

What Next?

Marxist Discussion Journal

30

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Through What Stage are We Passing?

Ed George

“[The] assertion that ‘everything is possible in human affairs’ is either meaningless or false.”
– E. H. Carr¹

What happened to the socialist revolution? Anyone who has pretensions to being a revolutionary socialist nowadays, at the dawn of the twenty-first century, is surely obliged to answer one simple, if salient, question: what on earth has happened to the socialist revolution?² For those of us who believe that the socialist transformation of society must through necessity pass through the gate of the *revolutionary* overthrow of the capitalist order the fact is that moves to do just that have, since the mid point of the last century, been almost entirely absent from our planet; and *absolutely* absent³ from that part of our planet where the locus of capitalist power is lies – the advanced metropolis of western Europe, north America and Australasia.⁴ While the first half of the last century, as we shall see, was indeed a period rich in revolutionary experience in just this part of the world capitalist system, since the stabilisation of social and political order following the Second World War the metropolitan capitalist citadel has remained pristine in its resistance to revolutionary challenge.⁵

For sure, the quarter of a century following the Second World War witnessed a period of economic growth and social stability arguably without parallel in human history: that openly anti-capitalist struggles were marked only by their absence in the bourgeois democracies of the “west” in this period was only to be expected. But what of the period which opened up at the cusp of the sixties and seventies of the post-Second World War boom? Those who believed that the “long detour” of the previous two decades would end in a renewal of the conditions favourable to placing the socialist revolution back on the historical agenda will have been sorely disappointed.

While some will surely use this state of affairs as further ammunition for the argument that the revolutionary struggle for socialism was always

a chimera, it is incumbent for anyone maintaining a commitment to socialist transformation with a modicum of intellectual honesty to point out that other roads to socialism – the so-called parliamentary one, for example, or the once modish strategies of “counter-hegemony” and the like – have been found even more wanting in their efficacy in shifting the power of the bourgeoisie and its political institutions than the socialist revolution. The hard truth is that capitalist power has only ever been directly and successfully challenged by a *revolutionary* socialism. So, if the conclusion that the struggle for socialist emancipation was only ever a naïve and utopian dream is to be avoided, the question poses itself in all its force: what is it that is *absent* from the current world set up that was *present* in the first half of the twentieth century; and what might be the circumstances that will announce its return?

The ‘long-waves’ of the capitalist economy It is now commonly accepted across the most diverse schools of economic thought – bourgeois and Marxist, mainstream and heterodox – that the global capitalist social order (whether it is labeled as such or not) has since its infancy been subject to long-rhythm cycles (or “waves” or “periods” according to taste) of more and then less accelerated growth, of relative expansion and relative contraction, of now more advanced development and now relative regression. There is, of course, vigorous disagreement as to what the real root cause of these successive long-term waves of relative boom and slump may be, and what in turn the waves themselves represent;⁶ given the scope of this essay, however, we shall for the moment be skating around these questions, and taking the existence of the phenomenon for granted.

How can we periodise these long-term cycles? Again, while debate surrounds the details, there is perhaps surprisingly general agreement as to the rough outline of the model. The following table⁷ would induce little outrage, even across the most diverse schools of economic thought:

Table 1: The Long-Waves of the Capitalist Economy

CYCLE	RISING PHASE		DECLINING PHASE	
I	1780/90	----- A -----	1810/17	----- B ----- 1844/51
II	1844/51	----- A -----	1870/75	----- B ----- 1890/96
III	1890/96	----- A -----	1914/20	----- B ----- 1940/45
IV	1940/45	----- A -----	1967/73	----- B ----- ?

According to this model, the modern global capitalist system has undergone four successive cycles of (relative) development and (relative) stagnation; we should now be, were it to continue repeating itself, either right at the end of the fourth or just at the beginning of the fifth of them.

Following this model, and by a process of induction alone, where should we expect significant revolutionary socialist challenges to the capitalist system to occur? It should brook little argument that revolution requires deep economic and social crisis to be triggered: we should therefore not expect to find significant *revolutionary* upsurges – at least, not in the metropolis – in the ascending “A” phases of the cycle. And indeed we do not.

Nor should it provoke too much opposition if we assume that revolutionary *socialist* movements will post-date the formation of genuinely proletarian mass organisation, so we shall ignore the period before the mid-point of the nineteenth century. We – knowing nothing else – should deduce that the socialist revolution would pose itself as an actuality in the descending “B” phases of the second, third and fourth cycles, in other words within the roughly demarcated periods 1870 to 1896, 1914 to 1945, and 1967 to the present day.

But what do we really find? It is true that *one* of these periods – 1914-1945 – did indeed witness significant revolutionary struggle: the last great metropolitan socialist revolutionary cycle – indeed, the only one there has ever been in human history – took place here. The great revolutionary wave of 1914 to 1923 saw not only the first successful overthrow of capitalist rule in human history, in the Russian October 1917, but revolutionary conflagration across Europe east and west, from Finland to Italy, from Siberia to Spain. And in the 1930s the spectre of revolution was again to criss-cross the European theatre: now in Germany; then in France, Austria, and Portugal; and finally in Spain. Such was the way in which the sense of mortal danger was felt within the institutions of bourgeois society that the blunt instrument of fascist dictatorship was unleashed with the aim of forever eliminating the threat of the socialist revolution. But in vain; for once again, over 1944-45, a continental-wide mass insurrect-

ionary movement, directly aimed at the liberation from Nazism, once more posed the actuality of socialist revolution.⁸

Put another way, then, the entire period from 1914 to 1945 in Europe was one in which the very existence of capitalist rule was periodically challenged by revolutionary movement from below.⁹ According to our earlier inductive suppositions this is what we might have expected to find.

But what of the other two periods? What of 1870-1896 and post-1967? It is of course clear that no period of capitalism is entirely free from struggles, sometimes very great struggles, and these two periods are no exception to the rule. The first saw possibly the first great proletarian insurrectionary movement in human history – the Paris Commune; and the second bore witness to two of the most highly developed mass struggles of recent living memory – May 68 and the Portuguese Revolution. But neither of these periods can compare to that of 1914 to 1945 in the way that in this last case the capitalist system was *repeatedly* and *consistently* confronted with revolution. At the very least, and leaving to one side for now the already-addressed question of whether these struggles really *did* pose the possibility of overthrowing bourgeois rule (rather than simply modifying its form), the Commune, May 68 and the Portuguese *Revolução dos Cravos* do rather stand as exceptions within their respective periods; while, on the other hand, in the revolutionary decades of 1914-1945 it is precisely those times of quiescence which appear exceptional.

And now, of course, we have arrived again at the question posed at the outset. Why is the present post-1967 period not like that of 1914-1945? Once again: what has happened to the socialist revolution?

Shifting hegemony

I have assumed – and further assumed that it will not be objected to – that economic stagnation is a precondition of socialist revolution. But is it the only one? Are economic collapse, crisis and slump sufficient to impel the masses to undertake the potentially mortal struggle for political power – and are they sufficient to allow them to win?

I have consistently described the capitalist order

in the foregoing as a “global” order. This is not to say that the global capitalist economy is composed of an undifferentiated and unmediated social structure: relations of domination, subordination, dependence and inequality clearly obtain within its social fabric, but they are not ultimately relations between national *capitalisms*, but between nationally-located *capitals* within a single, *global*, social structure. Even though it should not really be necessary to insist on this, the global, supra-national, nature of capitalist social relations, it probably is. Let us reiterate, then: “capitalism in one country” has been historically as much of a myth as “socialism in one country” ever was; something on which the founders of classical Marxism were absolutely clear.¹⁰

But nationally-located capitals are indeed *nationally-located*: it is too highly pertinent to observe that while at the level of the social capitalism tends to the global, at the level of the political the fundamental structure of the bourgeois order is precisely national. And if we look at the capitalist order on a global scale, we see alongside an international capitalist economy a highly structured international *system of national states*. And one of the most notable features of this state system is that it is hierarchical: not just in the sense of the relations between the states of the imperialist and imperialising metropolis and those without, but between the states of the metropolis themselves. The history of the capitalist system is at the same time the history of this highly structured hierarchical state system *within* the metropolis: of its evolution, and of the rise and fall of successive hegemonic states within it.

It is generally accepted that thus far under the capitalist mode of production we have witnessed three such hegemonic states: the Netherlands, in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries; Britain, in the nineteenth; and, today, the United States.

But what is a *hegemonic* state; or, in other words, what distinguishes a hegemon from a simple *primo inter pares*? It seems to me that, in the case of the international state system, for one state to be considered truly hegemonic it would have to play a role in that system which would be determining in how in turn this whole system itself operates; and, since we are considering here the capitalist state (or capitalist states), that set of political institutions which arise from the capitalist social structure, correspond to it, and create the legal and political institutional framework within which capital accumulation and reproduction occurs,¹¹ a hegemonic state is hegemonic to the extent that it is able to set the framework within in which the whole capitalist system operates, in which the accumulation of capital on a global scale takes place.

How can we date these various periods of hegemony? Britain has been one of the most

important capitalist states for a long time now. The Treaty of Utrecht saw her emerge as the world's principal naval and commercial power, and subsequently she quickly became the world's greatest port and warehouse, at the same time as accumulating for herself generous masses of colonial territory. But it would be a mistake to confuse an economic big-hitter with a true political hegemon. Despite Britain's eighteenth-century world commercial role, up to the French Revolution the true hub of world finance remained Amsterdam: it was not London; at least, not yet. In fact it would be difficult to claim for Britain a *determining* role within the world state system at least before the post-Napoleonic settlement, when, with France defeated, and Amsterdam having been hit terminally hard by the war-time blockade, followed by the resumption of gold payments in 1821, British economic and political dominance really did begin to appear genuinely unchallengeable. The height of British *hegemony* is therefore precisely that subsequently ushered-in *Pax Britannica* “Free Trade” era of the mid nineteenth century, a period, under British direction, characterised by Perry Anderson as that of “diplomatic-industrial imperialism” – a period to be distinguished from that which was to follow, by the 1880s, as rival imperialisms, principally Germany and the United States, emerged to challenge British supremacy, a period he dubs that of “military-industrial imperialism”.¹²

By the same token, if we want to locate the period in which the United States began to play a directing role within the world state system, i.e. operated as a true hegemon, rather than one in which she was simply a powerful economic performer, perhaps the key date should be July 1944 – the signing of the Bretton Woods agreement, which saw the subsequent setting up of the IMF and IBRD – events which, in their own way, set the conditions anew for the functioning of the post-bellum global capitalist economy within the framework of supranational institutions in which the United States would predominate. And perhaps the first signs of the weakening of US hegemony can be dated to the collapse of this system, in 1971.

These observations lead us to a number of interesting conclusions. First, it seems as though capitalism “needs” a hegemonic power within it, to give it stability. The period between British and United States hegemony was of course marked by two World Wars, each in turn witness to human and material destruction on a scale hitherto unseen; and the period immediately preceding British hegemony again saw continental-wide total war. In fact, it is difficult not to see these wars as a product of the *absence* of hegemony, and as a mechanism to resolve the absence of hegemony.

Second, the two periods under consideration – of British and United States hegemony – seem to correspond to distinct stages of development of the capitalist system itself; and if we factor in the

period of Netherlandish hegemony, the observation is confirmed. The Netherlands functioned as the hegemonic power in the period of “commercial capitalism”, through its dominance of world commerce, by controlling shipping and the international monetary order. Britain, with a pre-classical imperialist industrial capitalism through its manufacturing dominance and its naval policing of “free” trade. The United States, within the modern imperialist system proper, through the hegemony of the dollar (and subsequently its military machine) and its dominant role within supranational state institutions, including those set up under the auspices of Bretton Woods. Thus the manner in which hegemony is exercised within the capitalist state system seems to be in turn a function of the stage of development of the capitalist system itself: mercantile capitalism, industrial capitalism, finance capitalism. Qualitative changes in the latter bring about a qualitative reorganisation of the state hierarchy.

Third, if we, now look more closely at the dates of British and United States hegemony, we see that, respectively, these two hegemonic periods run from something like 1820 to 1890, and 1945 to the present day, with a clear ascendant and descendent phase in each case. Two things now immediately stand out: first, that between each hegemonic phase there is an extended interregnum, a transitional period of non-hegemony; and second, that our two hegemonic periods now look very similar in scale, and rhythm, to our long-wave economic cycles II and IV. Let us then replot the original long-wave table, and, without stretching the dates too much, map our periods of state-system hegemony on it (see Table 2).

I would suggest – but here can do no more than suggest – that this relation between cycles of political hegemony and economic rhythms is not casual: that capitalist relations need – and find, through force of necessity – a stable institutional political framework in which to unfold themselves, and this institutional stability is granted them through a state system held in balance by a hegemonic state power. Each cycle of state hegemony corresponds with a phase in the economic cycle. But, as the modalities of capitalist accumulation evolve – from commercial capitalism,

through industrial capitalism to finance capitalism, the necessities of the economic structure *vis-à-vis* the institutional framework change, and the hegemon acts as a break on economic development, while new possible contenders for the role of hegemon are pushed forward: hence the close match between the ascendant and descendent phases of the political and economic cycles. Finally, freed from the shackles of a redundant hegemon, a new economic cycle begins – less spectacular, less stable and more prone to crisis than the preceding one. Increasing instability at the institutional level – manifested most clearly in wars (the Napoleonic Wars and the two twentieth-century World Wars) – supervenes to bring the cycle to a close. The political instability – the wars – have the function of resolving the interregnum, and a new cycle, now newly hegemonic, begins.¹³

Some results and prospects

So what happened to the socialist revolution?

Lenin once famously remarked¹³ – chiding the voluntaristic impatience of the early British Communists – that for revolutions to occur it is not only sufficient that the exploited classes not want to go on in the old way, but for the exploiters too to be *unable* to carry on in the old way. Now it is clear that the exploiting classes – and their political apparatuses, the state – are afflicted by mortal crisis not only by the prevailing economic conditions and by political challenges from below, by the mass movement impelled by the ravages of slump and war, but also by their relations with the exploiting classes of other states. In other words, when we look for the “objective” preconditions for socialist revolution it is not sufficient to look for them only in the socio-economic fabric of capitalist society, or with respect to the level of conscious and/or combativity of the working class, but also in relation to the situation of the ruling class and its institutions *vis-à-vis* its relations with other classes and institutions both within and without the country.

The problem I posed above – why do we find that revolutions occur in only one of the descending “B” phases of the long-term economic cycles, when we should expect them to occur in two more – should now not be so perplexing. For what

Table 2: The Long-Waves of the Capitalist Economy (Political-State Hegemonic Periods Shaded)

CYCLE	HEGEMON	RISING PHASE		DECLINING PHASE	
I	(none)	1780/90	A	1810/17	B 1844/51
II	BRITAIN	1844/51	A	1870/75	B 1890/96
III	(none)	1890/96	A	1914/20	B 1940/45
IV	USA	1940/45	A	1967/73	B ?

distinguishes the “B” phase of the third cycle – the period 1914 to 1945 – is that it is the “B” phase of a cycle within a period of an *absence* of hegemony within the political-state structure. And if we are looking for a factor present in the inter-war period and absent today it is precisely this: United States hegemony may be on the wane, we may be on the cusp of a new cycle of political and social ascendance and descendance, but we are still clearly living, and have lived since the late 1960s, under a state system within which the United States functions as hegemon.

My argument here is that a necessary condition for the ruling classes to be unable to go on in the old way is a breakdown in bourgeois state hegemony within the metropolis. That without such a breakdown the institutions of capitalist rule here prove – have proved – too robust to be shaken in any real qualitative – revolutionary – way. The post-67 period witnessed no socialist revolution in the metropolis for precisely this reason: US hegemony, operating at both the political and ideological levels, even if in the descendent, has resulted in a bourgeois institutional structure that has proved itself too strong.

If the foregoing has an element of truth to it – and this is a big “if”, for, as should not need saying, what I am presenting here is nothing but a sketch, which can only have the scientific status of tentative conjecture – what conclusions can we draw?

First, in relation to the character of the period we are about to enter. We can surmise that we stand on the brink of a new long-wave cycle – the fifth under capitalism. The forthcoming cycle will be marked by an absence of global hegemony; or, rather, will form an interregnum between one global hegemon – the United States – and the next. Which the next will be, of course, we do not know, as this will be something determined by inter-imperialist competition between the declining power – the United States – and new, rising, ones, and overdetermined by other factors exogenous to the cyclical process. But who might the contenders be? What seems to be happening in the present leads to the conclusion that the coming period of inter-imperialist competition – and this is what will be new about the forthcoming cycle – will be fought out not between states but between *blocs* of states: a northern American bloc, a European bloc, a Pacific bloc. And it seems not unreasonable to project that, while these imperialist blocs will operate within a world with clearly definable core, periphery and semi-periphery regions, as now, within these blocs too we will be able to discern core, periphery and semi-periphery regions, and the consequent tensions and instabilities arising from these multiple relations of political and economic dependence and domination.

If it is historical analogies that we are looking

for, then we can say that the coming long-wave will not have the political characteristics of the last cycle but those of the one before, i.e. that we will be moving in a period more akin to that of 1890-1945 than 1945 to the present. The ascendant phase of this cycle, it will be recalled, was coloured by the imperialist scramble to divide up the hitherto unconquered world; the forthcoming cycle may well be conditioned by a redivision of the world in a desperate and increasingly competitive scramble for dwindling energy supplies. The recent oil wars would appear to point to that possibility: the element of inter-imperialist competition being signalled by the differences within the imperialist world – between the United States and Europe, for example – on the strategy of war, and the growing conflict between the dollar and the euro in, amongst other places, the oil market itself.

We can expect the ascendant phase of the coming cycle to be marked by a slower and more unstable rhythm of growth than we saw during the post-Second World War boom, and the descendent phase by qualitatively more turbulent than the post-1970 period: the descendent phase of the third long-wave cycle opened of course with World War One and closed with World War Two. But the supervening period was that single period in human history to see a genuine flourishing of socialist revolution.

What conclusions can we draw as socialists, particularly in respect of the type of political organisations we should be building? It should now be clear that what should not be on the agenda is the type of organisation that was being built in the late 1930s, as the few remaining socialist revolutionists struggled desperately against time and against seemingly impossible odds to construct parties that would be ready, in extraordinarily unfavourable circumstances, to deal with what was seen as an imminent struggle for power. We are in a period more akin to the end of the nineteenth century, in which the mass parties of the Second International were built. And, although it is generally regarded today that the Second International ended in failure, in ignominious collapse in the face of imperialist war, this one-sided picture misses its real lesson. What really happened was that, faced with the outbreak of World War One, the parties of the Second International *split*: the very crisis of war acted as midwife to that radicalisation, spurred on by the Russian Revolution, which bequeathed to us the only global mass revolutionary socialist force we have ever seen: the young Third International.

The only political current which today retains any filiation to the idea of socialist revolution is that emanating from Trotsky’s Fourth International, formed exactly towards the end point of that last period of revolution and counter-revolution. But the political practice of the organisations

which trace their origins, however indirectly, to this tradition – “leadershipism” and leadership cultism, literary fetishisation of programmatic declarations, bureaucratic centralisation to the point of monolithism, catastrophism, extreme hyperactivism, vanguardism, “short-cut” substitutionism – are precisely a reflection of the fact that these groups still see themselves on the brink of a real collapse of the capitalist system and an actual and imminent struggle for power, as if the maxims of Trotsky’s *Transitional Programme* that “the historical crisis of mankind is reduced to the crisis of the revolutionary leadership”, that the “prerequisites for the proletarian revolution have not only ‘ripened’; they have begun to get somewhat rotten”, that “mankind’s productive forces stagnate”,¹⁵ were not conjunctural pronouncements contingent on the circumstances of the time but timeless and ahistorical programmatic ones (akin to the way in which Lenin, at the Fourth Congress of the Comintern, characterised the approach of the young European Communist Parties to the resolution on organisational structure approved at the Third as akin to “hanging it in the corner like an icon and praying to it”).¹⁶

No: the parties we need to be seeking to build will be built much more in the way in which, for example, Lenin’s *What Is To Be Done?* was precisely not presented as a blueprint for a doctrinally pure and programmatically pristine centralised “propaganda group” but as a call to, and for, “revolutionary social-democrats”, *all* revolutionary social-democrats, to build a party of the Russian working class movement, in close connection with and out of that movement; exactly in the same spirit as the *Communist Manifesto*, which declared its aim as the “formation of the proletariat into a class”, could declare that “The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties. They have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole. They do not set up any sectarian principles of their own, by which to shape and mould the proletarian movement.”¹⁷

Engels, writing much later (in 1884), summarised his and Marx’s “party” approach:

“When we founded a major newspaper in Germany, our banner was determined as a matter of course. It could only be that of democracy, but that of a democracy which everywhere emphasised in every point the specific proletarian character which it could not yet inscribe once for all on its banner. If we did not want to do that, if we did not want to take up the movement, adhere to its already existing, most advanced, actually proletarian side and to advance it further, then there was nothing left for us to do but to preach communism in a little provincial sheet and to found a tiny sect instead of a great party of action. But we had already been spoilt for the role of preachers in the wilderness; we had studied the

utopians too well for that, nor was it for that we had drafted our programme.”¹⁸

And this is the choice we face: To “take up the movement [...] and to advance it further”, building “a great party of action”; or “to preach communism in a little provincial sheet and to found a tiny sect”.

And, while my argument here is that the struggle for power is not on the *immediate agenda*, it is also that it *will* come, and the former statement is, as a consequence of the latter, no alibi for quiescence. For 1914-45, while it brought the socialist revolution to the fore, also brought with it terrible, and unimaginably terrible, world war. So we had better not fail, for socialism or barbarism it will be again.

Notes

1. *What is History?* (Harmondsworth, 1977), 93.
2. The thought process behind this article was inspired by an online conversation I had around two years ago with the late, and much-missed, Mark Jones; it is therefore dedicated to him, and I can only hope that he would have agreed with at least some of it. (For the conversation itself, see: Mark Jones, ‘thinking out loud’ [24 July, 2002], <<http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/marxism/2002w30/msg00079.htm>> [28 December, 2004], Ed George, “Re: thinking out loud” [25 July, 2002], <<http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/marxism/2002w30/msg00108.htm>> [28 December, 2004], and Mark Jones, “Re: thinking out loud” [25 July, 2002], <<http://archives.econ.utah.edu/archives/marxism/2002w30/msg00113.htm>> [28 December, 2004].)
3. To anticipate a little, it will surely be objected that the Portuguese Revolution of 1974-5, and possibly the events of the French May 68, disprove this assertion. However, I would argue that, tumultuous although these experiences might have been, the ease with which capitalist order was subsequently restabilised gives the lie to this argument. Neither of these events, although they did indeed provoke a reorganisation – and a radical reorganisation in the case of Portugal – at the level of government, brought about the kind of breakdown at the level of the *state* that February 1917 did in Russia, for example, or the uprising of November 1918 did in Germany.
4. Whenever this assertion is made it is common to see proffered the charge of “Eurocentrism”. But it would be a very curious form of internationalism indeed which posited the possibility of the survival of revolution in the non-metropolitan world without the overthrow of bourgeois rule in the centre. This is of course not to say that the oppressed of the non-European world are “dependent” on the workers of the centre, and are therefore obliged to abstain from struggle until the latter move into action; rather the reverse is true. Revolutionary

outbreaks, because of the nature of the capitalist order itself, are necessarily international in character, and each actual revolutionary experience has involved revolution spreading from the periphery to the centre. It is the workers of the “west” (or, nowadays, perhaps the “north”) who need those of the periphery, not the other way around. The whole of pre-revolutionary Russian social-democracy (and not just the Bolsheviks) understood this perfectly. Before the heady days of “socialism in one country”, for all shades of the Russian revolutionary movement the idea that the revolution in Russia could sustain itself without revolution throughout Europe would have been regarded as absurd. Their only error was related to the time that would be necessary for the revolution to fail.

5. I am not, for reasons of space, going here to enter into the anyway tangential debate surrounding the precise characterisation and assessment of the post-Second World War social overturns in Eastern Europe.

6. The reception of “long-wave” theory in the socialist tradition is usefully summarised by Ernest Mandel, *Late Capitalism* (London, 1975) (by which comment I do not mean necessarily to endorse Mandel’s own interpretation of long waves, which appears to me to be overly “technologicalist”). The name with which the phenomenon of long waves is most closely associated is of course that of Nikolai Dmitrievich Kondratieff, the head of the Soviet Institute of Economic Investigation in the 1920s. Like many other outstanding members of his generation, Kondratieff died during the purges of the late 1930s. Trotsky’s short critique of Kondratieff’s work, ‘The Curve of Capitalist Development’, originally published in 1923, and in English in 1941, has been republished by the Scottish International Socialist Movement in the October 2001 issue of their journal *Frontline*, and is available online here: <<http://www.redflag.org.uk/frontline/four/04flashback.html>> (21 December, 2004). Trotsky’s criticism of Kondratieff amounts to arguing that long waves, if they exist, rather than being structural phenomena arising from the inner workings of the capitalist mode of production, occur as a consequence of more external contingencies. Long-wave theory has subsequently formed a central plank in the “world-system” view of Immanuel Wallerstein and his followers.

7. This particular example (although many similar examples could be cited) is taken directly from Peter J. Taylor, *Political Geography: World-Economy, Nation-State and Locality* (London and New York, 1985), 13; Taylor, one of the better political geographers we have, is, interestingly enough, something of a Wallersteinite himself.

8. It will probably be countered that not all of these experiences were truly revolutionary. Limits of space preclude all but a select bibliographical

rebuttal of this (anticipated) contention. With regard to the German Revolution: for a discussion of the range of demands raised by the working class movement see Dick Geary, ‘Radicalism and the Worker: Metalworkers and Revolution 1914-23’, in Richard J. Evans, *Society and Politics in Wilhelmine Germany* (London, 1978); for an account of the evolution and character of the USPD over this period, see David W. Morgan, *The Socialist Left and the German Revolution* (Ithaca and London, 1975), especially 53-17; for an eye witness account of the revolutionary atmosphere in Berlin after the Kaiser’s “flight” see Theodor Wolff, *Through Two Decades* (London, 1936) (Wolff was editor of the *Berliner Tageblatt*). With regard to Spain, see Fernando Claudín, *The Communist Movement: From Comintern to Cominform* (London, 1975), especially 210-42, and P. Broué and E. Témime, *The Revolution and Civil War in Spain* (London, 1972). For the 1934 rising in Asturias, see also Adrian Shubert, *The Road to Revolution in Spain: The Coal Miners of Asturias 1860-1934* (Urbana, 1987). On the revolutionary crisis in France through 1934 and 1936, see Claudín, 179ff., and D.R. Brower, *The New Jacobins* (Ithaca, 1968). On the World War Two resistance in general, see Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre *Is Paris Burning?* (London, 1965), F. Knight, *The French Resistance* (London, 1975), and Claudín, 307-454.

9. See note 5 above.

10. For example, and typical, from Marx: “Along with the national debt there arose an international credit system, which often conceals one of the sources of primitive accumulation in this or that people. Thus the villainies of the Venetian system of robbery formed one of the secret foundations of Holland’s wealth in capital, for Venice in her years of decadence lent large sums of money to Holland. There is a similar relationship between Holland and England. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Holland’s manufactures had been far outstripped. It had ceased to be the nation preponderant in commerce and industry. One of its main lines of business, therefore, from 1701-1776, was the lending out of enormous amounts of capital, especially to its great rival England. The same thing is going on today between England and the United States. A great deal of capital, which appears to-day in the United States without any birth-certificate, was yesterday, in England, the capitalised blood of children.” (*Capital* vol.1 (Harmondsworth, 1990), 920.)

11. “It is in each case the direct relationship of the owners of the conditions of production – a relationship whose particular form naturally corresponds always to a certain level of development of the type and manner of labour, and hence to its social productive power – in which we find the innermost secret, the hidden basis of the entire social edifice, and hence also the political form of the relationship of sovereignty and dependence,

in short, the specific form of the state in each case.” Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol.3 (Harmondsworth, 1981), 927.

12. Perry Anderson, ‘Origins of the Present Crisis’, *English Questions* (London and New York, 1992) (originally *New Left Review* 23 [January-February 1964]), 24. Anderson explains: “By ‘diplomatic-military imperialism’ is meant the economic subjugation of other nations, usually secured by the threat of force, rather than by outright annexation. ‘Military-industrial imperialism’ [on the other hand] proceeded by straight conquest; it was a product of the fear of rival European imperialisms, in particular of Germany, whose shadow haunted the extreme patriots of the period. It thus marks the moment at which British world supremacy was no longer unquestioned” (ibid.). It is curious, but not paradoxical, that it is this latter period of relative British decline, and not the golden age of *Pax Britannica* that had preceded it, that produced the symbols and ideological paraphernalia of “Empire” in its classical and familiar form: formal demarcation of colonies (“colouring the map of the world pink”) and the ideology and sloganising of “jingoism”.

13. The similarity between this account of mine and Marx’s statement of method in the 1859 Preface – “The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure” (‘Preface to A Contrib-

ution to the Critique of Political Economy’, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth, 1992), 426) – will be clear, especially if we follow G.A. Cohen’s reading of Marx (*Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (Princeton, 1978)), and his – in my opinion entirely convincing – assertions that what Marx there denominates “superstructure” is in fact the state, and that the relation between this last and the economic structure is a functional one: “super-structures are as they are because, being so, they consolidate economic structures” (Cohen, xi).

14. In his “‘Left-Wing’ Communism – An Infantile Disorder’: *Selected Works* (Moscow, 1968), 561-2.

15. Leon Trotsky, *The Transitional Programme for Socialist Revolution* (New York, 1977), 111-2.

16. Cited in Jane Degras (ed.) *The Communist International 1919-1943: Documents* (London, 1956), vol.1, 257.

17. Karl Marx, *The Revolutions of 1848* (Harmondsworth, 1993), 79.

18. ‘Marx and the Neue Rheinische Zeitung (1848-49)’ (n.d.), <<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1884/03/13.htm>> (28 December, 2004).

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Revolutionary History Vol. 9 No.1

The Russian Revolution of 1905: Change Through Struggle

The Russian revolution of 1905 was the first modern revolution; it was the first revolution in which the working class took a leading role, building its own institutions – the soviets – and imposing its control upon the day-to-day life of the country’s urban centres.

This issue of *Revolutionary History* is devoted to the observations and reminiscences of revolutionary activists who were directly involved in the events of 1905. Collected and translated into English for the first time by Pete Glatter, these contributions show how the Russian workers were politically transformed through their involvement in revolutionary struggle, how women often took a militant lead, how Russian workers showed their solidarity with their Polish comrades and opposed the anti-Jewish pogroms, and how the revolutionary parties of Russia oriented themselves to the new and often unexpected developments. Also included are three articles by Rosa Luxemburg on 1905 that have never before appeared in an English translation.

The 1905 revolution almost unseated the Tsarist autocracy, and although it recovered through a period of reaction, it was to fall just 12 years later when the Russian working class once again entered on the revolutionary road. One hundred years on, *Revolutionary History* celebrates the revolutionary workers of the Russian empire, whose struggles still have great relevance to socialists today.

This issue can be ordered on-line, at the price of £12.95 + £2.00 postage and packing at www.revolutionary-history.co.uk

Punctuation Marks: A Story of Class Struggle

Sheila Cohen

THE 1905 revolution consisted of a series of mass strikes which pushed the Tsarist regime into at least the promise of major constitutional change. The focus here, however, is not on the “results” of the 1905 revolution, but on its “prospects”;¹ on what its *process* promised and still can promise, even in so much less revolutionary times. 1905 was a crucial year not only for its revolutionary content but for its expression of the *dynamic*, and *form*, of working class struggle.

A drink of water: the dynamic of struggle
There are a number of key points to be made about this dynamic. First – with all due respect to the role of the party (see below) – grass roots class struggle is “spontaneous”. This doesn’t mean spontaneity is *enough*. But, whatever the accuracy of the revolutionary analysis which predicts, builds and guides such eruptions, they occur almost entirely independently of the role and pronouncements of revolutionary organizations. There are countless examples of this, including, notably, the strikes of 1905.

The second factor might be called the “spark”. Few major working class struggles evolve gradually. Exceptions may occur within already strong workplace organizations in which strategists plan action in advance – for example the 1997 UPS strike, where ideological leadership was provided by long-time Teamsters for a Democratic Union activists – but most such sustained organizations have their origins in earlier “sparks” rather than in programmes or policies.

In general, the beginning of major unrest is almost always explosive, sparked by a “last straw” which symbolizes all that has gone before; and the spark that ignites that straw is almost always material, concrete issues of workplace conditions, wages, work time patterns etc. The Decatur War Zone of 1993, a conflagration of class struggle amongst previously conservative, impeccably “Middle American” workers, began with a strike over the imposition of new working patterns. Tabloid-reading (and producing) British printing workers engaged in a class war with the Thatcher-

ite state when Rupert Murdoch robbed them of their jobs. The final straw which pushed starvation-wage Immokalee farmworkers to begin organizing for justice in the mid-1990s was seeing an 11-year-old boy beaten for taking a drink of water. And in 1905, it was punctuation marks:

“The typesetters at Sytin’s print-works in Moscow struck on September 19. They demanded a shorter working day and a higher piecework rate per 1,000 letters set, not excluding punctuation marks. This small event set off nothing more nor less than the all-Russian political strike – the strike which started over punctuation marks and ended by felling absolutism.”²

Workers’ organizational forms

An equally crucial aspect of the class struggle dynamic illustrated by 1905 is its creation of new, independent *organisational forms* unique to grass roots struggle. Again, this phenomenon is not confined to periods of outright revolutionary upsurge. In the decidedly non-inflammatory 1950s, US activist Stan Weir noted the development of “informal underground unions” in workplaces across the country, constituting “the power base for ... insurgencies from below”;³ in Britain, similarly, workplace-based independent rank and file groups grew into the shop steward networks and industry-wide “combine committees” which lent thousands of workers real power during the rank and file upsurge of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Rather more epochally, the Communards of 1871 soared, for two doomed months, to the heights of a “free town” based on factory occupations and constructed entirely according to the principles of direct self-government; workers involved in the semi-insurrectionary US “Great Upheaval” of the late 1870s generated, unknowingly, similar forms and structures.⁴ The self-organisation of Russian workers in 1905 was not so much consciously handed down as “spontaneously” reiterated in later struggles; zoom forwards a hundred years, from the Paris Commune, the Great Upheaval, and you have the *inter-embrasa*

(inter-factory committees) of the 1974 Portuguese revolution, the Chilean *cordones* (literally “ropes”) in which networks of rank and file workers organized factory occupations in support of Allende’s doomed regime, and the Iranian *shuras* of 1979.

What is difficult for institutional loyalists to accept about such alternative structures is their espousal of the *union form*, rather than “the union”, by the rank and file activists and workers who support them. As such they reflect the philosophy of most rank and file workers: “as a general rule rank and file loyalty was to the principle of trade unionism rather than to trade unions as organizations.”⁵ Yet the most effective organizational moves are towards that form, that dynamic, rather than being embodied in static institutions.

Rosa Luxemburg’s *The Mass Strike* supports the significance of these independent organizational forms. Quoting a representative of the Petersburg Soviet who reported, “Our trade unions are simply new forms of organisation for the direction of those economic struggles which the Russian proletariat has already waged for decades”, she comments: “A proletariat almost wholly unorganised created a comprehensive network of organisational appendages in a year and a half of stormy revolutionary struggle.”⁶ Struggle *creates* organization: “while the guardians of the German trade unions fear that organisations will fall in pieces in a revolutionary whirlwind like rare porcelain, the Russian revolution shows us exactly the opposite picture; from the whirlwind and the storm, out of the fire and glow of the mass strike and the street fighting rise again, like Venus from the foam, fresh, young, powerful, buoyant trade unions.”⁷

It was this “revolutionary whirlwind”, rooted not in parties and programs but direct, materially-based class action, which created that most archetypal of independent working class organizational forms – the Soviet. Out of the “punctuation marks” strike of September 19th came the great October strike, the most clearly revolutionary of that revolutionary year; and out of that revolutionary strike, the Petersburg Soviet – a constellation, literally a “council”, of workers’ deputies from factory committees throughout the city. This “committee”-based form is characteristic, almost without exception, of every form of grass roots, non-institutional, “spontaneous” class struggle.

Party and class: the “steam”

Trotsky wrote of the Petersburg Soviet: “this purely class-founded, proletarian organization was the organization of the revolution as such.... The Soviet was, from the start, the organization of the proletariat, and its aim was the struggle for revolutionary power.”⁸ Lenin welcomed the Soviets as “organs of the *general revolutionary* struggle against the government”.⁹ Yet, not long after its birth, even major revolutionaries appeared to have given up on or even overlooked the significance of the

Soviet. Rosa Luxemburg, one of the most enthusiastic supporters of workers’ self-organization, failed to mention it in her classic treatment of 1905, *The Mass Strike*; and Trotsky omitted the Soviet completely from his 1906 post mortem, *Results and Prospects*.

Why the ambivalence? Part of the problem was that the Soviet, despite its revolutionary trajectory, could not *lead* the revolution. In the coda to the argument quoted above, Lenin makes it clear that: “It was not some theory ... not party doctrine, but the force of circumstances that ... transformed [Soviets] into organs of an uprising ... ‘Soviets’ and similar mass institutions are in themselves *insufficient* for organizing an uprising.”¹⁰ Trotsky makes the same point from the opposite point of view: “The social-democratic [revolutionary] organization ... was able to speak for the masses by illuminating their immediate experience with the lightning of political thought; but it was not able to create a *living* organizational link with these masses....”¹¹ The “lightning of political thought” was missing from the essentially event-driven, materially-based dynamic of the Soviet; the “link” with that dynamic was missing through the party’s relative lack of influence and position within the masses at that time.

The dialectical opposition indicated in both these comments tells us not only why the Soviet could not perform the work of the party, but also, of course, why the party would have been nothing without the Soviet, or at least the living, breathing mass revolt it represented. As Trotsky wrote elsewhere – a quote cited in the very similar circumstances of France in May 1968 – “Without a guiding organization the energy of the masses would dissipate like steam not enclosed in a piston box. But nevertheless what moves things is not the piston, or the box, but the steam.”¹²

This dialectical opposition looks almost like common sense. But not all revolutionaries are keen to acknowledge the interaction between these two sides of the insurrectionist coin. Even Gramsci, a brilliant exponent of the contradictory and dynamic nature of class consciousness in struggle, remarked in an amused (and rather patronising) response to *The Mass Strike*: “Rosa – a little hastily, and rather superficially, too – theorised the historical experiences of 1905. She in fact disregarded the ... organisational elements which were far more extensive and important in these events than – thanks to a certain ‘economistic’ and spontaneist prejudice – she tended to believe.”¹³

In fact, the essential point is that political organization and “spontaneism” are not mutually exclusive; the place of a conscious revolutionary leadership is *with* the class, rather than above or beyond it. As Engels complained of the 19th-century British sect, the Social Democratic Federation: “It insisted upon ... unfurling the red flag at the [1889] dock strike, where such an act would

have ruined the whole movement, and, instead of gaining over the dockers, would have driven them back into the arms of the capitalists.”¹⁴ Lenin, usually regarded (unfairly)¹⁵ as the arch apostle of the theory that revolution can only be “brought to” the working class “from without”, moved away from that position both before and after its classic expression in the 1902 pamphlet *What Is To Be Done?* – each time as a result of struggle. In 1899, moved by the mass strikes already gripping Russia, he wrote: “Every strike brings thoughts of socialism very forcibly to the workers’ mind.”¹⁶ Still more enthusiastically, in 1905: “One is struck by the amazingly rapid shift of the movement from the purely economic to the political ground ... and all this, notwithstanding the fact that conscious Social-Democratic influence is lacking or is but slightly evident.”¹⁷ In 1917, on the eve of the Russian revolution, he concluded that “A specifically proletarian weapon of struggle – the strike – was the principal means of bringing the masses into action.... Only struggle educates the exploited class.”¹⁸

In alternating between “optimistic” and “pessimistic”¹⁹ views of the potential of trade union struggle, Lenin’s writings simply reflect the two poles of the dialectic which constitutes the logic of working class struggle and consciousness, itself reflecting the contradictory character of capitalist production relations. While the experience of exploitation may not generate revolutionary consciousness, it also precludes uninterrupted acceptance of the *status quo* – simply because the system itself disrupts that very *status quo*, time and again. The exigencies of profitability preclude any lasting stability, sustained reforms, or uninterrupted advances in working class standards of living. In this way those at the sharp end of the contradiction, whatever their pre-existing consciousness, are pushed time and again into struggle against, or at the very least disillusionment with, the system – a point recognised by the Lenin of 1905, if not by the Lenin of *What Is To Be Done?*

Occasionally and in flashes
Clearly, both sides of the dialectic of “spontaneous” struggle and effective political praxis have to be held in view at the same time. And the hinge of the dialectic? Consciousness. As Lenin had argued, “it was not some theory” which drove the revolutionary spirit behind the Soviets. The direction of revolutionary, political, consciousness is not down *from* the party *to* the class, but *out of* the “consciousness-raising” quality of class struggle towards openness to revolutionary theory, which begins to seem increasingly relevant to the concrete concerns of the working class. Yet the contradictory, uneven and unpredictable dynamic of such struggle belies static conceptions of “stages” in the growth of class consciousness. As Rosa Luxemburg put it, working class consciousness “does

not proceed in a beautiful straight line but in a lightning-like zigzag”.²⁰

One major analyst of the kind of “leaps” or “breaks” in consciousness experienced in struggle is Antonio Gramsci. Pinpointing the “contrast between thought and action” among workers in struggle, whose actions often contradict their ideological awareness, Gramsci points out that “the social group in question may indeed have its own conception of the world, even if only embryonic; a conception which manifests itself in action, but occasionally and in flashes – when ... the group is acting as an organic totality”.²¹

The essential element here is the break, the *action* which, “lightning-like”, can take ideologically-colonised workers from passive acceptance to outrage and resistance. It is this break which gives “the Party” its chance – not the other way around. Over and over again, in every historical example of major class struggle, the same elements of explosiveness, of unpredictability, of unstoppable motion, are apparent.

A central characteristic of “spontaneous” resistance is its *resurgence*. Like apparently dead wood which suddenly bursts into flame, an era which seems weighed down by total reaction can suddenly be transformed by the unpredictable, ground-up dynamic of materially-based working class struggle. The apparent doldrums of mid 19th century trade unionism in Britain, casting Marx and then Engels into cynical despair, were broken by the explosive mass upsurge of New Unionism in the late 1880s: “It is the movement of the greatest promise we have had for years.... If Marx had lived to witness this!” wrote Engels excitedly.²² Even in 1905, after the initial January uprising, “the turmoil was over; and in the spring the Labour movement was in the doldrums. The strikes had fizzled out”.²³ It was the takeover of the Battleship Potemkin by its sailors in June 1905 – sparked by the decidedly material issue of rotten meat – that was to set in motion the dynamic of struggle once again.

The task of revolutionaries is not to conjure up or even necessarily to predict such motion – not usually, in any case, possible – but to be *ready* for it, through building an in-class leadership open to and aware of revolutionary ideas through what are often the long years of “downturn” – a preparatory process which means that, in the next upsurge of struggle, revolutionary leadership is not “caught unawares”. As Trotsky put it, writing about what he called “opportunists” (quasi-revolutionary liberals): “It may seem paradoxical to say that the principal psychological feature of opportunism is its *inability to wait*. But that is undoubtedly true.... And that is precisely why great events always catch it unawares.”²⁴

But are such “great events” still possible? In the airbrushed consumer culture of modern times, the idea that any small example of “against the

stream”, economically-based struggle can shake the foundations of an apparently seamless hegemony appears laughable. Yet the impact of such struggle on the consciousness of those involved, over and over, is to release them into a sphere in which perceptions of the world undergo a 360-degree turnaround. In the words of yet another “economistically”-motivated striker, in yet another bulk-standard American struggle of the 1980s: “You have to understand what it was like.... There was a lot of solidarity, togetherness.... It was kind of a revolution, like during the sixties, during the Civil Rights movement or ... the Vietnam war.... You had the company and you had us.... it was no longer a big family. Everyone was choosing up sides.”²⁵

From a bad labor contract to “a kind of a revolution”; from piecework rates for punctuation marks to the genuine article: the dynamic is the same. In celebrating the determined, passionate, inspiring spirit of hundreds of thousands of far from “ordinary” workers in the great struggles of 1905, we remember them, as French workers remembered the Communards in 1968, as the pioneers of an ongoing struggle, a struggle which, however pedestrian its forms, however stifled by the somatic blandness of 21st-century America, is the one thing the ruling class is unable to eradicate – and the one hope of freedom for us all.

Notes

1. Leon Trotsky, *Results and Prospects*, 1906.
2. Leon Trotsky, *1905*, Vintage Books, 1971, p.85.
3. Stan Weir, *USA – The Labor Revolt*, New England Free Press, p.279.
4. Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*, South End Press 1997, pp.13ff.
5. Tony Lane, *The Union Makes Us Strong*, Arrow Books 1974, p.180.
6. Rosa Luxemburg, *The Mass Strike*, Merlin Press 1906, pp.54, 62.
7. Luxemburg, *Mass Strike*, pp.35, 63.
8. Trotsky, *1905*, pp.104, 251.
9. Lenin, *Collected Works (CW)*, Vol.8, pp.124-5, emphasis in original.
10. Lenin, *CW* Vol.11, pp.124-5.
11. Trotsky, *1905*, p.105.
12. Quoted by Daniel Singer in *Prelude to Revolution: France in May 1968*, South End Press 2002, p.1.
13. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, Lawrence and Wishart 1971, p.223.
14. Interview with the *Daily Chronicle*, 1 July 1893; quoted in Kenneth Lapides, *Marx and Engels on the Trade Unions*, International Publishers 1987, p.165.
15. Hal Draper, ‘The Formation of the Bolshevik Party: Myth and History’, Lecture, 19 March 1963; cited in Alan Johnson, ‘Hal Draper: A Biographical Sketch’, *Historical Materialism* No.4, 1999.
16. Lenin, ‘On Strikes’ (1899), *CW* Vol.4, pp.315.
17. Lenin, ‘The St. Petersburg Strike’, *CW* Vol.8, pp.92-3.
18. Lenin, ‘Lecture on the 1905 Revolution’ (1917), *CW* Vol.23, pp.239-42.
19. Richard Hyman, *Marxism and the Sociology of Trade Unionism*, Pluto Press 1971. Most of the quotes used here are taken from this pamphlet.
20. Luxemburg, *Mass Strike*, p.73.
21. Antonio Gramsci 1971, p.327.
22. Friedrich Engels, letter to Eleanor Marx in *The Labour Elector*, 26 August 1889.
23. Isaac Deutscher, *The Prophet Armed: Trotsky 1879-1921*, Vintage Books 1965, p.118.
24. Trotsky, *1905*, pp.300-1.
25. Marc Lendler, *Crisis and Political Beliefs: The Case of the Colt Firearms Strike*, Yale University Press 1997, pp.42-3.

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So What *is* Secularism?

Ian Birchall

ANDREW COATES' article 'In Defence of Militant Secularism' (*What Next?* No.29) calls for a reply. In attempting to produce one, I shall try to avoid the polemical style which Coates has adopted.

Thus he puts the word "Islamophobia" in inverted commas, as though no such phenomenon existed. Worse, the Anglo-Saxon left also get inverted commas, as though those of us who happen to disagree with Coates on this issue have been excluded from the left. And the Respect Coalition is dismissed as "so-called". Coates may disagree with the politics of Respect; that is his absolute right. For him to suggest that we are masquerading under a false name is a quite different matter.

There is a long tradition of this sort of writing on the left (and, if needs must, I am quite good at it myself). But I don't think it helps rational debate. I shall attempt to avoid such slurs in my reply. I don't question Coates' sincerity as a socialist. I just think he is wrong.

To begin with the Enlightenment. Coates is absolutely right to defend the Enlightenment tradition (widely repudiated by post-modernism). But the Enlightenment must be understood in historical terms. When Voltaire and his comrades were alive, the Church in many respects was the main enemy. The absolute king ruled by divine right. Blasphemy could be punished by death, as in the case of the chevalier de La Barre, who was tortured and executed in 1766 for failing to take off his hat to a religious procession; Voltaire courageously took up the case.

At the same time the Enlightenment was predominantly bourgeois. The leading Enlightenment figures had a deep distrust of the masses. There is a story – perhaps apocryphal, but reflecting much that he wrote – that when one of Voltaire's visitors started a conversation about atheism, Voltaire sent the servants out of the room, worried that if they lost their fear of God they would murder him in his bed. And those who are so shocked by George Galloway's formal politeness to Saddam Hussein should look at Voltaire's relations with Frederick the Great – or Diderot's with Catherine the Great.

Marxism is in a sense a product of the Enlight-

enment, but it also involves a dialectical critique of the Enlightenment. Marx rejected as idealist the notion that the main task of revolutionaries is to attack religion. What Marx argued – in the full text of the famous "opium of the people" passage ('Introduction to a Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right'; see <http://marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/intro.htm>) – is that religion is the product of social conditions, and will only disappear when those social conditions disappear. Will religion vanish with the socialist revolution? I suspect the process may take some time. What is fairly certain is that neither Coates nor I shall be there to see.

The tradition of *laïcité* in France is also much more double-edged than Coates suggests. Universal state primary education, based on the principles of *laïcité*, was introduced in France in 1882. Partly this was, as elsewhere, a response to the need for literacy in a modernising economy. But there was another reason. France was a large, and mainly rural, country. A great many peasants had only the vaguest notion that they were French citizens. Yet in every village there was a priest. The rulers of the republic were afraid that too many peasants would follow the politics of the Vatican rather than of Paris. The schools were designed to give children a sense of the nation they belonged to. (It is no coincidence that the politician most associated with universal education, Jules Ferry, was also the architect of the French colonisation of Indochina.)

The strategy succeeded. In 1914 (despite the courageous opposition of a certain number of *instituteurs* and *institutrices*) the regime succeeded in mobilising the French peasantry into the trenches to defend "their" Republic against the Germans.

And as any observer of French political life knows, *laïcité* has all too often served as an alibi for those who have been willing to make disrespectful jokes about the Virgin Mary to cover up for the fact that they aren't prepared to fight any real social grievances. The whole history of the Radical Party is there to prove it. And I suspect that many of those shouting loudest in the current furore over the hijab are those who have no intention of leading a fight against poverty, exploitation, unemployment or racism.

I find Coates' definition of secularism – “the freedom of the public sphere from religious dogma” – profoundly unhelpful, because it is so imprecise. If he means that there should be complete separation of church and state, then I have no problems. The Church of England should be disestablished, the blasphemy laws abolished, and religious education in schools replaced by an objective consideration of the role of the various religions as a part of History and Social Studies.

I'll go along with all that, though I don't think they are issues which inspire much passion among most citizens. And even here there are certain contradictions. I am so bored by the whole issue of House of Lords reforms that I can't even remember if the bishops are still in the House of Lords. Of course they shouldn't be. Nonetheless in practice they might be more willing to speak out against, say, the invasion of Iraq, than many of the superannuated Labour MPs and trade-union bureaucrats who are there as “representatives of the working class”.

But Coates apparently wants to ban religion, not just from the apparatus of the state, but from “the public sphere”. Now the fact is that a great many people hold religious beliefs, and inevitably their political conduct will be influenced by their beliefs. Those of us who are atheists may deplore this, and those of us who are Marxists may offer a sociological explanation. But we can hardly prevent it happening.

It is true that there are “those crazed by God”. (I'm more afraid of the Christian fanatics in the Pentagon with nuclear weapons than of the Islamic variety.) But there are also many cases of a very different sort. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were both motivated by religious belief; would Coates have excluded them from the “public sphere”? I have many disagreements with Bruce Kent, but any anti-war activist must respect his tireless and courageous campaigning. If someone comes to my union meeting and proposes a day of prayer instead of strike action, I shall politely demur. But if they say: “God made us all equal, but those bastards in management earn ten times what we get”, I shall applaud and leave the theological discussion till later.

Coates should look at the Marxist tradition. In 1905 Lenin was keen to develop a relationship with Father Gapon, though he was criticised by many Bolsheviks for being too sympathetic to this clergyman who turned out to be a police agent. But as Krupskaya pointed out, “Gapon was a living part of the revolution that was sweeping Russia”. (N.S. Krupskaya, *Memories of Lenin*, London, 1970, p.104.) Earlier, in 1903, the Bolsheviks had launched a paper called *Rassvet* (Dawn) aimed specifically at members of religious sects, of whom there were over ten million in Russia. After the Russian Revolution Trotsky argued for a sensitive and non-sectarian approach to Muslims, and in

particular rejected any attempt to put Muslim nationalism on the same level as Russian nationalism:

“And this uniform conception must consist in a non-uniform attitude to Great Russian and to Muslim nationalism: in relation to the former, ruthless struggle, stern rebuff, especially in those cases when it is displayed in the administrative and governmental sphere, in relation to the latter – patient, attentive, painstaking educational work.” (A. Richardson [ed], *In Defence of the Russian Revolution*, London, 1995, p.181.)

Where does this leave the hijab? Coates claims it is oppressive. I have my doubts. My old mother, a very proper Christian lady, used to wear a headscarf – whether to quell lust or just in order to look respectable I don't know. The “simple fact” is that in the customs of most societies men and women dress differently. The logic of Coates' position – that women should not wear the hijab because men don't – is that women should be obliged to bathe topless in public swimming pools.

Moreover, it is quite clear that for the state to ban the hijab will undoubtedly have consequences the exact opposite of what Coates wants. The more the hijab is banned, the more it becomes a symbol of resistance, and the more young people will be pushed towards fundamentalism. When socialist organisations refuse to admit women wearing the hijab, they turn those women, and their associates, away from socialism. Over a hundred years ago many French socialists refused to support Dreyfus, on the grounds – as the syndicalist Emile Pouget put it – that he was “one of their richest officers, an Alsatian Yid called Dreyfus”. That is where “class-related politics”, understood in a crudely literal fashion, leads. Many Jews became totally disillusioned with socialism. The result, in terms of recruitment to Zionism, is one we are still living with today.

Even if it were true that the hijab is oppressive, that would not justify a state ban. It has always been central to the socialist tradition (as distinct from Enlightenment elitism) that the emancipation of the oppressed is the task of the oppressed themselves. It greatly amuses me that Trotskyists who oppose state bans on fascists by reciting the appropriate quotes from Trotsky are quite willing to see the agents of the selfsame bourgeois state snatching scarves from young women's heads.

One of my most vivid memories of the great anti-war demos was two young Asian women, marching side by side and sharing a megaphone, taking it in turn to shout anti-imperialist slogans. One wore the hijab, the other did not. Now I suspect that in private they have fierce arguments – and if my opinion were of any relevance, I would be on the side of the bare-headed one. But it is they, and they alone, who must determine whether they are oppressed and how to liberate themselves.

Coates charges that Respect has abandoned

class in favour of faith “communities”. But the overwhelming majority of British Muslims are working class or not very prosperous shopkeepers etc. In my own local area we got the breakdown of Respect votes in the 2004 elections ward by ward. In Edmonton Green ward Respect got over 11 percent. In the neighbouring, and more affluent Grange ward we got less than 2 percent. At the same time the local authority published figures on life expectancy. Men in Edmonton Green live, on average, eight-and-a-half years less than their Grange neighbours (72.2 as against 80.8, a difference of twelve percent). The simple reason is poverty. Certainly there are a lot of Muslims in Edmonton Green. But I see that result as a class vote rather than a community vote.

Finally, in Bethnal Green and Bow both the Tories and the Liberals stood Muslim candidates

in the general election. Therefore Muslims who voted for George Galloway, the Respect candidate, were voting for his programme rather than on the basis of religious affinity. Doubtless it is the values of their faith that makes them oppose Bush and Blair’s murderous war. But they chose a resolute opponent of the war rather than a Muslim who has joined a pro-war party (or an inconsistent and unreliable opponent of the war, in the case of the Liberal Democrats). That Muslims, Christians and socialists should join in opposing Bush and Blair’s criminal war is entirely to be welcomed, and something that most Muslims, with their long tradition of tolerance, will approve, even if they do not accept the term “secularist”. To me, as an atheist, such secularism in practice is far more relevant than the abstract version which Coates is pushing. ■

Islamophobia Watch

Islamophobia Watch was initiated in January 2005 as a project to document material in the public domain which advocates a fear and hatred of the Muslim peoples of the world and Islam as a religion. Islamophobia Watch has been founded with a determination not to allow the racist ideology of Western imperialism to gain common currency in its demonisation of Islam.

‘You wouldn’t even think they’re non-Muslims such is their analysis of the cancer of Islamophobia’ – Osama Saeed, Muslim Association of Britain

‘Islamophobia-watch has excelled itself ... in grovelling before Islamist reaction’ – Pete Radcliff, Alliance for Workers’ Liberty

www.islamophobia-watch.com

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Thornett and Religious Hatred: A Trot Who's Lost the Plot

Geoffrey Brown

AT ITS national conference in November 2005, Respect – the Unity Coalition quite rightly voted down a motion sponsored by the International Socialist Group, the British section of the Fourth International, that would have committed Respect to opposing the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill, which proposes to extend the existing law against inciting racial hatred to cover religious hatred.

The ISG's position on this issue was outlined by Alan Thornett in an article published in the November 2005 issue of the FI's monthly theoretical journal *International Viewpoint*. It is evident from the article that Thornett has made no attempt to understand the arguments in favour of the religious hatred law. Instead, he uncritically repeats the false and dishonest assertions of its opponents, notably the Liberal Democrat peer Anthony Lester.

Thornett gives this misrepresentation a "left" spin by claiming that the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill is "a cynical ploy by new Labour to redress the damage done to its Muslim vote by its war in Iraq". If this is so, how does he explain that the government first tried to bring in legislation against religious hatred back in 2001? The law would have been on the statute books long before the Iraq war if it had not been rejected by the House of Lords.

It is certainly true that the original decision to introduce a religious hatred law was partly motivated by the need to sweeten the pill of the government's anti-terror measures, which had antagonised Britain's Muslim communities. But it ill becomes socialists to join with those accusing the government of "appeasing Muslims". If members of minority communities face incitement to hatred and call for legislation to defend them against this, it is surely the duty of socialists to support them, or at the very least listen to and honestly assess the views expressed by those who are the actual victims of oppression.

Thornett tries to wriggle out of this by telling us that "Muslim opinion is divided on the Bill". The reality is that Muslim opinion is overwhelm-

ingly in favour, as he himself implicitly recognises – for how could the legislation be a "cynical ploy" by Blair to win electoral support from Muslims, if the majority of them did not support it? The Muslim Council of Britain, which is the most representative Muslim organisation in the UK with some 400 affiliates, has given its official backing to the Bill. Leading figures in the MCB have repeatedly made public statements supporting the proposed new law and criticising the Bill's misrepresentation by its critics. Thornett shows no sign of having bothered to familiarise himself with their arguments.

Why a new law is needed

The Racial and Religious Hatred Bill is in reality a welcome (and long overdue) move by the government to address a loophole in Part 3 of the 1986 Public Order Act, which criminalises incitement to racial hatred. As it stands, the anti-hatred law protects Jews and Sikhs, who are held to be members of mono-ethnic faiths, but it does not cover adherents of multi-ethnic religions such as Islam and Hinduism. In the aftermath of 9/11, with Islamophobia having become the favoured weapon of racists and fascists, this loophole has been extensively used by the British National Party in order to disseminate its race-hate propaganda without falling foul of the law.

Echoing Lord Lester, Thornett claims that, under the existing law against incitement to racial hatred, "Jews and Sikhs are protected as ethnic groups, i.e. because of their ethnicity not because of their religious belief. Stirring up hatred against Muslims because of their ethnicity – as Asian or Pakistani for example – would equally be protected". But this is a complete distortion of the current legal position.

When the far Right incites hatred against Jews, even if it does so ostensibly on the basis of their religious beliefs, it is clear that the aim and effect is to incite racial hatred. Similarly, if the BNP incites hatred against Islam, this is not because it objects to the tenets of that religion as such, but because the overwhelming majority of Muslims

belong to minority ethnic communities. In the former case, the fascists can be successfully prosecuted under the racial hatred law, because Jews are held to be members of a single ethnic group. In the latter case, successful prosecutions are difficult, if not impossible, because the fascists' Islamophobic propaganda is not directed against a particular ethnic community. "Islamophobia is racial hatred under a religious guise", Thornett tells us, quite correctly. What he ignores is the legal obstacles that exist to proving this is so.

As an example of the present racial hatred law's inadequacy when it comes to defending Muslim communities against racists, the Commission for Racial Equality has related how in May 2004 it wrote to the West Yorkshire police asking for action to be taken against the BNP for publishing a sickening leaflet headed: "The Truth About Islam: Intolerance, Slaughter, Looting, Arson, Molestation of women." This had been distributed by the fascists in Dewsbury where there is a sizeable Pakistani community, popularly referred to by the local white majority community as "the Muslims".

But the Crown Prosecution Service declined to take legal action against the BNP, even though it accepted that the leaflet was designed to incite Islamophobia. "The stirring up of fear and hatred against Muslims is ... a likely result of its publication given the strength of the language used", the CPS wrote. "Muslims are not, however, a racial group ... and the hatred stirred up could not therefore be defined as racial hatred.... It might be that evidence could be gathered to establish whether or not the term 'Muslim' is generally understood to mean 'Pakistani' or 'Indian'. The difficulty in relation to this particular leaflet ... is that [it states] 'This problem is not a matter of race. Those Muslims oppressing and murdering infidels and women have included Arabs, Pakistanis, Black Nigerian and White Bosnians'. Given this specific statement it would not be possible to infer incitement to racial hatred."

In reaching this conclusion, the CPS was no doubt drawing on the experience of an earlier case involving a BNP member named Dick Warrington. He was prosecuted for incitement to racial hatred after displaying a window poster reading "Islam Out of Britain – Protect the British People" and featuring a picture of the World Trade Center on fire, but he was found not guilty at Leeds magistrates court in 2002. Celebrating Warrington's acquittal, the BNP wrote: "The snag for the police, however, is that Islam is not covered by the anti-free speech race law.... it's legal to say anything you want about Islam, even far more extreme things than the very moderate message on the poster."

Thornett claims that "the Bill adds nothing to current law since incitement to religious hatred – in its various forms – is actionable under existing

legislation. In particular under an amendment to the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, which extends the offence of causing alarm or distress to include cases that are racially or religiously aggravated".

Again, Thornett misrepresents the position. It is true that Mark Norwood, a BNP member in Shropshire, was convicted in 2002 on the charge of causing religiously aggravated "harassment, alarm or distress" after displaying the BNP's "Islam Out of Britain" poster. But this is a much lesser charge than incitement to racial hatred, and in Norwood's case his conviction resulted only in a £300 fine, a sum that was no doubt covered by a quick whip-round among his fellow Nazis. If he had displayed a poster with the slogan "Jews Out of Britain", Norwood could have been prosecuted under the racial hatred law and would undoubtedly have received a much more severe sentence. Thus the fact that it is sometimes possible to secure a conviction for an offence of religiously aggravated harassment still does not give Muslims or Hindus parity with those faith groups who have protection under the law against incitement to racial hatred.

A threat to free speech?

Thornett, like all opponents of the Bill, claims that a law against religious hatred would be a major threat to freedom of expression. However, as a young Muslim woman at the Respect conference argued: "Sikhs and Jewish people are already covered – if they suffer abuse [strictly speaking, incitement to hatred] because of their religion, they are protected under the law. So why, when a bill is put forward that will give Muslims the same protection, does it suddenly become an issue of limiting people's free speech?"

This is a question that Thornett's article fails to answer. If the proposed religious hatred law threatens free speech, as he repeatedly asserts, does that not equally apply to the existing law against incitement to racial hatred? After all, the government's Bill does little more than go through Part 3 of the 1986 Public Order Act and, where that refers to racial hatred, it adds the words "and religious". Indeed, from the time that a law against racial hatred was first introduced, in the 1965 Race Relations Act, it has been attacked as an unwarranted restriction on freedom of expression. These arguments have, however, previously come almost exclusively from the Right.

Thornett quotes his political muse Lord Lester: "Freedom of speech, like equality and freedom of religion, is a fundamental civil and political right. Its protection is at the heart of our liberal democratic society. The right of freedom of speech means the right of everyone to communicate information and opinions without unnecessary state control or interference. That includes evil ideas expressed intemperately or in ways that shock." So why doesn't this same reasoning apply

to the legal suppression of material and behaviour inciting racial hatred?

In fact, Thornett goes on to indicate that he is against *all* laws that criminalise incitement to hatred. He approvingly quotes Soli Sorabjee, a former Indian Attorney-General, who argues: "Experience shows that criminal laws prohibiting hate speech and expression will encourage intolerance, divisiveness and unreasonable interference with freedom of expression." If this is so, then again, in all consistency, Thornett should be campaigning for the repeal of the existing ban on incitement to racial hatred.

That he does not explicitly argue this position is not unconnected with the fact that, were he to do so, he would find himself in a bloc with the likes of the BNP. They have of course been vociferous in denouncing the racial hatred law and demanding its repeal so they can spread their race-hate propaganda without legal restraint.

The freedom to insult and offend

Thornett assures us that, under the proposed new law, "language only has to be considered 'insulting' to be actionable". This is not true. As we have noted, the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill merely amends that part of 1986 Act dealing with incitement to racial hatred by inserting the words "and religious". Under the religious hatred law people would be no more likely to be prosecuted for insulting religious groups than they are now for insulting ethnic groups.

Comedians such as Bernard Manning and Jim Davidson are notorious for telling "jokes" that are widely regarded as racist and are clearly deeply offensive to members of minority ethnic communities. Neither of them has been prosecuted under Part 3 of the 1986 Public Order Act, for the simple reason that racial insults are not a criminal offence under that Act. What is criminalised is the incitement to racial *hatred*.

Equally, those more serious forms of artistic expression that minority communities find insulting or offensive are free from the threat of prosecution. As a mono-ethnic faith group, Sikhs are covered by the racial hatred law. But the staging of the play *Behzti*, which offended and angered many members of the Sikh community, did not lead to the prosecution of the Birmingham Repertory Theatre under the Public Order Act. Offending people and making them angry is not at all the same thing as inciting hatred against them.

Exactly the same position would apply under the new provisions proposed by the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. Comedians, playwrights and other writers and performers could insult or offend Muslims, Hindus, Christians and other faith groups to their heart's content. What they would not be able to get away with is inciting hatred against these communities.

More distortions

Like many of its opponents, Thornett asserts that the religious hatred law amounts to an extension of the blasphemy law. However, as Frank Dobson MP has pointed out: "It doesn't. If it did, I wouldn't dream of supporting it because I have been campaigning for years to abolish the blasphemy law.... If the proposed new law were widely drawn, it could in effect extend the blasphemy law. But it isn't. It is narrowly drawn, confining the offence to expressions or behaviour intended or likely to stir up hatred."

Thornett warns us that "similar legislation in Australia ... has been used against Muslims by Christian fundamentalists". But Section 8 of the Racial and Religious Tolerance Act, adopted by the Australian state of Victoria in 2001, is in fact framed much more broadly than the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill. It states: "A person must not, on the ground of the religious belief or activity of another person or class of persons, engage in conduct that incites hatred against, serious contempt for, or revulsion or severe ridicule of, that other person or class of persons." The government's Bill, by contrast, specifically restricts the offence to one of inciting *hatred* – not contempt, revulsion or ridicule.

The Victoria state law has so far resulted in just one successful prosecution – that of two evangelical Christian pastors who were convicted in 2004 on the basis of articles and speeches stating that Islam is an inherently violent faith and that Muslims were planning to take over Australia. To my knowledge, no case has been launched against Muslims in Victoria by Christian fundamentalists.

Furthermore, unlike in Victoria, any prosecution for incitement to religious hatred in Britain will have to be agreed by the Attorney-General. This will ensure that frivolous or vexatious prosecutions cannot be launched by small and unrepresentative religious groups in support of their own extreme views.

Thornett is aware of the role of the Attorney-General, because he refers to it in his article. Yet he also tells us: "Already a protestant evangelical pressure group, Christian Voice, has warned that it will seek to use it to prosecute bookshops selling the Qur'an for inciting religious hatred. Its director Stephen Green told the *Guardian*: 'if the Qur'an is not a hate speech, I don't know what is'." Does Thornett seriously believe that there is the slightest prospect of the Attorney-General authorising the prosecution of a Muslim bookshop for selling the Qur'an?

Hatred and intent

Thornett once more quotes his friend Lord Lester on the offences contained in the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill: "Unlike most other serious offences they require no criminal intent." Again, if the Bill were passed, the position with regard to

religious hatred would be no different from that applying to racial hatred under the 1986 Act, which combines the test of objective effect with the allowable defence that there was no intention to incite hatred. This formulation is the result of long experience in relation to racial hatred legislation.

The 1965 Race Relations Act, which introduced the first ever law against racial hatred, criminalised “threatening, insulting or abusive” words or actions done “with intent to stir up hatred” against someone on the basis of their colour, race, or ethnic or national origin. Thus the law did require proof of intention for a successful prosecution. This turned out to be a major weakness in that law, making it very difficult to secure convictions.

In a famous case which came to court in 1968, members of a Sussex-based far Right group rejoicing in the name of the Racial Preservation Society were charged with inciting racial hatred after their newsletter *Southern News* warned of the dangers of “racial mixing”, accused politicians of favouring “racial levelling” and asserted that Black people were genetically inferior to whites. Though the newsletter clearly had the effect of stirring up racial hatred, it was impossible to prove that this was the intention behind its publication. The racists claimed that the material was “innocently informative” rather than “intentionally inflammatory” and on that basis they were acquitted.

During the inquiry into Kevin Gately’s death during a demonstration against a National Front rally in Conway Hall, Red Lion Square in 1974, Lord Scarman drew attention to the weaknesses in the existing racial hatred law. He argued that it needed “radical amendment to make it an effective sanction, particularly, I think, in relation to its formulation of the intent to be proved before an offence can be established”.

The 1976 Race Relations Act amended the racial hatred law accordingly. Whereas the 1965 Act required proof that the offending words or actions be done “with intent to stir up hatred”, the 1976 Act required only that “having regard to all the circumstances, hatred is likely to be stirred up”. When the racial hatred law was incorporated into the 1986 Public Order Act this wording was retained. Both the 1976 and 1986 Acts allowed the defence that the stirring up of hatred was not intentional, but it is for the defendant to demonstrate that this is the case, rather than the prosecution being required to prove the existence of intent.

The Racial and Religious Hatred Bill maintains this position, with the addition that the offending words or actions must be “likely to be heard or seen by any person in whom it is likely to stir up racial or religious hatred”. This is to cover the legitimate objection that material which is not accessible to a public audience should not be actionable. That does not prevent Thornett quoting Lord Lester to the effect that the offences under

the Bill “apply not only to words spoken in public but in private”.

Lord Lester’s tactics

Throughout the controversy over the proposed religious hatred law, Lord Lester has played a quite atrocious role, using his legal expertise to generate confusion and misunderstanding about the aims and implications of the legislation. It is quite clear that he is opposed to any law against religious hatred, but rather than argue this position openly and honestly he has adopted the tactic of presenting amendments which appear reasonable, at least to those lacking a detailed understanding of the issues, but which would in practice have the effect of completely neutralising the legislation.

Initially, Lord Lester sought to organise opposition to the government’s legislation around the celebrated “Lester amendment”, which proposed to add to Part 3 of the 1986 Public Order Act a clause making it a criminal offence to incite religious hatred “as a pretext for stirring up racial hatred against a racial group”. During the second reading of the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill last June, Lester’s fellow Liberal Democrat, Evan Harris MP, assured the House of Commons that “Lord Lester’s amendment leaves no hiding place for the BNP”.

This was simply untrue, as both Lester and Harris must have been well aware. Sher Khan of the MCB was among those who identified the hole in Lester’s argument. “If it were possible to identify religious hatred as linked to racial hatred”, he wrote, “there would be no need for the proposed law. The point of the proposal is to protect a group of people who don’t fall into a single racial identity. This is precisely why law-enforcement agencies believe current legislation is inadequate.” In other words, the “Lester amendment”, if adopted, would have left Muslims and Hindus in exactly the same legal position that they are at present.

The writers’ organisation PEN and journalist Nick Cohen were among those who promoted the “Lester amendment”, insisting that, in so far as there was a loophole in the existing racial hatred law, Lester’s proposal would close it. However, the government’s attempt to incorporate a new offence of incitement to religious hatred into the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act had to be abandoned in the run-up to the general election because of opposition from the Lords, and the present Bill was drawn up post-election. Unfortunately for Lester, this extended process gave supporters of the religious hatred law time to expose the fraudulent character of his amendment and show that its effect would be to maintain the status quo, leaving members of multi-ethnic faiths still without legal protection against incitement to hatred.

In October, when the Bill reached the committee stage in the House of Lords, Lester therefore

suddenly dropped his original proposal without explanation and sprang an entirely new amendment on his fellow peers. Instead of extending Part 3 of the Public Order Act to cover both racial and religious hatred, as the government's Bill proposed to do, Lester's new amendment proposed to leave Part 3 of the Act unchanged and to introduce a new Part 3A that would deal exclusively with religious hatred. Like the original "Lester amendment", this new version was carefully crafted to sound sensible and reasonable, and the House of Lords passed it by 260 votes to 111.

Under Lester's 3A, a person would be guilty of an offence when he "uses threatening words or behaviour, or displays any written material which is threatening ... if he intends thereby to stir up religious hatred". The new offence of incitement to religious hatred thus differs from the existing offence of incitement to racial hatred in two important respects.

First, the test of objective effect is removed and the prosecution is required to prove subjective intention. In other words, Lester proposes to reintroduce the very same requirement which was such an obstacle to securing convictions for incitement to racial hatred under the 1965 Race Relations Act – and which was removed by the 1976 Race Relations Act for that reason. Secondly, under the new Part 3A only words or behaviour that are "threatening" constitute a criminal offence, and stirring up hatred by means of abuse and insults is entirely within the law. This would produce an offence that would be even less likely to result in successful prosecutions than that in the 1965 Act, which like all subsequent laws criminalised incitement to hatred by means of abusive and insulting words and behaviour.

The opportunities Lester's amendment would offer to racists and fascists to evade criminal charges are quite obvious. Material like the "Truth About Islam" leaflet distributed by the BNP in Dewsbury, which is abusive and insulting but does not include any explicit threats of violence, would probably still be immune from prosecution.

In other words, the new Lester amendment – just like the earlier one – would leave the legal position in practice little different from what it is now. While Jews and Sikhs would qualify for relatively strong protection under the racial hatred law, the only protection offered to Muslims and Hindus would be a religious hatred law which set the threshold for prosecution so high that it would be virtually impossible to convict anyone of an offence. This would maintain the same unjust and discriminatory situation that we have at present – which, of course, is exactly what Lord Lester intends.

Indicative of Thornett's inability to grapple with the issues here is his utter failure to understand what Lord Lester is up to. Instead of condemning a dishonest attempt to wreck a piece of

progressive legislation, Thornett criticises Lester's amendment on the grounds that it fails to reject a religious hatred law outright:

"The Lords amendment is designed to tighten up the definition of language needed to bring a prosecution which would then be restricted to 'threatening' rather than 'insulting' or 'abusive' language. They argue that this would make prosecutions more difficult in some cases – we would not know until it was tested in the courts. What we do know is that the principle of the Bill would be the same. It would still threaten free speech and would be just as divisive as the original wording."

It would be difficult to find a better example of getting hold of the wrong end of the stick.

Conclusion

At the time of writing the government is still engaged in negotiations with Lester and his supporters in an attempt to achieve a consensus before the third reading of the Bill in the Lords. It seems unlikely, though, that the opposition will have any real interest in reaching a compromise settlement and agreeing to accept a prosecutable religious hatred offence. It is possible that the Lords will insist on returning the Bill in its amended form to the Commons, where the government may decide to introduce its own alternative amendments.

Throughout this process, it will be the duty of anti-racists to put pressure on the government to stick to the principles of the Bill and not dilute the proposed legislation in an attempt to placate its opponents.

While the outcome of the struggle over the Racial and Religious Hatred Bill is difficult to predict, what can be said is that Thornett's article provides a glaring example of a worrying development on the Left. Over the years, there have been numerous grounds for criticising the politics of the Trotskyist movement – the mistaken perspectives on which the Fourth International was founded, its unreconstructed Leninism, its tendency to produce sects and even cults – but the movement's commitment to the defence of the oppressed was never in question.

Today this is no longer the case. Recently two Trotskyist groups, Lutte Ouvrière and the Parti des Travailleurs, shamefully supported Chirac's disgraceful ban on the wearing of the Islamic headscarf in French state schools, and now we have the official British section of the Fourth International contemptuously rejecting appeals from Muslims for legal protection against the hate-propaganda of the far Right. As we have already noted, Islamophobia is now the preferred weapon of the BNP, and the defence of Muslim communities against racism and fascism has become a vital political issue. Unfortunately, a section of the Left has chosen to take its stand on the wrong side of the ideological barricades. ■

Outrage! and the Iran Hangings: Chronicle of a Manipulation

Pedro Carmona

This article was written in August and was reproduced in several Latin American LGBT media, such as Notigay (Mexico) and Sentido G (Argentina). An edited version was published in the 1-14 September issue of the leftist newspaper *Diagonal* (Madrid). This English translation is based on one that appeared on Indymedia. It has been checked against the Spanish original and amended.

IN MID-JULY of this year a news item was circulated on the internet about two minors who were hanged in the Iranian city of Mashhad for having had homosexual relations. When after some weeks a very different version of the events became available, according to which it appeared that Mahmoud Asgari and Ayaz Marhoni, both above the age of 18, had been sentenced for the rape of a boy younger than themselves, many demonstrations had already been called outside Iranian embassies in various cities, and the Islamophobia of certain gay and lesbian groups had been unleashed.

The email which detonated the international reaction against Iran cited as its source an Iranian student association, and, in another account, a Teheran newspaper. In both cases, the news was dated 19 July and included images of the two boys as they walked to the gallows and as the noose was placed over their heads. At this time the election of the new anti-Western Iranian president was very recent, and the crisis between Teheran and various Western capitals (Washington, London, Paris and Berlin) over the continuation of the Islamic Republic's uranium enrichment plan was about to break out. The British association Outrage, known both for its continuous struggle for the rights of gays and lesbians as well as for its enthusiasm in denouncing any Muslim government, translated the news item and promoted its diffusion over the internet. Coverage of the event in the mainstream media was zero, which unfortunately came as no surprise to gays and lesbians who almost never merit the attention of the international news agencies, regardless of how

bloody may be the cases of state homophobia committed in various countries in the world.

This first account, which was rapidly propagated through the web, stated that the boys were minors and that they had been executed "for the mere fact of being gay". The note included their declarations: "We didn't know it was a crime and thought it was something normal because everyone does it." Within a few days, 200 people were demonstrating in front of the Iranian consulate in Milan, organised by ArciGay and other Italian gay and lesbian and human rights organisations. Outrage called for a demonstration in London. On various gay and lesbian websites and in internet forums promoting sexual freedom, and by means of email messages, people were urged to sign and send letters of condemnation to leading officials in Teheran, always emphasising the homophobic character of the hanging. In subsequent accounts new information was included: in addition to the death penalty imposed on the young men, they had also been sentenced to 228 lashes and the total time they spent in prison was 14 months. Indymedia Beirut, in its "Queer" section, called for several different forms of protest, although – perhaps suspecting where this all might be headed – it specified that "the campaign against these crimes can never serve as a justification for the military invasion of Iran".

The campaign bore fruit in high places: the Nobel Prize winner Shirin Ebadi, a high-ranking official in the Swedish government and the mayor of Florence, among others, announced that they would be sending protests to Iranian diplomatic authorities, and they were followed shortly by the

presidency of the European Union. The Dutch government froze expulsion proceedings against Iranians. Even two members of the US congress requested that Condoleezza Rice – whose government is by no means gay-friendly in the policies it adopts towards US gays and lesbians – should investigate the case and clarify the facts.

None of these persons mentioned the fact that the sentence was motivated by the homosexuality of the young men, although they made reference to their (reported) age. Nevertheless, the credit for this outcome undoubtedly goes to the campaign led by gays and lesbians in cyberspace: other recent executions of underage persons by the Iranian regime – there was at least one during the earlier months of 2005 and a minimum of five in 2004 – have produced nothing like this sort reaction.

The first documented investigations of the case appeared online around 25 July, signed by the International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC), Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. These associations had consulted *in situ* with local human rights organisations and NGOs. In light of this new information, they pointed out that the death penalty was imposed on these young men for the rape of a 13-year-old boy (who, according to some accounts, was coerced at knifepoint and also suffered the theft of his bicycle), that both of the authors of this crime were above the age of 18 at the time of the hanging, and that at least one of them was also over 18 when the crime was committed. The rest of the information from the first accounts remained valid. The hanging of the two young men was still branded as repellent and disproportionate in these new versions, and the signatory organisations called for letters of protest to be sent to Iranian governmental authorities, but they based the case on grounds very different from those of the first calls for condemnation. “It’s not a gay case”, Paula Ettlbrick, executive director of IGLHRC, stated in a 28 July interview.

In subsequent news follow-ups an Iranian lawyer declared that while homosexuality is illegal in Iran, and in the penal code is punishable by various kinds of sentences up to and including the death penalty, this “is never applied in the case of homosexual relations between consenting adults”. Several reports indicated that in Iran women are considered legally adults at age 9 and men at age 15. Some human rights associations requested that protests not focus only upon this case, as the abuses of the Iranian regime are many, and they encouraged protesters to direct the mobilisation against all of these abuses. Between the date of the two young men’s deaths and 2 August, five more people have been hanged in Iran for various reasons, without the slightest condemnation from the international community.

No one denies that the homosexual character of the rape might have been used to increase the sentence, although no source cites any statements to this effect in the judicial ruling, and the possibility is mentioned in some reports as a mere hypothesis. Other sources indicate that another motive for judicial discrimination might have been the fact that Mahmoud and Ayaz both belong to an ethnic minority: in a Persian majority country both of the hanged boys were Arabs. Their families come from the border area with Iraq and, like thousands of other Iranian Arabs, they were forced by the authorities to abandon their homes and to settle in Mashhad (in the north-western part of the country) during the Iran-Iraq war, a policy the Iranian authorities maintained for fear that the Arab minority might ally with the neighbouring country. Mashhad is “the holiest city of Iran”, very conservative, and it was in this city that the two young men were recently tried and executed.

At the beginning of August, an article by US journalist and activist Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg pointed to the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an organisation based in Paris, as the probable source of the false information. This organisation, according to its own website, advocates opposition to the regime of the ayatollahs by any means necessary – including military intervention – in order to impose in Iran a Western-inspired system of elections and a free-market economic model, backing capitalism and “foreign investment by those industrialised countries which wish to collaborate in the reconstruction of Iran”, measures which from the standpoint of opposition to economic globalisation might be interpreted as a complete dismantling of the country at the hands of Western multinationals. The NCRI has already chosen the person who will preside over the government of the “new Iran” during the “transition period before elections”, who is none other than the president of their own organisation. In the political programme of the NCRI the recognition of the state of Israel is also included.

At this moment the ball seemed to be in the court of Outrage, the main force behind the international protest. It appeared that the easiest thing to do would have been to acknowledge a certain prematurity in their initiative and to reorient their campaign. But despite the evidence contained in the new information, this organisation did not change its position: “We will not give the benefit of the doubt to Iran. We have no reason to believe that this has been a case of rape rather than a consensual relation: perhaps the rape accusation is false and has been promoted by the mullahs in order to undermine the protest’s international support. We all know that it is a homophobic regime.” When asked which sources they relied

upon in maintaining this attitude of suspicion, they shamelessly included “the Iranian opposition in exile”. Outrage maintained the call for a demonstration in front of the Iranian Embassy in London on 11 August, which was attended by around 100 people, while rallies were also held in Dublin, San Francisco, Paris and Montpellier. The group Outrage has great prestige among gay and lesbian organisations around the world due to its long history of struggle against homophobia. However, one of its most controversial actions in recent years consisted in turning up at a Palestine solidarity demonstration in London with placards accusing the Arafat government of homophobia. Also, Outrage has periodically made strong statements against Islam as a whole.

In an interview with an Iranian gay activist conducted by Nikolai Aleksiv of the GayRussia group, and circulated on the internet during this period by the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA), the activist points out that strong homophobic repression exists in Iran, exemplified by the closure of 15 gay websites and the non-existence of bars or nightclubs, but that the regime no longer systematically persecutes sexual minorities. He adds: “There are cinemas and parks which serve as meeting places for gay men and, though everyone knows they are there, no strict measures are taken for their eradication.” Sex-change operations are legal and are explicitly supported by the government. The law continues to punish “repeated homosexuality” with the death penalty, but this code is not applied. In the progressive media timid proposals to “respect different lifestyles” occasionally appear. The principal problem which gays and lesbians face in Iran is “lack of information”. The Iranian activist declares that he has not the slightest knowledge of the real motives for the death penalty imposed on Mahmoud and Ayaz.

On 3 August Faisal Alam, a US queer activist from a Pakistani family and founder of the Al-Fatiha group (made up of US queers of Muslim origin), argued in the magazine *Queer* that the campaign of condemnation had been launched without the slightest attempt, on the part of the groups that called for it, to confirm the truth of the allegations, in contrast to the three major human rights organisations which alerted people to the imprecision of the information on which the protests were based. The author, who points to the forces of the Iranian opposition in exile as the promoters of the confusion, suggests the creation of an international network of groups promoting sexual liberty between industrialised countries and those of the “Third World”, in order to avoid misunderstandings of this kind and have access to direct sources of information. This network would also serve to coordinate international

protests in accord with what might be helpful in the countries where the cases of abuse occur – like Iran, in this instance, where the campaign may have involuntarily provoked a worsening of institutional homophobia – and thus avoid effects that are contrary to those intended. Alam places this manipulation within the framework of the growth of Islamophobia in Europe and North America, and of the “Axis of Evil” campaign of the Washington government. Finally, he asks how US public opinion can protest against the death of some presumed minors when their own country does the same – it is one of the only five countries on the planet where this occurs. Of the 21 cases of capital punishment imposed by the state on minors since 2000 throughout the world, 13 have taken place in the United States.

One last nuance that should be added to the initial accounts of the events is the use of Western concepts to describe types of sexuality in other cultures. It is an error to speak of “two gays” to define two young Iranian men around 18 years of age who, if the present information is correct, imposed by intimidation a sexual relationship upon a boy of 13, as this behaviour is perceived as perfectly “heterosexual” within the dominant culture of that country, as long as the perpetrators adopt the active role in the penetration. What is more, far from being a “gay” act, it could even be taken as a homophobic act on the part of the rapists, as it is the “manly man” who can, by violence, “fuck the faggot”. It is possible that the Western LGBT movement, in the name of the rights of gays and minors, is ironically demonstrating in favour of two young heterosexuals who chose this 13-year-old minor as a victim because he was or appeared to be gay.

The sources continue to present a certain confusion at the time of completing this article, and much information remains to be confirmed. The theory that it was the Iranian regime which disguised as a “rape” case a sentence for homosexuality, though it has lost credibility over the past weeks, may yet prove to be true. With the passage of time, however, the theory defended by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and IGLHRC appears to be the most reliable. The anti-Iranian campaign which has been promoted by certain gay and lesbian groups has been based on information that is heavily biased, incomplete and sometimes plainly untrue. It certainly appears to be a premeditated exercise in misinformation. Also suspicious is the warm reception of these mobilisations on the part of conservative parties and groups which have never defended gay and lesbian rights, or have even promoted openly homophobic initiatives, like the Republican Party in the United States. Unfortunately, the protest campaign, which we should characterise as at the very

least unwise and poorly documented, is now unstoppable, despite the appearance of contradictory information and clarificatory accounts: up until today, the petitions continue to circulate, maintaining the version that Mahmoud and Ayaz were hanged “solely” for being gay. It is understandable that our rage at the continued homophobic abuses we see should lead us to immediate reactions that are not thought through; but this could result in our being converted, while believing ourselves to be struggling for the liberation of gays and lesbians, into mere puppets of greater interests.

Around the same time as the events recounted in this article came the death of King Fahd of Saudi Arabia, whose regime is an ally of the United States and other Western countries. In the Spanish State, as in other neighbouring countries, there was an official day of mourning – which in the municipality of Marbella, where the monarch regularly spent his holidays, was extended to three days. The obituaries in the European and North American press heaped praise on him, avoiding any condemnation of the dictatorial regime he presided over and remaining silent about its horrible human rights abuses. No media mentioned the beheadings of homosexuals which frequently take place in the public squares of his kingdom. As recently as 14 March a couple of men were beheaded for “living in sin and socially displaying their homosexual relationship”. Between 9 and 20 April of this year, 202 homosexuals and transsexuals were arrested during two gay parties and were sentenced to prison terms of up to two years and to floggings which varied, according to the case, between 200 and 2600 lashes. The prison term is calculated so that the prisoners may receive all the lashes stipulated in the judicial sentence, at a rate of 15 per day, interrupted by resting periods in order to avoid the death of the detainee. Today, while you are reading this, they may be receiving those lashes. No gay or lesbian group has initiated an international campaign to denounce these events.

Note: The author of this article is a gay activist. He is opposed to the death penalty and is aware that Iran is among the most homophobic regimes in the world, and he denounces it accordingly. In the 1990s, the author participated in an international campaign similar to the one analysed in this article – on that occasion directed against the Cuban regime, and orchestrated, as was reported much later, in Florida. While that campaign was taking place, death squads presumably trained by the Pentagon were killing gays, lesbians and transsexuals in almost all the other countries of Latin America; these cases were only revealed years later. The campaign against Cuba, motivated by events such as the closing down of gay parties, became so harsh that the US group Human Rights Watch published a report which stated that “there is no serious or emergency situation for the gay and lesbian population of Cuba”. Various reports on human rights included the names of 12 Latin American countries in which “there are extremely serious situations of homophobia”, including frequent assassinations carried out by ultra-right groups in the face of the authorities’ passivity, “to which we see no reaction whatsoever on the part of the international activist groups”.

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The Alliance for Workers' Liberty: Britain's Revolutionary Imperialists

Tony Greenstein

IT MAY seem to be a contradiction, a revolutionary imperialist, and of course it is, but that is in essence the contradiction that lies at the heart of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Not of course that the AWL is alone in wrestling with this dilemma. On the contrary, the AWL stands in the finest traditions of labour imperialism. It was Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation that pioneered the belief that socialism and imperialism could be reconciled. Coming from a rich Ulster family, Hyndman was antagonistic to the struggles of the Irish, supported the Boers and eventually the British in world war one. Another prominent British socialist of the period, *Clarion* editor Robert Blatchford, later to join the Tory Party, was equally a supporter of British imperialism and its foreign ventures.

Marxism is to be distinguished from Fabianism and the different varieties of reformism in that it is wedded to a class analysis of society and in its historical materialist approach. New Labour is forever talking about its values (even if they end up in imprisonment without trial at Belmarsh) but socialists deal with concrete actualities. What is it that has led generations of socialists and their organisations into supporting the wars and adventures of the ruling class? What material base do these politics have? Although it is fashionable to deride the thesis of Lenin, it is unarguable that his thesis, that the conservatism of the British working class was due to their being the recipients of the crumbs from the fruits of imperialism, explains both the racism and the lack of revolutionary fervour of this class.

British racism, at its heart, has material foundations. It does not exist solely in the realm of ideas. The relative privileges of the British working class, compared with their Argentinian or South African counterparts, lies in the operation of British capital abroad, the returns from their investments in the form of a social wage – the NHS, Social Security etc. Repression abroad paid for reformism at home. The greatest reforming Labour Government, under Attlee, was also the government which most intensified the robbery

of the African and Malaysian colonies, in order to fund the dollar deficit.

I first came across the AWL when I was a young member, about 18 at the time, of the International Socialists (now the SWP). I was in the Liverpool branch when a proposal came from the leadership that the organisation should expel the Trotskyist Tendency as they were called. A speaker was invited from this group and Andrew Hornung, their most effective speaker and someone with whom I worked closely over Palestine in future years, spoke to the branch. Nonetheless the branch split 2-1 in favour of the expulsion and delegates were elected proportionately.

One member of the Liverpool branch who came to play a prominent part in Socialist Organiser/AWL was John Bloxham, then a young teacher. When I was expelled a few months later, for publicly disagreeing with and voting against the decision of IS to close down the Anti-Internment League, Bloxham repaid my support by abstaining. He explained that it was all a question of democratic centralism!

By way of an aside, I should mention that the Liverpool branch was somewhat reluctant to expel me. It was felt necessary to bring up to Liverpool their Industrial Organiser, Roger Rosewell. Rosewell managed to complete his task admirably. It was no doubt a good preparation for his future career, which included sitting on the SDP's Industrial Committee, working for the free-market Aims of Industry and being a leader-writer on the *Daily Mail*. Currently he is bag-carrier-in-chief for Lady Shirley Porter!

I digress however. The Trotskyist Tendency was expelled at an Extraordinary Conference of IS and soon became Workers' Fight. It was a typically Trotskyist organisation with standard views in support of the Irish and other liberation movements.

I first caught up with what was by now Socialist Organiser when I went, after the invasion of Lebanon, to a Bradford Labour Movement Conference on Palestine in or around 1982. There I met up with Andrew Hornung, with whom I

was to work for the next four or so years on Palestine. The Labour Party had traditionally been a bastion of support for the Zionists. Indeed the only support the Palestinians had ever received came from the right of the Party – people like Andrew Faulds MP and David Watkins MP. Ian Mikardo, Jo Richardson, Tony Benn, Eric Heffer – all were stalwarts of the Labour Friends of Israel, though the latter two left shortly after the invasion of Lebanon.

Andrew and myself set up, at a meeting in the GLC's County Hall, the Labour Committee on Palestine, which led directly to the passing of an emergency motion at the 1982 Conference supporting a democratic, secular State of Palestine. At this time SO had a policy, common on the far left, of support for a democratic, secular state in Palestine.

However SO had already begun moving in the direction of imperialism, when it began to criticise Sinn Féin from the right. It began to warm to the Ulster Loyalists, arguing that they were merely articulating the sub-national feelings of the Protestants, rather than seeing them as a political representatives of a form of settler colonialism and an appendage and extension of British imperialism. This resulted in SO supporting some sort of federation in Ireland to accommodate Loyalist desires and for their guru, Sean Matgamna/John O'Mahoney to argue for the repartitioning of Ireland so as to excise from the current Northern Ireland statelet the Catholic counties of Fermanagh and Tyrone!

The LCP became transformed into the Labour Movement Campaign on Palestine after the Workers Revolutionary Party, at the instigation of Ted Knight, then leader of Lambeth Council, took over the organisation. SO were traditional enemies of the WRP, having been taken to court by the latter for libel. So at this time the main battle was with the WRP's LCP, but within a couple of years Matgamna was becoming restless as he sought to take his organisation down what is known, in the Trotskyist jargon, as the road of the "Third Camp".

AWL has now become a full "Third Campist" organisation. This term was used to describe the position of Max Shachtman, one of the leaders of American Trotskyism, which was in essence a forerunner of the SWP's "Neither Moscow nor Washington". Shachtman himself ended up as a cold war warrior, supporting the CIA invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs. Matgamna has now succeeded in taking AWL down exactly the same road.

AWL have since the mid-1980s adopted a "Two States" position on Palestine. Both "nations" according to them are entitled to their own state. Leaving aside the question of whether or not the Israeli Jews are a nation, what the AWL position ignores is the fundamental difference between Israeli Jews and Palestinians – one is the oppressor and the other is the oppressed. When AWL first

adopted this position I argued with them, in debates and articles, that what they are doing is supporting an imperialist solution to the problem – a Palestinian Bantustan which would merely replace the face of the Israeli soldier with that of the Palestinian.

However AWL's position is actually far worse than this.

There are many good supporters of the Palestinians and genuine anti-Zionists who support a Two States position, not because they wouldn't wish to see one, unitary, democratic and secular state but because they don't think it's practical politics or feasible. People such as Noam Chomsky and the late Israel Shahak. No one could doubt that these people are genuine and sincere opponents of Zionism and the racism of the Israeli State. It's just that they don't see an alternative to Two States. Now I would argue they are wrong in thinking that a stable and organic Palestinian State, with its own sovereignty and free from Israeli domination, is possible. Today the presence of some 400,000 settlers and the cantonisation of the West Bank would, I suggest, make this impossible. However this is a debate within the Palestine solidarity movement.

AWL's position is however entirely different. They don't support a Two States position because it is the only thing that is attainable. They see the existence of the Israeli State, a State of its Jewish citizens, for whom its Arab citizens are at best a tolerated minority, as a *good thing in its own right*. AWL, beyond the occasional reference to Israeli racism, have absolutely nothing to say about the inherent racism in the Zionist State. Nothing about the fact that 93% of the land is reserved for Jews, or that welfare benefits are higher for Jews than Palestinians in order to encourage a higher birthrate. AWL even support the Israeli Law of Return which allows people like myself to go and live in Israel and become citizens but denies the same right to Palestinians who have been born and brought up there.

It is little wonder then that both Sean Matgamna and his faithful lapdog, Martin Thomas, both describe themselves in Thomas's words as "a little bit Zionist". This is the ideology that the founder of modern Zionism, Theodore Herzl, described as "an antidote to socialism". The nationalism of Zionism was seen as the only way to wean the Jews off socialist politics. It was no accident that the Balfour Declaration was issued five days before the Bolshevik Revolution in a forlorn attempt to win the allegiance of Russia's Jews. Balfour himself, as the author of the Aliens Act 1905, was a dyed-in-the-wool anti-Semite who seriously believed that the Russian revolution was a Jewish affair! It was also the reason why the Zionist movement was the only legal political movement in Czarist Russia. Zionism was vehemently opposed to Jewish revolutionary activities.

Emigration to Palestine, escape from the anti-Semites, this was the only “good” Zionist activity.

It was no surprise therefore that when the Association of University Teachers passed a motion supporting the boycott of Israeli universities, Haifa and Bar Ilan, both hotbeds of anti-Arab racism, the AWL moved into action *in support of these racist universities*.

Haifa, on 17 May, hosted a conference, organised by its own Professor Arnon Sofer, into the “demographic problem and Israeli policies”. The “problem” being too many Arabs in the Jewish State. Sofer’s preferred solution being “transfer” i.e. expulsion. Nor is Sofer just an academic crank. He heads the Department of Geo-Strategy and is deputy-chair of its Institute of Security Studies. The guest of honour at the conference, from which Arabs were excluded, was the Rector of Haifa University, Professor Yossi Artzi. Haifa bans the Arabic language from being used on signposts on campus, its website is in Hebrew and English (despite Arabic being an official language in Israel) and despite there being 20% Arab students at Haifa – the highest of any Israeli university. Bar Ilan University is a hotbed of the religious right. It validates the degrees at the College of Judea & Samaria in the Ariel settlement on the West Bank. Bar Ilan used to bar Arab students from even living on campus. Israeli academics are complicit in all aspects of Israeli military life and have never spoken up, except for a minority like Haifa’s Professor Ilan Pappé (whom the Rector has tried to get expelled from the university), for the Palestinians and against the racism that their universities tolerate.

AWL has nothing to say about any of the above. Racism against Arabs is not its concern. It doesn’t exist. You will not find in the reams of articles they have produced even a single one attacking or even analysing racism in the Jewish State and how it has come about. AWL have no analysis of Zionism, with its aim of creating an ethnically pure Jewish State. Like all good colonialists and imperialists, for AWL, the natives are invisible. They simply don’t exist other than as supporting actors in a play. And anyone who criticises Zionism is labelled an anti-Semite or a “left anti-Semite”. AWL therefore had no difficulty in taking part, with Jon Pike and other Zionists, in the Engage site, which libelled Sue Blackwell and other lecturers who had supported the Boycott of Apartheid Israel. AWL is at home with these reactionaries, many of whom argue that it is no business of trade unions to meddle in the politics of other countries. Bread and butter issues are their sole concern.

The AWL position on the Academic Boycott is a good example of their hypocrisy. If they were sincere in their Two States position, they would of course understand that Israel is a military giant compared with the Palestinians. That the only

way, given the power and support of the settlers and far-right in Israel, to obtain a Palestinian State was precisely to put as much pressure on the Israeli State as possible. This indeed was the position of one of the main speakers for the original AUT motion supporting the boycott. But AWL are *opposed to any* pressure on the Israeli State and certainly any *effective* pressure on them. The real reason is that AWL’s Two States position is really a totem. In practice they support the Zionist State and nothing else. In the event that the Zionist State “solves” its demographic problems by expelling the Palestinians into Jordan, which must remain a distinct possibility, you can be sure that as time goes on, AWL will label all those seeking the return of the Palestinians as “anti-Semitic”.

It is no accident therefore that AWL have become the main left group in support of the war in Iraq. For sure they didn’t support the original invasion, but today they are full square behind the occupation. Matgamna even muses on AWL’s website that it might lead to the establishment of a bourgeois democracy with the elections in January (if only one forgets about the tiresome bombing!).

There was a full debate over the AWL’s position on the Socialist Alliance Democracy Platform’s e-mail list earlier this year. Pete Radcliff’s “defence” of their position was to call their opponents, primarily myself, “liars”. However this defence didn’t go down particularly well, and when I subsequently moved a motion at the January SADP calling for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of imperialist troops from Iraq, AWL first tried to amend it, arguing that “calls for troops out should be consequential to an overall orientation towards working-class solidarity”. When this was defeated, AWL opposed the main motion. AWL’s other main difference over Iraq was its support for the scab leadership of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions, whose Iraqi Communist Party leadership were also part of the US puppet government under Allawi. The IFTU have operated with the blessing of the US occupation authorities, utilising the same decrees (Order 31) that Saddam Hussein issued, effectively banning any other trade union organisation such as the Federation of Workers Councils or the Iraqi Union of Unemployed. Despite this AWL continues to support the IFTU and their strike-breaking activities.

Despite having joined with other comrades in forming the SADP, after the SWP had effectively closed the Socialist Alliance down, AWL found that they could no longer co-exist within the same organisation with those who were genuine anti-imperialists. AWL members have now stopped posting to all left e-mail lists such as UK Left Network. Instead members such as the rabid Zionist Jim Denham post to the pro-war Harry’s Place, where they are in congenial company with

even more ardent Zionists than themselves. The reality is that AWL are now uncomfortable with all sections of the left in Britain.

Why is AWL pro-war? Because if you refuse to call for the withdrawal of troops, you must, by necessity, be in favour of the troops remaining, i.e. the occupation. It is little wonder that satellite members of AWL, such as Kate Ahrens (recently defeated in the UNISON elections), have signed joint letters with the openly pro-imperialist Labour Friends of Iraq, attacking comrades on the left. LFI, incidentally, has been formed by ex-AWLers like Jane Ashworth, Simon Pottinger and Alan Johnson who have taken AWL's politics to their logical conclusion and openly abandoned any pretence that they oppose imperialism. Johnson himself has written in *Red Star* defending the US war crimes in Falluja.

Even when AWL was a formal part of the anti-war movement, it spent most of its time attacking the fact that the Muslim Association of Britain was part of the anti-war coalition. Working with Zionist fundamentalist groups was fine, but working with an Islamic group was not. The fact that MAB has, under the pressure of events, been moving leftwards for some time, was irrelevant. A hostility to Muslims because of their perceived Middle East connections and anti-Zionism has been a part of the fare at the AWL table.

Concomitant with this has been an obsession with the figure of George Galloway and Respect. Now I am not a supporter of Respect. I am opposed to communalist politics and seeking to win over a small minority (5%) of the working class on the

basis of their religious affiliation. In particular when the appeal is a cross-class appeal. However I would venture to suggest that most socialists, even some inside the Labour Party, welcomed the defeat of the warmonger Oona King in the General Election. We were even more thrilled by Galloway's brilliant performance at the Senate hearings when he tore into the hapless Senator Coleman. Not so AWL. AWL supported both Roger Godsiff against Respect's Salma Yaqoob in Birmingham and Oona King in Bethnal Green. It beggars belief that a so-called socialist organisation, which itself supported the Socialist Green Unity Coalition standing candidates against New Labour, nonetheless opposed Galloway's successful challenge to King.

Yes Galloway became very close to elements of the Ba'athist regime. But this has always been the case with Labour MPs, not least Tony Benn. Yes he was an Arabist (and also a supporter of Two States!). But he was a consistently anti-war MP and deserved on that account, if no other, to receive the critical support of socialists.

The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, which stood just one candidate in the General Election (Pete Radcliff in Nottingham), is a tiny ex-Trotskyist sect, numbering maybe 100 people. Its main strength is still in the National Union of Students where it has worked with the Zionist Union of Jewish Students on and off for years. The AWL is fast moving to the right as it abandons any pretence at internationalism and support for the oppressed of the world. As Karl Marx wrote, a nation that oppresses another will not itself be free. It's a lesson that the AWL has forgotten. ■

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Lies, Damn Lies and Tony Greenstein

Daniel Randall and Sacha Ismail

TO THOSE on the left who derive sado-masochistic entertainment from the more bilious of its internal debates, Tony Greenstein will need no introduction. But for anyone who doesn't think that spending endless hours on email discussion lists and internet message boards is an appropriate and productive use of their time, it is necessary to provide a little background.

Tony Greenstein is a socialist based in Brighton who engages in a form of political masturbation that consists basically of attacking the Alliance for Workers' Liberty in the most poisonous terms known to him at every possible opportunity. Tony attacks the AWL for its small size, but he is not on very firm ground arguing numbers with a group more than 100 times the size of his own: the Tony Greenstein sect of one.

Tony's ferocious hatred of the AWL overrides all rational political thought; so, for example, when Tony stood as a candidate for the Socialist Green Unity Coalition (in which the AWL also participated) in the 2005 General Election, Tony felt it appropriate to write a letter to the CPGB newspaper *Weekly Worker* attacking the AWL in characteristic terms, even though he knew this would harm the coalition of which he himself was part. This sort of behaviour is illustrative of Tony's general approach – not rational, worked-out criticism but frenzied slander. His diatribe in *What Next?* is no different. It is embarrassing in its lack of rigour, in the way it substitutes anecdotal slander for political critique, and in its use of blatant lies, distortions and half-truths.

For Tony, the AWL are “revolutionary imperialists”. This is laughable. Tony can't even do baseless slander properly. What about the AWL is “imperialist”? Is it a nation pursuing an aggressive policy of self-aggrandisement? What countries has it occupied? What wars of conquest has it fought? Presumably Tony means “pro-imperialist,” but once again his irrepressible urge to hysterically attack the AWL has affected his ability to think and write rationally.

Tony attempts to tar the AWL with the pro-imperialism of the late-19th century Social Demo-

cratic Federation, but does not reference or quote from any documents of either the SDF or the AWL to prove his point. He simply asserts it as fact and moves on, attempting to cover up his inability to substantiate his claims with some irrelevant biographical information about SDF leader Henry Hyndman.

This method – one of baseless assertion without substantiation, quote or reference – is used in a tiresomely repetitive fashion throughout Tony's article. For example, he accuses the AWL of “criticising Sinn Féin from the right”, but fails to provide any quotes from AWL literature to back up this claim. He repeats this trick when accusing AWL member Sean Matgamna of “arguing for the repartitioning of Ireland”; again when accusing the AWL of seeing anti-Arab discrimination by the Israeli state as “a good thing in itself”; and again when accusing us of “support for the scab leadership of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions.” None of these claims can possibly be justified, since none of them are true.

It is also worth mentioning some of Tony's more colourful and surreal lies. When referring to the AWL's opposition to the way the right-wing Muslim Association of Britain was promoted by the leaders of the Stop the War Coalition, Tony says that, for the AWL, “working with Zionist fundamentalist groups was fine, but working with an Islamic group was not”. Which “Zionist fundamentalist group” is he talking about? Does Tony think the AWL proposed that the MAB were replaced as co-sponsors of the Stop the War demonstrations by Israel's ruling Likud party?

In typical fashion, Tony claims that the AWL's position on the MAB was wrong because the latter was “clearly moving leftward”. But once again, Tony fails to substantiate this wild claim with any reference to MAB's propaganda or activity. In reality, even a cursory glance at the MAB's website will make it clear that its is anchored firmly in its harbour of socially conservative religious reaction. Look at Dr Azzam Tamimi, a member of the MAB executive and one of its most prominent spokespeople, who describes himself as a “sym-

pathiser and supporter of Hamas” and claimed that Arab women “ask” to be beaten by their husbands; or Anas Altikriti, a prominent MAB member and head of Respect’s Yorkshire list for the 2004 European elections, who told the *Weekly Worker* that his religious beliefs told him there would “always be rich and poor”.

Tony also says that “hostility to Muslims ... has been part of the fare at the AWL table”. Apparently he missed the fact that the AWL was the most vocal element of a tiny minority on the left who thought that opposing the genocide of the mainly-Muslim Bosnians in 1995 and mainly-Muslim Kosovars in 1999 was more important than empty anti-NATO rhetoric. He has also failed to notice that the AWL is the only organisation on the left that has done any serious solidarity work with the emerging labour movements in countries like Iran, Iraq and Indonesia whose members and militants are ... guess what? Muslims. But of course for “anti-imperialists” of Tony’s stripe, the only people that matter in mainly-Muslim world are right-wing religious fundamentalists.

This is, of course, just a limited selection – the list of instances in which Tony makes a slanderous claim against the AWL but totally fails to substantiate it is almost endless.

By contrast, it is a matter of consummate ease for any literate person to pick apart Tony’s fabrications about the AWL’s politics by simply reading anything we have ever written. Tony says we are “four-square behind the occupation [of Iraq]”. Were we perhaps lying, then, when we said “No US/UK occupation” and “End the occupation” – including on the front cover of our paper *Solidarity*? Tony accuses us of supporting the leadership of the IFTU, so maybe it was a different AWL that wrote: “The actual effect of the ... Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions intervention at the Labour Party conference was to give Blair a free hand to carry on backing Bush. Whatever sophistry may be used to evade this fact, it was de facto support to Bush’s policy – brutal, arrogant, militaristic, privatise-at-all-costs, ‘spot of trouble? Slaughter a few hundred more civilians and that’ll show them!’ – which, far from being a democratic alternative to the rise of Islamist reaction, has fuelled that rise” (see the debate at www.workersliberty.org/node/view/3150). These examples are typical of the way Tony regularly tells lies about the AWL’s politics. It is difficult to find a more effective way of responding to him than identifying each one of his fabrications and repudiating them one by one. This, however, is an exhausting and time consuming process; the lies are numerous, life is short and there are far more important things to be doing.

The way Tony relates the AWL’s position on the AUT’s academic boycott of Israel typifies his entire approach. He starts with the “left common

sense” – in this case that a boycott of “Apartheid Israel”, whether cultural or academic, is a good thing – observes the AWL’s opposition to this and then fabricates a reason which he then doesn’t bother to substantiate. For those with a slightly more rigorous attitude than Tony, the AWL actually opposed the boycott because we have a general position against all boycotts, believing that positive acts of solidarity are more effective and that boycotts often harm most the people who are your potential allies (in this case the Israeli left and workers’ movement). The way he refers to “Apartheid Israel”, or elsewhere to the IFTU’s “strike-breaking activities” simply regurgitates the buzzwords and received wisdom of the left without any political explanation whatsoever.

Some of the other disingenuous tricks Tony employs are staggering. He attacks the AWL by attacking the politics of some of its ex-members, namely Alan Johnson and Jane Ashworth. He justifies this by saying that their current trajectories are the “logical conclusion” of the AWL’s politics. A more rational person might realise that these people left the AWL precisely because they no longer agreed with the AWL’s politics. If the views of Alan Johnson and Jane Ashworth were really the full expression of the AWL’s politics, why did the AWL waste the ink and paper to write lengthy polemics denouncing them both as “ex-Marxist Blairites”? Again, one wonders if Tony believes we were lying when we wrote those words.

(Incidentally, Tony’s “more anti-occupation than thou” attitude on Iraq is particularly amusing given his recent membership of the Alliance for Green Socialism; an organisation which positively supports the occupation of Iraq by UN troops!)

A good example of the way Tony twists reality can be found when he describes how the AWL “supported both Roger Godsiff against Respect’s Salma Yaqoob in Birmingham and Oona King in Bethnal Green [against George Galloway]”. Tony’s distortion makes it appear as if the AWL specifically backed these two Labour candidates because they were standing against prominent Respect members. In actual fact, the AWL had a consistent position of calling for Labour votes in seats where independent working-class candidates were not standing. Agree or disagree with this position by all means, but don’t pretend that our support for these two Labour candidates was somehow unique.

Tony himself admits that Respect’s candidates do not fall into the category of independent working-class politics; his only reason for backing Galloway (he himself says there was “no other” reason for doing so) was that “he was a consistently anti-war MP”. Perhaps Tony would also like to see socialists giving “critical support” to other MPs who never voted for the war; Liberal Democrat leader Charles Kennedy, perhaps, or

maybe even the Tory Kenneth Clarke.

We can see Tony's farcical distortions at work again when he says that the AWL has "worked with the Zionist Union of Jewish Students on and off for years". We certainly do not share Tony's vitriolic hatred of UJS and actively opposed him when he campaigned to have Jewish Societies banned on campuses (a product of his irrational anti-Zionism; irrational because it far outweighs his opposition to any other form of nationalism or regional-expansionism). But there has never been a political bloc of any kind between the AWL and UJS. Tony naturally refuses to go into any sort of detail as to what the "work" between the AWL and UJS might have consisted of. Once again, he is simply lying. For example, at NUS conference 2005, it was a UJS-Federation of Student Islamic Societies-SWP-Socialist Action bloc that defeated an AWL motion opposing faith schools.

Yes – the AWL has had UJS speakers on platforms at our events and at events organised by groups in which we play a role. But we have not done so in order to promote their views on Palestine, with which we have made it clear we disagree, since we call loudly for immediate and total Israeli withdrawal from the Occupied Territories and they do not. For instance, at the recent founding conference of Education Not for Sale (a broad left group in the student movement in which AWL is involved), a UJS speaker did indeed take part in a platform discussing racism and anti-semitism – but the only speaker on Palestine was an activist from War on Want who disagrees with us to the extent of favouring an economic boycott of Israel. We have also had Tories, Greens and a whole host of other petty-bourgeois and bourgeois muddleheads on platforms at our events. This is for the same reason that we are replying to Tony's attack on us: precisely because we are not a "sect", but a democratic organisation that believes in free, open debate and political argument even with

those who maintain a poisonous hatred of our politics.

Tony refers to the Trotskyist Tendency – a 1970s forerunner of the AWL – as "a typically Trotskyist organisation with standard views in support of the Irish and other liberation movements". Here we can see clearly what seems to be the main factor in Tony's grudge against the AWL. He attacks us for breaking with positions that were "common on the far left", and says "the reality is that the AWL are now uncomfortable with all sections of the left in Britain", as if there's something inherently wrong with this. Tony obviously believes that it's wrong for an organisation to break with or challenge the "left common sense", or do anything not considered "typically Trotskyist".

In early 1900s Russia, when "left common sense" was a peasant-centred anarcho-populism, a tiny group of Marxists around George Plekhanov advocated independent working-class politics and were met with violent sectarian abuse. Presumably Tony would have berated Plekhanov's Emancipation of Labour Group for being "uncomfortable with all sections of the left" in Russia at that time.

All in all, Tony's miserably ill thought-out, unreferenced, unsubstantiated collection of randomly thrown together assertions about the AWL's politics, most of which consist of attacks on fabricated positions that the AWL has never held, is a farcical joke. At one point in this pointless piece of self-indulgent drivel, written to satisfy Tony's irrational (and, if the amount of incidental anecdotal rubbish about his various friends and enemies in AWL circles down the years is anything to go by, massively personal) grudge against the AWL, he complains that an AWL member once called him a "liar" in a Socialist Alliance meeting. Well, Tony – that AWL member was right. To rephrase Mark Twain's old adage: there are lies, damn lies – and then there's Tony Greenstein. ■

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Appraising the SW Platform in the Scottish Socialist Party

Gregor Gall

This article was written in early 2004 for circulation within the *Socialist Worker* Platform, the organisation of SWP supporters in the Scottish Socialist Party. Gregor Gall left the SW Platform in January 2005 after 15 years of membership in it and the SWP.

We are grateful to Gregor for providing us with a copy of the document, which received widespread circulation on the internet after it appeared on the *What Next?* website, and was printed in the *Weekly Worker* (which didn't even do us the courtesy of acknowledging where it came from). However, we are publishing it here as agreed with the author, because it offers an important critical view of the functioning of the SWP.

Introduction

This document is written with the hope of stimulating a debate within the SW Platform which will result in a critical self-appraisal of its development and relative successes and failures since being created in May 2001, and in turn, lead to different political perspectives and practices. It is motivated by a position where there is a realisation that there are serious weaknesses in the Platform which itself is held to be a serious revolutionary socialist organisation and therefore worth the time appraising rather than dismissing outright no matter the trenchant criticisms that follow. Thus, the concern is to avoid "throwing the baby out with the bath water". To this end concrete suggestions are made for the future direction of the Platform at the end of this document.

At the meetings about joining the SSP just prior to May Day 2001, there was a relatively long period of internal discussion and debate. At the last meeting where the decision to join was taken, there were some 120 comrades present with a paper membership of around 200 at the time. At the last all members meeting in 2003 – the aggregate prior to the SWP national conference in November 2003 – attendance was around 60. This may or may not indicate the shrinking of the Platform and the active size of the Platform (which on balance, I think it does) but what is not open to doubt are the following: a) fewer members are coming to important Scottish meetings and without the

previous routine of branch meetings (which were clearly far from perfect) and the use now of fortnightly Marxist Forums, far fewer members are coming to these local based meetings, and b) despite the much vaunted "new mood" (of which there have been several iterations over recent years), the same old (old and the same) faces still turn up to meetings. Members are extolled of the opportunities for growth in influence and members but these have no manifestation in subsequent Platform meetings. This situation is not confined to Scotland judged by reports in the SWP Party Notes and accounts from a number of comrades in England. Thus, this document begins by analysing why the SWP as a de facto organisation throughout Britain is not in a healthy state and is certainly not of the size, influence and vibrancy frequently stated by the SWP's national leadership (the Central Committee and National Committee).

Notes and Theses on Characteristics of the SW Platform/SWP

In analysing the SW Platform, we must also analyse the SWP in Scotland and in Britain prior to 2001 as well as the SWP in England and Wales since 2001. The organisations share the same biologies. The central characteristics of these organisations are argued to be those of a) ultra-leftism, b) sectarianism, c) a command and control culture, d) absence of internal democracy, e) exaggerated political perspectives, f) voluntarism,

and g) prioritising cadre accumulation. These are identifiable as separate characteristics although they are, in the case of the *SW Platform/SWP*, inherently bound up with each other.

a) *Ultra-leftism*

There is a clear tendency to posit the existing structures and processes of capitalism with those of (revolutionary) socialism in a way that does not directly and effectively relate to the consciousness of where the most radicalised non-socialists are. What is correct in the abstract is in practice posited in a way that separates the *SW Platform/SWP* from potential supporters rather than draw them nearer. For example, bourgeois democracy is counter-poised to workers' democracy in an either/or, take it or leave it, way. Reform is counter-poised to revolution in the same way. This alienates potential support by putting the *SW Platform/SWP* too far away from where most people are without relating to the material circumstances and their existing political consciousness. It marginalises the *SW Platform/SWP*. People, thus, see the *SW Platform/SWP* as hopeless dreamers and far too unrealistic. There is no part in the *SW Platform/SWP* perspective for a method of taking people from where they are a few steps further down a long road to socialism. All that exists is the notion that under struggle people will become radicalised and their consciousness develop. On the one hand, there are loads of people not involved in struggle. On the other, the evidence of this kind of radicalisation *en masse* is absent. We are not living a period of widespread mass, active struggles no matter what we would like to be the case. The anti-war and anti-globalisation movements, important as though they are, do not constitute these. On top of this, there is no sense in which the *SW Platform/SWP* looks at its forces and concludes that "x" rather than "y" is thus possible in the current period. The notion of the small cog turning a larger cog is ripped out of its present context, making it an ineffective metaphor. Rather, the goal is set and the members have just get on with striving for it.

b) *Sectarianism*

Sectarianism can be simply defined as elevating points (over tactics, strategic) of difference to differences in over principles, goals and grand outcomes. Difference becomes more important than commonality and unity. Flowing from this, working with other forces, no matter attempts at united fronts, becomes very difficult and fraught. Control of campaigns and organisation thus takes on a key importance. Arrogance and self-righteous are unhealthy by-products. The sister to this type of sectarianism is the emphasis on party building (i.e. recruitment, party initiatives like open letters, petitions etc) and selling of party literature (i.e. a weekly newspaper *inter alia*) to the exclusion and detriment of strengthening the left and the work-

ing class overall. The former became the *raison d'être* of the party. Interestingly, in the last few years, this emphasis on party building has not been quite so strong. It has been replaced by campaign building of issues in which the party has decided to take a lead in. But in any case the sectarian mentality is still to the fore even if recruitment is not.

c) *Command and control culture*

The culture of being scared of dissent and independent thinking comes from leadership fear of debate becoming a diversion from activity and at worst an obstacle to activity. Rule by diktat and exhortation based on enforced political agreement is, for the leadership at the centre, more efficient, more effective and more responsive for the executive of party initiatives. Plurality of perspectives and extensive debate are not seen as desirable in a combat organisation.

d) *Absence of internal democracy*

Absence of internal democracy only becomes a problem for ordinary members when political differences emerge amongst individuals disagreeing with the leadership line where the leadership is unwilling to engage in serious debate and be open-minded. Options facing members are usually shut up or leave.

e) *Exaggerated political perspectives*

In order to motivate members to super-activism and to create self-confidence in the party, exaggeration of the prospects for growth of the organisation, paper sales or periphery as well as that for trade union, oppositional movements and the working class is necessary. Exaggeration breeds further exaggeration and not balanced perspectives. While it may be thought that a broken clock will always shown the right time twice a day, continually exaggerated perspectives mean that even this becomes a remote possibility. For example, each time a sizeable strike takes place, this becomes "the most important ever". By now, we must be well off the Richter scale. Other examples are the constant parodying of "two swallows making a summer". Another aspect of this characteristic is that political perspectives seldom look further than 6 months to a year forward so that the organisation operates on a basis of campaign-itis. Whilst flexibility of operation is needed, the downside is that organisational priorities become, in effect, an endless series of campaigns where an overall elaborated political perspective of the current era is absent.

f) *Voluntarism*

An essential trait of (small) far left organisations is to normally implicitly suggest that their actions (through their members) make a significant difference to the material and political conditions.

Thus, to some extent the actual and difficult material and political conditions that socialists find themselves working within are stood on their head. Concomitantly, it is implicitly suggested that if members are increasingly active and if there are more members, even more influence can be exerted. Again, in the abstract this might be true but in this period with the forces of the far left being very small, this is applied mechanically and without any sensitivity. Thus, an attitude of "Just do it!" prevails with the only thing standing between success and failure being members' effort.

g) Cadre accumulation

In order to make an impact in the world as part of the struggle for socialism, party growth and party matters are prioritised. Along the way, it is of almost no importance if members leave because leaving is believed to be the consequence of people who have lost their way from the right way and have become pessimistic. Consequently, those who remain members are obviously the most loyal. These are the members who can sustain twists and turns in perspectives and continued exaggeration because no matter whether these come true or not, there is always the next struggle to be involved in/the next issue to taken up with. Retrospection has no role here. What this amounts to is an accumulation of primitive cadre.

h) Decline in attention to industrial work and industrial analyses

Whilst the last twenty years has witnessed a very difficult environment for trade unions to work within and this has had a knock-on impact on the ability of socialists to work effectively to gain influence within unions, the SWP has increasingly paid less consistent attention to its industrial work. For example, up until about 7 or 8 years ago the pre-conference discussion document prepared by the Central Committee would have had a specific paper on the SWP industrial analyses and its industrial work (no matter that *Socialist Worker's* industrial coverage has remained at 2-3 pages per week). Going back many years earlier, the SWP had bi-monthly industrial discussion bulletins and published pamphlets on specific unions and workplace issues/union campaigns/strikes etc. Since about 1995, trade union work has merely warranted a section within general political analyses. The effect of these symptoms has been to have a party that has an increasingly thin and unnuanced analysis of industrial struggle as a whole and in particular with regard to certain industries and unions. SWP analysis of industrial struggle and SWP intervention in industrial struggle appears to have become subsumed to political struggle. Nothing wrong with that in the abstract, but in practice this means that the degree of divergence between the two has not been recognised and navigated leading to less serious

work and less returns from interventions in the last decade (and notwithstanding recent advances in establishing "rank-and-file" newspapers and national executive election successes in Amicus-AEEU, CWU and PCS).

Explaining this Overall Trajectory

Where do these tendencies come from? Some may think there are inherent characteristics. Some are but what is critical to understand why they have become so pronounced. This is most credibly explained by the following which centres around a) the period of the downturn, b) the political "brand" of the SW Platform/SWP, c) the influence of student cadre, d) the impact of small numbers, and e) relations with the working class and radicalised milieu.

a) The period of the downturn

In order to protect the organisation from the dramatic move to the right and the defeats of the working class from 1979 onwards, the SW Platform/SWP deliberately steered a course to the left. This gave ideas and ideology the key role in motivating members and shielding them from the outside world. Differences in ideas with others became of paramount importance, heightening sectarianism. The nature of Russia became a shibboleth. The building of the party in a period of hostility assumed paramount importance.

b) The political "brand" of the SW Platform/SWP

Given the relatively small size of the SW Platform/SWP in its early days (c1965-1985), its exclusion from widespread engagement with Labour Party members as a conscious result of building an independent revolutionary organisation outside Labour, its trenchant criticism of the Communist Party and trade union leaders, the brand of the SW Platform/SWP became "ideology" over and rather than "activity". The cutting edge of the ideology was its internationalist revolutionary purity with its black and white dichotomies. Notwithstanding the impact of the downturn on the far left, the appeal of the brand was ideological purity while the practical consequence was for many years, and arguably still is, political marginalisation.

c) Student cadre

The emphasis on purity of ideology was conducive to building amongst students in higher education. What is important is that many of these students members retained their membership thereafter and the bulk of the present and longstanding leading members were recruited when students. Consequently, in the period in which they have been active (denoting certain important shaping conditions), they have carried this ideological purity and ultra-leftism with them. It reinforced Cliff's leadership and the post-Cliff leadership.

d) The impact of small numbers on political perspectives

This problem affects the majority of left-wing organisations for much, if not all, of their existence. The lack of proximity to exercising real (sic) influence over workers and other milieux allows organisations and their leaderships to be exempt from paying attention to the nuances and practicalities of the responsibilities of widespread authority and influence within the working class and the trade union movement. It thus allows the continuation of revolutionary purity. Indeed, it reinforces revolutionary purity for the belief is that only if others could move towards the right perspectives then the organisation would grow, rather than the organisation contemplating moving towards them by dint of orientation.

In the case of the *SW Platform/SWP*, this problem is particularly acute. Being the biggest far left group in Britain while others have imploded means being able to dominant much of what goes on in the left but the rub is the left is fraction of its former size. The *SW Platform/SWP* is a big fish in a small pool which has been unable to break out of its marginalisation. Despite perspectives which continually extol the possibilities of growth, the *SW Platform/SWP* has not grown since the early to mid-1990s in real terms. Recruitment levels have not been as high as previously while medium and long-term retention rates are very low. Blame is thus accorded to a) the loyal remaining members by the national leadership for not realising the possibilities for growth, and b) not having the right ground-level party structures so sets of branches are continually reorganised (merged, split) and branches per se as the basic unit of the organisation are periodically stood down and then reintroduced.

e) Relations with the working class and radicalised milieu

The *SWP* has never gone beyond the poorly thought out position of quasi-spontaneity-ism in its method of orientating on the working class and radicalised milieu. There is no conceptualisation of an overarching mechanism with attendant strategies of how to relate to the target audiences or of how human consciousness changes. What does exist is campaign-itis and spontaneity-ism where party work takes on no long term plan or character. Consequently, few roots and solid ones at that have been sunk amongst the target audiences, particularly where overall cadre turnover is high.

It is too ambitious for this short paper to try to lay out an alternative mechanism or *modus operandi* to that of the *SWP/SW Platform*. What can be done is to agree that the demise of the Tories, the disillusionment with new Labour, the unmasking of the brutality and inhumanity of neo-liberalism, capitalism and imperialism all present opportunities for socialists. But in saying

this we need to contextualise the opportunities not in terms of possibilities, a very loose and unproductive formulation, but in terms of probabilities and prospects. Therein, it should be recognised that there is competition for the attention and loyalty of people from social democracy and the Labour left (as well as the *BNP* and *Nazis*).

More important than this though is the need to be able to relate to the target audiences in a way than makes tangible connections rather than create distance between socialists and their audiences and thus isolation and marginalisation for socialists. In essence, socialists need to be able to raise issues and demands which combine being where the consciousness of the most radicalised milieux is at the same time as being several steps ahead of these milieux so that socialists can both reflect and lead. This would be part of taking them on a journey towards a revolutionary socialist consciousness as well as creating the forces necessary for revolutionary socialism. Put around the other way, there is little point be absolutely correct in the abstract but completely marginalised in practice. It is not unrevolutionary to raise basic and non-revolutionary demands and to connect with these struggles so long as this is part of a wider transformative project. The thrust of the analysis here is to see the socialist project in terms of a transitional method (which the *SW Platform/SWP* has previously used, namely the two cases of the *Action Programme* [Mark 1 and Mark 2] and *Callinicos's Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* [Polity, 2003]). But such a transitional approach or method must be considered in a nuanced way rather than coming down to a replication of unchanging, formulaic transitional programmes that do not spring organically from the aspirations of a substantial section of the most radicalised workers.

What the Platform is Doing and What it Should Be Doing

The opportunities and challenges for the Platform in Scotland are in many ways different from those facing the party in England and Wales in terms of the manifestations of particular political trajectories, the specificity of the body politic and the left in Scotland after devolution and operating within the *SSP* as a new political formation in the socialist project.

While the Platform is formally committed to the *SSP*, in practice this has been far less the case since 2001. Some outside the Platform believe this informal lack of commitment has accelerated in the last couple of years. To the Platform, the *SSP* has been just one of many sites of struggle and milieux in which it operates. Not only is this analogous to the situation in England and Wales for the *SWP* but it is also a working out of positions adopted by the *SWP* of which the Platform remains an integral component. Politically and organisation-

ally, this is inept and inopportune because of what the SSP represents and how it is open to being influenced.

The SSP is a political project that is currently far in advance of anything in the rest of Britain, politically and organisationally. Moreover, it is also far in advance of any other left organisation since the zenith of the CPGB. Without taking a detour to discuss the political character of the SSP, it needs to be understood that it is neither nationalist, reformist, centrist nor social democratic. To characterise it as such is ultra-left is to fail to appreciate the strategy of political implantation through campaigning for reforms linked to the dissemination of basic socialist idea through a transitional method (see before). This is not necessarily to be without criticism of the way in which the SSP project is being carried out but it is to appreciate what the project is trying to do and what it has achieved so far. Organisationally, the SSP allows differing Platforms to exist and has a fully-functioning democratic structure where national policy is determined by two-monthly national councils and an annual national conference which is the sovereign body of the SSP. This allows individual members, members acting in concert across branches and branches to put forward motions to determine SSP policy and to hold the national executive and MSPs to account. Platforms are also entitled to put forward motions. Of course, determining policy is not the be all and end all for implementation and effective implementation are necessary corollaries but it is the start of the process.

For all the issues and campaigns that the Platform holds to be important in the current period, these are much less influential amongst wider layers and numbers for the lack of their thorough grounding throughout and in the SSP. Not only has there been the tendency for the Platform to decide to side step the SSP with regard to much of this work because it requires time and effort to win the SSP to these positions but there is also a sense in which, reflecting the SWP strategy in England and Wales seeking to relate to the “new movement”, that the SSP is not regarded as being worth the effort by dint of the quality of its members not being the most radical compared to those outside the SSP like school and university students, anti-war activists and anti-capitalist/globalisation activists.

Clearly, the thrust of the position adopted in this paper is that the Platform should centre all its work at the first point of departure from within the SSP. There is no credible sense in which the Platform faces an “either/or” choice of working inside or outside the SSP for the work it wants to carry out and for the people it wants to reach out, relate to, work with and ultimately recruit. But there is also another sense in which the Platform needs to change. Not only should it pursue its own

agenda as outlined but it must also be prepared to work in areas and forums which it did not initiate and which emerge from other parts of the SSP like the Women’s Network, the Independence Convention or the development of a programme of political education for the SSP.

For this to happen, the Platform must develop politically and organisationally. Operating within the SSP as a broad party of left-wing class struggle with such extensive implantation is a political challenge which is unparalleled for any IST group in the recent past. Platform members need to understand some issues which have either not been important before for them or which they know relatively little about, such as national identity, the tactical use of Parliamentarians and the transitional approach. Simply, believing that how the Bolsheviks in the Duma operated or that the Russian Revolution forms the only or even most convincing model of socialist revolution is not to deal with the nature of capitalist society as we currently find it. This understanding has not been achieved to any great extent to date, with Marxist Forums in essence being replications of those in England and Wales, with titles set according to the political tradition of the SWP or the contemporary will of the SWP Central Committee. A programme of political education for the Platform is needed here (see below).

On top of this, there are also issues which arise in Scotland which have not arisen elsewhere or have not arisen in the same way as elsewhere such as toleration zones for prostitution thus presenting the Platform with significant challenges. This means being able to develop politically in certain ways that are divergent from the SWP Central Committee based in London and the general thrust of the IST. This particularly concerns the adaptation of general tenets to national or local conditions and requires a flexibility and independence of thought as well as the existence of an advanced political consciousness and understanding. At the moment, only small parts of these attributes exist amongst or across certain sections of the Platform. More accurately, these reside in certain individuals and are therefore not part of the political culture and understanding of the Platform. This points to the need to prioritise cadre development and to operate a looser political culture that can facilitate such developments.

Organisationally, the Platform should develop as an autonomous section of the IST in the way that other sections have done elsewhere in Europe and further afield. What would this mean? Beginning with the obvious, it would mean having formal structures which would comprise an annual policy making conference preceded by regional aggregates and discussion bulletins led off by the Scottish Committee of the Platform. This to some extent would mirror the structure of the SSP itself and follow, by preceding it (sic), the SSP policy-

making timetable and so on. Following on from this, the Platform should have its own Party Notes type bulletin rather than circulate that of the SWP and publish more pamphlets which are specific to Scotland, Scottish conditions and issues and manifestations of international or cross-Britain phenomena in Scotland. An obvious example would be seriously engage with the so-called “nationalist left” and “left nationalists” and the distinctive hegemonic political (left social democratic) culture in Scotland. Another essential activity is political education in the form of day schools or meetings and day schools and meetings that do not conform to the standard fare of the anointed expert doing a lead off following by discussion and then comeback. Rather they would be structured to allow the genuine thinking through of issues and problems. Central to this move towards autonomy within the IST would be a constitution which would act as a foundation for the above and formally guarantee heterogeneity of thought through allowing for platforms and currents *within* the Platform. Finally, much more thought needs to be given to the role of the SWP’s publications (primarily *Socialist Worker*, *Socialist Review* and the *International Socialism Journal*) within Scotland, as well as within the SSP as a distinct political entity and where, within it, Platform publications are not permitted to be sold outwith SSP structures. Indeed, there is a need for the Platform to at least have its own website and journal/newsletter.

Most of what the SWP in Scotland has done

since reconstituting itself as a Platform within the SSP has been to carry on with the same political routine developed outside and prior to the SSP. The changes that have arisen have essentially only arisen as a result of changes in the *modus operandi* of the SWP in England and Wales. Thus, it is problematic to say that the process of forming a Platform as such was actually carried out. Consequently, and echoing what was argued above, the Platform does not fully engage with the milieu in which it now operates within and therefore is incapable of (fully) punching its weight within the SSP. The unwritten law in joining the SSP was pretty much “business as usual” without appreciating what the SWP in Scotland was actually getting involved in. This has led to a disorientation in outlook amongst members within the Platform who often act as SWP (sic) members within the SSP. Some comrades spend very little time operating as SSP members, merely coming to the odd branch meeting to raise this or that issue or campaign as and when they deem this necessary. Others attend their branch meetings far more regularly but contribute relatively little through meaningful engagement as opposed to just stating their positions in an abstentionist way. It is hard in these circumstances for respect and credibility to be built up for the Platform with the SSP. It is even harder given the basis of the previous sectarianism towards the Militant/Scottish Militant Labour and the mistaken approach by the SWP towards the Scottish Socialist Alliance, i.e. of dismissive rejection. ■

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The SW Platform in the SSP: A Response to Gregor Gall

Andrew Johnson and Mike Pearn

GREGOR GALL has produced an interesting document [‘Appraising the *SW* Platform in the Scottish Socialist Party’] and a valuable one in that it deals seriously with issues that many Socialist Workers Party members don’t consider even in an unserious way. However, it seems to us to have severe problems. We are afraid that Gregor finds himself in the position of a doctor who enumerates the symptoms, then gives a faulty diagnosis and finally prescribes a cure that won’t do any good. Gregor’s recent exit from the *Socialist Worker* Platform would seem to confirm this deficiency. What we want to do here is to explore some of his points, the problems we think exist in his analysis and whether any practical lessons can be drawn.

We don’t intend to take up Gregor’s points about the absence of democracy inside the SWP, the lack of a realistic perspective or the leadership’s reliance on voluntaristic exhortation. Those would be common points between us. On the *SW* Platform’s decay since its entry into the SSP, we see no reason to dispute his empirical account. We would only make the observation that the SWP could have joined as a loyal opposition, where in fact it has been neither loyal nor oppositional. It has generally failed to raise its distinct politics against the SSP majority or the dominant International Socialist Movement platform, Neil Davidson’s historical writings notwithstanding. Rather the Platform has found itself in a whole number of non-political, or better sub-political, disputes with the SSP leadership essentially around the question of divided loyalties. Thus the comrades have achieved the worst of both worlds. If what Gregor says is true, that some Platform members have essentially absented themselves from the SSP while others (himself included) have concluded that they can best function as members of the SSP without a connection to the SWP – well, that is only to be expected.

Gregor makes another important point, which is that today’s SWP is suffering from the political equivalent of attention deficit disorder. Short-

termism in perspectives is compounded by a culture in which the strategic issues – developments in the labour movement, for example, which have not been seriously analysed by the party for years – are downplayed while the campaign of the moment is ludicrously exaggerated. And when the campaign fails – well, there’s always the next campaign, and it’s better to bail out and move on before it fails definitively. Thus an accounting is put off indefinitely. This may be convenient for the Rees-German leadership but hardly helps the comrades learn any lessons or better orient themselves for the future.

What we fail to recognise is Gregor’s view that the main problem with the SWP is ultraleftism and an exaggerated concern with revolutionary purity. The SWP’s self-image as the Bolshevik Party *de nos jours* is extremely important, of course, but ultraleftism these days exists almost exclusively on the verbal level, in occasional rhetorical flourishes. (We accept these might have been more frequent in Scotland due to the party’s formerly dismissive attitude to the Scottish Socialist Alliance/Scottish Socialist Party.) In fact the SWP’s behaviour in recent years has been defined by a shift away from opportunism as a method and towards opportunism as a principle. Gregor recognises this indirectly when he writes of the party’s fake spontaneism and rejection of transitional politics – in effect the idea is that the demands don’t matter, all that matters is getting people mobilised and the logic of struggle will do the rest. More recently party theoreticians have put forward a concept very similar to the old Militant idea that reformist demands become revolutionary when those putting them forward are subjectively revolutionary. An example is Callinicos’ “transitional programme” in his *Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, which is very largely the programme of Attac. This formalises the party’s pre-existing practice of building by being the loudest and most enthusiastic advocates of whatever is popular this week. However, this thoroughgoing opportunism has not been accompanied by the SWP abandoning its aggressive sectarianism,

which may often be mistaken for ultraleftism.

Gregor's discussion as to a "transitional programme" or as he prefers it a "transitional method" becomes more confusing still when one looks at what he means by this. For Gregor it seems that a "transitional method" is an approach that will allow forward movement via a series of transitional demands that can mobilise large numbers in pursuit of a defined goal. In Gregor's mind this goal is that defined by the SSP of an independent Scotland which as he has argued in his pamphlet on socialism and the national question in Scotland cannot but be a progressive demand. Leaving aside this doubtful assertion, which is dependent on conjectural factors, it would seem that for Gregor his "transitional method" is to function as a method of mobilising nationalist opinion behind the goal of an independent Scotland with a welfare state. As Gregor is at pains to defend the internationalist credentials of the SSP it would appear that here he is suggesting that an independent Scotland should act as a stage towards the establishment of socialism at an international level. In our opinion this strategic vision is an attempt to revive the stagist perspectives of classical Social Democracy.

Older readers may have noticed that Gregor's understanding of a "transitional method" has nothing in common, other than its name, with an understanding of this concept as developed by the Communist International. That method was designed so as to mobilise workers behind a series of "transitional demands" that would lead to the conquest of state power by the working class. Properly speaking a transitional programme can only be fully operative at a time when the rule of capital is threatened and the crisis endemic to the bourgeois mode of production becomes open and manifest. The purpose of a transitional programme in such circumstances, for the Comintern and later for the Fourth Internationalist movement, was to act as replacement for the older discredited notion of a minimum programme achievable under the rule of the bourgeoisie (an independent Scottish state as advocated by the SSP is just such a minimum programme). The key idea was that by raising a series of demands, both political and economic, the revolutionary party could win the leadership of the working classes and other oppressed groups and move forward to the seizure of state power.

Such an approach is far from viable in today's very different circumstances when the rule of capital is not threatened by open crisis. But a transitional method of politics which seeks to mobilise workers on the basis of class politics is valid even in periods as seemingly placid as that of today. Curiously Alex Callinicos came close to grasping this in his short discussion of Trotsky's famous document of 1938 only to abandon this conception in his more recent *Anti-Capitalist Man-*

ifesto in which he portrays transitional politics as little more than a pious wish list of desirable reforms. This is a consequence of the SWP's campaigning style which as Gregor has rightly noted relegates the slow patient work of building a base in the workplaces and unions, in a word the construction of a rank and file movement, to a poor second best. In practice, if not in theory, this is a result of the SWP's effective abandonment of the working class as the subject/object of social change.

In general therefore we would characterise the SWP as a rightward moving centrist formation. One might also, if one were being harsh, describe the SSP as a rightward moving centrist party – however, the SSP has two advantages that the SWP lacks. One is a democratic structure that means, if you think the party's position is opportunist, a more principled position can be fought for. The other is a genuine implantation in the working class that makes the argument worth having in the first place. We have no doubt that, for Marxists in Scotland, the SSP is the place to be, and if the *SW Platform* had a sensible perspective they should see it as being their primary site for political struggle. This would concretise Cliff's metaphor about the small cog and the big cog (of course he meant gears, but engineering was never his strongest point).

This brings us to the question of how to operate in the distinct circumstances of Scotland. It hardly needs to be said that the idea of the *SW Platform* operating as an autonomous section of the IST, setting its own priorities and thinking through Scottish conditions, is appealing but absolutely utopian. After what happened to the American ISO, does anyone seriously think the London CC is going to raise the battle cry of more autonomy for its international affiliates? The member groups of the IST do of course have absolute formal independence and on paper are united only by a shared body of theory – in fact the international tendency has no structures and has never taken any formal decision except to excommunicate the American heretics. But here's how things work in practice. The Irish SWP has its "policy-making" conference in April or May. However, major shifts in perspective almost invariably take place in November after the British SWP conference. The fraternal observers from the IST return to the colonies bearing the latest wisdom. Then the Political Committee in Dublin announces a turn, invites the comrades to unanimously acclaim the turn, and heresy hunts anybody who asks an awkward question. There is no reason to suppose that a formally autonomous Scottish section would be any different.

Essentially the *SW Platform* is running an unsustainable holding operation. It could be a dynamic part of the SSP, but that would require

its members to display a grasp of principled politics. It could be, as some SSP members suspect, a Trojan horse for a Scottish launch of Respect the Populist Coalition, which would be a massive step backwards politically even if successful, and more likely an embarrassing flop. And if the Platform continues in its present half-in half-out mode, further disintegration and political decay are inevitable. Even though we don't agree with Gregor's own

political trajectory, his abandonment of this no-win situation in favour of becoming a loyal citizen of the SSP does at least demonstrate some political realism. What would be better would be some sort of perspective of fighting the increasing national-reformist pressures in the SSP rather than surrendering to them, and making the SSP a genuine weapon for the strategic task of building a class struggle left wing in the labour movement. ■

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Head On: The French Left After the Referendum

Andrew Coates

“Social Democracy is incapable of defending its own historic gains.” Jean-Luc Mélenchon, Parti Socialiste Left (*France-Inter*, 16 June 2005)

ON 29 MAY 54.87% of French electors rejected the proposed European Constitutional Treaty. Four days later 61% of Dutch voters gave the same response. The European Union (EU), from the Council of Ministers, the Commission, the Parliament, to the 25 member states, has been profoundly shaken by these results. There are deep divisions about the EU's institutional shape, over further integration, the pursuit of economic and social reform, and the place of the EU in the world. Centre stage at the moment is a clash between Tony Blair and France's President Jacques Chirac over the European model. The Gallic conservative appears, in British eyes, to defend Europe's social gains against the Prime Minister's efforts to abolish constraints on economic dynamism.

Engels once wrote of the process of social and political causality that “what each individual wills is obstructed by everyone else, and what emerges is something that no one intended”. It has been said, against Marx's collaborator's thesis, that the EU was conceived to preserve the power of nation states, and pool without loss the sovereignty and wishes of all.¹ Now, with an outright clash over fundamentals, with no one side likely to win outright, Engels may be proved right. What the electorates willed, the *intentions* of the EU's pro-Treaty governmental actors, their victorious opponents, and the consequences, are each far from clear. The present “pause for reflection”, postponing ratification of the Constitution, leaves open the future development of the Union.

The French campaign on the Constitutional Treaty, and its aftermath, has faced head-on these issues. France offers a prism that, above all through the left, reflects and splits Europe, from the run-up to 31 May to the fall-out from the vote.

Nowhere was the Constitutional Treaty more hotly debated than amongst the French Socialists, the Parti Socialiste (PS) – the party that it is heg-

emonic within the Parliamentary left (141 out of 178 left deputies in the National Assembly, 120,000 individual members). After the defeat of PS candidate Lionel Jospin in the Presidential Elections of 2002 two radical internal currents were founded, Nouveau Monde (New World) and Nouveau Parti Socialiste (NPS, New Socialist Party). Both made Europe their central concern. Jean-Luc Mélenchon, of Nouveau Monde, was previously a leader of the left group, the Gauche Socialiste (GS, Socialist Left) that promoted an alternative Europe-wide Social Republic, stating “We cannot make the Social Republic in a Single Country”. Grounded on “people's sovereignty”, dominating capitalist globalisation, it offered a raft of measures to develop public services, investment, welfare and the environment.² Nouveau Monde has increasingly defined this project in opposition to the path taken by the EU. The smaller NPS advocates a more democratic Sixth Republic and a priority to the transformation of the Socialists' organisation.

In 2003 the two tendencies won around 40% of the PS conference vote (which is reflected proportionally in their “Parliament”, the Conseil National). However, a former leader of the GS, Julien Dray, went over to the centre Majority of Party Secretary, François Hollande, and became the Socialists' official spokesperson. The influence of Jacques Delors' more market-friendly pro-European views – while defending its “social dimension” – remained dominant.³ During the negotiations on the Constitutional Treaty the PS advocated – out of government – the protection of public services, fiscal harmonisation and cultural support against the multinational media. The PS left's position was reinforced when the Constitutional Convention's draft Treaty was modified last year. Pushed by Tony Blair it watered down Union powers, social rights, and labour market regulation in the name of flexibility (*Le Monde*, 18 June 2004). Nevertheless an internal PS vote in December 2004 saw 58.8% of members supporting the final Treaty.

On the non-Socialist left the majority has been hostile to the direction the EU has been taking since

the French Maastricht Treaty referendum (1992). This, which brought to the fore opposition from Communists, Trotskyists, the resignation of Socialist Minister Jean-Pierre Chevènement, was only approved by a whisker. This time an alliance emerged of the LCR, the PCF, Nouveau Monde, thousands of local committees, appeals and the intellectual energy of the think-tank the Fondation Copernic, and European Social Forum sponsors, ATTAC (launched by the monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique*).⁴ Two of the trade union federations, the CGT (after an initial attempt to adopt a neutral stand) and Force Ouvrière, joined the Non camp. Former Prime Minister (1984-86), Deputy Socialist Leader, Laurent Fabius, and his friends, urged blocking the Constitution: its threadbare approach to social and labour rules left no room for amendment (*Le Monde*, 30 November 2004). The themes that united – at least superficially – these groups were the defence of a Social Europe against the Treaty's concessions to neo-liberalism (enforcing competition, eroding public services), ambiguities over social rights, its democratic deficit, and alignment with NATO. Chevènement's much reduced Mouvement Républicain et Citoyen continued to defend state sovereignty. The Parti des Travailleurs ("Lambertists") mounted its own initiatives to promote France's national Jacobin traditions.

The Oui camp was led by the main parties in the National Assembly, from Chirac's UMP (Union pour un mouvement populaire), his allies the UDF (Union pour la démocratie Française), to the PS majority. A desperate President increasingly directly intervened in the campaign as it began to founder. Socialist leaders called in their friends in European social democracy to rally support. From the UK Europe Minister Denis MacShane joined in, and made a thorough fool of himself. The Green party, les Verts, favoured the Treaty, though most of its left minority was caught up in the groundswell for a Non. The centrist union federation, the CFDT, endorsed the Constitution, as did the influential Islamic association, the UOIF (Union des organisations Islamiques de France) which is close to the Muslim Brotherhood and Britain's MAB. These forces, by no means exclusively from the political élite, lacked popular resonance. Any momentum the Oui may have had evaporated when speculation grew about a "Plan B" to deal with a Non win.

The triumph of the Non was followed by joyful declarations and agonised autopsies. All analysis of the popular will is, in the land of hypertrophied opinion polls, contentious. The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and the Parti Communiste Français (PCF) lost little time in declaring that the Treaty opponents were, in the majority, of the left, trade unionists, youth and most of the work-

ing class (64% of left electors, including 54-56% of the pro-Oui PS, 62% of the 25-29 age group, 79% of workers). Unemployment loomed large in people's concerns (46%), French conditions (52%) and the economically liberal nature of the Treaty (40%). The Oui supporters were wealthier, overwhelmingly supporters of the conservative Raffarin government, and likely to live in comfortable urban districts (*Rouge*, 10 June 2005, *L'Humanité*, 1 June 2005). For Nouveau Monde 75% of the total left voted Non (Nouveau Monde website, 7 June 2005). Writing in the pro-Constitution *Nouvel Observateur* Claude Weill claimed by contrast that for 100 Non electors only just over a half backed the Parliamentary left, 5% the extreme left, and that 20% were far-right Front National supporters, 18% of the Parliamentary Right and 12% had no preference (9 June 2005). They indicated that many middle class voters (58% earning between 2,000 and 3,000 Euros a month) cast their ballots for Non. Of the 48% of French people who consider there are too many foreigners in the country 67% voted against the Treaty. Weill asserted that the common thread was loathing of "liberalism", a term so widely used that it had become meaningless.

Whatever the validity of these partisan interpretations they do indicate that a powerful left impulse was at work. However, the Referendum result was not the act of a unified class subject. Political affiliation, class and civil society support and motivations were more diverse than some on the left believe. It is not surprising that many Non voters were right-wing. The ultra-conservative Mouvement pour la France of Philippe de Villiers was very prominent during the Referendum, and the less active Front National was equally opposed. Underlying the left Non result, was an undefined belief that some kind of new Constitution or change in European and French institutions could be obtained. It is precisely because of this lack of clarity that real difficulties lie ahead.

If the atmosphere inside the PS had been heated before 31 May it became a furnace afterwards. After rows and insults swamped their Web Forum the Socialists were obliged to close it down (*Le Monde*, 3 June 2005). ATTAC was threatened with the removal of public subsidies. The PS was all the more affected in that it had appeared to be gathering strength by winning all but one of the regional councils last year. The Socialist Majority blamed the present defeat not on the Treaty but on dissatisfaction with the UMP government, and asked why the rest of Europe should suffer for Chirac's domestic policies. Despite 71% of PS sympathisers being against sanctions, on 4 June Laurent Fabius was evicted from his No.2 position and his allies were removed from the Bureau National (167 for, 122 against and 18 abstentions). Benoît Hamon, of the NPS, which had respected

party discipline and did not campaign outside the PS for a Non, accused the leadership of “autism” faced with the results of the referendum (NPS website, 7 June 2005). A special PS Congress on 18 November will draw up a new party Project to prepare for the 2007 Presidential Elections. The position of François Hollande is by no means secure, though it is hard to see the left rallying to a challenge by Laurent Fabius with his Prime Ministerial record as a proto-Blair.

The Non left, socialist or not, has been reinvigorated, from the declining PCF, to the Ligue, which last year fared badly in European and regional elections. This left has announced its intention to sustain a unitary campaign. The LCR proposes initiatives with the PCF: a programme of a “rupture with capitalism”, and a possible electoral alliance of all the Non campaigners. Nouveau Monde supports renegotiations of the Constitution on the basis of popular power, a halt to the liberalising Lisbon agenda and deregulation along the lines of the Bolkestein Directive, economic integration of the new Union members, and an alignment and rally of the Social Europe left. Conscious that its 21 National Assembly members depend on the electoral goodwill of the Socialists the PCF is warier, and more modestly backs continued mobilisation. The poorly attended Parisian Non march on 16 June indicates the limits of these appeals.

François Hollande argued during the campaign that the French left had few allies with any power who could influence Europe in a better direction than that offered by the Constitutional Treaty. In the absence of any levers in the Council of Ministers, and inter-governmental talks, it is difficult to see how the Non campaigners – in both France and the Netherlands far from office – can determine the outcome of the negotiations on Europe’s future. Yet a *tertium quid*, social Europe, is a widely shared objective on the Union’s left whatever the stand on the ratification process. There is a good case for

a European social republic. 1970s programmes, the UK Alternative Economic Strategy, Chevènement’s take on the Projet Socialiste, for the national control of the economy, could not grapple with the global flux of capital. A social Europe with the architecture to grapple with these problems, that can promote public ownership, investment, the upgrading of social rights and welfare, internationalist economic measures, and a progressive foreign policy, requires institutions, not just activism. Despite Mélenchon’s pessimism it remains to be seen if all social democracy can be excluded from their construction. In their absence voices offering something other than “Anglo-Saxon” capitalism, or an already liberalising Europe, will struggle to be heard.⁵

Notes

1. Marx-Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, Progress Publishers 1975, p.395. Engels to Bloch, 21 September 1890. This use of Engels to describe how the decisions of the European Union work out is made in Keith Middlemas, ed., *Orchestrating Europe: The Informal Politics of the European Union*, Fontana Press 1995. On EU nation states see Alan S. Milward, *The European Rescue of the Nation-State*, Routledge 1994.
2. Gauche Socialiste, *Democratie et Socialisme*. See particularly, ‘Pour une République Sociale Européenne’, February 1999.
3. George Ross, *Jacques Delors and European Integration*, Polity Press 1995. For Delors’ backtracking see John Grahl, *Notes on Financial Transformation and Social Citizenship in the EU*, London Metropolitan University 2002.
4. See ‘Décodage de cinq points clés du traité’, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, May 2005.
5. At its gloomiest foreseen by John Palmer (*Guardian*, 28 May 2005). See his *Europe without America*, Oxford 1987, for a sustained left pro-European argument.

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Marxism is Dead!

Long Live Marxism!

Mike Rooke

“The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an ‘immense collection of commodities’.”
Karl Marx, *Capital*, Vol.1, 1867.

“The whole life of those societies in which modern conditions of production prevail presents itself as an immense accumulation of spectacles.”
Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, 1967.

THE OPENING line of Guy Debord’s book was an obvious play on the opening line of Marx’s *Capital*. Whatever its limitations, the concept of “the spectacle”, central to Debord’s entire oeuvre, and his one original contribution to the development of revolutionary theory, registered the profound changes that were underway in the post-war capitalist democracies: the importance that mass consumption now had for the reproduction of capital, and the “spectacular” mode of its representation. Absolute poverty for the metropolitan proletariat was no longer the issue, nor was its exclusion from bourgeois society. But the autonomy of the commodity producing spectacle from human control, was! It was the virtue of Debord not only to depict this in his own inimitable, “spectacular” fashion, but to assert the significance of this for revolutionary theory. His uncompromising assessment of the existing orthodox Marxist tradition was that it had become an ideology opposed to revolutionary practice.

Orthodox Marxism rested on and grew out of the European working class movement that emerged in the final quarter of the 19th century and continued in that form until the middle years of the twentieth century. Its two institutional expressions were the 2nd and 3rd Internationals, which despite the great schism in 1919, were marked by a shared conception of capital and labour. Their fortunes therefore rose and fell together. Trotskyism and Left communism were equally orthodox in their thinking and approach, and therefore must be considered left-variants of this tradition. By the mid 20th century the class

basis of this orthodox tradition and the character of capitalism were undergoing changes (the democratic counterrevolution and the rise of mass consumption) that would render the orthodox conceptions increasingly outmoded. By the 1950s Social Democracy was exhausted, its historical mission of inclusion of the working class into the bourgeois order, largely achieved. Stalinism had likewise achieved its historical mission of modernisation through industrialisation. Together, these two wings of orthodoxy had largely played out their historic roles in the completion of the bourgeois revolution.

The orthodox Marxism of the 2nd/3rd Internationals (and this included the Trotskyist 4th) represented an interpretation and application of Marx’s ideas based on the struggles and aspirations of the working class movement in the period 1870-1950.¹ This period saw the emergence of what Marx referred to as the first real working class organisations. Its social base consisted largely of skilled workers and artisans, and its pre-occupation was achieving a just reward for and recognition of the importance of productive labour. It sought inclusion of the labouring class (or privileged sections of it) as a class in the bourgeois order. The lifespan of orthodox Marxism mirrored the rise of this industrial working class in Europe and North America. The critique of the bourgeois order produced by this class reflected its exclusion from bourgeois politics, the parasitism of unproductive capital, and the erosion of its position in the work process. It was a claim for inclusive status on behalf of industrial labour as industrial labour, but not a critique of capital, as the value form of this industrial labour. The Marxism that rested on and drew sustenance from this new industrial working class and its struggle, was a critique of capital, but from the standpoint of a class protective of its status as a class. The spontaneous socialism of the working class movement produced a Marxism limited to the sovereignty of industrial labour in the bourgeois order.

The critique to be found in the late works of Marx (*Grundrisse* (1857-8), *Theories of Surplus Value*

(1862-3), *Das Kapital* (1864-1867)) was a critique that was never consistently taken up by the leading theoreticians of the 2nd and 3rd Internationals. This was Marx's critique of capital as a critique of the value form of labour. It was a critique of the very form taken by labour in the capitalist mode of production – abstract labour as the source of value, and constitutive of the form of social domination characteristic of this mode.² It was therefore a critique pointing to the necessity of the abolition of value producing labour as such.³ This critique was unappreciated not because of the personal failings of the leading Marxists of this tradition. In the attempt to establish Marxism as a source of authority for working class struggles, those very struggles, rooted as they were in a specific stage of development of industrial capital, and generative of specific forms of social consciousness, militated against a full grasp of Marx's mature critique. In the context of the period in which it was written, Marx's critique of the value form was ahead of its time, pointing as it did to a development of abstract labour and value that lay only in the future.

The strategic vision of Classical Social Democracy and its Bolshevik variant, despite their differences over the state, parliamentary democracy, and war, was of a socialist mode of production as the highest form of industrial (i.e. wage) labour. This was the essential content of the work of the dominant voices of orthodox Marxism – Bernstein, Kautsky, Plekhanov, Lenin, Bukharin, and Trotsky. Syndicalism and council communism were merely the more consistent advocates of the sovereignty of industrial labour and the autonomy of workers' struggles. Although the architecture of the value form was explored in the 1920s by I.I. Rubin and Georg Lukács, these works remained marginal (partly because they were declared heresy by the leadership of the 3rd International) to the Marxist mainstream until recovered by a later generation of Marxists.

It was Marx's claim in *Das Kapital* (Marx 1976, p.132) to have been the first to point out that the commodity has a dual character, possessing both use-value (its natural form) and exchange value (its value form). This duality derived from the two-fold nature of the labour expended in its production – concrete and abstract labour respectively. As values, commodities were the objective expressions of homogeneous or abstract labour – that is labour abstracted from any aspect of use or skill. Commodities as exchange values were thus “congealed quantities of homogeneous human labour” (ibid., p.128).

Exchange value is for Marx the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance, of value. It is not intrinsic to, or inherent in, the commodity, but is as he puts it, the form of appearance of a content distinguishable from it (ibid., p.127). The substance of value is therefore labour, but a form

of human labour expended in a definite social relation of production (i.e. wage labour). The forms of value – commodity, money, capital, are merely different, but necessary forms of appearance of this value, for value can only exist in such empirical forms (value as such has no empirical reality). Value therefore, is not invoked as a thing standing outside of, external to the labour power of the producers, but is rather the necessary expression of a historically specific form of its expenditure.

The story of capital is the itinerary of value becoming a “subject” that valorizes itself independently of the will of the real, producing individuals engaged in capitalist work. Taking on a life of its own, it “moves” and provides the movement of society (the society of value is first and foremost a “dynamic” spectacle) behind the backs of the producers. Despite being an “abstract subject”, value has very real, concrete, effects, dependent as it is, because premised on, the loss of subjectivity of the labourers – their loss of control over the labour power they expend and the products they produce.

Marx's mature critique was therefore a critique of value – as the constitutive force of society and its form of social domination – which was at the same time a critique of the “social substance” (abstract labour) that gives rise to it. By contrast, Orthodox Marxism saw the rule of capitalism as the domination of a class in possession of capital, the secret of which was the extraction of surplus value from wage labour. Class struggle was the resulting conflict between a possessing class and a proletariat without capital. Although this optic was based textually on the writings of Marx, and endorsed by Engels, its chosen emphases owed much to the experiences and perceptions of the nascent working class movement in the latter quarter of the 19th century.

Capital was conceptualised by Orthodox Marxism as a thing separate from and opposed to labour. Capital and labour were thus polarities, discreet opposites, each standing in an external relation to the other. Labour was an entity whose essence was denied by the existence of capital – the source of its oppression understood as something outside it. This dualist conceptualisation is to a large extent explicable if it is remembered that the parties of the 2nd International were an organic part of the first real working class movements. These movements were struggling to assert the integrity and dignity of industrial labour as a legitimate producer of wealth. While Social Democracy articulated this sentiment in the form of a collectivist state socialism, syndicalism offered a purely corporatist version, and Bolshevism a modernising variant in the circumstances of backwardness. But all were in the last analysis variants of a class representation of labour as wage labour.

By contrast, Marx's critique of capital was as a form of appearance of value, the substance of which

was alienated (abstract) labour. The critique and negation of capital was at the same time the critique and negation of abstract labour – the abolition of the proletariat as a class. The implication of Marx's critique is that the expression of the domination of capital through the medium of a class of capitalists is secondary; while the exercise of domination through the value form (the rule of an abstraction which presents itself as natural necessity) is primary. Insofar as the critique of capital by Orthodox Marxism equated the abolition of capital with the abolition of the capitalist class (a change of property relations), it had no critique of labour as wage labour.

Understanding capital as a thing, a self-contained entity, meant understanding labour as an equally self-contained entity. In such an understanding the source of change for capital or labour derived not from the internal contradictions of the capital-wage labour relation, but from forces external to either side of the polarity. It followed from this that Orthodox Marxism had no understanding of the dialectic of the social relation of capital – of the necessary development and dissolution of this relation. Without an understanding of the self-movement, the self-development of this relation, the strategic aim of Orthodox Marxism, in all its variants, was to represent the proletariat in its finished, capitalist form, as wage labour.

The age of mass workers' parties (Socialist and Communist Parties) spanned the period from 1870 to 1950. While the strategic goal of these parties was a socialist commonwealth or workers' state, the content was the sovereignty of industrial labour in a collectivist, planned economy. Earlier attempts at cooperative self-help created organisations that ran parallel to bourgeois society while remaining subordinate to it. The Social Democratic struggle for inclusion in effect sought due recognition of the central importance of productive labour brought into being by the capitalist mode of production. In a real sense it was the demand that this new productive force should be utilised more rationally and more justly than was possible in the existing political economy.

Inclusion was won/conceded in the capitalist heartlands by the middle of the 20th century. The significance of the Keynesian approach to the crisis of capital, was that, on the one hand, it understood the importance of wages for profitability, and therefore stability of accumulation, and at the same time understood this as a means of incorporating the proletariat into the capitalist political economy. Keynesian state socialism offered a solution to the underconsumption aspect of the crisis of accumulation, and neatly complemented the commercial strategy of mass marketing/advertising (pioneered in the US in the twenties) that would create the citizen-consumer. Fordist mass consumption thus provided a neutralising of the class struggle over

distribution and a hoped for stimulus to economic growth (through the avoidance of chronic depression).

Bourgeois citizenship as consumption became central to the Social Democratic strategy of achieving the inclusion of the working class in bourgeois society, and thereby "civilizing" capitalism: providing due recognition of the claims of labour and stabilising capital's circuit of reproduction. Inclusion for the majority of the working class, which was achieved in the capitalist heartlands by the 1960s, thus completed the historic task of Classical Social Democracy. This explains why Social Democracy has eventually had to transmute into a managerialist version of economic liberalism. This latest explicit embrace of the market should not be seen as a betrayal of its earlier principles, but a natural terminus for them. It is merely the logical extension of a strategy of securing for the "included" masses their individual rights as citizen-consumers (i.e. as full participants in the valorisation of capital).

The growth of the factory regime in the late 19th century, with its deepening of the division of labour (large scale production and mechanisation) produced proletarian resistance in the form of a struggle for the right to free association and self-organisation. Such working class autonomy centred on the preservation and protection of traditional job skills and craft status (much of the support for early Social Democracy came from skilled, craft workers, and much of the militancy of the years 1914-1920 stemmed from the resistance on the part of engineers and metal workers to an erosion of their job control and status). It was a work-based militancy of rank and file workers that was at once radical (by-passing as it often did, the official trades union structures), and conservative (seeking the preservation of the privileged position of skilled workers vis-à-vis unskilled workers). But even in its most radical manifestations (mass strikes, factory occupations and workers' councils/soviets that made it the high point of proletarian insurgency in the twentieth century) it was not necessarily incompatible with the objective of inclusion in the bourgeois order – in particular the "reformist" aspiration to pressure the existing bourgeois state to act in the interests of the working class (or even to use it as a direct agency of working class interests). While springing from a view of the worker as master of the production process, it was nevertheless a struggle for the autonomy of work based on work as wage-labour. Revolutionary syndicalism and council communism, despite their championing of direct, mass action, and their criticisms of the reformist tactics of the mainstream of Social Democracy, reproduced this weakness in their critique of capital.

The history of the capitalist mode of production in the second half of the twentieth century is the history of the developing hegemony of the value

form as the regulator of social life. The basis of the capital relation, which was its origin, and remains its essential underpinning, is the separation of the direct producers from the means of production, a separation ensuring the selling of labour power, which as abstract labour (labour abstracted from any aspect of use or skill), constitutes the substance of value. This mode of production demands the perpetual revolutionising of the means of production (division of labour/mechanisation) to produce commodities in the shortest possible time (highest possible labour productivity). Such revolutionizing drives the homogenisation of work (i.e. skills become more perfectly interchangeable, and the identification of workers with particular kinds of useful work is eroded). A mode of production resting on abstract labour thereby inevitably produces a homogenisation of the work process.

This development was not of course the smooth unfolding of a pre-established trajectory. It was at every juncture the outcome of class struggles generated by the wage-labour/capital relation. The struggles of the period 1875-1950, for inclusion and for the autonomy of work, eventually resolved into a reconfiguration of the terms of engagement of wage-labour and capital. As the challenge to the right of the bosses to manage was defeated, the workers' movement was gradually reconstituted around a different perspective. In the context of the democratic counterrevolution after the Second World War, the struggle to establish juridical rights for all workers regardless of skill or job performance – over unemployment, guaranteed pay (a living wage), conditions of work, pensions – displaced the struggle for the autonomy of work; the new emphasis on the statutory paralleled the homogenisation of work. Not surprisingly this trend spelled the demise of craft based trades unionism and the diminishing resonance in the social consciousness of class distinctions based on occupational categories.

The birth of Orthodox Marxism (the first post-Marx Marxism) coincided with a working class experiencing the erosion of predominantly pre-capitalist social relations by capitalist commodity production. Its most class-conscious elements aspired to the sovereignty of industrial labour whilst preserving the community and solidarity of established craft traditions. The working class being formed was in effect straddling two modes of production – it was already experiencing the formal subsumption of labour, but not yet the real subsumption of labour (Marx 1976, pp.1019-1038). For semi-capitalist labour in transition to fully capitalist labour, oppression and exploitation was seen to lie outside the act of labour itself (in a class of landlords and employers). The Marxism that was built on, and drew sustenance from this class experience relied on the categories of base and superstructure, forces and relations of production, and economic determinism, but not those of value

and abstract labour. By contrast, in the fully developed capitalist labour anticipated by Marx (the product of real subsumption), social domination was intrinsic (internal) to labour itself; it lay in the very act of value producing labour. But the new industrial proletariat, and the Marxists who championed its cause, would not fully grasp the nature of a value form that was then still in the early stages of its development.

Today, the proletariat is incorporated more firmly into the circuit of the production and realisation of value via mass consumption, is more indifferent to the content of work, and thus more conditioned to the value imperative that flows from abstract labour. This means that the proletariat will in the future be less and less able to confront capital as a force external to itself, and more and more must experience capital (value) as internal to its activity, the very form of its (waged and thus alienated) labour. The value imperative, as a form of domination experienced as natural necessity, must be seen by the proletariat as a force that lies within itself as wage-labour. Marxists can no longer retail the orthodox view of class struggle as the struggle against capital as object, external to the proletariat as subject; the proletarian struggle must henceforth be seen as a struggle to abolish itself as labour. This is the theoretical truth posed by the development of the value form.

Debord's achievement did not lie in a detailed exegesis of Marx's critique of the value form, or in providing a contemporary critique. Rather he evoked the hegemony of the value form indirectly through his concept of the spectacle, and the necessity of a total revolution against it.⁴ The spectacle was a manifestation and a measure of the disenfranchisement of the self through the commodification, not only of work, but of "free" time. The gesture of total refusal expressed an awareness of the need only to make conscious what people already knew ("all you lack is the consciousness of what you know"), and it was this "knowledge" that the notion of the spectacle so brilliantly encapsulated. It was exactly this that all the wings of orthodox Marxism were unaware of, and therefore could not speak to. The revolutionary orthodoxy had become part of the world of separation, and therefore a barrier to revolution. An important strength of the Situationist critique (usually taken only to be its weakness) lay precisely in the vantage point afforded by its lack of roots in the workers' movement.

In contradistinction to the ossification of orthodox Marxism, Debord and the SI uniquely captured the alienation of the times in the notion of the "spectacle", and insisted that revolution must be about taking back the totality of life. This was its "good" side. But its weakness (its "bad" side) lay in an inability to show how the negation of the society of capital (not just the "spectacle", which always threatened to become detached) was

rooted in the development of the value form – the process whereby alienated labour becomes the substance of value – and a related inability to articulate how the antagonistic relation of value generates the possibility of its transcendence (the abolition of wage-labour). This is directly evident in the way that Debord falls back uncritically on the experience of the workers' councils as the discovered form of the economic emancipation of labour, without appreciating the limitation of this form of struggle and organisation to a specific historical conjuncture. Debord, for all his imaginative audacity and intransigence (which, it must be insisted, proved to be a historically progressive catalyst in the rethinking of revolutionary theory), could only provide a utopian "solution" to the crisis of Marxism. In the last analysis, both Situationism and Orthodox Marxism failed to theorise (in the case of Debord we may add, adequately) value as a social relation, and as a result did not apprehend class antagonism and revolutionary rupture as immanent to that relation.

What of the tendencies that have usually been identified as providing radical alternatives to the mainstream orthodox tradition?

The starting point for Trotskyism was always the need to preserve what it saw as the essence of Bolshevism in the face of its betrayal by the Stalinist bureaucracy. The differentiating feature of Trotskyism was its analysis of the degeneration of the Soviet Union under Stalin. The USSR according to Trotsky remained a workers' state because of its nationalised property relations. The Stalinist bureaucracy was not a class but a parasitic excrescence on these proletarian property relations. What was required was not a new social revolution, but a political revolution to inject democracy back into the structures of the state (soviets). Nationalised property relations were chosen as the category that defined the class (i.e. proletarian) content of the state. This category, together with the categories of the "productive forces" and the "economy", functioned in the Trotskyist version of Marxism as bourgeois categories of political economy, standing over and above the social forces that were the real content of the class struggle; categories that in effect kept the working class fixed in its position as object of production. Socialism was the collectivist state (i.e. bourgeois) socialism of the orthodox tradition: the replacement of the anarchy of the capitalist market by the rational planning of production and distribution. The Trotskyist mentality was summed up perfectly by Anton Ciliga in his 1938 book *The Russian Enigma*. Referring to the 1923 Trotskyist Opposition, Ciliga observed:

"Trotsky never spoke of organizing strikes, of inciting the workers to a fight against bureaucracy in favour of the Trotskyist economic programme. His criticisms, his arguments and his advice seemed

all addressed to the Central Committee, to the Party apparatus. Mentioning the fall in the standard of living of the workers, Trotsky concluded in the tone of a good employer giving advice to the workshop, 'What are you doing? You waste our most precious capital, the force of labour.' The active body to Trotsky still remained 'the Party' with its Politbureau or its Central Committee; the proletariat was but 'the object'" (p.231).

The legacy of Trotskyism was twofold. Its conflation of class with property relations (nationalised property = proletarian class content) encouraged a view of Stalinist bureaucracies and parties as potentially reformable, and thereby potentially revolutionary. Hence the venerable tradition of the 4th International in seeing Stalinist and Nationalist parties (representing the petty bourgeoisie and the peasantry) as indirect vehicles of proletarian revolution. Secondly, a congenital reluctance to distance itself from the mainstream of the Social Democratic and Stalinist parties in order to stay with the working class, an orientation codified in the tactics of "entryism" and the "united front". Not surprisingly, the fate of Trotskyism has been bound up with the fate of its parent tradition: the implosion of Stalinism and the death of Social Democracy has deprived it of the coordinates for positioning itself in the world.

Bordigist left-communism originated in the ranks of Social Democracy prior to the Russian revolution. Its claim to communist purity rested on its intransigence towards the tactical compromises of reformism (in both Socialist and Communist Parties) and its view of the absolutely exclusive and leading role of the party in relation to the organisations of the proletariat (soviets). But underpinning this doctrinaire leftism lay an assertion of proletarian separateness premised on its preservation as a class, rather than its self-abolition. In this it shares with Trotskyism a reliance on reified categories that fix the proletariat in its role as wage-labour, albeit the object of state collectivist rather than market direction.

Council communism (Roland-Holst, Pannekoek, Gorter, Rühle, Mattick) originated as the radical left wing of the 2nd International.⁵ In its advocacy of the mass strike and independent proletarian organisation, it acted as the conscience of working class struggle constrained by party control. The fate of council communism as a distinct political tendency mirrored the rise and fall of the workers' councils in Europe in the years 1917-1923. The councils, despite a struggle (for immediate economic demands and democratic reforms) that by-passed the official party and trades union structures, never transcended the general aspiration of workers for inclusion in the bourgeois order and a recognition of the sovereignty of industrial labour. To hold, as the Council communists did, that independent expressions of proletarian power would be necessary in any transition to socialism,

did not warrant the assumption that the workers' councils were, in the period 1917-23, automatically revolutionary, or that the pre-requisites (the configuration of capital, class and consciousness) for communism were present.

The difference between syndicalism and council communism was that while both were an expression (the most radical expression) of the ascendancy of the industrial working class movement, the syndicalist project was in essence the consummation of industrial capitalism (based on industrial syndicates) without its state. Council communism, although rooted in the same struggles that gave rise to syndicalism, and therefore limited by them, did grasp important aspects of the qualitative break with capital necessary for the transition to communism. It represented the best aspects of the Orthodox Marxist tradition insofar as it expressed the most radical content of the workers' struggles of the period (the proletariat as a self-developing revolutionary subject). But it was inevitable that, as the working class movement and Orthodox Marxism went into decline, it too became marginalized.

Today the social totality is no longer constituted by politically constructed divinities. The invisible leviathan that rules is the value imperative: when value based on abstract labour is not only the undisputed regulator of production and consumption, but when this imperative has hegemonised social consciousness, when as Marx puts it: "individuals are now ruled by abstractions" (Marx 1973, p.164). Only Marxism as a critique of the value form will be adequate to the global proletariat now taking shape (of which the anti-globalisation movement is an expression). On the basis of the most advanced division of labour (itself driven by the most advanced mobility of labour power and value), this collective intelligence will more and more countenance its own activity as abstract labour (the substance of value): the limits of value (experienced as the many irrationalities of the world market) are the limits of itself as alienated

labour, and will increasingly be seen as such. Marx's critique of value will finally come into its own as the results of human practice catch up with theory.

Notes

1. By orthodox Marxism I mean a Marxism which in mechanically substituting the "material" for the "ideal" in Hegel, ended up with a dialectic of reified structures, discoverable and expressible through a positivist science. In this dialectic the proletariat was a finished, fixed social category rather than a self-developing, self-transforming revolutionary subject.
2. See Postone 1996 for the notion of social labour as the form of social domination peculiar to capitalism.
3. A useful commentary on the notion of the "abolition of labour" in Marx can be found in Silbersheid 2004.
4. A measured and balanced assessment of Debord's contribution to revolutionary theory can be found in Jappe 1999.
5. The case for including Rosa Luxemburg as part of this "councilist" tradition rests on the view of proletarian emancipation she shared with the Dutch "left radicals".

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The Importance of Happiness

Harry Ratner

WHAT IS or what should be the purpose of political activity? Most people would say it should be to strive for a better or more progressive society. But how should one define “better” or “progressive”?

Since Marx identified the growth of the productive forces as the motor force of progress, there has been a tendency to judge the progressiveness and desirability of various forms of society primarily by economic criteria. If an economic system developed the productive forces it was progressive and therefore desirable. Thus, for Marx, because capitalism developed the productive forces it was progressive compared with the previous feudal and mercantilist societies. It only ceased to be progressive when it became a fetter on their further development.

In the *Communist Manifesto* Marx enthuses: “The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation.”

In this view the fact that the growth of capitalism was accompanied by massive poverty, slums, wars and exploitation – i.e. possibly avoidable misery – seems to be of secondary importance; they were unavoidable “growing pains”. It is true that elsewhere Marx points to the dehumanising aspects of capitalism, to alienation etc. But that is seen more in the context of the contradictions of a more mature capitalism leading to its demise. Capitalism in its youth was progressive; it was necessary for the further development of the productive forces which would later make communism possible and historically inevitable. This implied that the accompanying misery and exploitation was an inevitable cost of progress.

Marxists are not the only ones who argue that economics and economic growth are the most important, even determining factors in the health and desirability of societies. Economists, politicians, both New Labour and Tory, repeat that a healthy economy and economic growth are the key to well-being and essential to the solution of all social problems. Market forces determine everything. Only get the economy right and everything follows.

Both Marx and the modern neoliberals are

guilty of this economic determinism. This over-emphasis of the economic over other factors – political, cultural, ethical, emotional is wrong. It is wrong on two accounts. Firstly as an explanation of how societies work. Secondly as the sole, or even main, criterion for judging the “progressiveness”, “health” and desirability of different societies.

Why economic determinism is wrong

In places Marx writes as if the material forces of production have a built-in, intrinsic urge – almost a will of their own – to expand quite independently of human decisions or actions. Further, he argues that the stage of development of the productive forces rigidly determines the relations of production, i.e. the economic (and hence the political) relations between classes. “The hand mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam mill, society with the industrial capitalist” (*The Poverty of Philosophy*).

As one critic of Marx, Peter Singer, comments: “But isn’t all this much too crude? Should we take seriously the statement about the hand mill giving us feudal lords, and the steam mill capitalists? Surely Marx must have realised that the invention of steam power itself depends on human ideas, and those ideas, as much as the steam mill itself, have produced capitalism” (Peter Singer, *Marx*, OUP, 1980).

History, real empirical history – not history tailored to suit abstract theory – is a history of social changes brought about by the complex interaction of economic, political, ideological and cultural factors. It is not a history of the economic base exclusively determining the political and ideological superstructure but of a multi-way interaction between all these factors. Causality runs both ways between base and superstructure. Even Marxists acknowledge that when the superstructure becomes a fetter on the productive forces it is events in the superstructure – i.e. political struggle, socialist revolution – that are necessary to bring about changes in the economic base.

And political struggles do not have to depend on a supposed “ripeness” of economic development.

Referring to the Marxist argument that early capitalism was progressive because it enabled the

productive forces to grow we must ask whether it was inevitable that the growth of mankind's productive forces should take place in a capitalist way? That it should be accompanied by ruthless exploitation and misery? Were these unavoidable accompaniments of this growth? Was it not possible that this growth could have occurred under different relations of production than capitalist ones?

Was it really inevitably determined by the then level of development of the economy that the Chartist movement should have been defeated and in retreat from 1848 onward?

No! It was the relationship of *political* forces that determined that the Monster Petition and mass demonstrations of 1848 failed to win reforms and that subsequently the movement declined. If the Chartists had been successful in winning sufficient extensions to the franchise to enable a radical reforming government to win elections such a government might not have established socialism but it might have been able to introduce significant reforms. The Chartist programme was not just about parliamentary reform. Its activists were imbued with the ideas of Robert Owen, of advocates of land reform and cooperation and of the early socialists,

One must admit that the concept and the feasibility of the central planning of a mainly state-owned economy could only arise after the further development of capitalism had given rise to large enterprises and the socialisation of the productive process. The level of development of the economy in the early and middle nineteenth century, the existence of a multitude of small enterprises and the relative primitiveness of communications and statistics certainly made central planning of state-owned industries unfeasible. But the common ownership of the means of production does not necessarily mean state ownership and central planning. Common ownership can also mean co-operatively owned enterprises interacting via the market. And could not have such a government, resting on a working class constituency, carried out Robert Owen's socialist and co-operative policies? Could not a wide extension of co-operative ownership have prevailed over capitalist ownership – or at least competed on equal terms? With all that this implies for better working conditions?

Eventually reforms such as the limitations on child labour, reduced working hours, progress in housing and sanitation, pensions, sick pay and unemployment benefits were achieved even under Liberal and Tory governments right up to 1914. A Chartist breakthrough in 1848 or earlier and the election of radical reforming governments would have meant the far earlier achievement of these reforms. It might not have been socialism. It might still have been capitalism but it would have resulted in a more humane capitalism and the reduction of the sum of human misery and a better quality of

life. Surely not an unimportant consideration. For some Marxists the struggle for reforms is important mainly as a means of raising class consciousness in preparation for the final struggle for power. The fact that the reforms won might actually reduce misery and make for a better quality of life are largely ignored.

If we go back further in time to the English Revolution we know that ideas of common ownership of the land and economic and political equality motivated the radical wing of the Cromwellian Model Army. Was it really inevitably determined that the Levellers should have been defeated? Certainly the emergence of socialist ideas did not have to await the development of the productive forces to a specific stage, whether the steam mill, electricity or even telecommunications. Even more than in the 19th century the conditions of simple reproduction with thousands of independent producers that existed in the 17th and 18th centuries were unfavourable to either the idea or feasibility of socialist central planning; but they were not inimical to co-operatives operating in a market economy and a democratisation of land tenure as well as a long lasting democratisation of the state structure. A co-operative and democratic Commonwealth arising out of the English Revolution was not an impossibility.

We know of course that this did not happen and that, in actual fact, industry did develop from this time under capitalist property relations, i.e. private ownership. But the adoption of new technology, division of labour and concentration of production into large units making economy of size possible could also have taken place under co-operative ownership. It was not the level of development of the productive forces and the level of technology that held back the growth of co-operative ownership and democratisation of land tenure but the general ideology of the time – which favoured the idea of private ownership and private pursuit of wealth. Obviously the general economic and material conditions of the time and the interests of the various classes and strata of society were important factors in forming this general ideology. But they were not the only factors.

In our explanation of why society developed in a certain way and not in others we need to abandon the idea that the economic base mainly, or even in the final analysis, determines the superstructure. We need to see how the superstructure – political forces and ideology – themselves affect the economic base. Sometimes the main current of causality flows from the base to the superstructure. At other times it flows the other way.

Premature revolutions?

This leads to the question of whether attempts to introduce socialism (or any other change in the economy) are premature. And, if so, when?

Marxism's theory of stages of social change,

dependent on the development of the productive forces reaching a stage when the political superstructure “became a fetter”, implied that only when capitalism had reached its full development could a socialist revolution be possible. Hence, as orthodox Marxists, Kautsky and the Mensheviks argued that the Bolshevik revolution of October 1917 was premature because the level of economic development in Russia was inadequate and any attempt to introduce socialism bound to fail. Subsequently the isolation of the Soviet regime in a hostile capitalist world and its degeneration and eventual collapse back into capitalism was deemed by many to have confirmed this. I too, in an article in *New Interventions* on the 80th anniversary of the revolution, described it as “premature and diseased from infancy”. I think such a description is only half correct. In the context of *political possibilities* it was not premature. The Bolsheviks banked everything on the spread of the revolution to Germany and other advanced industrial countries and the establishment of a federation of Soviet states with a sufficiently powerful industrial base to make the construction of socialism feasible.

Was it inevitable that the revolutionary situations in Germany from 1918 to 1923 should have failed to result in a Soviet Germany? The abortion of the revolution in 1923 was due as much to political factors – the mood of the masses, the mistakes of the Communist Party leadership – as to purely economic factors, i.e. the stabilisation of the economy and the end of inflation at the end of August 1923 – themselves the result of *political decisions*.

So in that sense the Bolshevik seizure of power in 1917 was not premature. The subsequent degeneration of the regime was not due solely to economic causes. The policies of the Bolsheviks diseased it from the beginning. Firstly the refusal of Lenin and Trotsky – mirrored by the equal intransigence of the right wing Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries – to accept a coalition government of all the pro-Soviet parties. Secondly the forcible dissolution of the Constituent Assembly. These policies led to the complete isolation of the Bolshevik government and its increasing reliance on terror to survive; leading to the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt and the eventual rise of Stalinism.

The Russian revolution could only be described as premature if one accepts Marx’s argument that socialism can only be built on the material foundations developed by advanced capitalism and that no social formation, no economic system, leaves the stage until it has exhausted all its potential for development. Since it is now evident that in 1917 capitalism had by no means exhausted its potential to develop the productive forces, then – according to Marxist theory – it could be argued that the Russian revolution was premature. But I think I have shown why this conclusion is wrong.

The Russian revolution also shows how, in certain situations when the combination of economic, political, military forces is finely balanced, the decisions of a small group of individuals, the dozen or so members of the Bolshevik Central Committee, and one individual among them, can have a profound influence on history. If the Bolshevik Central Committee had not decided to seize power there would have been no October Revolution – and the future of the whole world would have been different in many incalculable ways.

There is no reason why socialists should wait until capitalism has exhausted all its potential before trying to replace it. In any case how does one decide at exactly what point capitalism has indeed exhausted its potential? Lenin and others thought that outbreak of the first World War in 1914 had marked this stage. In 1939 Trotsky and the 4th International thought that capitalism was over-ripe. They were wrong. But capitalism survived not because it had not exhausted its potential for growth – as the subsequent post-war expansion showed – but because of the relationship of forces on the political plane. Capitalist society was on the brink of collapse following the two world wars – in 1917-23 and 1943-45. It was the weakness of the forces of social revolution and the support given the faltering regimes by social democracy and Stalinism that helped it survive. At the same time it must be remembered that after the initial political crises had been survived it was capitalism’s continued potential for economic recovery after 1923 and 1948 that finally turned back the tide. The fact that capitalism had not exhausted its economic potential (making an increase in the general standard of living and the establishment of the Welfare State possible) was a factor making possible its political victory and hence its survival. Another example of the interaction between the economic and the political.

If, in 2005, the prospect for the advance of socialism in the near or immediate future seems dim it is not because the economic conditions are not ripe but because the political conditions are not. And these will only become ripe if and when socialism wins the battle for the hearts and minds.

We must reject economic determinism and reinstate the role of the political – and indeed the role of individuals and assemblies of organised individuals (parties and governments) – as at least as important factors as the economic in determining history. We must analyse societies and their histories in a holistic way; seeing the economic, the political, the ideological as a complex assembly inter-reacting with each other within an overall context.

We must also rescue the role of the individual and of organised individuals as important factors in history.

Marxists may argue that I am being unfair to

Marx and Marxists. They will point out that Marxism does recognise the role of individuals and the political superstructure. They will remind me of Marx's comment that "men make their own history, but they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given, and transmitted from the past". However, many (fortunately not all) Marxists take the reference to circumstances not chosen by themselves but "directly given and transmitted from the past" to mean essentially the level of development of the productive forces. And we are back to economic determinism.

The quality of life

Let us now deal with how economic reductionism is wrong in the second way – in its overemphasis on the state of the economy in determining well-being and in the neglect of other factors, the cultural, the psychological and the personal.

Oliver James, a well known psychologist argued in his book *Britain on the Couch* (Century, London 1997) that though people in Britain were materially better off than in the 1950s they were unhappier.

He quotes from statistics showing that the incidence of stress, depression, suicides, violence, drug abuse, alcoholism, and marriage breakdown had all increased compared with the 1950s despite the increase in material wealth of the majority of the population, including the working class.

James argues: "It is almost a tenet of modern life that as a nation becomes wealthier, the satisfaction and well-being levels of its citizens will rise accordingly – affluence should breed happiness and this is the ultimate justification offered by politicians for placing increased prosperity at the heart of their politics. Yet this principle seems to apply only up to a certain basic level and not beyond. Large surveys of national well-being and satisfaction levels show that when a nation moves from developing ('Third World') to developed status, there is a significant increase in well-being. But once nations reach the level where most or all of their citizens' basic needs for food, shelter and so on are being met, relative affluence beyond that does not make a difference. Although there are large variations between developed nations in how happy they say they are, the explanation is not differences in wealth. The well-being of three of the richest, Germany, Japan and the USA, is less than that of many poorer nations, such as Ireland, Finland and Australia. Furthermore, the surveys have consistently found little change over time, despite increases in wealth. The USA, for example, is much richer than in the 1950s yet about the same numbers say they are happy today as compared with then. Even more dramatically, the Japanese real per capita income increased fivefold between 1958 and 1987 without any change in the

reported amount of well-being. Thus within developed nations, it appears that raising the incomes of all does not increase the happiness of all" (pp.44-45).

James' basic explanation for this is the way advanced capitalism has developed. The drive to encourage consumerism as a means of expanding its markets has created, even in well-off people, expectations that cannot be met.

"Put crudely, advanced capitalism makes money out of misery and dissatisfaction, as if it were encouraging us to fill the psychic void with material goods. It can also profit from fostering spurious individualism by encouraging us to define ourselves through our purchases, with ever more precisely marketed products that create a fetishistic concern to have 'this' rather than 'that'. Even though there is often no significant practical or aesthetic difference" (p.xi).

"A sharp rise in aspirations and individualism since 1950, necessary for continuous economic growth, has led to an all-consuming preoccupation with our status, power and wealth relative to others. No sooner than we achieve a goal, we move the goalposts to create a new and more difficult one, leaving ourselves permanently dissatisfied and depleted, always yearning for what we have not got, a nation of Wannabees" (p.xii).

"Since 1950, expectations have risen dramatically for personal and professional fulfilment (especially among young women as well as men). Likewise, demands for individualism have inflated. The media (particularly television), increased hours spent at school and competitiveness there and increased pressure to compete at work make us obsessively preoccupied with how we are doing compared to others and whether we are individual enough" (p.7).

"For that vast majority unable to achieve their inflated aspirations and to obtain objective confirmation of their sense of their individual importance, upwardly comparing simply rams home their inadequacy and encourages depression.... In a society undergoing rapid industrialization and expansion social mobility may be widespread. But in traditional agrarian societies, social status is hereditary. Where there is little or no possibility of changing your social position through ability, such as in a feudal or caste system you are unlikely to make undiscounted comparisons with your betters. Princes or kings are simply a different category of human to which you cannot aspire by the definition of your society. It would not occur to you. This may explain the ostensibly surprising fact that the most oppressed group of women in the developed world, the Japanese, are also by far the most satisfied compared with men" (p.88).

One can disagree with many of James' arguments; it can be objected that he exaggerates today's discontents and minimizes those of previous periods. Is it really the case that the feudal serf was

not so discontented; or that Japanese women do not suffer unhappiness because of their low status? And is it not a fact that people in 1950 – and earlier – did aspire to better status and compare themselves unfavourably with others? If they did not, what is the explanation for all the struggles by the working class and the disadvantaged such as women, gays and racial minorities against discrimination and for better treatment?

It can also be argued that many of the statistics of depression, stress and mental illness quoted are misleading and exaggerate the increase. For example the awareness and diagnosis of such conditions have changed since the 1950s. People did suffer from stress and depression then but their condition was not recognised, they were not diagnosed as suffering from these conditions. They did not appear in the statistics.

James is wrong in citing the increase in the incidence of divorces and separations as a cause of increasing unhappiness. Undeniably the process of divorce and separation and the break-up of personal relationships is stressful and traumatic. But the situation that existed when divorce was difficult, when people were trapped for a lifetime in unhappy marriages – with all that it entailed in misery for both partners and children – was far worse than it is today. The old restrictive sexual mores condemned young women who had children out of wedlock to ostracism. Women were forcibly separated from their babies and forced to give them away for adoption; the women were put in institutions. This caused untold misery. So did all the old taboos and prejudices. The sexual revolution of the sixties which introduced much more tolerant attitudes, easier divorces and more sexual equality and the decriminalisation of homosexuality has not abolished all problems of sexuality but it has improved matters and eliminated at least some causes of unhappiness.

Even if we disagree with much of what James argues, he nevertheless draws welcome attention to the fact that much of the quality of life is determined by non-economic factors. The overall quality of life depends not just on the economy but on cultural, emotional and psychological factors; on perception of one's social and material situation, on personal relationships and self-esteem.

What is to be done?

James links depression and unhappiness with low serotonin levels in the brain. He does not make clear whether he believes unhappiness causes the low serotonin levels or whether it is the low serotonin levels that cause the unhappiness. James seems to argue that it is a bit of both. Unsurprisingly, as a clinical psychologist, he advocates the better use of medication, government action to make medicines cheaper and more available, and increased resources for mental health care. One

cannot quarrel with that. But is there not also the need to change society?

James does acknowledge this. He writes: "It is neither a necessary condition nor an inevitable destiny of advanced capitalism that it should induce low levels of serotonin. By changing the social environment to one that is more in accord with our species' inherited tendencies we could correct the chemical imbalance. In the short term, low-serotonin individuals can do so through psychotherapy as well as by taking pills. But only changes in the way we are organised as a society will address the fundamental problem" (p.xiii).

So what conclusions are we to draw from this re-emphasis on the overall quality of life as opposed to over-emphasis on the economic?

We must remember that the ills James identified in advanced capitalism are nothing compared with the misery of the masses in the Third World, in Africa, Latin America, large parts of Asia and Eastern Europe. The priority must be to combat this poverty. It can only be done if their peoples struggle for themselves. But we in the wealthier countries have an internationalist duty to assist in their struggles.

Some on the left argue that the only solution to Third World poverty is world socialism. Just as some have also argued that campaigning for feminist issues, or for gay rights, that any single-issue campaign that cuts across class lines is a distraction from the fight for socialism. That only the overthrow of capitalism and world socialism will resolve all these issues. And that the main aim of fighting for demands (which many argue cannot be achieved under capitalism) is to prepare and train the working class for the final onslaught on capitalism.

This is nonsense. A sufficient motive and justification for political activity is the maximisation of human happiness. So any reforms or measures that increase the potential for happiness and reduce misery are worth pursuing for that reason alone, even if they are merely reforms within capitalism. In the Third World this includes campaigning for the cancellation of debt, increased aid for providing clean water to villages, making medicine and services to combat the Aids epidemic more available, and a whole host of immediately feasible objectives.

In advanced capitalist countries, in addition to combating the residual poverty of the poorest layers, attention must be given to improving the non-economic as well as the economic quality of life – altering society to make it more compatible with our emotional needs. Some progress has been made. There has been some improvement in the status of women, the liberalisation of sexual mores, improvements in other non-economic fields. But much remains to be done in campaigning for improvements even within the parameters of capitalism. For example the legalisation of volunt-

ary euthanasia – saving thousands from the avoidable agony of lingering and undignified deaths.

How does all this relate to the fight for socialism? A socialist world is still desirable. But one does not have to wait till it is achieved to win measures that increase well-being.

The conclusion to all this is that the aim of all political activity must be to create a social framework that maximises the potential for happiness and reduces misery. Social change – whether it be

the achievement of a socialist society or merely reforms within capitalism – is a means to an end. And that end is not just economic growth in itself but economic growth that is sustainable, is not destructive of the environment and underpins a social framework that maximises the potential for better personal relationships and a better emotional life, i.e. that maximises happiness.

The ultimate end – to which all else is a means – must be the maximisation of happiness. ■

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Understanding Fascism: Daniel Guérin's *Brown Plague*

David Renton

MOST OF the ways in which fascism is often said to have distinguished itself were not in fact unique. The movement was opportunist – that had happened before. It was based on a leadership cult – that has been common. It opposed the values of the French revolution. Its propaganda was nationalistic and inegalitarian. It employed violence against its opponents. All of these characteristics represent merely the loose change of history. They were hardly unique in interwar Italy or Germany, and have not been rare since. The best definition of the uniqueness of fascism is rather a historical one. Fascism brought to modern, industrial Europe the practice of genocide. This combination matters. Since the industrial revolution, few developed capitalist countries have gone to war with another, and none except Germany has attempted to butcher such a large number of its own people.

Fascism is most often defined today in relationship to genocide. The word fascism itself is inseparable from the fate of the Jews in Germany. The War and the Holocaust do not seem to retreat into the past, in the way that we might expect from phrases such as “to consign [an event] to history”. They remain in present-day focus. Yet if fascism was primarily a form of state terrorism against minorities, which were not minorities (women, workers), and if fascism was only a preparation for war and genocide – then why did anyone support it at the time, and why has anyone tried to revive it since? We can formulate the same question differently, and in terms that were of interest to the writer whose work forms the subject of this paper. How far was fascism a radical or even revolutionary movement? How far did it take the spontaneous demands of German people, and reproduce them in new ways? And to what extent did it provide the people with answers that were hostile to their own?

This article is an account of Daniel Guérin's book *The Brown Plague: Travels in Late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany*. The book is a first-hand account of two tours through Germany, in 1932 and 1933.¹ A brief note is required on the text,

which went through various forms. Following Guérin's first visit, in 1932, he published a series of articles in various left-wing newspapers. Again, following his second 1933 visit, Guérin wrote up his experiences for the Socialist Party press. These 1933 articles were then published as a short book of less than 100 pages in 1933,² and again in 1945.³ The 1965 French edition includes the text of the 1945 book, and also a first half, based on the 1932 articles, rewritten in memoir form.⁴ Although there were some later changes, these are relatively few. The book conforms to the original reports written by Guérin, in his journal and for the left press.

At the time of writing, then, Daniel Guérin was twenty-eight years old. He was someone who had travelled widely, through the Mediterranean and through Germany. Guérin's closest allies were among a generation of former syndicalists who had adopted Trotskyism, and were now members of the left wing of the Socialist Party. He saw that Germany possessed both the largest working-class movement in Europe, and also the most exciting cultural, artistic and sexual scene. For Guérin, of course, such a combination could hardly be coincidental. Like many socialists, he subscribed to the idea that the working class was naturally internationalist, a class of people who identified their interests with those of the oppressed all over the world. The first surprise of his book is a surprise in the author's own mind. The Germany that Daniel Guérin expected to find – certainly, in 1932 – was a country on the verge of a Communist revolution. The first pages of *The Brown Plague* record that “everyone” had indeed, “taken sides”.⁵ But this polarisation was one in which the final victory of the far right represented at least an equal possibility to that of the left.

Guérin's first sights of Germany conveyed this dual message. “At the edge of the Black Forest, I was overflowing with an optimism not yet shaken by the vicissitudes of the social struggle.” Germany, he tells his readers, “I had admired unceasingly since my childhood.” The conflict between classes was here at its height. “Here the

hour would sound when then the formidable bloc of wage earners would have it out once and for all with the mercenaries of big capital.” Yet before Guérin could record a single meaningful conversation, nature itself gave reasons for doubt. “The seeds of a mortal illness was already corrupting this flesh, so resplendent in appearance. Birds flew low in a heavy sky, as if before a storm. The farther I would plunge into the heart of this country, the more disillusioned I would become.”⁶

Twenty miles across the French border, Guérin and his single companion spent an evening at a youth hostel. The common was full of young German men, aged between fifteen and twenty. “Legs were deeply tanned”, Guérin recorded, “muscles taught and hard.” The visitors’ book filled with the competing slogans of left and right. One eighteen year old took on to explain the contest: “You see, we’re pitted against each other. Our passions are so white-hot that occasionally we kill each other, but *deep down we want the same thing* ... a new world, radically different from today’s, a world that no longer destroys coffee and wheat while millions go hungry, *a new system*. But some *believe adamantly* that Hitler will provide this, while others believe it will be Stalin. That’s the only difference between us.”⁷

Unlike Guérin’s other, better-known study, *Fascism and Big Business*, *The Brown Plague* is no work of finished theory. It presents an argument in development, it acknowledges moments of disbelief in its author’s own head. This indeed is a large part of its charm – the feeling that the writer keeps no secrets. Yet if the book was to end just there, a few pages in, then it is likely that many readers would emerge with a real sense of surprise. What was Guérin arguing, that fascism was indeed an authentic mass movement, with popular support, as its advocates maintained?

The Brown Plague addresses such concerns, but it does not do so directly. Rather it treats the energy and unruliness of the new Nazi converts through the social situation in which they found themselves. Poverty is a common feature of Guérin’s book. It can be seen through the large numbers of vagabonds, tramping almost aimlessly, no longer looking for work. It expresses itself in the unemployment which talkative German youths assume to be the common experience of their French counterparts. It expressed itself differently, from class to class.

Beside a river, Guérin meets an unemployed shoemaker and his unemployed dyer friend. “Today, they had nothing to clothe themselves with but patched-up vests under which they were bare-chested; laughing, they showed us their worn-out boots.” The pair had already walked through countless small towns. Their papers were stamped many times over with the details of their travelling. “A hellish cycle”, Guérin records, “It would end only when they enrolled in the Brown-

shirts or were taken on by an armaments factory.” If this pair would adopt fascism in the future then they would do so unwillingly, Guérin argued, out of economic constraint and not free choice.⁸

A second description, following almost immediately afterwards, might appear to be the same sort of story. Entering a rural home to buy eggs and milk, Guérin found himself face to face with images of Hitler torn from picture-magazines, “‘Our saviour’, proclaimed the father, with an opaque certainty. They spread out before me a pile of Hitlerite tracts amassed during the last electoral campaign. They came in all shapes, sizes and colours. The son declared in a rough voice which neither allowed nor even could imagine contradiction [and referring to the last elections]: ‘The National Socialist list won an absolute majority here’.”⁹ Yet for all the superficial similarities between these two incidents, there was a clear difference. These peasants that Guérin met had chosen fascism spontaneously. They felt that it conformed closely to their interests. In all this they were different from the unruly but demoralised artisans who showed Guérin their worn-out boots.

One theme of *The Brown Plague* is the difference between plebeians and proletarians. We find it illustrated in Guérin’s pen-portrait of one Nazi leader. “Outfitted in boots and belt, with a black tie over his brown shirt, he was stubby-legged, bald, slightly obese with a protruding lower lip. Gregor Strasser looked more grotesque than soldierlike. In ‘civilian life’ he was a pharmacist, and the panoply in which he was rigged out failed to camouflage his vulgar petit-bourgeois bearing.”¹⁰ The point appeared again in Guérin’s account of one of the last meetings of the free Reichstag, from September 1932. The Centre Party’s representatives Guérin described as “prelates”, the Conservative Party “hunched-up barons”. Compared to either, the Nazis were drawn from a poorer layer, “young men – good-looking, insolent fellows”. Hermann Göring, meanwhile, was “elegant and impertinent”. He was the representative of an entire class – not the rich, nor the industrialists, but people of small property who still bore scars from the years of inflation. “Soon, the Third Reich would be born out of the disunity of the proletariat *and* a compromise between the old and new ‘gentlemen’. On September 12, this was already in the air.”¹¹

The Nazi delegates were “provocative, plebeian, turbulent”.¹² The adjectives we might associate with energy and movement, but not healthy movement, rather urgency or hyperactivity. We can contrast them to the “solid” proletarians of Kuhle Wampe, the camp made famous in Brecht’s film of the same name. Guérin spent time also among the disciplined industrial workers of Stuttgart, “Families out for a walk, lovers out on the town, women on their doorsteps, toddlers in

the gutters, friendly cyclists.” Again, the Communists of Red Wedding struck Guérin as “serious”.¹³

Guérin was drawing his audience’s attention to a difference between two types. The Nazis, he argued, were often men and often young. They were people with property, but without real social status. They belonged to the rural areas and the small towns, rather than to the cities or the factories. By and large, they had still failed to win support among the old bastions of the German left, the cities that remained socialists, or the Communist enclaves such as Wedding. There were exceptions of course that Guérin reported, and anyway he did not treat consciousness as a simple “thing” that could be ticked off from class, but rather as a process, a pattern of shared and unique experiences and competing loyalties.

Why was Guérin so adamant in arguing that the working class remained aloof from fascism? One sceptical answer would be that he had to argue this. Guérin was, after all, a socialist. Fascism was the enemy; it meant, in his contemporary Victor Serge’s phrase, “the attack of the police force, of the executives of the army, safe troops, of some colonial troops ... against the organisations of the working class.”¹⁴ Daniel Guérin believed that the proletariat had a special role to play in bringing about the transition away from capitalism. This class had to be represented as being uniquely immune to the threat of fascism. For the sake of the morale of his French comrades, Guérin had to assume this was true, whether it actually was or not.

Much research suggests that Guérin’s insights were in fact accurate. The typical member of the NSDAP was indeed young and male. They tended to live in affluent, rather than poorer areas, rural areas rather than the cities. Districts with a long Socialist or Communist identity saw low Nazi votes, although so did the staunchest Catholic areas (a point largely missed by Guérin). By and large, leadership positions were indeed taken by civil servants or small owners. Parts of the Nazi Party were more proletarian. Conan Fischer has demonstrated that the SA won nearly half its support from unemployed workers.¹⁵ But the more that workers had an opportunity to be judged as workers, the less interest they took in the NSDAP. The Nazis’ very worst election results, in the run-up to 1933, came not in constituency elections, but in the nominations for shop stewards, in the trade unions.

Indeed, on inspection, Guérin’s point turns out to have been not merely political, but sociological as well. It was based on a deeper argument than Radek’s idea of fascism “as the socialism of the petty bourgeoisie”.¹⁶ Through the whole of *The Brown Plague*, Germany seems to be witnessing a process of de-socialisation. People who were used to defining themselves by their work, were now excluded from industrial employ-

ment. Where once there had been a class, there now was merely a people, and a poorer one at that. Here is Guérin’s account of one group of roamers: “They had the depraved and troubled faces of hoodlums and the most bizarre coverings on their heads: black or grey Chaplinesque bowlers, old women’s hats with the brims turned up in ‘Amazon’ fashion adorned with ostrich plumes and medals, plebeian navigator caps decorated with enormous edelweiss above the visor, handkerchiefs or scarves in screaming colours tied any which way around the neck, bare chests bursting out of open skin vests with broad stripes, arms scored with fantastic or lewd tattoos....”¹⁷ The “plebeian” hats were hardly accidental. This was a class in decomposition, and tramping could form only a brief interlude.

Class was becoming less salient for the simple reason that the workers, tamed by unemployment, were winning no victories. In this context, the character of the trade unions was changing. Daniel Guérin was struck by the extraordinary wealth of the main trade union building in Dresden. The carpets were thick. A waiter offered menus at a price far beyond that of the average workers’ budget. “Suddenly the word *bonze*, the name Communists and Nazis commonly called the reformist leaders, took on its full meaning to me.” The bureaucrats were friendly and welcoming people. They were also fat, slow and privileged. “Red in the face, bloated and dull, confined to their cushy, tiny, bureaucratic and corporative world, they made me want to grab them by the collar and give them a good shaking ... the fascist peril was at the door. But the *bonzes* of Dresden treated themselves to a good time.”¹⁸

As the defeats became more urgent, so the cynicism of ordinary Germans grew. In Franconia, Guérin met a naturalist who advocated compulsory military service. “Since you seem to be so interested in the proletariat”, the German asked him, “would you really wish a Stalinist regime upon it.” It was the same in rural areas, where a farming woman thrust on Guérin a bundle of worthless notes. “All of our assets! Everything we saved during twenty years of working like slaves. Now it’s worth nothing.... The Social Democrats with *their* inflation have taken it all.” Even in Berlin, the unemployed exchanges saw opposed Socialist and Communist workers, who knew by heart each one of their rival parties’ betrayals, since 1914.¹⁹ “As they waited for their rapidly approaching final defeat, the luckless workers of Germany were cast into extreme disarray and confusion.” People were cynical about voting, about campaigning, about everything. Guérin noted down comments he heard in the streets, “‘Why must I, a Social Democrat worker, consider my main enemy to be my Communist workmate?’ ‘Why must I, a Communist worker, often come to lethal blows with the Nazi worker who’s in line beside me at the unem-

ployment bureau?' Nobody, to tell the truth, knew the *why* of anything any longer."²⁰

So although Guérin's account opens with details that might tend to suggest that the Nazi victory was inspired by a sort of youthful cross-class revolutionism, these elements become subordinated within the narrative that follows. Rather than portraying fascism as the product of a self-conscious revolutionary generation, confident, argumentative, literate, eager to feel their own power, and snatching at history, *The Brown Plague* makes almost exactly the opposite points. It sees fascism rather as the product of defeat, confusion and decay – not hope or freedom, at all. Guérin's explanation for the rise of fascism was in other words a cocktail: three-sevenths proletarian demoralisation, two-parts de-socialisation, one-seventh misdirected enthusiasm, and one last part confusion. This was a society in which ideas were being widely discussed, but it was also one in which they were barely understood. Hitler's triumph was unaccompanied by heroism, either on its part, or that of its opponents. Fascism was the product then of extreme bitterness, and a mutual failure – shared by both left-wing parties – to act together to stop it, in time.

To get a sense of the distinctiveness of Guérin's argument, it is useful to contrast his approach briefly to ideas current in liberal historical scholarship. There are broadly three groups of British historians who engage with the history of fascism. The first group are British historians of fascism in Italy and Germany, including Ian Kershaw, Michael Burleigh and Richard Evans.²¹ Little of what I have written would be of surprise to them. They operate within a literature shaped by original, German and Italian sources. While the exact detail of Guérin's analysis, and in particular his eye-witness accounts of the German left, would probably be unfamiliar and therefore of interest, there is no great sense in which their analyses differ markedly from *The Brown Plague's*. The second group are the British historians of British fascism, including Richard Thurlow, Tom Linehan and Julie Gottlieb. Their interest is variously in the relationship between British fascism and the British state, or between fascism and culture.²² *The Brown Plague* passes them by. There is also, however, a third group, who are often the best-known outside the UK, writers such as Roger Griffin and Roger Eatwell, who have set themselves the task of defining a fascist core, a common set of values which manifested themselves in all fascisms over time.²³

To give just a sense of the approach, I will quote from a recent paper by Roger Eatwell, arguing for what he termed "a fascist matrix". The following quote is chosen to be representative not just of one paper but of a whole style of literature.²⁴

"At the heart of fascist thinking was the creation of a new elite of men, who would forge a

holistic nation and build a new third way state. However, there were notable differences among fascists about the new man, the nation and state. Fascism more than any other ideology has fuzzy edges, overlapping at times both the conservative right and even the left. Part of the problem involved in neatly delineating fascism stems from the fact that in practice it was at times opportunistic – and where it achieved power, it in turn attracted many opportunists. More fundamentally, fascism is elusive because it sought radical syntheses of ideas. This point was put well by Sir Oswald Mosley, the leader of the British Union of fascists in the 1930s, when he wrote: 'In this new synthesis of Fascism ... we find that we take the great principle of stability supported by authority, by order, by discipline, which has been the attribute of the Right, and we marry it to the principle of progress, of dynamic change, which we take from the Left.' The point of the matrix is to highlight that instead of simply prioritising key words like 'new man', 'nation' or 'state', we need to ask how fascists conceived such terms, including what they were defined against. The matrix also shows that syntheses could produce conclusions which tended more to the left or more to the right – for example, in relation to the interests of workers versus employers."²⁵

There are various themes here that I think are representative of an entire school. First, although this is mainly a matter of emphasis, there is the idea that fascism is best understood from the inside, or (as Eatwell puts it elsewhere in the same article) "empathetically". Second, there is a sense that fascism is to be defined primarily by its ideas, rather than by its historical practice. For the purposes of understanding fascism, events such as the Holocaust are relatively less important, more significant are the speeches in which fascist ideologues attempted to position their movement. Third, there is an argument that fascism was as much of the left as the right. If ideas are the only thing that matters then it follows that a vague promise that fascism might "do something" for the workers is more important than the historical relationship between the Italian or German regimes and the trade unionists that they jailed.

One of the features of this so-called "new consensus" in the study of fascism has been the argument that fascism was an authentic revolutionary movement, a revolutionary form of ultranationalism. If fascism's interwar opponents were unable to recognise this fact, then it follows that is because they were so blinded by ideology that they were incapable of recognising that which was in front of their nose. Let me quote Roger Griffin then, on Daniel Guérin and his co-thinkers:

"Ever since the March on Rome a high level of consensus had prevailed among Marxist political scientists, intellectuals, and activists which allowed them to see through the façade of Mussolini's regi-

me and discern both in it (and later in the Third Reich) no more than an exhibition of capitalism's ruthless survival instinct now that its foundations were starting to give way under the tectonic forces of history. Hence its desperate bids to conceal its terroristic counter-revolutionary purpose by masquerading as an 'alternative' revolutionary ideology to international socialism, or the efforts to camouflage its cynical destruction of working class power with spectacular displays of aestheticizing and anaesthetizing politics. They thus approached it not as a mysterious force, but as a predictable (and readily definable) exercise in the mystification of power relations."²⁶

We have already explored the question of how revolutionary fascism actually was. What about the other arguments, that (for most left-wing writers) fascism was purely a form of mass display, a sort of glorified drug trip, and that its "mystery" was merely a desperate attempt to conceal its true counter-revolutionary purpose? Did Guérin hold these views? And if not, did he hold to the implied opposite claims – that fascism was an unpredictable and "authentic" revolutionary movement, that its "mystery" was not "anaesthetizing" but a serious attempt to transform all aspects of life?

Guérin's second trip began in April 1933. He left alone this time not on foot but by bicycle. He kept his notes hidden in the frame. There were certain similarities between the accounts of the two journeys and certain differences. Let us note some of the similarities first. The chief similarities were stylistic. Meeting ordinary workers, Guérin describes them as "ardent and disciplined". The left is normally described in adjectives that imply stability, rank-and-file Nazis still in terms that imply unhealthy speed. There are the thin again (workers, the unemployed), and the fat. One immediate difference is that the trade union functionaries have ceased to exist, or if they remain they no longer give off such an impression of self-satisfaction. In Guérin's hierarchy of corpulence, the new NSDAP appointees have taken their place.

The most obvious difference the trips was that Guérin was travelling through Germany now after Hitler's victory, after the left had been destroyed. "A socialist today travelling beyond the Rhine today has the impression of exploring a city in ruins after an earthquake. Here, only a few months ago, were the headquarters of a political party, a trade union, a newspaper; over there was a workers' bookstore. Today, enormous swastika banners hang from these buildings. This used to be a Red street; they knew how to fight here. Today one only meets silent men."²⁷

One person's defeat was of course a second person's victory. "The other Germany struts about in broad daylight with all its meanness, its evil instincts awakened, its brutality, and its stomping of boots." As before, Guérin explained Hitler's in part as a series of sociological characters brought

to life. "The Hitlerite wave is such an extraordinary phenomenon (in the proper sense of the term) that vengeful epithets aren't enough to explain it ... Certainly, the dregs of the population have found asylum in the Brown army. There, they wield truncheons and play with guns to their hearts' content. But behind them are the peasant masses suffering from their low wages; the entire middle class in decomposition ... and there are also broad working-class layers whose nerves have been wrecked by hunger and idleness; and most of all, youth, without bread, work or future." A trip to a youth hostel gave Guérin the chance to observe the new young, a different people to those he had met just eight months before – a generation without jokes or ribaldry. "Finally, there is a lull. Just to say something, I allude to the poverty, to the eight million unemployed. 'Not now!', interrupts one of the boys, about twelve years old, in a tone of surprise and reproach. And the others in chorus, more explicit: 'Hitler has promised that in four years there will be no unemployment'." This "mechanical, inevitable reply", Guérin would hear day after day, from people of all ages, even younger than twelve.²⁸

When Guérin wanted to assess the extent that fascism was a movement of hope or of horror,²⁹ he tended to take examples from the lives of those that his readers would have accepted as revolutionaries. And yet his narrative suggests that more was at stake than simply the fate of the fallen Socialist comrades. It is easy to imagine a revolution without revolutionaries, even a revolution in which last year's revolutionaries had lost something of their former role. *The Brown Plague* describes a much more systematic form of counter-revolution. The Germany Guérin experienced was one where rank was respected, universally, where reports of spies were treated as fact – even if the details were fantastic. It was a world of uniforms, salutes. It was a world in which the very desire for self-emancipation had been crushed. The examples Guérin gives of Nazified society may appear familiar to us, but that is because we read them across a distance of seventy years. We have seen and heard Nazi Germany represented like this so many times that we almost forget that it was actually like that, or that Guérin was one of the first to report it in this way.

How then to make sense of the fascist claims that theirs was a revolutionary party? One way to read *The Brown Plague* is as a reflection on choice. Guérin's emphasis on fascist regularity, uniforms, and the unthinking acceptance of authority stemmed not just from the head, from his Marxist politics, but from his eyes. The author who had travelled in 1932, looking in part for companionship, returned to find that the very bodies of his friends were different, wrapped up, concealed. The Nazi voice, he heard from the speakers at public rallies, struck him as "curt, imperative".³⁰ In a

uniform, one is a soldier. Receiving an order, one has no right to refuse.

The motto of the French Revolution had of course been liberty for all. The question then, was whose freedom? For the rich, it was the freedom to own property. For those left radicals, about whom Guérin himself would write later, the choice that mattered was the freedom to live without poverty, without hunger, without being reminded every day that your children would face the same obstacles as you.³¹ The German Nazis set themselves against all aspects of 1789. They derided the promises of democracy, liberty, equality and fraternity as mere prattle. Their hostility towards democracy leads the British historian Richard Evans to write, “Most revolutions have ended, even if only temporarily, in the dictatorship of one man; but none apart from the Nazi revolution has ever been launched with this explicitly in mind.”³² The point is well made, but insufficient. What I think Guérin sensed was that the hierachical instinct of fascism was still more profound. This movement did not merely want to end the principle of democracy, or even that of revolution; it wanted to go further and remove from most people’s lives all difference, all meaningful choice.

What then of fascist spectacle? To return to Griffin’s categories, Guérin did indeed find evidence of spectacle and mystification. But if we read his account as a whole, we encounter the material facts of everyday life, described not like giant billboards around which the Nazis feared to tread, but more as known anxieties, a warning note of caution deep in the heard of people who judged themselves convinced. “Eleven o’clock. There’s nothing left on the program announced in the *Beobachter*. Look at the dignified petit-bourgeois couple returning home. The swastika glows ostentatiously on their breasts. No doubt their fever’s still ablaze. But doubt is already at work on their subconscious. The man whispers into the ear of his wife, ‘All these festivities are very nice, but they don’t put bread on the table’.”³³

Rather than dismiss the emotional power of propaganda, as some flimsy, *The Brown Plague* took seriously Hitler’s boast that he had stolen the symbols and songs of fascism from the old German left. Daniel Guérin gave examples of lyrics mutilated, “the blood red flag becoming “the *swastika* flag”, trade union halls annexed, Communist schools covered now in Nazi insignia, but still fulfilling some distorted version of their previous role. He even claimed – with perhaps less justice – that the tune of the *Horst Wessel Song* had been taken from the Communists.³⁴

There was a relationship evidently between fascism spectacle and time. One way to understand it, as we have seen, would be from the perspective of Adolf Hitler and his supporters. “A new age was beginning; history was once more setting the mighty wheel in motion and apportioning lots

anew. We had come to a turning point in world history – that was his constant theme.... He saw himself as chosen for superhuman tasks, as the prophet of the rebirth of man in a new form. Humanity, he proclaimed, was in the throes of a vast metamorphosis.... The coming age was revealing itself in the first great human figures of a new type.”³⁵ If fascism was indeed a forward-looking movement, then why not see its “revolution” in the same way that Walter Benjamin spoke of Messianic time, as a revenge against the inevitability of the present, as “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past”?³⁶

It was possible, rather, to oppose fascism while recognising its future-oriented dynamic. Daniel Guérin did not find anything of the past in fascism. Rather it struck him as a new and different form of politics, and one indeed which enjoyed widespread support. He employed natural metaphors. German fascism was a “plague”, he wrote, a “storm”, a “tide”, and on one occasion a “meteor”, “still advancing at a constant speed”.³⁷ Nazism was a movement that believed in profound change, and was future-centred, but in those sense alone did Guérin consider it revolutionary.

For if fascism was really about breaking away from ordinary time, then why was it so concerned with order, uniform and routine? Esther Leslie has recently reminded us of the figure of the Robot Cloth Flaw Detector. This machine was designed to test the wearing qualities of German cloth. It was found that the robot “soldier” could stand up and sit down precisely 97,000 times before the average German uniform showed the least signs of wear. “This flaw-detecting machine”, writes Leslie, “conjures up industrial modernity’s dream of efficiency, economy, prescribed movements, an administered society, where even the precise moment of failure ought to be predictable. Its corollary is administrators’ attempts to subdue material, be that fabric or human, in order to aim at an ideal realm of ideal forms, technically perfected.”³⁸ This, Leslie suggests, was the Nazi hierarchy’s attitude towards time: not its liberation, but its imprisonment in a world of perfectly administered stasis.

The fascist determination to control nature, also expressed itself in an obsessive ordering of human bodies. This was one part of Guérin’s rejection. While chemistry was the source of new fibres, and engineering the means to build the new machines, biology was charged with reconstructing the human, through race and eugenics. Many Nazis, Guérin observed, were embarrassed by the regime’s obsessive racism, and this “weak spot” was often easier than class or political issues to raise among Hitler’s supporters. Yet not all Germans thought the same. “You have to have heard these sons of the people who are not race theorists and who have never donned a brown short in order to grasp the wellsprings of their hatred.

Hitler has invented nothing; he has simply listened, formulated, and guessed what an outlet anti-Semitism offers to the anti-capitalist sentiment of the masses.”³⁹

What did the Germans want, the millions, those who worked? Below the Hamburg shipyards, Guérin found narrow streets covered in graffiti, “Death to Hitler”. In the trade union buildings, officials looked forward despondently to a future without work. Their posts had already been passed on to Nazi functionaries, turncoats, lecturers who understood nothing of the world of work.⁴⁰ The Brownshirts had been directed to form “revolutionary” cells in the workplaces; their leaders were busy making German safe for profit. “Incident follows upon incident: Cell delegates bang their fists on the boss’s desk demanding control over the business or the reduction of top salaries and high-ranking personnel. Others recall that Goebbels had promised to cancel the wage-slashing Brüning decrees once the Nazis were in power. But such resistance is ruthlessly broken, the ‘ringleaders’ thrown out of the factory, expelled, and replaced by safer elements. It is estimated that soon the NSBO will be rid of some 100,000 undesirables and will regain its character as a trusted faction.”⁴¹

Guérin’s final chapter opened with a dialogue between an imaginary optimist and a hypothetical pessimist. The former predicted that the Nazis would have difficulty in taming the German army. The latter insisted that whole classes of Germans would “support Hitler to the very end”. Fascism was essentially aggressive, Guérin warned his French readers, “If we let it go forward, it will annihilate us.” His was not a national appeal, but a class one – “if the working class continues to default, fascism will become generalized throughout the world”. The only chance for hope lay with the left – the need was there to build alternative movements, to persuade the workers and above all the young, that their best grounds for hope lay elsewhere.

Guérin’s journalism was published in the Socialist paper, *Le Populaire*. Much of the French left treated it initially with scepticism, but the more that independent reports tended to corroborate one another, the more people began to understand the threat. *The Brown Plague* was published in book form 1933. The following year saw the first of the great united anti-fascist demonstrations that would culminate in the election of the French Popular Front. After 1936, the French Prime Minister was Guérin’s old editor at *Le Populaire*, Léon Blum. Guérin absorbed himself in the rival ideas of the French syndicalists, Rosmer and Monatte, the Trotskyists and the Socialist Left of Marcel Pivert. Prior to 1939, he sided politically with the latter. Through 1938 and 1939, Trotsky composed increasingly urgent letters to his young ally, urging him to break all residual, emotional links with the

Socialists.⁴² Daniel Guérin did side with the revolutionary left after 1940, on a long journey that would take him in his last decades to the politics of anarchism and gay liberation.

Returning to the arguments with which this paper opened, what are the most important insights to be gleaned from *The Brown Plague*? We will choose two. One theme of the book – more an anticipation, than a description of a process that had only just begun – was the inevitable destruction of the unruly, civilian SA. Daniel Guérin treated Hitler and fascism as if it was a movement that would reach its defining heights in the destruction of its own supporters. The only other Marxist to have treated this intra-fascist treachery as the key episode was the German socialist Ernst Bloch. His great masterpiece, *The Principle of Hope*, explains Hitler as the personification of the events of 1934, “The petit bourgeois in particular has traditionally been fond of the fist clenched in the pocket; this fist characteristically thumps the wrong man, since it prefers to lash out in the direction of least resistance. Hitler rose out of the Night of the Long Knives, he was called by the masters out of the dream of this night when he became useful to them. The Nazi dream of revenge is also subjectively bottled up, not rebellious; it is blind, not revolutionary rage.”⁴³

Bloch’s last sentence is undoubtedly one with which Daniel Guérin would have concurred. In Leipzig, Guérin jotted down the words of a Brownshirt song, half Communist, half nationalist, with its promises to free the workers from Jewish rule, “I have never heard people sing with such a faith. Never have I seen, even among the Aissaouas of Islam, people so projected out of themselves. I am lost on my feet, motionless in the middle of this mass that would die without interrupting its song.” The appropriation of spectacle threatened to overstep its bounds. “Already the rumour is spreading that the Storm Trooper sections are getting impatient, even mutinous, I think to myself it will be necessary to satisfy this crowd – or else crush it, brutally.”⁴⁴

For *The Brown Plague*, 1933 was a story of destructions. The first, and subsidiary, was the pending defeat of any Nazi “leftist” minority. The second, and decisive, was the prior destruction of the unequivocal Socialist militants of Red Wedding and elsewhere. The most important point, therefore, is Guérin’s practical advice – never to underestimate the potential of fascism to win converts even among the poor and dispossessed by posing as a revolutionary force to overturn society. It was not despite some adherence to a dry and “predictable” Marxism that Guérin could see the threat. Instead, it was precisely his determination that the workers should rule for themselves and in their own name that made him treat such shifts in popular consciousness with real seriousness and in 1932 and 1933, with alarm.

Notes

1. D. Guérin, *Sur La Fascisme - I - La Peste Brune* (Paris: Maspero, 1965). It was published as with an accompanying volume, D. Guérin, *Sur Le Fascisme - II - Fascisme et Grand Capital* (Paris: Maspero, 1965). A new edition was published in 1969.
2. *La Peste Brune A Passé Par Là* (Paris: Librairie du Travail, 1933).
3. D. Guérin, *La Peste brune a passé par là: un Témoignage sur les debuts du régime Nazi* (Paris: Éditions Universelles, 1945).
4. The genesis of this later manuscript is discussed in D. Guérin, *The Brown Plague: Travels in Late Weimar and Early Nazi Germany* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp.43-6 and 77-80.
5. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, pp.49-50.
6. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.48.
7. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.50.
8. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.52.
9. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.53.
10. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.59.
11. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.65.
12. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.63.
13. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, pp.56, 68-70.
14. D. Renton, 'Three documents by Victor Serge, 1921-6', *What Next* 27, autumn 2003, pp.37-44.
15. C. Fischer, 'The SA of the NSDAP: Social Background and Ideology of the Rank and File in the Early 1930s', *Journal of Contemporary History* 17/4 (1982), pp.651-670.
16. Cited in M. Kitchen, *Fascism* (London: Croom Helm, 1976), p.2
17. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.65.
18. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.57.
19. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, pp.53, 55, 71.
20. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.72.
21. I. Kershaw, *Hitler: Hubris 1889-1936* (London: Allen Lane, 1998); I. Kershaw, *Hitler: Nemesis 1936-1945* (London: Allen Lane, 2000); R. J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich* (London: Penguin, 2004); M. Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (London: Macmillan, 2000).
22. T. P. Linehan, *East London For Mosley: The British Union of Fascists in East London and South-West Essex 1933-1940* (London: Frank Cass, 1996); J. V. Gottlieb, *Feminine Fascism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2000); R. C. Thurlow, *Fascism in Britain* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1999).
23. R. Eatwell, 'Towards a New Model of Generic Fascism', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4/2 (1992); R. Eatwell, *Fascism. A History* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1995); R. Griffin (ed.), *International Fascism* (London: Edward Arnold, 1998).
24. For a systematic analysis of Griffin, Eatwell and their school, see the early chapters of D. Renton, *Fascism: Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto, 1999).
25. R. Eatwell, 'The Nature of Generic Fascism: The "Fascist Minimum" and the "Fascist Matrix"', in U. Backes (ed.), *Rechtsextreme Ideologien im 20 und 21 Jahrhundert* (Cologne: Bohlau Verlag, 2003).
26. R. Griffin, 'The Primacy of Culture: the Current Growth (or Manufacture) of Consensus within Fascist Studies', *Journal of Contemporary History* 35/1 (2002).
27. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.85.
28. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.91.
29. The account in *The Brown Plague* can also be compared to the one which appears in Guérin's better-known but perhaps more schematic work, *Fascism and Big Business*, published in 1936. Here Guérin spoke of "fascist demagoguery", or "'anti-capitalist' capitalism". As in the earlier book, his general approach was to concentrate on the contradictions of fascist rhetoric. If anything, he tended to concentrate more in his later work on the refusal of fascism to deliver in government. He described how fascism, in opposition, left "a door ajar for the management of production by the workers". In power, by contrast, fascism offered workers the corporatism that they knew from social democracy, combined with political authoritarianism and the imprisonment of trade unionists. D. Guérin, *Fascism and Big Business* (New York: Pathfinder, 1973), pp.88, 98.
30. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.102.
31. D. Guérin, *La Lutte de Classes sous la première République: Bourgeois et "bras nus" 1793-1797* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946).
32. Evans, *Coming*, p.461.
33. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.96.
34. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.101. The song it seems was based rather on an old sea shanty. There was a similar tune, which some left-wingers had used to sing in honour of the Battleship Potemkin, but this probably was not the root. More interesting would be the satirical uses to which the Horst Wessel song would be put in war, but that of course would come later. G. Broderich, 'Das Horst-Wessel-Lied: A Reappraisal', *International Folklore Review* 10 (1995), pp.100-27.
35. R. Griffin, 'Party Time: Nazism as a Temporal Revolution', *History Today* 49/4 (1999), pp.43-50.
36. R. Griffin, "'Awakening the dead": towards a higher synthesis in Marxist conceptualizations of fascism', paper presented to 'The Labour Movement and Fascism' conference, Leeds, November 2003.
37. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.87.
38. E. Leslie, 'Synthetic Chemistry and the Fate of History in the Third Reich', paper presented to the London Socialist Historians Group seminar 'New Approaches to Socialist History', June 2004; also E. Leslie, *Synthetic Worlds: Nature, Art and the Chemical Industry* (London: Reaktion Books, 2005).
39. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.111.
40. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, pp.122, 126.
41. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.130.
42. L. Trotsky, *On France* (New York: Pathfinder, 1979), pp.213, 246.
43. E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972), pp.30-1.
44. Guérin, *Brown Plague*, p.149.

The Marxist Theory of Crisis

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ACADEMIC economic theory has become “crisis conscious”. This is a new phenomenon, resulting from the shattering experience of the world economic crisis of 1929-32. From the times of Adam Smith and Ricardo up to recent times the prevalent opinion among bourgeois economists was that the “free enterprise” system was self-regulating, automatically adapting supply and demand, and crises were just exceptional disturbances like floods and earthquakes, the explanation of which was not the business of economists who had proved to their satisfaction that such a thing as general overproduction could not exist. This attitude was aptly summed up by Professor Hicks when he wrote in his review of Keynes’ *General Theory of Employment*: “Ordinary (static) economic theory explains to us the working of the economic system in ‘normal’ conditions. Booms and slumps, however, are deviations from this norm, and are thus to be explained by some disturbing cause.”¹

It is a symptom of the general crisis of capitalism that this naive faith in the internal harmony of the capitalist system is shattered in the minds both of practical businessmen and of the theoreticians of capitalist economy. The fear that the boom in USA must end sooner or later is as general now as was the belief in everlasting prosperity in 1929. In the last two decades more theories of the trade cycle were produced than in the preceding century, although the periodical alternation of booms and slumps is as old as industrial capitalism.

But none of the numerous bourgeois theories explains why from the very conditions of capitalist production periodical crises arise from necessity. These economists still believe that crises could be avoided, the swings of the economic pendulum damped, the irregularities of the cycle ironed out, by some adaptation of the monetary or credit system, by state intervention, by increased “elas-

ticity” of wages or by a more equal distribution of incomes with the help of taxation; shortly, by reforms which would improve the workings of the capitalist system without touching its basis – private property in the means of production. The various proposals for guaranteeing full employment are based on this conviction that nothing is fundamentally wrong with the economic system.

While for the apologists of capitalism, economic crisis is a dismal paradox which has not so much to be explained as to be explained away, for Marx and Engels, the revolutionary critics of this system, economic crisis was the most obvious, the outstanding empirical proof of their fundamental ideas, proof of the irreconcilable, ever sharpening internal contradictions of capitalism, its growing inability to put to productive use the tremendous productive forces which have grown up under this system. In the writings of the founders of scientific socialism, we find numerous references both to the theoretical explanation of capitalist crisis and to the revolutionary implications of these recurring upheavals.

Unfortunately, Marx was not able to complete his great work on capitalist economy as he had outlined it in his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* in 1859. Therefore we do not find an elaborate and systematic presentation of the theory of crisis in the writings of Marx. But it can be claimed that all the elements of such a theory are to be found in *Capital* and in the *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, posthumously published by K. Kautsky.²

But as the different aspects of this complicated problem are treated by Marx in various contexts, his ideas have been interpreted in different ways by Marxists and it is not easy to connect the links in one consistent chain of thought.

There are two basic ideas in Marx’s analysis:

1. Capitalist crisis is an expression of the underlying basic contradiction of capitalist society; the social character of production and the private

character of appropriation and consequently the tendency of boundless, rapid expansion of production on the one hand, the limitations of consumption on the other hand.

2. The internal contradictions involved in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, find expression in crises.

These two ideas are closely interconnected, they are not two alternative theories between which we have to choose, they are two aspects of one clear-cut economic theory.³

A theory of crisis, to be satisfactory, has to explain the trade cycle, the regular periodical alternation of booms and slumps, both the fact that for some time a relative equilibrium, a certain proportion between the various branches of production, between supply and demand, is established and the fact that this equilibrium cannot be maintained and breaks down suddenly and violently. Therefore neither underconsumption nor the anarchy of production in itself can be regarded as an explanation of crisis.

Marx and Engels repudiated a crude, oversimplified theory of underconsumption.⁴

Marx points out that “crises are precisely always preceded by a period in which wages rise generally” and that this “relative prosperity” of the working class occurs always only “as a harbinger of a coming crisis.” Engels stresses the point that underconsumption of the masses, i.e. the limitation of their consumption to the bare minimum, existed thousands of years before capitalism emerged, but only with capitalism does the new phenomenon of overproduction emerge. Underconsumption is a chronic fact in capitalist society while crises recur periodically.

If we take into account that even in modern monopoly capitalism with its high concentration of production and capital there are many thousands of independent productive units, every one producing for the unpredictable contingencies of a vast market, every one dependent on the decisions of millions of other private producers and consumers, and every one directed only by the desire to make the maximum profit, it is not so astonishing that this absurd system tends to break down. It is astonishing that it functions somehow, for some time. The whole process of production, normally a process of expanding production, can only continue if the mass of capitalist producers find on the market a sufficient demand to enable them to sell their product at what they regard as a reasonable profit and a sufficient supply of the means of production (machinery, raw materials and labour) and at such prices as will enable them to reproduce their capital, to continue their production on an enlarged scale.

Marx (in Volume II of *Capital*) derived a formula which gives the quantitative relations which must obtain between the two main departments of social production, the production of means of production

and the production of means of consumption, to make expanded reproduction of capital accumulation possible.

As long as commodities are produced and exchanged in these proportions production can continue on an ever-enlarged scale.

This equation symbolises in fact numerous quantitative relations of this type.

How are these proportions established and maintained in an unplanned market economy? By the so-called price-mechanism, the “law of supply and demand”. When there are deviations from the socially necessary proportions, the over-produced commodities will fall in price, the under-produced commodities will rise, an under-average rate of profit will be realised in the over-expanded branches, an over-average rate in the under-sized branches, capital will flow from the first to the second till equilibrium is restored.

In this way, for some time (to a certain degree), with continuous deviations and vacillations, a relative equilibrium of supply and demand can be maintained. *Partial* crises of overproduction, overproduction of some commodities parallel to underproduction of other commodities, are thus a regular feature of capitalist economy.

But those economists are mistaken who think they can explain the periodical crises from disproportions of this sort.⁵

The anarchy of production only explains the *possibility* of crises, it does not explain their necessity. If we abstract from the basically dynamic character of capitalist production the rapid growth of the productivity of labour, it is easy to construct a model of an expanding capitalist system which would maintain the equilibrium once established, by increasing working class and capitalist consumption at the same rate as the increase in capital and output.

Capitalism is distinguished from all previous systems of production by the continuous, rapid growth in the productivity of labour which is reflected in the steady growth of the organic composition of capital, in the growing mass of “dead labour” put into motion by living labour.⁶

Capitalism revealed the tremendous productive forces which – as the *Communist Manifesto* says – “slumbered in the lap of social labour”. For it is not the ingenuity of the capitalist class which develops the productivity of labour on an unprecedented scale. It is the higher stage of integration of social labour, the development of the division of labour and the assembly and organisation of thousands of workers in one process of production, and the application of science to the technique of production, which achieves these miracles of productivity.

It is the accumulation of capital itself which implies the constant growth of productivity. It makes the application of technical improvements possible on a larger scale, and the concentration

of production in itself without technical revolutions enhances productivity as a growing share of the total is produced in more efficient large-scale enterprises.

This social character of production, which causes the volume of production to rise much more quickly than the numbers of workers employed in production, conflicts with private appropriation, the fact that the whole product is appropriated by the private owners of the means of production for whom the realisation of a maximum rate of profit is the only motive for production. To achieve this the capitalist has both to keep down wages and to limit his own consumption so that the maximum is left for accumulation. Both these tendencies imply the restriction of the consuming power of society. So the contradiction results which finds its expression in *general overproduction*, the main feature of crisis.

The so-called orthodox economists never even came near to an explanation of crisis as they refused to recognise the possibility of general overproduction. They accepted the dogma, first pronounced by J.B. Say and then adopted by Ricardo, that total demand always equals total supply, that production creates incomes equal to the values produced.

The price, according to this theory, consists of the sum of wages, profits and rent. So total income must be equal to the total value produced.

This specious argument forgets, first, that the value of a commodity becomes income only after it has been sold, and while wages as a rule have to be paid beforehand, profit income arises only when the product has been sold at profitable prices, secondly that income is not identical with demand, for a capitalist who has exchanged his commodities against money is not forced to exchange his money for commodities. "Say's Law" begs the question by assuming that commodities produced are commodities sold and it fails to take into account the fundamental difference between the function of money as a medium of circulation, serving merely the interchange of different use-values, and money as the embodiment of value in a capitalist economy where the realisation of surplus value, the accumulation of capital, and therefore the appropriation of more and more money is the only purpose of those who dominate production.

Marx explains how the dual character of a commodity as use-value and value appearing in exchange, involves the *possibility* of crisis. The fact that commodities are useful, needed to satisfy human wants, does not guarantee that they are saleable at prices corresponding to their values and realising the surplus value which alone makes production worth while from the point of view of a capitalist producer.

When the value aspect of commodities finds a separate embodiment in money, the "general commodity" which in itself has no use-value, the

same contradiction reappears and reveals the possibility of crisis. An exchange of commodities, mediated by money, is not barter. It consists of two separate acts. "If the interval in time between the two complementary phases of the complete metamorphosis of a commodity become too great, if the split between the sale and the purchase become too pronounced, the intimate connection between them, their oneness, asserts itself by producing a crisis."⁷

A theory of the trade cycle has to explain both why production can expand over a period of time in spite of the underlying permanent contradiction between the increasing productive power and the limited consumption capacity, and why this contradiction must in the end find expression in a violent crisis. The answer to these interrelated problems lies in the conditions of reproduction of fixed capital on the one hand, and in the contradictions involved in the tendency of the rate of profit to fall on the other hand.

The classical economists, A. Smith and D. Ricardo, regarded a long-term trend of the rate of profit to fall as a fact proved by experience, by the continuous fall of the rate of interest to 3-5 per cent in the middle of the sixteenth to 3-5 per cent at the end of the eighteenth centuries.⁸

Marx's theory connects the tendency of the profit rate to fall with the increasing productivity of labour by means of the increase in the organic composition of capital. If – using the usual symbols – we denote the organic composition of the capital c/v by r , the (annual) rate of surplus-value by s' and the rate of profit by p , we have:

$$p = \frac{s}{c + v} = \frac{s'}{r + 1}$$

If s' , the rate of exploitation, remains constant, the rate of profit must fall as the organic composition of capital (r) increases with the progress of technique, which implies that more machinery and raw material is used and used up per worker. But p will fall, too, if s' is growing at a slower pace than $r+1$. Generally speaking, the rise of s' which is a normal feature in capitalism, is a force counteracting the *falling* tendency of p and may even reverse it – for a time.⁹ The other main counteracting tendency is the depreciation of constant capital. The same process of increasing productivity which appears in a higher *technical* composition of capital (a bigger *volume* of machinery and raw material per worker) reduces the value of those commodities of which c consists so that to this extent the increase of the organic composition is checked.

Discussing the internal contradictions of the law of the tendency of the rate of profit to fall, Marx says: "These different influences make themselves felt, now more side by side in space, now more successively in time. Periodically the conflict of

antagonistic agencies seeks vent in crises.”¹⁰

The long-term tendency of the rate of profit to fall is important as one of the causes of the continuous sharpening of the internal contradictions of capitalist society. For an understanding of the trade cycle, however, we have to analyse the movement of the rate of profit during the cycle. For this purpose we have to drop the assumption (made by Marx when concerned with the long-term analysis) that prices equal values. The regular deviation of market prices from values is an essential element of the cyclical movement.

The general price level and the rate of profit go up in the phases of revival and boom, they drop suddenly and violently in the crisis, and depression persists till prices and the rate of profit begin to rise again.

The cyclical movement of the rate of profit is in a sense the motive force behind the cycle. For capitalists expand production when profit prospects are bright and stop expansion or even contract when profit prospects deteriorate.

Some economists of the subjectivist school solemnly “explain” the trade cycle by “a rhythmical recurrence of errors of optimism and pessimism”. But even if there are “errors” of judgement, e.g. over-estimation of the prospects of profits at the end of the boom, they are not essential. Essential is the fact that for a considerable time there are good and even growing profits, justifying “optimism”, while, sooner or later, irrespective of the feelings of the capitalists, the tendency is reversed and a more or less sudden fall in the rate of profit sets in.¹¹

On the face of it this seems to contradict the Marxist analysis. For the upward phase of the cycle is just the time when, with increasing investments, accumulation of capital and concentration of production, technical improvements, etc., the organic composition of capital is growing, the tendency of the rate of profit to fall is developing. But here one must bear in mind that the fall in the rate of profit becomes effective only when market prices go down, corresponding to a general reduction of values.

If by technical progress costs of production are reduced while prices of finished goods remain stable or are even rising, then evidently the rate of profit will rise and not fall. And this is just what normally happens in the upward phase of the cycle.

So just when the value of commodities is falling, prices tend to rise. This is not a logical contradiction in the labour theory of value, but a real contradiction in capitalist economy.

Prices are kept above values as long as demand exceeds supply. At the end of a depression stocks are at an ebb, the productive apparatus is run down, necessary replacements have not been made, there is a low rate of interest, reflecting an abundant supply of capital looking out for profitable investment. The possibilities of satisfying this pent-

up demand are, however, limited by a productive capacity reduced in crisis and depression. A substantial increase in the supply of consumption goods will not begin before a re-equipment and expansion of industrial plant has been effected.

This is the basis of the revival in production goods industries. Growing employment in the investment goods industries increases workers’ incomes, and so the demand for consumption goods expands again. This is the way in which one cogwheel drives the other in the upward phase of the cycle.

Reproduction of fixed capital is concentrated in the upward phases of the cycle. In crisis and depression hardly any net investments take place and even replacements are reduced to a minimum. Marx stresses the connection between this discontinuity in the reproduction of fixed capital and the trade cycle:

“It is true that the periods in which capital is invested are different in time and place. But a crisis is always the starting point of a large amount of new investments. Therefore it also constitutes, from the point of view of society, more or less of a new material basis for the next cycle of turnover.”¹²

It is easy to understand why the process of expansion, once it has got under way, is cumulative. It cannot be proved that there is a constant relation between the amount of net investments and the growing demand for consumption goods – as the theory of the multiplier implies¹³ – but there is no doubt that an increase in the production of each of the two main departments stimulates production in the other department. The problem is why this process cannot go on without limit, why the boom must end.

The question is then: Why cannot the rate of profit be maintained? The rate of profit depends on the general level of prices compared with the cost of production. Both tend to go up in the upward phase of the cycle. As long as prices are not forced down by overproduction, the rate of profit tends to grow because the increase in the organic composition of capital is overcompensated by the increase in the rate of surplus value.

Technical improvements are introduced by capitalists only because they increase their rate of profit. They reduce the cost of production per unit, which means extra profits – as long as prices are not reduced to a level corresponding to the reduced value. Marx stresses this point very clearly:

“No capitalist voluntarily introduces a new method of production, no matter how much more productive it may be, and how much it may increase the rate of surplus value, so long as it reduces the rate of profit. But every new method of production of this sort cheapens the commodities. Hence the capitalist sells them originally above their prices of production, or, perhaps, above their value. He pockets the difference which exists

between the prices of production and the market-prices of the other commodities produced at higher prices of production. He can do this, because the average labour time required socially for the production of these commodities is higher than the labour time required under the new method of production. His method of production is above the social average. But competition generalises it and subjects it to the general law. Then sets in the fall of the rate of profit – perhaps first in this sphere of production and then levels with the other spheres – which is, therefore, wholly independent of the will of the capitalists.”¹⁴

It might be assumed that extra profits made in this way are made at the expense of other sections of the capitalist class and do not increase the rate of profit for the capitalist class as a whole. Marx is explicit on this point:

“It might be asked, whether the causes checking the fall of the rate of profit, but always hastening it in the last analysis, include the temporary rise in surplus value above the average level, which recur now in this, now in that line of production for the benefit of those individual capitalists who make use of inventions, etc., before they are generally introduced. The question must be answered in the affirmative.”¹⁵

This is so because wage rates never increase in step with the growing productivity of labour. Wage costs per unit are reduced or – this is only another expression of the same fact – the rate of exploitation grows. In fact, workers frequently have to put up a stiff fight even to maintain their real wages while living costs are going up. But even if they succeed in increasing their real wages which the better organised skilled workers as a rule achieve when the demand for labour is high in times of prosperity, wages still lag behind productivity. Those interpreters of Marxist theory who try to explain the fall in the rate of profit by a fall in the rate of exploitation, caused by wage increases in a time when the industrial reserve army is absorbed in production and demand for labour exceeds supply, are as far away from the facts of modern capitalism as from the spirit of Marxism.¹⁶

It is true that when the general price level rises, the prices of the elements of constant capital go up too, and this tends to increase the organic composition of capital and to reduce the rate of profit. But firstly as far as fixed capital is concerned the rate of profit is as a rule calculated in relation to the capital actually invested when the turn-over began, not in relation to what plant and equipment would be at current prices, and secondly when raw material prices rise the increased costs are automatically calculated in the prices of finished goods – as long as goods find a market at prices of production.

The crisis sets in when at the inflated prices which have been established during the boom a considerable part of the commodities produced are

not saleable any more, when general overproduction becomes apparent. As it takes years from the beginning of the large new investments undertaken in the revival phase of the cycle, to the full operation of the new plant, when the market is flooded with consumption goods, there is no gradual adaptation of supply and demand, of actual market prices and prices of production, but this adaptation can only be effected by way of periodical catastrophes as Marx explains:

“As the process of circulation of capital is not a matter of days, but lasts for a longer period till capital returns to its starting point, as this period coincides with the period when market prices are adapted to production prices, as during this period great revolutions and changes happen on the market, as great changes take place in the productivity of labour, therefore also in the real value of commodities, it is very clear that from the starting point – the presupposed capital – to its return after one of these periods, big catastrophes are bound to happen and elements of crises must accumulate and develop.”¹⁷

The process of adaptation of prices to values or to production prices follows the pattern of other dialectical processes. There may be some gradual, continuous adaptation, but this does not solve the contradictions, the tension is growing till it finds a violent solution in the sudden slump of the crises.

Overproduction is always overproduction *at certain prices*. The market could absorb all the commodities produced in the boom period – at lower prices. But at lower prices the original capital would not be replaced with the usual average profit.

So capitalists at the peak of a boom are faced with a dilemma. When they observe that the demand is flagging, they may first reduce prices and try, at the same time, to reduce their costs of production. The largest, technically best developed enterprises may maintain their rate of profit in this way for a time while even increasing production and conquering a bigger share of the market. Smaller and weaker enterprises, forced to follow suit, will not be able to compensate losses in prices by reduction of production costs. Their rate of profit is falling, they are threatened with losses.

But when they reduce production, they cannot make full use of the capacity of their plant, they are not able to reproduce their capital with the expected profit either.

So with overproduction and the fall of prices the fall of the rate of profit sets in.

If there were continuous adaptation of prices to value, as they are being reduced by growing productivity, and if the nominal income of the workers and the other productive classes would remain stable, purchasing power would grow in step with production and no general overproduction would arise. But then there would be a continuous fall of the rate of profit, and the cap-

italists would lose their incentive to accumulation.

The demand of the working class for consumption goods cannot offer a sufficient market because it lags behind the growing productivity of labour.¹⁸

Nor does the purchasing power of the lower middle class increase, if it increases at all, at the same rate as large-scale industrial production.

They are losing ground in the competition with big capital, and can hardly maintain their share of the national income. This holds true particularly for the peasants. As all real crises are world market crises, and in the world as a whole the vast majority of the population are small holders, the importance of this fact – the poverty of the masses of the agrarian population – is evident. They share the catastrophe of the slump while they hardly share the benefits of the boom. Seasonal variations of agricultural income, at its lowest before the harvest, may explain the fact that most of the crises begin in either autumn or spring.¹⁹

The essential question, however, is whether capitalist income, the growing sum of profits, interests, and rents, can compensate the relative decrease of mass demand. This would be so if profits were used mainly for the individual consumption of capitalists, if personal luxury were the purpose of capitalist economy. But capitalist reality is not like that.

Capitalists “save” part of their profits for investment, not because their “propensity to consume” is lacking, but because their power as capitalists, their chance of continuing their profitable business, their ability to stand up against competitors, depends on the amount of capital they command. Therefore accumulation of capital, not maximisation of luxury consumption, is the driving force of capitalist production.

In this way both workers’ and capitalists’ demand for consumption goods tends to lag behind growing production. Therefore Marx in developing the contradiction between production and consumption stresses not only the reduction of the consumption of the great mass of the population “to a variable minimum within more or less narrow limits”, but also the restriction of consuming power “by the tendency to accumulate, the greed for an expansion of capital and a production of surplus value on an enlarged scale”.²⁰

Keynes in his *General Theory* propounds the idea that deficiency of demand is the basic cause of mass unemployment, but he fails to take into account the dependence of demand for investment goods on demand for consumption goods. This is his criticism of underconsumption theories:

“Practically I only differ from these schools of thought in thinking that they may lay a little too much emphasis on increased consumption at a time when there is still much social advantage to be obtained from increased investment. Theoretically, however, they are open to the criticism of neglecting

the fact that there are two ways to expand output” (loc. cit., p.825).

“Theoretically”, there are no limits either to increasing the means of consumption (as human needs grow with the means to satisfy them) or to increasing investments, i.e. improving and expanding the means of production. In a capitalist society, however, investments are limited just by the limitation in the amount of consumption goods which can be profitably sold. Keynes’ criticism amounts to this:

If there is overproduction of textiles, let us make more spindles; if not enough cars, locomotives and other useful things made of steel can be sold, let us produce more steel and build new furnaces! It is the essence of commodities that they must have also use value to have an exchange value and the use value of investment goods is to help to produce consumption goods, a simple truth which is forgotten also by practical capitalists as long as prosperity prevails.

When the crisis begins, the fall in production is more marked in investment goods than in consumption goods. If demand for consumption goods only remains stable after having steadily grown for some time, consumption goods production could be maintained at that level for some time. But demand for production goods would be instantly cut down to the necessities of simple production.²¹

This explains why overproduction may appear first in a striking way in production goods. Nevertheless, it is evident that the real starting point of the crisis must always be in deficient demand for consumption goods.²²

If we remember that throughout the upward phase of the cycle productivity of labour is growing, the sudden and violent fall of prices, characteristic of crisis, is understood as a violent adaptation of the level of market prices to the level of value.²³

Prices may swing deeply down below values. “Such a collapse of prices”, Marx says, “merely balances their inflation in preceding periods.”²⁴

This is what Marx has in mind when he says the law of value regulating exchange relations of products according to the labour time socially necessary for their production “asserts itself like an overriding law of nature. The law of gravity thus asserts itself when a house falls about our ears”.²⁵

For a clear understanding of the connection between overproduction and the fall of the rate of profit we have to distinguish between the cyclical up and down movement and the long term tendency. Marx explains the latter by a permanent feature of capitalist accumulation – the increase in the organic composition of capital:

“If Smith explains the fall of the rate of profit by superabundance of capital, accumulation of capital, then this is regarded as a permanent effect, and this is wrong. However, transitory superabundance of capital, overproduction, crisis, this

is another matter. There are no permanent crises.”²⁶

This is not in contradiction to what Marx says in another context: “Overproduction produces & permanent fall of profit, but it [i.e. overproduction – J.W.] is permanently periodical. It is followed by underproduction, etc. Overproduction follows from the fact that the average mass of the people can never consume more than the average mass of means of consumption, that their consumption does not grow correspondingly with the productivity of labour.”²⁷

In capitalism there is a permanent tendency both to overproduction and to the fall of the rate of profit. But neither of these tendencies is permanently in evidence; they assert themselves periodically in crises. The tendency to a fall in the rate of profit develops during prosperity, but asserts itself in the crisis. The counteracting tendencies come into play again in crisis and depression when prices of raw materials and wages reach their lowest level, existing fixed capital is depreciated and new conditions for profitable investments are thus created.

The depreciation of the elements of constant capital has a contradictory effect: it intensifies the crisis, but it also helps to solve the contradiction which finds expression in crisis.

When a general fall of prices sets in this also cheapens the elements of constant capital. But this is no help to the capitalists, who have to assess their rate of profit by comparing sales proceeds with the capital they have invested before and not with the capital they would need now for renewing their equipment and stocks of raw material. Therefore the reproduction of capital at a new level of technical development and at prices which correspond to this new level is connected with those numerous bankruptcies which are characteristic of crises.

The crises of the twentieth century have been aggravated by the fact that the power of monopoly capitalism is particularly strong in some of the basic raw materials, like iron and steel. When in a general slump of prices the prices of these essential elements of constant capital follow late and slowly in the downward movement, crises become more violent and depressions are prolonged. The adaptation of price levels to the needs of reproduction of capital is delayed by monopoly prices.

“The world market crises”, Marx sums up, “have to be understood as the real condensation and violent solution of all contradictions of bourgeois economy.”²⁸

For the explanation of crisis it is obviously not essential that the rate of profit should actually fall from cycle to cycle; Marx was not dogmatic about this thesis. He says:

“The law therefore shows itself only as a tendency, whose effects become clearly marked only under certain conditions and in the course of long periods.”²⁹

The slackening of accumulation in highly developed industrial countries, the growing

pressure to export capital to backward countries, where the rate of profit is higher, seem sufficient empirical evidence that the tendency asserts itself in the long run. For the theory of crisis, however, the conflict of counteracting causes is essential. The capitalists, fighting against the tendency by pressure on wages, by reducing costs of production with the help of technical improvements, by the struggle for new markets, are intensifying those contradictions which land the whole system in crises.

The Marxist theory makes it clear beyond doubt that there will be crises as long as capitalism exists and that crises tend to become deeper and more violent as the basic contradictions of capitalist production grew.

The progress of technique, the growth of the productivity of labour, which is the necessary precondition of an improvement of the living standard of the people, of progress to a higher level of civilisation, becomes, under the contradictory conditions of the capitalist system, a curse, a cause of permanent economic insecurity, of mass unemployment and recurring crises.

The cure of the evil is not to stop or to retard the development of productive forces, but so to change the basis of economic life that the satisfaction of the needs of the people, instead of capitalist profit, becomes the driving and regulating principle.

Notes

1. *Economic Journal*, June 1936, p.239.
2. These four volumes of contributions to a critical history of economic thought are of inestimable value to every serious student of economics. Vol.II, Part 2, contains a long chapter on “Accumulation of Capital and Crisis”. I learn that a shortened English edition is being prepared by Lawrence and Wishart.
3. The American Marxist, Paul M. Sweezy, in his interesting *The Theory of Capitalist Development* (Dennis Dobson), goes so far as to distinguish between two kinds of crises: those associated with the falling rate of profit and those arising from underconsumption, pp.145ff.
4. *Capital*, Vol.II, pp.475f., Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Third Part, Socialism, III, p.814.
5. The ex-Marxist, K. Kautsky, asserted solemnly that no crises could have been avoided if only capitalists had studied and applied the reproduction schemes of Marx (in his Preface to the German popular edition of Volume II of *Capital*). The reformist illusion that the development of monopolies would lead to an “organised capitalism” without crises (Bernstein, Hilferding) was based on the same mistake.
6. i.e. Machinery (embodying labour) put into motion by man-power. The proportion of constant

capital to total capital is growing larger.

6. Cf. Engels, "Socialism, Utopian and Scientific"; Marx, *Selected Works*, Vol.I, pp.175ff; *Capital*, Vol.III, pp.286-7.

7. *Capital*, Vol.I, pp.87ff. Marx devotes a long, detailed argument to a devastating criticism of Say's dogma in *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, in the Second Part of Vol. II, pp.274ff. J.A. Hobson's critique of Say's Law (*Evolution of Modern Capitalism*, pp.288ff) was obviously written without knowledge of Marx's penetrating analysis. J.M. Keynes knew somehow that Marx did not accept the demand-equals-supply dogma, but his abysmal ignorance of Marx's economic theory finds expression in his slighting reference to "the underworlds of Karl Marx, Silvio Gesell or Major Douglas" (*The General Theory of Employment*, p.32).

8. *The Wealth of Nations*, Book I, Chap.IX.

9. J. Robinson is puzzled by Marx's "drastic inconsistency" which she finds in his demonstration of the tendential fall of p under the assumption of a constant s' while the argument of Vol.I of *Capital* implies a tendency of s' to grow with the growing productivity of labour. (*An Essay on Marxian Economics*, pp.42ff.) The conflict of these counteracting tendencies is expressly dealt with in *Capital*, Vol.III, Chaps.14-15. But as dialectics is a terra incognita for Mrs Robinson, she fails to understand that there is no "inconsistency", but a contradiction in reality reflected in Marx's theory. Also N. Moszkowska in *Das Marx'sche System* (Berlin, 1929) grossly misinterprets Marx when she tries to prove that either p falls with constant s' or s' rises with constant p (p.118).

10. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.15, p.292.

11. In his "Notes on the Trade Cycle" (*General Theory*, Chap.22), Keynes also stresses the psychological element very strongly. "When disillusion falls upon an over-optimistic and over-bought market, it should fall with sudden and even catastrophic force" (p.316). What he calls "the marginal efficiency of capital", though defined with his usual ambiguity and confusion, is roughly the expected rate of profit. About revival he says: "It is not so easy to revive the marginal efficiency of capital, determined, as it is, by the uncontrollable and disobedient psychology of the business world" (p.817). But he hints at least at the objective facts which determine the changing moods of the "business world": "The disillusion comes because doubts suddenly arise concerning the reliability of the prospective yield, perhaps [!] because the current yield shows signs of falling off."

12. *Capital*, Vol.II, p.211.

13. The contradictions in which the Keynesians get involved with their attempts to use the theory of the multiplier as an element of a theory of the cycle were well exposed by G. Haberier in his book, *Prosperity and Depression*, 3rd edition, Chap.13.

14. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.15, pp.310f. I have adapted

Untermann's translation more closely to the original.

15. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.14, p.274.

16. Sweezy and Moszkowska (in their books quoted above) fall into this trap misled by an argument of Marx (in *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.15, p.205), where he discusses the possibility of a crisis arising when an increased capital would not find any exploitable labour. But he stresses more than once the great difference between pointing out diverse possibilities of crises and finding the law of the regular reproduction of crises. See also *Capital*, Vol.III, p.281: "Nothing is more absurd, than to explain a fall in the rate of profit by a rise in the rate of wages", although there may be exceptional cases where this may apply. Marx proved in *Capital*, Vol.I, Chap.25, that as a rule the working population increases more rapidly than the means of employment on account of the growth in the organic composition of capital. He discusses the problems arising from a shortage of labour with reference to England in the fifteenth and during the first half of the eighteenth centuries.

17. *Theorien über den Mehrwert*, II, 2, p.207.

18. This is a common experience which will be confirmed by every trade unionist. There are, however, questionable statistics which try to prove the contrary. E.g. Professor L. Robbins (*The Great Depression*, p.211) compiled an index of consumers' goods production which - from 1924 to 1929 - rose only by 7 per cent, while wage income rose by 12 per cent. But he takes into account only textiles, leather, and food, while the biggest increase was in durable consumers' goods. Motor-car production which played a leading part in this boom increased by 79 per cent, textiles by 33 per cent, tobacco by 43 per cent. The general index of production was up by 83 per cent.

19. Beveridge, *Full Employment*, p.803.

20. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.15, pp.286ff.

21. This is an application of the so-called "acceleration principle". For literature on this principle see Haberier, loc. cit., p.87.

22. Throughout the nineteenth century railways played a leading part in the industrial cycle; after 1900 the electrical industry, mainly in Germany and USA, played a similar part. In Britain textiles used to be ahead of other industries. (Beveridge in the *Economic Journal*, 1939, pp.52ff.) In the 1929 crisis in the USA over-production emerged first in motor cars and other durable consumers' goods.

23. This explains why there was a violent crisis with a big slump of prices in the USA in 1929 although there was no preceding "inflationary" rise of the price level. The increase of productivity by 25 per cent corresponds to a fall in values by 20 per cent. But prices fell only by 10 per cent. It is the relation of prices to values that counts.

24. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.XXX, p.577. There is a small element of truth in the idea, current among modern economists, that there is an alternation of

“inflation” and “deflation” in the trade cycle. This, however, is no explanation of the cycle, but just one of its aspects.

25. *Capital*, Vol.I, p.40 (Allen and Unwin edition). It is evident that Marx refers here to crisis. In a note he quotes Engels: “What are we to think of a law that asserts itself only by periodical revol-

utions?” This idea is also most forcefully expressed in “Wage-Labour and Capital”, Marx, *Selected Works*, Vol.I, p.201.

26. *Theorien*, loc. cit., p.269, note.

27. *Theorien*, loc. cit., p.210.

28. *Theorien*, loc. cit., p.282.

29. *Capital*, Vol.III, Chap.14, p.280.

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REVIEWS

Dr Widgery

Patrick Hutt, *Confronting an Ill Society: David Widgery, General Practice, Idealism and the Chase for Change*, Radcliffe 2004. Paperback, 144pp, £19.95.

Reviewed by David Renton

ONE OF the difficulties of writing a biography of someone who has died recently is the temptation of their friends to demand a role in the story. Some will remind you of their dead friend's many positive characteristics and deny all other blemishes as if they were quite imaginary. Others will insist that any of your protagonist's best known achievements did not belong to them at all; that "David" (or whoever), far from originating the campaign he is said to have led, was in fact only a distant bystander, muscling into events late and with the sole idea of gaining all the credit afterwards. As a biographer, you can only do your best, armed with your protagonist's writing, a historian's guess as to who is right, and ideally by checking as many different views as possible. The interpretation that none of them denies is probably just right.

David Widgery, doyen of *OZ*, the *BMJ*, *Rock Against Racism* and *Socialist Worker*, has surviving friends in abundance. Which makes it heartening that the author of this first biography is a recent medical student who was even not in his teens when Widgery died in October 1992. Patrick Hutt uses Widgery as the start and end of his book but much of the middle is a rather general reflection on the nature of general practice and also of "idealism", the quality that Hutt associates with Widgery's political radicalism and also with the work of being an NHS doctor.

Hutt perceives a profession dominated by new managerial initiatives, by increased integration into the rhythm of the market, by stupidity, bureaucracy, and by a sort of fallback cynicism in face of the tenaciousness of ill health. "Consultants have different interests from GPs, who have different interests from nurses, who all have different interests depending on which part of the country they work in." Against the culture of permanent change, Widgery is seen to have embodied alternative values.

Hutt reads Widgery's life through the prism of his last and greatest book, *Some Lives*, a medical journal turned history, turned autobiography, an account of Widgery's own medical practice in the East End. His socialism is explained in similar terms: "Widgery believed his causes deserved attention

but he also knew that you had to make an argument for them. He drew strength from a belief that his patients and colleagues were especially hard done by. They were already poor and working in depressing circumstances. The last thing they needed were changes making life more difficult.... This is not to say that he did not possess a wider view, merely that he thought that taking a narrow and extreme view was a necessary tactic."

One of the first reviews of *Confronting an Ill Society* appeared in *Socialist Review*, where a former medical colleague of David's complained that Hutt's politics were hazy and that he had relied too much on other people's opinions. Perhaps the silliest of these, *Socialist Review* concluded, was the quote Patrick Hutt cites from another doctor Trevor Turner who told him that if he was still alive Widgery would be working for New Labour. Definitely, Hutt should have seen through such nonsense.

Widgery acted at various stages as a guiding influence to half a dozen of the best-known names of British feminism, a similar number of early gay socialists, and countless other activists. Hutt passes the politicians by, concentrating on doctors who knew David, some of them barely. The best anecdotes are missing as a result and even the quotes from Widgery's books are not his sharpest, nor his funniest, but come from the frequently more constrained passages of Widgery on medicine.

Confronting an Ill Society does suffer from a surfeit of sources, and those often of the wrong sort. The list of people who dedicated obituaries to Widgery, following his death at a party in October 1992, counted Paul Foot, Richard Neville, Mike Rosen, Raph Samuel, Sheila Rowbotham and Darcus Howe. By the time Widgery died in the early 1990s, no one but he could have kept them in a room together. The sparks between them might have enlightened a different book.

The last word should belong not to the book but its protagonist. David Widgery wrote several obituaries, the most poignant of which was dedicated to the magazine *OZ*, where his first and some of his liveliest journalism had been published: "The last part of *OZ*'s life was spent in a wistful melancholy.... He was happiest among friends reminiscing and he would talk of the old days with a bewildered tenderness. The circumstances of *OZ*'s tragically early death remain unclear. Whether *OZ* is dead, of suicide or sexual excess, or whether *OZ* is alive and operating under a series of new names is unclear at the moment. What is clear is that *OZ* bizarrely and for a short period expressed the energy of a lot of us. We regret his passing."

Media Bias and the Left

James Curran, Ivor Gaber and Julian Petley, *Culture Wars: The Media and the British Left*, Edinburgh University Press, 2005. Paperback, 316pp, £14.99.

Reviewed by Bob Pitt

THIS BOOK has a rather narrower focus than the title implies, concentrating as it does on the media's treatment of the Labour Left in London. James Curran analyses the campaign against the GLC in 1981-86 and Julian Petway the parallel attacks on Left-controlled local authorities of the period, while Ivor Gaber brings the story up to date with an account of the propaganda war against Ken Livingstone two decades later, when the '80s stereotypes of "Red Ken" and the "loony Left" were dusted off in an attempt to discredit and provoke public opposition to the congestion charge. The final two chapters assess the influences shaping the media and the impact of right-wing bias on popular political consciousness.

Petley's detailed investigation of the false stories about left-wing councils in the '80s is of particular interest. He shows how the notorious "Baa Baa Black Sheep" story, claiming that a local authority had banned school children from singing the song because it was deemed to be racist, which was attributed to several councils – first Hackney, then Haringey and finally Islington – was in fact a media-generated fraud. The same methods are of course still used today, though the targets may have changed. Hence the absurd reports that Lambeth and Islington councils (both under Lib Dem control) had "abolished Christmas" because they referred officially to "festive" or "celebration" (rather than "Christmas") lights. The obvious point that the neutral term had been chosen to take account of the fact that the lights were also used to celebrate the Hindu festival of Diwali did not prevent the *Daily Express* from running a front-page story headlined "Christmas is Banned: It Offends Muslims".

Culture Wars reveals another interesting connection between the '80s campaign against the Labour Left and the current wave of media-inspired anti-Muslim bigotry – namely reporter John Ware, who was responsible for the August 2005 Panorama Special that falsely depicted the Muslim Council of Britain as a hotbed of extremism. It turns out that Ware (a former *Sun* reporter, according to Julian Petley) headed a similarly scurrilous Panorama programme in 1987 entitled "Brent Schools – Hard Left Rules". Petley notes that "this particular edition of Panorama provoked an unusually large number of complaints". Regarding Ware's interview with Brent council leader Merle Amory, Petley writes that "the sole purpose behind Ware's interviewing techniques was to get Amory to make an incriminating remark about Trotskyist penetration of Labour". Amory and her fellow Labour councillors "were

never allowed freely to put their own or the council's point of view, unlike those critical of the council's policies – their function in the programme was simply to stand at the receiving end of criticisms levelled by their opponents and reinforced not only by Ware himself but by the very manner in which they were actually interviewed." I imagine Iqbal Sacranie knows exactly how they must have felt.

Curran demonstrates that the media onslaught on the Labour Left had little influence on elections in the local authorities under attack. Here Labour remained broadly popular with voters, whose own direct experience of councils under Left control ran counter to the media campaign and undermined its credibility. However, for voters outside London (or other leftist local authorities like Liverpool and Sheffield) who relied for their information on a politically biased press, the impact was different. Curran argues that media attacks on the Left did make a significant contribution to the Tory general election victory in 1987. No less importantly, he also shows how the "political elite" embraced the media myth that the Labour Left was unelectable, paving the way for and legitimising the Labour Party leadership's subsequent shift to the right.

A New Moscow Trial?

Michael Barratt Brown, Edward S. Herman and David Peterson, *The Trial of Slobodan Milosevic*, Spokesman Books, 2004. Pamphlet, 80pp, £5.00

Reviewed by Ian Richardson

DEVELOPMENTS since the early 1990s in Yugoslavia have posed many challenges for the Left in Britain. With a few honourable exceptions, most notably the SWP and what remained of the "Bennite" current in the Labour Party, most of the Left failed to fully grasp what was happening in Yugoslavia and to consistently oppose imperialist intervention. The Hague Tribunal, which seeks "justice" for the victims of Milosevic, is the latest of these challenges. This pamphlet seeks to answer the question: "What purpose does the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia serve?"

The answer is well worth reading, providing as it does further evidence that imperialist intervention exacerbated the problems in Yugoslavia rather than providing peace and security, as well as exposing the truth behind the Tribunal. It does not aim to be more than an expose of the court, though, so readers will have to consult the works of Kate Hudson, Peter Gowan and others for more in-depth analyses of Western intervention in the region.

The publication is divided into two parts. First, an in-depth analysis of the transcripts of the trial by Michael Barratt Brown. Second, a "study in propaganda" by Herman and Peterson critiquing the reporting of *New York Times* correspondent

Marlise Simons.

Barrett Brown starts from a point which should be obvious – that the degeneration and break-up of Tito's Yugoslavia was a reactionary process, with horrendous consequences for millions of people. He rightly argues that "the main responsibility for the break-up of Yugoslavia and the subsequent civil war lies with outside forces, primarily German and American, who fought out their own rivalry on the bodies of the Yugoslav peoples" (p.7).

The validity of the court is dubious to say the least under current international law, although it has received surprising amounts of support from liberal leftist elements tied to the agenda of "cosmopolitanism". The true nature of the Tribunal, which received at least qualified support originally from elements such as *Red Pepper* contributor John Palmer, is to further pursue and legitimise the agenda of the NATO intervention.

Just one illustration of this is how the Tribunal has been funded. Whilst it was supposed to be funded out of the UN budget, "in fact it has depended on US and other governments' funding, on donations from Soros and other private donors, with equipment and staff seconded by NATO members" (p.11), with \$3 million coming from the US in 1994-5, at a time when it was failing to meet its UN obligations.

Finally, Barratt Brown rightly points out that to expose the hypocrisy and aggressive actions of the Western powers is not to excuse any war crimes committed on the Serbian side. Rather, it is central to being able to grasp the dynamics in Eastern Europe today, where the US seeks to further strengthen its support and bases, in order to isolate Russia and be able to strike against any other "rogue" regimes, whether by military or political means.

Herman and Peterson's contribution is useful in terms of illustrating Barratt Brown's key points, rather than being a sophisticated analysis of the political situation. Putting Simons' reporting to a vigorous test, they show that bias was there in every aspect. From the number of witnesses quoted on each "side", to the tone of the reporting, to the use of quotation marks, each article was designed in such a way as to demonise the Serbian side and justify US intervention. The US is presented as being on the side of "international justice", despite its refusal to back the ICC or the UN. Crucially, "when the issue of NATO culpability in the deliberate bombing of civilian facilities came up during and after the 78-day bombing, Simons and her paper evaded the issue and provided only NATO tribunal apologetics" (p.37).

(Indeed, the authors go as far as to compare the "trial" of Milosevic to the judicial frame-up of Trotsky in the Soviet Union in the 1930s, stressing its political, public relations and pre-arranged aspects. Whether this is a valid comparison, I shall leave to other readers to decide.)

The most worrying thing about this of course is not that US imperialism and its allies would lie, or

that the bourgeois media would propagandise on behalf of their projects – socialists should expect nothing less! Rather it is that much of the "Left" has swallowed the propaganda and bought into the agenda of imperialist intervention in the region. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty, who actively promoted and joined pro-NATO demonstrations, were the most grotesque element in this regard, but many others were effected.

With the war on Iraq clearly exposing the nature of US and UK imperialism to new layers of people, those on the Left who adapted to imperialism in terms of their analyses of Yugoslavia should revisit their position or they will fail to meet the continuing challenges posed by the US war drive.

Freeing the World

William Blum, *Freeing the World to Death: Essays on the American Empire*, Common Courage Press, 2005. Paperback, 314pp, \$18.95.

Reviewed by Will Podmore

THIS IS a brilliant collection of essays, extraordinarily acute, containing some fascinating information. Blum is the author of two of the very best books on US foreign policy – *Rogue State: A Guide to the World's Only Superpower* (Common Courage, 3rd edition, October 2005) and *Killing Hope: US Military and Civil Interventions Since World War II* (Zed Press, 2003).

This book includes a selection from his Anti-Empire Reports, available at www.killinghope.org; studies of some US interventions; an overview of the Cold War, showing how Cold Warriors have consistently used Goebbels' biggest and most-repeated lie about communist aggression and violence; and studies of the unemployment and poverty inflicted on American workers, exposing the myth, peddled by Gordon Brown among others, of the USA's booming economy.

Blum exposes the US state's current political violence against Cuba, Venezuela, Palestine, Iraq and Afghanistan. Charles Clarke should perhaps readdress to George Bush and wormtongue Blair his remarks about how political violence is so unnecessary nowadays.

Contrary to Blair, the war on Iraq has not made us safer. Blum cites the US State Department as witness: "Tensions remaining from the recent events in Iraq may increase the potential threat to US citizens and interests abroad, including by terrorist groups." (*Voice of America News*, 21 April 2003)

Blum quotes a leading member of Al Qa'ida who threatened that they will bomb people in Britain "until the people of the country themselves recognise that this is going to go on until they get the leadership changed". Oh, no, sorry, that was Britain's Admiral Sir Michael Boyce threatening to keep

bombing people in Afghanistan.

Strangely enough, people the world over tend to react hostilely to aggression and violence. Colin Powell wrote of the 1983 US assault on Lebanon: "The U.S.S. *New Jersey* started hurling 16-inch shells into the mountains above Beirut, in World War II style, as if we were softening up the beaches on some Pacific atoll prior to an invasion. What we tend to overlook in such situations is that other people will react much as we would." Was he glorifying terrorism?

Liberation Music

Sun Ra, *Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra Vol.3: The Lost Tapes*, ESP, £10.99; Charlie Haden, Liberation Music Orchestra, *Not In Our Name*, Verve, £11.99.

Reviewed by Robert Wilkins

ALTHOUGH the African-American composer and bandleader Sun Ra began his musical career back in the swing era, and had by the 1960s acquired a reputation in jazz circles as an eccentric musical genius, it wasn't until 1970 that he made his first appearance in Britain. I can still remember sitting in a concert hall at Liverpool University, waiting with some trepidation for the "Arkestra", as Sun Ra's band was known, to appear on stage. The audience consisted of several hundred hippy-ish students who had been attracted to the event by publicity presenting Sun Ra as a exponent of "space music", and they were presumably expecting something along the lines of Pink Floyd. Being familiar with the challenging music contained in the two volumes of the *Heliocentric Worlds of Sun Ra*, I was convinced that the Arkestra's music was going to prompt a mass walk-out. (I would have been even more anxious if I'd known that a few days earlier Sun Ra had almost been booed off stage at a concert in Germany – he had outraged his serious-minded free-jazz audience by training a telescope on the roof of the auditorium and announcing that he could see his home planet of Saturn!)

As it turned out, the Liverpool performance was a triumph for Sun Ra and his band, and at the close of the concert a large section of the audience rushed to the stage cheering and chanting "Ra, Ra, Ra". In part, this enthusiastic reception was undoubtedly due to the highly theatrical form in which the music was presented. The members of the band were all dressed in lurid costumes like extras from a Flash Gordon movie, saxophonists came down from the stage and wandered through the audience playing duets, and the 1970 version of the Arkestra included several dancers, one of whom doubled as a fire-eater. Sun Ra certainly knew how to put on a show.

The music, too, turned out to be much more

varied than I'd anticipated. The highly abstract style of the *Heliocentric Worlds* albums, which were the only Sun Ra recordings readily available in Britain at that time, in fact represented just one aspect of the Arkestra's repertoire. The Liverpool concert featured a wide variety of music, including written arrangements together with singalong ditties like 'Outer Spaceways Incorporated' ("Do you find earth boring, just the same old same thing? Come and sign up with Outer Spaceways Incorporated.")

Since then, Sun Ra fans have been much better served by the recording industry and these days we are able to get a fuller sense of the breadth of his creative output. Most of the once obscure albums that received only limited distribution on Sun Ra's own Saturn label are now widely available on CD, as are his recordings on more mainstream labels – and, having begun by recording enough music for three-and-a-half albums in 1956, he continued to produce material at the same prodigious rate until shortly before his death in 1993. While much of this music is far more accessible than the mid-'60s stuff – the 1950s material, though unlike anything else being produced at the time, does feature compositions based on chord changes with solos in a conventional hard-bop style, while in the 1970s Sun Ra began introducing classics from the swing era into the Arkestra's performances – I still retain a lot of affection for the two *Heliocentric Worlds* albums as the records that introduced me to Sun Ra's music. So the discovery, after all these years, of additional material for a Volume Three is an unexpected bonus.

The first three tracks are out-takes from the second volume of *Heliocentric Worlds*, recorded in November 1965 by a small-scale version of the Arkestra. The opening cut, 'Intercosmosis', is definitely the highlight of the album, an example of Sun Ra's brilliance in maintaining interest throughout the 17 minutes of improvisation. Various combinations of instruments are used, and John Gilmore's tenor sax and Pat Patrick's spluttering baritone are given solo space, as is the alto of (I think) Danny Davis, while Sun Ra himself makes a contribution on piano in his Cecil Taylor mode. The next track, 'Mythology Metamorphosis', is a slighter affair, though we do get to hear Sun Ra's keyboards, Marshall Allen's eastern-sounding oboe and a short solo by the Arkestra's great bass player Ronnie Boykins. Next up is 'Heliocentric Worlds', an interesting piece in 5/4 featuring Sun Ra on piano and electronic celeste accompanied by bass and percussion. Unfortunately the master tape was damaged and about a minute of music has been lost, resulting in a brutal splice at 1:09. The album notes carry the assurance that "you won't notice". Well, not if you've got tin ears and no sense of rhythm.

The last two tracks are performed by the larger version of the Arkestra that is used on Volume One of *Heliocentric Worlds*, and they presumably come

from the same April 1965 session. 'World Worlds' is, however, untypical of the other music from that date – it is a written arrangement in 4/4, and John Gilmore's melodic solo recalls his playing on the space ballads of a few years earlier such as 'Lights Of a Satellite' or 'Tapestry From an Asteroid' (though the effect is rather undermined by some out-of-tune contributions from other band members).

The final track, given the title 'Interplanetary Travelers' (I suspect that none of these pieces was actually named by Sun Ra himself), is in fact an alternate take of 'Other Worlds' from Volume One, and has previously appeared on the 1989 compilation *Out There a Minute*, Sun Ra's personal selection of rare Arkestra recordings. Though usually attributed to a later session that produced some of the music for the album *The Magic City*, it is more likely an initial attempt at the issued cut, which is a much tighter and more coherent performance. A comparison of the two takes demonstrates why Sun Ra always resisted attempts to describe his work, even at its most abstract, as free jazz. Though 'Other Worlds' dispenses with conventional harmonic, melodic and rhythmic structures, and on first listening sounds wild and utterly chaotic, it is nevertheless a highly organised piece of music.

Heliocentric Worlds Vol.3 is probably only for completists, or at least for hardcore fans of the first two volumes (now handily available on a single CD, by the way). Nevertheless, in its short 36 minutes of music this album does provide some useful additions to the already vast Sun Ra oeuvre.

I usually try to work out some sort of political angle for music criticism in *What Next?* but in Sun Ra's case this is not easy. The nearest Sun Ra came to public political engagement was his mid-'60s collaboration with Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones), for whose play *A Black Mass* the Arkestra provided the music. However, although Baraka welcomed Sun Ra's fusion of ideas and images from ancient Egypt and science fiction as an attempt to develop a distinctive African-American mythology which tied in with his own Black nationalist concerns, Sun Ra himself remained an unreconstructed mystic who lacked any real grasp of political issues. While Amiri Baraka subsequently became active in the Maoist movement and remains an anti-imperialist radical to this day, Sun Ra ended up voting for George Bush and Ross Perot.

Placing Charlie Haden's latest album, *Not in Our Name*, in a political framework presents no such problems. The bass player and bandleader has declared that "music can't be separated from politics" and that is certainly true of much of his own work. The latest incarnation of his Liberation Music Orchestra was formed to campaign against the Bush administration and its foreign policy. It consciously harks back to the first album by the orchestra, recorded in 1969 at the height of the struggle against the Vietnam War. Like the earlier work, *Not in Our Name* features arrangements by

Carla Bley and the artwork uses same "Liberation Music Orchestra" banner that Bley designed for the first album. As Haden has explained: "although the music might be different, the reason for its existence is the same. Then it was Nixon, now it's George W. What they're doing is the same."

The centrepiece of the 1969 album was a 21-minute suite based on music from the soundtrack of *Mourir à Madrid*, a documentary film about the Spanish civil war. But the album's high point was undoubtedly 'Song for Che', which featured a poignant bass solo by Haden and included an excerpt from Carlos Puebla's homage to Guevara, 'Hasta Siempre Comandante'. The 1969 album contained only two pieces that related directly to US domestic politics – 'Circus '68 '69', a musical representation of the 1968 Democratic Convention in Chicago, and an inspiring version of the civil rights anthem 'We Shall Overcome', with the great Roswell Rudd on trombone, which concluded the album.

Not in Our Name adopts a different strategy, concentrating exclusively on pieces with an American theme. The avowed aim of the LMO is now to "reclaim our country in the name of humanity and decency". Haden writes: "We want the world to know ... that the devastation that this administration is wreaking is not in our name. It's not in the name of many people in this country." Elsewhere Haden has stated that his aim is to establish "an America worthy of the dreams of Martin Luther King Jr, and the majesty of the Statue of Liberty".

The argument that the United States has been hijacked by an unrepresentative, corrupt and unpatriotic elite, and that it is necessary to return control of the country to the common people, has been a familiar theme within US radicalism since the days of the Populist movement in the late nineteenth century. It was an approach enthusiastically adopted by the CPUSA in its Popular Front period and became a distinctive characteristic of the politics of the "Old Left". In the 1960s, however, would-be revolutionaries derided this appeal to "American values" as a concession to social patriotism and a betrayal of true internationalism. They identified with anti-imperialist movements in the Third World and denounced their own country as "Amerika", while some even campaigned against the Vietnam War under the slogan "Victory to the Vietcong", with its implied support for the killing of US servicemen.

As a political tactic, I have some sympathy with the "radical patriotism" stance, which does try to relate to the consciousness of the masses. In a country like the US, where school children are brought up to salute the flag and a sense of national pride is deeply ingrained among large sections of the population, there is nothing wrong with trying to present a radical message in language that has resonance in the minds of the people it seeks to influence.

The problem I have is with the music itself,

rather than the politics behind it. In an interview last year Carla Bley was quoted as worrying that Haden might find her arrangements “too ironic”. Certainly the original LMO album was characterised by an exuberant humour that sometimes verged on parody. However, with the exception of a catchy version of David Bowie and Pat Metheny’s ‘This is Not America’, performed in a cod reggae arrangement (and what is *that* about?), irony is in short measure on the new album. Hackneyed pieces that have an association with the US, such as ‘Amazing Grace’, Samuel Barber’s ‘Adagio for Strings’ and the largo from Dvořák’s ‘New World Symphony’, are played almost completely straight (with the latter sounding disturbingly like the brass band version that was once used to accompany an advert for Hovis bread).

Jazz artists do of course face problems getting radical politics across to relatively large numbers of people by means of a music most listeners find too demanding. Archie Shepp, a prominent tenor saxophonist of the 1960s “New Wave”, was a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist who had embraced Black nationalism, but the free-form music that dominated his recordings of the period proved far too abrasive for all but a tiny minority of his fellow African-Americans. Shepp’s most overtly political album, 1972’s *Attica Blues*, dispensed with free improvisation altogether in favour of soul and other popular musical forms. There is of course a pragmatic argument in favour of moderating a difficult style in order to reach a wider audience – but, frankly, in artistic terms, the album fell far short

of Shepp’s earlier work.

Although the original Liberation Music Orchestra album was itself not lacking in identifiable melodies, the folk themes of the Spanish civil war medley dissolved into some pretty challenging “outside” playing, which undoubtedly restricted its appeal beyond committed fans of that variety of jazz improvisation. When I played the album a couple of years ago in a political campaign office it provoked loud complaints (“What is this rubbish?”) from one comrade, who was dissuaded from removing it from the CD player only after its progressive politics were drawn to her attention.

There is no doubt that the new album contains some impressive musicianship, notably from alto saxophonist Miguel Zenon, while Curtis Fowlkes’ trombone, which recalls Rudd’s dixieland-derived style, does give the music a slightly rougher edge. But at times the restrained and tasteful playing comes perilously close to falling into that dire musical category, “smooth jazz”. You miss the quirky trumpet playing of a Don Cherry and begin to wish that the blistering saxophone of a Gato Barbieri would come crashing through the mix and disrupt the almost suffocatingly polite atmosphere.

Let me finish on a positive note. Despite my complaints this is an interesting album both politically and musically which I have listened to repeatedly, and I wouldn’t dissuade anyone from buying it. But it does underline the brilliance and one-off character of the original 1969 recording. If you don’t yet have a Liberation Music Orchestra album, get that one.

LETTERS

A Message from Uncle Bulgaria

THE MORE I read “Geoffrey Brown’s” article ‘Wombing Free? Anarchists and the European Social Forum’ (*What Next?* No.29) the more it ceases to be odd & amusing & becomes utterly bewildering.

The document ‘reflections & analysis: the wombles, the esf & beyond’ (<http://www.wombles.org.uk/auto/reflections.php>) may clarify some of “geoffrey’s” attempts at trying, & failing with almost subtle brilliance, to construct a valid argument against our continued criticism & antagonism towards the European Social Forum.

What interests me more though is his clueless (& I mean genuinely clueless) attempt to discredit the wombles over Dublin mayday. Let’s be clear: the relationship between the wombles & DGN [Dublin Grassroots Network] has never been stron-

ger, indeed the wombles & groups involved in DGN have every intention of working together in the future. We respect (though do not always necessarily agree with) the groups involved with DGN. Odd that we should be described as “the anarchists” whereas in fact most of the group involved in DGN would happily describe themselves as such & vehemently argue the anarchist corner. The ritual attempts at creating false divisions may work in reactionary left circles (& indeed it is the favourite tactic of state agents) but anarchists are made of sterner political stuff & stronger friendships.

The fact that much of “geoffrey’s” source material is from anonymous posting on irish indymedia it makes it virtually impossible to take what he has to say seriously. It reminds me a little of the right wing media & their woefully apolitical, but equally hysterical, criticism of the wombles. But, again, just

to be clear:

1) the meeting the evening before mayday where it was decided collectively how we would approach the police was attended by over 100 people, almost 3 times the amount of people who decided at DGN meetings (no more than 30) about how they would approach the police. Even by “geoffrey’s” standards a bigger majority.

2) as the demonstration approached the line of police on the navan road it was stopped by a spokesperson from DGN who informed people that was where the “official” demonstration was to end. He went on to explain that those who wished to confront the police should move to the front while everyone else could leave & go home, thanking them for their participation. Naturally nobody, not a single person, moved. The entire demonstration stood firm against the backdrop of water cannons & riot police. This we call direct democracy. We as a group neither compelled nor instructed anybody in their behaviour & as such would never condemn anybody for their behaviour. Faced, as we are, with greater hostile numbers of state forces, we call this solidarity.

The rest of “geoffrey’s” article seemed to be culled from past fragments of half-truths spewed from the mainstream media or, wonderfully, constructing a new & unique view of our relationship with the other autonomous spaces.

dean (wombles)

PS Tell “geoffrey” it’s white overall movement building libertarian effective struggles. Oddly it’s only the right wing media & state agents who seem to get the acronym wrong.

Further Reflections on the ESF

GEOFFREY Brown’s piece on the 2004 London ESF makes a number of worthwhile points. However, I felt some brief thoughts on the event with a less specific focus could be of some interest to readers.

Brown is absolutely right to point out that “Others, however, while not prepared to condone the Wombles’ behaviour, have been inclined to see it as a response, albeit a mistaken or exaggerated one, to the supposedly undemocratic process through which the London ESF was organised.” Even *Briefing’s* report by a “mole” was somewhat in this camp, apparently written by someone who didn’t attend a single organising meeting or much of the ESF itself. It is indeed amazing how much of the Left will believe and recycle what they read in the *Weekly Worker*!

Even if one accepted that the process leading to the ESF was particularly “closed”, which this writer does not, one should still have strongly condemned the violent behaviour and understood that it was motivated by ideas fundamentally oppo-

sed to Marxism. The Wombles are a particularly irrelevant example of those who espouse the idea that no one involved with political parties or states should be involved with the ESF or WSF at all. Their irresponsible and destructive behaviour stems from this false analysis – one which must be strongly opposed by those claiming to be Marxists, for whom the importance of state power and parties to both “sides” in the international class struggle should be “abc”.

Indeed, the involvement of forces such as parts of the Brazilian Workers Party, the Mayor of London, European trade union leaders and the Venezuelans in the European and World Social Forums are strengths, helping the Forums attract significant support and be the broadest international alliances today that oppose the twin offensives of neo-liberal “globalisation” and the US war drive.

These forums, including London 2004, should therefore be seen by the Left as positive in at least two ways. Firstly, they enable the international co-ordination and forming of alliances around key issues around which united fronts need to be formed. The February 2003 demonstrations against the Iraq War came out of a call from the ESF in Italy, for example. Secondly, whilst promoting this unity in action, they also allow debate and learning to take places across national borders. This presents opportunities for Marxists to put forward progressive politics forward on issues such as how to fight racism and the centrality of anti-imperialist activity to the struggle for global justice, and thereby win many of those recently radicalised against globalization and war to a socialist analysis. The involvement of political parties and those involved with them, including those who control regional or national states, are crucial to ensuring success in both these areas.

The Left should therefore support politically broad and inclusive social forums, which at times will mean they have to be firm in their opposition to the likes of the Wombles, when they are acting against this happening. One should not expect this from most of the British ultra-left though, who are more interested in scoring sectarian points and reading the *Weekly Worker* than building and engaging with emerging mass movements against the “twins” of neo-liberalism and US imperialism.

Nicky Law

War Crimes in Falluja

TONY Greenstein [see ‘The Alliance for Workers’ Liberty: Britain’s Revolutionary Imperialists’ in this issue – ed.] alleges that “[Alan] Johnson himself has written in *Red Star* defending the US war crimes in Falluja”. Greenstein is wrong.

In advance of the assault, I was the author of a model Labour Party resolution opposing it. That resolution stated: “This CLP is alarmed that military

action against the terrorists in Falluja and other towns will result in large scale loss of civilian life. The aerial bombardment of a built-up civilian area will drive ordinary Iraqis towards the men of violence. We implore the Labour government to exercise all its influence to prevent these casualties and to pursue all political and humanitarian channels to resolve the crisis. We urge the Labour Government to do all it can to support the UN process that envisages a democratic sovereign Iraq and to support all democratic forces within Iraq, including the newly emerging trade union movement. This CLP recognises that a flourishing democracy and civil society in Iraq will powerfully undermine the terrorists.”

After the assault, on January 13, 2005, I wrote an article for the Labour Friends of Iraq website, titled ‘Bush Does Not Get It (Part 5): Lessons from the agony of Falluja’. I wrote:

“The scale of the humanitarian and political failure in Falluja is as stark as the military ‘victory’. Elections are only three weeks away and many Sunnis are unsure whether to vote. Their participation is vital to the legitimacy of the results and ability of the Iraqi assembly to restore peace and security by marginalising the ba’athists and terrorists. Yet the US and the international community have failed to care for, or to speedily return to Falluja, the hundreds of thousands of Fallujans who fled the city; failed to organise the distribution of voting papers to Fallujans; failed to check the spread of disease among Fallujans. As a result, on January 9 (reports the United Nations Aid Mission to Iraq website) ‘Hundreds of demonstrators gathered in al-Naimiya area in Fallujah Friday calling on the interim Iraqi government and U.S. army to open new routes for displaced residents to return to the war-torn town. Demonstrators carried banners saying “Is it the solution to displace women and children and destroy houses?” and “Occupiers, get out of our city”.’

“Purely military ‘solutions’ in Iraq are a chimera. We need ‘political warfare’: capacity-building the organisations of democratic grassroots Iraq, economic reconstruction on a scale and urgency that would deserve the name ‘Marshall Plan’, a step-change in international community involvement in security, all to underpin the UN-backed political process which remains Iraq’s only hope. Labour Friends of Iraq will continue to argue this view.”

Even my article posted at *Red Star* does not support Mr Greenstein’s assertion. In it I explicitly oppose the assault. I wrote “another way has to be found” and called it a “recruiting sergeant for the terrorists”. But I also made the point that those who opposed the assault on Falluja had a responsibility to face the fact that our position would itself have had victims – the people trapped in thug-imposed Taliban-like regime inside Falluja. Yes, I gave space to the voices of those Fallujans who spoke of their suffering – torture, rape, shootings, murder – in the fundamentalists’ little statelet. Did their voices not deserve to be heard? And with these voices in mind, I argued that it was the UN-backed political process that should be critically supported not the fascistic Saddamist-Jihadi “resistance”. In particular, urgent solidarity should be extended to the democratic and progressive forces inside Iraq, such as the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions. (Greenstein, by contrast opposes the UN-backed political process, is viscerally opposed to the largest force of the Iraqi labour movement, the IFTU, oddly calling it a scab and a “strike breaker”, and he supports the victory of a fascistic jihadi “resistance” which has murdered labour movement leaders such as Hadi Saleh.)

I wrote in *Red Star* (the article took the form of an open letter to a far left-er): “If we are not to be faced with this agonising choice in the future (between leaving the fascists in charge of cities or storming the city with the attendant civilian casualties) we need the political process to succeed. That’s why your peculiar combination of policies (troops out now, victory to the resistance, no support to the ‘fake’ unions and the ‘fake’ elections and the ‘fake’ political process and ... workers power and socialism!) is so, well, childish. You are thinking like a child. In Iraq the democrats have a name for people like you. They call you ‘the people of the slogans’.” (For the full article go to http://redparty.org.uk/redstar004/rs4finalfinal_030105.pdf)

My position can be disagreed with, for sure. It may be wrong. It may be right. But it can’t reasonably be read as “defending the US war crimes in Falluja”.

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