new  
gentry lie in wait to  
sink their long  
vampiric fangs into  
your wallet.  
Where expensive dwellings  
harken back  
to Black 47,  
when we were  
stuffed inside workhouses,  
packed tight like  
cigarettes in their box,  
just waiting  
to burn out. The greedy  
rub their hands  
with glee in much the same  
way now as  
they did back then. Over a  
hundred and seventy years changed  
nothing. The  
rich get richer and the  
poor grow more  
poor, and most of us have  
nowhere to  
live. For there ain't no home  
in Dublin.

Some poets reflect on being victims of abuse in a society that has relinquished its duty of care for many of its children, its women, its men. Jennifer Horgan writes heartrendingly about the Tuam babies, the 798 children of unmarried mothers who died at the Catholic-run Bon Secours Mother and Baby Home in Tuam, County Galway between 1925 and 1961, and were buried in an unmarked mass grave:

### **Tuam Babies**

by Jennifer Horgan

Damp and green  
the garden frames our warming.  
Same shape and grain  
as when you'd drive me out to school  
and back again.

Along the bank  
you mark the knot-still-forming  
Dried-out earth  
long-term dearth of flowering.  
With thanks to God you understand  
sieving mud through ageing hands  
years of trying patchy growth.  
The strangeness of a single rose.

It's a good thing you've come home

Your weed so furiously fused  
that we must both remove  
pull and drag it to the sack,  
until halved and heaving you approve  
and I relax.  
File in sands, a saving grace  
You  
Your woollen jumper, muddied hands.

This no burial ground  
to cover violence  
Simple truth in unmarked silence.

Then there is the very real social violence against over 10,000 homeless people. Sarah Boyce evokes this for Belfast:

### **Its Beating Heart**

by Sara Boyce

'*Live in the heart of the city*' the outsize banner proclaims.

Its dirty disposable heart,  
strewn with coffee cups in latte coloured puddles,  
where bicycle wheels, bent like Uri Geller spoons,  
muffle lampposts on street corners softened  
with smoke from a nearby bingo hall,  
where hopeful hearts quicken then slow,  
as the two fat ladies wave from the opposite side of the  
hall.

'*Live in the heart of the city*'.

Its swollen imperial heart,  
whose arteries still pulse a royal blue,  
and watch its newcomer families  
gather in safety knots within the folds  
of the Famine Queen's marbled frock  
and wonder –  
would she be as *flaithiúil* with her fivers\*  
for those foodbanks they depend on?

'*Live in the heart of the city*'.

Its brick-bleed and rain-wept heart,  
whose municipal vision cuts through  
its public benches;  
no space here for homeless bums  
Meanwhile, down a high street entry  
great black-backed gulls  
span a crumpled sleeping bag  
in search of carrion.

(\*the English translation of the Irish word *flaithiúil* is generous. Queen Victoria, known as the Famine Queen, is reported to have donated £5 to the Irish Famine Relief Fund. On the same day she donated a fiver to the Battersea Cats and Dogs Home.)

Other writers, like Rita Ann Higgins, address unemployment with unrepentant sarcasm:

## No One Mentioned the Roofer

For Pat Mackey  
by Rita Ann Higgins

We met the Minister,  
we gave him buns, we admired his suit.  
The band played, we all clapped.

No one mentioned the roofer;  
whose overtime was cut  
whose under time was cut  
whose fringe was cut  
whose shoelaces were cut  
whose job was lost.

We searched for his job  
but it had disappeared.  
One of us should have said  
to the Minister,

Hey Minister, we like your suit  
have a bun, where are our jobs?  
But there was no point;  
he was here on a bun-eating session  
not a job-finding session.

His hands were tied.  
His tongue a marshmallow.

These themes and countless others emerge from the poetry of people who identify with the disregarded and dispossessed. The authenticity of 67 working lives unfolding before our eyes makes for a genuinely unique volume.

The Irish labour movement was hugely supportive of the project, including Fórsa, UNITE, CWU, Mandate, as well as the Belfast, Dublin and Galway Trades Councils. As Brian Campfield, General Secretary of the Northern Ireland Public Services Alliance, 2010-2015, and President of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 2015-2017, said:

“In the trade union movement, we understandably concentrate our efforts on collective actions to advance the interests of working people, both in the workplace and in our interventions in the public and political arenas. Underlying our collective actions is an understanding that we are also involved in a movement which challenges the hollowing-out of democracy, and it is no surprise that in addition to the struggle for a fairer share of the fruits of labour, we find ourselves in conflict with those interests which promote an even greater extension of private sector interests through privatisation and the commercialisation of public services. We are well aware that the struggles of working people and their hopes and aspirations are constantly marginalised.

“We also understand that the creative articulation of working-class experiences contributes to a more developed awareness and self-confidence among working people, and therefore I was delighted to be asked to become involved in assisting Culture Matters to publish this anthology of working-class poetry in Ireland. The support of a number of Irish trade union organisations, North and South, has provided a rare opportunity to publish the work of poets who regard their work as expressions of working-class experiences and conditions.

“The response in terms of the number and quality of submissions, and the variety of themes and styles represented, can only be described as phenomenal. At the same time, I am convinced that this response only scratches the surface and that there are many more poets, whose works shed important light and insights into the lives of ordinary people, who may not have been aware of the call for submissions. So although this is the first anthology of its kind to be published, I hope that it is not the last.

“The anthology is inclusive and egalitarian, and values authenticity, relevance and communicativeness as well as literary skill and inventiveness. A platform has been created which enables artistic expressions of a range of themes experienced from working-class perspectives to be not only articulated, but brought to life in print. The anthology is grounded in individual effort, but has transformed these individual endeavours into a collective expression of the lives, aspirations, concerns and hopes of that class in our society which constantly has to struggle to get its voice heard and valued, and its interests represented, in mainstream publishing and public discourse generally.

“It is also heartening that the anthology includes poems in both the Irish and English languages.

“For all these reasons, I sincerely welcome this pioneering anthology as a good example of the application of the principles of cultural democracy to poetry publishing. I feel sure that readers will not only enjoy the poems but also gain valuable, sympathetic insights into the lives, struggles and preoccupations of working people in this country through the medium of poetry.”

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to all the poets for permission to republish their poems. *No One Mentioned The Roofer* was first published by Bloodaxe in *Tongulish* by Rita Ann Higgins.

*The Children of the Nation: An Anthology of Working People's Poetry from Contemporary Ireland*, edited by Jenny Farrell, is published by **Culture Matters**, and is available from <http://www.culturematters.org.uk/index.php/shop-support/our-publications/item/3184-the-children-of-the-nation>

## Notes and References

- 1 D O'Brien, D Laurison, A Miles and S Friedman, *Are the Creative Industries Meritocratic? An analysis of the 2014 British Labour Force Survey*, in *Cultural Trends*, Vol 25, 2016, pp 116-131.

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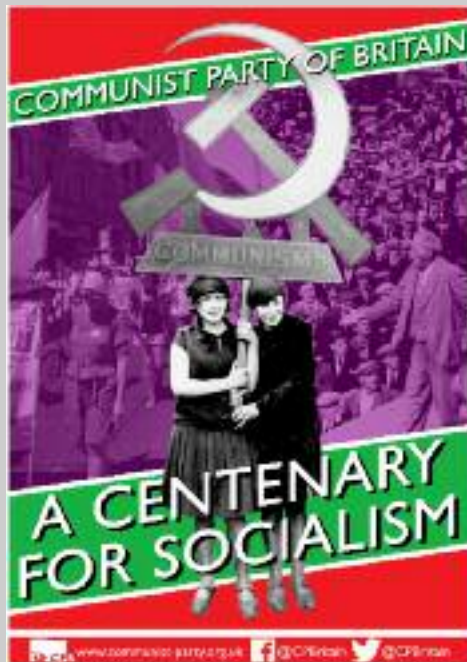
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