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Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation: *Tricontinental Institute*

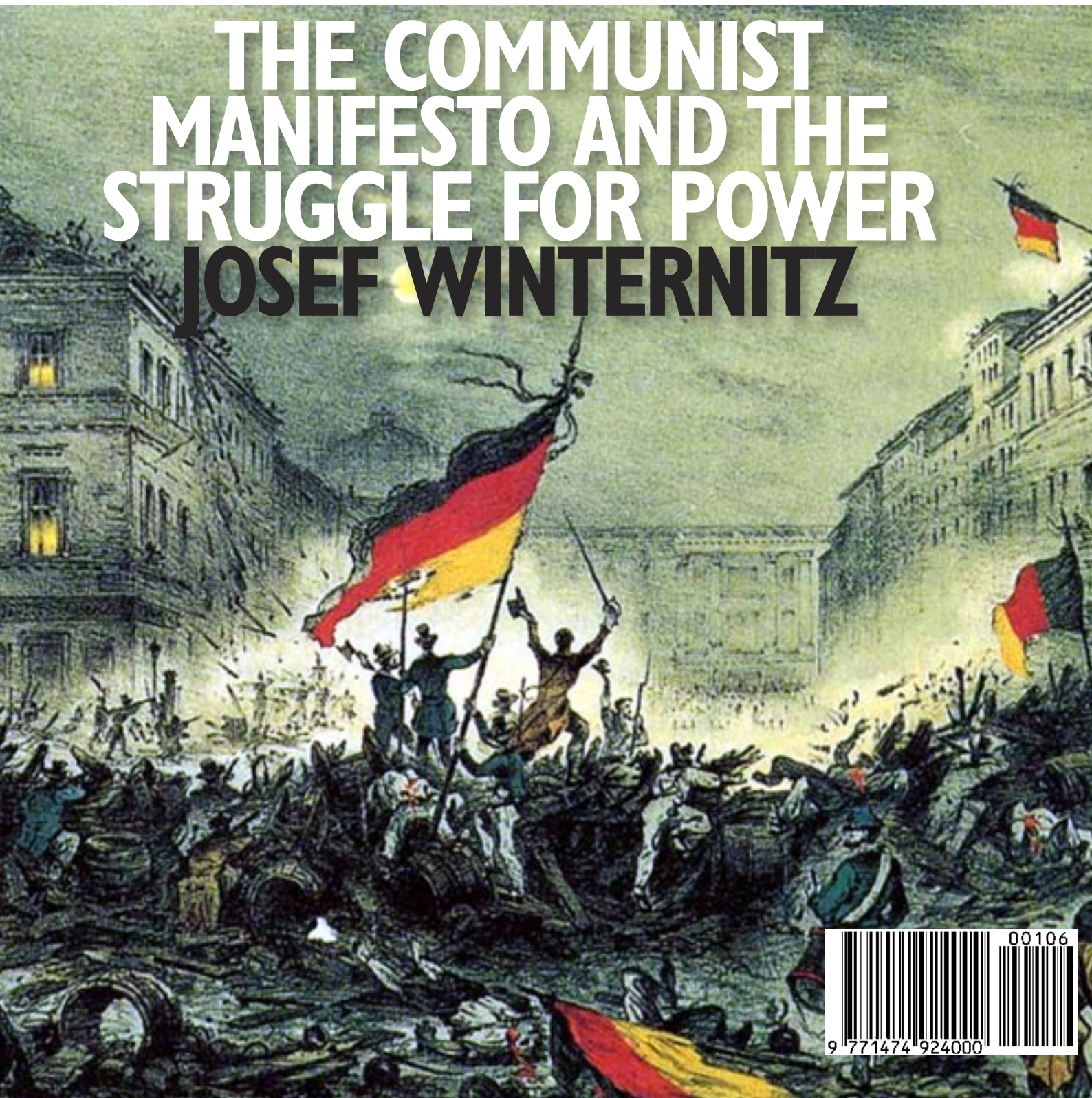
New possibilities for revolutionary change *Ruth Styles*

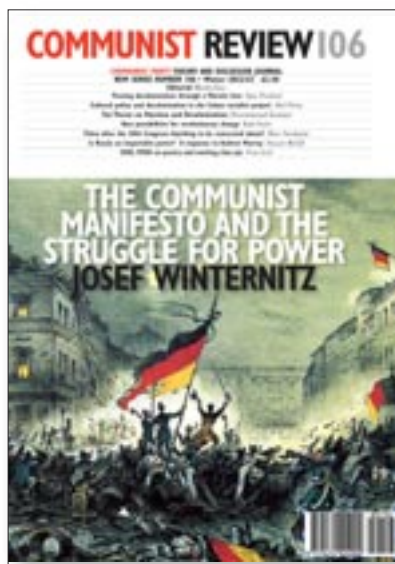
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THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER JOSEF WINTERNITZ





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Back Cover Image Violeta Parra (Chile), *Untitled* (unfinished), 1966, embroidery on sackcloth, 136 x 200 cm; Antonio Berni (Argentina), Juanito Laguna, nd, painted wood and metal collage (triptych), 220 x 300 cm. These and the images on pp 8, 14 and 18 illustrate the online *Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation*, and all are from the Casa de las Américas, Havana.

Front Cover Image The Berlin insurrection of March 1848, showing the origin of the German flag. Lithograph, author unknown.

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TRICONTINENTAL: INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH is an international institute guided by popular movements and organisations. It seeks to bridge academic production and political and social movements in order to promote critical thinking and stimulate debates and research with an emancipatory perspective that serves the people's aspirations.

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EDITORIAL

MARTIN LEVY

OF VERY FEW products of human imagination can it be said that the world was never the same afterwards. Beethoven's *Eroica* symphony of 1803, with its two staccato opening chords, was described by one reviewer as 'throwing open the gates to the nineteenth century'. And it is no accident that it was composed at a time of turbulent change in Europe, following the French revolution of 1789 and the overthrow of several other feudal regimes. Beethoven's sympathy for the revolutionary principles of 'liberty, equality and fraternity' is well-known.

The *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, first published 175 years ago on 21 February 1848, stands in the same position in the economic, philosophical and political sphere. The 45 years since the *Eroica's* first performance had seen revolution replaced by reaction, and the advance of capitalism in Europe – but with that, the rise of the working class, or proletariat. Now, for the first time, a call to revolution was made on the basis of a dialectical and historical materialist analysis of human society, and particularly of class struggle.

That Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels were able to produce such a ground-breaking work, at respective ages of 29 and 28, may seem astounding. Yet they had absorbed much from their education and the milieu in which they operated. That background, and the process leading up to the production of the *Manifesto*, is vividly – if somewhat romantically – portrayed in Raoul Peck's 2017 film, *The Young Karl Marx*. While, unfortunately, the English-subtitle version is still not available to buy or rent in Britain, it does seem possible to stream it from Internet Archive.¹

The publication of the *Manifesto* could hardly have been more timely. The manuscript, in German, was sent to the printer in London a few weeks before the French revolution of 24 February 1848. A French translation was brought out in Paris shortly before the June insurrection. The *Manifesto's* publication, Engels wrote later, coincided with the national armed uprisings in Milan and Berlin. "Everywhere the revolution was the work of the working class" although "the fruits of the revolution were reaped by the capitalist class." And though it "was not a socialist revolution, it prepared the ground for the latter."²

With the defeat of the June 1848 revolution in Paris, and with the Cologne Communist Trial of 1852, the workers' movement disappeared from the public scene and, Engels also wrote, "the *Manifesto* too passed into the background."² Yet, as the working class movement revived, so too did the *Manifesto* and the ideas it inspired. It has remained at the foreground ever since.

To celebrate this *demisemiseptentenary*³, we reproduce here a brilliant article by Josef Winternitz from the centenary in 1948. Writing about 'The Communist Manifesto and the Struggle for Power', he shows how much of it was still relevant for Communist strategy then – and in fact still is today: "The Communists fight for the immediate aims ... of the working class, but ... they also

represent and take care of the future of [the] movement; the *Manifesto's* stress on avoiding sectarianism; its characterisation of the proletariat as the "really revolutionary class"; the hint of 'permanent revolution' – of national-democratic going over into socialist revolutions; and the transformation from capitalism to socialism.

The bourgeoisie's "naked, shameless, brutal exploitation" of workers and its "constant revolutionising" of the instruments of production, that Marx and Engels referred to in the *Manifesto*, are at the root of the widespread outbreak of industrial action in Britain, taking "more and more the character of collisions between two classes." However, the world has of course turned since 1848, and Marxism has developed with it. Capitalism is now global, though in the imperialist form in which formerly colonial nations remain dependent on the metropolitan centres of capital, and where imperialist war – including trade embargoes – seeks to maintain domination as a last resort. Our own labour movement, which is weak on imperialism, needs to understand this. We therefore devote much of the rest of this edition of *CR* to the Tricontinental Institute's *Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation* and articles related to it.

Those *Theses* stand for themselves, and it would be churlish of me to highlight any of them in this column – except to point to Thesis Eight's comment that on 'Red Books Day', the *Manifesto's* anniversary, people throughout the world go into public places to read from the *Manifesto* in their own languages. That apart, here Vijay Prashad's Marx Memorial Library seminar and Abel Prieto's Foreword to the *Theses* provide excellent introductions, the former also providing pointers for activity here in Britain, and the latter emphasising the essential role of education and culture in freeing Cuba from imperialist domination.

Four more articles complete this edition of *CR*: Ruth Styles' contribution, on behalf of the Communist Party of Britain, to the recent International Meeting of Communist and Workers' Parties in Havana, where she correctly pointed to the new possibilities for revolutionary change, given the domestic and international situation in which we find ourselves; Marc Vandepitte's contrast of the crisis in Western society with the progress made by China, and that country's direction after the Twentieth Party Congress there; Stewart McGill's response to Andrew Murray, in the discussion about whether (or how much) Russia can be described as imperialist; and Fran Lock's *Soul Food* column, this time focusing on how poetry can contribute to working-class joy

Notes and References

- 1 <https://archive.org/details/the-young-karl-marx-2017-720p-eng-subst-le-jeune-karl-marx>. A donation is recommended –Ed.
- 2 Engels, Preface to the English edition of 1888, in *Marx & Engels Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 26, pp 512ff.
Engels, Preface to the Italian edition of 1893, in *MECW*, Vol 27, pp 365-6.
- 3 ½ x ½ x 700, see <https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anniversary>.



THE COMMUNIST MANIFESTO AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POWER JOSEF WINTERNITZ



175th Anniversary of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* From the archives, 1948

IT WAS ON the occasion of one of the general elections between the World Wars that Bernard Shaw remarked that the Communist Party was the most conservative party of all. For while all the other parties had outlined or recast their programmes in the twentieth century or even after 1918, the Communists still stuck to their programme of 1848, *The Communist Manifesto*.

There was not much of a sting in this jibe. Marxists understand better than other people that political demands and the tactics of a political party have to be adapted to changing historical circumstances. On the other hand, it is the great strength of the working-class movement, based on the principles of scientific socialism, that its principles, aims and strategy are derived from the analysis of the whole historical epoch of capitalism, its decay and the transition to socialism.

Therefore, in spite of the fundamental differences between different countries and different nations, in spite of the tremendous changes which capitalist society has gone through since 1848, it can still be said that the working class of every country could and can find the basis of its policy, the aims and the general strategy of the struggle against oppression and exploitation in the immortal lines of the *Manifesto*.

There is no other political document which has stood the test of time, of a revolutionary epoch of particularly vehement and rapid change, as well as the *Manifesto* has done.

Marxism would not be a science based on experience and developing with experience if there had not been a great advance in the understanding of the forms and methods of class struggle and of the transformation of society since the eve of the revolutions in 1848. But it is true that there is hardly any basic idea on the tasks and methods of the struggle for the liberation of the proletariat, the germ of which could not be found in the *Manifesto*.

The contemporaries and practical leaders of three great revolutions (1905; March and November, 1917) could draw on a wealth of experience far beyond the reach of the experience of the authors of the *Manifesto*. It is the more astonishing and admirable that we find so many of the most important political ideas of Leninism in an embryonic form in this first programme of communism.

Engels, in the Preface to the German edition of 1872, says:

“However much the state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in this *Manifesto* are on the whole, as correct today as ever. ... The practical application of the principles will depend, as the *Manifesto* itself states, everywhere and at all times. on the historical conditions for the time being existing. ...”

Engels refers in this context to the revolutionary measures proposed for a working-class government coming to power, to the experience of the Paris Commune as to the impossibility of making use of the old bourgeois state machinery for the purposes of the working class, and to the criticism of socialist literature and the remarks on the relations of the Communists to other opposition parties which “although in principle still correct, yet in practice are antiquated.”

What Engels wrote still remains true and was confirmed by the development of the working class and the socialist movement in dozens of countries and by the first historic example of a victorious socialist revolution.

Referring to the class struggles of the past the *Manifesto* describes two alternatives. The fight has ended “either in a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or in the common ruin of the contending classes.” There is no such uncertainty about the issue between bourgeoisie and proletariat. The first section of the *Manifesto* ends:

“What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, are its own gravediggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

Is this only an encouraging battle-cry, or is this a demonstrable truth? As far as there are demonstrable truths in the social or historical sciences, probabilities which amount to practical certainties, the certainty of proletarian victory was proved in the *Manifesto* by the analysis of the development of the proletariat as a class.

This development has two contradictory aspects. On the one hand the working class, more and more concentrated in the big industrial centres, grows in number, in organisational power and in class consciousness. On the other hand, its material conditions deteriorate:

“The modern labourer, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth.”

This seems a paradoxical thesis. If the power, organisation and consciousness of the proletariat grows with the development of capitalism, why should the fight of the working class against exploitation not result in improved conditions? The *Manifesto* says:

“Now and then the workers are victorious, but only for a time. The real fruit of their battles lies, not in the immediate result, but in the ever-expanding union of the workers.”

Marx and Engels did not deny the possibility and the importance of reforms, of legislation which may protect the working class against some of the brutalities of the capitalist system. The *Manifesto* mentions as an example the Ten-Hours' Bill. The *Inaugural Address* of 1864, the programme of the Workingmen's International Association (the First International), calls this Bill “not only a great practical success”, but “the victory of a principle”; for it says, “it was the first time that in broad daylight the political economy of the middle class succumbed to the political economy of the working class.”

Yet in this same document – which some reformists tried to oppose to the *Manifesto* as a kind of renunciation of the ‘juvenile revolutionism’ of the earlier programme – Marx stresses the fact that from 1848-64, in a period of unrivalled development of industry and commerce, “the misery of the working masses had not diminished.”

It is clear why Marx in all his writings on this subject, from the short summary of the effects of industrial capitalism on the living conditions of the working class, to the elaborate analysis of the same problem in *Capital*, insists on what he called “the general law of capitalist accumulation”:

“Accumulation of wealth at one pole is at the same time accumulation of misery, agony of toil, slavery, ignorance, brutality, mental degradation, at the opposite pole, *ie* on the side of the class that produces its own product in the form of capital.”¹

This gloomy prognostication sounded strange to British socialists who compared wages and social conditions won by decades of stubborn trade union struggles under the specific conditions of a capitalist country exploiting half the globe, with the desperate conditions of early capitalism described so graphically in Engels' study of British working-class conditions in 1844 and in the first volume of *Capital*.

But the permanent mass unemployment in all capitalist countries which appeared as the most striking economic and social feature of the general crisis of the capitalist system after the First World War confirmed the accusation on which the *Manifesto* based the death sentence of the bourgeoisie:

“The bourgeoisie is unfit any longer to be the ruling class in society ... because it is incompetent to assure an existence to its slave within his slavery, because it cannot help letting him sink into such a state, that it has to feed him, instead of being fed by him.”

The most devastating war of all history was necessary to create temporary conditions of full employment in the most advanced capitalist countries. But the contrast between the tremendous growth of productive forces, of the power of men over nature, of wealth amassed in the hands of a tiny minority on the one pole and of mass poverty, misery, starvation on the other pole has never been more striking than in our times.

“The Communists” the *Manifesto* says, “fight for the attainment of the immediate aims, for the enforcement of the momentary interests of the working class; but in the movement of the present, they also represent and take care of the future of that movement.”

This summarises precisely the Marxist attitude to reforms. The knowledge that a permanent and fundamental improvement of social conditions is impossible within the framework of the capitalist system does not reduce the vanguard of the working class to the part of sectarian preachers of social revolution, without interest in daily issues. What the *Manifesto* defines as the immediate aims of the Communists, “formation of the proletariat into a class, overthrow of the bourgeois supremacy, conquest of political power by the proletariat”, cannot be achieved in any other way but by the development of class consciousness and class organisation in decades of struggles for “immediate aims” and “momentary interests”.

It may appear a queer contradiction that Marx and Engels, writing the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, begin the discussion of the relation between the Communist vanguard and the proletariat as a whole with the definite statement:

“The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to other working-class parties.”

The Communist League was an international propaganda society. Its members in the various countries were advised to work inside whatever mass organisations or mass movements of the working class existed. Engels criticised the London leaders of the League who – before Engels established contacts – kept aloof from the Chartists, disregarding them as “not revolutionary”.²

The operative words in the sentence quoted above are “separate” and “opposed”. When communism as a scientific theory just began to spread among the most advanced workers, a party of the working class representing a real political force could not well be Communist from the outset.

Engels in 1886, comparing the situation in the American labour movement with the situation in which they found themselves before 1848, wrote:

“The first great step of importance for every country newly entering into the movement is always the organisation of the workers as an independent political party, no matter how, so long as it is a distinct workers party. ... That the first programme of this party is still confused and highly deficient ... these are inevitable evils but also only transitory ones. The masses must have time and opportunity to develop and they can only have the opportunity when they have their own movement – no matter in what form so long as it is only their own movement – in which they are driven further by their own mistakes and learn wisdom by hurting themselves.”³

The main stress here, as in the *Manifesto*, is against the sectarian tendency to isolate the vanguard from the mass movement. But the parties which Communists should not oppose but help to develop from inside are defined as “distinct workers' parties” which have the same immediate aim as the Communists, the conquest of power by the proletariat.

When bourgeois influence began to infiltrate into the workers' parties and threatened to turn them away from the historic task of the proletarian movement, the authors of the *Manifesto* turned against the danger of right-wing opportunism with all their revolutionary passion and determination. At a higher level of the development of socialist consciousness in the masses, they

insisted on the necessity to base the workers' party on the clear principles of scientific socialism and they severely criticised the compromise by which the German Social Democrats in 1875 established a united party at the price of accepting a muddled and inconsistent programme.⁴ When, later on (1879), an organ of the German party proposed to renounce the proletarian character of the party and to replace the class struggle by general appeals to "love of humanity" and "justice", Marx and Engels recalled what they had said about "German or 'True' Socialism" in the *Manifesto* and threatened publicly to dissolve their solidarity with the German party.⁵

With the prophetic foresight which characterises so many of the utterances of the founders of the modern working-class movement, Marx and Engels predicted in this letter that the Social Democrats, if they accepted this repudiation of the revolutionary class struggle, would find themselves, in a future revolutionary crisis, on the side of the counter-revolution.

"If Berlin should ever again be so uneducated," they wrote, "to have a March 18th,⁶ the Social Democrats, instead of taking part in the fight as 'riff-raff with a mania for barricades'⁷, must rather 'follow the path of legality', act pacifically, clear away the barricades and if necessary march with the glorious army against the rough uneducated one-sided masses."

So it happened literally in Berlin 1918-19.

I quoted this document of 1879 because it illustrates the point that the Communist attitude to the question of political organisation had to change essentially when, with the development of imperialism and its corrupting influence on wide sections of the labour movements, social-democratic parties became instruments of bourgeois influence inside the working class.

It was and is still true that the Communists "have no interests separate and apart from those of the proletariat as a whole"; they were and are still prepared to cooperate with all proletarian parties and organisations which put up a fight for any of the immediate aims and interests of the working class. But with the strongly entrenched, well-organised influence of opportunism inside the mass movement, it became necessary to set up a separate Communist party to fight this influence and to re-establish the unity of the movement on the basis of a class programme.

"Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today", the *Manifesto* says, "the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class."

What now seems obvious to many was far from self-evident in 1848. Only in Britain, with the Chartist movement, had the proletariat entered the historical scene as an independent political force. Central Europe was on the eve of a bourgeois-democratic revolution in which the middle class dominated the scene. Even half a century later, in eastern Europe, with its survivals of feudalism and with a peasantry in the bondage of serfdom as the main exploited and oppressed class, Marxists had to fight for the bold conception of the nascent working class as the leader of the coming revolution.

The singling out of the working class as "the revolutionary class, the class that holds the future in its hands" is a key idea of the *Manifesto*, a triumph of the application of the dialectical method to the analysis of contemporary capitalist society which

at that time was just beginning its conquest of the world.

Because it is the product of modern industry the authors of the *Manifesto* recognised in the proletariat the coming leader, while the classes between bourgeoisie and proletariat and the remnants of precapitalist society are doomed to decay and to be pushed into the background by the advance of large-scale industry.

The clear prospect of the splitting up of modern society "into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other" did not, however, mean an oversimplification of the role of the other classes. Marx sharply criticised Lassalle's barren schematism which lumped together all the other classes outside the proletariat as "one reactionary mass". A correct strategy of the class struggle which mobilises all possible allies and makes use of all conflicts in the camp of the enemy is only possible on the basis of a concrete class analysis.

The elements of such an analysis are to be found in the *Manifesto*. When Lenin worked out in detail the strategy and tactics of the proletariat in the democratic and in the socialist revolution, the starting point for his meticulous study of the specific Russian class conditions and class relations were the relevant paragraphs of the *Manifesto*.

Of the lower middle class, the most important representatives of which are the peasants, the *Manifesto* says that they are conservative, or even reactionary, in so far as they fight for their existence as a class. They can be revolutionary only "in view of their impending transfer into the proletariat; they thus defend not their present, but their future interests; they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat."

There is an implication of far-reaching practical importance in this analysis. The peasantry, while not able to take the lead or play an independent revolutionary part in modern society, have increasingly come to the fore and today in alliance with the proletariat are playing an important revolutionary role under the leadership of the Marxist parties of the working class. This fundamental idea of proletarian strategy was first fully developed in theory and practice by Lenin in the Russian revolution and is a basic idea of the liberation struggle in the colonial countries.

After the experiences of the 1848 revolutions, which fully revealed the inconsistency, cowardice and treachery of the bourgeoisie even in a bourgeois-democratic revolution as soon as the working class appears on the scene, but also – particularly in France – the weakness of the revolutionary proletariat as long as it is isolated from the non-proletarian working masses, Marx and Engels won much greater clarity on the class alignments in modern society.

Writing in 1850, Marx said in *The Class Struggles in France, 1848-50*:

"The French workers could not take a step forward, could not touch a hair of the bourgeois order before the course of the revolution had forced the mass of the nation, peasants and petty bourgeois, standing between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie to revolt against this order, against the rule of capital, to attach itself to the proletariat as its vanguard."⁸

Here is the germ of the idea of the hegemony of the working class which Lenin developed fully both for the bourgeois-democratic and the proletarian revolution. Obviously, the authors of the *Manifesto* could not envisage the leading role of the working class in the incipient democratic revolution in central Europe.

"As could easily be foreseen," Engels writes in the *History of the Communist League*, "the League proved to be much too

weak a lever in the face of the popular mass movement.”

Therefore also Marx preferred to act in the revolution as a representative of the radical wing of the general democratic movement and not as representative of an independent working-class organisation. Engels criticised Stephan Born, leading member of the League in Berlin, for concentrating on the organisation of a ‘Workers’ Brotherhood’, of trade unions and cooperatives and forgetting that first, by the victory of democracy, the field had to be conquered “in which alone such things could be realised on a lasting basis.”⁹

While Marx and Engels realistically took the leading role of the bourgeoisie for granted and advised the class-conscious workers in Germany to “fight with the bourgeoisie whenever it acts in a revolutionary way, against the absolute monarchy, the feudal squirearchy and the petty bourgeoisie”,¹⁰ their perspective was not a lasting stabilisation of bourgeois rule as the result of the democratic revolution. The Communists, while fighting with the bourgeoisie against absolutism and the remnants of feudalism, should “instil into the working class the clearest possible recognition of the hostile antagonism between bourgeoisie and proletariat” in order that the democratic rights and the general conditions of free capitalist development might be used “as so many weapons against the bourgeoisie.” Because the democratic revolution in Germany began with a more developed proletariat, compared with England in the seventeenth and France in the eighteenth century, the *Manifesto* pronounced the expectation that “the bourgeois revolution in Germany will be but the prelude to an immediately following proletarian revolution.”

It is easy to sneer now at the illusions of these young revolutionaries who foresaw a proletarian revolution in the immediate future. It would be wiser, however, to reflect on the causes why neither the democratic nor the socialist revolution succeeded in Germany while both were victorious under the much more backward conditions of Russia.

Lenin and the Bolsheviks fully realised that, under modern conditions when the bourgeoisie, frightened by the growing power of the working class, has become thoroughly reactionary, a democratic revolution can only be carried through consistently to a full victory under proletarian leadership and that the achievements of a democratic revolution, real power of the popular masses, can only be safeguarded when the economic basis of the power of the reactionary classes is destroyed, *ie* when the proletariat in alliance with other working classes uses its leading position for the transition to socialism, when the democratic revolution ‘grows over’ into the socialist revolution.

Democracy in Germany was defeated in 1848 because the bourgeoisie preferred a compromise with reaction to a revolutionary mass struggle and because the working class was not developed enough even to aim at leadership. Democracy in Germany was defeated again in 1918-19 because the right-wing leaders of social democracy, far from following the advice of the *Manifesto* to make the democratic revolution a prelude to the socialist revolution, allied themselves with the forces of reaction to defeat the forces of socialist revolution. Not only the German people, but the whole world had to pay a terrible price for this policy which, by betraying socialism in the name of democracy, betrayed democracy as well.

This is the essence of the theory and practice which social democracy opposes to communism.

* * *

The Marxist idea of ‘permanent revolution’, first hinted at in the *Manifesto*, further advanced in Marx and Engels’ *Address of the Central Authority to the League of 1850*¹¹ and fully developed to a comprehensive theory and strategy of revolution by Lenin, is of the greatest importance for the present period when the Second World War was followed by a series of revolutions and revolutionary changes.

All of these began as struggles for national liberation against foreign fascist domination; the elements of national and democratic revolution were closely interwoven. While decisive sections of the old ruling class had either allied themselves with the oppressors of their own nation or sold out and surrendered to them, the leadership in these revolutions fell to the working class. The battle for democracy and for national independence was finally won only in those countries where the working class was able firmly to establish its leading position and to use it for what the *Manifesto* calls “despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production”, measures which prepare the ground for the democratic transition to socialism.

It was in these national revolutions led by the working class that all the deep implications of the words of the *Manifesto* emerged:

“Since the proletariat must first of all acquire political supremacy, must rise to be the leading class of the nation, must constitute itself the nation, it is, so far, itself national, though not in the bourgeois sense of the word.”

The *Manifesto* explains how it was the rise of capitalism with its agglomeration of population and centralisation of the means of production which led up to the centralisation of political power, to the emergence of modern nations and the national states:

“Independent, or but loosely connected provinces, with separate interests, laws, governments and systems of taxation, became lumped together into one nation, with one government, one code of taxes, one national class interest, one frontier and one customs tariff.”

But the further development of the productive forces – expansion of commerce, extension of the world market, growing uniformity in the mode of production and in the conditions of life – would reduce more and more national differences and antagonisms and make them finally disappear with the victory of the proletariat which, by ending the exploitation of one individual by another, would also end the exploitation of one nation by another, so that with the antagonism between classes the hostility between nations would disappear.

While in broad outline this analysis and forecast is certainly correct, the dialectics of history proved to be more complicated than could be foreseen in 1848. With the emergence of modern imperialism and the replacement of free trade by the domination of monopoly, the rule of the bourgeoisie no longer promoted the cause of national unity and freedom; it became the greatest obstacle to the attainment of national freedom first in the underdeveloped countries; and finally, in our times, it even spelt ruin to the national existence of the powerful, industrially highly developed countries. Witness France in 1940 and the catastrophe of Germany, where the working class had to restart the fight for national unity and independence which was lost in 1848.¹² And if the present fatal trend of British policy continues, in a

Britain dependent on US imperialism, the fight for national independence will become the first duty of the working class.

The policy of imperialist exploitation and oppression, intensified to the horrors of mass extermination by fascism, created the most bitter national hatreds and sharpened national antagonisms to an unprecedented degree.

On the other hand, the Marxist policy of a consistent fight for the freedom and equality of all nations, as developed in theory and practice in the USSR, put an end to the hostility of nations and for the first time in history created a free community of nations bound together by common work and a common fight for a great cause. It has not, however, abolished the differences between nations. On the contrary, by giving free scope and every encouragement to the growth even of the smallest nations and national groups, peoples awake to national consciousness and new national cultures arise. The greatest variety in the national form of culture is combined with the unity of the common socialist content.

Marx and Engels had done away with the illusions of 'pure democracy' years before they drafted the programme of the Communist League. They were as clear about the necessity to fight for democracy, as the first condition for the free development of working-class organisation and consciousness, as they were about the decisive importance of the actual class character of state power which matters much more than the forms of representative government which vary with varying historical circumstances.

Speaking about "the modern parliamentary state", the *Manifesto* says:

"The executive of the modern state is but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."

This we have to contrast with the operative sentences on democracy which Lenin called "a formulation of one of the most remarkable and most important ideas of Marxism on the subject of the state."¹³

"The first step in the revolution by the working class is to raise the proletariat to the position of ruling class, to win the battle of democracy. The proletariat will use its political supremacy, to wrest, by degrees, all capital from the bourgeoisie, to centralise all production in the hands of the state, *ie* of the proletariat organised as the ruling class."

There are important lessons in this for the tasks of our time. The battle of democracy is not won even when general suffrage and other democratic rights have been won, valuable as these are. Nor is it won when some representatives of the working class assume important offices in the state. The battle is won only when the working class is in fact the ruling class, both in the political and in the economic life of the country.

Experience teaches that the proletariat may achieve a position of power in various ways. But, without working-class power, democracy is essentially restricted and there is no advance towards socialism.

A combination of state-owned and state-controlled industries with private ownership in other sections of economy is a possible form of transition from capitalism to socialism – as we saw in the USSR in the period of the New Economic Policy. But

a programme of gradual nationalisation will fail if the warning of the *Manifesto* is forgotten:

"this [*ie* the expropriation of the bourgeoisie and the centralisation of the instruments of production in the hands of the state] cannot be effected except by means of despotic inroads on the rights of property, and on the conditions of bourgeois production; by means of measures, therefore, which appear economically insufficient and untenable, but which in the course of the movement, outstrip themselves, necessitate further inroads upon the old social order, and are unavoidable as a means of entirely revolutionising the mode of production."

Only such a policy can result in the centralisation of economic power in the hands of the proletariat organised as the ruling class, and in the foundation of a new society, based on common ownership of the means of production.

I have examined the policy put forward in what has been called the birth certificate of the modern working-class movement in the light of experience and particularly of the great revolutionary changes of the present time. It can truly be said that the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* of 1848 has kept its value, not only as an incomparable summary of the scientific analysis of the evolution of society since the origin of classes, but also as a reliable guide to action for the vanguard of the working class in all countries.

■ This is a slightly edited version of the article first published in *The Modern Quarterly*, Vol 3 No 2, 1948, pp 37-51.

Notes and References

- 1 Marx, *Capital*, Vol 1, Ch 25.
- 2 Engels, *On the History of the Communist League*, in Marx & Engels *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 26, p 316.
- 3 Engels, *Letter to Sorge*, November 29, 1886, in *MECW*, Vol 47, p 532.
- 4 Compare the *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *MECW*, Vol 24, pp 75ff.
- 5 Marx and Engels, *Circular Letter to Bebel, Liebknecht, Bracke and others*, September 1879, in *MECW*, Vol 45, pp 407-8.
- 6 This refers to the street fighting in Berlin, 18 March 1848.
- 7 Quoted from an editorial article of the *Social Democratic Yearbook*, published at Zürich at that time.
- 8 *MECW*, Vol 10, p 57.
- 9 Engels, as in Note 2, p 329. See also Lenin's analysis of Marx and Engels' policy in the 1848 revolution in *Two Tactics of Social Democracy in the Democratic Revolution*, Epilogue, Sect III, in Lenin, *Collected Works (LCW)*, Vol 9, pp 130ff.
- 10 This is not a precise translation of the German *Kleinbürgerei*, which means petty-bourgeois backwardness. If the authors had thought of a class alignment with the bourgeoisie against the middle class they would have used the expression *Kleinbürgertum*.
- 11 *MECW*, Vol 2, pp 277ff. On Lenin's interpretation of Marx's idea of permanent revolution and the Trotskyist distortion of this idea see Stalin, *Foundations of Leninism*, Sect III.
- 12 Otto Grotewohl, at the Second Congress of the Socialist Unity Party, answered Dr Schumacher's accusation of "National Bolshevism" with the reminder that Marx and Engels in 1848 demanded "a unified, indivisible, democratic republic." "The demand for national unity is as old as the German working-class movement," he said.
- 13 Lenin, *State and Revolution*, Ch 2, in *LCW*, Vol 25, pp 406-418.

VIEWING DECOLONISATION THROUGH A MARXIST LENS

VIJAY PRASHAD



Antonio Seguí (Argentina), *Untitled*, 1965. Oil on canvas, 200 x 249 cm.

Seminar given on 21 November 2022 at the Marx Memorial Library and online, the fourth in a series organised jointly by the Library and the Barry Amiel and Norman Melburn Trust

I WANT TO make a few comments about the question of decolonisation, decolonial thought, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism. If you are interested, I would like to recommend that you go to the web site of the Tricontinental institute, <https://thetricontinental.org>, and download our dossier, which we did with the Casa de las Américas in Havana, Cuba. It is called *Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation*.¹ Now I am not actually going to talk directly about this text or from the text, but I highly recommend the text at any rate. I think it might be useful for people to read and study – it's a very slim text, like all our monthly dossiers, but this one in particular I highly recommend, so please go and have a look at it.

We are in a very tough place right now. Obviously, Europe is definitely convulsed by the conflict in Ukraine – that's what the focus is on. The knock-on effects of that conflict are going to impact people with the cost of living in places like Germany, which is already experiencing quite high inflation, high energy prices as a consequence largely of the slowing down of Russian natural gas. Certainly the destruction of Nord Stream is going to have a long-term impact for the cost of living in Germany but also in the rest of the continent, and in England, Scotland, and Wales. So we know that that's where the focus is on largely – stop the war in Ukraine.

It's interesting of course that so little focus is on other wars that are ongoing on the planet, including the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, where in the eastern flank of that country we are once more waiting for an expeditionary-type force coming in from Uganda, from Kenya, from other countries. That country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, over the last 30 years has seen a death toll in the millions – perhaps up to 8 million people dead – and almost zero international interest in that conflict.

That's one of the reasons why even the government of South Africa under Cyril Ramaphosa – not a government of the left – came out in public and said 'Look, the war in Ukraine is not our war, it's your war, it's a European war. We're not really going to touch that.' The Indian government, a government of the right, has said: 'We are not prepared to condemn anybody for this, because it's your war. We have our own conflicts. India has a conflict about the border with China – that's India's conflict, why does India need to comment on the war in Ukraine?' Similar noises from Latin America: 'This is a European war; this is not the world's war.'

I'm starting here because this is an interesting phenomenon – this idea that people in places all around the world

must have an opinion on something that is directly to do with Europe. In other words, Europe's history again makes a claim to being universal history, whereas the people of the Democratic Republic of Congo have no claim to universal history. Why isn't Europe convulsed by those events in the DRC?

The Cubans might turn round and say, 'Look, every year at the United Nations, 183 or 185 countries vote to end the US unilateral blockade of Cuba, an act of war since 1960 – a war that the United States has prosecuted all these decades.' They might turn round and say, 'We belong in universal history. Why is it that we now have to comment on Europe's history, but Europe is uninterested in us? Our human rights are not there to be defended, and so on.'

This is the prevailing mood now, a wave of this mood, a wave saying, 'You know what? We are not interested in actually accepting that your history is universal history.' I would like to underline this. It's very interesting that you see this from the left – that is to say the government in Cuba – all the way to the right, that is the government in India. Across the Global South, in other words, formerly colonised parts of the world, countries are just saying, to quote from the *Black Panther* movie, 'Not today, coloniser, not today.'

Actually the most striking expression of this comes from the Indian foreign minister, Mr Jaishankar, who, when actually scolded by a Western reporter, 'Why doesn't India stop buying oil from Russia?', calmly replied: 'You know, I have been looking into this. The Russian oil that India buys in a month, Europe buys in an afternoon. Think about it.' And I thought that kind of measured attitude is essentially a paraphrase of that emblematic expression, 'Not today, coloniser' – not interested in being bullied by you, in being told by you what I should do.

We saw this at the G20 in Bali, Indonesia, an attitude from heads of states not to kowtow to Joe Biden or to Justin Trudeau: the scolding that Justin Trudeau received from Xi Jinping, which was widely circulated across the South and, I dare say, across sections of the North as well, where Xi Jinping basically told him, 'You are behaving like a schoolboy, when it comes to diplomacy.' And Justin Trudeau had to skulk off after making those comments.

There's a new mood. What is this mood? Can we characterise it as a residue of anticolonialism perhaps, some kind of residue? Not to say that these governments are necessarily governments of the people or governments of the left. Mr Modi's government in India is a neofascist government. Nonetheless, this is the prevailing mood: it has to be men-

tioned. Add to this the fact that the French have been booted out of Mali, out of Burkina Faso. When Emanuel Macron went to Oran in Algeria he was jeered, he was booed, people said, ‘Get out of here, France.’ Macron had to jump into his car and make a quick escape. A new attitude.

Now the European countries, including the United Kingdom, are trying to regroup in West Africa and in the Sahel region. You might want to know that one of your high officials has gone to Accra, Ghana, to basically lay out an agenda with the Accra Initiative, which is supposed to substitute for the various other plans and plots that the Europeans have had for that Sahel region of Africa and West Africa. Your Minister for the Armed Forces, James Heapey, is trying to push the Accra Initiative as a substitute.

In other words: ‘Not today, coloniser’ is the vibe from the street but this doesn’t stop the old colonial powers from constantly trying to reinstate their authority, now, of course, bandying about terms such as ‘human rights’ and that other people are imperialist – the Russians and the Chinese in particular. ‘Let’s forget about the imperialism of Europe or of the United States.’ Whether for propaganda purposes, or purposes of their own clarity, they would like the world to believe that the only imperialists on the planet today are in Beijing or in Moscow. The old imperialism, which morphed into neocolonialism, that should be forgotten – that’s their prevailing mood.

Well, let’s now come back to the question of theory. During the 1980s, there was the great debt crisis that wracked the Third World and bankrupted several countries including Mexico – from which it has barely recovered; the Soviet Union was weakening; we began to see an attack being launched by the Western warrior states against countries in Central America, the coup in Burkina Faso against Thomas Sankara in 1987, as an example. Right through this period, ideas of anti-imperialism began to lose focus in the Western academic centres. In fact, ‘imperialism’ began to be a term that evoked a lot of eye-rolling, as if it was anachronistic. We began to hear new words, such as globalisation and the flatness of the world economy, and that in the World Trade Organisation, set up in 1995, all countries would have a kind of equivalence; the term imperialism, the concept of imperialism, the structure of imperialism, was not something to bother oneself with.

There was a sustained attack on Marxism in this period, led by New Left Books, now Verso Books, in London, which published *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy* by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe in 1985. The book mischievously utilised the work of Antonio Gramsci to make an attack at Marxism, to in fact champion something they called ‘post-Marxism’. Post-structuralism, post-Marxism, post-colonialism: this became the flavour of academic literature coming out of Western countries from the 1980s. Many scholars of the left went into retreat, and produced empirical work of one kind or the other, but didn’t want to challenge these schools of thought frontally. Particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a great weakness in our ability to fight back against this denigration of Marxism in the name of post-Marxism. My great comrade, Aijaz Ahmed, who died in 2022, used to say that all this talk of post-Marxism is actually pre-Marxist, that Laclau and Mouffe in fact returned to the texts before Marxism, a kind of idealism. When they talk about ‘agency’ and ‘the subject’ and so on, they have basically walked away from the structuring impact of political economy and returned to a pre-Marxist time; they have in fact not gone beyond Marxism but back to a time before Marxism.

So, what about the fact that there are rising inequalities between North and South, with increased poverty rates in many parts of the world, despite the fact that industrial plants were exported from the centre of the world economy – Europe and North America – to other parts? We have to understand that the industrialisation that was part of the agenda of the anti-colonial movement in an earlier period was not industrialisation piecemeal. It was whole-hog industrialisation, so that they could produce national economies, regional economies, improve and diversify economies out of a kind of one-crop colonial economy. That was the agenda from the earlier period, when they said, ‘We must have import-substitution, industrialisation’. It wasn’t just to have a factory in the country, it was actually changing the balance of forces in the world economy structured by imperialism.

But now, in this era of globalisation, factories began to be disarticulated. You didn’t get a whole car company moving from Germany to Indonesia. What you got was a tyre factory, or a transmission belt factory, or somebody making sparkplugs. The disarticulation of production was what got globalised. Effectively, globalisation isn’t that industries get spread around the world, it’s that these disarticulated forms of manufacturing spread around the world.

All of this happened at a time when Marxism was extremely weak, and in a way had been put into the back seat. And you got from the camp of Marxism works such as Antonio Negri’s book *Empire*, which argued that there was no real centre to this empire, it was a rhizome in the way of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s work *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980); that this was a kind of post-modern economy, not an economy with a centre. Forget the fact that the City of London, or Wall Street, or the Finanzplatz in Frankfurt, continued to structure a great number of parts of the global supply chain, or that the new international property rules, set in place in the World Trade Organisation, allowed firms such as Apple to basically not produce anything. Apple doesn’t make any computers or anything: those are made in disarticulated factories, by Foxconn and other companies, and Apple merely makes money on rent. It basically makes money on its patents.

This was, extraordinarily, a period of some confusion for people: even David Harvey saying that ‘The evidence for imperialism is not there, because foreign direct investment has increased in the South, and you have industrialisation in the South.’ But that was just looking at one indicator – foreign direct investment flows, or the growth of industrialisation or manufacturing capacity. It wasn’t looking at the structure of the world system as a totality, and trying to understand how these countries – even India, despite the major advances made by sections of the population – continued to be structured into a position of subordination. This was all not seen very clearly.

And in the middle of this, the energy that would have perhaps gone towards trying to analyse the new colonial tentacles was dissipated; and the approach became kind of culturalist, like much of post-structuralist thought. In other words, it was looking for the cultural subordination of people by others, what multiculturalism had done inside the metropolitan countries, thereby taking out the question of race as a structuring principle in the economy, the structure of racism. Rather than looking at that, it was looking at attitudes and behaviours, so that, for example, it would be enough to have seminars for people, so that they stopped behaving like racists – train the police to sensitise themselves to black youth, and then they’ll stop shooting black youth. Such an approach didn’t allow people to

think about the fact that the shooting of black youth in London, for instance, isn't about attitude and behaviour alone, but that those attitudes and behaviour are structured into the political economy, and that has to be understood in a deep way.

In the same way as multiculturalism basically took the guts out of the anticolonial, anti-racist critique, at a global level you had the arrival of 'postcolonial' thought, and also 'decoloniality' – in other words, let's look at power, let's look at culture, but let's not look at the political economy that structures everyday life and behaviour and reproduces the colonial mentality; that has to be off the table.

So, we entered into a kind of academic morass, where Marxism was not, in a sense, permitted to enter. A giant sign at the door of the academy: 'Marxism cannot come in' – unless it wants to slink in through a little mousehole, and just stay there as a cottage industry in a campus where there is one nut-case Marxist professor allowed per university, just in order to say that we allow diverse views; Marxism must remain inside that little mousehole, and can't have the confidence to launch an attack on the mainstream thinking. Radicalism then appears as multiculturalism, or as decoloniality, as decolonial thought and so on. But God forbid you ask questions about the mining of coltan in the Congo, or copper mining in Zambia, transfer payments, the theft of the wealth of the people, that 60% of the children who live above the seam of copper in the Copperbelt region of Zambia can't read, or that the Socialist Party of Zambia is leading a process to transcend these conditions. Those questions can't be on the table. Eyes will roll, if not heads. Eyes will roll in the seminar room, and the heads may roll if the mouse-like Marxist academic tries to get out of their little lane and challenge people. In particular: 'Your contract may not be renewed.'

That was the state of affairs until recently, and in fact even now. And what I am trying to suggest is that there is a disconnect. The contradictions of actual human processes have produced a situation where you get, from the socialist experiment in Cuba to the neofascist government in India, a new mood of anticolonialism. But intellectual thought, particularly in the Western warrior states, just doesn't know how to tackle or understand this. Eyes are rolling again, and then of course heads may roll. You can get cancelled on Twitter and so on, if you don't toe the party line – the party line being 'It's OK to talk about attitudes and behaviour; but you can't talk about structured wholes, the structured political economy' – which has immense effects in social and cultural life.

Now, let me just make four points in conclusion. Firstly, the retrieval of our Marxist tradition into this domain is very important. We have to go back and read the national-liberation Marxists of an earlier period, like Kwame Nkrumah's terrific book from 1965, *Neocolonialism*. It's one thing that people are reading Walter Rodney now – and I'm happy for that, because Rodney is a key figure in this – but before Rodney, there was Nkrumah, who theorised the emergence of neocolonialism. We have to go back and read Ho Chi Minh, EMS Namboodiripad and Fidel Castro, to seriously engage with Castro's thinking on some of these issues. We have to go back and create a new tradition. Our Marxism is not a Marxism which is 'marxology' – going back constantly to get quotations from Marx. We also have to look at how Marxism had life breathed into it by Lenin, and by the great Marxists in the colonised world – all the way from Jose Carlos Mariátegui in the Andes to Ho Chi Minh, Tan Malaka and others. We have to recover this tradition – that's one of the tasks of our Tricontinental institute: we are very keen

on recovering this tradition, as much as possible.

Secondly, we have to fight to have the actual history of colonialism and imperialism taught in schools. In Britain, for instance, there's a refusal to teach even the history of Jallianwala Bagh – the great massacre in 1919. Where's the apology for that? The Jallianwala Bagh campaign, that was led by the Indian Workers' Association, is such a key campaign. Every British person who is sensitive should be part of this campaign, to demand that young children learn about the actual history of British imperialism – can't sanitise Churchill. If you don't face up to the past, you'll repeat it constantly. You'll repeat it in the actions of the Tory government, whether it's led by Boris Johnson or Rishi Sunak. Sunak gave a speech recently where he said that Britain has always fought for freedom. Wrong: Britain only understood freedom because of the fight against British imperialism. Let's be honest: if Britain had understood freedom, it would have had a different history. And to have Rishi Sunak make that statement is a sign that history is not being taught in the way it must be taught. I'm very glad that Tariq Ali wrote that book on Churchill, and I hope that everybody has read it. It's written in the classic Tariq Ali style: he's casual and biting, and Churchill deserves it. That's the biography of Churchill that you need, not some Tory MP who writes a 3-volume book on Churchill on the side.

Third, the structure of imperialism today. When are we going to come to terms with the fact that imperialism reproduces itself constantly, that the City of London is a criminal venture, a mafia place where Canadian mining companies domicile themselves? In Britain right now you have a debate about 'non-doms' not paying taxes. The whole City of London is a 'non-dom' place of transnational corporations. You are being so high and mighty, talking about 'non-dom', but you are not allowing into that debate that the City of London is a 'non-dom' location. Bring the City of London into international law. Don't allow secret corporations to incorporate there and basically transfer-price profits out of places where they are extracting minerals, without paying the high royalties that they should be paying. It's very interesting that Indonesia recently put on the table the creation of a nickel cartel, asking Canada to join. I don't think Canada's going to join – it doesn't have the stomach for it – but it's interesting that we're back to cartelisation of raw materials.

Let's talk again about how the global economy is actually structured: how, for instance, it's not Chinese companies that are out there alone, exploiting African workers. What about the Canadian companies? 60% of the world's mining companies are Canadian. No light is shone on them. By the way, the Canadian government, under pressure by Barrick Gold, led the attempt to overthrow the government of Hugo Chavez of Venezuela in 2002. Also, Canada's role in Haiti is unremarked, but should be made public. The role of the United States in Haiti in recent years has been horrendous. The structure needs to be looked at honestly and clearly – and, by the way, most of the things that we do at Tricontinental on the structure, we get the evidence from World Bank, IMF and UN reports. You don't even need to go further than the mainstream – the material is there. It's just that the epistemology used to look at that material is, in my opinion, quite juvenile. It's idealistic, perhaps.

Fourth and last: mentality. There is a kind of battle of ideas – the phrase Fidel used in the late 90s and early 2000s – around how we understand the world. There is this colonial mentality, the idea that you can lecture countries around the

world about how and what they should be doing. And just because Rishi Sunak is of South Asian origin doesn't make him anything other than a prime minister of the British ruling class. His origin is hardly going to change the way people in India see another British prime minister scolding them. That colonial mentality, which allows governments in the Western warrior states to go out there telling other people what to do, has to be put on the table and exposed for what it is.

At COP26 in Glasgow, Western warrior states were chiding India, China and other countries for using coal. Now, because they are refusing to allow the war in Ukraine to come to a close, they are talking about opening coal-fired power plants in Germany, maybe even in the UK. Well, too bad, Thatcher destroyed much of that possibility – I don't know; maybe you'll open up your mines again. But just a year ago Western warrior states were high and mighty: 'Stop using coal.' A year later: 'Let's use coal.' This is the colonial mentality: what's OK for the Western warrior states is not permitted for the formerly colonised world. That attitude has to be exposed for what it is. Let's not forget what they said just a year ago.

We have now, slowly, a shift in the mood. People are not interested in seeing the prolongation of a colonial attitude. We also know also that our concepts to handle neocolonialism today have been worn down, partly because at least a generation, if not two generations, of academics globally, have been afraid to launch a full-fledged anticolonial attack on the world system, from a Marxist perspective. We just haven't seen it in the way we needed to. What we need to do is: recover the national-liberation heritage; insist that the actual history of colonialism be on the table; try to construct a more honest and true account of the structure of neocolonialism today; and, finally, be very precise in exposing the colonial mentality that seems to saturate television channels like the BBC. We have to recover decolonisation into the Marxist paradigm, we cannot allow it to slip out there and become part of these culturalist pre-Marxist forms of thinking.

Following this there was a short discussion between Professor Mary Davis, MML secretary (MD), and Vijay Prashad (VP), and then questions from the floor (not reproduced here):

MD: : Vijay, that was great, thank you so much. So: 'Decolonisation through a Marxist lens'. The first big question that I want to ask you to comment on is, 'Have we ever had decolonisation?' I'm just not sure that we have. Rather than decolonisation isn't it more accurate to talk about neocolonialism? You made the terrific points about the impact of the dominant discourse of globalisation, multiculturalism, and post-Marxism – and that it is absolute nonsense because it has never really recognised imperialism. This is why Marxism is so important because imperialism, which is linked to racism, has never been fully grasped by the right or the left, other than by Marxists, full stop. And to me this is very apparent when we talk about the battle of ideas. The fact is that we haven't even won that battle of ideas within the labour movement.

For example, in this country, Britain being the prime imperialist country – certainly in the period after the First World War – those ideas of race and Empire, and of the inferiority of the races that Britain conquered, penetrated very deeply into the body politic, including into the labour movement. I'm using Britain as an example, partly because I know most about it, and partly because it had its own developed labour move-

ment; and the penetration of those ideas was so deep that the labour movement itself cooperated in the colonial and neocolonial project. When it looked like the national liberation movements were actually going to win, what did they do? The TUC said, 'We have to make the world safe for British expansionism, we need to keep it safe, and we need to ensure that the alternative bloc, in the form of the socialist countries and the World Federation of Trade Unions, doesn't penetrate the liberation movements and the post-colonial' world. So let's ensure that we have tame trade unions in those countries.' The TUC sent colonial labour advisers into all of those then colonies, to ensure that there was a little bit of social reform, a little bit of freeing up of trade unions, so they were allowed to operate, and this was the mentality of neocolonialism.

So, when you talk about ideas, I absolutely acknowledge the fact that our Marxist ideas have not dominated. It's wonderful that you are quoting Nkrumah and Walter Rodney: the title of Walter Rodney's book was so important, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. You mentioned David Harvey saying that the evidence for imperialism is not there because now there's foreign direct investment in the Global South. There always was: after 1870 Britain's biggest export was capital. And where did the capital go to? It went to Britain's colonies, because the rate of return was greater where the rate of exploitation was higher, and that was in the colonies and it still is even after independence. So, can we really talk about decolonisation?

VP: Obviously you are right that decolonisation has not been completed – it happened in phases. When India won its independence, the Communist Party of India put out a terrible slogan, 'This independence is false'. It was a terrible slogan because the mood in 1947 was elation that the British had been defeated, they had left. You can't then give a slogan saying, 'This independence is false.' Of course, the slogan was correct, but it was tone-deaf. Political independence is considerable.

But when you have political independence, what is the next category? Liberal thought will say, 'Well, you have political independence', but Marxism asks the next question: 'Are you able to establish your sovereignty?' That's a key question put to us by Lenin: he advances a lot of this thinking, giving us the key category of sovereignty. It's not enough to have what, in the African continent, was known as 'flag independence'.

Why do you need sovereignty? So that you can then marshal your resources in the best way possible, whether for trade or internal development, to establish the dignity of your people. These are the two key concepts, in my opinion, of a kind of Marxism of national liberation. Sovereignty and dignity. And so yes, if we look at these two concepts, we study all the countries of the world, very rarely have countries been able to establish their sovereignty, let alone dignity.

We talk about the conflict in Ukraine. But what about the fact that the United States has been at war against Cuba since 1960? That illegal sanctions policy is a 62-year war that the US has prosecuted against the Cuban people, so that they are unable to establish their own sovereignty.

Yes, decolonisation hasn't fully occurred, but we have to understand phases of decolonisation: certain advances take place, and then there are retreats. Engels, in one of his 8 reviews of Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, said: 'History moves in zigs and zags. There are advances, there are retreats.'

Right now, I would say that we are in a very contradictory

phase, where there is a kind of new attitude being developed, a kind of anticolonial attitude, but without a real anticolonial project. How are you going to advance out of this? And, although we don't have time to get into this, I think that one of the phases we are in now is a kind of demand for a sovereign regionalism, increasing regional linkages to get out from under the kind of neocolonial structure which is centred around the banking centres of Wall Street and the City of London, perhaps Paris's Bourse and the Finanzplatz. Otherwise, there's a mood against colonialism, but I don't know if there's a project, actually, now, as there was, say 70-80 years ago.

MD: I'm going to ask you one more thing, and that is this question of the history of colonialism being taught in schools. Do you honestly think that it is a realistic project? We don't control the ideological apparatus of the state. The example of the Amritsar massacre: we don't control the curriculum, we could do this in a socialist society. But what mileage is there in taking hold of the ideological apparatus of the state, and teaching what you like, before you've got socialism?

VP: You don't need to be a socialist to make that demand. Every time I travel to the UK, I'm struck by the number of people who reside in the UK, whose families are from one colony or the other, whether it's from South Asia, Africa or the Caribbean. In fact, the actual curriculum taught to children of these former colonised zones denigrates them. You could get families, Caribbean-origin families, Bangladeshi-origin families, and so on, to get involved in a mass campaign, saying that we don't want our children to be belittled by the history being taught to them. I think that bringing the colonial history into

the curriculum in this way could be much more than a campaign merely saying, 'Let's have Jallianwala Bagh written about in the story,' although that's a great place to begin.

I feel like the Windrush debate that broke out in the UK recently is a great example of the lack of knowledge and understanding among the general public about British colonialism in the West Indies, and what happened in that period of the 1940s, 50s and 60s. The destabilisation by British intelligence of Guyana, for instance, is not known by people. I feel that there is a large enough constituency within England, Scotland and Wales that could join a mass struggle to change the way in which history is taught to children. And it should not just be people who have origins in these parts of the world, and others as well. It's about time trade unions are challenged again to lift up some of these banners: for example, the transport workers' trade union in London, where most of the drivers seem to have their background in one former colony or the other.

It is something to ask the question: do you want your children to continue to feel denigrated in the curriculum they have, where they continue to feel like the British East India Company came to save them from barbarism, that they were barbarians before, and along came Robert Clive and Warren Hastings, to teach them manners, and how to talk a proper language, and not talk like barbarians? This is a horrible psychological attack on young people who have different national origins and so on. I think that it's not going to be an easy thing, but it seems to me like a fitting campaign for all of us to be involved in, in one way or the other.

● Transcribed by the *CR* editor from the video at <https://www.marx-memorial-library.org.uk/events>, and pub-



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Foreword to Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation

CULTURAL POLICY AND DECOLONISATION IN THE CUBAN SOCIALIST PROJECT

ABEL PRIETO



Roberto Matta (Chile), *Cuba es la capital* ('Cuba Is the Capital'), 1963. Soil and plaster on Masonite (mural), 188 x 340 cm. Located at the entrance to Casa de las Américas, Havana.

THE CUBAN REVOLUTION came about in a country subordinated to the US from all points of view. Although we had the façade of a republic, we were a perfect colony, exemplary in economic, commercial, diplomatic, and political terms, and almost in cultural terms.

Our bourgeoisie was constantly looking towards the North: from there, they imported dreams, hopes, fetishes, models of life. They sent their children to study in the North, hoping that they would assimilate the admirable competitive spirit of the Yankee ‘winners’, their style, their unique and superior way of settling in this world and subjugating the ‘losers’.

This “vice-bourgeoisie”, as Roberto Fernández Retamar baptised them, were not limited to avidly consuming whatever product of the US cultural industry fell into their hands. Not only that – at the same time, they collaborated in disseminating the ‘American way of life’ in the Ibero-American sphere and kept part of the profits for themselves. Cuba was an effective cultural laboratory at the service of the Empire, conceived to multiply the exaltation of the Chosen Nation and its world domination.

Cuban actresses and actors dubbed the most popular American television series into Spanish, which would later flood the continent. In fact, we were among the first countries in the region to have television in 1950. It seemed like a leap forward, towards so-called ‘progress’, but it turned out to be poisoned. Very commercial Cuban television programming functioned as a replica of the ‘made in the USA’ pseudo-culture, with soap operas, Major League and National League baseball games, competition and participation programmes copied from American reality shows, and constant advertising.

In 1940, the magazine *Selections of the Reader’s Digest*, published by a company of the same name, began to appear in Spanish in Havana with all of its poison. This symbol of the idealisation of the Yankee model and the demonisation of the USSR and of any idea close to emancipation was translated and printed on the island and distributed from here to all of Latin America and Spain.

The very image of Cuba that was spread internationally was reduced to a tropical ‘paradise’ manufactured by the Yankee mafia and its Cuban accomplices. Drugs, gambling, and prostitution were all put at the service of VIP tourism from the North. Remember that the Las Vegas project had been designed for our country and failed because of the revolution.

Fanon spoke of the sad role of the “national bourgeoisie” – already formally independent from colonialism – before the elites of the old metropolis, “who happen to be tourists enamoured of exoticism, hunting, and casinos”. He added:

“We only have to look at what has happened in Latin America if we want proof of the way the ex-colonised bourgeoisie can be transformed into ‘party’ organiser. The casinos in Havana and Mexico City, the beaches of Rio, Copacabana, and Acapulco, the young Brazilian and Mexican girls, the thirteen-year-old mestizas, are the scars of this deprivation of the national bourgeoisie.”¹

Our bourgeoisie, submissive ‘party organisers’ of the Yankees, did everything possible for Cuba to be culturally absorbed by their masters during the neocolonial republic. However, there were three factors that slowed down this process: the work of intellectual minorities that defended, against all odds, the memory and values of the nation; the sowing of Martí’s principles and patriotism among teachers in Cuban

public schools; and the resistance of our powerful, *mestizo*, haughty, and ungovernable popular culture, nurtured by the rich spiritual heritage of African origin.

In his speech *History Will Absolve Me*, Fidel listed the six main problems facing Cuba. Among them, he highlighted “the problem of education” and referred to “comprehensive education reform” as one of the most urgent missions that the future liberated republic would have to undertake.² Hence, the educational and cultural revolution began practically from the triumph of 1 January 1959. On the 29th of that same month, summoned by Fidel, a first detachment of 300 teachers alongside 100 doctors and other professionals left for the Sierra Maestra to bring education and health to the most remote areas. Around those same days, Camilo and Che launched a campaign to eradicate illiteracy among the Rebel Army troops since more than 80% of the combatants were illiterate.

On 14 September, the former Columbia Military Camp was handed over to the Ministry of Education so that it could build a large school complex there. The promise of turning barracks into schools was beginning to be fulfilled, and 69 military fortresses became educational centres. On 18 September, Law No 561 was enacted, creating 10,000 classrooms and accrediting 4,000 new teachers. The same year, cultural institutions of great importance were created: the Cuban Institute of Cinematographic Art and Industry (ICAIC), the National Publishing House, the Casa de las Américas, and the National Theatre of Cuba, which has a department of folklore and an unprejudiced and anti-racist vision unprecedented in the country. All of these new revolutionary institutions were oriented towards a decolonised understanding of Cuban and universal culture.

But 1961 was the key year in which a profound educational and cultural revolution began in Cuba. This was the year when Eisenhower ruptured diplomatic relations with our country. This was the year when our foreign minister, Raúl Roa, condemned “the policy of harassment, retaliation, aggression, subversion, isolation, and imminent attack by the US against the Cuban government and people” at the UN.³ This was the year of the Bay of Pigs invasion and the relentless fight against the armed gangs financed by the CIA. This was the year when the US government, with Kennedy already at the helm, intensified its offensive to suffocate Cuba economically and isolate it from *Nuestra América*⁴ and from the entire Western world. 1961 was also the year when Fidel proclaimed the socialist character of the revolution on 16 April, the eve of the Bay of Pigs invasion, as Roa exposed the plan that was set to play out the following day. This is something that – considering the influence of the Cold War climate and the McCarthyite, anti-Soviet, and anti-communist crusade on the island – showed that the young revolutionary process had been shaping, at incredible speed, cultural hegemony around anti-imperialism, sovereignty, social justice, and the struggle to build a radically different country. But it was also the year of the epic of the literacy campaign; of the creation of the National School of Art Instructors; of Fidel’s meetings with intellectuals and his founding speech on our cultural policy, *Words to the Intellectuals*; of the birth of the National Union of Writers and Artists of Cuba (UNEAC) and the National Institute of Ethnology and Folklore.⁵

In 1999 in Venezuela – almost four decades later – Fidel summed up his thinking regarding the cultural and educational component in any true revolutionary process: “A revolution can only be the child of culture and ideas”.⁶ Even if it makes radical changes, even if it hands over land to the peasants and eliminates large estates, even if it builds houses for those who survive

in unhealthy neighbourhoods, even if it puts public health at the service of all, even if it nationalises the country's resources and defends its sovereignty, a revolution will never be complete or lasting if it does not give a decisive role to education and culture. It is necessary to change human beings' conditions of material life, and it is necessary to simultaneously change the human being, their conscience, paradigms, and values.

For Fidel, culture was never something ornamental or a propaganda tool – a mistake commonly made throughout history by leaders of the left. Rather, he saw culture as a transformative energy of exceptional scope, which is intimately linked to conduct, to ethics, and is capable of decisively contributing to the “human improvement” in which Martí had so much faith. But Fidel saw culture, above all, as the only imaginable way to achieve the full emancipation of the people: it is what offers them the possibility of defending their freedom, their memory, their origins, and of undoing the vast web of manipulations that limit the steps they take every day. The educated and free citizen who is at the centre of Martí's and Fidel's utopia must be prepared to fully understand the national and international environment and to decipher and circumvent the traps of the machinery of cultural domination.

In 1998, at the 6th Congress of the UNEAC, Fidel focused on the topic “related to globalisation and culture”. So-called ‘neoliberal globalisation’, he said, is “the greatest threat to culture – not only ours, but the world's.” He explained how we must defend our traditions, our heritage, our creation, against “imperialism's most powerful instrument of domination”. And, he concluded, “everything is at stake here: national identity, homeland, social justice, revolution, everything is at stake. These are the battles we have to fight now.”⁷ This is, of course, about ‘battles’ against cultural colonisation, against what Frei Betto calls “globo-colonisation”, against a wave that can liquidate our identity and the revolution itself.

Fidel was already convinced that, in education, in culture, in ideology, there are advances and setbacks. No conquest can be considered definitive. That is why he returned to the subject of culture in his shocking speech on 17 November 2005 at the University of Havana.⁸ The media machinery, together with incessant commercial propaganda, Fidel warned us, come to generate “conditioned responses”. “The lie”, he said, “affects one's knowledge”, but “the conditioned response affects the ability to think”.⁹ In this way, Fidel continued, if the Empire says ‘Cuba is bad’, then “all the exploited people around the world, all the illiterate people, and all those who don't receive medical care or education or have any guarantee of a job or of anything” repeat that ‘the Cuban Revolution is bad’.⁸ Hence, the diabolical sum of ignorance and manipulation engenders a pathetic creature: the poor right-winger, that unhappy person who gives his opinion and votes and supports his exploiters.

“Without culture”, Fidel repeated, “no freedom is possible”.¹⁰ We revolutionaries, according to him, are obliged to study, to inform ourselves, to nurture our critical thinking day by day. This cultural education, together with essential ethical values, will allow us to liberate ourselves definitively in a world where the enslavement of minds and consciences predominates. His call to “emancipat[e] ourselves by ourselves and with our own efforts” is equivalent to saying that we must decolonise ourselves with our own efforts.¹¹ And culture is, of course, the main instrument of that decolonising process of self-learning and self-emancipation.

In Cuba, we are currently more contaminated by the symbols and fetishes of “globo-colonisation” than we have been at

other times in our revolutionary history. We must combat the tendency to underestimate these processes, and we must work in two fundamental directions: intentionally promoting genuine cultural options and fostering a critical view of the products of the hegemonic entertainment industry. It is essential to strengthen the effective coordination of institutions and organisations, communicators, teachers, instructors, intellectuals, artists, and other actors who contribute directly or indirectly to the cultural education of our people. All revolutionary forces of culture must work together more coherently. We must turn the meaning of anti-colonial into an instinct.

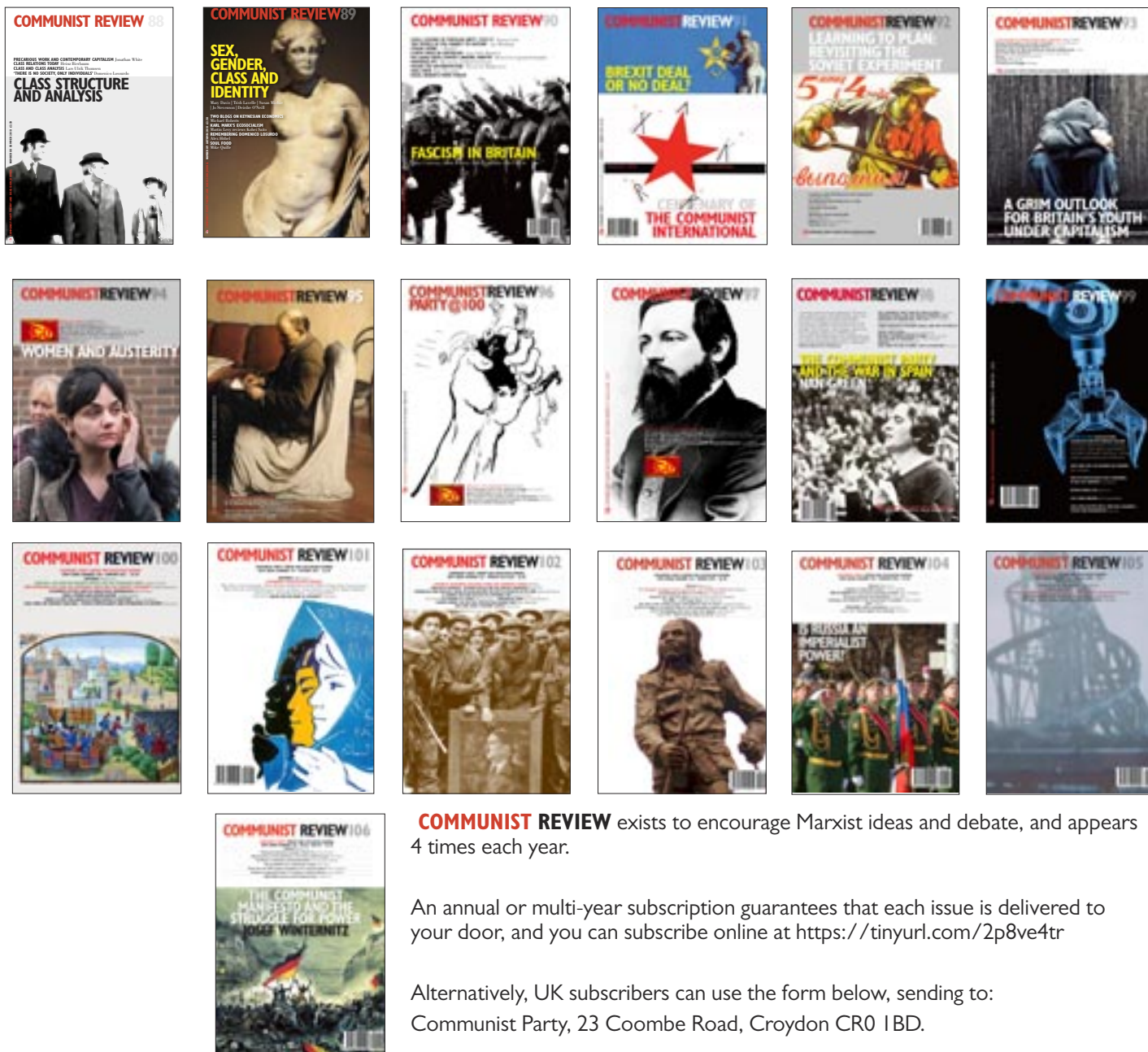
● Reprinted with permission from <https://thetricontinental.org/dossier-ten-theses-on-marxism-and-decolonisation/>.

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- 4 Translator's note: *Nuestra América – Our America –* is a concept stemming from Cuban national hero Jose Martí's 1891 essay on Latin American nationalism calling for unity among nations to foment a Pan-Latin American identity opposed to the cultural values of Europe and the United States.
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NEW POSSIBILITIES FOR REVOLUTIONARY CHANGE

RUTH STYLES

Contribution of the Communist Party of Britain to the 22nd International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties, Havana, 27-29 October 2022

THE COMMUNIST PARTY of Britain welcomes this 22nd International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties in Havana. We salute our hosts, the Communist Party of Cuba. We pledge our profound solidarity with Cuba and its fight for self-determination and sovereignty.

Our meeting takes place at a time when world peace is under immediate threat from economic, military, and political tensions arising from the situation in Ukraine, notably the intervention of US-led imperialist forces seeking to escalate, prolong and widen the conflict.

The escalation of the conflict threatens a nuclear conflagration, with Zelensky now calling for a pre-emptive nuclear strike against Russia. The US, NATO and the EU have – by a massive escalation in arms supplies – changed the battlefield geometry and further reduced the chances of a negotiated resolution based on the principles agreed at Minsk. This option is even further reduced by Russia's incorporation of Ukrainian territory while Putin's barely veiled threat of nuclear escalation has diminished the credibility of Russia's *raison d'être* in violating Ukrainian sovereignty.

Beyond the legitimate defence of linguistic and political rights for significant sections of the Ukrainian people – and the countervailing defence of Ukraine's sovereignty – this conflict is a struggle over territory, mineral wealth, energy and its transit routes, markets, and natural resources.

The sabotage of the Nord Stream pipeline exactly fits the US strategy in opening up Europe to fracked gas exports from a newly energy-sufficient North America. The US has largely succeeded in subordinating European states to its global strategy, diminishing capitalist Russia's regional influence and security and – with Britain and the US client Baltic States as instruments – reducing Europe as a potential commercial, financial, and military rival. This is an essential component of its wider aim of containing China. Sanctions against Russia are a multi-use weapon that both weakens European, especially German and French capital, and depresses living standards, productive capacity, and demand.

The OPEC decision to limit oil production is a challenge to the US and is a function of reduced demand in the East and the unwillingness of states outside the Western imperialist alliance to go along with the US global strategy. This is expressed both by the failure of the US to gain a majority at the UN and the relative success of Russia in aligning its energy policy with that of major oil producers, including direct US allies. The OPEC move undermines the scheme by the major imperialist powers in the G7 to constrain Russian energy prices.

The domestic consequence of the Western imperialist strategy is inflation, rising interest rates, increasing impoverishment and political crises in several states.

We can measure the relative and recent success of the US strategy in Europe against the relative failure of its global strategy, where the balance of forces is changing. The latter is reflected in the sclerosis and atrophy of productive capacity in the developed capitalist countries and a growth of the productive forces, most particularly in China and the Eurasian landmass.

We must not lose sight of the reality that, wherever the productive forces develop along capitalist lines, this results in an aggregation of capital which constantly seeks further outlets. Where capitalist relations of production develop there develops the working class, and the essential antagonism between capital and labour inevitably arises. These contradictions arise independently of the wishes or desires of particular states and leaders, and are themselves the motor of history and the precondition for a transition from capitalist hegemony to working-class power.

The circumstances in which we find ourselves – following the world historical defeat of socialism at the end of the last century – are pregnant with new possibilities for revolutionary change that were unimaginable in the decades in which capital was able to absorb into the capitalist system of wage labour vast millions of working people from the countries where socialism was dismantled with brutal consequences.

In every continent we see the developing contradiction between popular power and capitalism in crisis. In a global dimension there are renewed threats to agreements to ameliorate the climate crisis which increasingly expresses a profound contradiction between capitalism and life itself.

In these circumstances it is particularly important for the working-class movement in general, the trade unions in particular, and most essentially the Communist movement, to find the greatest political, ideological, and organisational unity. This, of necessity, precludes formulaic and mechanical approaches based on old realities. It compels us to learn from experience, particularly new experience. It compels us to consider every facet of the class struggle in its concrete, national, material reality and its movement and development.

I would like to refer to recent developments in my own country. Britain was, until India replaced it a few weeks ago, the fifth largest economy in the world, but one gripped by a profound political and economic crisis, and today a crisis of government. The divisions in Britain's ruling class – with the

most powerful, dominant, monopoly sections wedded to the capitalist entity of the European Union, but with a subordinate section, rooted in a section of predatory finance capitalism, seeking new opportunities outside the EU – were temporarily resolved with a deal that the EU bureaucracy and the major EU powers were more than happy to agree.

However, this did not resolve the economic problems of what is the world's second most powerful imperial power, nor the internal divisions in the ruling class. The reflection of this in politics is the deep division in the Tory Party, the main party of bourgeois power, as it jettisoned its populist figurehead, Boris Johnson.

In recent weeks, the new leadership of the Tories, under Liz Truss, swiftly discovered that the price it pays for departing from capitalist orthodoxy is the mobilisation of the markets and the permanent instruments of monopoly rule – including the 'independent' Bank of England – to limit its freedom of movement. In a few days it lost its credibility and opinion polls showed a deep erosion of its support.

Truss resigned after only 44 days in office, making her the shortest serving prime minister in British history. Her successor will offer no respite to the working class, only more of the poisoned pill of capitalist austerity, inequality and racism. Even at the next general election due in 2024, the Labour Party – with membership losses in the hundreds of thousands and its parliamentary left reduced to silence and impotence – will represent only the possibility of cosmetic change.

Britain's Labour Party, born in the late 19th century crisis of imperialism, reflects the contradictory trends in the working class, being both the repository of millions of working-class votes and the expression of class-collaborationist ideas in the working class. Its parliamentary cohort is insulated from pressure exerted by both party members and voters. However, less than a decade ago, following a maladroit manoeuvre by the party's establishment to open up its leadership election to US-style primary votes, hundreds of thousands of people joined Labour to elect Jeremy Corbyn as leader. He is a veteran of the anti-war movement that put two million people on the streets against Tony Blair's Iraq War.

Corbyn's election totally transformed the life of the Labour Party everywhere except in Parliament, where Labour MPs, in their great majority, tried three times to depose him. Their efforts were subverted when, in 2017, a radical manifesto based on extending workers' rights and social protection, industrial development and progressive social measures resulted in the largest increase in Labour votes since the Second World War, with a 40% plurality. This completely destroyed ruling-class confidence that Labour could be periodically entrusted to take its turn in office. There followed an intensive two-year programme of slander and mass-media attacks on Corbyn, combined with a subversion – by Keir Starmer – of Corbyn's pledge to respect the vote to leave the European Union. These diminished working-class confidence in Labour. Boris Johnson's pledge to "Get Brexit Done" ensured a shift in working-class votes to give the Tories victory in the 2019 general election.

Our experiences in this period – in which our Party threw its modest resources into influencing the revived Labour left – confirm our view that it is only possible to open up the road to working-class power and socialism on the basis of the massive mobilisation of the working class and its allies around a programme which cannot be met by capitalism in crisis. Experience, realism, and revolutionary ideology convince us

that the objective situation always provides both limits to advance and new opportunities. No defeat such as the one we suffered is ever permanent; and today millions of workers in Britain are on the move in a strike movement of unprecedented scale and intensity.

What is distinctive in the present movement of the working class is the clear articulation – by the main leaders of this strike movement – that the issue is the contradiction between the interests of wage earners and employers. The repeated positing of wages against profits is giving a new and more class-conscious dimension to a popular movement in which overwhelming majorities – even of Tory voters – back public ownership of energy, utilities, transport and even banks. Even in the face of Europe's most restrictive employment rights, workers are piling up massive majorities for strike action in ballots.

In this situation the recent growth and revitalisation of our Party and Young Communist League are factors which compel optimism that, along with the growing influence of the *Morning Star* daily newspaper, revolutionary Marxist-Leninist ideas are finding new audiences.

Long live our Communist unity for Peace and Socialism!

Long live the international unity of Communist and Workers Parties!

December 2022 | I

international bulletin

Published by the Communist Party International Commission December 2022

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- ★ Venezuela repression
- ★ Palestine hopes and Israeli fears
- ★ Chris Hani assassin freed
- ★ ITUC leader arrested in corruption probe



11pm Friday 9 December
An UNITE goes to press the Peruvian communists report that Peruvians are marching in Lima to demand the closure of the right-wing majority congress that just ousted Pedro Castillo in a legislative coup.

Rural indigenous communists are said to be marching towards the capital tonight.



7 December 2.30 pm, Plaza 2 de Mayo

Communists defend democracy against coup

PERU COUP

where the Executive and Legislative confrontation will be determined by the people on the streets. In this perspective, the PCP welcomes the call of the ANP (National Alliance of the People) and the COTP (General Confederation of Workers) to the Mobilization on Wednesday at 2.30 pm, in the glorious Plaza 2 de Mayo to express rejection of the coup of the neo-fascist congress and prevent President Pedro Castillo from fulfilling the commitment to implement the program of national sovereignty, growth and distribution of wealth, tax reforms, new constitution, labour dignified, II agrarian reforms, among other points that are vital to confront poverty, corruption and the exploitation of the failed neoliberal model.

Secretary of the PERUAN Communist Party reaffirmed that "our horizon continues to be socialism".

The British delegation visited the Cuban Centre for Genetic Engineering and Biotechnology (CCIGEB). A presentation on the Abilco Covid-19 vaccine, other Cuban Biotechnological innovations and research was made by director general Maria Ayala – a member of the PCC political bureau and Dr Fernando Fajal.

On 27 October – following an all-day meeting of the INCPWP working group chaired by PCC's Angel Arango Reyes, 24/25 working group members present and 24 other parties in attendance, Ruth Stiles was invited to a meeting at the Palace of the Revolution with Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel who welcomed delegates on behalf of the PCC, the Cuban government and stressed the importance of the event.

On the evening of 28 October delegates attended an annual commemoration of revolutionary hero Gerardo Cordoba to mark the anniversary of his disappearance in 1959.

On 28 October the main conference, commemorated by Roberto Morales Ojeda, organisation secretary of the PCC, central committee and political bureau.

The conference was attended by the PCC leadership as well as Fernando Gonzalez of CAP, referencing the international and multi-dimensional nature of capitalism, the unsustainability of the current world order, the role of the PCC in the world, and the commitment to the PCC to the ideas of José Martí, Marx and Lenin.

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Unity for peace and against imperialism



South Africa: Bidwan Mhloni

HAVANA

COMMUNIST AND Workers parties from across the world met in Havana, Cuba, on 16 December from 17 parties and from 100 countries gathered at Havana's palace of convention. The theme of the meeting was solidarity with Cuba and unity against imperialism, capitalism and the threat of fascism.

A total of 117 parties are affiliated to the International Meeting of Communist and Workers Parties.

After two days of speeches, led by the Communist Party of Cuba (CPC) followed by all parties present, a political declaration and a plan of action were agreed unanimously. These documents are available on the Solidnet website (www.solidnet.org).

Ruth Stiles addressed the meeting on behalf of the Communist Party of Britain affirming our party's solidarity with Cuba, our stance on the war in Ukraine and briefing delegates on the revitalisation of class struggle in Britain.

This was the first meeting of the INCPWP for three years and was a resounding success. A broad unity was achieved despite (both expressed and underlying) divisions and tensions on some key international questions such as the causes of the war in Ukraine and socialist China's role in the world.

The PCC also hosts invited guest efforts in securing communist unity, with the politburo attending throughout, chairing each session. Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel addressed the closing session (above) and neurologist

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www.comunistparty.org.uk/unity/





**I CALL MYSELF A COMMUNIST
AND HAVE NO WISH TO
QUALIFY THAT WORD BY
JOINING ANY OTHER TO IT.
WILLIAM MORRIS**

TEN THESES ON MARXISM AND DECOLONISATION

TRICONTINENTAL INSTITUTE AND CASA DE LAS AMÉRICAS



Alirio Palacios (Venezuela), *Muro público* ('Public Wall'), 1978, oil on canvas, 180 x 200 cm.

Introduction

In 1959, the Cuban revolutionary leader Haydee Santamaría (1923–1980) arrived at a cultural centre in the heart of Havana. This building, the revolutionaries decided, would be committed to promoting Latin American art and culture, eventually becoming a beacon for the progressive transformation of the hemisphere's cultural world. Renamed Casa de las Américas ('Home of the Americas'), it would become the heartbeat of cultural developments from Chile to Mexico. Art saturates the walls of the house, and in an adjacent building sits the massive archive of correspondence and drafts from the most significant writers of the past century. The current director of Casa, Abel Prieto – whose words make up the Foreword to this dossier – is a novelist, a cultural critic, and a former minister of culture. His mandate is to stimulate discussion and debate in the country.

Over the course of the past decade, Cuba's intellectuals have been gripped by the debate over decolonisation and culture. Since 1959, the Cuban revolutionary process has – at great cost – established the island's political sovereignty and has struggled against centuries of poverty to cement its economic sovereignty. From 1959 onwards, under the leadership of the revolutionary forces, Cuba has sought to generate a cultural process that allows the island's 11 million people to break with the cultural suffocation which is the legacy of both Spanish and US imperialism. Is Cuba, six decades since 1959, able to say that it is sovereign in cultural terms? The balance sheet suggests that the answer is complex since the onslaught of US cultural and intellectual production continues to hit the island like its annual hurricanes.

To that end, Casa de las Américas has been holding a series of encounters on the issue of decolonisation. In July 2022, Vijay Prashad, the director of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, delivered a lecture there that built upon the work being produced by the institute. Dossier No 56, *Ten Theses on Marxism and Decolonisation*, draws from and expands upon the themes of that talk.

Thesis One: The End of History. The collapse of the USSR and the communist state system in Eastern Europe in 1991 came alongside a terrible debt crisis in the Global South that began with Mexico's default in 1982. These two events – the demise of the USSR and the weakness of the Third World Project – were met with the onslaught of US imperialism and a US-driven globalisation project in the 1990s. For the left, this was a decade of weakness as our left-wing traditions and organisations experienced self-doubt and could not easily advance our clarities around the world. History had ended, said the ideologues of US imperialism, with the only possibility forward being the advance of the US project. The penalty inflicted upon the left by the surrender of Soviet leadership was heavy and led not only to the shutting down of many left parties, but also to the weakened confidence of millions of people with the clarities of Marxist thought.

Thesis Two: The Battle of Ideas. During the 1990s, Cuban President Fidel Castro called upon his fellow Cubans to engage in a 'battle of ideas', a phrase borrowed from *The German Ideology* (1846) by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.¹ What Castro meant by this phrase is that people of the left must not cower before the rising tide of neoliberal ideology but must confidently engage with the fact that neoliberalism is incapable of solving the basic dilemmas of humanity. For instance, neoliberalism

has no answer to the obstinate fact of hunger: 7.9 bn people live on a planet with food enough for 15 bn, and yet roughly 3 bn people struggle to eat. This fact can only be addressed by socialism and not by the charity industry.² The Battle of Ideas refers to the struggle to prevent the conundrums of our time – and the solutions put forth to address them – from being defined by the bourgeoisie. Instead, the political forces for socialism must seek to offer an assessment and solutions far more realistic and credible. For instance, Castro spoke at the United Nations in 1979 with great feeling about the ideas of 'human rights' and 'humanity':

“There is often talk of human rights, but it is also necessary to speak of the rights of humanity. Why should some people walk around barefoot so that others can travel in luxurious automobiles? Why should some live for 35 years so that others can live for 70? Why should some be miserably poor so that others can be overly rich? I speak in the name of the children in the world who do not have a piece of bread. I speak in the name of the sick who do not have medicine. I speak on behalf of those whose right to life and human dignity has been denied.”³

When Castro returned to the Battle of Ideas in the 1990s, the left was confronted by two related tendencies that continue to create ideological problems in our time:

1 Post-Marxism. An idea flourished that Marxism was too focused on 'grand narratives' (such as the importance of transcending capitalism for socialism) and that fragmentary stories would be more precise for understanding the world. The struggles of the working class and peasantry to gain power in society and over state institutions were seen as just another false 'grand narrative', whereas the fragmented politics of the non-governmental organisations were seen as more feasible. The retreat from power into service delivery and into a politics of reform was made in the name of going beyond Marx. But this argument – to go beyond Marx – was really, as the late Aijaz Ahmad pointed out, an argument to return to the period before Marx, to neglect the facts of historical materialism and the zig-zag possibility of building socialism as the historical negation of capitalist brutality and decadence. Post-Marxism was a return to idealism and to perfectionism.

2 Post-colonialism. Sections of the left began to argue that the impact of colonialism was so great that no amount of transformation would be possible, and that the only answer to what could come after colonialism was a return to the past. They treated the past, as the Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui argued in 1928 about the idea of indigenism, as a destination and not as a resource. Several strands of post-colonial theory developed, some of them offering genuine insights often drawn from the best texts of patriotic intellectuals of the new post-colonial nations and of the national liberation revolutionary tradition (anchored by writers such as Frantz Fanon). By the 1990s, the post-colonial tradition, which had previously been committed to revolutionary change in the Third World, was now swept up in North Atlantic university currents that favoured revolutionary impossibility. Afro-pessimism, one part of this new tradition, suggested – in its most extreme version – a desolate landscape of 'social death' for people of African descent, with no possibility of change. Decolonial thought or decolonialidad trapped itself by European thought, accepting the claim that many human concepts – such as democracy – are defined by

the colonial ‘matrix of power’ or ‘matrix of modernity’. The texts of decolonial thought returned again and again to European thought, unable to produce a tradition that was rooted in the anti-colonial struggles of our time. The necessity of change was suspended in these variants of post-colonialism.

The only real decolonisation is anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism. You cannot decolonise your mind unless you also decolonise the conditions of social production that reinforce the colonial mentality. Post-Marxism ignores the fact of social production as well as the need to build social wealth that must be socialised. Afro-pessimism suggests that such a task cannot be accomplished because of permanent racism. Decolonial thought goes beyond Afro-pessimism but cannot go beyond post-Marxism, failing to see the necessity of decolonising the conditions of social production.

Thesis Three: A Failure of Imagination. In the period from 1991 to the early 2000s, the broad tradition of national liberation Marxism felt flattened, unable to answer the doubts sown by post-Marxism and post-colonial theory. This tradition of Marxism no longer had the kind of institutional support provided in an earlier period, when revolutionary movements and Third World governments assisted each other and when even the United Nations’ institutions worked to advance some of these ideas. Platforms that developed to germinate left forms of internationalism – such as the World Social Forum – seemed to be unwilling to be clear about the intentions of peoples’ movements. The slogan of the World Social Forum, for instance, was ‘another world is possible’, which is a weak statement, since that other world could just as well be defined by fascism. There was little appetite to advance a slogan of precision, such as ‘socialism is necessary’.

One of the great maladies of post-Marxist thought – which derived much of its ammunition from forms of anarchism – has been the purist anxiety about state power. Instead of using the limitations of state power to argue for better management of the state, post-Marxist thought has argued against any attempt to secure power over the state. This is an argument made from privilege by those who do not have to suffer the obstinate facts of hunger and illiteracy, who claim that small-scale forms of mutual aid or charity are not ‘authoritarian’, like state projects to eradicate hunger. This is an argument of purity that ends up renouncing any possibility of abolishing the obstinate facts of hunger and other assaults on human dignity and well-being. In the poorer countries, where small-scale forms of charity and mutual aid have a negligible impact on the enormous challenges before society, nothing less than the seizure of state power and the use of that power to fundamentally eradicate the obstinate facts of inequality and wretchedness is warranted.

To approach the question of socialism requires close consideration of the political forces that must be amassed in order to contest the bourgeoisie for ideological hegemony and for control over the state. These forces experienced a pivotal setback when neoliberal globalisation reorganised production along a global assembly line beginning in the 1970s, fragmenting industrial production across the globe. This weakened trade unions in the most important, high-density sectors and invalidated nationalisation as a possible strategy to build proletarian power. Disorganised, without unions, and with long commute times and workdays, the entire international working class found itself in a situation of precariousness.⁴ The International Labour Organisation refers to this sector as the precariat – the precarious proletariat. Disorganised forces of the working class

and the peasantry, of the unemployed and the barely employed, find it virtually impossible to build the kind of theory and confidence out of their struggles needed to directly confront the forces of capital.

One of the key lessons for working-class and peasant movements comes from the struggles being incubated in India. For the past decade, there have been general strikes that have included up to 300 million workers annually. In 2020–2021, millions of farmers went on a year-long strike that forced the government to retreat from its new laws to uberise agricultural work. How were the farmers’ movement and the trade union movement able to do this in a context in which there is very low union density and over 90% of the workers are in the informal sector?⁵ Because of the fights led by informal workers – primarily women workers in the care sector – trade unions began to take up the issues of informal workers – again, mainly women workers – as issues of the entire trade union movement over the course of the past two decades. Fights for permanency of tenure, proper wage contracts, dignity for women workers, and so on produced a strong unity between all the different fractions of workers. The main struggles that we have seen in India are led by these informal workers, whose militancy is now channelled through the organised power of the trade union structures. More than half of the global workforce is made up of women – women who do not see issues that pertain to them as women’s issues, but as issues that all workers must fight for and win. This is much the same for issues pertaining to workers’ dignity along the lines of race, caste, and other social distinctions. Furthermore, unions have been taking up issues that impact social life and community welfare outside of the workplace, arguing for the right to water, sewage connections, education for children, and to be free from intolerance of all kinds. These ‘community’ struggles are an integral part of workers’ and peasants’ lives; by entering them, unions are rooting themselves in the project of rescuing collective life, building the social fabric necessary for the advance towards socialism.

Thesis Four: Return to the Source. It is time to recover and return to the best of the national liberation Marxist tradition. This tradition has its origins in Marxism-Leninism, one that was always widened and deepened by the struggles of hundreds of millions of workers and peasants in the poorer nations. The theories of these struggles were elaborated by people such as José Carlos Mariátegui, Ho Chi Minh, EMS Namboodiripad, Claudia Jones, and Fidel Castro. There are two core aspects to this tradition:

- 1 From the words ‘national liberation’, we get the key concept of **sovereignty**. The territory of a nation or a region must be sovereign against imperialist domination.
- 2 From the tradition of Marxism, we get the key concept of **dignity**. The fight for dignity implies a fight against the degradation of the wage system and against the old, wretched, inherited social hierarchies (including along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, and so on).

Thesis Five: ‘Slightly Stretched’ Marxism. Marxism entered the anti-colonial struggles not through Marx directly, but more accurately through the important developments that Vladimir Lenin and the Communist International made to the Marxist tradition. When Fanon said that Marxism was ‘slightly stretched’ when it went out of its European context, it was this stretching that he had in mind.⁶ Five key elements define the

character of this 'slightly stretched' Marxism across a broad range of political forces:

- 1 It was clear to the early Marxists that liberalism would not solve the dilemmas of humanity, the obstinate facts of life under capitalism (such as hunger and ill-health). Not one capitalist state project put the solution to these dilemmas at the heart of its work, leaving it instead to the charity industry. The capitalist state projects pushed the idea of 'human rights' to abstraction; Marxists, on the other hand, recognised that only if these dilemmas are transcended can human rights be established in the world.
- 2 The modern form of industrial production is the precondition for this transcendence because only it can generate sufficient social wealth that can be socialised. Colonialism did not permit the development of productive forces in the colonised world, thereby making it impossible to create sufficient social wealth in the colonies to transcend these dilemmas.
- 3 The socialist project in the colonies had to fight against colonialism (and, therefore, for sovereignty) as well as capitalism and its social hierarchies (and, therefore, for dignity). These remain the two key aspects of national liberation Marxism.
- 4 Due to the lack of development of industrial capitalism in the colonies, and therefore of a large enough number of industrial workers (the proletariat), the peasantry and agricultural workers had to be a key part of the historical bloc of socialism.
- 5 It is important to register that socialist revolutions took place in the poorer parts of the world – Russia, Vietnam, China, Cuba – and not in the richer parts, where the productive forces had been better developed. The dual task of the revolutionary forces in poorer states that had won independence and instituted left governments was to build the productive forces and to socialise the means of production. The governments in these countries, shaped and supported by public action, had a historical mission far more complex than anything envisaged by the first generation of Marxists. A new, boundless Marxism emerged from these places, where an experimental attitude towards socialist construction emerged. However, many of these developments in socialist construction were not elaborated into theory, which meant that the theoretical tradition of national liberation Marxism was not fully available to contest both the post-Marxist and post-colonial assault on socialist praxis in the Third World.

Thesis Six: Dilemmas of Humanity. Reports come regularly about the terrible situation facing the world, from hunger and illiteracy to the ever more frequent outcomes of the climate catastrophe. Social wealth that could be spent to address these deep dilemmas of humanity is squandered on weapons and tax havens. The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end hunger and promote peace would require an infusion of \$4.2 tn per year, but, as it stands, an infinitesimal fraction of this amount is spent to address these goals.⁷ With the pandemic and galloping inflation, even less money will go towards SDGs, and benchmarks measuring human well-being, sovereignty, and dignity will slip further and further away. Hunger, the greatest dilemma of humanity, is no longer within sight of being eradicated (except in China, where absolute poverty was ended in 2021).⁸ It is estimated that around 3

bn people now struggle with various forms of daily hunger.⁹

Take the case of Zambia and the fourth SDG to eradicate illiteracy, for example. Approximately 60% of the children in classes 1 to 4 in the Copperbelt cannot read.¹⁰ This is a region that produces much of the world's copper, which is essential to our electronics. The parents of these children bring the copper to the world market, but their children cannot read. Neither post-Marxism nor post-colonialism addresses the fact of illiteracy or these parents' determination for their children to be able to read. The theory of national liberation Marxism, rooted in sovereignty and dignity, however, does address these questions: it demands that Zambia control copper production and receive higher royalty payments (sovereignty), and it demands that the Zambian working class take a greater share of the surplus value (dignity). Greater sovereignty and dignity are pathways to address the dilemmas facing humanity. But rather than spend social wealth on these elementary advances, those who own property and exercise privilege and power spend over \$2 tn per year on weapons and many trillions on security forces (from the military to the police).¹¹

Thesis Seven: The Rationality of Racism and Patriarchy. It is important to note that, under the conditions of capitalism, the structures of racism and patriarchy remain rational. Why is this the case? In *Capital* (1867), Marx detailed two forms for the extraction of surplus value and hinted at a third form. The first two forms (absolute surplus value and relative surplus value) were described and analysed in detail, pointing out how the theft of time over the course of the working day extracts absolute surplus value from the waged worker and how productivity gains both shorten the time needed for workers to produce their wages and increase the amount of surplus produced by them (relative surplus value). Marx also suggested a third form of extraction, writing that, in some situations, workers are paid less than would be justified by any civilised understanding of wages at that historical juncture. He noted that capitalists try to push "the wage of the worker down below the value of his labour power", but he did not discuss this form further because of the importance for his analysis that labour power must be bought and sold at full value.¹²

This third consideration, which we call super-exploitation, is not immaterial for our analysis since it is central to the discussion of imperialism. How are the suppression of wages and the refusal to increase royalty payments for raw material extraction justified? By a colonial argument that, in certain parts of the world, people have lower expectations for life and therefore their social development can be neglected. This colonial argument applies equally to the theft of wages from women who perform care work, which is either unpaid or grossly underpaid on the grounds that it is 'women's work'.¹³ A socialist project is not trapped by the structures of racism and patriarchy since it does not require these structures to increase the capitalist's share of surplus value. However, the existence of these structures over centuries, deepened by the capitalist system, has created habits that are difficult to overturn merely by legislation. For that reason, a political, cultural, and ideological struggle must be waged against the structures of racism and patriarchy and must be treated with as much importance as the class struggle.

Thesis Eight: Rescue Collective Life. Neoliberal globalisation vanquished the sense of collective life and deepened the despair of atomisation through two connected processes:

- 1 by weakening the trade union movement and the socialistic possibilities that come within the public action and workplace struggle rooted in trade unionism.
- 2 by substituting the idea of the citizen with the idea of the consumer – in other words, the idea that human beings are principally consumers of goods and services, and that human subjectivity can be best appreciated through a desire for things.

The breakdown of social collectivity and the rise of consumerism harden despair, which morphs into various kinds of retreat. Two examples of this are: a) a retreat into family networks that cannot sustain the pressures placed upon them by the withdrawal of social services, the increasing burden of care work on the family, and ever longer commute times and workdays; b) a move towards forms of social toxicity through avenues such as religion or xenophobia. Though these avenues provide opportunities to organise collective life, they are organised not for human advancement, but for the narrowing of social possibility.

How does one rescue collective life? Forms of public action rooted in social relief and cultural joy are an essential antidote to this bleakness. Imagine days of public action rooted in left traditions taking place each week and each month, drawing more and more people to carry out activities together that rescue collective life. One such activity is Red Books Day, which was inaugurated on 21 February 2020 by the International Union of Left Publishers, the same day that Marx and Engels published *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848. In 2020, the first Red Books Day, a few hundred thousand people around the world went into public places and read the *Manifesto* in their different languages, from Korean to Spanish. In 2021, due to the pandemic, most of the events went online and we cannot really say how many people participated in Red Books Day, but, in 2022, nearly three-quarters of a million people joined in the various activities.

Part of rescuing collective life was vividly displayed during the pandemic when trade unions, youth organisations, women's organisations, and student unions took to the public domain in Kerala (India) to build sinks, sew masks, establish community kitchens, deliver food, and conduct house-to-house surveys so that each person's needs could be taken into account.¹⁴

Thesis Nine: The Battle of Emotions. Fidel Castro provoked a debate in the 1990s around the concept of the Battle of Ideas, the class struggle in thought against the banalities of neoliberal conceptions of human life. A key part of Fidel's speeches from this period was not just what he said but how he said it, each word suffused with the great compassion of a man committed to the liberation of humanity from the tentacles of property, privilege, and power. In fact, the Battle of Ideas was not merely about the ideas themselves, but also about a 'battle of emotions', an attempt to shift the palate of emotions from a fixation on greed to considerations of empathy and hope.

One of the true challenges of our time is the bourgeoisie's use of the culture industries and the institutions of education and faith to divert attention away from any substantial discussion about *real* problems – and about finding common solutions to social dilemmas – and towards an obsession with *fantasy* problems. In 1935, the Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch called this the "swindle of fulfilment", the seeding of a range of fantasies to mask their impossible realisation. The benefit of social production, Bloch wrote, "is reaped by the big capitalist upper stratum, which employs gothic dreams against proletarian real-

ities".¹⁵ The entertainment industry erodes proletarian culture with the acid of aspirations that cannot be fulfilled under the capitalist system. But these aspirations are enough to weaken any working-class project.

A degraded society under capitalism produces a social life that is suffused with atomisation and alienation, desolation and fear, anger and hate, resentment and failure. These are ugly emotions that are shaped and promoted by the culture industries ('you can have it too!'), educational establishments ('greed is the prime mover'), and neofascists ('hate immigrants, sexual minorities, and anyone else who denies you your dreams'). The grip of these emotions on society is almost absolute, and the rise of neofascists is premised upon this fact. Meaning feels emptied, perhaps the result of a society of spectacles that has now run its course.

From a Marxist perspective, culture is not seen as an isolated and timeless aspect of human reality, nor are emotions seen as a world of their own or as being outside of the developments of history. Since human experiences are defined by the conditions of material life, ideas of fate will linger on as long as poverty is a feature of human life. If poverty is transcended, then fatalism will have a less secure ideological foundation, but it does not automatically get displaced. Cultures are contradictory, bringing together a range of elements in uneven ways out of the social fabric of an unequal society that oscillates between reproducing class hierarchy and resisting elements of social hierarchy. Dominant ideologies suffuse culture through the tentacles of ideological apparatuses like a tidal wave, overwhelming the actual experiences of the working class and the peasantry. It is, after all, through class struggle and through the new social formations created by socialist projects that new cultures will be created – not merely by wishful thinking.

It is important to recall that, in the early years of each of the revolutionary processes – from Russia in 1917 to Cuba in 1959 – cultural efflorescence was saturated with the emotions of joy and possibility, of intense creativity and experimentation. It is this sensibility that offers a window into something other than the ghoulish emotions of greed and hatred.

Thesis Ten: Dare to Imagine the Future. One of the enduring myths of the post-Soviet era is that there is no possibility of a post-capitalist future. This myth came to us from within the triumphalist US intellectual class, whose 'end of history' sensibility helped to strengthen orthodoxy in such fields as economics and political theory, preventing open discussions about post-capitalism. Even when orthodox economics could not explain the prevalence of crises, including the total economic collapse in 2007–08, the field itself retained its legitimacy. These myths were made popular by Hollywood films and television shows, where disaster and dystopian films suggested planetary destruction rather than socialist transformation. It is easier to imagine the end of the earth than a socialist world.

During the economic collapse, the phrase 'too big to fail' settled on the public consciousness, reinforcing the eternal nature of capitalism and the dangers of even trying to shake its foundations. The system stood at a standstill. Austerity growled at the precarious. Small businesses crumpled for lack of credit. And yet, there was no mass consideration of going beyond capitalism. World revolution was not seen on the immediate horizon. This partial reality suffocated so much hope in the possibility of going beyond this system, a system – too big to

fail – that now seems eternal. Our traditions argue against pessimism, making the point that hope must structure our interventions from start to finish. But what is the material basis for this hope? This basis can be found on three levels:

- 1 The obstinate facts of hunger and illiteracy, homelessness and indignity, cannot be made invisible. Neither will those who are denied their basic rights be silenced, nor will their material conditions disappear if these obstinate facts are not addressed. Desolation and anger are the products of this denial.
- 2 Massive advances in global production – both in agriculture and industry as well as in the service sector – have enabled us to imagine a world that transcends necessity and opens the door to freedom. One cannot be free simply by a legal edict. Freedom requires that the obstinate facts of life under capitalism be transcended. For decades, we have lived in a world with the capacity to meet the needs of humanity.
- 3 These massive advances in global production took place not only because of improvements in science and technology, but decisively because of the socialisation of labour. What is known as globalisation sees the entire process from the standpoint of capital and increased returns to scale. What it does not acknowledge is that these massive advances in global production took place because workers now labour with each other across oceans and that this socialisation of labour demonstrates the integration of the international working class. This socialisation of labour runs against the narrow, suffocating boundaries of private property, which hold back further advances for its own petty gains. The clash between the socialisation of labour and private property deepens the struggles to socialise property – the basis for modern socialism – as Marx predicted.

Capitalism has already failed. It cannot address the basic questions of our times, these obstinate facts – such as hunger and illiteracy – that stare us in the face. It is not enough to be alive. One must be able to live and to flourish. That is the mood that demands a revolutionary transformation.

We need to recover our tradition of national liberation Marxism but also elaborate the theory of our tradition from the work of our movements. We need to draw more attention to the theories of Ho Chi Minh and Fidel, EMS Namboodiripad and Claudia Jones. They did not only do, but they also produced innovative theories. These theories need to be developed and tested in our own contemporary reality, building our Marxism not out of the classics alone – which are useful – but out of the facts of our present. Lenin's 'concrete analysis of the concrete conditions' requires close attention to the concrete, the real, the historical facts. We need more factual assessments of our times, a closer rendition of contemporary imperialism that is imposing its military and political might to prevent the necessity of a socialist world. This is precisely the agenda of Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, of the almost thirty research institutes with which we work closely through the Network of Research Institute, and of the more than 200 political movements whose mass lines inform the development of Tricontinental's research agenda through the International Peoples' Assembly.

Certainly, socialism is not going to appear magically. It must be fought for and built, our struggles deepened, our social connections tightened, our cultures enriched. Now is the time for a united front, to bring together the working class and the

peasantry as well as allied classes, to increase the confidence of workers, and to clarify our theory. To unite the working class and the peasantry as well as allied classes requires the unity of all left and progressive forces. Our divides in this time of great danger must not be central; our unity is essential.

Humanity demands it.

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CHINA AFTER THE 20TH CONGRESS: ANYTHING TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT?

MARC VANDEPITTE



SHARING CULTURE

In Mianyang City, southwest China's Sichuan Province, a number of densely populated communities have set up 'shared medicine boxes'. Residents who have enough medicine voluntarily share their extra medicine with those who need it. With more than 90 'shared medicine boxes' received more than 3,000 medicines have been donated.

CGTN images

“... wages in China have tripled over the period 2005-2016, while they have stagnated in many countries; and between 1978 and 2018 China lifted 770m people out of poverty. The life expectancy of a Chinese person today is higher than that of a US citizen.”

MAINSTREAM MEDIA coverage of the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of China was dismal. All attention went almost exclusively on one man and his alleged consolidation of power. Yet this congress was not about Xi Jinping's person but about the fundamental changes and challenges of the world's largest country in terms of population. We found out practically nothing about that, except for some heated clichés.

In this article, I want to talk about those challenges facing China and the whole world. To see what we can expect from China in this regard, I shall look at how the country has responded to some recent crises and compare that approach with how the West, and especially then the US, deals with them.

Peace

With Mexico and Canada as its neighbours, the US has just about the most stable and secure borders in the world and does not have to worry about its national security. Nevertheless, the country has waged war against as many as seven countries over the past 20 years: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Yemen, Somalia and Pakistan. Today, the US is waging a proxy war against Russia and is not at all pushing for peace negotiations – quite the contrary. It wants to weaken Russia as much as possible.

According to a US Congressional report,¹ the US has launched as many as 251 military interventions since 1991. Worldwide, the US has roughly 750 military bases in 80 countries.² It has also imposed economic sanctions against more than 20 countries – all part of an effort to maintain its absolute autocratic rule.³

With respect to China, Washington is increasingly steering toward a new Cold War. Over the years, it has built a veritable military encirclement around China^{4,5} and has established military partnerships with countries in the region to isolate it: the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the US), AUKUS, and the Five Eyes (intelligence-based partnership between New Zealand, Australia, Canada, Britain and the US).

China adopts a very different approach. In past centuries, its economy was largely self-sufficient, so it could afford to live isolated from the outside world and often did so. Even at the height of its imperial power, China spread its culture by establishing diplomatic and economic relations rather than by military conquest.

It has maintained this foreign policy even in its recent history. China seeks a multipolar world characterised by equality among all nations. It regards sovereignty as the cornerstone of

international order and rejects any interference in the internal affairs of another country for any reason.

Per capita, China spends 12 times less on armaments than the US.⁶ It has only one military base abroad – in Djibouti – used for anti-piracy operations. The last war China fought was in 1979, against Vietnam. Except for a border incident with India in 2020, China's rise in East Asia has been remarkably conflict-free, despite the many unresolved border disputes of the past. China is also the only one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council that has not fired a single shot outside its borders in the last 30 years.

Like most countries of the Global South, China is not getting carried away by the war fever which has flared up, especially in Western countries, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Instead, it is pushing for peace negotiations and opposing economic sanctions against Russia.

China responds to its military encirclement, not by building military bases around the US, but by fortifying small islets in the South China Sea and claiming much of this territory. Oversight of shipping routes along which its energy and industrial goods are transported is vital to Beijing. It is in this same context that the New Silk Road must also be seen: an overland way of bypassing maritime encirclement.

Together with other countries of the Global South, China is trying to build a multipolar world characterised by a better balance of power than exists today. Along with Brazil, India, Russia and South Africa, it is a partner in BRICS. Soon Iran, Argentina, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Egypt may join this group of countries.⁷

COVID

The coronavirus pandemic is the most serious health crisis in recent world history. How a country has dealt with it teaches us a lot, not only about its healthcare system, but also about how it is organised, what its priorities are, how efficient its policies are, and so on. In other words, COVID-19 is a rock-solid stress test.

In the US, the handling of the pandemic was downright abominable. At first, the Trump administration did not take the threat seriously. On 10 February 2020, Trump even flatly proclaimed that the virus would disappear on its own as the weather warmed up.⁸ Only when the stock markets took a deep dive on 12 March 2020 did his administration begin to wake up.

Until its last moment, the Trump administration tried to secure the interests of the big capital groups, even at the expense of disease prevention and protection of the population.

Trump therefore wanted to avoid measures such as social distancing as much and as long as possible, let alone implement a lockdown.

A second reason for the Trump administration's slow response was cost-cutting considerations. That greatly reduced, not to say demolished, the USA's capacity to fight epidemics. Both reasons also played out in many other Western countries.

The consequences of this approach or lack thereof have been disastrous. In all, more than 1.3 million US citizens have died from COVID-19.⁹ Epidemiologists are convinced that the death toll could have been 10 times lower if lockdown had been declared two weeks earlier.¹⁰

In contrast, after a false start in Wuhan, the Chinese government jumped into action very quickly with drastic measures such as lockdown. The main goal was and still is to keep the number of casualties as low as possible. Economic motives were pushed aside.

To combat the pandemic, the government deployed major resources. In the initial phase, 40,000 doctors and nurses were transferred from the rest of the country to Hubei Province, the epicenter of the epidemic.¹¹ A good 3,000 companies, ranging from automakers and textile companies to pharmaceutical giants, temporarily switched their production to making face masks, protective clothing, disinfectants, thermometers and medical equipment.¹²

The World Health Organisation describes the Chinese approach as "perhaps the most ambitious, flexible and aggressive disease control in history".¹³ The approach has paid off. The number of COVID deaths in China, as at 20 November 2022, is 5,227.¹⁴ Per head of population, a US resident is 1,060 times more likely to die from COVID-19 than a Chinese citizen.

Fighting the virus also has an international dimension: you can only overcome a pandemic if you act globally. And here too, the differences in approach between the West and China are striking. The rich Western countries refused to help low- and middle-income countries financially. They secured themselves first and failed to ensure adequate global supplies and equitable distribution of essential goods, including protective equipment, diagnostic materials, medicines and medical supplies.¹⁵ In the early days, rich countries hoarded vaccines for themselves at the expense of countries of the Global South.

The Chinese approach is in sharp contrast to this. In 2020, China exported 220bn face masks.¹⁶ During that crucial early period, it also supplied 3.8bn vaccine doses to the world.¹⁷ Only at a later stage, when there was a surplus of vaccines at home, did the US export just over 600m doses.

Climate

Rich countries are responsible for more than half of historically accumulated CO₂ emissions.¹⁸ Their wealth and development are based on that. For the US alone, we are talking about a quarter of all past emissions. Therefore, countries like the US also bear the greatest responsibility in preventing further climate degeneration.

Despite the policies announced with much bravado by the Biden administration, the US is promising only a 9-11% reduction in emissions compared to 1990,¹⁹ which is far too little to meet the Paris Climate Agreement target of limiting the global temperature rise to 1.5°C. Under Biden, there will be no carbon tax or increase in gasoline taxes. Conversely, fossil-fuel companies are making billions in tax benefits today as a result of the 'Build Back Better' Act.²⁰ The reason for this is not hard to find; many members of the government have direct ties to the

oil and gas industry.²¹ And the current president is not one of the worst. The previous one was a climate denier and there is a reasonable chance that the next one will be also.

It's a very different story in China. There, it is not the big (energy) companies that rule the roost and direct the political course. The policy is set by the Communist Party which resolutely opts for a sustainable future. Recently, the Chinese government advanced the concept of an "ecological civilisation".²² That means paying as much attention to developing ecosystems as to human well-being.

China accounts for only 13% of historical emissions, but is the largest emitter today. On a per capita basis, China currently has the same emissions as Western countries in 1885.²³ Per capita, China's cumulative emissions are one-eighth of those of the United States. Furthermore, a not insignificant portion of China's current emissions is due to the production of goods consumed in the West.²⁴

China pledges to be climate neutral by 2060. During that transition period, it will still rely on coal, but to reach its climate goal it is making enormous efforts to diversify. Today, Chinese companies produce 72% of the world's solar panels, 69% of all lithium-ion batteries and 45% of all wind turbines.²⁵ By 2021 China alone had added more offshore wind capacity than the rest of the world combined in the previous five years, and it promises to nearly triple its current wind and solar power capacity over the next decade.²⁶

Thanks to China's innovations, the production costs of hydroelectric, wind and solar power have fallen so much worldwide that they can now compete with fossil fuels in terms of price in large parts of the world. The country today accounts for 99% of the world's electric buses and 70% percent of all high-speed trains. Its forest area has doubled since the early 1980s. China's total renewable energy capacity exceeds that of the US, EU, Japan and the UK combined.²⁷

Political crisis

There is clearly something wrong with the Western political system. Given Trump, Johnson, Bolsonaro, Duterte etc, the system seems to be becoming a biotope for potty-mouthed, unaccountable and dangerous figures. Political leaders with an overtly racist and/or authoritarian agenda are increasingly gaining favour with voters – just think of Orban in Hungary, Meloni in Italy, Modi in India, Le Pen in France, Morawiecki in Poland. The list, unfortunately, is getting longer and longer.

Some recent studies²⁸ show that ordinary citizens have practically no influence on policy and that their wishes or needs are hardly or not at all taken into account. It is the economic elites who have the greatest influence on political decision-making.

During the coronavirus crisis, it was the pharmaceutical giants who led the dance and raked up big profits. It is the energy giants which have held the climate crisis hostage and which, in the current energy crisis, are making money on the backs of ordinary people. It is the arms industry that has fuelled war fever and run off with big profits. And while the big banks were responsible for the 2008 financial crisis, working people have paid the price.

It is becoming more and more obvious to people that we live in a plutocracy; and, as a result, trust in politics is sinking further and further. According to a study of 77 countries,²⁹ 59% of the population are dissatisfied with democracy, a big increase from the 40% before the financial crisis. It has been estimated that, by the end of 2023, only one fifth of European citizens will

trust their national government.³⁰

And China? In the eyes of the West, it is not a democracy. The system there in no way meets the standards the West sets. But for most Chinese, democracy primarily means ruling in the public interest and good governance. In the West, we place emphasis on how and by whom decisions are made. The Chinese attach more importance to the quality of their politicians than to the procedures for choosing their leaders. To optimise that quality, the Communist Party recruits the most competent people. The selection process for promoting top leaders is objective and rigorous.³¹

In any case, the Party can count on strong popular support. Nearly three-quarters of Chinese say they support the one-party system.³² The score is head and shoulders above those of Western countries, and it is not really surprising. As I showed in a previous article,⁴ wages in China have tripled over the period 2005-2016, while they have stagnated in many countries; and between 1978 and 2018 China lifted 770m people out of poverty. The life expectancy of a Chinese person today is higher than that of a US citizen.³³

So, anything to be concerned about?

It's not that China has no problems. The laundry list of challenges facing the country is long. At the social level, there is the redistribution of wealth and the issue of 'internal migrants'.³⁴ At the economic level, there is the issue of an ageing population, the transition to an internal market and debt reduction.

At the political level, there is the need for harmonious coexistence with the various minorities, the curbing of nationalist resentments, the tackling of corruption, the further development of the rule of law, a further democratisation of decision-making, the containment of the capitalist elite, the restoration of socialist morality and the filling of the ideological vacuum.

On the ecological front, there is tackling global warming, with the phasing out of coal in particular, but also the elimination of environmental pollution. And then there is the economic and technological war declared by the US against China.³⁵

Considering how the Chinese have handled the major crises of recent years, the chances are that they will be able to handle these challenges as well. What we should be more concerned about is what awaits us in the US and in a string of other Western countries.

We can only hope that the European Union and other Western countries, in the face of the great challenges, will keep a cool head, steer their own thoughtful courses and not allow themselves to be drawn into the bellicose domination logic of the US.

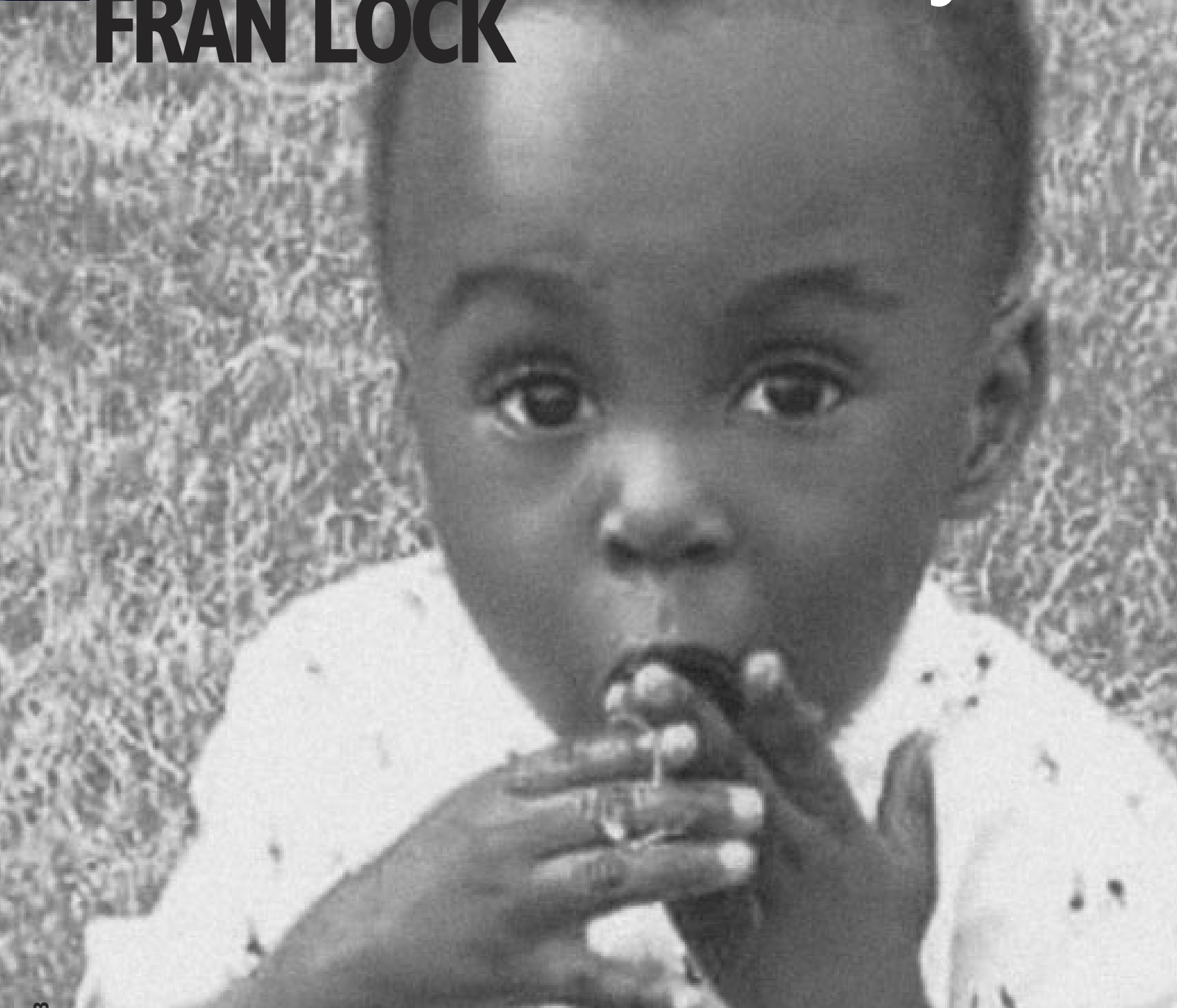
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SOUL FOOD ON POETRY AND WORKING CLASS JOY FRAN LOCK



AS ODD AS it might sound – given the present state of the world – this quarter’s *Soul Food* is all about joy. Before anyone starts to wonder who I am and what I’ve done with Fran Lock, I’ll explain: I began working on this column, as I usually do, scrolling the rolling news and noting its reception and appearance in the comments and creative output of my friends and fellow poets. Which stories strike people as particularly vivid? Which seem to demand or incite that deeper investment of attention, an artistic response as opposed to a visceral gut reaction? Lately I’d noticed that art – mine and others’ – had stalled at this blank wall of awfulness; that there was something about this particular social and political moment that seemed to preclude the possibility of meaningful poetic response.

This feeling began for me with the coroner’s verdict that two-

year-old Awaab Ishak died as a direct result of prolonged exposure to black mould in his family’s flat in 2020. It began with a rage that felt quite literally unspeakable. When I say “unspeakable”, I am evoking two distinct silences. The first is the silence of being unheard: it is the silence of the ‘other’ whose voice does not register on the instruments and apparatus of the state. It is the silence of Awaab Ishak’s parents before their social housing provider. ‘We shouted as loud as we could,’ they said, but they might as well have been screaming in space. Too poor, too brown, their words carried no weight, transmitted no sound.

The second silence is the silence that results when articulate language crumbles in the face of our rage and sadness; when miseries proliferate faster than our ability to name them. It’s a defeated silence. It’s the silence we retreat into when we know that to speak would be a waste of breath. It’s an inability to *catch*

our breath, to organise or formulate a response. Too beaten, too reeling, we stagger from indignity to crisis to tragedy and back. The world provokes a response, but denies our right to reply. It is infinitely frustrating and confusing.

Perhaps this is tactical. Not just the terrible things themselves, but the endless and malignantly rapid succession of them: iterative, accumulative, daily. Michelle Mone and her children – an article alleges – received £29m on the quiet from the profits of a PPE business that was only awarded such lucrative government contracts after she pushed it to ministers. The equipment provided by that business was deemed unfit for use. NHS staff – among them the nurses currently being denied a decent pay rise – were donning DIY PPE to protect themselves and the public while Mone posted pictures of her jet-set life on Instagram. Nauseating. But hardly unique. And a drop in the ocean compared to the £37 bn wasted on Test and Trace under Boris ‘Partygate’ Johnson.

Energy bills have quadrupled. Over 2m people are using foodbanks. Tenants face eviction. I watch footage of police brutality. I see images of our dying planet. I engage with the news in spasms of violent anger, and I’m not the only one. Social media shows us lives destroyed and taken, globally, moment by moment. It is overwhelming, and there is a deadening of ethical nerve that results when oppression and corruption are reduced to a litany of interchangeable instances. Calls for our compassion or outrage are so swift, numerous, and diffuse that meaningful dedication of focus and effort become a challenge; people feel bewildered and exhausted. You can’t fight it all, so you feel like fighting any of it is futile. And while injustice without redress is naturalised as the new normal, so too is our image of ourselves as helpless and victimised. Poor and working-class people become those the world happens to, and working-class identity is fused inextricably to sorrow and impotent struggle.

Somewhere in the midst of all this our creativity disappears. Why wouldn’t it? It seems inadequate, even indulgent to write amidst the suffering of a people, the death of a child. And why bother? What’s the point in diagnosing the problem again and again, when we already know, when it changes nothing, when we’re just – and I hear this one a lot – ‘preaching to the converted’? What is restored or solaced in writing? Either we end in an apolitical catharsis that lets us off the hook, discharging potentially radical discontent in a vague gesture towards empathy, or we contribute to the performance and consumption of working-class pain without so much as touching the systems responsible for creating and maintaining that pain. It’s easy to discount ourselves. It’s easy to believe that our art doesn’t matter.

But it does. More than ever. Perhaps it helps not to picture our own small acts of creative resistance as purely unilateral. Although we often work as individuals, our many gestures of articulation and defiance have accumulative power, form a network of responses in solidarity with others. You can’t change everything, but you don’t have to: there are a million or more points of focus, there are thousands of approaches or methods of engagement. You are not alone, you are chipping away, in concert with others, at different facets of the same edifice, until cracks appear and the monolith falls.

As for ‘preaching to the converted’, who says that the primary purpose of your writing is to persuade those opposed to you? Isn’t art also for strengthening the bonds of friendship or community? For remembering? For mourning? For holding space for each other? Critics on the right are always using this one to belittle and discount left-wing and working-class art because their experience of the world doesn’t admit to the power

and importance of testimony, of witnessing. Of *course*, we’re talking amongst ourselves, nobody else is listening. Don’t discount the power of our talk, the sheer gift of it. Listening is one of the most important things we can do for each other. We gain strength from it. We also share information and find common ground. It allows us to recognise and care for ourselves in a way that society does not and never has.

It is true that when we speak about our pain and sadness, we leave ourselves vulnerable to misrepresentation. So often, working-class pain is co-opted as narrative freight by the culture industry; representations of our lives are narrowly focused and selectively edited in ways that deny us our full humanity. Here are stories of poverty, addiction, violence and abuse. But where is the music we make in the teeth of these things? Where is the love? Where is the joy? Our silence will not patch these representational lacunae, it will only ensure that others speak for and about us. And so often the making of our art, the writing of the poem, is how joy is accessed and born.

Joy is not the same thing as happiness, which is fleeting and interior. Joy is a made thing. Often, although the subject matter of our work is bleak, in the language of our texts – their wit and liveliness – they manifest models of resistance, they carve out a scene of refusal. The poems I want to share in this column – all previously unpublished – enact this resistance in different ways. In Sab Lyall’s *I wanna live with common people like you*, the poem echoes the coda to Pulp’s 1995 working-class anthem *Common People* at the precise moment when Jarvis Cocker’s lyric pivots from an ironic address to a privileged pretender to – in Lyall’s imagination – a sincere expression of care for his working-class community. “all-affirming. Firm” writes Lyall, which functions as both a description and celebration of Cocker’s voice, and of the community Lyall dares to image. ‘Firm’ is informal British slang for a group of (working-class) football supporters, typified in popular (middle-class) imagination by aggressive and hooligan behaviour. Lyall’s poem turns this stereotype on its head, giving a two-fingered salute to the judgement which sees any group of working-class men as inherently violent and dangerous. Her “firm” is a place of solidarity and mutual support, and the “fist” is formed, in an act not of menace or destruction, but of cherishing and protection.

In *Lumpen Broadcast Connotation* Wendy Young takes a playful, performative, and linguistically knotty approach to parody, challenging the “repetitive banality in querulous bollox – borne of ye olde BBC” with iconoclastic zeal. The poem tackles the treatment of working-class and left-wing political figures by the mainstream media through the person of Mick Lynch. Young’s poem captures that sense of a hectoring and unsympathetic interview in which ‘questions’ are used to accuse and bludgeon rather than facilitate genuine exchange.

When Young gives voice to her BBC interlocutor, the speaker indulges in a monologue that forecloses the possibility of meaningful reply: a mixture of stale refrains, click-bait phrases, and irrelevant non-sequiturs: “What will *YOU* do if agency workers cross the line *MISTER Lynch?* / Isn’t your social media profile The Hood from Thunderbirds *MISTER Lynch?*” Often, Young’s interviewer is so carried away by their own rhetoric that their questions take on an absurdist stream-of-consciousness quality, delivered in one long breathless rush of words, blurring the line between private thought and public utterance: “Let me get on with my chauffeur driven car to work my holiday home my several annual holidays my kids in private school while I bandy about your 130K salary *MISTER Lynch?*”

In this way Young exposes both the ideological and self-

interested underpinnings behind the speaker's bland facade; the working-class audience of which Young is part has spotted the dodge, and more than this, they are capable of giving back as good as they get. Young's poem relishes wordplay and pun, taking pleasure in the rude and brazen buzz of language, which she uses to lampoon her targets to hilarious effect, running verbal rings around those stolid apologists for the awful status quo. There is rage in this poem, but there is also a healthy strain of ridicule, that takes on the powerful with spoof and swagger.

THE WHITE NATIONALISTS ARE STONED ON THEIR OWN BALL SWEAT AGAIN, by Paul Corman-Roberts, is a stateside burlesque on a racially polarised and increasingly totalitarian vision of Christian conservatism. It is a frightening world in a which an atavistic urge toward power and violence – “the blood of the vulnerable/ makes them hot with lust” – is cloaked in the legitimating veil of patriotism. Corman-Roberts' images are driven by a farcical and excessive juxtaposition which would be funny if we were not already living with their fatal consequences: “Teenage martyrs/ rifles strapped to their bibles”. The power of this poem, however, is not in its accretion of grotesque images of white conservative power, but in their contrast with the vulnerable dignity of America's ‘others’ – “God's beautiful queers/ black and brown families in perpetual mourning”. While the image of an historically suspect “white Jesus” rocking out to Ted Nugent is horribly comic, the poem's moral bite comes from his being set against a “dark Jesus” who is depicted as miserably enmeshed in the apparatus of immigration detention. Throughout the poem Corman-Roberts weaves the nebulous threads of conspiracy culture, so that the final lines depicting a world ruled over by the “will of invisible men/ who live in the sky” signal not only a hazy grasp of the life hereafter, but an approximate knowledge of reality itself. “Dark Jesus” is persecuted by indifferent oppressors without a will to recognise him. Yet, he is aligned in the poem with those who mourn and suffer, and in this way the poem sounds one sweet, low note of radical hope.

Post-Covid by Kevin Patrick McCann is less an expression of joy than it is an indictment of the way that joy is coerced and manipulated by politicians and by culture. From the beginning McCann implicates poetry in this exercise, introducing the “smooth poet to/ Chant an In Memoriam/ At fifty quid a line”, a public figure bought in (and bought off) to mediate and manage our collective experience of grief; to absorb it back into a politically expedient nationalistic script. The poet speaks on our behalf, over-writing the choppy textures of our difficult mourning with his own nicely modulated voice from which every ounce of anger has been purged. McCann's poem has no time for this voice. His bracketed asides puncture the fluent operation of his poem, as if providing interruptions, tears, sudden glimpses into the world as it really is. *Post-Covid* is a poem that says ‘don't take my word for it’, it is sleight of hand slowed down to half the speed to show its workings. It provides – then deconstructs – a recipe for misdirection: “Re-arrange the past”, “Invoke the Dunkirk Spirit”, “Slow-mo footage of crowds” etc. It shows us how art can be used to depoliticise tragedy; to strip it of its long biography – its precedents and legacy – by providing a neat (false) resolution “End with happy children playing”. I offer McCann's image of a sinister contentment as a counterpoint to the real joy we can access through working-class art and poetry. A joy that sees the world as it is, but finds both courage and pleasure in fighting and writing back.

I wanna live with common people like you

(after *Common People* by Pulp)

by Sab Lyall

The first is
a sneer, wiped
off on the back
of the hand.
The dreggy taste
of closing time.

The second is
yearning. our
fingers inch
toward the fire.
Our itch to
confirm a blue
flame.

The third is all-
affirming. firm.
The fist you form
around your key –
To live.
To live with you.
With all of you.
So common.
So rare.

Lumpen Broadcast Connotation – the Paxman Cometh

by Wendy Young

‘when the hurlyburl(e)y's done, when the battle's lost and won' ... (not MacBeth Rigby)

So what if Mick Lynch gets 130K a year!?! In my workplace the pay for non-medical consultants is phenomenal – and we're informed endlessly that good negotiators and brains should be paid a good remuneration ... guessing (well knowing) they get far more than Mick Lynch. Worth it just to see him make the lumpen press splutter!

Pompous lump

The spoilt lump on news channel conniving, emphasises *MISTER* Lynch emphatically

Proving their worth – repetitive banality in querulous bollox – borne of ye olde BBC

happenstance – coined by established – frankly bored – interrogator seeking a “straight” Tory answer

Why don't you just do as you're told *MISTER* Lynch?

Why don't you just stay in your place *MISTER* Lynch?

People going about their daily BIZ-ness *MISTER* Lynch?

People getting to work *MISTER* Lynch?

You can ridicule me all you want *MISTER* Lynch!

Behind this Botox facade is an older person who remembers the Miners' Strike *MISTER* Lynch?

And of course those burly beastly Miners were pure selfish and out for a fight *MISTER* Lynch!

What will *YOU* do if agency workers cross the line *MISTER* Lynch?

Isn't your social media profile The Hood from

Thunderbirds *MISTER* Lynch?

Let me get on with my chauffeur driven car to work my holiday home my several annual holidays my kids in private school while I bandy about your 130K salary *MISTER* Lynch?

MISTER Dempsey why did you walk out of talks with the shit-shoveller – worker turned management kowtow bower?

I ask as a once-council-house-dwelling done-gooder – worst of the bunch – part of the Press who pressures plebs – who now calls dinner a champagne lunch Maybe even a Mone muncher! A PPE perpetuating prick emanator! Hey, don't bring up the "scum" remember what happened to Ms Rayner?

Awh but int she gorgeous – blonde bimbo incumbent – a "laydeee doncha know" ooh an offshore public money dumper!

Let me tell you how it is and cut the crap chat pleasing Shapps chap down to spouting media dolly lumpens:

The RMT represents flexible workers who are willing – though you flex us vex us – try to shake us your nexus – slit our throats – pay us groats – in it up your necks –

It would be helpful if you stopped spewing like barrow-boy bankers – to ignoramuses – our loyal supporters – it's basically a fantasy that being said 'Hello' to by managers, our workers will restart their break – they serve the public 24/7 – stop dragging up old laws spreading them in treacle –

We have a skilled work force who deserve protection – a decent wage – it goes for every worker who ticket – collect – clean – shunt – tap – drive – operate – help – because people want humans not automated chastity – our Members don't want charity – food banks – income support – just clarity – plain and simple guaranteed futures – for their well-being and families!

ALL THAT'S FINE WHOOP-WHOOP WHISTLE
THISTLY SHIFTY BUM EAGER BADGERING
BULLSHIT SEEKER ME BEGS – please let me break you – *MISTER* Lynch and *MISTER* Dempsey!

THE WHITE NATIONALISTS ARE STONED ON THEIR OWN BALL SWEAT AGAIN

by Paul Corman-Roberts

It was neocons' eve last night
fight or flight now for God's beautiful queers
black and brown families in perpetual mourning
protection gun rackets for sale
on every corner

QAnon is the new Ministry of Information
Prince DeVos smells broken glass
smells fire
the blood of the vulnerable
makes them hot with lust.
Teenage martyrs
rifles strapped to their bibles
matching uniforms
while white Jesus
rocks out with Ted Nugent

all making sure dark Jesus
knows which side of the room
to line up on
don't get too close
to the right saviour
everything is on the table
United States of Russia
flat earth-centred cosmos
will of invisible men
who live in the sky.

Post-Covid

by Kevin Patrick McCann

And when it's all over
(By Christmas) find
Some smooth poet to
Chant an In Memoriam
At fifty quid a line,
Re-arrange the past
(Johnson moved swiftly)
Invoke Dunkirk Spirit
(Slo-mo footage of crowds
All masked) morph
Surmise into facts,
Montage rainbows
(Avoid corruption)
Doorstep clapping
(Don't mention useless PPE)
End with happy children playing:
Fade out on Our Own Dear Queen.

Sabrina Lyall divides her time between Clonmel and London. She is new to poetry, but is currently working on her first collection.

Wendy Young is a poet/performer, whose publications include *Living with Ghosts* (Natterjack Poetry, 2015), *Ooetry* (William Cornelius Harris Publishing/London Poetry, 2015) and *The Dream of Somewhere Else* (Survivors Press, 2016). Her poem *The Time is Ripe and Rotten Ripe for Change* was selected for *Handbook for 2021*, the anthology of the Bread & Roses Poetry Award 2020 (Culture Matters).

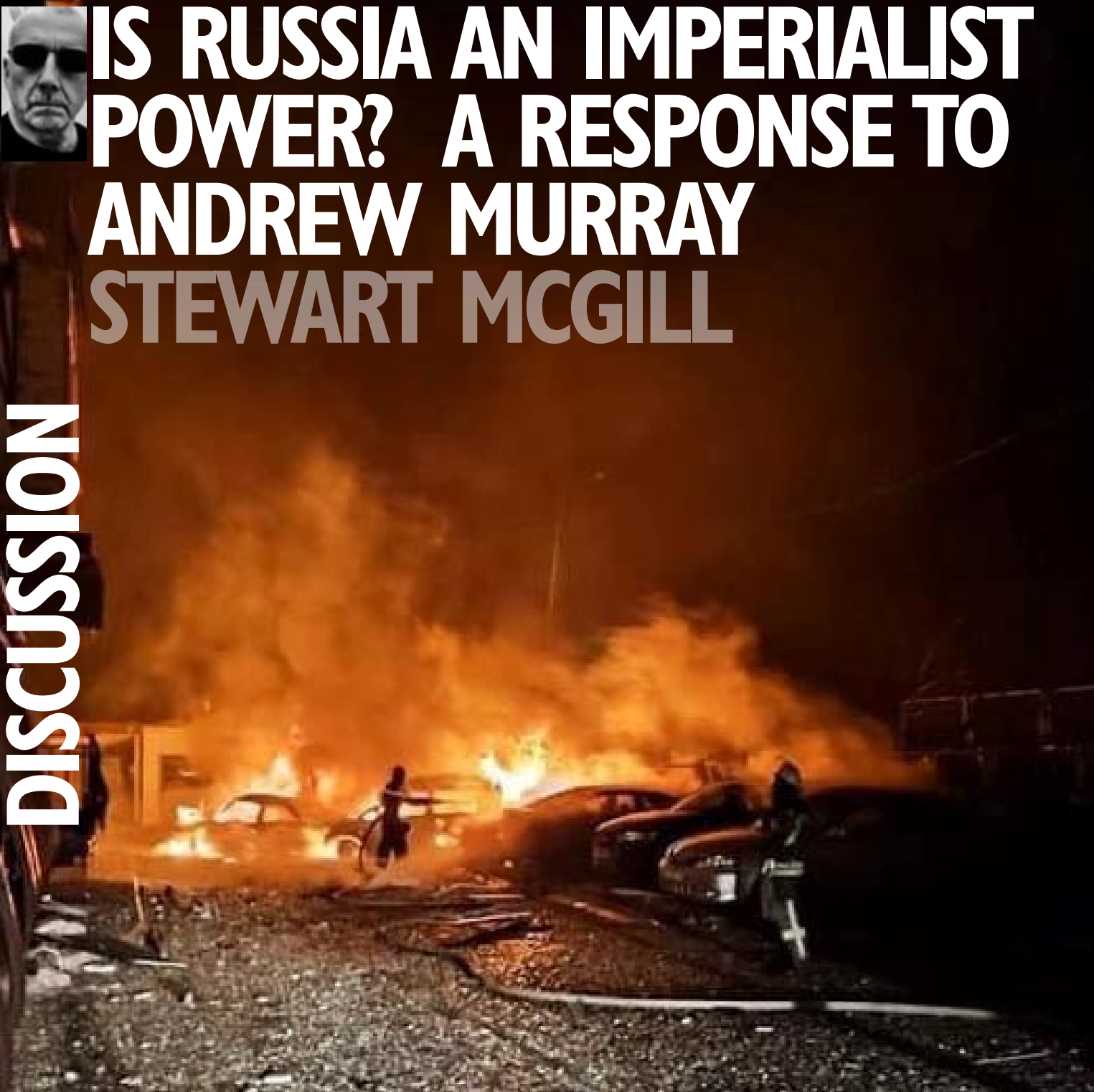
Paul Corman-Roberts is the author of the CLMP Firecracker-nominated *Bone Moon Palace* from Nomadic Press (2021). A co-founder and co-director of Oakland's Beast Crawl Literary Festival, he teaches with the Older Writer's Lab of San Francisco, the San Francisco Creative Writing Institute and with the Oakland Unified School District.

Kevin Patrick McCann has published eight collections of poetry for adults, and one for children: *Diary of a Shapeshifter* (Beul Aithris Publications). There is also a book of ghost stories: *It's Gone Dark* (The Otherside Books), and *Teach Yourself Self-Publishing* (Hodder), co-written with the playwright Tom Green. *Ov* (Beul Aithris Publications) is a fantasy novel for children. *Deleted Scenes: Poems i.m. Shirely Jackson* is a new e-pamphlet from Culture Matters.



IS RUSSIA AN IMPERIALIST POWER? A RESPONSE TO ANDREW MURRAY

STEWART MCGILL



I DIDN'T PARTICULARLY want to write this article: it's an issue that seems to provoke rancour at a time when we need to work together with undivided purpose and loyalty to the interests of the encircled working class. However, the issues are important and I have to reply to Andrew Murray's article in the Autumn 2022 edition of *Communist Review*.¹

After the war in Ukraine began, the CPB general secretary asked me to do some notes on "How imperialist is Russia?" After that I was asked to produce an article expanding on the notes, which eventually appeared in the Summer 2022 edition of *CR*.²

Note the original question, "How imperialist is Russia?" and the title of my article, "Is Russia an Imperialist Power?" These are not unimportant, regarding purpose, emphases and conclusions.

I began by saying, "The current crisis in Ukraine has been described by some as a proxy war between two imperialist

forces, and by others as a war against Russian imperialism." I looked at various definitions of imperialism and the nature of modern imperialism, including John Smith's excellent work on globalisation, and assessed how Russia matched those definitions.

It's an important question because the 'war between competing imperialisms' narrative is misleading and is used: (i) to attribute all the blame for the war onto an inherently expansionist Russia; (ii) to justify NATO's actions; and (iii) to create the impression that Russia must be stopped to prevent further invasions, as Putin has Hitlerite plans to take over large parts of Europe. I have heard variations on the latter from a wide range of people, including generally knowledgeable and intelligent people on the left.

This is not just an intellectual exercise. The 'Russia as an expansionist power' and 'Putin as a madman who wants to be Hitler and Peter the Great' stories are used to demonise Russia

and justify NATO's active role in a conflict that it knew its actions would provoke. Gorbachev warned about NATO expansion; Clinton and Yeltsin fell out over it. This is not just about Putin: let's look at the words of Biden's current CIA director, Bill Burns.

Before he took on his current job, Burns published a memoir entitled *The Back Channel*.⁴ Reviewing this book, American 'liberal' commentator Peter Beinart wrote:

"It directly contradicts the argument being proffered by the administration he now serves. In his book, Burns says over and over that Russians of all ideological stripes – not just Putin – loathed and feared NATO expansion. He quotes a memo he wrote while serving as counsellor for political affairs at the US embassy in Moscow in 1995. 'Hostility to early NATO expansion', it declares, 'is almost universally felt across the domestic political spectrum here.' On the question of extending NATO membership to Ukraine, Burns' warnings about the breadth of Russian opposition are even more emphatic. 'Ukrainian entry into NATO is the brightest of all redlines for the Russian elite (not just Putin),' he wrote in a 2008 memo to then Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. 'In more than two and a half years of conversations with key Russian players, from knuckle-draggers in the dark recesses of the Kremlin to Putin's sharpest liberal critics, I have yet to find anyone who views Ukraine in NATO as anything other than a direct challenge to Russian interests.'"⁵

They knew their actions formed a major issue for Russia; they knew they were provocative; why did they do it? Why did they direct an anti-Russian coup on Russia's border with much of the muscle being supplied by revanchist fascists? If you believe that this was all because the America regime cares about the Ukrainian people

I felt it was important to look behind the rhetoric, on both sides, and highlight that Russia as an imperial power of any heft is, at best, stretching a definition so wide it becomes meaningless. This is not like 1914-18, a conflict between competing imperialisms. This is not a war necessary to contain aggressive Russian expansionism; Russia's significant economic limitations and vulnerabilities render it unable to be any more imperialist than a local power, and it's not even very good at that limited role, see below.

Russia is in no way the equivalent of the major imperialist forces across the globe – see my original article for a further explanation. This is not just a difference of degree: when differences of degree are so great they become differences of kind. Andrew Murray used a football reference to explain something in his article, so I shall do the same. Arsenal, and one of my favourite local teams, Peckham Town FC, are both football clubs. Peckham play in the Kent County League Premier Division, Step 7 of the National League System, so very few of you will ever have heard of them. Like Arsenal, they are a football club, but these are wholly different animals and should be seen as such.

Now Putin and others in Russia may have aspirations to greater imperial clout, but given Russia's economic limitations, including an over-reliance on fossil fuel extraction, it's very unlikely that they will achieve that aim in a foreseeable future. Peckham may want to get to the same league as Arsenal; I may want to write a *Das Kapital* for the 21st century; but we face limitations on time, resources and talent. Our awareness of those limitations has an impact on our actions. Russia is in a

similar position.

Portraying Russia as some kind of significant imperial power is inaccurate and serves to substantiate Western narratives on the war. I shall now turn to some statements in Andrew Murray's article that I think require responses that, hopefully, will illuminate the issues.

1. "... if low rankings on various indices force us to conclude that Russia is not imperialist, then the same procedure forces us to conclude that China is! I doubt that is comrade McGill's intention but it is the fruit of mechanical logic."

If, for example, the export of capital is seen as being of pronounced importance as a criterion of imperialism then it is perfectly legitimate to point out that Russia is a very insignificant player in this area and many others. It does not necessarily follow that being a significant capital exporter makes you a great imperialist. It's important to look behind the data: Ireland is a major exporter of capital but this is a technicality related to corporates booking profits in the country for tax reasons then repatriating them.

This allegation is the fruit of mechanical logic more than anything in the original article. Notwithstanding, there are legitimate reasons to debate whether China's behaviour in Africa in particular is tantamount to imperialism, not a debate from which we should recoil, see the excellent book by Tom Burgiss on the looting of Africa.⁶

2. "*Lenin insists on the contingent nature of any proletarian social processes. The second [structure], more political, was that imperialism was 'in general a striving towards violence and reaction.'*"

Lenin's quote in context:

"Kautsky's definition is as follows:

"Imperialism is a product of highly developed industrial capitalism. It consists in the striving of every industrial capitalist nation to bring under its control or to annexe all large areas of *agrarian* [Kautsky's italics] territory, irrespective of what nations inhabit it."

This definition is of no use at all because it one-sidedly, *ie* arbitrarily, singles out only the national question ..., it arbitrarily and *inaccurately* connects this question only with industrial capital in the countries which annexe other nations, and in an equally arbitrary and inaccurate manner pushes into the forefront the annexation of agrarian regions.

Imperialism is a striving for annexations – this is what the political part of Kautsky's definition amounts to. It is correct, but very incomplete, for politically, imperialism is, in general, a striving towards violence and reaction."⁷

Marxist writers aren't always the best on clarity.

So imperial violence and reaction, are not all about the annexations: violence and reaction is an inherent part of the politics of imperialism. However, violence and reaction aren't necessarily imperialist. Guatemala is up there with the most reactionary and violent states that I've visited, and it's not an imperialist nation. The same applies to many African countries, and to Iran, a 'neighbourhood bully' like Russia.

China had serious border wars with India in 1962 and the Soviet Union in 1969. In 1979 it unleashed a punitive invasion against Vietnam in response to the latter ousting China's allied

Khmer Rouge regime. That's a lot of conflict, but I'm sure Andrew Murray would not suggest that the China of that era was imperialist with a tendency to violence and reaction.

Russia's such tendencies have, I feel, been exaggerated in relation to Ukraine until the recent military action. In an interview covered in the *Guardian* on 25 November 2022, the former German leader Angela Merkel insisted that her stance on the Minsk agreement – which brought a ceasefire after Russia reclaimed Crimea – had been right.

“Key points of the Minsk peace talks, including disarmament and supervision by an international body, were never followed through. But Merkel said the agreement had nevertheless helped buy Kiev time to arm itself better against the Russian military.”⁸

She has a point and I'm sure that the Russians were aware of the implications of doing no more than taking back Crimea and a section of the Donbas region. From their point of view, they should have moved much earlier into a hostile, revanchist Ukraine with Nazis in its armed forces; that they did not indicates a sense of their own weakness and an unwillingness to enter into conflict, not what you'd expect from an expansionist, imperial power bent on dominating large parts of Europe. For some perspective, imagine America allowing things to go so far if a hostile military alliance dominated by Russia initiated an anti-American coup in Mexico and began to arm Nazi militias that hated America and formed part of the Mexican armed forces; and those militias began a prolonged war of attrition along disputed parts of the USA and Mexican border.

The CSTO

After having projected a “hostile military alliance dominated by Russia” above, let's look at the sad history of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, the CSTO. In 1992, six post-Soviet states – Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan – signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST). Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Georgia signed in 1993. On 2 April 1999, six of the nine – all but Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan – agreed to renew the treaty; while Uzbekistan joined the GUAM Organisation for Democracy and Economic Development, established in 1997 by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova. In 2002, the six member states of the CST agreed to create the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), as a military alliance.

Analogous to NATO's Article 5, Article 4 of the CST provides security assurances to member states in the event of armed conflict:

“If one of the States Parties is subjected to aggression by any state or group of states, then this will be considered as aggression against all States Parties to this Treaty. In the event of an act of aggression against any of the participating States, all other participating States will provide the latter with the necessary assistance, including military”⁹

The failings of the CSTO to make any telling interventions in Armenia's conflict with Azerbaijan in 2020, or the most recent outbreak of hostilities in September 2022, prompted a public snub from Armenia's prime minister on Wednesday 23 November:

“During a ‘family’ photograph of leaders of countries in

the (CSTO) in Yerevan on Wednesday, Armenia's prime minister, Nikol Pashinyan, stepped away from Putin Pashinyan then refused to sign a summit declaration, as he railed against the recent failures of the CSTO”¹⁰

A recent article on the Estonian International Centre for Defence and Security's website trenchantly sums up the issues:

“Hardly was the CSTO managing the hotbeds of tension in Central Asia either. Among them, the simmering border dispute between two Member States – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan – deserves special attention. ...

Furthermore, the menace from Afghanistan ... has not disappeared. The Kremlin is aware that were it to abort an agreement with the Taliban, the latter could attack neighbouring Tajikistan. It would subsequently compel Moscow to fulfil its binding commitments under the Charter. Were Russia to wriggle out of its allied commitments to Tajikistan, exploiting the loophole it had already used during the Nagorno-Karabakh war in 2020, it would undermine the entire structure of the CSTO. ...

Hardly have any integration or alliance-building projects that Russia championed in the former Soviet republics ever succeeded. Furthermore, the reality on the ground shows that the Russia-led organisations have utterly failed to reverse the main underlying trend of our times – Russia's diminishing influence in the post-Soviet space.”¹¹

Not only is Russia not an imperial power of any consequence, it's an increasingly ineffectual local power, or ‘neighbourhood bully’, due to, *inter alia*, the economic and structural weaknesses adumbrated in my previous article.

Back to selected extracts from Andrew Murray's article:

3. “... can one place the same dynamic weight on the matter of the export of capital in a globalised world where such exporting is ubiquitous, and nowhere more so than China?”

Let's look at the data:

“In 2021, the United States had the largest outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) stock worldwide, amounting to approximately 9.8 trillion US dollars. China was second by a wide margin with around 2.58 trillion US dollars.”¹²

Export of capital is not that “ubiquitous”: the G20 held 62% of the total stock of outward FDI in 2021, the EU 33%. Russia had 0.9%. These figures indicate at the least that Russian capital buys little reach and/or influence.¹³

4. “... let me attempt what comrade McGill does not, and sketch a political economy of Russia today, necessarily in summary form. This is the threshold all the protagonists of a non-imperialist Russia fear to cross, lest what they find might confound their speculations. ...
... If it is acknowledged that Russian capitalism is monopoly capitalism, and we further accept that social formations are a process and not a fixed category, then the issue is to identify a dynamic. For example no Russian firm would have ranked on these lists (not specified) 30 years ago and it would only take a few mergers among Russian controlled

enterprises to transform some of comrade McGill's rankings [not specified –SM] today. To suggest that we wait until then in order to recategorise Russia in our schema substitutes the research methods of King Cnut for Marxism. A sapling may be described as a tree even well short of its full maturity."

Some Russian firms could merge and form large companies but so what? They would still be operating in an economy smaller than Italy's,¹⁴ dominated by fossil fuel industries with dubious futures given environmental imperatives, with a limited presence in global growth industries and whose only globally significant manufacturing industry is armaments. See my original article.

The Russian armaments industry is interesting, and here I must overcome my fears of talking about Russian political economy: it effectively belongs to the state, *de facto* if not *de jure*, and can't really be compared directly with the American equivalent that forms such an important, influential and blood-thirsty part of American monopoly capitalism. This is too big a subject to go into here but Pavel Luzin's¹⁵ article in *Russia Matters* is a useful starting point.

This takes us into an interesting area, it's not clear-cut but an IMF 2019 paper estimated that the state's share in Russia's economy in 2016 as around 33% in value added terms; the report also said that the state represented 40% of formal-sector activity and 50% of formal-sector employment.¹⁶ This might not be a socialist country but it has a very strong state sector and comparisons with the workings of western monopoly capitalism have to be viewed with caution. It looks more like China, in which state-owned enterprises account for about 40% of national output.¹⁷

China has been clamping down on monopolies recently so it is an area of concern,¹⁸ but its protectionist measures have allowed its firms to build up strong monopolistic, or more correctly, oligopolistic, market presences domestically that enable them to exert real competitive pressure on European markets in particular:

"China's vast yet protected home market has allowed some of its firms to acquire a scale that provides them with significant advantages when they compete in other markets."¹⁹

So Russia and China have structural similarities, and both bear a resemblance to western monopoly capitalist economies, but with significantly larger state sectors. Therefore, as Andrew Murray clearly thinks that one is an imperial power and one is not, there can be no automatic and mechanical connection between being a quasi-monopoly capital economy and imperialism. So, why the big effort to prove in his piece that Russia is monopoly capitalist and *ipso facto* imperialist? Other factors must be important, some of which we have dealt with already.

Now there may be a case for saying that any capitalism is imperialist as it's based on exploitation of the periphery. It's a fair comment, albeit tangential to the original questions I tried to answer, and on this basis Russia is less imperialist than most, as it's fundamentally an extractive economy with little involvement in Africa or Asia.

5. *"The former Soviet Republics ... were an obvious first objective in any attempt to expand Russia's sphere. The 2013 attempt to lock Ukraine into a Eurasian Economic Union dominated by Russian*

monopolies ... was an aspect of this. ...[Russia] was not acting out of philanthropy nor post-Soviet nostalgia."

Russia was pursuing the best deal with an important trade partner – it's what countries do. An absence of philanthropy or nostalgia does not indicate inherent imperialism. See the section on the CSTO above for Russia's ineffectual attempts at establishing a sphere of influence.

6. *"But the fact is that Russia has become a significant military actor, intervening beyond its borders far more than the USSR did, it should be noted."*

A summarised list of Soviet interventions:

- 1920 invasion of Poland
- 1934 invasion of Xinjiang
- 1939 invasion of Finland
- 1939 invasion of Poland
- 1945 invasion of Manchukuo
- 1956 invasion of Hungary
- 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia
- 1979 invasion of Afghanistan

Irrespective of any debate about the justness of these actions, and remembering that in boxing you score according to the impact of the blows, not just the number landed, I give this to the Soviet Union on points.

7. *"But in general, and in its interventions in Syria, Ukraine and (through the mercenary Wagner Group) in west Africa, Russia's policy is self-seeking and reactionary. It is pushing for a redivision of international influence in its favour, and to the advantage of its monopoly ruling class."*

All states are self-seeking, look to further their international influence and are run in the interests of their ruling classes. This does not necessarily make them fundamentally imperialist powers of any import. The Wagner Group is active not only in west Africa, and represents Russia cashing in on its reputation for no-questions-asked brutal violence; but selling yourself as a hired gunslinger is not exactly high-level imperialism.

A 2022 Rand Corporation report on Russia in Africa includes an assessment of the impact of the Wagner Group and states that:

"Russia's presence in Africa is very limited. ... There is little evidence that the Kremlin has a grand plan for Africa. Because the continent remains peripheral to Russian grand strategy, Moscow's approach in Africa is essentially opportunistic."²⁰

I talked about Syria in my original article. Regarding Ukraine: a hostile military alliance, whose *raison d'être* is to oppose Russia, ran an anti-Russian coup in a neighbouring country, armed and supported a military that contained Nazis, encouraged Ukraine in its desire to seize Crimea against the wishes of its people, with profound implications for Russian security, and refused to rule out Ukraine joining that hostile alliance. Reducing Russia's response to one of self-seeking reaction is a serious over-simplification, at best.

8. *"To all this can be added Putin's ideological posturing ... denying Ukrainian statehood, comparing himself to Peter the Great. At this point, one would*

have to be wilfully blind not to discern Lenin's remark on 'striving towards violence.'"

Again, we need to contrast the rhetoric with the caution displayed in 2014 and up until 2022. The rhetoric is relatively new, a function of Putin's declining relationship with the USA, and seems designed to rationalise and almost sacralise military action. In 2002 he stated that:

"Ukraine has its own relations with NATO; there is the Ukraine-NATO council. At the end of the day the decision is to be taken by NATO and Ukraine. It is a matter for these two partners."²¹

At Bucharest in 2008 Putin was warning that Ukraine was a difficult state because of the agglomeration of territories it acquired by dint of historical circumstances and chance. He suggested that adding NATO to the mix could bring it to the brink of extinction. He conceded that Russia had no right of veto but cited Russia's interest and the number of ethnic Russians in Ukraine and Crimea.

I don't think there is much doubt that Putin regards himself as the guardian of Russians everywhere, nor that his views on Ukraine's integral position inside Russia developed the more he saw it as a security threat. Do his actions and posturing betray an inherent imperialistic imperative? Or a local superpower throwing its weight around? Or a reflection of legitimate security concerns informed by a not wholly inaccurate or paranoid interpretation of history?

This is the debate and it's not clear cut. I think it's a complicated meld of these factors and others, though for me calling it 'imperialist' stretches the definition a little and focuses the conversation away from more important historical and current factors. Any conversation needs to focus on more than the rhetoric.

9. *"A final point needs addressing ... many commentators argue that Russia is not imperialist because they do not want it to be politically. A subordinate reason for this is doubtless Soviet nostalgia."*

Just "No." I dislike Putin and the Russian polity that he has created. I have always criticised his supporters on the left, and I was never an uncritical admirer of the Soviet Union either.

10. *"So Russia is at the very least a great monopoly-capitalist power throwing its weight around in an imperialist world system."*

It's a middle ranking extraction-based economy that is better, and generously, described as a failing local superpower. And one that generally doesn't compete economically with the genuine imperialist powers. Apart from the area of fuel provision maybe, but the war has endangered that business.

See this video from the *FT*: 'Exports have skyrocketed for America's LNG producers as demand soars, particularly from Europe.'²² The war, provoked by American actions, has been good for that country in many ways. This is how a real imperialist power behaves; Russia here has been another extractive-economy victim.

Methodology

I find most discussions of methodology a little sterile and recondite, but I need to quickly address this matter. This is a complicated issue with no simple binary 'yes or no' or easily

quantifiable answers, eg 'We estimate Russia as 45% imperialist.' I've basically looked at the characteristics of modern imperialism and assessed Russia's words and deeds against those characteristics. You might not agree with my views, but I think that that approach has been effective in highlighting the major issues around the debate, including the economic bases/parameters and the superstructure of motivations, nuances, actions and velleities that arise therefrom. I'm aware of the limitations of the "mechanistic rankings beloved of English empiricism" but (i) that misrepresents the original paper, and (ii) the facts matter.

Finally ...

Debate among comrades is good. It has to be characterised by mutual respect and the avoidance of tones and language that foster unnecessary rancour: you can express disagreement without being condescending to your interlocutor. Marx and Lenin lacked this skill, and their tendency to vitriol and sarcasm against those with whom they disagreed seems to have had a lasting impact on the left's debating style. Time to move on. And, like in boxing, if you're going to trash talk, you need to bring a very good game.

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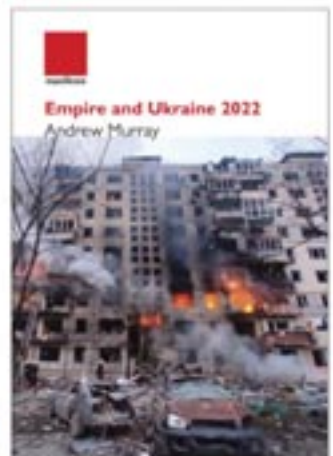
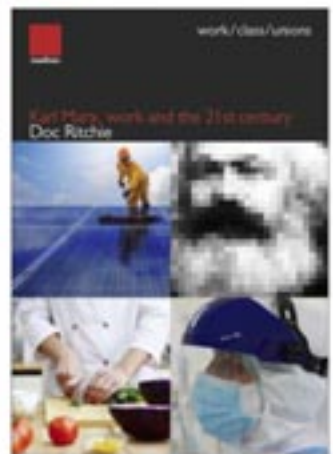
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