

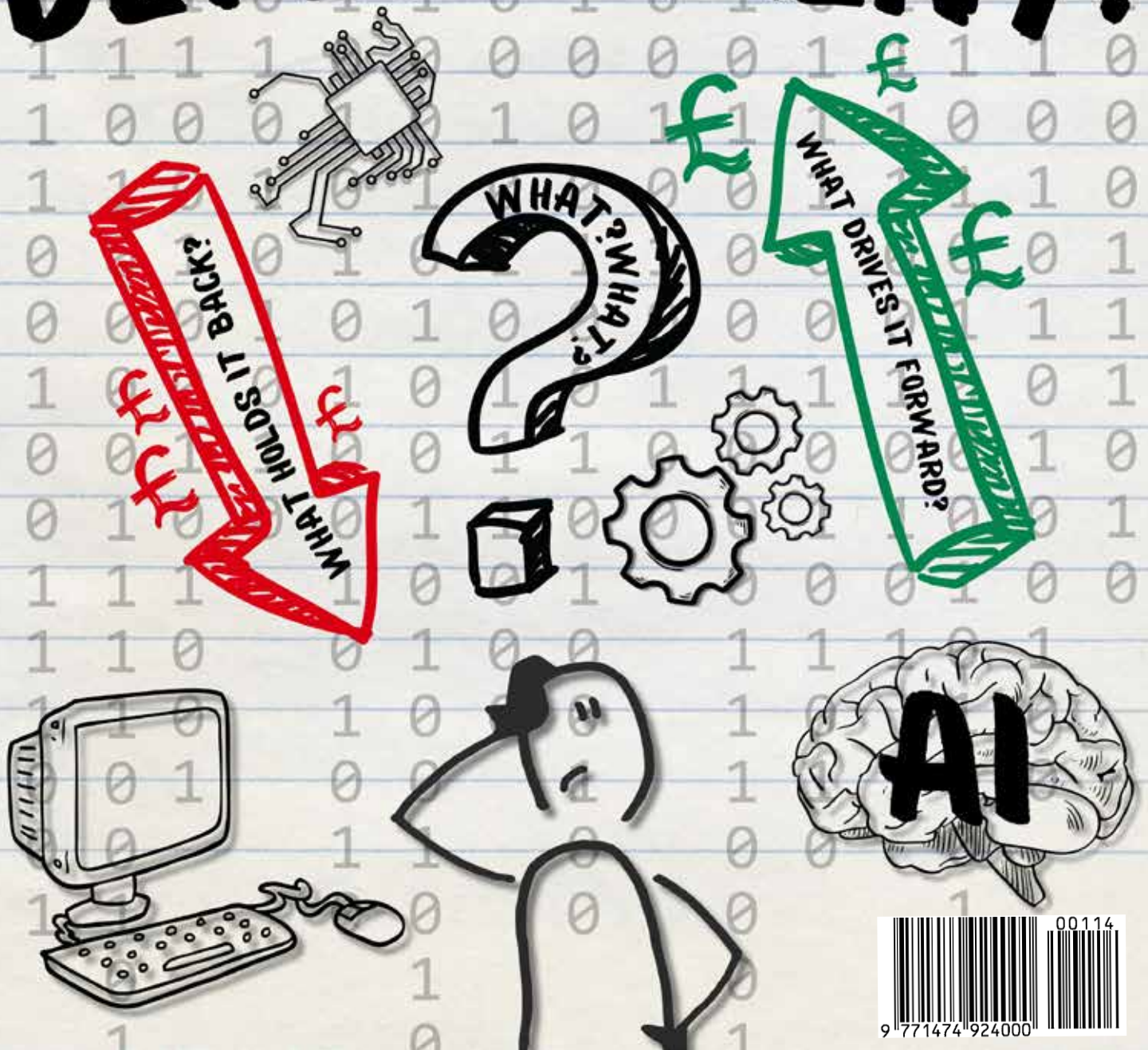
# COMMUNIST REVIEW 114

COMMUNIST PARTY THEORY AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL

NEW SERIES NUMBER 114 · NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2024 · £2.50

**Editorial** *Martin Levy* ★ **IN MEMORIAM** *Sitaram Yechury* ★ **What Drives Economic Development, Part 1** *Jerry Jones* ★ **The Significance of China's Fulfilment of its Second Centenary Goal by 2049** *Cheng Enfu and Chen Jian* ★ **AL Morton: A Red Intellectual** *James Crossley* ★ **Why Study British Marxists?** *David Grove* ★ **Class Politics and the Struggle for Unity, Independence and Socialism** *Eugene McCartan* ★ **Reflections on the General Election 2024** *Nick Matthews* ★ **Review of 'The Glean of Socialism'** *Martin Levy* ★ **SOUL FOOD: Archives of Solidarity and Resistance** *Fran Lock*

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT:

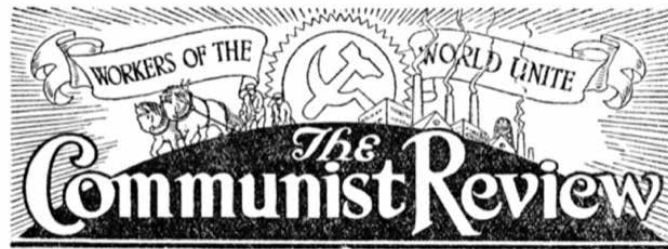




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FOUNDED 1921

NEW SERIES No 114 · November-December 2024

COMMUNIST PARTY THEORY AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL

ISSN 1474-9246

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Advertising rates on request

Printed by APRINT

*Communist Review* welcomes submission of articles (normally up to 5000 words), discussion contributions, and poetry and letters – send to [editor@communistreview.org.uk](mailto:editor@communistreview.org.uk).

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**Front cover:** design by Johnnie Hunter.

**Back cover:** the late Sitaram Yechury at a rally in connection with the Communist Party of India (Marxist) 23rd Congress, Kannur, Kerala, 6-10 April 2022. Photo from the Kerala chief minister's page.

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**MARTIN LEVY** is editor of *Communist Review*.



# EDITORIAL Martin Levy

17 October 2024

THE DEATH OF Sitaram Yechury, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), has come as a great shock to his many comrades, not only in India but in the international communist movement. As editor of this journal, I was honoured to meet him several times, most notably for me at the 19th CPI(M) Congress in Coimbatore in 2008, when he was international secretary, and had the task of ‘enshawling’ the international guests, in front of a crowd of 100,000 at the end-of-congress rally.

I was always struck by his geniality, but also by his deep understanding and application of Marxism. Over a decade ago, we published two of his articles, ‘The International Communist Movement in the 21st Century’, in *CR56* (Spring 2010), and ‘On Transitional Governments’, in *CR60* (Spring/Summer 2011). We should have sought to publish more.

Communist Party of Britain (CPB) general secretary Robert Griffiths has written a very warm tribute to Sitaram in the *Morning Star*.<sup>1</sup> Here, we add to that by including a eulogy from Sitaram’s long-time comrade Vijoo Krishnan. But we precede that with one of Sitaram’s last published speeches, his opening address to the CPI(M) 23rd Congress, just two and a half years ago. This was before the recent Indian Lok Sabha elections, which saw the far-right governing Bharatya Janata Party under Narendra Modi lose its absolute majority, under the impact of the secular INDIA alliance which Sitaram helped to build.

The speech is notable for its emphasis on building not only unity of Left and democratic forces against the policies of the Indian ruling classes (a ‘united front’), but also the broadest possible front of secular forces against Hindutva communalism (a ‘popular front’ – see *CR112* for comparison). Sitaram also makes pertinent remarks on the impact of the Covid pandemic and economic recession, not only in India but internationally, and on the political rightward shift internationally, US imperialism’s quest for global hegemony, and the Russia-Ukraine war, which at the time had only been going for 42 days.

*Communist Review* is, as our mast-head states, the theory and discussion journal of the CPB, and our cover feature article from Jerry Jones ticks all those boxes. Jerry seeks to explain in general – whatever the mode of production – the processes which drive forward, or hold back, economic development. In this first of three articles, he argues that what happens to *surplus labour*, once it has been performed, and how it is utilised, determines the course that economic development takes. The second and third articles, to be published later, will deal with the analysis of capitalist economic policies from the 1940s onwards, and with the application of the surplus labour concept in the building of socialism.

On 1 October 2024 the People’s Republic of China (PRC) celebrated its 75th anniversary. Slightly late for that, we include a chapter here from Praxis Press’s very recent book, *People’s China at 75: The Flag Stays Red*, edited by Keith

Bennett and Carlos Martinez. In the chapter reproduced here, Marxist economists Cheng Enfu and Chen Jian deal with two China centenaries, and the respective goals attached to them. For the first centenary, that of the Communist Party of China in 2021, the goal was set of “building a moderately prosperous society in all respects”, and this has been achieved. For the second centenary, that of the PRC itself in 2049, the goal is to build China into “a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful”, and the authors demonstrate that this is being rapidly realised, with China at the same time striving for “the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and a new internationalism.”

We follow that with a warm appraisal by James Crossley of the life and work of British Communist intellectual AL Morton, perhaps best known for his *A People’s History of England*. In fact, as James points out, Morton was very much an activist as well as a writer, and there is much in his writings that is worthy of study, in particular *The English Utopia*. Interestingly, James says, Morton was an early advocate of ecological Marxism, and his comments on the “endless consumer trash” of capitalism remain highly pertinent. James’s book-length study of Morton will be appearing in 2025. But meanwhile as David Grove points out in the Political Education column, Morton is one of a number of British Marxists whose works need to be part of the reading list of ‘classics’.

Several shorter articles complete this edition of *Communist Review*. First up, we have a recent speech by Eugene McCartan, general secretary of the Communist Party of Ireland, where he situates the demand for a united Ireland within the context of class and imperialism, emphasising that “the struggle for unity cannot be separated from the struggle for independence and national democracy”, and that “ending partition is an essential step on the road to achieving socialism.” Then, reflecting on the recent British general election, Nick Matthews points out how democracy in the major parties has been progressively hollowed out, and that “messianic managerialism” in Labour will “only accelerate the exodus from the party.” Following that, we have a review by your editor of Robert Griffiths’ *The Gleam of Socialism* and finally the Soul Food column, where Fran Lock argues that ‘working class’ poetry constitutes “archives of solidarity and resistance”.

Since our last edition, this journal’s web site, <https://www.comunistreview.org.uk>, has gone live. We hope you find the archive there useful.

## Notes and References

1. R Griffiths, ‘A champion of the masses: Sitaram Yechury 1952-2024’, in *Morning Star*, 20.09.2024, at <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/champion-masses-sitaram-yechury-1952-2024>.



## Inaugural Speech to CPI(M) 23rd Congress, 6 April 2022

*Yatra* can never be complete without paying homage to the heroic Kayyur<sup>2</sup> and Karivellur<sup>3</sup> martyrs and draw inspiration from the strength of revolutionary movement and traditions here at Kannur.

Pinarayi village hosted the first Communist Party conference in Kerala. The legends of the Communist movement like P Krishna Pillai, EMS Namboodiripad, AK Gopalan and many others were delegates to this conference.

With Cde P Krishna Pillai as the secretary, the Communist Party started functioning initially from Chirakkal in Kannur, braving intense repression, often functioning from the underground, particularly when the Party was banned. These dedicated comrades carried forward the revolutionary struggles laying the foundation of the Communist movement to emerge as a leading political force in Kerala. The emancipatory vision of the Communists and their dedicated struggles earned the confidence of the people to make the Kerala Communist movement a formidable outpost for the Indian revolutionary movement.

The organising committee has compiled this rich history and heritage of the Communist movement in a publication, *Kannur: The Red Land*, which details its emergence as the Communist stronghold not only in Kerala, but in India. Kannur symbolises the people's struggle for freedom, equality, dignity and democracy in order to move towards socialism.

In today's conditions and the challenges the country and people face, it is most appropriate that our 23rd Party Congress is being held here. My salutes to comrades and friends here for receiving us so warmly.

### *Comrades and friends,*

For more than two years, during this period of four years since our 22nd Congress, the world was impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic. This has wreaked havoc, disrupting the lives of millions of people.

Even before the pandemic struck, the global economy, as well as the Indian economy, were both showing signs of a slowdown moving into recessionary conditions. The pandemic worsened the situation. Capitalism's lust for profit maximisation as its sole concern exposed its gross inadequacy in providing

*President of the inaugural session, Cde Manik Sarkar; chairman of the Organising Committee, Cde Pinarayi Vijayan; general convenor of the Organising Committee, Cde Kodiyeri Balakrishnan; Cde D Raja, general secretary, CPI; esteemed guests, delegates and observers,*

### *Dear comrades and friends,*

Thank you very much for accepting our invitation and joining this inaugural session of the 23rd Congress of the Communist Party of India (Marxist). We are gratified at the presence of eminent public figures, distinguished veteran leaders of the Communist movement and leaders of various contingents of the people's struggles.

I wish to thank Cde D Raja, general secretary of the CPI, for physically being present here. Cde Debabrata Biswas, general secretary, All India Forward Bloc, Cde Manoj Bhattacharya, general secretary, Revolutionary Socialist Party and Cde Dipankar Bhattacharya, general secretary CPI(ML) Liberation, for some compelling reasons, could not be physically present. They, however, sent their greetings to the 23rd Party Congress which are being circulated and will be read out.

In the present context, the working together of the Left parties to strengthen Left unity is of vital importance to meet the current challenges being faced by the working people, the secular democratic republic of India and its Constitutional order. Their greetings reflect our mutual desire and resolve to strengthen Left unity.

### *Comrades and friends,*

We are meeting here in this region of Kannur which historically has been the crucible of civilisational churning and the confluences of many cultures. This is the birthplace of the communist movement in Kerala.

Religiously oriented people often go on *'Theertha Yatras'*<sup>1</sup> seeking blessings at different shrines. A revolutionary *'Theertha*

universal health care to the people. In contrast, socialist countries have been able to combat the pandemic and put their economies on a growth path. In India, the manner in which the LDF<sup>4</sup> government in Kerala tackled the situation earned both domestic and international acclaim.

The pincer attack of Covid and economic recession has led to alarming growth in the levels of hunger, poverty, educational deprivation and intensified exploitation of the working people. At the same time the total wealth of the world's billionaires reached a new height of \$10.2 tn in 2020. The wealth of the 10 globally richest people increased by \$413 bn in 2021. The top 10 people in India hold 57% of the country's wealth; the share of the bottom half is only 13%.

**Political Rightward Shift:** The quest for maintaining control of the governments, in order to pursue the bankrupt neoliberal policy of profit maximisation, is seeing the continuation of the political rightward shift in many countries. This seeks to disrupt the growing united struggles of the working people by whipping up emotional passions fostering divisive appeals and promoting racism, xenophobia, religious sectarianism, fundamentalism, parochialism and in the Indian context, communalism.

This rightward political shift is facing growing resistance with the rise of countervailing trends, particularly in Latin America, with electoral victories of Left, progressive forces and growing protests and struggles, elsewhere, all across the world.

**Quest for global hegemony:** US imperialism is aggressively seeking to strengthen its global hegemony in the post-Covid world. It has targeted to 'isolate' China, moving from its earlier efforts to 'contain' China. US imperialism is mobilising all its allies in this global effort.

**Russia-Ukraine War:** Today is the 42nd day of the Ukraine-Russia war. This is a war actually between Russia and the USA/NATO. The relentless eastward expansion of NATO moving towards the Russian border with 175,000 combat troops at Russia's borders is the backdrop for this conflict aggravated by the proposal to grant Ukraine NATO membership. This war has to end immediately.

However, this war has set in motion many developments with international ramifications for the future.

This war and India's consistent position of abstaining on UN resolutions against Russia clearly shows the futility of the Modi government's passionate pursuit of cementing India as a subordinate ally of US imperialism in today's world. India must safeguard its own interests by upholding an independent foreign policy and should now seriously consider distancing itself from US imperialist-led alliances like the QUAD<sup>5</sup>.

### *Comrades and Friends,*

During these four years, particularly since the return of the BJP government in the 2019 elections, we in India have been subjected to the aggressive pursuit of the Hindutva agenda of the fascistic RSS by the BJP government.<sup>6</sup> There are multi-pronged attacks along with this unfolding of the RSS fascistic agenda. There is the simultaneous pursuit of rabid neoliberal reforms strengthening the communal corporate nexus, promoting crony capitalism brazenly, the wholesale loot of national assets,

legalising political corruption and imposing full-fledged authoritarianism.

**Undermining the Indian Constitution:** In this process, systematic efforts are being made to change the character of the secular democratic Indian Republic. The four fundamental pillars of the Indian Constitution – secular democracy, federalism, social justice and economic sovereignty – are being severely assaulted and undermined. The pursuit of the Hindutva agenda of the fascistic RSS requires a unitary state structure negating the federal character of India.

To achieve this objective, all the independent institutions created by the Indian Constitution to act as checks and balances for implementing constitutional guarantees – Parliament, Judiciary, Election Commission, CBI, ED etc<sup>7</sup> – are being undermined, negating their independent authority.

The pursuit of this agenda being its sole concern, the Union government has thoroughly mismanaged the combating of the pandemic, imposing unprecedented misery on the people, leading to the loss of a huge number of lives. There is a determined systematic effort to fudge statistics and data, which severely underestimates the incidence of the infection and death.

### *Comrades and Friends,*

Far from addressing the provision of relief to all suffering people, this BJP Union government continues to impose more economic burdens, with daily hikes in the prices of petroleum products leading to galloping inflation. Coming on top of growing unemployment, poverty and hunger, this is ruining the lives of people.

The RSS and BJP have succeeded in creating the narrative of an overarching Hindutva identity among the people. The sharpening of communal polarisation through the spread of hatred, poison and violence is polarising Indian society. This sharpening of polarisation is the RSS-BJP mainstay for political/electoral mobilisation.

### *Dear comrades and Friends,*

Under these circumstances it is essential that the BJP is isolated and defeated in order to strengthen the people's struggles for a better life, and to safeguard the secular democratic character of the Indian republic and the Indian Constitution.

Isolating the RSS-BJP cannot be achieved only electorally but will have to be undertaken by conducting sustained efforts in the political, ideological, cultural and social spheres. This 23rd Party Congress will discuss the concrete steps that need to be undertaken to strengthen the struggle against this Hindutva agenda.

- The foremost task that needs to be focused upon is to substantially increase the independent strength of the CPI(M) and its political intervention capacities.
- On this basis, to strengthen the unity of Left forces by sharpening class and mass struggles.
- To forge the unity of Left and democratic forces on the basis of an alternative programme to the policies of the India ruling classes. In order to defeat the BJP the broadest possible front of all secular forces must be forged against Hindutva communalism.

The CPI(M) appeals to all Left, secular democratic forces to come together in order to isolate and defeat the BJP. All

political parties that proclaim secularism must rise to the occasion to discharge this patriotic duty. The Congress Party, along with some other regional parties, must set their houses in order and decide on where they stand to safeguard the secular, democratic character of the Indian republic. Prevarications and compromising attitudes can only lead, as experience has shown, to an exodus from such parties towards the communal forces. Hindutva communalism can only be combatted by championing uncompromising secularism.

### *Comrades and Friends,*

We are meeting in Kerala today where the CPI(M) and the Left Democratic Front have shown the way to uncompromisingly uphold secularism, respecting equality irrespective of caste, creed or gender while at the same time seeking to implement pro-people policies as the alternative to the neo-liberal agenda. The results are there for all to see with the world acclaiming Kerala's high ranking human development indices.

The CPI(M) shall resolve to strengthen the efforts for building a strong Communist Party, stronger Left unity and the forging of a Left and Democratic Front. We seek your cooperation and appeal to all Indian patriots to jointly resolve to safeguard our Constitutional republic and strengthen the struggles for alternative pro-people policies by forging the broadest front of secular forces against Hindutva communalism.

■ Speech given to Communist Party of India (Marxist) 23rd Congress, EK Nayanar nagar,<sup>8</sup> Kannur, Kerala, 6-10 April 2022, as published at [https://cpim.org/wp-content/uploads/old/documents/comrade\\_sitaram\\_yechury\\_delivers\\_inaugural\\_address.pdf](https://cpim.org/wp-content/uploads/old/documents/comrade_sitaram_yechury_delivers_inaugural_address.pdf), with explanatory endnotes added by the CR editor.

### Notes and References

1. *Theertha Yatras* are pilgrimage sites.
2. Kayyur martyrs, executed 23 March 1943, see [https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2020/0322\\_pd/kayyur-martyrs-stars-shine-brightly](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2020/0322_pd/kayyur-martyrs-stars-shine-brightly).
3. Karivellur martyrs, shot by police 20 December 1946, see [https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2022/1225\\_pd/kerala-remembering-historic-karivellur-struggle](https://peoplesdemocracy.in/2022/1225_pd/kerala-remembering-historic-karivellur-struggle).
4. LDF = Left Democratic Front.
5. QUAD = Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a grouping of Australia, India, Japan and the USA, involving summit discussions and joint military exercises.
6. BJP = Bharatya Janata Party; RSS = *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh*, an Indian right-wing, Hindu nationalist volunteer paramilitary organisation; Hindutva = a right-wing ethno-nationalist political ideology desiring to make India an overtly Hindu state.
7. CBI = Central Bureau of Investigation, ED = Enforcement Directorate.
8. A *nagar* in Indian English is an area outside the centre of a city; EK Nayanar (09.12.1919-19.05.2004) was a senior leader of the CPI(M) and Chief Minister of Kerala for nearly 11 years in total.



# Unwavering Commitment to Socialism and Liberation

## Vijoo Krishnan

COMRADE SITARAM YECHURY, general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), has been one of the most recognised faces of the Left in India. In the last decade he has also been one of the most vocal opponents of the corporate-communal and authoritarian regime at the helm. Having started his political activism through the students' movement in 1974 in the Students' Federation of India, the next five decades of his life displayed an indelible commitment to socialism and the liberation of the masses.

It was in the turbulent years of the 1970s that his political ideas were sharpened. The humiliating defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam, the general anti-imperialist surge, the international solidarity with the resistance in Chile, the Palestinian Liberation Movement, the anti-Apartheid movement and heroic resistance of the Cuban people had all undoubtedly inspired the youth of his times. In the heyday of the authoritarian Emergency imposed by the Indira Gandhi-led Congress government he went underground, organising resistance, eventually being arrested in 1975. After the Emergency, he was elected as the President of the JNU<sup>1</sup> Students' Union three times during a single academic year 1977-78, a distinction only he holds, which is

testimony to his popularity as well as the strong presence of the Students' Federation of India (SFI) which he helped to build on the campus. He went on to be the all-India President of the SFI in 1984-86. At a relatively young age of 32 he was inducted into the Central Committee of the CPI(M) in 1984 and the next year into the newly formed Central Secretariat. He was elected to the Polit Bureau in 1992 at the 14th Party Congress.

His induction into the Polit Bureau was at a time of intense debate, world over, about the future of socialism and when, in the wake of the collapse of Soviet Union, there was talk of the 'end of history' and the triumph of liberalism. It was also at a time when the political right wing, under the leadership of the fascist RSS, was in the ascendancy in India. He, along with the collective leadership, steered the CPI(M) with an ideological clarity that could break the demoralisation and inspire hope in the cadres. His writings in this period on imperialism, the neoliberal economic policies, the communal forces as well as the Hindutva ideology, are of great relevance. In the era of coalition politics in India, he played a significant role in formulating policies and the Common Minimum Programme especially when the first UPA<sup>2</sup> government was formed. During

the first tenure of the UPA government, the strength of the Left could be leveraged to ensure implementation of progressive legislations like the MGNREGA<sup>3</sup>, Forest Rights Act, Right to Information Act etc.

As a Parliamentarian for 12 years, he came to be seen as one of the most effective voices against the communal-corporate BJP regime, and also on many occasions he put the Government in the dock. On issues of the working class, peasantry and oppressed people he was an inspiring presence, both in the Parliament and on the streets. In particular, his role during the protests against the Land Acquisition Ordinance, rallying the opposition parties in support of the farmers during the historic struggle that eventually forced the Narendra Modi-led BJP Government to apologise and withdraw the three pro-corporate Farm Acts, is notable. His role in building resistance to the divisive Citizenship Amendment Act, in defence of the Constitution, secularism, the rights of the people of Jammu and Kashmir, the federal rights of States, civil liberties, and the rights of the oppressed, also won him wide respect. On the privatisation of public assets, food security, perils of demonetisation, the Goods and Services Tax and such matters, as well as against corporate cronyism, his was a strong voice. He was also an excellent educator of the masses, preparing them ideologically to counter imperialism, fascism and the neoliberal trajectory of capitalist development. The clarity of thought on the need to combine class struggle also with the struggle against untouchability, social oppression and discrimination will also stand out. His wide interaction with the international Communist movement, as well as world leaders, was well recognised; and often quoted is his role after the anti-monarchy struggle in Nepal and in the democratic transition including coordination with different Communist Parties there.

His insights into the emerging contradictions in the agrarian sector, with the implementation of neoliberal economic policies, helped in developing a correct anti-corporate stance of the movement without losing sight of the fact that the unity must have the landless, agricultural workers and poor peasants as the core around which the broadest unity has to be built to meet the objective of defeating a common enemy. He often stressed the Party Programme's assertion that the agrarian revolution is the axis of the people's democratic revolution, and the importance of strong worker-peasant unity. Comrade Sitaram also consistently connected the rise of the Hindutva fascistic forces in India with the ascendancy and the hegemony of global finance while reiterating that only the worker-peasant alliance can resist and defeat these divisive fascist forces.

On a personal note, I have had a three-decade long association with him. It was in 1995, as a student of JNU, that I first met him at a public meeting organised by the Students' Federation of India. In my decade-long stay in the University, there have been countless occasions where he has enthralled audiences with his speeches, having an astute mix of a reportage on political developments, anecdotes from his wide experiences, cultural and literary references, humour and sharpness.

In election after election to the JNU Students' Union, he was the most sought-after speaker for the last General Body Meeting, which usually was the crescendo of the election campaign that gave a decisive push in favour of the organised left; invariably it always saw the biggest crowd. In many ways we could predict the sequence of what he would speak: beginning with a question whether the audience wanted him to speak in English or Hindi or his mother tongue Telugu, a multi-linguist that he was, he would venture into narrating his experiences in the students' movement – his being elected three times as

President of the Union, to stress how democracy functioned in JNU; the repression of the Congress-imposed Emergency; how he read out to Indira Gandhi the demand of the JNU Students' Union asking her to step down as the Chancellor of the University, which she continued to hold even after her defeat in the 1977 elections; quoting something from PG Wodehouse; evoking memories of having been resident of Ganga Hostel, which then was a Boys' Hostel; countering the 'TINA [There is no alternative] to Capitalism' argument with "Socialism Is The Alternative", referring smilingly to the acronym SITA, and so on. This was only a build-up to attract new listeners to the more substantive issues that were to follow later on. A sharp critique of caste oppression and communal politics would follow, as also would the analysis of world developments, imperialist aggression and the national political scenario. This last section of the speech, dealing with contemporary issues in a comprehensive manner, would be the most insightful and set the tone and tenor for the Presidential debate as well as leaving a mark on the voters. His ability to convey matters in a simple and attractive manner, even while dealing with complex issues, whether in speech or in writings, is particularly noteworthy.

He was a person of exceptional academic credentials and had to quit his PhD due to the fast-changing political developments immediately after the Emergency. I fondly remember his insistence that I should complete my PhD and not give it up midway like him and many other fellow comrades; I actually managed to complete it. Ever since I quit my teaching job and became a full-timer, working in the Party and in the All India Kisan Sabha<sup>4</sup> there have been many occasions when we have interacted on issues, regarding the course of the movement, and also for building wider consensus. There have also been occasions when he would consult or bring to notice issues that merited our response. In the last three decades, despite at times our being on opposite sides of different debates, he always maintained a warm demeanour and also played a role in shaping my ideas.

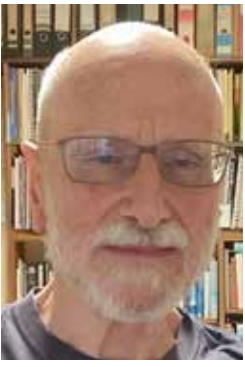
My last interaction with him was at the behest of the Naga people, regarding the progress of the Peace Process, and he assured me that he would play a role in bringing the opposition parties to write to the Prime Minister, questioning his tall claims that he had resolved the matter; it remained an unfinished task.

Adieu, Dear Comrade. Red Salute, Comrade Sitaram!

■ Published by *NewsClick* on 13 September 2024, and downloaded from <https://www.newsclick.in/tribute-com-sitaram-ye-chury-unwavering-commitment-socialism-and-liberation>. Endnotes inserted by the *CR* editor.

## Notes and References

1. JNU = Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi.
2. UPA = United Progressive Alliance. Led by the Indian National Congress, it was formed after the 2004 Indian general election, with support from left political parties, when no single party got the majority. The government's policies were initially guided by a Common Minimum Programme with the Left Front.
3. MGNREGA = Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act, 2005, which gives a legal guarantee of a hundred days of wage employment in a financial year to adult members of a rural household who demand employment and are willing to do unskilled manual work.
4. All India Kisan Sabha = peasants' movement.



# What drives Economic Development Forward, and What Holds it Back: A new theoretical approach – Part 1

## Jerry Jones



THIS IS THE FIRST of three articles making the case for a revolutionary new (Marxist) approach to the analysis of economic development that gets to the bottom of what drives the process forward and what holds it back. It focuses on the key role played by surplus labour – that is, labour performed over and above that required for current consumption.<sup>1</sup> I show that it is what happens to surplus labour, once it has been performed, and how it is utilised, that determines the course economic development takes, and who benefits. Karl Marx in *Capital* identified surplus

labour as the origin of the surplus value that generates the profits of capitalists in the capitalist mode of production – that it is the appropriation of the surplus labour performed by the workers employed by capitalists that generates the surplus value and that gives rise to their profits. This laid the basis for his detailed analysis of the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production. However, as will become apparent, I use the concept in a more general way, not dissimilar to how Marx used it in a number of his notebooks.<sup>2</sup>



In this article, I start by describing the main elements of the economic theory I am putting forward. It can be applied to any economic system, including a socialist economy based on common ownership. Next, I use this new theoretical approach to analyse the dynamics of the current capitalist/imperialist system and the cause(s) of the perennial economic crises that are endemic to capitalism. In the second article, I apply the theory to the analysis of economic policies since the 1940s and their consequences. I show that the current neoliberal policies we have been forced to live with since the 1980s are both a response to, and a cause of, the ongoing crises of the current capitalist/imperialist system. I then speculate on whether we might be moving towards the ultimate crisis of capitalism, which, indeed, could threaten the very existence of human life.

In the third article, I assume that human intelligence will prevail, and that class struggle will lead to the emergence of a new socialist mode of production based upon common ownership as envisaged by the Labour Party in its original constitution<sup>3</sup> – which was jettisoned by New Labour in the 1990s. I will use this new theoretical approach to show that under such a system the factors causing economic crises could more or less be a thing of the past, such that economic (and human) development could finally become a smooth ongoing process thus able to realise its full potential. I will also suggest the kind of economic policies needed at national and international levels to achieve that goal – some of which could be introduced even now.

### **Investment and surplus labour**

I start from the basis that all economic development, whatever the economic system, depends first and foremost on investment – that is, labour performed to establish new economic activities that produce a new stream of goods or services.<sup>4</sup> Note that “investment” is used here in its proper economic sense. This is quite different from popular usage of the word emanating from the financial press in the sense of the buying and selling shares, bonds and other financial assets, which, in the last analysis, is merely a glorified system of gambling – punters seeking financial gains without having to do any work – and which, if anything, has an adverse impact on the process of economic development.<sup>5</sup>

Real investment depends on people working – or, more precisely, performing surplus labour. If labour were performed purely to produce or supply what is currently consumed, it would not result in an increased or more diversified output, or the technological developments upon which economic development depends. Investment in new productive activities is often thought of in terms of money or capital, but its origin always is surplus labour. This is best illustrated by way of an example that

does not involve money (see box). This shows that investment in new productive activities – or its *financing* – depends not on money or capital, but on labour being performed over and above that required to fulfil immediate consumption needs. In other words, it depends on the performing of surplus labour. In a money economy, money facilitates the process, but the surplus labour first has to be performed in order to create the money or capital that is to be invested. Investment can, of course, also be financed through credit. Credit is equivalent to surplus labour that has not yet been performed, but which has to be performed in due course in order to repay the debt that arises.

Today, this role of surplus labour in economic development is not so obvious because surplus labour mostly ends up in the form of money, as savings or capital. However, this does not change the fact that economic development cannot happen without surplus labour being performed. Once that is realised, it opens up a whole new approach to explaining the course economic development takes at different times, and who benefits. Another factor obscuring the process is the fact that, once surplus labour has been performed and turned into a money form, it is highly fungible. That is, it can readily be appropriated by some people from those who have performed it without it being realised, people normally not even being aware that they perform surplus labour, let alone how it might be appropriated. As will be discussed shortly, this appropriation of surplus labour in terms of economic development has far-reaching consequences. But before that, a note of clarification is needed regarding the meaning of economic development.

### **What is economic development?**

First and foremost, economic development is obviously about expanding the capability of producing and supplying more goods and services in increasing diversity in response to people’s ever-changing needs and wants. In other words, it is about economic growth. But it is more than that. Economic growth is merely a measure of the expansion of goods and services being made available, whether or not they are useful to society, or superfluous, and irrespective of their possible adverse impact on society or the environment. Economic development (as used in the current context), on the other hand, has the additional implication that it is economic growth that is geared to improving social welfare, the natural environment, and people’s capabilities – “giving people the freedom to choose the lives they value”.<sup>6</sup> This implies also that economic development involves a political choice of what to produce or supply, a choice that would reflect, among other things, the class structure of a society (an issue beyond the scope of this article).

### **Investment without involving money**

Consider a community or group of people wishing to irrigate their farms from a nearby source of water. One way would be for the people to construct a system of canals and furrows in their spare time – for example, in afternoons or evenings after completing their daily farming activities, or during slack seasons of the agricultural cycle. Once the irrigation system had been created, the people would have a more reliable and productive farm system, maybe producing three or four times as much as before, and in more variety, especially if, say, two crops per year could be cultivated on the same land. Economic development would have happened because there would be more products available for consumption, in greater diversity, and perhaps a surplus that could be traded with other communities, thus further diversifying consumption. Furthermore, local resources, including land, water and human labour power, would be used more effectively. All that would have been achieved without money. How would it have been financed? None other than through people performing labour during what otherwise would have been their leisure time, over and above that needed to satisfy their immediate or most basic needs. In other words, it would have been financed by the surplus labour they had performed.

## Economic demand

Economic development does not only depend on investment. There would be no point in investing in new productive activities if no-one wanted the resulting products. For there to be investment, there have to be enough people wanting or ‘demanding’ the new products that would become available. But it requires more than that. There have to be enough people wanting the new products *and with the economic means to procure them* – able to afford them. This is what I mean by *economic demand*. There has to be economic demand for the particular goods or services for there to be investment in their production or supply.<sup>7</sup> This can refer to specific goods or services that are, or could be made, available, or to goods and services in general in an economy as a whole. If not obvious from the context, when referring to the latter, I use the phrase *overall economic demand* (which is roughly equivalent to the less precise phrase *aggregate demand* used by some economists). It should be noted also, about which more later, that the distribution of economic demand within a society would reflect its class structure and the distribution of income, which would tend to skew investment towards the production and supply of goods and services favoured by the better-off.

## The trade-off between investment and economic demand

To sum up so far, for economic development to happen, there has to be both investment *and* economic demand. Economic demand for particular goods or services, and overall economic demand for goods and services in general, stimulates investment in new productive activities that enables their production or supply to meet that demand. Meanwhile, investment in new productive activities creates new employment opportunities, and the means for those employed to procure goods or services produced or supplied by others, thus generating new economic demand. In short, economic demand stimulates investment and investment creates new economic demand, thus driving forward the process of economic development.

However, in an economy as a whole, there is a trade-off between the two. That is because both investment and economic demand derive from labour, such that if more labour performed in an economy is surplus labour upon which investment depends, the less will be the labour performed that generates new economic demand, and vice versa. In terms of money, both economic demand and investment would derive from income – money that people, enterprises, nations or whatever receive from labour performed. Economic demand would derive from income that is spent on consumption. And investment would derive from income not yet spent, or, in other words, from savings, or if on a larger scale, capital. In an economy as a whole, the more that people (and enterprise or nations) spend on consumption, the less are the savings available for investment, and vice versa.

A consequence of this trade-off, is that if either investment or economic demand gets too far ahead of the other, economic development will be held back, either because investment had been insufficient to provide goods or services for which there is economic demand, or because economic demand was insufficient to provide markets for goods and services capable of being produced or supplied. In short, optimising the process of economic development is highly dependent on an optimal balance being struck between investment and economic demand.

## The appropriation of surplus labour

In most economies to date, it is economic demand that is the one that tends to be deficient or left behind – often to a consid-

erable extent, especially under the current imperialist/capitalist system. That is because, under such a system, a large part of the surplus labour that most people perform is appropriated by others, which is at the expense of economic demand. As noted already, this is facilitated by the fact that most people are not even aware that they perform surplus labour, let alone how it might be appropriated. And those doing the appropriating, normally, are oblivious of the fact that that is what they are doing – at least not in those terms.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of employers, for instance, they would no doubt be conscious of the fact that they profit from employing people, but not realise that the profit derives from appropriating the surplus labour performed by the workers they employ – that is, the labour they perform over and above that which could have gone towards what they might have wanted to consume. Similarly, traders would be aware that they profit from buying cheap and/or selling dear, but not aware that it derives from the appropriation of the surplus labour of sellers (by paying them less than the value of the labour they used to produce the product), or from their customers, who overpay, which is equivalent to the appropriating of their surplus labour that they could have been used in other ways.

The same applies to bankers, who appropriate surplus labour from borrowers through high interest rates, and from savers who receive interest payments at much lower rates. And it applies to landlords, or owners of other assets, who appropriate surplus labour through excessive rents. Furthermore, landowners and monopoly owners of other assets, including special skills, benefit from economic rent, which is the excess income generated by an asset that has a limited supply but is in high demand – land being the prime example: “they don’t make it any more”.<sup>9</sup> The owners of such assets benefit from what amounts to the appropriation of surplus labour from society as a whole.

To sum up, the main mechanisms by which surplus labour may be appropriated are through employment, trade, interest and rent – and, more often than is commonly realised, through fraud and corruption. Any or all of these mechanisms may be taking place simultaneously, thus multiplying the extent to which surplus labour may be appropriated.

How much surplus labour is appropriated by any of these mechanisms depends on the relative bargaining positions of the parties involved. In the case of employment, for example, it would depend on how much pay workers have been able to squeeze from their employers, and the ‘going rate’ of wages for a particular skill – which again would be determined by the relative bargaining positions of the workers employed and their trade unions. In a given locality, this would be affected by such factors as: the balance between supply and demand for particular skills; whether or not workers are organised in trade unions; the general level of employment or unemployment; and the extent to which there may be collusion (tacit or otherwise) among employers to keep wages lower than they might otherwise have been.

In the case of trade, the capacity of traders to appropriate surplus labour from suppliers or customers would depend on factors such as: the supply situation of the products being traded relative to economic demand for the products; how dependent sellers are on the traders to find markets for their products; and the extent of competition among suppliers, traders and final consumers. And if traders are in a weak bargaining position, they may end up having their surplus labour appropriated by their suppliers or customers. Similar arguments apply to the other ways in which surplus labour may be appropriated.

## The appropriation of surplus labour internationally

The mechanisms by which surplus labour may be appropriated internationally are similar to those operating within countries – that is through employment, trade, interest and rent (and through fraud and corruption) – except that those doing the appropriating reside in another country.

The appropriation of surplus labour internationally began in earnest some 500 years ago following the discovery of the sea route from Europe to Asia via the Cape of Good Hope. This enabled the shipment of cotton textiles, spices, and other commodities avoiding the routes overland which greatly added to costs, as governments and merchants whose land the routes passed through demanded their cut. The new route allowed the shipowners and their associates based in Europe to charge the same high prices, so that all the profit now went to them. This benefited the countries in which they were based, at the expense of the countries or territories where the items were produced and through which the items previously passed.

Over the next few centuries, this profiteering – this appropriation of surplus labour from the rest of the world – escalated dramatically: first, when trade morphed into downright plunder; second, through the slave trade and the extreme exploitation of slave labour in the Americas; and third, European colonial occupation of territories all over the world; all of which was aided by the superior military technology of countries in Europe, largely paid for out of surplus labour appropriated from the rest of the world.

Furthermore, it was this large-scale accumulation of surplus labour appropriated from the rest of the world ending up as capital that helped to finance the industrial revolution, first in Britain, and subsequently in other European countries. Meanwhile, economic development in the rest of the world tended to stagnate – or worse, go into reverse – precisely because the surplus labour performed by their peoples was being appropriated abroad on such a large scale. The main exceptions were Japan, whose political system and military prowess prevented European penetration, and territories where Europeans settled after suppressing indigenous populations.

International trade has continued to benefit what became the advanced capitalist countries at the expense of the rest of the world, because the advanced capitalist countries are where most of the profit from international trade – the surplus labour appropriated by those involved in international trade – ends up.<sup>10</sup> Other ways in which surplus labour continues to be appropriated internationally are through foreign investment and foreign lending, which benefit the advanced capitalist countries because they are where the transnational corporations involved are based and therefore where most of the profits end up.<sup>11</sup>

## The appropriation of surplus labour versus surplus value

As noted earlier, Marx identified the appropriation of the surplus labour performed by workers employed in capitalist enterprises as the origin of the surplus value that is the source of their profits. However, in my theoretical approach, I stop short at the point where the appropriated surplus labour becomes surplus value, because that makes it possible to go beyond the (pure) capitalist mode of production, thus creating the basis for analysing more complex social formations such as the current capitalist/imperialist system of exploitation and other economic systems, including one based on common ownership. It allows one to analyse the effects on economic outcomes of surplus labour being appropriated not only through the capitalist production of commodities, which was the focus of Marx, but also through

trade, interest and rent (and through fraud and corruption), as well as what the effect would be of creating an economic system that did not involve the appropriation of surplus labour, such as in a future socialist mode of production based on common ownership. In *Capital*, Marx treated the profits of traders, banks and landlords as their appropriation of a portion of the surplus value (surplus labour) appropriated by capitalists involved in the production process, whereas, as will become clear in what follows, for the purposes of analysing the mechanisms of exploitation under the current capitalist/imperialist system it is more appropriate to separate out those different ways in which surplus labour may be appropriated – including the extent to which it is appropriated across national boundaries.<sup>12</sup>

## The economic consequences of the appropriation of surplus labour

The most obvious is that economic development has benefited some people and some countries very much more than others. It has led to some people – those appropriating the surplus labour performed by others the most – becoming excessively wealthy at the expense of other people whose surplus labour to a greater or lesser extent is appropriated, which, in effect, prevents them from realising the full benefits of their labour. It is also why some countries became wealthy at the expense of other countries left behind, whose economic development has been held back precisely because the surplus labour performed by their peoples that could have contributed to investment and economic demand, and boosted their economic development, has been appropriated abroad, ending up benefiting the countries where the appropriated surplus labour ends up. In short, it is the large-scale appropriation of surplus labour from those performing it – indeed, on a larger scale than ever – that is the underlying cause of the huge inequalities in the world and why millions of people continue live in abject poverty, in spite of the major advances in technology and the productivity of labour, and the means being available to eliminate poverty and the suffering to which it gives rise once and for all.

Moreover, the appropriation of surplus labour has had a cumulative effect because those doing the appropriating – individual people, corporations, countries – can invest the appropriated surplus labour in the form of capital in activities that allow them to appropriate surplus labour performed by others all the more. For example, corporations can invest in machinery that can allow workers to become more productive without workers being paid more in return for their higher productivity. Transnational corporations can invest in less developed countries where wages are low, and transfer the higher profits to the advanced capitalist countries where they are mostly based, at the expense of the workers employed and the countries where the investments had taken place.

However, the economic consequences of the appropriation of surplus labour go far beyond the inequality to which it gives rise. It holds back the whole process of economic development because of the impact the appropriation of surplus labour has on the trade-off between investment and economic demand. Thus, when surplus labour is appropriated on a large scale, investment – or more precisely, the capital derived from the appropriated surplus labour that becomes available for investment – tends to grow too much at the expense of economic demand. A considerable part of that capital (surplus labour), therefore, ends up either being invested in productive activities for which there is an insufficient market, which gives rise to crises of overproduction or overcapacity. Or, it ends up not being invested at all, accumulating as surplus capital unable

to find profitable investment opportunities. The result in both cases is that a significant portion of the surplus labour that people perform is wasted, not contributing either to investment or economic demand, thus holding back economic development.

Meanwhile, in the absence of other outlets, the accumulating surplus capital ends up being ‘invested’ in various kinds of financial assets that are traded (gambled) in financial markets. As noted earlier, this is not investment at all in any economic sense. It does not result in the production or supply of new goods or services that people need or want, nor does it contribute to the process of economic development. Indeed, it may hold it back. For instance, it may be that the profits to be had from speculative ‘investment’ in financial markets are such that this attracts capital (surplus labour) away from less profitable but more useful investment in the production and supply of real goods and services that people need or want that might otherwise have taken place.

### How the effects of the appropriation of surplus labour may be offset

Notwithstanding the appropriation of surplus labour over the centuries, economic development, obviously, has made huge advances. Indeed, economic development – the production and supply of goods and services that people need and want, and technology – accelerated dramatically under capitalism even as surplus labour was being appropriated on an ever-larger scale. But the process has been erratic, sometimes moving forward more rapidly, at other times much more slowly – and, on occasion giving rise to economic crises when the process might go into reverse, leading to fewer goods or services being produced and supplied. And, as noted above, it has been extremely uneven in the sense that it has hugely benefited some people, and some countries, at the expense of others, precisely because of the ongoing large-scale appropriation of surplus labour taking place both within countries and internationally.

The question is, how is it possible that economic development has advanced to such an extent, albeit unevenly, when surplus labour continues to be appropriated on an ever-larger scale at the expense of economic demand, which, as just explained, is what holds back economic development? It is because there are various ways by which economic demand may be extended, thus offsetting (up to a point) the effect of the appropriation of surplus labour, including:

- *The ‘trickle-down effect’*, which describes the extent to which those appropriating surplus labour spend the surplus labour they have appropriated on the consumption of what may be described as ‘upmarket’ or ‘luxury’ goods and services;
- *Credit*, which enables people and businesses to buy things that they would not otherwise have been able to afford (in effect, as noted already, making use of surplus labour before it has been performed);
- *Government expenditure* on public services and social welfare, or investment in infrastructure or other economic activities;
- *Technological developments that diversify the goods and services capable of being produced or supplied*, thus creating new economic demand;
- *Technological developments that raise the productivity of labour* – which make goods and services cheaper than otherwise, thus creating economic demand for other products;
- *Workers successfully bargaining for higher wages*, which gives them more purchasing power.

In all these cases, acting together or separately, the generated additional economic demand creates new investment

and employment opportunities. This, in turn, generates further growth of economic demand when the newly employed workers spend their wages, and new economic demand for the inputs required, both of which stimulate new rounds of investment, and so on. At the same time, the new investment opportunities can make use of at least some of the appropriated surplus labour accumulating as surplus capital, so that less is squandered on speculative activities.

However, under the current system, those offsets have their limitations. In the case of ‘trickle down’, for instance, those appropriating surplus labour may reach the limits of their capacity to consume, or run out of the time available for consumption. In the case of credit, banks (or other lenders) run out of people with sufficient collateral (the capacity to repay) to lend to. In addition, as more and more people become involved in repaying their debts, this ends up being at the expense of economic demand. In the case of government expenditure, depending on what it is spent on, this is limited by the revenue governments need to collect for it to be sustainable, and by the extent to which it might give rise to inflation, thus reducing or eliminating its stimulating effect on economic demand.

The others are limited by the extent to which surplus labour continues to be appropriated at the expense of economic demand – often, in many cases, to an ever-increasing extent. For instance, technological developments that raise the productivity of labour, as implied already, more often than not allow the capitalist owners of enterprises to appropriate surplus labour at the expense of economic demand all the more, because the wages of the workers employed do not increase in line with their higher productivity. Furthermore, because technological developments allow more to be produced or supplied with a smaller workforce, many workers may end up becoming unemployed or having to make do with lower-paid jobs – both of which, of course, depress overall economic demand. Meanwhile, the bargaining positions of workers are limited by the fact that they lose wages when taking any industrial action to advance their conditions of employment – which could mean defaulting on debts, or in an extensive dispute, even losing their homes – as well as by various labour laws introduced over the years that restrict the sort of actions workers and their trade unions can take.

In the global economy as a whole, all of those offsetting factors are in a continuous state of flux, sometimes combining to bring investment and economic demand more into balance, thus driving economic development forward at a faster rate, and at other times combining to have the opposite effect. It is the ebb and flow of their effects and interactions that explains why economic development to date has tended to occur in fits and starts or waves. Economic crises arise or come to a head when those offsetting factors no longer work. Crises get resolved when one or other of those factors begin to operate again, normally after a period of so-called ‘creative destruction’ when economically ‘less efficient’ enterprises fold. This reduces or eliminates the problems of overproduction or overcapacity – a major characteristic of economic crises which would have arisen from insufficient growth of economic demand in the previous period. This then creates space for the enterprises that managed to survive to expand, thus contributing towards resolving the crisis. ‘Creative destruction’ is, of course, a cold euphemism for the very real destruction of people’s lives arising from the loss of livelihoods, perhaps even their homes, or access to basic foods. It is, indeed, a major indictment of the current capitalist system that this happens. Moreover, such crises represent a huge waste of the surplus labour that had

been performed to create those assets now destroyed. This goes some way towards explaining why economic development under capitalism has been held back and plagued by recurring economic crises.

In short, the large-scale appropriation of surplus labour from those who have performed it begins to explain why economic development under the current capitalist/imperialist system has not only benefited some people and some countries very much at the expense of others, but also why economic development has constantly been held back and been subject to frequent economic crises, thus unable to realise its full potential.

### Notes and References

1. Not to be confused with surplus labour power. Thus, “surplus labour” is often used incorrectly – including by economists, even self-described Marxists, who should know better – to describe a situation of too many people for the work available, or, in other words, in the sense of unemployment or under-employment. This is not surplus labour, but *surplus labour power* – that is, the capacity to perform labour. If people are unemployed, obviously, they cannot perform labour, and therefore cannot be performing surplus labour. Surplus labour can only be the result of labour having actually been performed!
2. Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy (Rough Draft)*, M Nicolaus, transl, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1973.
3. As stated in its Clause IV: “...to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry or service”. This was adopted at the Labour Party Conference in 1918, with the words “distribution and exchange” being added in 1929. See K Coates, *Common Ownership: Clause IV and the Labour Party*, Spokesman, Nottingham, 1995.

4. This also includes expenditure on such things as: maintenance; the construction of buildings and other infrastructure required to establish new productive activities; the manufacture and acquisition of equipment or materials required; research and the development of new technologies, new products and new services; and education and training, healthcare, and public services in general.
5. See below and, in more detail, the second article in this series.
6. A Sen, *Resources, Values and Development*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1984; A Sen, *Development as Freedom*, Random House, London/New York, 1990.
7. Many economists use the term ‘effective demand’ rather than ‘economic demand’, but I prefer the latter as it is more precise.
8. For example, Jeff Bezos, founder of Amazon, had a vague notion of this when, after completing his space flight in July 2021, he thanked Amazon workers and customers for making it all possible ....
9. Attributed to Mark Twain (1835-1910). In fact, under the current capitalist/imperialist system, the appropriation of surplus labour through rent has become increasingly dominant. See B Christophers, *Rentier Capitalism: Who Owns the Economy and Who Pays for It?*, Verso, London/New York, 2020.
10. See for example, J Hickel, D Sullivan and H Zoomkawala, ‘Plunder in the Post-Colonial Era: Quantifying drain from the Global South through unequal exchange, 1960-2018’, in *New Political Economy*, Vol 26, Issue 6, 2021, pp 1030-1047. The authors do not invoke the concept of surplus labour, but they provide the empirical evidence as a measure of the extent to which it is appropriated through international trade
11. To be discussed in more detail in the second article in this series.
12. In fact, Marx, in *Grundrisse*, used the phrase “surplus labour” more generally without referring to surplus value. For instance, he talked about the appropriation of surplus labour through international trade: “...nations may continually exchange with one another, may even continually repeat the exchange on an ever-expanding scale, without for that reason necessarily gaining in equal degrees. One of the nations may continually appropriate for itself a part of the surplus labour of the other, giving back nothing for it in exchange...” (*op cit*, p 872).

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# The Significance of China's Fulfilment of its Second Centenary Goal by 2049

## Cheng Enfu and Chen Jian



A floral decoration on display in Beijing on 22 September 2024 in connection with the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China.

UNDER THE leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Chinese nation has overcome the bitter modern history of a semi-feudal and semi-colonial society, and finally established a New China in 1949, which not only washed away the humiliation of being constantly invaded by the imperialist powers, but also initiated a brand-new situation of striving to become stronger and more powerful.

Nowadays, on the basis of fully realising the first goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the centenary of the CPC (founded in 1921), the second goal of building China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious and beautiful by the centenary of the People's Republic of China is being rapidly realised. In this paper, we will analyse the significance of China's realisation of the second centenary goal in economic, political and international dimensions.

### **I. Continuously surpassing the United States in various economic respects and becoming the world's largest economy and a 'Top Country in the Centre'**

President Xi Jinping pointed out that "China enjoys distinct strengths such as a socialist market economy in systemic terms, a super-size market in terms of demand, a fully-fledged

industrial system in terms of supply, and abundant, high-calibre labour forces and entrepreneurs in terms of human resources."<sup>1</sup> These advantages constitute a solid support for China's transformation from a follower to a leader in the world economy.

### **First, the growth rate of China's economy since 1949 suggests that it will surpass the United States by 2049.**

The history of China since 1949 can be divided into three major stages: before reform and opening-up; after reform and opening-up but before the 18th CPC National Congress; and in the New Era after the 18th CPC National Congress. In these three stages, "three miracles" in world economic development have been created, and they correspond consecutively to the formation of a preliminarily rich and strong economy, a secondarily rich and strong country, and an intermediately rich and strong country as a 'quasi-centre' in the world's economic system.

The first miracle of creating a preliminarily rich and strong China was achieved before reform and opening-up. The founding of New China put a definitive end to the semi-colonial and semi-feudal state of poverty and weakness in China, and to the frequent wars that the country had suffered for more than 100 years since the First Opium War. Under the leadership of the CPC, the great socialist practice and exploration of China began

in a poor and backward country. Science and technology began to develop as marked by the “two bombs (nuclear bomb and missile) and one satellite project”; an independent industrial and national economic system was initially established; comprehensive development was seen in education, culture, health and sports; the population grew rapidly and people’s livelihood significantly improved; China successfully restored its legitimate seat in the United Nations (UN) and its Security Council; and China had a great influence among the vast number of Third-World countries. All these show that New China got rid of the image of a poor and weak country of the old China in international economic, political and military arenas, and truly stood up and became preliminarily rich and strong. This is the “first miracle” in the economic development of New China.

Statistics for this stage show that, while in 1952, China’s GDP was only RMB 67.9 bn yuan, it was as high as 364.52 bn yuan in 1978. In terms of the year-by-year development rate, although there was a decline in China’s economic growth in 1960, 1961, 1962, 1967, 1968, and 1976, respectively, due to natural disasters, policy mistakes and exceptional circumstances, China’s average nominal annual growth rate during the period of 1952-1978 was still as high as 6.68%. In 1952, China’s total population (excluding Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan) amounted to 575m, and per capita GDP was 119.4 yuan. In 1978, per capita GDP rose to 381 yuan, even with the total population jumping to 960m, and the average annual growth rate of per capita GDP was as high as 4.56% between 1952 and 1978. During this period, the average annual growth rate of China’s real GDP was as high as 6.15%, and the average annual growth rate of real per capita GDP was as high as 4.05%. With the average growth rate of the world economy during this period being 3%, China’s development rate was more than twice that of the world.<sup>2</sup>

The “second miracle” was created after reform and opening-up as a stage of becoming intermediately rich and strong. The convening of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978 marked the entry of China’s socialist practice into a new period of reform and opening-up. By 2012, China’s industrial output value and foreign exchange reserves had jumped to first place in the world; its total economic output steadily ranked second in the world; the development of education, culture, health and sports were remarkable; people’s livelihoods were raised from subsistence to moderate prosperity; Hong Kong and Macao were successfully returned to China; and China’s political and military status were rising internationally. These changes indicated that China is in the position of a “secondarily rich and strong” country. It is the “second miracle” of China’s economic development.

The third economic miracle has been created in the New Era, with the formation of a ‘quasi-centre’ in the world economic system at the stage of becoming intermediately rich and strong. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has adjusted the direction in the advance of the CPC and the state and ushered in a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. With the changes in the main contradiction in China’s society, the central task of the Party and the country has been further enriched and upgraded while continuing to focus on “economic construction as the centre”. Through implementing the “people-centred” development philosophy, the “Five-Sphere Integrated Plan”, and the “Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy”, and through integrating “the great struggle, the great project, the great cause and the great dream”, the comprehensive development of human beings and the sharing of wealth

among all people have been continuously advanced. Furthermore, through international cooperation such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) etc, China has contributed Chinese wisdom and provided Chinese solutions for human development, and promoted the construction of a community of shared future for humanity. With its growing international appeal and influence, China has become a ‘quasi-centre’ country in the world system,<sup>3</sup> marking China’s status as an “intermediately rich and strong” country, and is presenting the “third miracle” in New China’s economic development.

Relevant statistics and forecast data also support the above assertion on China’s development stage. Since its reform and opening-up, China’s economy has been developing rapidly, with the average annual growth rate of the country’s GDP as high as 9.4% from 1978 to 2023, as a result of which China’s total GDP in 2023 was \$17.52 tn, with a growth rate of 5.2%, while the total GDP of the United States in 2023 was \$27.36 tn with a growth rate of 2.54%.<sup>4</sup> These figures visually and powerfully demonstrate that China’s economic growth rate since the founding of New China has exceeded that of almost all capitalist countries, which vividly illustrates the historic achievements of China’s economic development.

### ***Second, China is able to achieve step by step its centenary goal of moving from its current position of a ‘quasi-centre’ in the world’s economic system to that of a ‘top centre’.***

Relevant data calculations show that if China basically realises modernisation in 2035, it will be a ‘second-highest rich and strong’ country in the ‘centre’ of the world economic system; if it realises full modernisation in 2049, it will be a rich and strong country ranking among the ‘top countries’ in the centre of the world economic system. Assuming that: by 2049 China’s total population reaches 1.3 bn people; that of the United States reaches 335m people; the exchange rate remains unchanged, with China’s total GDP of \$17.52 tn and US total GDP of \$27.36 tn in 2023; and assuming after calculation 5% for China’s annual GDP growth and 2.5% for the United States in 2024-2049; then through comprehensive calculation we can derive that by 2049 China’s total GDP and per capita GDP volume would be \$59.94 tn and \$46,106.52, respectively, compared to that of the United States in the amount of \$49.69 tn and \$148,300.<sup>4</sup>

At present, China is focusing on building a new development pattern with the domestic macro-cycle as the main body facilitated by the mutually reinforcing domestic and international dual cycles. China is accelerating the development of new quality productive forces represented by artificial intelligence (AI), and emphasising the opening-up strategy with the advantage of independent intellectual property rights rather than the outdated opening-up strategy of leveraging comparative advantages. Through implementing a new type of national system of self-reliance in key and core technologies, the government is clarifying the direction for promoting high-quality development of China’s economy and society. Even if the US-led West launches a cool war, a cold war or a hot war against China, and keeps increasing illegal sanctions to the extent of a total blockade, China will be able to unite the vast number of developing countries and the countries of the South to fully realise the second centenary goal in a self-reliant manner.

Strengthening the country and the army requires a strengthening of heart and spirit first. In that line, China can confidently turn the bad things that the US and the West do to suppress China, and launch all kinds of ‘hybrid wars’, into the

good things of accelerated modernisation and early unification of China, thus achieving a strong country, prosperous people and modern Chinese civilisation.

## **2. Continuously surpassing the West in various political respects and fully demonstrating the advantages of whole-process people's democracy**

Democracy is a common value shared by all humankind and is the fruit of the development of human political civilisation. There is no end to the human exploration and practice of democracy. By 2049, the systemic advantages and practical effects of China's socialist whole-process people's democracy will certainly be better demonstrated.

### ***First, the people have not only the right to vote in various ways, but also the right to broad participation.***

When the people have the right to vote, they can freely express their personal will, but the right to vote alone is not enough, because the right to political equality of 'one person, one vote' does not automatically eliminate other political inequalities and inequalities in economic and social rights. In order to solve this problem, the people must have the right to participate in a comprehensive and wide-ranging manner. The right to participation lies at the core of democracy. A democracy is only formalistic if the people only have the right to vote but not the right to extensive participation, and if the people are awakened only when they vote and go dormant afterward. The most important thing is that the people are able to participate deeply in the management of the life of the state and society through both elections and means other than elections.

Furthermore, in accordance with the law, the Chinese people have the right to participate in the management of state and social affairs and of economic and cultural undertakings through various means and forms, such as consultations, expert seminars, consultation meetings, debates, symposia, hearings, councils, criticisms and suggestions. It can be seen that the people of China have not only the right to vote, but also the right to participate in a wide range of activities; not only to express their democratic will effectively, but also to fully exercise their right to democratic participation in democratic elections, democratic consultation, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision.

### ***Second, when the people are promised something verbally during the election process, those promises are largely fulfilled after the election.***

Is it necessary to make verbal promises to the people during the election process? The answer is yes, because this is not only a conventional practice, but also the presentation of a future plan and a people-friendly attitude. However, verbal promises in the election process are not the objective of democracy; the objective of democracy should be the transformation of verbal promises into real actions. If the people are awakened only at the time of voting and then go dormant, if they only listen to flowery slogans during the election campaign and then have no say in it, if they are favoured only during canvassing and then left out in the cold after the election, then this kind of democracy is not a real democracy. It is clear that the CPC and the government must take effective action to continuously respond to the needs and aspirations of the people after making verbal promises.

The CPC and the government of China have a strong sense of continuous attention and response to the people's interests and needs. This is because the democratic chain in China is complete, covering the entire process of the five major

democratic processes of democratic election, democratic consultation, democratic decision-making, democratic management and democratic supervision. Thus a systematic 'full-chain democracy' has been formed, which overcomes the 'half democracy' that emphasises election but not management. The undesirable phenomenon and embarrassing situation of democracy at the time of election but no democracy after the election has been avoided. This ensures that the verbal promises made to the Chinese people during the election process will be realised after the election.

### ***Third, it is important to pay close attention to what kind of political procedures and rules are stipulated in the systems and laws, but also, and even more importantly, to see whether or not these systems and laws are actually implemented.***

The vitality of systems and laws lies not only in the possession of basic political procedures and rules, but also in their eventual implementation and effectiveness. Only in this way can they take root, blossom and bear fruit. If the system and the law are just for show and cannot be effectively implemented, then they will exist in name only.

The political procedures and rules laid down in China's system and laws are very strict. For example, if we look at the procedures through which members of the National People's Congress are elected, we will find that they take various forms, including initial inspection and consultation, preparatory elections, secret ballot elections, and competitive elections. These cover both top-down organisational nominations and bottom-up free elections and constitute real and concrete procedural democracy. Moreover, under the principle of democratic centralism, China's system and laws have the advantage of being implemented on a national basis. Therefore, in the future, China will gradually and truly achieve unity between the expression of public opinions and the satisfaction of public opinion, thus realising democracy with strong executive power and highly effective overall performance.

### ***Fourth, we should focus not only on whether the rules and procedures for the operation of power are democratic, but also on whether power is truly subject to supervision and constraint by the people.***

The people are the legitimate source of all state power. Since power originates from the people and is endowed by the people, it can only be used to serve, benefit and be accountable to the people. Therefore, the people should constitute the main body of supervision and constraint of power. Numerous historical experiences have shown that the less power is effectively supervised and restrained, the greater the possibility of abuse and corruption. Only when power is truly subject to the people's all-round strict supervision and regulation can it effectively fulfil its important role.

After years of practice and improvement, China has basically established the institutional, procedural and standardised rules for the operation of power, which further enhances the vitality and anti-corruption character of power, while in the meantime avoiding both 'uncaged' power and power locked up in the cage of capital. For example, China is: 1) establishing and implementing a system whereby those in power dare not be corrupt, those who are corrupt will be severely punished, and active and passive bribery will be combated; 2) improving the system for transparency in Party, government and judicial affairs, as well as in administrative procedures of all areas; 3) perfecting the system for questioning, accountability, auditing



of economic responsibility, and blame-taking resignation and removal from office. At the same time, systems of internal Party supervision, internal political supervision, supervision by the National People's Congress, supervision by democratic parties, supervision by the people without party affiliation, supervision by scientists, and supervision by the masses have been proposed and implemented, allowing power to operate in a transparent way. In the long run, this multifaceted system of supervision and regulation in China will effectively carry forward the fine traditional style of the ruling party, whereby the National People's Congress and the people's government keep close contact with the masses using the method of self-criticism and self-revolution.

The Constitution of the Communist Party of China, adopted at the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, states that the Party "shall uphold and improve the People's Congress system, the Communist Party-led system of multiparty cooperation and political consultation, the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and the system of public self-governance at the primary level. The Party shall develop a broader, fuller, and more robust whole-process people's democracy, advance extensive, multilevel, and institutionalised development of consultative democracy, and act in earnest to protect the people's right to manage state and social affairs and to manage economic and cultural matters."<sup>5</sup> We firmly believe that it is necessary to dispel the "superstition of Western-style democracy" and the "cult of Western-style system" represented by the United States, and unwaveringly hold high the scientific banner of whole-process people's democracy in the future. Also, we must better transform the advantages of the system into efficacy in governance. We shall then be able to, by the middle of the 21st century, better win the people's support in continuing to write a new chapter of socialist political civilisation with Chinese characteristics and make new and greater contributions to the development and progress of the political civilisation of mankind.

### **3. Continuously transcending hegemonism and narrow nationalism at the international level and promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and a new internationalism**

Looking around the globe, the world today is in the midst of changes of a magnitude unseen in a century. The configuration of international forces has undergone profound changes, and in recent decades a large number of emerging market economies and developing countries have embarked on the fast track of development, leading to the rise of a group of countries whose strength, capacity for independent development and international influence have been continuously enhanced, and who are changing the global political and economic pattern. The 'old ways' of Western imperialist countries of relying on hegemony and power politics have become increasingly impractical, as the international system and order are in urgent need of in-depth adjustment in the light of the changes in the international balance of power. The call for promoting the development of the global governance system in the direction of greater justice and rationality has also become increasingly louder. China has always adhered to a foreign policy of peace and justice, standing on the right side of history and on the side of human progress, working with the world's anti-hegemonic forces and people of all countries to push the wheels of history towards a brighter future, and contributing China's solutions for the realisation of the overall interests of humankind.

### ***First, China has always had the tradition of uniting countries of the Global South.***

A country should not be guided by the pursuit of profit, but by the pursuit of the greater good and shared interest, which is particularly true in international cooperation. As the world's largest developing country, China has always adhered to the concept of truthfulness and sincerity and attaches great importance to friendly and cooperative relations with the vast number of developing countries. As an active participant in international cooperation, China has always had a tradition of solidarity with the countries of the South, and the vast number of developing countries are natural allies in the development of China's cause of diplomacy. In the process of South-South cooperation, China has insisted on mutual support and assistance with the vast number of countries in the South, and China's infrastructure construction has been incorporated into projects such as transportation and railroad building in many brotherly countries. On the journey to fully realise its second centenary goal, China has the strength and ability to unite and help more developing countries embark on the path to modernisation and national prosperity, and to promote South-South cooperation.

### ***Second, China is a country that stands on the side of justice.***

Today, the changes in the world and in history are unfolding in an unprecedented manner. The question of peace or war, cooperation or confrontation, is an important one facing every country and the world. The founding of New China was like the morning sun piercing through the fog and illuminating the future of peace and development. Now, after more than 70 years of development, China has become a powerful force for world peace. China's development has not only brought peace and prosperity to its own people, but also injected new impetus into the cause of global peace and development. Unlike countries that stand on the opposite side on the question of world peace, China has always been its guardian. The Chinese nation has been a peace-loving people since ancient times, and Chinese civilisation has an outstanding peaceful nature, passing on the concepts of 'peace is precious', 'being a good and friendly neighbour', and 'building a commonwealth of the world' from generation to generation. Therefore, China has always stood on the side of justice and fairness, maintaining peace and promoting development while taking into account the legitimate concerns of other countries, contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to the harmonious development of international relations and the peaceful development of the international environment.

Certain Western countries not only eye China's development with hostility, but also try to manipulate attitudes and opinions of other countries by making absurd and ill-grounded statements. China, however, has proved to the world through its practical actions that it has always pursued a defensive national policy. China's development represents the growth of peace in the world. The more China develops, the more the world develops. No matter how far it develops, China will never claim hegemony. On the one hand, with regards to its attitude towards international affairs, China always decides its position and policy on the basis of the facts of the matter itself, upholds the basic norms of international relations, and safeguards international justice; on the other hand, in its attitude towards other countries, China has always insisted on the equality of all countries, irrespective of their size, strength, and wealth, and has respected the sovereignty and territorial integrity of

each country and its path to development and the social system that has been chosen by its people independently. China resolutely opposes all forms of hegemonism, imperialism, neo-colonialism, neofascism, and neoliberalism. It is also against the Cold War mindset, interference in other countries' internal affairs, and hypocritical double standards. It is evident to the world that China has always been a builder of world peace, a contributor to global development and a defender of the international order, as codified in the United Nations Charter. China's adherence to the path of peaceful development and its concentration on its own affairs is in itself a major contribution to world peace and development. China insists on developing itself through the maintenance of world peace, never seeking development at the expense of the interests of other countries. China is safeguarding world peace through its own development. It is willing to live in harmony with all peoples of the world, to develop in harmony, to seek, share and protect peace together, and to share with the world the opportunities of China's development.

**Third, China advocates the building of a community with a shared future for humanity during the struggles against hegemonism.**

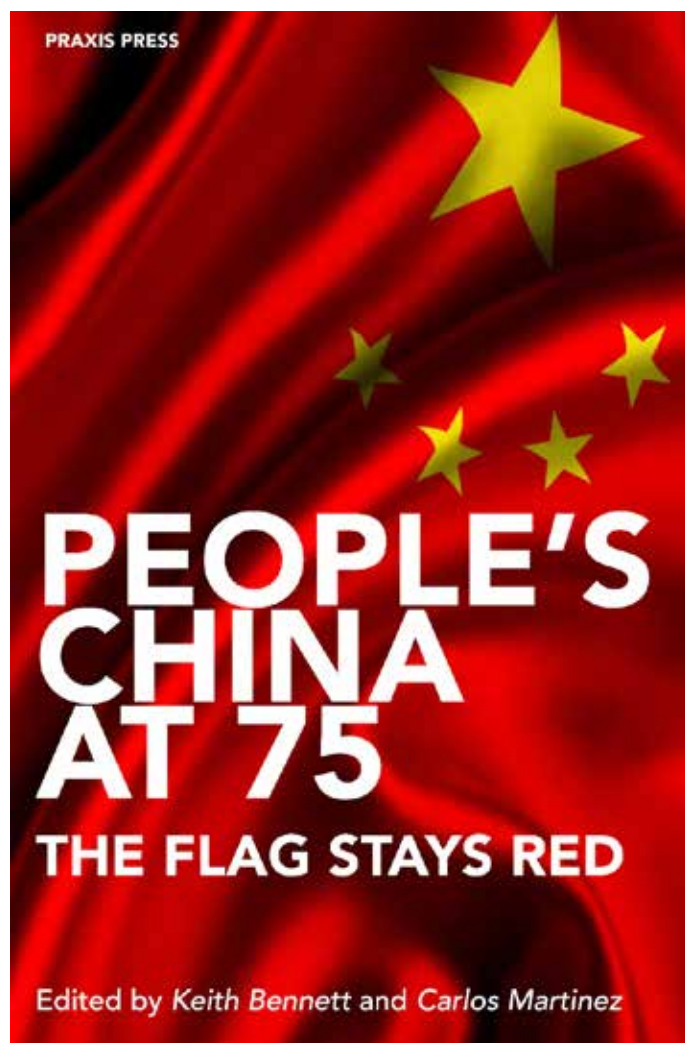
China has continuously transcended hegemonism and narrow nationalism to promote the building of a community of shared future for humanity, which is a Chinese-style innovation for realising the prosperity and development of mankind at present, and an exploration of the development of world history on the basis of Marxism and Sinicised Marxism. At the same time, the idea of “a community of shared future for humanity” lies at the core of China's major global initiatives, namely, the BRI, Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative, Global Civilisation Initiative, and Global AI Governance Initiative. Among them, the most vivid embodiment of the effective practice of a community with a shared future for humanity is the BRI. The construction of a community with a shared future for humanity was from its very beginning intended to benefit all peoples of the world, promote peace, and thus realise common prosperity and development. For that reason, it was widely welcomed by the international community once it was put forward. As a practical platform for promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity, the BRI, while achieving high-quality development, has also demonstrated that this road of hope and happiness embodies the goal of benefiting the whole world, will extend wider and farther in the future, and will ultimately arrive at the final destination of jointly building a prosperous and beautiful world.

The new Marxist internationalism that we advocate has three meanings: first, to promote the development of a community with a shared future for humanity on the basis of the common values of humankind; second, to promote the development of world socialism on the basis of Marxism and the core socialist values; and third, to unite all progressive forces of the world to counter the hegemonic and monopolistic oligarchic forces that are attempting to besiege and annihilate peace-loving countries such as China and the forces of socialism.

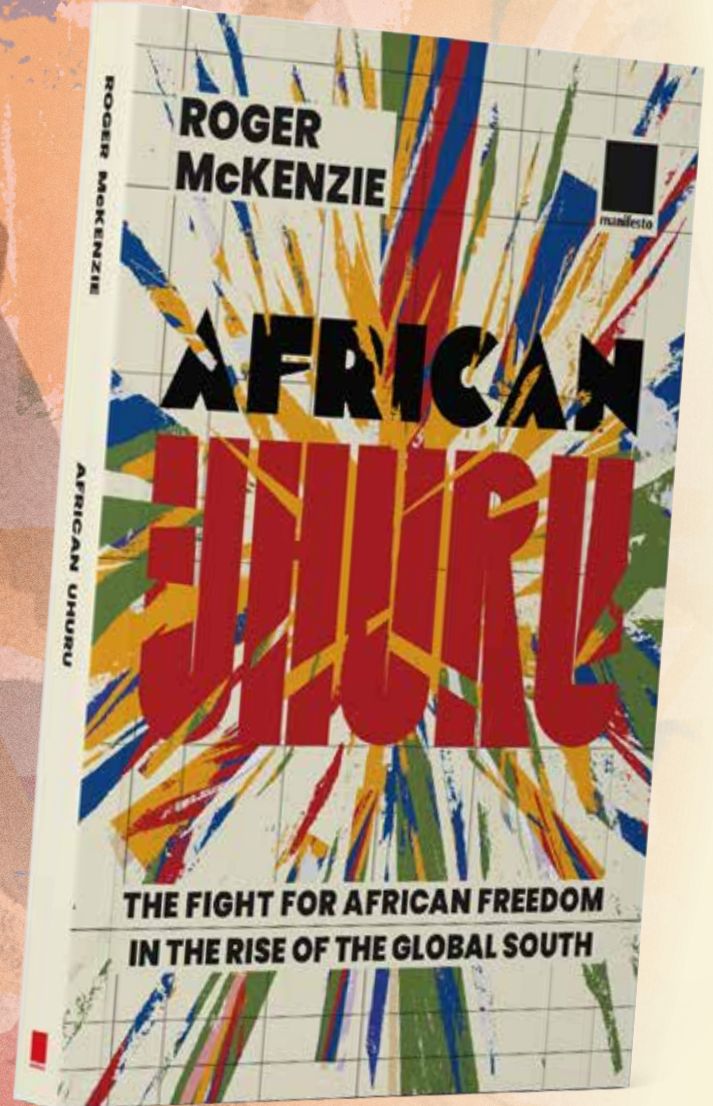
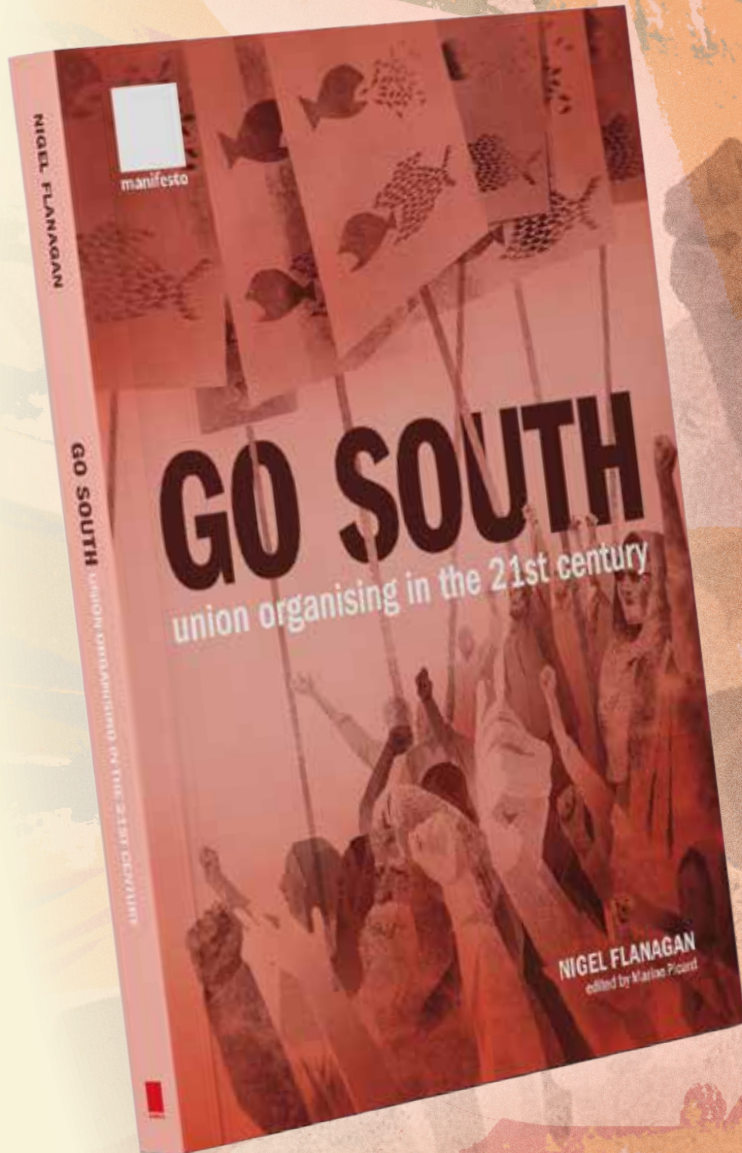
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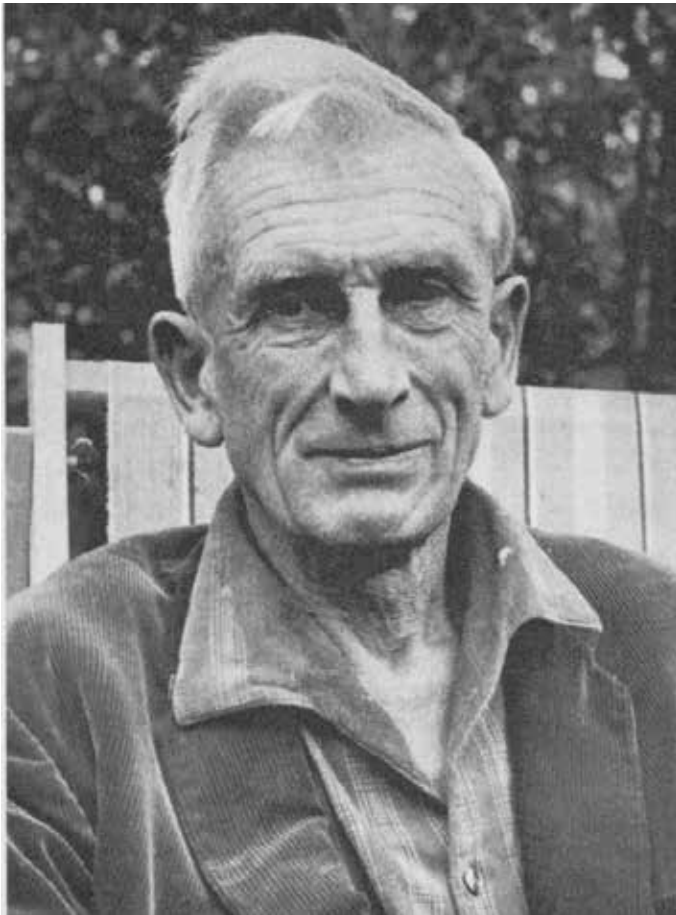
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# A L Morton: A Red Intellectual

## James Crossley



1970 photo of AL Morton from the *Morning Star*.

ARTHUR LESLIE MORTON (1903–1987) was one of the most important intellectuals of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). He is best known for *A People's History of England* (1938) and *The English Utopia* (1952), though his output was vast and wide-ranging. In addition to occasionally publishing poetry, he wrote and spoke on the English Revolution, Chartism, the British labour movement, the legacy of utopianism in working-class movements, Arthurian legends, Shakespeare, the Brontë sisters, Robert Owen, William Morris, radical religion and imperialism, to name but a few topics. He played a relatively prominent role in some of the CPGB's most testing times (1956 and 1968) and was a dedicated Party activist, first in London but mainly in Suffolk.

Despite his fame, only short biographical articles are written about Morton, including one by his friend and fellow CPGB intellectual Maurice Cornforth.<sup>1</sup> I have spent the past few years writing a book-length biography of Morton, and I share some of the results here.<sup>2</sup> It has now become possible to write a fuller account of Morton's life because of the availability of archival

material in the Marx Memorial Library, the Labour History Archive & Study Centre at the People's History Museum in Manchester, and the Working-Class Movement Library in Salford. Additionally, we now have Morton's secret service files, released in 2017 and made available in the National Archives (NA).

Here, I offer a selective summary of Morton's life and work as a Communist intellectual.

### Early Years

Morton was born in 1903 at Stanchils Farm near Bury St Edmunds. After being tutored at home, he attended King Edward VI Grammar School at Bury St Edmunds, which had a typical royalist, Anglican, and imperial ambience, including an Officer Training Corps established in 1908.<sup>3</sup> War and imperialism would feature heavily in Morton's writings but would be turned against the kind of propaganda represented by his schooling. He also seems to have excelled in the study of Shakespeare,<sup>4</sup> an area he would return to in later life, particularly in his travels to the German Democratic Republic. But there were also less orthodox influences on him – he was excited by, and very familiar with, the *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*, a translation of the so-called 'Astronomer-Poet of Persia' by the poet and King Edward alumnus Edward Fitzgerald (1809–1883).<sup>5</sup> This interest in unconventional religion would remain throughout Morton's life.

When he was 15, Morton was sent to Eastbourne College. The First World War had intensified its militaristic and imperialist interests. However, school propaganda did not have the intended effect on Morton, whose politics were moving leftward around this time, though initially with a conservative bent influenced by his father. Among the many books he was reading, Jack London's *The Iron Heel* was the one he viewed as life-changing for a 17-year-old coming to terms with socialist ideas. Soon after, he moved on to William Morris's *News from Nowhere*, followed by Marx and Lenin.<sup>5</sup>

Morton then studied History and English at the University of Cambridge (1921–4). His developing political ideas flourished in an environment where such thinking could be discussed more openly (though still controversially) in the light of the Russian Revolution and growing labour militancy. He joined the Cambridge University Labour Club and became involved in what would become influential socialist circles, guided by the Communist economist Maurice Dobb. During Morton's time at Cambridge, TS Eliot published *The Waste Land* (1922), an account of societal decay that influenced Morton's socialism (and other socialists), despite Eliot moving in the opposite political direction. Morton increasingly saw revolutionary transformation in the Soviet Union as providing the answer to the crisis of capitalism outlined by Eliot.

## Towards Communism

After Cambridge, Morton took up a teaching post in 1924 at the grammar school in Steyning, a conservative market town. Despite disliking his time there, he met a former close follower of the occultist Aleister Crowley: the poet, publisher, eccentric, and bohemian Victor Neuburg (aka ‘Vickybird’).<sup>6</sup> While Morton never believed in magic, he discussed such issues with Neuburg and developed a Marxist reading of the history of magic in minor publications in the 1920s and 1930s.

He saw magic as having played a progressive role in the evolution of early human society. It was materialist in the sense that it was about humans trying to control their environment, but lacking the technological knowledge to do so – it was an attempted shortcut to a fuller understanding of the laws of nature. However, Morton argued, once people learned that spells and related practices could not bring about rainfall or increase flocks, they likely moved on to irrigation and new forms of breeding animals. Magic, therefore, represented an advance for humanity through the “use of reason even if it were a misuse.”<sup>7</sup>

Morton and Neuburg also discussed English radical history, and it was through Neuburg that Morton developed his interest in William Blake, culminating in the publication of *The Everlasting Gospel* in 1958 (see below). We know Neuburg’s home at Vine Cottage was already a hub for those who would learn or talk about Blake.<sup>8</sup> We now know from the Marx Memorial Library archives that, in 1957, Morton discussed how he had been trying to understand Blake as a poet and as a man for more than thirty years. The maths, of course, takes the timeline back to the brief period Morton was in Steyning. From then on, Blake began to feature in Morton’s poems (eg “Blow, Blow...,” “One Law for the Lion and the Ox...”).<sup>9</sup>

As his Communist sympathies grew, Morton witnessed the struggle of the working class with his own eyes and with personal consequences. After openly supporting the General Strike of 1926, Morton was made redundant from Steyning Grammar School. He moved closer to home to work at AS Neill’s progressive ‘free school’, Summerhill in Leiston, and was impressed by the school’s resistance to teach children prevailing capitalist values. Here, Morton met his first wife, Bronwen Jones; after marrying in 1928, they moved to London as members of the CPGB. Their correspondence in the Marx Memorial Library and the secret service files reveal how the couple struggled financially with two small children (one their son, the other Bronwen’s child from before she met Morton) and being away from their families. By 1934, the couple had split but remained on good terms, as their correspondence in the Marx Memorial Library further shows. Morton soon settled down with (and later married) Vivien Jackson, daughter of the working-class autodidact and Communist intellectual TA ‘Tommy’ Jackson.

## London and the *Daily Worker*

In early 1930s London, Morton was engaged in menial work for the Communist Party, which he saw as essential training for its intellectuals.<sup>10</sup> He was part of the Islington branch, and his Party work included canvassing in the notoriously deprived Campbell Road in Finsbury Park and relaying information to the *Daily Worker*. He emphasised the importance of gaining the trust of locals rather than simply presenting the squalid conditions in which they lived for the newspaper writers. He was not always listened to, which sometimes caused difficulties for Communist activists among the residents.<sup>11</sup>

Around this time, the secret services took more interest in Morton’s activities, including his reading habits in the

British Museum. As a Special Branch report<sup>12</sup> put it, Morton was reading “literature bearing on extremist points of view.” He also published reviews and articles on history, literature, and politics in the *Daily Worker* and literary journals such as *The Criterion* (run by Eliot) and *Scrutiny*. These included Marxist understandings of English and European history, the transformation from capitalism to socialism, human relations in a post-revolutionary society, and anthropology of religion.

Though this was the era of ‘Class against Class’ in the Communist Party, and the rupturing of relationships with social democrats, Morton navigated his way around different ideological worlds while always maintaining Party discipline (for which he became noted). Even so, he recalled how, on May Day, “efforts had to be made to keep apart the two demonstrations – those of the Labour Party and the Communist Party – in case they collided.”<sup>13</sup>

In 1934, Morton began working for the *Daily Worker* (with the secret services continuing to monitor his activities). He was a feature writer and reporter, though he also covered tasks that simply needed doing. For him, the revolutionary journalist’s role meant going beyond merely describing individuals’ lives. Instead, individuals should be presented in relation to their social context. The journalist should highlight how individuals’ decisions (successful or not) are related to broader social and historical forces.<sup>14</sup>

Morton put his philosophy of journalism into practice in his reporting. He travelled across northern England and Scotland in 1935 and in the aftermath of the 1934 Unemployment Act. He wrote about organisation among workers, female breadwinners, and the elderly, in the context of low pay, housing crises, lost industries, unemployment, benefits, and cuts. He located these stories in relation to local bureaucracies, government policy, and the impact of capitalism on everyday lives.<sup>15</sup>

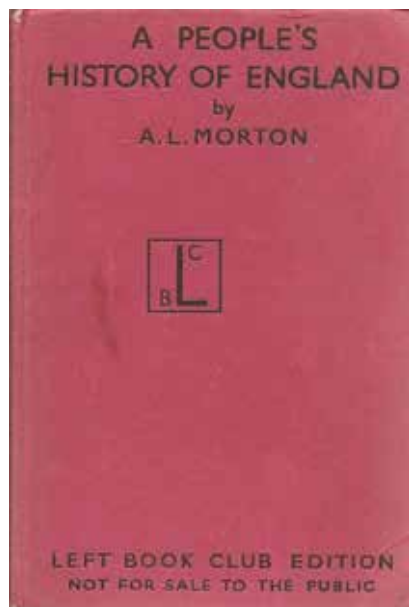
Morton also reported on the 1934 Hunger March from among the Norfolk marchers.<sup>16</sup> He had roused suspicions among the representatives of the Independent Labour Party, who thought that the Communist Party would take over the March. Characteristically, he explained the situation to his accusers and convinced them that he was present in his role as a *Daily Worker* reporter. While he was allowed to join the March, he was not given voting rights, but marchers and leaders regularly consulted him.<sup>17</sup>

Morton also took on the unenviable role of the Proprietor at the *Daily Worker*. Being named Proprietor meant he could potentially go to prison on behalf of the paper.<sup>18</sup> He was lucky enough to escape imprisonment – just. In September 1934, Morton and Robert Hazelden (the previous Proprietor) were summoned before the Old Street magistrate. William Joyce (later Lord Haw Haw) and the British Union of Fascists alleged that the *Daily Worker* had incited violence against an upcoming fascist rally by using the phrase “try to drown the Fascists in a sea of organised working-class activity.” Fortunately for Morton and Hazelden, the magistrate did not accept that the statement promoted a breach of the peace. The *Daily Worker* soon restated its position, adding that “if fighting occurs in connection with the demonstration and counter-demonstration the responsibility for this does not rest with those who are calling the workers to resist Fascist brutality.”<sup>19</sup>

## A People’s History

While Morton published regular reviews for the *Daily Worker*, he felt he had to leave to concentrate on writing what became his most famous book: *A People’s History of England* (1938). This was probably the first sustained Marxist history of the

nation and was emphatically historical materialist in presentation. *A People's History of England* provided an account of the transformation from ancient modes of production to feudalism and then capitalism, the rise of the working class, and the potential in-breaking of a new era of socialism up against the threat of fascism. This is not a history of England devoted to the reigns of monarchs but one about competing class interests, technological advances, and the dialectical transformation of society. Naomi Mitchison aptly commented in her review, "it must have been great fun for the author to write all those chapters about the last century without mentioning Queen Victoria or Prince Albert."<sup>20</sup>



The 17th-century English Revolution played a crucial role in Morton's history. At this point in his life, he was sometimes critical of the more radical end of the English Revolution, which he saw as tending to naivety or ultra-leftism. As radical agitation declined after 1652, its "essential weakness" was shown in a development towards Quaker pacifism and a "naïve Utopian Communism."<sup>21</sup> Morton regularly critiqued pacifism in English history as hindering those who opposed wars on different grounds. One example he gave was when the Labour Party and TUC capitulated to the government and moved from industrial militancy to support the government's recruiting campaign for the First World War. Workers were left abandoned to government propaganda while left-wing opposition to the war was stuck in the "peculiar form of pacifism."<sup>22</sup>

We should see Morton's numerous and heightened criticisms of ultra-leftism and naivety as part of the Popular Front line of the Communist Party in the second half of the 1930s, *ie* a concern for promoting broad anti-fascist alliances. The Popular Front line looked to promote homegrown progressive traditions to combat fascist appropriations of them and to critique the national narratives of the ruling class. Communists sought to connect progressive and revolutionary movements of the past with the struggles of the present. *A People's History of England* makes these kinds of connections throughout. It is a history of the nation that sees some significance in rebellious peasants and priests, heretical religious movements, Cade's rebellion, Kett's rebellion, the New Model Army, Levellers, Jacobins, Chartism, trade unionists, suffragism, and (of course) the emergence of the working class.

This Popular Frontist context also helps explain Morton's emphasis on the significance of strategic alliances in *A People's History of England*. In some cases, twentieth-century concerns were made explicit by Morton, such as in his warnings

from history about antisemitism, xenophobia, and fascism.<sup>23</sup>

Other issues relating to Popular Frontism were more subtle. He argued that the "Peasants' Rising" of 1381 carried the force it did because it was a broad, unified, non-sectarian, largely disciplined, and organised protest against reactionary forces. Unlike other peasant uprisings, Morton argued that 1381 was not a cry of despair but the work of those "who had already won a certain measure of freedom and prosperity and were demanding more." The rising may have had a background in "primitive communism" and featured prominent "preachers of communism," Morton tellingly claimed, but such "communism" was significantly downplayed in the demands made by the peasants. Instead, he argued, the rebels' demands had to address a range of interests, meaning they "were probably a minimum upon which all were agreed."<sup>24</sup>

Against the backdrop of the forces from below unleashed in the English Revolution, Cromwell came into his own in *A People's History of England* as someone who could harness their potential for progressive development. For Morton, Cromwell had too "often been oversimplified by regarding him either as a man of the Left or the Right." While acknowledging difficulties and failures, Morton stressed that Cromwell could negotiate competing interests and had "sufficient political realism to comprehend and master" such "peculiarly delicate class relations." Cromwell recognised that if the minority demands of Presbyterians and the Levellers had been met, the result might have been a Royalist restoration. And yet, for all the difficulties, mistakes, and compromises, Cromwell and the Commonwealth still brought some "solid gains to the working classes."<sup>25</sup>

## Second World War Onward

By the start of the Second World War, Morton moved back to Leiston, where he was part of a small but thriving Communist group led by the artist Paxton Chadwick and centred around the local newspaper, the *Leiston Leader*. Morton combined organising for the Communist Party with army service. During the War, he reached the rank of Lance-Bombardier, and his time was mostly spent labouring on the strategically important Isle of Sheppey – all the while spied on by the secret services. He was a regular polemicist and defender of the Communist Party's positions on the War. Morton even found himself in trouble towards the end of the War when he challenged censorship at home, calling Sir James Grigg (then Secretary of State for War) a "stupid blimp" in a *Leiston Leader* column from February 1944. Morton was brought before a sergeant-major and then taken off to court-martial, despite some reluctance to act against Morton and support the unpopular Grigg. A close reading of the King's Regulations showed that Morton was not guilty of military indiscipline.<sup>26</sup>

While he inevitably wrote less during the War, Morton developed ideas about utopianism. He started re-evaluating his views on the value of future transformation in religious thinking and historic millenarian sects. These ideas were included alongside his literary criticism in his short collection of essays, *The Language of Men* (1945), and were an indication of some of the themes that would dominate his postwar work (see below).

After the War, Morton had a short stint as a local councillor (1947-9) and was a key figure in founding the acclaimed Communist Party Historians' Group. The Group included figures who became foremost historians of their time, such as Christopher Hill, Eric Hobsbawm, Rodney Hilton, Dorothy Thompson and EP Thompson, and the now overlooked but then influential

Dona Torr. One of the reasons the group was founded was to revise *A People's History of England* and a new edition was published in 1948.

The heyday of the Group (1946-56) was marked by a concern for understanding national history in relation to historical materialism, as well as the development of history 'from below' and an appreciation of the role the English radical tradition played in progressive history. Morton led the way in his studies of 17th-century religious sects, the growth of the labour movement and its precursors in pre-modern radicalism, and the history of utopianism. His emphasis on English radicalism was shifting away from the criticisms of ultra-leftism which he gave in *A People's History of England*.

Morton now stressed the significance of lost causes and utopianism – while not neglecting their shortcomings – and how the twentieth-century working class could take up their progressive potential. For instance, in 1949, he was involved in commemorations of the 300th anniversary of the regicide. He promoted the importance of the Levellers and radical movements in the development of democratic thought and ideas of a new England. Where the Levellers failed, Morton argued, workers and veterans led by the Communist Party could now succeed in transforming society and challenging colonialism.<sup>27</sup> The emphasis on the working class being in a position to bring to fruition the centuries-long hopes of a better world was an attempt by the Historians' Group to counter the dispiriting political situation of postwar England (eg disillusionment with Labour, post-war conservatism, impact of American imperialism).

The writings of his friend Iris Morley were one prompt for Morton. He was inspired by her understanding of the lingering radicalism toward the end of the seventeenth century, represented by the Monmouth rebellion and the Battle of Sedgemoor (1685). He looked at the aspirations of "thousands of obscure men and women" and how their dreams were to be taken up again from the end of the 18th century and with the rise of the working class.<sup>28</sup> In doing this, Morton became an often-unacknowledged pioneer in the study of history from below, which would later take off in the universities.

He also gave fuller accounts of a pre-modern English radical tradition and its connection to the emergence of the working class. In a book co-written with George Tate, *The British Labour Movement 1770–1920* (1956), and in chapters he wrote up for the ailing Dona Torr and her book *Tom Mann and His Times: Volume One (1856–1890)* (1956), Morton re-evaluated different figures, notably the Chartist Ernest Jones.

In *A People's History of England*, Jones had been given short shrift: Morton noted Jones's advanced understanding of the class struggle but also his misjudgements, including on the issue of an insurrection, as Chartism was in decline.<sup>29</sup> Influenced by John Saviile's work on Jones,<sup>30</sup> Morton offered a reassessment in the 1950s. Jones's efforts to keep Chartism alive were now seen as "tragic as well as heroic." Jones was now presented as a pivotal figure in "creating the conditions for the movement of the future" and provided "immense service in a difficult time." Jones kept democratic and internationalist principles alive at a time when they were "in danger of being lost to sight", and his struggle "against the stream" was crucial preparation for revolutionary socialism.<sup>31</sup> Morton went as far as claiming that without the "heroic efforts" of Jones and others, "it is very doubtful if the First International would have been possible in 1864."<sup>32</sup>

Morton's major publication in this era was *The English Utopia* (1952). Grounded in the example of Cokaygne, the medieval utopian land of plenty, Morton traced the history of

utopian dreams in English cultural history. Primarily focusing on utopian literature, he looked at the idealistic concept of utopia in relation to medieval peasant hopes, the rise of bourgeois thought, and the emergence of socialism. For Morton, Morris's *News from Nowhere* represented the "final synthesis" in the dialectical development of the English utopia because he knew from experience that the transformation to a new world required more than hope or reason – it required struggle. Morton also believed that the rise of the Soviet Union had rendered the creation of literary utopias redundant as the transformation to a better world began to take place in reality. People like Orwell were writers of "counter-revolutionary apologetics" and represented the sorry degeneration of once optimistic bourgeois utopias into what Morton called "anti-utopia."<sup>33</sup>

Still, Morton saw value in lost causes and unrealistic dreams in *The English Utopia*, such as in his treatment of the Battle of Sedgemoor. It had received dismissive and passing treatment in *A People's History of England*, as a rebellion hopeless from the outset.<sup>34</sup> In *The English Utopia*, the rebels represented "the last defenders of Cokaygne, the Utopia of all jolly fellows, of the proud, independent man, neither exploiting nor exploited, eating and drinking of his own abundance." A failure the rebellion may have been, but the "plebian element" still played their part in the bourgeois revolution peaking in the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688. For Morton, understanding these rebels, in turn, helps us understand the bourgeois victory and the rise of Whig dominance over "Catholic-feudal counter-revolution."<sup>35</sup>

### A World of Ranters?

In 1950, the Mortons had moved from Leiston to The Old Chapel in Clare, Suffolk, where they lived for the rest of their days. Their local activism in the 1950s involved the vexed issue of American imperialism and local military bases in East Anglia. While rural life, writing, and local Party organising suited Morton, he was also involved in international political developments. The denunciation of Stalin by Khrushchev in 1956 was the most significant. Morton was part of a CPGB delegation sent to the Soviet Union to assess the state of socialism there, and the group's reports were published in *World News* throughout January 1957. Along with the Soviet military intervention in Hungary and debates over inner-party democracy, the fallout from Khrushchev's speech led to a sharp loss in CPGB members (though followed by a period of recovery), including members of the Communist Party Historians' Group.

While Morton was critical of intellectuals unmoored from the Communist Party and labour movement, he was non-sectarian in his approach towards leftist intellectuals. He remained close friends with historians formerly in the CPGB, such as Hilton, Hill, and the Thompsons. He also continued the work he and the Historians' Group had started, including reappraising English radical traditions. In the 1960s, for instance, Morton continued to reassess the significance of utopianism and lost causes in work on Chartism, Robert Owen, and the history of British socialism. This was both a continuation of his earlier ideas and an updating of them in the changing world of British Communism and the consolidation of capitalism in an increasingly post-industrial Britain.

In *The Everlasting Gospel* (1958), Morton argued that William Blake played a pivotal role between the legacy of the political and religious radicalism of the English Revolution in the past and the rise of a more secularised workers' movement in the future. This was part of Morton's understanding of how millenarian thinking was transformed by and into socialist and

communist movements with the rise of capitalism. This approach would be developed by luminaries such as Hobsbawm and Hill.<sup>36</sup> Morton showed that Blake was an influential dialectical thinker who saw history as the constant struggle of opposites; knowledge, struggle, suffering, and evil would all be important for building the New Jerusalem, with imagination and reason taken to a higher level. Morton credited Blake with appreciating that a new world had to be built rather than willed into being by abstract speculation. Morton also appreciated that Blake was constrained by his times and was left bewildered by the new world of mass production. Before the rise of the organised working class, Blake lacked a solution and could only witness destruction.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to his study of Blake, Morton turned to political ideas associated with the 17th-century antinomian group called ‘Ranters,’ eventually culminating in *The World of the Ranters* (1970). While this picked up on his earlier work on the radical end of the English Revolution, the framing of arguments and new additions to old essays suggest an interest in bringing his historical work into dialogue with the social, political, and cultural changes that had taken place in the 1960s. And Morton was hardly alone among prominent Marxists uneasily engaging with the social changes of the 1960s. The fabled generation of 1968 represented something Morton and other historians and theorists (eg Hill, Hobsbawm, Adorno) could neither ignore nor wholly accept – not least the return of anarchism, a recurring concern.<sup>38</sup>

Morton’s interest in antinomian behaviour of the Ranters doubled up as an implicit commentary on the comparable radicalism of the 1960s. For instance, the blunt irreverence of the Ranters may have had some popular appeal, but this was not enough to build a mass movement – a comment that could be (and was) made of either period. Such irreverent figures offered no serious threat to the established order, Morton argued, noting the limitations of those more akin to “confused mystical anarchists”.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, in line with his postwar interests in the contradictions involved in such movements, he also focused on what was valuable.<sup>40</sup> For example, he argued that for all the antinomianism of a figure like John Saltmarsh, he was self-disciplined and thoughtful because of his experiences in the Army. Unlike “some antinomian extremists”, Saltmarsh ensured (Morton stressed) that his thinking about religious freedoms did not automatically lead to libertinism.<sup>41</sup>

Morton also turned to his favourite 17th-century radical, the Leveller William Walwyn. In a world of turmoil and wild beliefs, Morton tellingly stressed that Walwyn was an older family man, and he even presented him as something akin to a reliable Communist Party organiser. Morton’s Walwyn was interested in “managing committees, drafting petitions and presenting them with the maximum effect.” Walwyn, Morton speculated, was possibly at the heart of regular “party organisation” with central and local committees, weekly dues, and the production of pamphlets. He argued that Walwyn’s polemics were aimed at “the extreme left” and antinomian “extremists” such as the Ranters, though ultimately concerned with attacking the established churches. Walwyn may have engaged with utopianism, but as a party man, Walwyn was most concerned with what could be done in the present conditions. Morton arguably presented Walwyn as a 17th-century equivalent of a cultured Communist of the mid-20th century: he was a “well-read man” who took humane and classical literature seriously, much more so than the Ranters.<sup>42</sup> Collectively, Morton’s rhetorical flourishes (and plenty more examples) are striking when we think of them having been published after the end of the 1960s.

## Culture and Aesthetics

Morton also represented a significant tendency in discussions of culture in the postwar CPGB. *The Matter of Britain* (1966), while primarily a collection of essays of Marxist literary criticism, should be seen as a cultural equivalent to *A People’s History of England*. The collection starts with the decline of feudalism, which is told through an analysis of the legends of King Arthur, moves through Shakespeare and the rise of bourgeois thought, and ends with an appreciation of TS Eliot in the context of decaying capitalism. In *The Matter of Britain*, Morton also collected essays on the contradictions in conservative literature and thought, which had been of interest to him most of his life. He illustrated the contradictions at play in conservative-inspired outrage at bourgeois exploitation and how such thinking and literature could not offer a serious solution. Nevertheless, writers sympathetic to both conservatism and early forms of socialism paved the way for audiences to move on to scientific socialism.<sup>43</sup>

Morton’s interests in English culture were not only about explaining the past; they had further contemporary political ramifications. In the 1950s, this stress on English culture was part of the CPGB’s reaction to the pervasiveness of American cultural imperialism. Morton published *Get Out!* (1953), the most polemical work he ever wrote. He argued that violent American comics and films were part of the same imperialist agenda as the presence of American bases and military personnel in Britain. His anti-American activities unsurprisingly caught the attention of the secret services around this time, as the National Archive files reveal.<sup>44</sup>



Morton and others of his generation have been seen as representative of a parochial and culturally conservative CPGB establishment which did not engage with the rapid social changes and youth cultures of the 1960s.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, Morton’s cultural interests and theorising were traditional Communist ones. Still, they can alternatively be seen as offering an early defence against the attacks on Communism and the CPGB as neoliberal capitalism was developing in the second half of the 20th century.

Morton’s views on aesthetics are seen most clearly in a 1963 essay on ‘The Arts and the People’, which soon became a pamphlet under the same title.<sup>46</sup> He acknowledged that film, TV, and wireless had opened up the possibilities of access to culture. However, the ruling class also seized upon these developments to produce unprecedented levels of propaganda. Under capitalism, the arts had become a trivial and nasty industry, with artists increasingly turning away from the world’s grim realities and the people’s interests towards introspection, abstraction, and political eccentricity.



He claimed that the latest stage in the degradation of arts was the uniformity of art, which benefitted American imperialism by destroying national cultural traditions. However, the working class could still develop its own artistic tradition, which would provide the basis for opposition. Some of the more bourgeois English and British cultural heritage (eg Dickens, the Brontës) also offered opposition, notably when it refused to accept injustice uncritically, understood human potential, and appreciated the human struggle with the environment.

For Morton, once artists accept that the bourgeois state is not representative of the will of the people, then they can become part of a progressive force for change. He saw that the best artists have taken the opportunity to serve the people while the growth of socialism will offer further such opportunities grounded in the struggle for a new society. Artists will be able to move away from the role of the disposable entertainer to help create the new society. This will be in dialogue with the interests of the people rather than artists emphasising their own genius.

As Morton developed his lifelong philosophy of aesthetics, the Western world was moving in a different direction. The era of post-modernity was at hand, and from the 1960s onward, postmodernist thinking was marked by challenges to Marxist metanarratives or totalising claims and ideas of human progress. The postmodern emphasis would instead be on individualism, kitsch, playful subversiveness, eclecticism, personal identities etc – the very phenomena Morton was warning against. Moreover, it has become clear that postmodernity and postmodernism constitute the cultural expression of emerging neoliberal capitalism. These developments were fundamental challenges to the Communist Party and were part of the fragmentation of the left and far left after 1968 and the rise to prominence of different (often non-Marxist) protest movements.

Ageing Communist thinkers like Morton may not have been attuned to trends in 1960s subcultures, but he (and others) understood the dangers of what would become known as postmodern culture. And the contradictions were sharpening on the British left. Prominent defenders of the new postmodern world were to be found in the universities, including among those on the left disconnected from the Communist Party and the labour movement and where provocative youth culture was on their doorstep. The Communist Party was hardly immune from such developments. The Eurocommunist faction effectively represented them, which destroyed the CPGB in the long run.

### The Future of Socialism

Morton was a critic of what he saw as the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, which he argued was an instance of wrongful interference in another socialist country – the loaded choice of the word ‘invasion’ rather than ‘intervention’ was far from the only indication of his position.<sup>47</sup> While this and the cultural, economic, and political shifts towards postmodern and neoliberal capitalism fed into the sharp disputes that eventually ended the CPGB, Morton remained committed to the legacy of the Bolshevik revolution, unlike influential tendencies on the left and among Eurocommunists.

Even so, Morton was realistic about the future. From the 1970s onward, it was clear to Morton that the transformation to socialism in England and Britain, and a significant maturation of socialism towards communism in socialist countries, would not happen in his lifetime. A younger Morton and many of his generation once believed they would see revolutionary transformation take place in their lifetimes. In a 1932 essay, Morton even argued that a post-revolutionary literary audience that did not then exist “will come into being even though it

may have to wait for a hundred years”, but it will still be an audience “that will grow up on the far side of the Revolution.”<sup>48</sup> As we saw in the early postwar years, Morton and his fellow historians believed that a Communist-led working class could bring the hopes of English radical history to fruition. They, like leading Party figures such as Harry Pollitt and Tommy Jackson, expected the beginnings of the dawn of socialism to take place imminently.<sup>49</sup> From the mid-1970s onwards, Morton began to push the fulfilment of such hopes into a vague future in the face of a CPGB in turmoil. This delayed future was reflected in his assessments of past movements that were once seemingly on the cusp of success, only for their progressive dreams to be shattered and taken up later.<sup>50</sup>

To help theorise the delayed future, Morton returned to Morris. Morton stressed that Morris came to appreciate the sheer size of the task facing socialists while refusing to weaken his revolutionary conviction.<sup>51</sup> Morton argued (with help from his friend Paul Meier) that Morris was the first to name Marx’s two stages of development in a socialist society, from socialism to communism and the withering away of the state. Morris was then “able to reach an understanding of revolution as a process rather than an event, and so project a model of an advance to socialism more realistic than that of any other British socialist of his time.”<sup>52</sup> Morton now argued that even Morris realised that transitioning from socialism to communism might take over a century. Morton further saw that the transformation of the economy and human behaviour was not progressing as quickly as he once thought in the world of actually existing socialism and began to think that developments would be slower and over the longer term.<sup>53</sup>

### Final Years

In his later years, Morton was a vocal defender of the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat at a time when it was either being forgotten by some Party members or openly challenged by Eurocommunists.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, he was saddened by the divisions in the Party he had loyally served, though he was increasingly distant from them in his older age. In later life, his intellectual efforts were typically geared towards Eastern Europe, especially the German Democratic Republic, where he was a regular visitor. Such was his reputation and influence that Morton was awarded an honorary doctorate from Wilhelm Pieck University Rostock in 1975.

Morton continued thinking, analysing, and writing until the day he died. He was an early advocate of ecological Marxism, as green politics and environmentalism were emerging in Britain and the West in the 1970s. Some of this was an outworking of his love of the English (and particularly East Anglian) landscape and countryside. But now there was a sense of threat to the environment, a “growing awareness of impending ecological crisis and of the consequences of the century of blind and greedy plunder of our planet.” He argued that it is no longer possible to think of abundance simply as “an inexhaustible supply of food and consumer goods.” If Morton anticipated future political interests here, he would have been shocked at environmental developments involving cars and the expansion of roads towards the end of the twentieth century. He did not believe it sustainable for the whole world to live at the same material level as the United States or advanced industrial European countries. He speculated that there was one car per every other family in Britain and almost one car per family in the United States. To “imagine this extended over the whole population of the world would be horrifying if it were not manifestly absurd.”<sup>55</sup> This assessment was from 1975; we

do not have to speculate much about what Morton might have thought of car use as the years passed.

Morton's ecological thinking did not involve ideas of forced poverty and deprivation, and he always appreciated the importance of technological advancements and how they should benefit the people. He further argued that a central task of socialism in its first phase was to redeploy resources to help enable a transformation of human needs. The "endless consumer trash" produced under capitalism involved a constant generation of imaginary wants (as opposed to needs). The fast-moving fashion industry meant convincing consumers that what was recently novel is now absurd. A simpler life based on "our real needs" for a fulfilling, dignified life was preferable. Abundance should mean quality made widely available to all and should replace poor quantity. This transformed future would not resemble the United States, but Morton added ominously that this lesson would be difficult to learn.<sup>56</sup>

### Afterlife

Morton died peacefully on 23 October 1987 at The Old Chapel while writing his final booklet on the fate of 17th-century radicalism and the so-called Glorious Revolution of 1688. He was buried with an edition of his poems at Clare Parish Cemetery next to Tommy Jackson's plot. In 1990, Vivien joined him. Beneath their names on the gravestone are words adapted from Morton's poem *Cokaigne Fantasy*: "Man grows with time in grace and gentleness, takes nature's mould and nature his."

Here, we have only touched the surface of Morton's depth of thinking. Yet it should already be clear that he should be remembered as one of the leading Communist intellectuals of 20th-century England and Britain. His historical materialism was consistent, unflinching, and constantly updated in the light of changing historical conditions. His historical arguments anticipated the more celebrated British Marxist historians (eg Hill, Hobsbawm, EP Thompson), which should now be appreciated. His literary criticism should be restored to its central place in British Marxist scholarship of the twentieth century after Terry Eagleton's influential attacks on Communist Party thinkers polemically downplayed their significance.<sup>57</sup>

Morton further offered a vision of national transformation and a promotion of a cultural heritage to counter American imperialism. His form of progressive patriotism was also openly aimed at countering the narrow-minded jingoism associated with Enoch Powell and the hard right.<sup>58</sup> Fast forward a few decades, and the broader left has now largely and regrettably surrendered English patriotism to the right, much to its detriment over the past decade. To return to Morton is to return to one of the best thinkers about England and Englishness produced in the history of British Communism.

### Postscript

*A People's History of England* remains a classic of British Marxism, and for good reason. However, if I were to recommend any book, it would be *The English Utopia*. Here, Morton developed his understanding of the potential of English radicalism and a progressive vision for the future transformation of England. He also presented a historical materialist understanding of English culture to complement *A People's History*, where the subject received little attention. If any single work unifies Morton's thinking over the decades, it is *The English Utopia*. It deserves a place as one of the finest works of any English or British Marxist intellectual in the twentieth century.

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## POLITICAL EDUCATION COLUMN

# Why Study British Marxists?

## David Grove



IN 1940 I WAS a sixth-former studying History and English. Like many schoolfellows in the pre-war years I called myself a socialist, though the nearest I'd come to Marxism was the writings of GDH Cole, the leading left Labour intellectual, and RH Tawney's *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*.

But I had just joined the Left Book Club. One of their choices that year was *India Today* by R Palme Dutt. My history course covered India so I lapped it up. That book not only transformed my school essays; it changed my life. Dutt's analysis provided the first credible answers to the questions I was asking about the relations between Britain and India. I recognised the intellectual power of Marxism, and two years later I joined the Oxford student branch of the CPGB.

Dutt was the party's foremost theoretical thinker. In 1934 he had published *Fascism and Social Revolution*, one of the first and still one of the best analytical accounts of the rise of fascism. Dutt's treatment of the relations between social democracy and fascism has lessons for today's efforts to counter the extreme right. In 1953 his *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire* demonstrated in detail the harm inflicted by imperialism on the British economy and society. That context still frames the class struggle today.

All Dutt's works remain relevant and readable. So do those of his contemporary AL Morton. His *A People's History of England* was published in 1938. It stimulated a series of Marxist studies that have had a lasting effect on mainstream English historians.

Morton's work casts a new light on familiar events. Take for instance the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588, usually presented simply as an example of English cool courage (Drake playing bowls on Plymouth Hoe), innovation and determination. Morton tells the story of the Armada in a chapter

entitled 'Origin of the English Revolution', because the victory over Spain, largely a private effort by merchants and bankers, helped to consolidate and give confidence to the rising capitalist class that half-a-century later executed Charles I and ended the divine right of royalty to rule this country.

Morton also did much to restore the political reputation of the first great English Marxist, William Morris. His introductions in *Three Works by William Morris* and *Political Writings of William Morris* are perhaps the easiest approach to that much misunderstood communist.

Regular readers of *Communist Review* will be well aware that the British stream of Marxist studies continues to flow. But activists engaging with scientific socialism for the first time may not know of the many works of the last hundred years that analyse the British economy, society and culture, building on the theoretical foundations laid by Marx, Engels and Lenin.

For instance, you might be struggling to apply to modern Britain the Marxist theory of the state set out in Lenin's *State and Revolution* in 1917. You would get considerable help from the insights in two books from the 1950s: Gollan's *The British Political System* and Harvey & Hood's *The British State*. The details are different today but much of the pattern is unchanged.

Of the top 50 'classics' on the present CPB website, 40 are by Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Only three are by British writers, the maverick Marxists Sylvia Pankhurst and William Paul. There are also two works by Ireland's James Connolly.

The Political Education Commission now proposes to add another list of 50 important works by British Marxists. The Commission will welcome suggestions for titles to be included.

# Class Politics and the Struggle for Unity, Independence and Socialism

## Eugene McCartan

**T**HE POLITICAL DEMAND of a 'United' Ireland is formally supported by the majority of political parties in Ireland, including establishment parties bar the Unionist parties. It is the declared central demand of those who openly call themselves Republican, almost akin to a declaration of faith for many Republicans. Many working people support the demand and aspire to see a united Ireland.

But we have to ask ourselves: Why do we need a United Ireland? What difference would it make to the lives of working people? Why should working people support such a demand? Would a united Ireland on its own end imperialist domination? Would a united Ireland give us sovereignty and independence?

These are some of the critical questions that we have to strive to answer. What type of 'United Ireland' are we struggling for? In whose interests will a united Irish democracy serve? If we live in a class-divided society then are there not clearly divergent class interests? The answer to those questions must and should determine our demands and strategy today and tomorrow.

### Class

The Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) is a Marxist party. For Marxists, society begins with economic activity: people must produce things in order to live in the first place. Food, shelter, and clothing are probably the most important primary needs. After this, tools and infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, places of work etc, would be a next level of development. All of this involves people working together to produce these needs, and it is out of this production that society grows and produces and reproduces itself.

It is from people coming together to produce the means of existence that the whole range of political, social, legal, cultural, and other structures of society develop. And class is at the heart of everything. It arises from the position of people and groups of people in the organisation of production. The crucial question in any class society is: Who owns the means of production and who controls the processes of production? In capitalism, a small class of property owners owns the means of production, and thereby they wield huge power in society – they are often known simply as capitalists, and also as the ruling class. The huge mass of property-less people are forced to sell their labour power to the capitalists in order to obtain the means of existence – this is the working class.

It must be said that class is not a salary bracket. It isn't those earning under X in wages each month or year. Technical statisticians and economists often reduce class to wage categories: those earning under €/\$25k are working class, those over it are lower middle class, etc etc. This is not our understanding of class. The reduction to wages strips the

concept of class, a relationship to the means of production, of all its revolutionary radical potential. It avoids the question of capitalism, the system. Ruling class hegemony often co-opts radical concepts, depoliticises them and strips them of revolutionary potential. We see these incorrect notions of class very dominant in NGOs, in the EU and national statistical bodies, and we have even begun to see them in our trade union movement.

Class as the simple division at the core of production has enormous social consequences, and every significant feature of capitalist society has its origins here. In the first place, the vast majority of people have no control over the very processes whereby society is created and their own lives are determined. They cannot freely cooperate with others to decide what is produced and how it will be distributed and consumed.

Marxists want to abolish the private ownership of property and the means of production and to create a society in which all property is socially owned and controlled. In this classless society, people would cease meeting each other primarily in terms of transactions in the market-place and instead encounter each other as fully-human beings with shared needs and wants, cooperating together to bring about a society where need and democratic decision-making determine social outcomes, not the private ownership of property by the few, nor the market with its laws of supply and demand; a society in which all of us can thrive and fully flourish, collectively and individually. This would be a communist society

All political parties and movements set themselves goals – objectives of where they wish to see society going and the nature of that society. The objective of the CPI is to bring about an independent socialist Ireland and we believe that it can be best achieved in the establishing of a united, independent, sovereign national democratic state.

A socialist future for our people is not an abstract or academic question. It is shaped by our understanding of the nature of the economic and social system we face. Socialism, and the future of the people of Ireland, are entirely dependent on the actions of real people in the material world, on the ideological struggle for ideas and the class struggle for human liberation.

The demand and struggle for a fully independent, sovereign and democratic Republic in Ireland arose and developed from the growing realisation that the consequences of the English colonial conquest, the social, economic, political, and cultural ills that flowed from it, could not be overcome by reform or participation in the colonial system. The interests of the English, and later British, state required the domination, subjugation, and exploitation of Ireland and the Irish people.

This is the political analysis of Pearse and Connolly, and it is the central message they brought to the 1916 Rising and

the Irish Revolution. They were not pursuing a romantic ideal nor an abstract political theory: the demand for real democratic control in a sovereign, independent Irish Republic was the practical means to secure the needs and interests of the Irish people. For them, political and economic freedom were inseparable – the one could not be achieved without the other. Connolly had earlier argued that completing the political revolution on its own, ignoring the need for revolution in the economy, would be futile:

“If you remove the English army tomorrow and hoist the green flag over Dublin Castle, unless you set about the organisation of the Socialist Republic your efforts would be in vain. England would still rule you. She would rule you through her capitalists, through her landlords, through her financiers, through the whole array of commercial and individualist institutions she has planted in this country and watered with the tears of our mothers and the blood of our martyrs.”<sup>21</sup>

Has history not borne this out to be true?

The struggle for an independent united, sovereign Irish National Democracy is not some idealised, romanticised goal or aspiration, but in fact is the necessary development for the emancipation of our people, free from imperialist domination, British, USA and EU – what the CPI calls the “Triple Lock of Imperialism”.

Connolly is telling us that completing the political revolution on its own, ignoring the need for a social revolution and revolution in the economy, would be futile. This is the tradition of Marxism that Connolly belongs to, the radical anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist Marxist tradition in which our Party is firmly rooted, because this is our experience, this is Ireland’s experience.

The struggle for a ‘United Ireland’ cannot be separated from all other struggles. The social and national struggles are completely interconnected.

## **Imperialism**

Capitalism/imperialism is based upon the exploitation of humans and nature in the drive for profits. It is a society dominated by the needs and interests of private property. The question that republicans and left activists have to understand and address is: What is imperialism, and in particular what is imperialism in Ireland and how does it control and dominate our lives? An understanding of imperialism is critical for shaping and determining the nature of the struggle and the forces with whom we can build alliances to challenge it.

It was during the period of James Connolly’s active political life that a clearer understanding began to develop in relation to developments within capitalism that gave rise to imperialism. Imperialism can be regarded as a particular expression of capitalism: production and capital have been concentrated in ever bigger corporations and monopolies; finance capital (banks, insurance companies, hedge funds, stockbrokers etc) has become dominant over industrial capital; and the export of finance capital has exceeded the export of goods. This leads to the incorporation of more and more parts of the world into the global system of capitalism and to a new global division of labour. Accompanying this is a political division of the world into spheres of influence and control.

Class is at the heart of everything in capitalism, and so it is with imperialism. This is of vital importance: class must be at the heart of the struggle against imperialism, and we must understand clearly the limitations of nationalism and social democracy in this struggle. They may travel part of the road with us, but they can and ultimately will accommodate with

imperialism, leaving us still dominated by capitalism and still unfree. Only strategies that place class at the centre, insisting on the need for social control of the economy and society, can free us from imperialism.

Imperialism is not simply about militarism, but militarism is a necessary feature of it. It is not the continuation of colonialism, with its exercise of colonial governance, subordination, and extraction of resources, but it is no less dominating or exploitative. Through the incorporation of former colonies and other territories into the system of monopoly capitalism, imperialism secures its interests and dominates and exploits them as certainly as before.

There is no neutral or benign imperialism. It acts and is driven only by its material needs and interests. While the empires of the 19th and early 20th centuries have almost disappeared, they have in general been replaced by a whole set of new dependences, in particular with local capitalist classes in former colonies as imperialism’s main allies. These are the real material conditions that shape and will determine how and against whom we struggle, and where we are in the struggle for human emancipation for socialism.

The CPI would argue that the dominant comprador elements of the Irish capitalist class are completely dependent on their subservient relationship with imperialism; therefore they have little or no interest in challenging it, but rather it is in their material interests to continue to strengthen the interests of imperialism in Ireland. The ruling class in Ireland maintains its class rule, and its legitimacy, primarily through alliances with more powerful dominant capitals and their political states and institutions, like the US, Britain and the EU.

We can see this in their strategy to abandon neutrality and to join EU military co-operation and to facilitate the US in Shannon. We saw this in the southern State appealing, on behalf of Apple, our ‘economic model’, against the EU’s tax ruling. We have seen this in the lobbying access that the US Chamber of Commerce in Dublin gets on all pieces of workers’ rights legislation.

## **Partition**

James Connolly argued that partition “would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish Labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured.”<sup>22</sup> The partition of Ireland is a further obstacle to the Irish people exercising real democratic control over their society and their lives. The division of our country arises out of the historical colonial domination of Ireland by England and Britain; the plantation of Protestants from England and Scotland and the deliberate promotion of sectarian antagonisms to protect colonial interests; and the needs of imperialism in the twentieth century to secure a stable Ireland where the interests of capital would be advanced.

As a response to political upheaval and revolution in Ireland in the early 20th century, partition provided a solution for and within imperialism. It divided the democratic forces and the working class; it was a compromise that Unionism and its Tory supporters could accept; it provided a state in the 26 Counties in which Nationalist capital and big business could advance its class interests; it provided a means of ending the Revolution without sparking social transformation; and it secured both parts of a divided Ireland for imperialism.

While the six counties were at one time an important economic unit of the British state and its empire-building, Unionism has now ceased to be the key ally of the British. It

is no longer the economic force it was at the time of partition; its material basis has almost gone and new sets of subservience and control are being constructed to meet the needs of imperialism in Ireland.

Imperialism is not attached exclusively to any one form of political governance or set of institutions in Ireland. If a United Ireland could be brought about without threatening its interests or risking further unrest and upheaval, then imperialism might well think it has advantages in reducing or removing the constant friction that flows from the continuing partition.

At every turn during Brexit, the unresolved issue of partition, British governance in Ireland and the obstruction of Irish democracy came back to plague the British negotiating position. Of course, the EU also used the Irish situation cynically to further its own objectives; but then it too is an imperialist construct and institution.

For the Irish ruling class, a 'United Ireland' is attractive as a cosy vision of some future cultural and social reconciliation on the island of Ireland, detached from all political content, its revolutionary potential defused, and safely confined within the imperialist system. Like all ruling classes, it wants to claim the legitimacy that is derived from Ireland's revolutionary tradition and struggle for freedom, while harnessing it to a conservative, deradicalised and pro-imperialist politics in the present.

We have to ask: What type of 'United Ireland' are we struggling for? Whose interests will a united Irish democracy serve? A united Ireland is clearly a class question, it is a democratic question. In the contemporary world it cannot be separated from the domination needs and interests of imperialism in its exploitation of the people of Ireland.

Partition can only be properly addressed by confronting its role in denying democracy across the island of Ireland and producing the "carnival of reaction" that Connolly foresaw. North and South, we are denied real democracy, sovereignty, and independence: all of the institutions of governance – the EU and the eurozone, the British Parliament, the Stormont Executive, and the Dáil at Leinster House – serve to remove

democratic control from the people and to promote the interests of capitalism and imperialism. Institutions in Ireland that facilitate the people exercising real democratic power themselves are the only means through which the people's interests can be secured and imperialism defeated.

So, the struggle for unity cannot be separated from the struggle for independence and the achievement of national democracy, from the struggle for instituting profound democratic transformation in all areas of human activity and relationships, economic, social, cultural as well as the political sphere, to end human exploitation. It's the demands and struggles of today that will shape and determine tomorrow, that will determine what sort of 'United Ireland' will be established.

For us, ending partition is an essential step on the road to achieving socialism. We must extract ourselves from the grip of imperialism, and ending partition is necessary if we are to attain the sovereignty and independence that are the requisites for building a truly democratic Republic, in which we can extend real democracy beyond the political sphere into the economy and all areas of society. In this independent, sovereign, democratic Republic, we can challenge private ownership of the means of production and property and build a truly socialised society that liberates us all to live fully human lives together and flourish to our fullest potential.

There is only one class that can bring about such a radical social transformation to a truly sovereign independent Ireland and in whose own material interests it is. That is the working class itself.

■ Based on a speech given at Féile an Phobail, Ireland's biggest community arts festival, West Belfast, Friday 9 August 2024.

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# Reflections on the General Election 2024

## Nick Matthews



THINKING ALOUD, the way Communists engage in politics is to an extent conditioned by the shape and structure of the major political forces in our country. Understanding those forces, and the challenges and opportunities they present us with, helps to determine the strategic priorities of the Party.

Over the last fifty years the UK has undergone huge social and economic change which our political system has struggled to accommodate. The structures of our political parties, it is often argued, no longer provide a source of identification for many citizens. We are now seeing an acceleration in those changes. How they develop, and the threats and opportunities they present, are important for future strategies of political engagement.

It is probably a cliché but the argument is that, in First Past The Post (FPTP) parliamentary systems, unlike in more proportional systems, the coalition is formed before the election. As the choice gets reduced, each major party becomes an internal coalition of interests jockeying for influence. In Britain the pinnacle of this approach was in the 1950s, when the combined Conservative/Labour vote never fell below 93%.<sup>1</sup> The effect of this was to drive much of the political discourse inside the two main political parties – hardly surprising when they had a genuine mass membership.

In the early 1950s there were around 2.8m Conservative Party members and 1m Labour Party members. Members of trade unions affiliated to the Labour Party and of the socialist societies and cooperatives boosted the total Labour Party membership by another 5 to 6m.<sup>2</sup> This was largely the case from the years after 1945 until the early 1990s.

Formed as a federal body, the Labour Party relied on an internal political discourse that had become quite sophisticated. These internal processes are brilliantly described by the late Lewis Minkin in his trilogy of books on the Labour Party Conference. His first, *The Labour Party Conference*<sup>3</sup>, produced a fresh insight of the party's internal processes. Lewis was a strong supporter of the party-trade union link, and this formed the basis of the second book, *The Contentious Alliance*<sup>4</sup>, which focused on the complexities of the relationship between the party and the unions at a time when he was relatively optimistic about its future. This optimism evaporated with his final book of the series, *The Blair Supremacy*,<sup>5</sup> which analysed changes in party management under New Labour. Lewis was highly critical of the managerial strategy developed under Tony Blair, while understanding the compelling reasons – not least electoral – that made many within the party go along with it.

Lewis's key observation is that Blair's transformation of Labour was based, not on the support for the New Labour 'Project', but on a mixture of command and control and highly manipulative politics. The internal report, *Partnership in Power*, introduced a new approach to policy-making. In place of the traditional conference adversarial style of policy-making, *Partnership in Power* introduced new institutions such

as the National Policy Forum, animated by the principles of inclusivity, dialogue and partnership. But hopes were soon dashed. Minkin shows, with a compelling wealth of evidence, how much of this new structure amounted to little more than a dignified façade masking a “covert managerial coup”<sup>6</sup> designed to fasten the Leader's grasp over all key institutions.

Some of the structures that Minkin described so well had indeed become moribund by the 1970s, making this coup that much easier. They had led to the formation of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy in 1973. It's interesting that the Conservatives only started having an annual 'conference' because they had seen the publicity Labour gained from its conference and it was only in 1965 that the Conservative parliamentary party became involved in electing their leader, choosing the grammar-school boy, Edward Heath.

The high tide of party democracy within Labour was probably the battle for the Deputy Leadership in 1981. The right of the party nervously watched Denis Healey beat Tony Benn by less than 1% of the vote. Since then, and at every opportunity, the right of Labour has sought to restrict internal party democracy.

This however is far from being simply a British phenomenon. In 2013 Peter Mair published his seminal book, *Ruling the Void*<sup>7</sup>, claiming that the age of party democracy had passed. His argument was that the major parties have become so disconnected from society that they no longer seem capable of sustaining democracy in its present form. He famously stated:

“[T]he functions that parties do perform, are seen to perform, and are expected to perform, have changed from combining representative and governing roles to relying almost exclusively on a governing role (eg candidate selection, recruitment etc). This is the final passing of the traditional mass party.”<sup>8</sup>

He presciently observed that the widening gap between citizens and their political leaders posed a crisis of legitimacy for the governing class and was therefore fuelling populist mobilisations against it. In particular, Europe's political elites had remodelled themselves as a homogeneous professional class, withdrawing into state institutions that offered relative stability in a world of fickle voters. Meanwhile, non-democratic agencies and practices proliferated – not least among them the European Union.

In the Labour Party this process of hollowing-out was deferred for a few years, when ironically the Labour right, using a contested constituency selection in Falkirk<sup>9</sup> as a catalyst, and on the back of the *Collins Report*<sup>10</sup>, moved the party to a one member, one vote selection process for the leadership and parliamentary candidates, a final attempt to dilute trade union influence. The speed of this process suggests that this had been prepared in advance. To the Labour right's surprise, and against the odds, Jeremy Corbyn was twice elected leader, when many of the post-war tendencies of hollowing-out were held in abeyance.

This year's General Election helps us to see what happens when the internal coalitions break down. The trigger for this was the result of the Brexit referendum, which came as a shock for the major parties and caused them serious internal difficulties, as both had strong internal majorities for 'remain'.

Theresa May replaced David Cameron as Prime Minister, without troubling the Conservative Party members. She delayed the process of leaving the EU and then, taken in by the opinion polls and in a fit of hubris, called a general election. To almost everyone's surprise this resulted in her losing her majority. Corbyn's remarkable 2017 election performance, which offered hope to many marginalised communities in the UK, had effectively neutralised the Brexit issue. With no majority, however, May was unable to control the legislative processes, initiating a long summer of Parliamentary shenanigans that did neither May nor Corbyn any favours.

This ultimately led to the downfall of Theresa May and the election of Boris Johnson as leader. He sought to make the Tories the party of the Brexit majority, restructuring the party, removing many 'one nation' pro-Europe conservatives and forming a coalition with the 'hard leavers'. He very successfully held this coalition together for the 2019 General Election, when the Conservatives received some 13.7m votes, even more than in the 1951 election. However, a combination of external shocks, including Covid and Johnson's sheer incompetence, meant that the ideological differences within this coalition were impossible to contain, so that the party ran through three leaders in quick succession, all unable to unite the internal factions. Although Johnson and then Truss became Leader by membership election, May and Sunak assumed the role without any member involvement.

The 2019 election also enabled the Labour right to regain control of the Labour Party. In a demonstration of total ruthlessness rarely seen in British politics, Keir Starmer and the right-wing faction in Labour sought to purge any support for the socialist left. Tony Benn used to quip that Labour was not a socialist party, but it had socialists in it. The Labour right, given a free hand by the leadership, sought to make sure that was no longer the case, leaving many traditional Labour supporters homeless.

This erosion of internal democracy and member engagement within the two major parties has not led to the destruction of political activity, but instead to political activity taking place outside the envelope of the existing political parties. This process has been patchy and difficult as it is a challenge for insurgents to win elections in the FPTP system; they are only successful when their vote is geographically concentrated, as was the case for many years for the SNP.

These processes were acted out in the general election of 2024. The conservative coalition split four ways: many 'remainder Tories' voted LibDem; another large group supported Nigel Farage's Reform UK group; and a third did not vote at all. The effect of this was that the Conservative vote fell from 43.6% to 23.7%, with a loss of 251 seats. This was the worst result in the party's history. The Labour coalition, whittled down by the Labour right, also had a poor result. The combined Labour/Conservative vote was the lowest since the 1918 General Election. On a very low turnout, less than 60%, the minor parties received 42.6% of the vote.

At this point the oddities of the FPTP system kicked in. With just 33.7% of the vote, 20% of the votes of registered electors, Labour gained 64% of the seats – astonishingly receiving fewer votes than Corbyn in 2019, characterised as

'Labour's worst result since 1935!' This gave Keir Starmer a majority in Parliament similar to Tony Blair's of 1997, which was achieved with a 43.2% vote share of the turnout and 3.7m more votes.

With a fragmenting electorate there are now very few safe seats; just 54 out of 650 MPs won a majority of the votes cast in their constituencies.

We now have a completely new Labour coalition with a very narrow base. A combination of the landslide and the ruthless selection processes have pulled in many new MPs who have shallow roots in the places they represent. Described in parts of the press as former special advisers, party insiders and 'nepo' babies, these are accompanied by a huge number of corporate lobbyists; according to the *New Statesman*,<sup>11</sup> lobbyists are 27 times more likely to be in Parliament than teachers.

Post-election, over 40 former lobbyists are now Labour MPs. Apart from a few exceptions, the MPs on the left of the party who survived kept their heads down in the run up to the election, for fear of deselection. So where does this leave us?

As James Butler said in the *London Review of Books*, "Keir Starmer is now the central fact of British politics".<sup>12</sup> A British Prime Minister does not need a large majority for their programme to be carried out, but having a 174-seat majority is both a luxury and a challenge. Starmer will have to hold together this new coalition that is very wide, covering the inner cities and the shires, but is also very shallow. The electoral threats will be multiple and the policy options often contradictory.

In *New Left Review*, Lorna Finlayson has described Starmer as possibly "keener to prove his allegiance to Washington by dragging the world to war, more brutal still in punitive cuts and privatisation."<sup>13</sup> His first months in office have done nothing to contradict this view. There is no evidence, so far at least, that the new government has any idea how to get us out of – as James Butler puts it – the "doom loop":

"The economy isn't growing so the country is starved of cash, it needs to rebuild. Its institutions degrade. Money earmarked for investment gets swiped for day-to-day costs .... Failure to invest means failure to grow, again and the cycle worsens and repeats."<sup>12</sup>

Starmerism, if that is giving credit where there is none, is an odd beast.

Caitlín Doherty points to "an important feature of Starmer's neo-Labourism: an assertion of working-class identity without any commitment to working-class politics"<sup>14</sup>. She continues:

"The Starmerite formula demands having once been proximate to wage-labour, then using 'public service' as a means of social mobility. Of the new MPs that make up 'Generation K', more than two-thirds emphasised in their election literature some early personal or familial link to the constituency in which they were standing. But, by drawing this connection, they also emphasised having left. Unlike former generations of working-class Labour politicians, the return of these middle-class small-town émigrés is packaged as a messianic managerialism. Prodigal pragmatists sent back to oversee decline. At least no-one speaks of a classless society any more."

Messianic managerialism does not represent a substitute for any meaningful political engagement inside Labour and will, I suggest, only accelerate the exodus from the party. Politics abhorring a vacuum, it will continue to develop outside. There are numerous nodes of growth amongst the 42.6% non-Labour/Tory vote. Under present conditions they will continue to grow, but the key question is: Will they coalesce into a new far-right movement or take a lesson from France and create a meaningful new green/left electoral force?



The Communist Party anticipated some of these developments by standing candidates in the General Election whilst continuing to seek to influence Labour via the trade union link. How these tendencies play out will determine which opportunities are available to us.

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- Winning entry in the YCL's Young Writers' Competition
- The Draghi Variant *Coniare Rivolta*
- Book reviews, political education column and Soul Food





## Strengthened by Memories and Enriched by Assimilated Experiences

### Martin Levy

Review of

**Britain's Communist Party 1920-2020:**

**'The Gleam of Socialism'**

**by Robert Griffiths**

Praxis Press, Glasgow, 2024, 264 pp, pbk/digital, £22/£10.

ISBN 978-1-899155-(27-9/28-6)

**T**HIS BOOK TAKES its title from a phrase which – it is said – Harry Pollitt, general secretary of Britain's Communist Party from 1929-39 and 1941-56, often used. YCL national organiser Gerry Pocock attested to that in 1960, in his tribute after Pollitt's death; he also referred to how, in Harry's lifetime, the gleam of socialism had “grown to a glorious reality for hundreds of millions throughout the world.”<sup>1</sup> But another interpretation was put on it by Victor Kiernan, who wrote in 1998 that Kevin Morgan's biography of Pollitt<sup>2</sup> recalled that most of those who attended his funeral were ordinary working folk who had caught from him “something of the ‘gleam’”.<sup>3</sup>

In fact the phrase very rarely figures in Pollitt's own published articles and speeches. Perhaps the clearest exposition of his own understanding of it is in his 1939 pamphlet, *Will it be War?*:

“Never, never, will we bow the knee to fascism. Never will the cry of surrender be heard from the lips of our people, whether the foes are in Britain or Berlin.

For our defence is strengthened by the memories of our past struggles. It is enriched by the collective experiences we have assimilated from the titanic struggles of those who hundreds of years ago saw the gleam of socialism and followed it in fair day and foul.

We are the inheritors of their fighting traditions and sacrifices, defeats and victories. ...

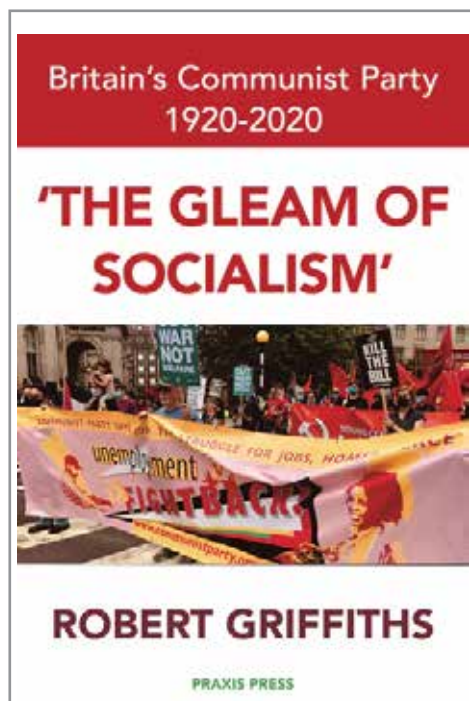
*We have been too long kneeling. It is time to rise!”*<sup>4</sup>

His own conception was therefore not dependent on the existence of a particular model of socialism, however much he himself may have been inspired by the successes of socialism in the Soviet Union and elsewhere. It was one which was rooted in the long-term visions of our predecessors who saw an unjust society and fought to change it. As William Morris wrote:

“... For this at least we know,

That the dawn and day is coming, and forth the banners go.”<sup>5</sup>

By stressing the “titanic struggles” of our predecessors, Pollitt was able to inspire generations of Communist Party and YCL members with the “gleam of socialism”. Mick Jenkins, who joined the Party as a young man in 1923, many years later recalled Pollitt speaking after Lenin's death at a big meeting in the Manchester Free Trade Hall in 1924:



“And how the audience rose when Harry lifted the curtain of the future and gave us a gleam of what these [Soviet] revolutionary workers were fighting for, of what their sacrifices would bring. He talked of the great leaders of our people – of John Ball, Robert Owen, William Morris and the pioneers and how their dreams were being made realities today. And he asked, ‘if the Russian workers and peasants ... with their terrible legacy of backwardness and privation can so confidently tackle the future – what could we do with our tremendous economic and industrial resources and our skilled working class? ... That night Pollitt became my hero.”<sup>6</sup>

This book by Robert Griffiths deserves to be read in the same way. The struggles of our predecessors in Britain's Communist Party, and their “gleam of socialism”, should inspire us in the struggles for peace, progress and socialism today.

It's not a compendium of Communist biographies – for that, see *Red Lives: Communists and the struggle for socialism*,<sup>7</sup> and Graham Stevenson's online *Encyclopedia of Communist Biographies*,<sup>8</sup> both of which recount the contributions of many individual Communists, but lack the comprehensive historical context.

Nor is it simply a short history of the Communist Party – for that, see *A Centenary for Socialism: Britain's Communist Party 1920-2020*.<sup>9</sup> Rather it is a combination of a limited number of biographies together with incisive historical overviews. Almost all of the articles have been previously published in some form: seven in the *Morning Star*, three in *Red Lives* (one now extended), two in this journal (one likewise extended), two in *A Centenary*, and two as pamphlets (now extended and updated).

Of course, the common feature, apart from Communist history in Britain, is that all the articles have the same author. As a prolific writer, and as Communist Party general secretary for nearly 27 years – actually longer than Pollitt served – Robert Griffiths is certainly entitled to bring out such a collection. Indeed, Pollitt had two volumes of *Selected Speeches and Articles* published; and many years ago I suggested to Robert that he might consider doing something similar. Not one for self-aggrandisement, he pooh-poohed the idea, but here he has given the Communist Party and the labour movement something much more valuable. Speeches can be very much of the moment, but this collection should stand the test of time.

There is, as the author says, “a disproportionate representation of Welsh Communists among the biographies featured”. That is entirely understandable, given his own roots and writings; and, as he adds, “No disrespect is intended for the tremendous contributions made by English and Scottish Communists”. The biographies of Thora Silverthorne, Dora Cox, Dai Dan Evans, Annie Powell and TE Nicholas, while inspirational, are also representative of the style of work by many Communists during the Party’s first century.

The biographies which I find warmest and most moving are those of Derek Robinson and John Haylett, respectively funeral oration and *Morning Star* obituary. These were comrades with whom Robert had worked particularly closely, and my own reaction may reflect the fact that I knew them too. The tribute to John Haylett is particularly important, as he is not included in *Red Lives*.

Among the other articles, there are two which are not actually biographies, but dedicated to rescuing the integrity of leading Communists of the past. Robert completely takes apart both John Callaghan’s hatchet job on the Party’s leading theorist Rajani Palme Dutt, and Nina Fishman’s “ideological grave-robbing” in her biography of miners’ leader Arthur Horner.

Likewise, reviewing Callaghan’s *Cold War, Crisis and Conflict*, Robert defends the record of the Communist Party in the 1951-1968 period, characterising the book as a “botched autopsy”; while he scathingly attacks Geoff Andrews’ *Endgames and New Times: The Final Years of British Com-*

*munist 1964-1991* as “partial in every sense of the word: a narrow-minded exercise in vanity publishing” and “not our history”. In the latter review he also defends Antonio Gramsci as “a Marxist and a Communist”.

There is of course no escaping the revisionist take-over of the Communist Party of Great Britain, which necessitated Re-establishment as the Communist Party of Britain in 1988. It is included in the opening article, ‘100 Years of Struggle for the Working Class and Humanity’, in the biography of Gordon McLennan, which appears to be written more in sorrow than in anger, and in ‘Party Crises, Recovery and Re-establishment, 1920-1988’. The last-mentioned is significantly extended from *A Centenary*, to include ‘Class Against Class’ and ‘A War on Two Fronts’, with the more recent period significantly extended.

That last crisis has been the most difficult to overcome, but much has been achieved. 36 years on, the Party can look back with pride on the ‘100 Years [and more] of Struggle’, and its work in the many areas described in this book, to which the author himself has made no mean contribution. Reading this book, comrades can take encouragement from the “gleam of socialism” which inspired the Party and so many of its members, and can face the battles of today with renewed vigour.

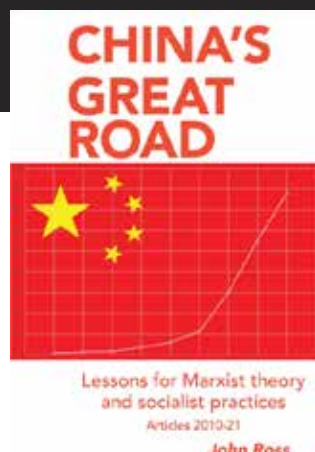
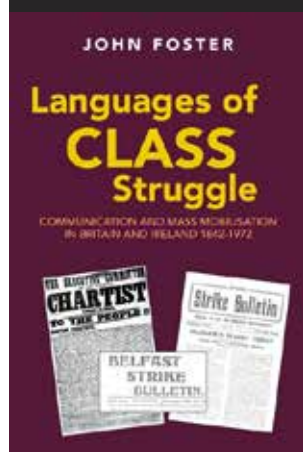
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# Archives of Solidarity and Resistance: Defining ‘working-class’ poetry

## Fran Lock

AT A RECENT EVENT for **Culture Matters**, celebrating two fine books by Wayne Dean-Richards and Charlie Hill, I asked both authors a question about whether or not they considered themselves to be ‘working-class writers’, and what that term meant to them. I asked the question with respect to prose writing, but I was also very much thinking about what it meant to be called – or to call yourself – a ‘working-class poet’.

In our discussion we touched on the importance of differentiating between ‘working-class’ as a strategic category – a definition employed to drive political or social outcomes such as greater cultural participation and opportunity for low-income and vulnerably housed writers – and ‘working-class’ as a kind of aesthetic marker, indicative of a particular style, set of thematic concerns, or *way* of writing. This distinction matters. If we allow our class identity to be defined only within a set of incredibly narrow and proscribed parameters, we risk creating a homogenised, two-dimensional vision of working-class culture and experience. Often, in insisting that there is only a handful of ways to express and experience one’s class identity, and that *they* know definitively what those are, literary elites shave out the complexity of class dynamics, and the fraught intersection of class with other forms of marginalisation. While class is first and foremost a social reality, it is also a subjective and psychological experience. This latter aspect of class is lost when we set – or allow elites to set – proscriptive limits on what ‘working-class’ writing looks and sounds like.

At the end of our discussion we agreed, I think, that class shapes and delimits all forms of cultural reception and creative opportunity; there are real, material bars to access and opportunity for working-class writers. But something that both authors brought up was the way in which exclusion itself becomes a powerful subject and generative force within working-class writing, and I wonder if one useful way to talk about working-class writing might be as a writing into or against various kinds of opposition; as a writing of resistance. By “resistance”, I don’t necessarily mean writing that has an explicit political aim or context – although I am obviously including those kinds of text – rather, I’d like to suggest that working-class writing itself is a *method* of resistance: a form of trespass; a means of registering presence and marking moments of erasure.

What do I mean by that? First of all that language itself is not a politically neutral territory, but a pre-existing system. It is worth noting that the oldest forms of written language were legal in nature. When the poor appear in such documents they appear as subjects to (subject to) different kinds of top-

down authority. This pattern has persisted for centuries. When poor or working-class subjects enter language we do so at a disadvantage, and there is a sense that when we engage with the written word we are continually wrestling with a system of signs that in its various ways attempts to assail, resist or evict us.

Traditionally, writing is not ours, and the establishment of an upper- and middle-class literary canon has naturalised this notion as absolute reality. It is not only the historically prohibitive cost of printing and publishing that has kept poor and working-class people from participating fully in print culture – even as print technology was democratised, educational opportunity was strictly curtailed – but the vigorous and systematic development of ‘taste’: a set of ever-shifting rules and assumptions about what constitutes ‘good’ writing. As custodians of ‘taste’, the upper and middle classes create a critical and discursive culture that functions as a form of coterie address, enshrining *their* preferred perspectives, styles and chosen forms as the gold standard of good writing. It is *they* who get to decide what is a fit subject for literary treatment, whose voice is worth hearing, whose perspectives and experiences are worth preserving.

The idea of preservation is key: posterity is a form of posthumous luxury, thus seldom afforded to the poor. Working-class and poor people have few material possessions, so our history has often been kept from the museum or the archive; we have no grand estates, and few monuments or street names capture the continuity of our lived experience. In every way we are aligned with the cheap and the ephemeral – our things, our history, our forms of cultural production. *Of course*, elites invent a metaphysics of inherent value to explain the endurance of their art. *Of course*, they present imperviousness to long attrition as the aim for *all* art and literature. Permanence is not, in reality, proof of special merit. It is, rather, artificially engineered. But if timelessness is both the goal and the metric upon which a work will be judged, then the highly specific social conditions under which that art is made can be discounted as merely topical, or of fleeting and limited relevance. Sneaky.

One of the things I love about Wayne Dean-Richards’ poem *a father’s advice to a son being interviewed to work on the Coventry Ring Road – 1958* is the way in which the space of the written poem becomes a repository for a fleeting moment of verbal exchange. The historic and geographical specificity of the title plays with conventions from canonical English literature, but rather than commemorating a portentous event of national significance, the poem argues instead for the importance and conservation of this ordinary working-class memory.

It is striking to me that the physical description of the speaker's father is so brief, comprised of only two lines in the opening stanza: "a peppery sort/ but with a good heart". Rather, it is the father's voice that characterises and defines him. This achieves a number of interesting effects. Because the father is drawn lightly, the reader is able to imagine themselves more readily into the exchange – this father could be any of our fathers. Quoting the speech directly, in short, self-contained epithets, creates a greater feeling of urgency, transforms the reader into the recipient of the advice, trying to assimilate the rapid-fire words. These words are geared towards securing employment, anticipating the wants and whims of a prospective boss, and this is indeed a matter of great urgency for working-class people. Presenting the exchange in this way allows the reader to inhabit the pressured intimacy of this moment. Perhaps more importantly, in letting the "old man" speak for himself, the poem shifts this traditionally peripheral literary figure from passive subject to active agent. The poem creates a space in which a voice not typically acknowledged by literature must be heard. In identifying the father absolutely with (and by) his voice, Dean-Richards recognises voice itself as a repository of working-class history and experience, an embodied record of everything lived and overcome. Voice is another kind of legacy. Sometimes such sounds are all we hand down to the next generation.

The poem's punchline is that the father's advice is *not* what secures the speaker his job. This does not mean, however, that the words are redundant. Rather, by framing the father's speech within the precincts of the poem, Dean-Richards argues for its inherent rather than use-driven value and meaning. The words represent an expression of familial care; they also provide a glimpse into the lived experience of precarious employment, an experience not so different in 1958 from today.

In *THINGS YOU NO LONGER SEE* by James Byrne, the incidental ephemera of working-class life – things remembered in fleeting glimpses, the sometimes-unlovely objects and scenes from the recent past – once again take centre stage. The poem is written after 'Photie Man', the Irish artist Tom Wood, who photographed decades of working-class life in Liverpool, and who recently had a 50-years exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool.<sup>1</sup> This in itself feels significant: for middle-class writers ekphrasis (a literary device that describes a visual work of art in a vivid and often dramatic way) can act as a status claim, another kind of closed loop or coterie address in which the poet implies a connection between their own and a prior (often classical, usually high-status) work. To recognise or decode the connection relies upon a shared fund of cultural references with their origins in elite education, implicitly excluding any reader not from this same rarefied background. But in *THINGS YOU NO LONGER SEE* Byrne turns the epigraph into an occasion of solidarity between two working-class artists whose vocation is to capture those moments and details so often exiled from the concerns of both art and literature. The poem functions both as a celebration of Wood's work, and a retelling or affirming of the people and places he captured on film.

Each stanza is a self-contained vignette or snapshot that gives life through language to one of Wood's 'photies'. While each functions as a complete picture, the syntax is loose, allowing odd details to blur and accrete, creating a tactile collage of image and idea. This effectively distils the sense of hectic energy and movement in Wood's work, and the liveliness of the scenes he chose to record. For example: "Furcoatsisters, Adam's ants. The flashlit strop of the park. Dicky John's/

ghettoblaster. Tailspin to bodypop. Two mop-haired toddlers sleep in a/ Silver Cross, refuse bags for pillows". I am really struck by the way Byrne uses sound to connect and cohere the different elements of this scene. The short, soft vowel sound in "strop", "John", "bodypop", "mop", "toddlers" and "Cross" creates a sonic through-line and persuasive sense of momentum.

Another aspect of the poem I find particularly arresting is Byrne's inclusion of puerile and pejorative graffiti, set out in three-line columns, like sinister haiku. These statements draw the eye and demand attention, a stain that cannot be expunged. One way of reading these might be as a refusal of what Peter Davidson has called a "benign pastness"<sup>2</sup>. That is, the tendency of poetry to convert the complexity and danger of working-class experience into toothless nostalgia. The unsettling homophobia of the graffiti works to prevent this romanticising tendency, but it also stops the poem from being fully assimilated by either its immediate readers or by wider literary culture, its social threat defused. While not endorsing the sentiments of the graffiti, Byrne seems to identify the poem with something of its obtruding and disturbing presence.

In both these poems working-class poetry functions as a kind of unofficial archive. Such literary spaces can serve not only as places of preservation, but as sites of witnessing to that which cannot be persevered; to the erasure of working-class communities and culture.

This act of bearing witness is the key theme of the short poem *I live in an arthouse town* by Peadar O'Donoghue. In his "art house town" the working-class culture of previous generations is cynically repurposed as the empty artsy kitsch of the "uber modern" middle-classes. Here "arthouse" is not merely suggestive of the kind of hip middle-class milieu who attend arthouse cinema screenings and pay for overpriced and largely inedible nibbles ("cactus canapés on a bed of regret"), but serves to create a sense of absolute unreality: nothing is made, no real lives are lived, the "town" is rather an expensive set, a showroom with no substance.

As with Byrne's poem, O'Donoghue resists the easy narrative of gentrification as wholesale improvement. While on a cultural level "We are a lot less racist than we used to be/ and the passages at night are quite delightful", structural rot, represented in the poem by the arresting image of the river, bleeding "naked excrement" into the sea, remains unchallenged.

It feels important to note that the poem is not anti-art as a purely middle-class form of cultural expression, rather what it records and rails against is the superficiality of *corporate* art; the shallowness of capitalism's culture-washing, as represented by the absurd image of "the Andy Warhol themed/ hole-in-the-wall". More disturbing still are the redeveloped dockyards, once again 'themed' around "shipwrecks and redundancies". I find these lines haunting: they capture a tendency whereby the scenes of working-class history and labour become, for the middle-classes, nothing more than a depthless backdrop, a kind of aestheticised inscription surface against which they can pose. Working-class heritage and culture, real *historical pain*, is seen as empty and up for grabs, all part of a meaningless post-modern melange. It is this process to which O'Donoghue's poem bears such articulate witness.

So what does it mean to be a 'working-class poet'? If these poems are anything to go by, it seems to me that what our writing might share is a fierce attentiveness to our own history, and a keen-eyed reckoning with the present. At its best, working-class poetry can be a writing and an archive of solidarity and resistance.

**a father's advice to a son being interviewed to work on  
the Coventry Ring Road – 1958**

by Wayne Dean-Richards

a peppery sort  
but with a good heart  
the old man's words came at him fast:

“tell him your name  
and don't correct him if he mispronounces it:  
bosses don't like to be corrected.

“he'll have nicotine stains on his fingers  
but don't stare:  
bosses don't like to be stared at.

“whatever you do don't listen to  
Heartbreak Hotel before your interview:  
that Elvis Presley will set you on the wrong road for sure!

“wear a clean white shirt,  
put creases in your trousers like razor blades and  
don't forget to shine your shoes.

“stand up straight  
and call him sir.  
don't speak unless you're spoken to.

“if there's a view of that new cathedral they're building  
and the boss points to it,  
be sure and say something nice about it.

“your hands are made  
to build this ring road they want building:  
so, make sure the boss sees them.

“if you get a chance  
tell him you know  
about building.

“if he asks,  
the ratio of sand to cement  
is 3 to 1.

“but make sure, son  
for god's sake:  
you don't mention that other building you do!”

the old man's words circled like crows,  
and still I said  
to the boss,

“I've all sorts of experience  
including, just recently,  
building a model Heinkel - He111.”

the boss' nicotine-stained fingers tensed.  
he said,  
“you've apparently got a sense of humour, lad.”

from the boss' window  
was a view of  
what remained of St Michael's:

a monument  
to  
madness.

the boss puffed on a Woodbine and said,  
“but I like a lad with a sense of humour ...  
you start tomorrow.”

**THINGS YOU NO LONGER SEE  
after 'Photie Man', Tom Wood**

by James Byrne

Jukebox tracklist (foxed paper). A man with a cigarette  
tucked behind his ear. In bird-winged cape, the selenium  
lights up his face.

A girl carries a Benson & Hedges tray through a hallway of  
backglancing fathers. What are you looking at?

A woman in red shoes, groceries either arm, right foot step-  
ping into a pyre of fishguts.

Abruzzi shits the stoop. Alan in Gráinne, pensive as the  
bull's hide he stands upon. Miss New Brighton bronzes  
a c-type bonnet. His tongue rolls upper gums at the Wig  
Centre foyer.

Furcoatsisters, Adam's ants. The flashlit strop of the park.  
Dicky John's ghettoaster. Tailspin to bodypop. Two mop-  
haired toddlers sleep in a Silver Cross, refuse bags for  
pillows.

they that go down to the sea in ships and have their busi-  
ness in great waters. A whole morning left to play Peppy the  
Clown.

paint. artex. Kirkby's uncladded risers smeared through tag  
glass. spliffo. cso96.

seacombe	paula	so
fairy	is	is
boy	a whore	plonky

Trigger hand on the till. Unseen apertures of the gyratory.  
Dockers with arms folded at the Laird shipyard. This is  
your union.

Beach matt bamboo green-frilled at the Halio snack bar.  
Thatcher's tomb crates. Grandmother's hands bound in  
gauze mittens.

chee's burge. jumbo saus. Burgermouth stacks grin from the  
grills.

Over the reclining chair, a nurse administers the medication  
by pinching the patient's eyes open.

Fluke's Kingdom. A man in polished heels makes his exit.

**Editorial notes:**

1. Gráinne is a figure from Irish mythology: the daughter of Cormac MacAirt, the High King of Ireland. She is known for her beauty and passion, and her name is often used (as it is here) as a metaphor/ personification of Ireland. The photograph of Alan on the bull's back can be seen at <https://tomwoodarchive.com/works/ireland>.
2. “Peppy the Clown” is a coin-operated amusement arcade machine.
3. “c-type bonnet” refers to a Jaguar car.
4. *The Heights of the Abruzzi* is a painting by William Linnell (1868) in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, where the recent ‘Photie Man’ exhibition took place.
5. Kirkby is in Knowsley, Merseyside.
6. “spliffo” and “cso66” are graffiti tags.

***I live in an arthouse town***  
by Peadar O'Donoghue

Seven bijou bars  
serve cactus canapes on a bed of regret.  
We are a lot less racist than we used to be  
and the passages at night are quite delightful,  
uber modern graffiti gurus  
and a harmless rapper  
work on a mission  
and a handsome grant.  
The river still bleeds to the sea  
naked excrement  
but the Andy Warhol themed  
hole-in-the-wall serves cash  
on a bed of no regrets.  
This is an arthouse town  
the French films  
are all un-dubbed into the latest  
east coast west speak,  
pointy shoes point the way,  
the little dogs no longer weep in the street.  
Building blocks rock by the docks  
with a marine theme,  
shipwrecks and redundancies.

**Wayne Dean-Richards'** work has appeared in a shedload of magazines and several anthologies. Spouting Forth published a collection of his short fiction, *At the Edge*, and a novel, *Breakpoints*. Another story collection, *Cuts*, subsequently

appeared, as well as *A Box of Porn* with his son Kalman Dean-Richards. A new story collection, *Money & Blood*, was recently published by **Culture Matters**, and a collection of poems, *It's A Mad World But Funny*, by Outside Left.

**James Byrne** is a poet, editor, translator and visual artist. He has published seven full collections, including *Of Breaking Glass* (Broken Sleep Books, 2022). A longtime teacher of poetry and transnational poetics, he has co-edited and co-translated several books, including Ro Mehrooz's *Poems Written Through Barbuire Fences*, a collection of Rohingya language poems, and Ashur Etwebi's *Five Scenes from a Failed Revolution*. A *Selected Poems* is forthcoming in February 2025.

**Peadar 'King Badger' O'Donoghue** writes things (that are a bit like poems) and takes photographs, tries to paint, to assemble things found on the beach, vainly tries to sleep. He co-edits all at PB Press with his wife Collette. His ambition is to be reborn as a badger. He has published two critically acclaimed collections, *Jewel*, with Salmon poetry, and *The Death of Poetry*, with PB Press. He has published poems all over the place, most recently in *The Irish Times*.

**Notes and References**

1. See <https://youtu.be/EEoBXebtP7E> for a video about Tom Wood and his photos, and <https://tomwoodarchive.com/books/photie-man> for a selection from his own archive.
2. P Davidson, *The Idea of the North*, Reaktion Books, London, 2005, p 199.



“

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