

COMMUNIST REVIEW 108

COMMUNIST PARTY THEORY AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL

NEW SERIES NUMBER 108 • Summer 2023 £2.50

Editorial *Martin Levy*

In defence of dialectical materialism, Part 2 *KK Thekedath*

'Let George do it?' Against Orwell *C Ritchie*

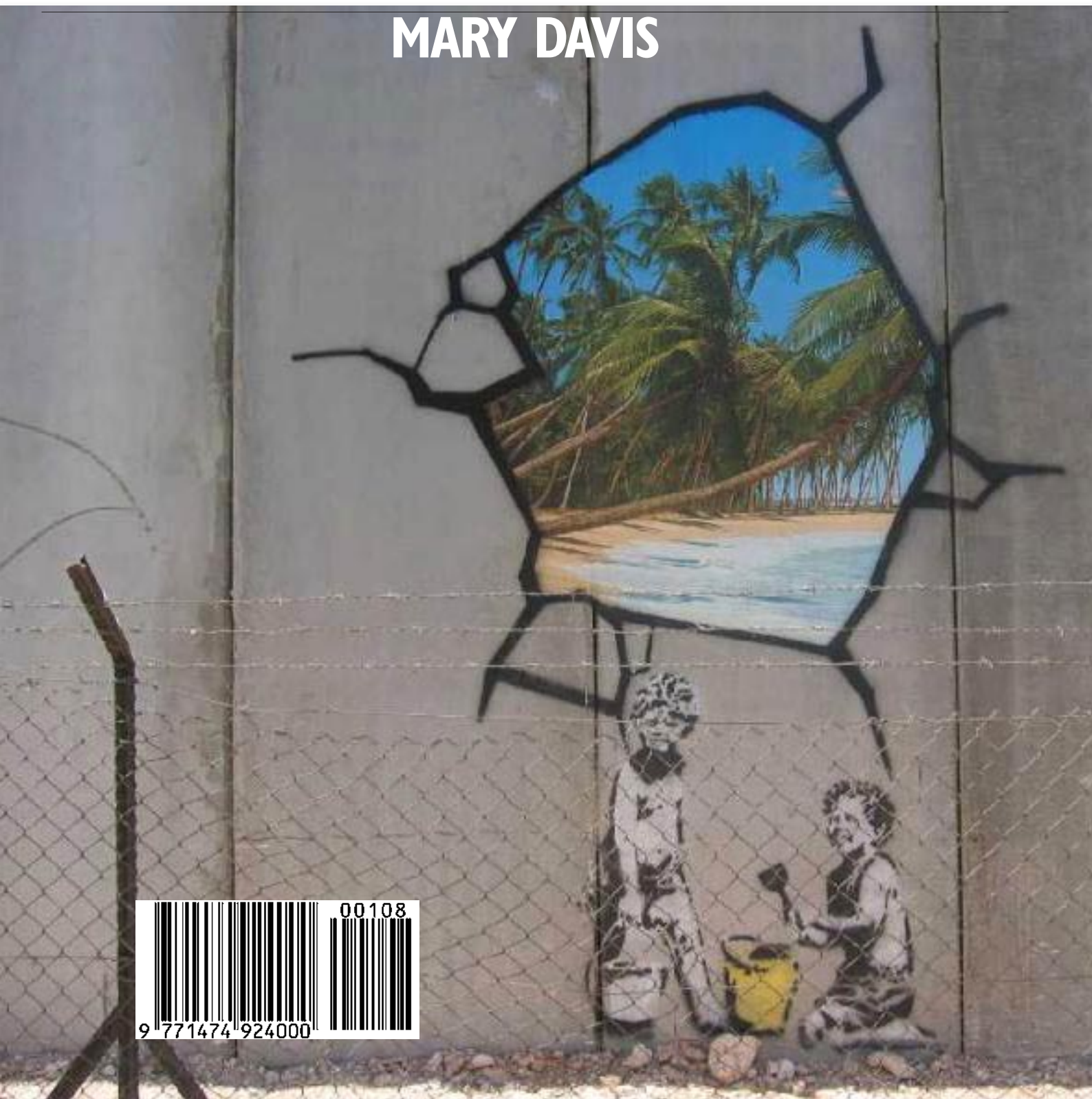
'The peace question and imperialism' A reply to Greg Godels *Arvinder Kandola*

The Kenya Resistance Archives and Library add missing links to the history of Kenya *Shiraz Durrani*

SOUL FOOD But billionaires are people too (poetry and the redress of unequal sympathy) *Fran Lock*

THE CONTESTED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

MARY DAVIS





FOUNDED 1921 NEW SERIES No. 108 • Summer 2023
COMMUNIST PARTY THEORY AND DISCUSSION JOURNAL
ISSN 1474-9246

editorial board

Martin Levy *editor* | Jonathan White *assistant editor*
| Joginder Bains | Mary Davis | John Foster | Johnnie Hunter |
Liz Payne | Mike Quille | Lars Ulrik Thomsen | Nick Wright

editorial office

Ruskin House 23 Coombe Road
London CR0 1BD 020 8686 1659 • fax: 020 7428 9114
email: editor@communistreview.org.uk

Advertising rates on request. Printed by APRINT

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

Articles will be reviewed by members of the Editorial Board, and we reserve the right not to publish.

Signed articles do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors or the Communist Party

Front Cover Image Banksy graffiti at the Israeli West Bank barrier in Bethlehem photographed by Markus Ortner 2005

Creative Commons

CONTENTS

- 1 **Editorial** *Martin Levy*
- 2 **The contested relationship between anti-Zionism and antisemitism** *Mary Davis*
- 6 **In defence of dialectical materialism, Part 2**
KK Theckedath
- 14 **'Let George do it?' Against Orwell** *C Ritchie*
- 20 **'The peace question and imperialism'**
A reply to Greg Godels *Arvinder Kandola*
- 28 **The Kenya Resistance Archives and Library add missing links to the history of Kenya**
Shiraz Durrani
- 34 **SOUL FOOD But billionaires are people too**
(poetry and the redress of unequal sympathy)
Fran Lock

CONTRIBUTORS

PROFESSOR MARY DAVIS is secretary of the Marx Memorial Library & Workers' School, and is a member of the *Communist Review* editorial board.

KISHORE KUMAR THECKEDATH is a Marxist mathematician-scientist and economist, a former president of the All India Federation of University and College Teachers, and a Maharashtra state secretariat member of the Communist Party of India (Marxist).

C RITCHIE is a Communist Party member in Teesside.

ARVINDER KANDOLA is a community pharmacist and a member of the Communist Party in Leicester.

SHIRAZ DURRANI is a Kenyan political exile living in Britain. His writings on Kenya and on politics of information draw on his experiences in Kenyan underground politics and on work in public libraries and lecturing in Britain.

FRAN LOCK is an activist, writer and illustrator. Her latest collection of poems, *Raptures and Captures*, has been published by **Culture Matters**.



EDITORIAL

MARTIN LEVY

22 July 2023

On 3-4 July, in the worst attack on the West Bank since 2005, Israeli forces committed yet another war crime against Palestinians. More than 1,000 soldiers, backed by helicopters, drones and bulldozers, invaded the city of Jenin and its neighbouring crowded refugee camp. Over 500 families were forced to flee, at least 13 Palestinians were killed and hundreds were injured. Homes, streets, civilian vehicles, water pipes and medical facilities were destroyed.

Officially, the aim of the invasion was to ‘root out militants’. And so the US White House supported “Israel’s security and right to defend its people against Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and other terrorist groups.” Britain’s prime minister Rishi Sunak, while urging all parties to avoid “further escalation”, said “We support Israel’s right to self-defence, we have condemned the recent terrorist attacks.”

Both these statements ignored the elephant in the room, Israel’s occupation of the West Bank and the accelerated construction of illegal settlements there. There was no condemnation of that, nor of the settler violence against Palestinians, let alone that of the military.

Israel’s current extreme right-wing government is seeking to intimidate Palestinians into accepting its plans to take over the whole of the West Bank. And the silence of the US, Britain and other imperialist powers means consent. They support Israel in order to block the development of progressive change in the Arab world. Yet the Palestinians, as an occupied people, have the right to resist, by whatever means are at their disposal.

This latest war crime continues a pattern for Palestinians which began even before the State of Israel was established in 1948. Such outrages can, as Mary Davis argues in our lead article, lead to a failure on the left to distinguish between the Israeli state and civil society. However, she says, Zionism is not a monolithic movement, and within Israel there are forces which oppose Israeli colonialism, racism, apartheid and fascism. Not recognising that leads not only to denying the right of Israel to exist, but also to anti-Zionism becoming blended with antisemitism: as Baroness Chakrabarti has said, “the word ‘Zionist’ has been used personally, abusively or as a euphemism for ‘Jew’” in the Labour Party.”

The theme of imperialism and colonialism/neocolonialism is picked up in a couple more contributions here. Responding to Greg Godels’ article, ‘The Peace Question and Imperialism’, in CR104, Arvinder Kandola argues that superexploitation has a ‘foundational’ role in modern imperialism, “where workers in the Third World and in the imperialist nations are oppressed and exploited in common”, albeit with differences. The global institutional architecture developed after the First World War has, he says, “been one in which self-determination has been acknowledged only to the extent that it serves the interests of imperialism.” Taking issue with Greg Godels’ statement that, while the US is declining, “it does not follow, nor is it likely,

that any new ‘distribution of wealth and power’ will be any more equitable or just”, Arvinder argues that “For poorer nations, the emergence of multipolarity may offer respite and opportunities which US domination has denied.” Any more discussion contributions on this?

Shiraz Durrani has been a frequent contributor to this journal on Kenyan history, starting with the Mau Mau rebellion against British colonialism, and continuing with the resistance, often underground, to neocolonialism and capitalism after Kenya formally became independent. In this edition of CR he introduces us to the recently-established Kenya Resistance Archives and Library, which documents the work of underground successors to the December Twelve Movement until open campaigning could resume. Because many documents had to be destroyed during the period of state repression, it is an incomplete archive but nonetheless fascinating.

Just a couple of weeks before Israel’s attack on Jenin, two boats sank, with tragic loss of life. One was the Titan submarine, seeking to view the *Titanic* shipwreck on the North Atlantic sea floor. The other was an unnamed fishing trawler carrying more than 700 ‘migrants’ off the coast of Greece. Contrasting the unbalanced media attention given to these two tragedies, Fran Lock writes in her *Soul Food* column that economic elites “desperately need the irresponsible personal choices of privileged individuals to be rebranded as in some way inherently beneficial for wider society” in order “to legitimate their daily gambles with financial markets, health and housing infrastructure, and with our very lives.” And there are some cracking poems to illustrate the class contrast.

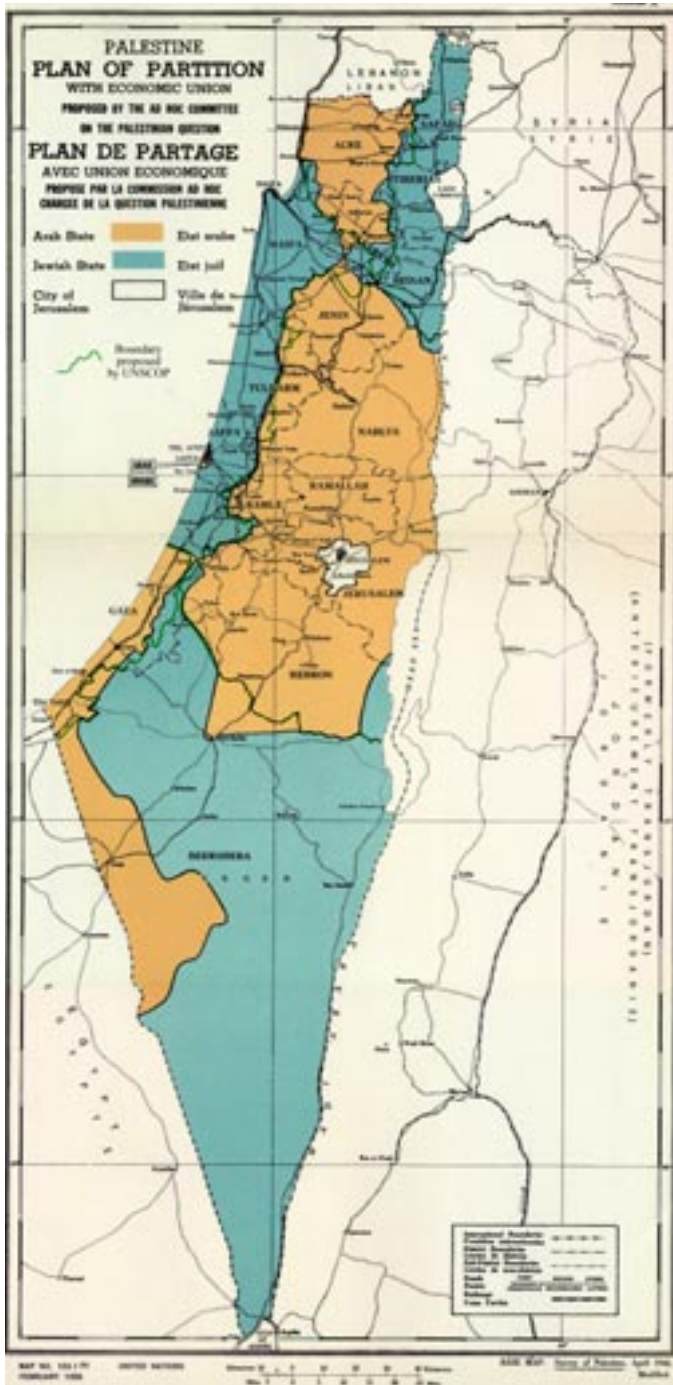
From poetry to narrative: George Orwell is best known as a writer from an allegedly left-wing non-communist perspective. In a critical examination here of the works *Homage to Catalonia*, *The Road to Wigan Pier* and *Down and Out in Paris and London*, C Ritchie explodes Orwell’s pretensions, and shows him to be an anti-communist “who is disgusted more by working-class poverty than its causes”. Orwell’s politics would, he says, fit perfectly with Starmer’s Labour Party, and ‘Orwellian’ should perhaps be redefined as “a smaller ineffectual McCarthyism”.

Finally, we include here Part 2 of KK Theckedath’s article ‘In Defence of Dialectical Materialism’, which was begun in CR107. If Part 1 was quite general, then Part 2 is scientifically particular, but it does raise important issues for Marxists, particularly that Nature behaves dialectically and its processes are inherently knowable. Dealing with Bertrand Russell’s claim that cause and effect are relative, and hence that progression of history from the past to the future has no meaning, he shows that space and time are derived from matter in motion. And on the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Theory – which leads to the denial of objectivity of the past – he champions David Bohm’s Marxist approach, in which particles and their waves exist together.



THE CONTESTED RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ANTI-ZIONISM AND ANTISEMITISM

MARY DAVIS



▲ February 1956 Map of UN Partition Plan for Palestine, adopted 29 Nov 1947, with boundary of previous UNSCOP partition plan added in green.

THE RELATIONSHIP between anti-Zionism and antisemitism is a vexed and controversial question. This is especially the case for those on the left in the UK following the persistent allegations of antisemitism in the Labour Party prompting the *Chakrabarti Inquiry* (2016)¹ and the Equality and Human Rights Commission’s investigation into antisemitism in the Labour Party (2020).² Disregarding the charge that antisemitism was ‘weaponised’ in order to discredit the former left leadership of the LP, it is an undoubted fact that the conflation of anti-Zionism and antisemitism has been, and still is, a constant theme of left discourse.

What is Zionism?

Zionism is both an idiom and a political concept which is rarely defined and frequently misunderstood. ‘Zionism/ist’ is often used by its opponents as an insult and is equated with colonialism, apartheid and, even worse, fascism. Moral judgements, however, must not be allowed to obscure an analysis of the Zionist movement and concomitant ideology in its historical, materialist and constantly evolving context.

The term Zion occurs 152 times in the Old Testament – it is a synonym for Jerusalem (the city of David), the site of the Temple. In every Jewish prayer book, and on every Jewish festival, congregants pray for a return to the Promised Land and to its holy city. Thus the religious aspect of Zion and return to the Land of Israel (*Eretz Yisroel*) predates the political Zionist movement by 2,000 years.

Zionism, as a political term and a political movement, originated very much later. Zionism is a form of nationalism which developed under two sets of linked influences in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and beyond. The first stimulus was the European nationalist movements which led to the formation of such nation states as Germany and Italy in the 1870s and the nationalist-inspired impulses in many other countries. The second spur to Zionism was the omnipresent antisemitism experienced by Jews in most of the countries in which they were domiciled.

Such antisemitism was nothing new – it had existed for centuries. However, the prevalence of state-supported nationalist ideologies, influencing indigenous populations in the direction of patriotic, jingoistic flag-waving fervour (what the late historian EJ Hobsbawm called “the invention of tradition”³), led to a renewal of the hatred of the ‘outsider’ (Jews) in a virulent form in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in eastern and western Europe.

It was in these linked contexts that a form of Jewish nationalism emerged – Zionism. Later, German Nazism expressed the ultimate form of nationalist antisemitism, culminating in the

“The failure to distinguish between the Israeli state and civil society has meant that the left barely acknowledges the existence of opposition Zionist forces within Israel. A monolithic interpretation of Zionist theory and practice clouds such understanding. Without a nuanced interpretation of Zionism, Israeli society as a whole is equated with colonialism, racism, apartheid and even fascism.”

Holocaust in which upwards of six million Jews were murdered in the most brutal and shocking circumstances. It should be noted, however, that antisemitism was not confined to Europe; it emerged later in the Middle East and resulted in the mass expulsion of Jews from such countries as Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and others in the 1950s and 1960s.

In response to European antisemitism, a secular political Zionist movement emerged, led by Theodor Herzl. He regarded Jewish assimilation as highly desirable but thought it was impossible to realise due to the pervasiveness of antisemitism. Thus, he argued, Jews were forced by external pressure to form a nation, and they could only lead a normal existence if they lived together, concentrated in one territory. In 1897 Herzl convened the first Zionist Congress at Basel, Switzerland, which drew up the Basel programme of the movement, stating that “Zionism strives to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law.”⁴

Zionist divisions

From the very beginning there were many currents within Zionism, although initially Herzl’s version was the dominant one. He was not the first to propound a form of secular, as opposed to religious, Zionism: such a form had been articulated in the 1860s by Moses Hess, Paris correspondent of the *Rheinische Zeitung*, the paper edited by Marx. Much later Ber Borochov developed a Marxist theory of Zionism as expressed in his book *The National Question and the Class Struggle* (1905). He was one of the founders of Labour Zionism – Poale Zion, an organisation which attracted many Jewish socialists, including David Ben-Gurion, the first Prime Minister of the State of Israel when it was founded in 1948.

Borochov and Poale Zion advocated a harmonious relationship between Jew and Arab in Palestine, although Borochov himself did not live to see the creation of Israel, since he died in 1917. Borochov’s vision was that Jews and Arabs would form a working class in Palestine and would be united in the struggle for a socialist state which would inevitably reflect their class interest. There was a significant current of secular socialist Jewry in the Russian Empire, notably the General Jewish Labour Bund (Yiddish title: *Algemeyner Yidisher Arbieter Bund*), formed in 1897, which resolutely opposed Zionism.

Nonetheless, many Jews, whatever their politics, emigrated to Palestine to escape pogroms and persecution in the early twentieth century, before the formation of the state of Israel. These early Jewish settlers, the *Yishuv*, sometimes, although by no means always, co-existed relatively peacefully with the indigenous Arab population. The failure of the Russian Revolu-

tion of 1905, and the wave of pogroms and repression that followed, caused growing numbers of Russian Jewish youth to emigrate to Palestine as pioneer settlers. By 1914 there were about 90,000 Jews in Palestine; 13,000 settlers lived in 43 Jewish agricultural settlements. In March 1925 the Jewish population in Palestine was officially estimated at 108,000, and it rose to about 238,000 (20% of the population) by 1933.

After the formation of the State of Israel, the first immigrants to reach the new state were survivors of the Holocaust, some from displaced persons’ camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy, and others from British detention camps in Cyprus. The remnants of certain communities were transferred almost in their entirety, for example Bulgarian and Yugoslavian Jewry. Large sections of other communities, such as those from Poland and Romania, came to Israel during these first years. After the initial influx of European Jews, the percentage of Jews from Moslem countries in Asia and Africa increased considerably in the 1950s.

The leftist secular Zionism of the early years was challenged by a right wing ultra-nationalist current. The leader of this strain was Ze’ev Jabotinsky, whose organisation, Betar, a youth movement, was formed in 1923. His ‘adult’ organisation, Hatzohar, formed in 1925, was right-wing enough to support Mussolini initially. Jabotinsky advocated ‘territorial maximalism’ in Palestine, a policy which sought Arab defeat and dispossession, rejecting any notion of peaceful co-existence. This ideology is now the dominant one in Israel today and is expressed by Likud, the political party headed by the current Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu. Likud’s predecessor, Herut, was formed in 1948 by Menachem Begin shortly after Israeli independence. Thus, the Zionist movement was fractured from its early days and remains so until the present time. The Poale Zion movement also split into left and right factions; the former represented by Mapai (and later the Israeli Labour Party) and the latter by Mapam (later Meretz). Mapai and Mapam dominated the Knesset (the Israeli parliament) in the early years of statehood.

Thus Zionism was never a monolithic movement with a settled ideology. The only constant that emerges from the foregoing is that of Zionism as a form of Jewish nationalism which, like almost every nationalist iteration that has emerged in world history, has a left, a right and a ‘moderate/diplomatic’ variant. The latter two variants always seek accommodation with the dominant capitalist status quo. This has certainly happened in Israel where the Jabotinsky ‘revisionist’ (a self-named title) version, presenting as right-wing nationalist Zionism, has been resurrected in the form of Likud, Yisroel Beitaynu and a host of newly emerging right-wing parties. It is this form of right-wing Zionist nationalism that has justly given rise to sharp criticism of Israeli government policy.

Zionist opposition in Israel: the state and civil society

The assassination of the Labour Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin by a right-wing Jewish extremist, Yigal Amir, in 1995 presented a sharp prompt of the fractured nature of Zionist politics in Israel. The assassination took place very publicly at a rally in Tel Aviv attended by some 100,000 supporters of the peace process. For the right, Rabin's 'crime' was that he dared to engage in dialogue with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO); something that Likud and other right-wing coalition governments have steadfastly refused to do, declaring that the PLO is not a 'partner for peace'. The assassin, Amir, expressed it succinctly when he said that Rabin wanted to "give our country to the Arabs" – a view shared by Likud.

Criticism of right-wing Zionism is to be found in Israel itself even among those who would call themselves Zionists. Communists understand that a distinction must be drawn between the state and civil society. Vibrant oppositional forces exist in Israel – but, as in Britain, the voices of the left are often ignored, censored or muffled. Gush Shalom (Peace Bloc) and Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) are longstanding proponents of alternative peaceful, non-expansionist policies, as are many other Israeli human rights organisations. Yesh G'vul (There is a Limit) supports 'refuseniks' (conscientious objectors) and members of the IDF who refuse to fight in the occupied territories. Peace Now was founded in 1978 during the peace talks with Egypt. At the time, when these talks broke down, a group of 384 combat soldiers and officers signed the 'Officers' Letter' – an open letter of protest to then Prime Minister Menachem Begin. Tens of thousands of Israelis supported the letter, and the movement was born.

Peace Now is leading a struggle against the government's policy of building settlements in the Occupied Territories. In its own words, "Peace Now currently works to ensure Israelis embrace the only viable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: two states, meaning the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel."⁵ In response to the Jewish Nation State Bill⁶ (now law), which breaks the balance between Israel's Jewish and democratic characters and discriminates against Israel's Arab population, Peace Now organised a demonstration in front of the Prime Minister's office. Among the speakers were two former military leaders – Peace Now's Director, General Yariv Oppenheimer, and former Shin Bet (Israel's secret service) chief Carmi Gilon.

B'Tselem – the Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories – "strives for a future in which human rights, liberty and equality are guaranteed to all people, Palestinian and Jewish alike, living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea."⁷ Apart from B'Tselem, all of the above organisations and actions are either led or supported by Israelis who would identify themselves as Zionists.

The election of Israel's most far-right, religiously conservative government in December 2022 has prompted an unprecedented level of mass protest. The Israeli Communist Party (MAKI) reported that in March 2023 alone, "Hundreds of thousands of Israelis participated in nationwide demonstrations held for the 11th straight Saturday evening against the far-right government. Protest organisers vowed to escalate demonstrations if the fascist-clerical coalition doesn't halt its legislative proposals."⁸ Over 260,000 people demonstrated across the country, including 175,000 in Tel Aviv, 20,000 in Haifa, 4,000 in Netanya, 11,500 in Herzliya, 18,000 in Kfar Saba, and 6,000 in Beersheba. Undoubtedly many of the demonstrators who wave the Israeli flag at these continuing demonstrations would consider themselves as Zionists. In addition, more and more

Israelis are seeing a connection with protests against the judicial coup and the occupation. An Anti-Occupation Bloc is present in all the rallies, among them Hadash and Communist Party of Israel members.

In the Jewish diaspora the policies of the Israeli government have also generated major criticism from some of its previous stalwart allies. In the USA this has included the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the Jewish Leadership Organisation. In the UK, it included the Union of Jewish Students and the Jewish Board of Deputies. This is hugely significant: it has not happened in Jewish community in either the UK or the USA since the 1950s.

The new anti-Zionism and left antisemitism

The failure to distinguish between the Israeli state and civil society has meant that the left barely acknowledges the existence of opposition Zionist forces within Israel. A monolithic interpretation of Zionist theory and practice clouds such understanding. Without a nuanced interpretation of Zionism, Israeli society as a whole is equated with colonialism, racism, apartheid and even fascism. Whilst the policies of Likud, the New Right and subsequent (and previous) coalition governments fit some of these descriptions, current leftist anti-Zionist discourse has taken legitimate criticism of Israel much further by questioning the very existence of the State of Israel itself. Their argument is that Israel is a Zionist colonialist settler state occupied by Jewish immigrants who have forcibly displaced the indigenous Arab population. As such, the legitimacy of its foundation, as a 'settler colonialist state', is challenged.

This is similar to the Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) revised charter of 2017, *General Principles and Objectives*, which states "Palestine is a land that was seized by a racist, anti-human and colonial Zionist project that was founded on a false promise (the Balfour Declaration), on recognition of a usurping entity and on imposing a fait accompli by force".⁹ Although the revised charter recognises the 1967 borders as a basis for the establishment of a fully sovereign and independent Palestinian state, and thus is a tacit recognition of Israel's existence, this stops well short of recognising Israel. In addition, the 2017 Charter reasserts the call for armed resistance toward a "complete liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea".

Anti-Zionism 'per se' is not antisemitic. Many Jews are not Zionists or are anti-Zionist, including some sects within the *Charedim* (ultra-orthodox Jews) and some socialist Jews – inheritors of the Bundist tradition. But there is currently a strain of anti-Zionism which has moved into mainstream discourse and which has normalised hostility to Israel as a Zionist entity founded by Jews. It is this strain of leftist anti-Zionism which, whilst not necessarily motivated by antisemitism (although it sometimes is), can and often does lead to antisemitism. Challenging the existence of Israel and maintaining an undifferentiated view of Zionism which identifies it solely with the policies of the Israeli government can and often does mutate into antisemitism for the following reasons.

Firstly, because it singles out Israel for special treatment. It is true that Zionism, like all forms of nationalism, bears responsibility for the oppressive and chauvinistic treatment meted out to the indigenous peoples whom it excludes from its national/ethnic definition. However, the white settlement of what is now the US was accomplished by the displacement of Native Americans and the enslavement of Black Americans, followed by the subsequent racist atrocities committed against them. A similar pattern can be discerned in the settlement of the white Common-

wealth, where Maoris and Aborigines, the indigenous populations of New Zealand and Australia, were displaced by force. But no-one today argues that, despite the crimes committed against their native populations, the countries now called the US, Australia and New Zealand should cease to exist – the argument is only applied to Israel.

Secondly, questioning the existence of the State of Israel ignores the motivation for its foundation as a refuge for Jews fleeing pogroms, antisemitism and attempted extermination by the Nazis. Fidel Castro understood this when he asserted Israel's unequivocal right to exist due to the "unique history of anti-semitism ... the consequences of 2,000 years of theological antisemitism", which has resulted in the obvious fact that Jews "had ample reason to fear for their existence".¹⁰ Castro added: "Jews were expelled from their land, persecuted and mistreated all over the world as the ones who killed God ... I don't think anyone has been slandered more than the Jews."

Inevitably, denying the right of the State of Israel to exist must mean that the objective of two-state solution is deemed redundant since only one state remains and that is not the Jewish state. The preamble of the 1988 *Covenant* of Hamas calls for the destruction of Israel, replacing it with the creation of a Muslim state "over every inch of Palestine" (article 6). Article 13 rejects outright any possibility of a negotiated peace, asserting that no solution to the Zionist problem is possible except by Jihad.¹¹

Thirdly, the failure to distinguish the historical evolution of Zionist ideology from the unacceptable aspects of its lived form has resulted in the blanket identification of Zionism with racism, apartheid, colonialism and worse. Thus, Jews are clearly associated with rapacious capitalism and its attendant evils. Israel is a Jewish state, so unless Jews renounce any allegiance to it they are guilty by association. This has become the predominant discourse of left anti-Zionism. It is predicated on a non-Marxist analysis of capitalism which associates its crimes with individual perpetrators, many of whom are named Jews. These 'rich Jews' together with American and British imperialism support and bankroll the Zionist settler colonialist state of Israel. The mechanism for this is the 'Jewish/Zionist lobby' – a shadowy frequently invoked antisemitic trope. Thus, for some on the left, the term Zionist is a term of abuse. Chakrabarti in her section on 'Zionism and Zionists' makes the following observation:

"Crucially, I have heard testimony and heard for myself first-hand, the way in which the word 'Zionist' has been used personally, abusively or as a euphemism for 'Jew', even in relation to some people with no stated position or even a critical position on the historic formation or development of modern Israel My advice to critics of the Israeli State and/or Government is to use the term 'Zionist' advisedly, carefully and never euphemistically or as part of personal abuse."¹²

Communist policy

The Communist Party of Britain, by avoiding the errors above, maintains its implacable opposition to antisemitism whilst also supporting the rights of the Palestinian people.

Our Party, in the aftermath of the Nazi genocide, supported the formation of a State of Israel in 1948 on the terms set by the UN resolution 187 of May 1947 – whereby it should exist on a defined territory alongside an Arab State within Palestine and "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of the existing non-Jewish communities". The editorial of the *Daily Worker* of 15 May 1948, in welcoming the

new state, additionally urged the new State "to take all possible measures to live in peace with its Arab neighbours ..."

Following the 1967 war and Israel's annexation of Palestinian territories, our Party supported UN resolution 242 (1967), which required Israel to withdraw to its pre-war boundaries and upheld the right of the people of Palestine to their own state beside the state of Israel with its capital in Jerusalem and the right of return of all refugees. This continues to be the position of our Party. It condemns the subsequent actions by the Government of Israel to defy both this and subsequent UN resolutions and to fail to honour the Oslo Accords negotiated between Israel's prime minister Yitzhak Rabin and the PLO in 1993. Our Party is a member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and supports the 'two-state' UN-mandated position.

The Communist Party of Britain therefore reiterates its opposition to all forms of antisemitism. It confirms its support for a State of Israel living in peace beside a State of Palestine within pre-1967 boundaries. This commitment includes its backing for the full implementation of UN resolutions and for the use of economic sanctions to achieve these objectives. Communists in Britain pledge their solidarity with all those campaigning on this basis, against antisemitism and, along with this, for the rights of the Palestinian people. This includes full support for, and solidarity with, our sister parties, the Palestinian People's Party and the Communist Party of Israel.

Policy of the Communist Party of Israel (MAKI): 2021 Congress:

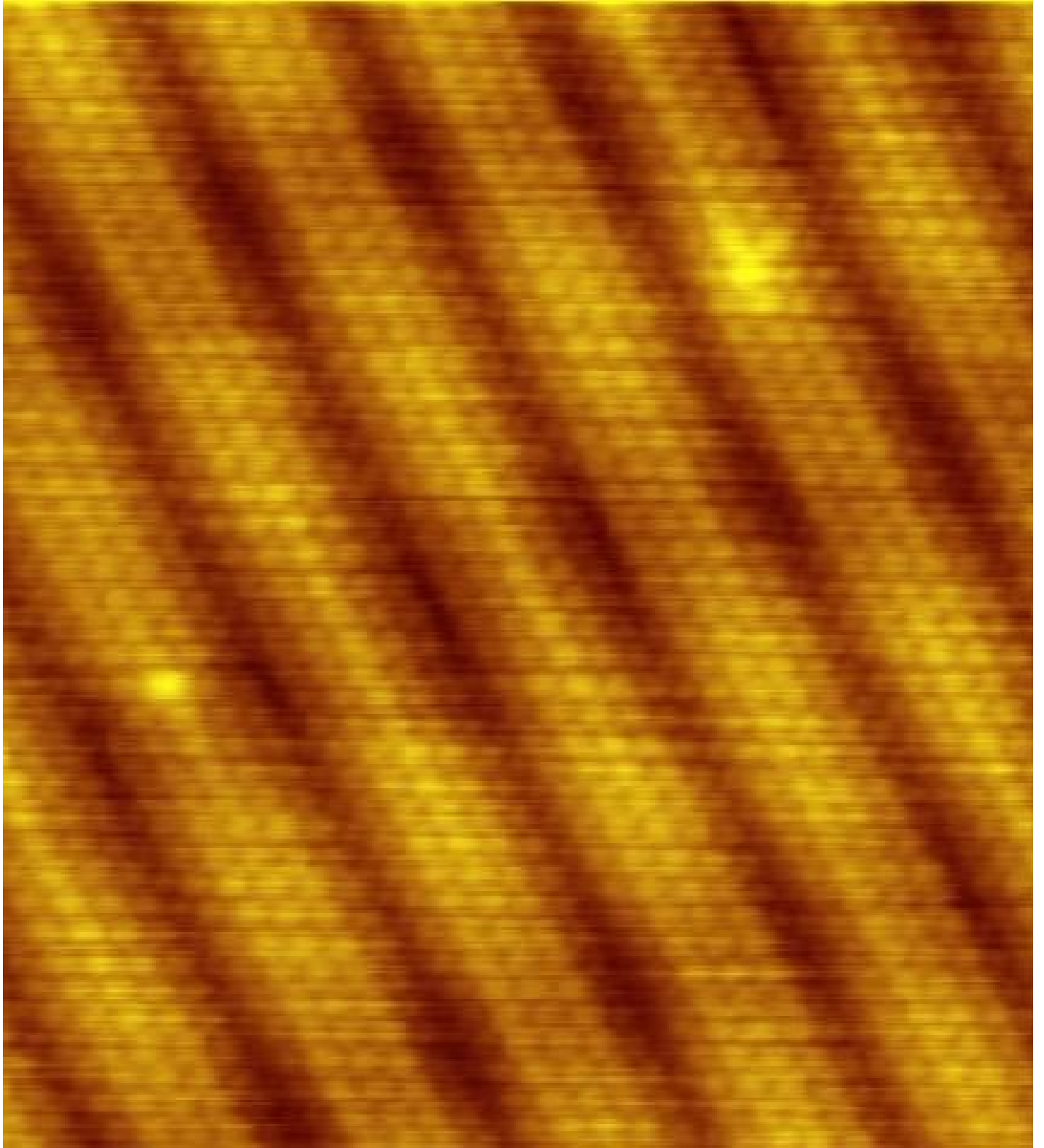
"The sole path to liberate the Israeli society from this crisis is by creating a deep and fundamental democratic change in the conceptions dominating Israeli politics. This change necessitates the end of the occupation and the acknowledging of the national rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to establish an independent state next to the state of Israel, as a basis for peace. Ending the occupation, establishing the independent Palestinian State within the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the refugees according to the international resolutions – are the keys to begin dealing with the structural political crisis in Israel."

Notes and References

- 1 The *Chakrabarti Inquiry* was a 2016 investigation into allegations of antisemitism and other forms of racism in the Labour Party, <https://labour.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Chakrabarti-Inquiry-Report-30June16.pdf>.
- 2 <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publication-download/investigation-antisemitism-labour-party>.
- 3 Hobsbawm, Introduction to *The Invention of Tradition*, T Ranger and EJ Hobsbawm, eds, Cambridge University Press, reissue, 2012.
- 4 SE Weltmann, 'Germany, Turkey, and the Zionist Movement, 1914-1918', in *The Review of Politics*, Vol 23, No 2 (Apr 1961), p 246, online at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1405778>.
- 5 <https://peacenow.org.il/en/about-us/who-are-we>.
- 6 The Nation State Law (ratified in 2021) makes the right to "national self-determination" in Israel "unique to the Jewish people", establishes Hebrew as the official language, and in terms of all official documentation downgrades the status of Arabic, and makes "Jewish settlement" a "national value".
- 7 https://www.btselem.org/about_btselem.
- 8 <https://maki.org.il/en/?m=20230320>.
- 9 <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/hamas-2017-document-full>.
- 10 www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2010/09/castro-no-one-has-been-slandered-more-than-the-jews/62566.
- 11 https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.
- 12 Chakrabarti, *op cit*, p 12.

PART 2 IN DEFENCE OF DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM

KK THECKEDATH



In Part I (Sections I and II) of this article, published in *CR107*, some of the basic ideas of dialectical materialism were developed, including: consciousness as a reflection of the material world; how such consciousness develops from labour, language and thought; matter as a philosophical category denoting objective reality given to people by their sensations; the world as cognisable through practice; and dialectics as the science of universal interconnection, with the law of unity and conflict of opposites as its defining law. We now go on to look at the impression given by T Jayaraman that Marxist philosophy needs friendly help from scientific realism to tackle certain problems in modern science.

III

Philosophy of Scientific Realism and Quantum Theory

In both his articles, 'Scientific Realism for the Contemporary Materialist',¹ and 'Dialectics and Materialism',² T Jayaraman refers to the Quantum Theory apparently as one of the reasons for his ventures into (a) the philosophy of scientific realism and (b) the attempt to understand materialism from the perspective of dialectics. I propose in this article to deal with the question of quantum mechanics in some detail. But first let us see how scientific realism is to be seen.

Scientific realism is presented as a philosophy which would assist dialectical materialism in "elaborating a Marxist view of science". The growth of realist trends in academic philosophy, it is said, could make a positive contribution to advance the insight available in Marxist classics such as Lenin's *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*. It is claimed that the realist philosophy of science has been in vigorous health and has provided a consistent, sophisticated and sound response to the new challenges posed by idealism and positivism:

"These advances constitute a valuable resource for the further evolution of a Marxist perspective on science. ...

Scientific realism, broadly speaking, accepts the existence of objective reality as a fundamental premise. This objective reality exists independent of our theories and descriptions, and beliefs and thoughts concerning the same. These theories and descriptions acquire the status of truths or falsehoods depending on how they stand with respect to that objective reality Among this limitless set of truths, there are some that we know now, some that we don't know now and will find out later, and some *that may lie beyond the furthest reach of our knowledge-seeking powers.*"¹ [emphasis added -KKT]

This is similar to Karl Popper's definition:

"The central issue here is realism. That is to say, reality of the physical world we live in: the fact that this world exists independently of ourselves; that it existed before life existed, according to our best hypothesis and will continue to exist, for all we know, long after we have all been swept away."³

How does scientific realism differ from dialectical materialism? T Jayaraman explains:

"Avoiding technical definitions, we shall take the philosophical position of materialism to imply, among other things, primacy of matter over mind, with the mind possibly being regarded as an emergent phenomenon. Thus, materialism implies a definite position that eschews a dualism of mind and matter. It also more particularly, especially for Marxists, implies that the social superstructure, depends 'in the last analysis' on a material base. *Scientific realists need not be committed to these positions.*"¹ [emphasis added -KKT]

"One of the major features of many forms of contemporary scientific realism is the realisation that a consistently realist view requires also a realist view of causation and explanation. The realist answer to the basic question of what is the meaning of cause and effect denies that causation is to be viewed (in the fashion attributed to Hume) as regularities that are perceived in Nature. In this view, cause and effect are simply the ordering of events in time, the constant conjunction of events, and there is nothing more to causation than this ordering. However, in the realist view, cause and effect are processes that are caused by some mechanisms or properties that are inherent in the particular nature of things. This view, referred to as the idea of causal powers, or causal dispositions, provides the basis for a realist appreciation of the role of laws in nature. Such laws, in the realist view, are just the inherent 'generative mechanisms' or 'causal powers' that are characteristic of matter in various forms."¹

It may be pointed out here that scientific realism eschews any attempt to search for inner contradictory tendencies while trying to understand movement and development. The central law and category of dialectics, namely, the category of contradiction, is given a go-by in scientific realism, while trying to use the "causal powers". Lenin had pointed out:

"The splitting of a single whole and the cognition of its contradictory parts ... is the essence (one of the essentials, one of the principal, if not the principal characteristics or features) of dialectics"⁴

This rejection of the essence of dialectics is the basic weakness of scientific realism, which is manifested in its inability to deal objectively with quantum phenomena or distinguish between alternative theories of the quantum.

Jayaraman admits that earlier forms of realism had implicitly allowed key aspects of their philosophical positions to be

founded on positivist or Humean views, on issues such as causation, explanation, the nature of scientific laws and the semantic structure of scientific theories. He also admits that there are several directions from which attacks have come on this philosophy. It is well known that these challenges include the empiricist challenge, the neo-Kantian challenge and the postmodern challenge. Jayaraman¹ makes a study of the various attacks and presents arguments in support of the philosophy of scientific realism.

It is not the attempt of this paper to enter into this field. What we wish to point out is that, in spite of this courageous defence, the philosophy of scientific realism is not able to tackle the very problems of science, namely in the field of quantum theory, for which dialectical materialism was supposed to take its help. He openly admits of the “problems of arriving at a satisfactorily realist understanding of quantum mechanics”, which are “cited in defence of anti-realist attitudes”. He ends the section on quantum mechanics with the following statement:

“It would certainly benefit the scientific realist view when the outstanding problems with the interpretation of quantum mechanics are resolved and our understanding attains a far more definitive state than the one which obtains today”.¹

IV

Dialectics, Relativity and Quantum

I wish to humbly submit that for the past 40 years, ever since 1972, I have been working on these problems of dialectical materialism and the sciences. My doctoral thesis was on dialectics and modern science with special reference to the theories of relativity and quantum mechanics. The main findings have been published in the book *Dialectics, Relativity and Quantum (DRQ)*⁵. I shall draw from these to answer the questions of the relevance of dialectical materialism, and its sufficiency in dealing with the problems of science.

As Engels said, “Nature is the proof of dialectics”,⁶ and it must be said for modern science that it has furnished this proof with very rich materials increasing daily. This is precisely what my thesis shows after examining the following five theories of modern science: the special theory of relativity, the general theory of relativity (Einstein’s gravitational theory), the relativistic theory of gravitation, the so-called standard quantum theory with its Copenhagen interpretation (CIQM), and the stochastic interpretation of quantum mechanics (SIQM, developed by Bohm, Vigier *et al*).

The conclusion of my thesis is that three of the above mentioned scientific theories, namely, the special theory of relativity, the relativistic theory of gravitation and the stochastic interpretation of quantum theory, after detailed analysis, are found to support the various propositions of dialectical materialism, the most important being those regarding matter and motion, space, time, transformation of quantity and quality, and the law of unity and conflict (struggle) of opposites in all processes of nature. In the sequel we examine some of these issues.

The remaining two theories, general relativity and the CIQM, suffer from some very serious problems of a technical as well as philosophical nature. Yet in the areas where these two theories have been tested and confirmed, they also fully confirm the propositions of dialectical materialism.

Relativity throws light on Hume’s definition of causation

One of the severest blows suffered by the reduction of causation to uniform succession came from relativity physics. Relativity showed that if two events A and B are viewed as simultaneous by one set of observers, then for another set of observers, it may appear that A occurred before B, and for yet another set of observers it may appear that B occurred before A. Thus, temporal order is not an absolute. This situation was misused by some writers like Bertrand Russell to say that all relations of cause and effect are relative.⁷ Further, the progress of history from the past to the future has no meaning!

In fact, what relativity showed was that for those events A and B, where one is causally related to the other, these two events do not alter their temporal order. The temporal order of causally connected events is absolute for all observers. It is precisely those pairs of events, which are not so connected, where time-reversal is possible. Thus, relativity gives a material definition of temporal priority. Priority in time is defined on the basis of causal chains, and it is not temporal priority that is the basis for defining causality. A time theory of causation is thereby reversed, and a causal theory of time is established. This is the end of Hume’s definition of causation.

Every event in some manner or other affects other events. In general, effect is motion of matter connecting one event with others through a series of intermediate events. Using this relation as the foundation, Soviet mathematician and philosopher AD Alexandrov defined space and time.⁸ This is a confirmation of the dialectical materialist position on space and time. The category of cause-effect thus gets a foundation through science. It may also be stated here that Alexandrov’s definition furthers the investigation of problems of science, and that such conceptions as ‘causal pathologies’⁹ posed by some relativity theorists are shown to be without basis (see *DRQ*, pp 114-129).

Relativity theory confirms the position of dialectical materialism regarding the relation between space and time on the one hand and matter in motion on the other. It confirms that space and time depend on matter in motion. While Einstein’s special theory of relativity confirms that space and time are derived from the causal relationships between events, the general theory of relativity goes further and shows that these relationships themselves are dependent on the motion of matter. Thus, space and time are not given *a priori*, as Kant assumed, but are derived from matter in motion (please see *DRQ*, pp 151-2).

Quantum Mechanics and Dialectics

Jayaraman devotes an entire section in his first essay to quantum mechanics, and in his second essay he has a section which states ‘Why the categories of science alone will not do’. He says:

“Especially in the era of quantum physics, there is ever-present confusion over the relation between essence and appearance in the realm of quantum phenomena. Is the probabilistic nature of phenomena such as radioactivity, which is a consequence of the probabilistic nature of quantum phenomena, merely the appearance of a determinist essence?”²

He points out in his first essay:

“Quantum mechanics posed a number of problems to the existing views of physicists One of the key issues was to

understand the ontological meaning of statements such as wave-particle duality. Another was whether the inability to determine the exact trajectory of quantum particles, while at the same time keeping exact account of their momentum, constituted a mere surrender of determinism or was a failure of realism, whatever that meant While acceptable solutions to these issues have been found, they have left behind a fundamental residue of contradictions, primarily in the failure of the local nature of causality. To put it differently, there exists a contradiction between quantum mechanics and the notion of locality following from the special theory of relativity, while maintaining the probabilistic aspect of the quantum theory.”¹

As stated earlier, Jayaraman is not able to deal with these questions with the help of scientific realism, but says that “*It would certainly benefit the scientific realist view when the outstanding problems with the interpretation of quantum mechanics are resolved and our understanding attains a far more definite state than the one which obtains today.*”¹ [emphasis added –KKT] Unfortunately, Jayaraman does not do justice to the state of quantum mechanics which obtains today. This is what I have tried to explain in two of my books: *DRQ*, and *Frederick Engels and Modern Science (FEMS)*¹⁰.

Necessity and Chance

In the above quotations Jayaraman refers to the “probabilistic aspect of quantum theory” and the “probabilistic nature of quantum phenomena”. This appears to be a long held and firm view of the author, for we find in an article written by him in 1975¹¹ the following statement:

“The probability interpretation of Ψ [psi] marks a sharp break with the mechanistic determinism of classical physics and is a concrete expression of the statistical nature of quantum phenomena This must also be considered a part of the rational core of quantum theory”.

This is very similar to the view of Hans Reichenbach:¹²

“The issue is whether causality is an ultimate principle or merely a substitute for statistical regularity, applicable to the macroscopic domain but inadmissible for the realms of atoms From the investigations of modern quantum mechanics we know that the individual atomic occurrences do not lend themselves to causal interpretation and are merely controlled by probability laws the idea of a strict causality is to be abandoned, and the laws of probability take over the place once occupied by the law of causality”.

We shall not go into the technicalities of quantum mechanics, but shall merely state that in the twenties of the last century, under the heavy influence of positivism, quantum theory was presented with an idealist interpretation, known as the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics (CIQM). Reichenbach is referring to this version of quantum mechanics. During the same famous Solvay Congress of physicists held in 1927, where the CIQM was accepted, there was another version of quantum mechanics presented by de Broglie. But under the strong positivist current of that time, his version was laughed out of court. The CIQM became the standard quantum theory.

There is a long history of debates on the fundamental assumptions. There were several attempts to come out of the

Copenhagen approach by finding a causal quantum theory. But all these were discouraged. The attempts to obtain a more complete quantum theory, with the help of variables which were hidden at the moment, received a severe set-back with the announcement in 1932 of a theorem by von Neumann. He argued:¹³

“It should be noted that we need not go any further into the mechanism of the ‘hidden parameters’ since we now know that the established results of quantum mechanics can never be re-derived with their help.”

The net result was that until 1950s the CIQM was the only quantum theory in physics.

Then a Marxist physicist David Bohm came up with a rebuttal to the above theorem of von Neumann. He argued on the basis of the dialectical principle that nature is infinite in depth: below every level of causal law are contingency fluctuations (given by probability), and below every level of statistical (stochastic-probability) law there are deeper causal laws operating. In 1952 Bohm published two important papers in the prestigious *Physics Review* presenting a consistent quantum theory of ‘hidden variables’.¹⁴ It was a version similar to the original de Broglie theory. This development of a theory, in which behind probability laws there are deeper laws at a sub-quantum level, has gone through a long and tortuous history, and now this theory, which is a causal stochastic quantum theory, has found a very strong confirmation in terms of experimental results. This is termed as the Stochastic Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics (SIQM). As the name indicates, in this theory causal processes are intimately linked up with stochastic processes (probability laws).

Here we shall give brief accounts of the topics raised by Jayaraman, namely, radioactivity, the wave particle duality, and the ‘many worlds’ approach which, according to Jayaraman, is the “counterview that has gained the most adherents”.¹

We shall also mention the so-called delayed choice experiment of Wheeler which leads to the conclusion in the CIQM that the past does not exist independently of what we do in the present, the “past has no existence except as recorded in the present.”¹⁵ This surely makes way for the postmodernists like Lyotard, about whom Jayaraman speaks, to argue that history is a matter of language, discourse, or ‘narrative’. It has therefore become the job of Marxists, exclusively, to fight in defence of history.

V

CIQM and SIQM

Quantum theory as it evolved at the beginning of the twentieth century consisted of three revolutionary steps. The first was taken by Planck and Einstein, who postulated that energy is transmitted in a discontinuous fashion. This was a sharp break from the established ideas of continuity in classical physics, and was brilliantly confirmed in the study of the photoelectric effect. The second revolutionary step was taken by de Broglie with the hypothesis of the wave nature of particles, namely, the assumption that with every moving particle is associated a wave motion. The wave-particle duality which he introduced was a great step forward. The third revolutionary step is the probability interpretation of some of the laws of quantum theory, and the recognition that along with necessary laws, there are in physics, statistical regularities governed by probability laws. At the level of quantum processes the operation of *prob-*

ability laws reveals a new form of law which goes beyond the usually recognised *causal laws*.

Under the influence of positivist philosophy, it was suggested that materialist philosophy was undermined, since quantum theory denied the operation of causal laws at the level of atoms etc. The motion of an elementary particle was described in terms of the wave equation called the Schrödinger equation, which described how a certain variable Ψ behaved with respect to space and time. The relation of Ψ to the particle in question was that the square of the modulus gave the probability of finding the particle in a given region. We have used the mathematical term ‘modulus’ because the variable is a complex variable. The Schrödinger equation is an equation in which both sides are in complex numbers¹⁶.

In this scheme we cannot speak of the motion of a single particle or of its trajectory. What we can do is to find out the probabilities in which a swarm of particles would be distributed.

We have explained in *DRQ* and *FEMS* the problems related to this approach of describing the motion of particles, including what is called the sudden collapse of the wave function when we actually observe a particle. It is enough to state that a whole lot of subjective formulations accompany the Copenhagen Interpretation of Quantum Mechanics. The question of the ‘splitting universes’, referred to by Jayaraman, is a supposed objective solution to this drama of the wave function subjectively collapsing when an observer makes an observation. In order to avoid the subjectivist conclusions of a wave collapsing whenever there is an observation, Hugh Everett and others proposed that there were many worlds, and the universe was constantly splitting into a stupendous number of branches, each branch with its own observers.

Suppose in a laboratory a physicist P performs a quantum mechanical experiment in which there are two possible outcomes, A and B. On performing the observation, it is noted that the outcome is A and not B. The original interpretation of the CIQM is that the probability function (wave) collapses to give the outcome A.

Instead of the wave collapse, the model used by Everett is of multiple universes. The explanation given is that both outcomes A and B, being possible, actually do take place, but in two different universes, say U and U'. “This universe is constantly splitting into a stupendous number of branches, all resulting from measurement-like interactions between its myriads of components.”¹⁷ Such is the fantastic conclusion to which the CIQM leads us.

It is to be noted that Jayaraman only states that this is the view that has gained the most number of adherents, and he is not able to reject this outright on the basis of scientific realism.

SIQM

The alternative theory to the CIQM is the stochastic interpretation of quantum mechanics. The SIQM starts from the Schrödinger equation itself and, noting that it is an equation in the field of complex numbers, works out the real and imaginary parts separately. It is shown that the two real equations resulting from the complex equation are both equations from classical physics, namely, (i) an equation of continuity and (ii) the so called Hamilton-Jacobi equation with a new interpretation – namely that, in the addition to the usual dynamical potentials there is an extra potential, called the quantum potential, Q.

This new quantum potential Q is closely connected with

the modulus of the complex variable Ψ of Schrödinger. It may therefore be stated here that this quantum potential is as material as the variable Ψ , from which it is obtained. So, it is not a ‘hidden variable’, and any attempt to describe the SIQM as a theory of hidden variables will be misleading.

In the SIQM, which is a causal stochastic quantum theory, every particle has associated with it an objectively real field given by the quantity Ψ . Ψ is itself a real field and not just a mathematical symbol. The particle itself has a well-defined position as well as a trajectory. It is acted not only by the classical potential but by the additional quantum potential, which is in a state of rapid random and chaotic fluctuation, arising from levels that are deeper than the quantum level. The mean field Ψ obeys the Schrödinger equation.

It should be emphatically stated that the SIQM avoids all the subjective conclusions of the CIQM, such as the subjective collapse of the wave function, or the splitting up of the universe whenever an observation is made. The SIQM gives a materialist explanation of all quantum phenomena dealt with above.

Radioactivity

In radioactivity we have the process of change of an atomic nucleus into another nucleus. Thus an atom of radium changes (decays) into another kind of atom when it gives out an alpha-particle. Suppose we consider two particular atoms X and Y of a given sample of radium. We find that atom X has decayed, but atom Y has not decayed. Are we entitled to ask the question: Why has atom X decayed and not atom Y? In the CIQM such a question is not allowed. What CIQM would allow and answer is this: of a given collection of N atoms of a certain kind, what proportion will decay in the next hour? This is what Reichenbach meant by saying that “the laws of probability take over the place once occupied by the laws of causality.”

In the SIQM, a perfectly intelligible answer is given to this question of the decay of atom X in terms of the quantum potential. This is done by considering and analysing the penetration of a latent alpha-particle within the radium atom X by a barrier formed by the quantum potential of the atom. This problem has been studied in detail by Dewdney and Hiley. (See *DRQ*, pp 252-3.)

In this context we can examine Jayaraman’s question:

“More problematically, we are left with a variety of contradictions that confuse us. ... Is the probabilistic nature of phenomena such as radioactivity, which is a consequence of the probabilistic nature of quantum phenomena, merely the appearance of a deterministic essence?”²

The answer is related to the dialectical opposites of appearance and essence, as well as the relation between necessity and chance.

Lenin’s contribution to dialectics of the infinite depth of nature as spelled out in Part I, “... the electron is as inexhaustible as the atom, nature is infinite, but it infinitely exists ...”,¹⁸ indicates that there are no final stages of essence. Below what is seen as the essence, are deeper laws and determinations which determine this particular essence. Also, below what is a probability law can be discerned deeper determinations which could be causal. In the particular case of the radium atom which decays, we see the operation of the quantum potential, which is itself undergoing rapid random (stochastic) fluctuations. As Engels had said, “...the accidental is necessary, and the necessary is also accidental.”¹⁹ But

the more important instruction from Engels is against what he called the rigidity engendered by our categories of thought. In *Anti-Dühring* he says:²⁰

“It is however precisely the polar antagonisms put forward as irreconcilable and insoluble, forcibly fixed lines of demarcation and class distinctions, which have given modern theoretical natural science its restricted metaphysical character.”

The Wave-Particle Duality

Waves and particles signify two different ways of transporting energy from one point to another: a floating piece of cork can be made to move either by throwing stones at it or by producing waves in the water which will travel to the cork. Typical properties of particles are mass, position, velocity, momentum, trajectory, and energy; whereas for waves we have the properties of frequency (number of oscillations per second), wavelength, amplitude, speed of propagation and energy.

The quantum theory, as presented by Planck, Einstein, de Broglie and Bohr, showed that particles behaved like waves, in producing interference fringes, and waves behaved like particles, in knocking off electrons to produce the photoelectric effect. It was understood that with every particle and its motion in space was associated a wave.

Things changed when Heisenberg tried to study the manner in which the trajectory (positions at different times) for a particle is observed. He demonstrated that there was a peculiar difficulty that crops up. If we try to measure the position of an elementary particle with great accuracy, then its velocity or momentum gets affected in a random way, because of the impact of the light waves by which we are observing the particle. If we use less energetic light, so that the disturbance is minimised, then the image gets blurred because of the longer wavelengths of the new light that is used. There is a margin of error in the position. There is also a margin of error in the measurement of the momentum if this is done. The two margins of error are reciprocally related: if we try to reduce one error, the other error gets larger. This result about measurements is called the Heisenberg uncertainty principle but is more properly the principle of indeterminacy.²¹ (Please see *DRQ*, pp 206, 214).

Now Marxism recognizes that to observe a thing is to interact with it and to change it. However, the dominating philosophy in the West was not Marxism but positivism. It was suggested by Neils Bohr (from Copenhagen, Denmark) that all attempts to speak of the position or trajectory of a particle should be given up. We can determine that a particle has passed a certain point by means of special experiments (say, the Geiger counter), or we can determine its wave nature by another kind of experiment (interference experiments). One or the other, the electron is a particle or a wave, not both. Bohr formulated the famous Complementarity Principle, according to which the wave and particle aspects are mutually exclusive, and only that which is being measured is capable of existence at that moment. This is the subjectivist version of quantum theory as prepared and accepted by the majority of Western scientists. This movement was led by Bohr, and it is called the Copenhagen interpretation of quantum mechanics (CIQM).

In the SIQM, however, both particle and wave aspects are present throughout in the motion of a particle or a wave. A particle such as an electron does not cease to have its wave properties or particulate properties at any moment. These are

two opposite aspects which coexist, and form the wave-particle duality of the motion of the particle, irrespective of the act of measurement.

Why are waves the opposite of particles?

By saying that waves and particles are two ways of transporting energy and momentum we cannot show that these are opposites of each other. If messages are received on some occasions through the postman, and at other times through a homing pigeon, that does not make the postman into the opposite of the homing pigeon.

The most obvious feature of a particle is its localisability. In classical physics a particle is defined, like a point in geometry, as that which has no parts but has position at a given instant. We may say that a particle is localisability incarnate.

On the other hand, a wave is characterized by its non-localisability. In classical physics a wave consists of simultaneous non-local correlations in a field. This is the essence of a wave front. The events in a wave front are having what is called ‘space-like’ separation. A wave is therefore non-localisability incarnate.

In the SIQM, particle and wave aspects are joined together, and therefore the motion of a micro-object expresses both aspects of localisability and non-localisability, respectively, through the particle and its quantum potential. Localisability and non-localisability are polar opposites of each other which get united in the motion of the particle. Experiments conducted by Alain Aspect and others, based on the work of John Stewart Bell, have confirmed that non-local connections do occur in relation to the motion of particles.²²

The ancient philosopher Zeno of Elea, who may be regarded as the first dialectician of history, had pointed out that motion contains a contradiction. He argued that an arrow X which is in flight is at a point A and is not at the point A simultaneously. Of course, he used this argument to show that motion is a fallacy. But credit should be given to him that he had pointed to this contradiction which is present in motion.

Engels states:²³

“Motion itself is a contradiction: even simple mechanical change of position can only come about through a body being at one and the same moment of time both in one place and in another place, being in one and the same place and also not in it. And the continuous origination and simultaneous solution of this contradiction is precisely what motion is.”

The causal stochastic quantum theory (SIQM) illustrates that the motion of micro-objects brilliantly confirms this position of dialectical materialism.

It may be pointed out that Alexei Bogomolov deals with the logical solution of the above dialectical contradiction as follows. He shows that the way to synthesise the two statements, the body X is at the place A and the body X is not at the place A, is through an integral act of thought which can be expressed as follows. “If body X is located in place A and is not located in place A, then body X is moving”.²⁴

Can the past be changed? Is history just narrative?

We have considered the issues raised by Jayaraman, namely, the question of the many universes, radioactivity and wave-particle duality. We now take up another question, which relates to the objectivity of past events. Quantum mechanics is the favourite hunting ground for all subjectivist idealists and for

the postmodernists, who are busy arguing that history is merely a matter of narration and discourse. Lyotard, whom Jayaraman mentions in his first paper, belongs to this group. Polkinghorne says in his book *The Quantum World*:

“It is a curiously unreal state of affairs that none of us lives in outside the study. As Feynmann has said, we are asked to believe that the historian who makes a statement about Napoleon simply means that there are books in the libraries which make statements similar to his own. There is no past; there are only sources.”²⁵

We now consider Wheeler’s famous ‘delayed choice experiment’, which relates to the objectivity of past events. The question that is asked by Wheeler is: does the past exist in a unique way that does not depend on what happens in the present? Wheeler discusses this in his long paper entitled: ‘The Past and the Delayed Choice Double-Slit Experiment’.²⁶

As has been explained, in the CIQM, according to the complementarity principle, for a given particle (like a photon, which is a quantum packet of energy), it is either observed exclusively as a particle or as a wave depending on the experimental set-up by which we are observing it. If we use the instrument of a photodetector we observe a particle, and if we use the apparatus of the double-slit experiment for interference we observe a wave manifestation. Depending on the observation, we can conclude that the photon existed as a particle or as a wave prior to the observation.

Wheeler set up the instrumentation in such a way that both the particle aspect and the wave aspect of the photon could be observed alternately merely by switching from one mode to another. (For details please see *DRQ*, pp 230-2, and Appendices VIII and IX.) The photon is made to enter the set-up from a source S in such a way that there is only one photon at a time in the path. There is the double slit interference arrangement of two paths, as well as the photodetectors placed in the path. The main idea is to decide on whether to check for particle or wave aspect by switching the mode **after** the photon has left the source S. If the photon is to leave the source at time t, then the choice is made after this time t, but before the observation takes place. This is why it is called the *delayed choice* experiment.

Wheeler discusses seven thought experiments. On the basis of this he comes to the conclusion that the past does not exist independently of what we choose to do in the present. If we choose to check its particle nature, then that makes the photon to be a particle at time t when it leaves the source S but before the decision to check was made. This is the logical conclusion of the complementarity principle of the CIQM. The only interpretation of the delayed choice experiment in the CIQM is that what happens in the past is decided by what we do in the present. This is what is called retroaction.

After setting out the arguments Wheeler asks the question: “Does this result mean that present choice influences past dynamics, in contravention of every formulation of causality?” To avoid this absurdity he says:

“... the lesson that presents itself rather is this, that the past has no existence except as it is recorded in the present. It has no sense to speak of what the quantum of electromagnetic energy (photon) was doing except as it is observed or calculable from what is observed. More generally, we would seem forced to say that no phenomenon is a phenomenon

until – by observation or by some combination of theory and observation – it is an observed phenomenon.”

Such is the strange and subjective conclusion reached as a direct result of using the CIQM, that is, the so called ‘standard quantum theory’. The CIQM leads to a rejection of the objectivity of the past as also to the denial of the reality of micro-phenomena. This is from where the postmodernists take off to say that the past is not objective, and that history is merely a matter of social construction from the narratives that we have.

It may be stated here that the causal stochastic quantum theory (SIQM) gives a direct explanation of the delayed choice experiment without in any way denying either the reality of microphenomena or the objectivity of the past. This was done by Bohm, Dewdney and Hiley in 1985.²⁷ They show that, using the quantum potential approach, it is possible to give a simple and intelligible account of a typical delayed choice experiment. Since the particle and the wave (quantum potential) exist together, in the double-slit experiment the particle passes through one of the slits while the wave passes through both slits. It is not necessary to suppose that the behaviour we ascribe to a system in the past is affected by what we do to it later.

VI

Dialectical materialism stands on its own

We are here dealing with two theories, the CIQM and the SIQM. The philosophy of scientific realism is unable to make a choice between these two theories. Dialectical materialism, on the other hand, played an active role in the formulation of the SIQM after a thorough critical examination of the CIQM.

The need to describe quantum phenomena in terms of probability did not militate against the assumption of the basic lawfulness of nature. What was not acceptable to sections of physicists like Einstein, Schrödinger and de Broglie, however, was the complementarity principle which insisted that processes at the quantum level are essentially unanalysable. Although Louis de Broglie had presented a causal quantum theory, this theory was criticised sharply and he abandoned it at that point of time.

Around 1950 a systematic tendency to criticize the CIQM began to develop. The most thoroughgoing criticism came from the physicists Blokhinshev and Terletzky in 1951. Then in 1952 David Bohm found a simple causal explanation of the quantum theory, which in fact had been earlier proposed by de Broglie. He published a series of papers independently, and along with Vigier and also with Hiley. At this stage, de Broglie, encouraged by the work of Bohm, returned to the original proposals that he had put forward at the Solvay Congress in 1927, and in collaboration with Vigier further amplified his theory.

The theory in its original form, though logically consistent, contained many aspects which seemed unsatisfactory. This work has been carried forward and developed into the quantum mechanics known as the causal stochastic theory (SIQM). In the entire process, the philosophy of dialectical materialism has helped in the critical steps and in guiding work into a materialist direction.

To describe David Bohm as a realist would be an injustice to him. Bohm was a communist, and he suffered heavily in the USA under the McCarthyist regime. He was not even allowed to use his own research work, or his doctoral thesis, as these had been classified as sensitive. There was an inquiry set up

against him for ‘un-American activities’, and he was suspended from Princeton where he was working as Einstein’s assistant. He was later removed from Princeton, in spite of Einstein’s intervention. He had to travel to Brazil to take up a job in the University of Sao Paulo, and then to the UK where he joined Birbeck College. His book *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics* shows how deeply he had imbibed the philosophy of dialectical materialism.

It is not a mere coincidence that David Bohm and Jean-Pierre Vigié, who initiated and developed SIQM, were Marxists,²⁸ even as VA Fock and AD Alexandrov, who tried to rescue the general theory of relativity from subjective deviations, were Marxists. The upshot is that dialectical materialism stands on its own, and does not need the support of the philosophy of scientific realism. Its propositions are being daily confirmed by the developments in science, notwithstanding the confusing twists and turns that ‘the quotidian developments’ in science may seem to be taking to a passing observer.

■ This article comprises Sections III-VI of the article of similar title which appeared in the Communist Party of India (Marxist) journal *The Marxist*, Vol XXX, part 2, April-June 2014. It is reproduced here by permission, and follows publication of Sections I and II, as Part 1, in CR107, Spring 2023, pp 2-7. Citations and explanatory notes here have been added by the CR editor, especially as the two works of the author mentioned in the text (Notes 5 and 10) are very difficult to find.

Notes and References

- 1 T Jayaraman, ‘Scientific Materialism for the Contemporary Materialist’, in *The Marxist*, Vol XXIII, part 1, Jan-Mar 2007.
- 2 T Jayaraman, ‘Dialectics and Materialism’, in *The Marxist*, Vol XXIX, No 4, Oct-Dec 2013.
- 3 K Popper, *Quantum Mechanics and the Schism in Physics*, Routledge, London, 1982.
- 4 Lenin, *On the Question of Dialectics*, in *Collected Works (LCW)*, Vol 38, pp 357-361.
- 5 KK Theckedath, *Dialectics, Relativity and Quantum*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1998. This book is now very difficult to find – *Ed.*
- 6 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Ch 1, in Marx & Engels, *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 25, p 23.
- 7 B Russell, *History of Western Philosophy*, George Allen & Unwin, pp 691, 695, 861; cited in *DRQ*.
- 8 AD Alexandrov, ‘Lorentz Transformations’, in *Uspekhi Matematicheskikh Nauk*, Vol 5, No 3 (37), 1950, p 187; cited in *DRQ*.
- 9 Situations where, for example, a person could travel to the future and then return to the present – *Ed.*
- 10 KK Theckedath, *Frederick Engels and Modern Science*, Navakarnataka, Bangalore, 2005 [very difficult to find – *Ed.*]
- 11 T Jayaraman, ‘Marxism and Quantum Mechanics’, in *Social Scientist*, Vol 3, No 35, June 1975, pp 65-72.
- 12 H Reichenbach, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1958, p 163; cited in *DRQ*.
- 13 J von Neumann, *Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Mechanics*, Julius Springer, Germany, 1932; English translation by Princeton University Press, 1955, p 324.
- 14 D Bohm, ‘A Suggested Interpretation of the Quantum Theory in Terms of “Hidden” Variables’, I & II, *Physical Review*, Vol 85, 1952, pp 166-179 and 180-192.
- 15 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wheeler's_delayed-choice_experiment. It’s actually a quotation from American novelist and philosopher William Faulkner – *Ed.*
- 16 A complex variable is the sum of a real part and an imaginary part, the latter being a multiple of i , the square root of -1 – *Ed.*
- 17 B De Witt, ‘Quantum Mechanics and Reality’, in *Physics Today*, Vol 23, No 9, 1970, pp 30-35.
- 18 Lenin, *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, Ch 5, Sect 2, in *LCW*, Vol 14, p 262.
- 19 Engels, *Dialectics of Nature*, ‘Notes and Fragments: Dialectics’, in

MECW, Vol 25, p 498.

- 20 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Preface II, in *MECW*, Vol 25, p 14.
- 21 D Bohm, *Causality and Chance in Modern Physics*, first published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957; republished by University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971, and Taylor & Francis, 1984; Ch 3, Sect 4.
- 22 A Aspect, P Grangier and G Roger, *Physical Review Letters*, Vol 47, 1981, p 460 ff; A Aspect, J Dalibard and G Roger, *Physical Review Letters*, Vol 49, 1982, pp 1804-7; both cited in *DRQ*. In 2022 Alain Aspect was co-awarded the Nobel Prize in Physics for this work – *Ed.*
- 23 Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, Part I, Sect XII; in *MECW*, Vol 25, p 111.
- 24 AS Bogomolov, ‘Dialectical Contradiction and its Solution’, in *Philosophy in the USSR*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1977; cited in *DRQ*.
- 25 JC Polkinghorne, *The Quantum World*, Longman, London/New York, 1984; cited in *DRQ*.
- 26 JA Wheeler, in AR Marlow, ed, *Mathematical Foundations of Quantum Theory*, Academic Press, 1978; cited in *DRQ*.
- 27 DJ Bohm, C Dewdney and BH Hiley, ‘A quantum potential approach to the Wheeler delayed choice experiment’, in *Nature*, Vol 315, 23 May 1985, p 294; cited in *DRQ*.
- 28 This was certainly true at the time but Bohm may have moved away from Marxism later – *Ed.*

Image by Erwin Rossen. Creative Commons

Scanning tunneling microscope image showing the individual atoms making up this gold (100) surface.



'LET GEORGE DO IT?' AGAINST ORWELL

C RITCHIE



ONE HUNDRED years ago an awkward Eton-educated Englishman set off to Burma to take a job as a colonial policeman. Then, after five years, he returned home to write about the dismal impoverishment of working class and transient life in England and Paris, producing several novels, working at the BBC and finally colluding with the Information Research Department (IRD), a government-sponsored anti-communist organisation.

'Orwellian' usually indicates a moral opposition to sinister state forces working against freedom of speech for the people; but the role of a police informer is actually collaborating with sinister state forces working against the freedom of speech of, in this case, Communist Party members and supporters. So the term 'Orwellian' is a relative one that means that when other countries do it, that's bad, when we do it, that's good. Orwell's books have had a universal appeal, yet this is not just for what they said, but where and how they were distributed, as well as who funded this.

This critical examination shows Orwell to be a bourgeois anti-communist who is disgusted more by the conditions of working-class poverty than its causes, and someone who preferred 'socialism without the socialism', politics that would fit perfectly with the current Keir Starmer Labour Party.

Orwell's work reveals a failure to understand that the fight against poverty in the 1930s and 1940s was one that the Communist Party was fully engaged in, unlike the parliamentary system he believed in, and that he turned from an astute observer of the desperate lives of the English working class to someone willing to compromise those fighting to change the system.

Orwell and The Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) was a militarised class war where Communists, Socialists, anarchists and syndicalists fought against a fascist coup led by Franco. The military success of the fascists was practically guaranteed by an embargo that prevented the Spanish Republic from buying essential armaments and other materials, while Franco received support from Hitler and Mussolini. Thousands of volunteers from around the world made their way to Spain to engage in this deadly political struggle and joined the militias and International Brigades in an unprecedented wave of militant class solidarity, something whose magnitude has yet to be repeated.

Orwell's *Homage To Catalonia* (1938) remains the most popular narrative of the Spanish Civil War, reprinted many times by Penguin, and has been the most prominent account that tries to discredit the role of the PSUC (United Socialist

“There is no doubt that Orwell’s investigative journalism, seeing and documenting the hardships of working-class life up close, then reporting it to a wider audience, is outstanding, but his weakness is how such poverty is overcome. His semi-skimmed socialism is not based on radical change but on a more humane management of capitalism, and his Eton education ill-prepared him for black tripe or grubby sandwiches.”

Party of Catalonia) and the PCE (Spanish Communist Party).

Orwell’s article, *Looking Back on the Spanish War* (1942), begins with his memories of “the sounds, the smells ... the filthy meals”, the inability “to escape from disgusting smells of human origin” and the “Latin type of latrine, at which you have to squat, [which] is bad enough at its best”.¹ Of course, what is actually disgusting is not the plumbing but a democratic republic facing extermination by a dictatorship supported by fascists and Nazis whilst other European governments stood back or tried to ignore it.

Orwell attacks communist literature – “dig out the files of *New Masses* or the *Daily Worker*, and just have a look at the romantic warmongering muck that our left-wingers were spilling at the time”² – and criticises statements like “international proletarian solidarity” that were “pathetically repeated by ignorant men who believed them to mean something”,³ yet he does not tell us how we ought to change this “pathetic ignorance”. His social, political, and class prejudices are blatant. He writes:

“Who can believe in the class-conscious international proletariat after the events of the past ten years? To the British working class the massacre of their comrades in Vienna, Berlin, Madrid, or wherever it might be, seemed less interesting and less important than yesterday’s football match.”⁴

Communist Party members everywhere will have been well informed of the violent struggles on the streets of “Vienna, Berlin, Madrid” because they were involved in organising international solidarity and would have read about it in the *Daily Worker*, *New Masses*, *l’Humanité* or other Party publications. Not only that, but thousands of members and supporters of Britain’s Communist Party had already been organising and fighting against Oswald Mosley’s British Union of Fascists (BUF), about which Orwell remained relatively silent.

Speaking as an outsider, how did Orwell know what “the British working class” thought when he had no involvement in rank-and-file organisation, trade union politics, or the general class struggle, and was only a day-tripper to poverty when it suited him? He goes on: the working class in Britain are too

“ignorant to see through the trick that is being played on them, they easily swallow the promises of fascism ... [and the] struggle of the working class is like the growth of a plant. The plant is blind and stupid.”⁵

But again, he does not tell us why the “blind and stupid” can so “easily swallow” the promises of fascism, and the fascist threat remains undiagnosed.

On Orwell’s first trip to the Spanish Republic’s frontlines the “food was good enough and there was plenty of wine”, although he misses a nice cup of tea with milk, and he didn’t like “that bright red sausage which tastes of soap and gives you diarrhoea”,⁶ [presumably chorizo], or the “rich, greasy cookery, with everything sodden in olive oil”. Orwell later states a preference for “kippers, Yorkshire pudding, Devon cream, muffins and crumpets ... Christmas puddings, treacle tart and apple dumplings”.⁷

By contrast, International Brigader George Wheeler reported that his first Spanish dinner comprised “bread and a very tasty macaroni washed down with a sour red wine” and he found the local cuisine most palatable.⁸ Not many had such luxury in Madrid where over 2,000 people died from malnutrition; and after the war, because the agricultural cycles had been severely disrupted, the working class survived on low-quality bread and lentils.

Whilst many refugees who escaped Spain ended up in French concentration camps, where “plates and chunks of bread were laid on the ground” for them to eat *al fresco*,⁹ Orwell crossed back into France without bother, then stocked up on cigarettes and finally had a decent cup of tea. Wheeler was not so lucky and ended up in a fascist concentration camp, half-starved, with the daily dread of execution, until he was released several months later.

When Orwell got back from Spain in 1937, he submitted an article to the *New Statesman* criticising the press coverage of the war and the role of the Communist Party, claiming that the *Daily Worker* was more propagandist than the *Daily Mail*. He also predicted, optimistically but wrong, “that the war will end up in some kind of compromise”.¹⁰ There was no compromise, there was a mass exodus from Spain for those who could leave, and repression, imprisonment, and execution of thousands who could not.

Like his previous prediction, Orwell’s claim “that Communism is now a counter-revolutionary force” was equally wrong, as over the next few decades the Communist-backed uprisings in Yugoslavia and Greece, and the revolutions in China, Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos, and Nicaragua would indicate otherwise.

Bill Alexander,¹¹ who commanded the British Battalion of the International Brigades for a while, later contributed an essay for *Inside The Myth* (1984), a book criticising Orwell and his attacks on the Communist movement, writing that “Unlike

many European intellectuals [Orwell] had not understood the essential clash between liberty and fascism.”¹²

In 1936, Orwell’s only criticism of fascism was whether Oswald Mosley was “sincere or if he is deliberately bamboozling the people”,¹¹ following the violence at the BUF’s Olympia rally in 1934, where Blackshirt thugs attacked hecklers and political opponents, something that subsequently lost Mosley a lot of supporters from the middle class. Orwell’s anti-fascist credentials are negligible compared with those of Communists who had been involved in violent street confrontations with fascists across Europe from the 1920s onwards.

Alexander acknowledges the success of the CNT/FAI and POUM militias who defeated the fascist uprisings in Catalonia, whereas in other places, including Madrid, the fascist advances were much more aggressive: although “always ill armed, often in confusion and with weak leadership, the workers’ militias fought with tenacity”.¹¹ The International Brigades, in tandem with the militias, stopped Franco from taking Madrid which, if successful, would have meant the end of the Republic.

Alexander reports that a British Communist working with the PSUC met Orwell and several other POUM members who wanted to join the International Brigades, but had felt that Orwell lacked “political understanding” and had no interest in “party politics”.¹¹ This is something that Orwell admits later when he was discharged from hospital and sent back to Barcelona:

“I did not make any of the correct political reflections. I never do when things are happening. It seems to be always the case when I get mixed up in war or politics Afterwards I can see the significance of events, but while they are happening I merely want to be out of them.”¹³

Alexander writes that Orwell had “a strong sense of remoteness and detachment from his comrades-in-arms, both in the ILP group and the Spaniards and other nationalities in his company”¹¹ – like his remoteness from those he observed in Wigan and elsewhere, although this could arguably be a form of journalistic objectivity rather than awkward distance. Alexander states that “Orwell had qualities as an observer” but ultimately “his conclusions had little relation to what he had seen” and that he “used his skill as a writer to mask his prejudices and ignorance”.¹¹

For Alexander, although the conflict was dominated by political differences, the Communists and Socialists agreed that the “organisation and priority to defeat fascism ... proved right in practice and ground”. Because the Soviet Union was the only country to supply material and advisors, the Communist Party became increasingly influential in Spain.¹¹ Orwell was critical of Soviet aid:

“[T]he quantity of arms supplied by Russia has been greatly exaggerated (in my first three months in Spain I saw only one Russian weapon, a solitary machine gun), the mere fact of their arrival brought the Communists into power. To begin with, the Russian aeroplanes and guns, and the good military qualities of the International Brigades (not necessarily Communist but under Communist control) immensely raised the Communist prestige.”¹⁰

Alexander points out that between January and July 1937 Orwell was at the front lines but not where the most intensive fighting was happening, which at the time was around Madrid. It made military sense to concentrate arms and munitions

where the fascist threat was at its most critical.

The militias maintained frontline defensive positions, as Orwell experienced, but lacking the arms and essential supplies they could not ultimately hold out against a professional army with German and Italian troops sent by Hitler and Mussolini who had superior air and artillery support. The militias’ supply lines were over-stretched and under-equipped and there were also problems with providing the appropriate calibre ammunition to the array of different weapons. As John Newsinger says, “The training and equipping of the Republic’s Popular Army was only possible because the militia were in place.”¹⁴

Orwell supported the Communist Party’s plan to build a disciplined army in order to defeat Franco then, presumably, sorting the rest out later:

“[He] found the Communist Party’s argument that the completion of the revolution would have to be postponed until after military victory had been achieved a convincing one and argued as much with his comrades in the militia ... the one thing that mattered was to win the war.”¹⁴

Newsinger writes that “The accuracy of Orwell’s account, written so soon after the events themselves, cannot be seriously disputed”,¹⁴ as if it is some kind of gospel. However, he also notes that “Orwell, by his own account, had little understanding of the differences that existed between the various political groupings in Spain” – which would cloud Orwell’s overall understanding of the complexities within the Republican side.

Orwell was wounded during his second stint at the front and, recuperating in hospital, he finally got a decent feed, including a breakfast at 6 am “of soup, an omelette, stew, bread, white wine, and coffee” - which is more like a three course dinner.¹⁵

Orwell’s politics around Spain were the opposite of a radical trajectory. Before setting off in 1936, he had lobbied the Communist Party for accreditation, which was rejected. Then he went to the ILP, whose support enabled him to join the POUM. On his return from Spain he rejected the CP line and gradually moved towards democratic socialism in the hope of diluting capitalism rather than changing it.

Newsinger has claimed that Orwell retained his radical politics after the Spanish Civil War, but this is questionable. Orwell had no part in the working-class movement, in trade unions, with anti-fascism, or with other left-wing militant activity. He was prepared to collude with the secret police and supply them with names of Communist Party members and supporters, which is far from radical, and he drifted into the cosy sitting rooms of the BBC and *Tribune*. We do need to acknowledge that, since Newsinger’s article came out, there have been more revelations about Orwell and his relationship with state forces, although Crick’s 1980 biography does refer to an Orwell notebook that contained dozens of names.¹⁶

Orwell’s claim is that “Every line of serious work that I have written since 1936 has been written, directly or indirectly, against totalitarianism and for democratic socialism,” but “democratic socialism” is too close to the Parliamentary Labour Party and too far away from radicalism. In his review of Robert Coll’s *George Orwell: English Rebel*,¹⁷ Newsinger again makes the assertion that Orwell is an advocate of revolutionary socialism, having “fought with the semi-Trotskyist POUM militia in Spain, [and] took part in the May 1937 uprising in Barcelona”.¹⁸

Orwell's democratic socialism was not a radical but a reformist socialism based on the ballot with no intention of overthrowing bourgeois society or seizing the means of production. He may have admired the revolutionary atmosphere in Barcelona, the workers' militias, and the possibility of radical change, but he would do little about it on returning home.

Wigan Pier

The Road to Wigan Pier (1937) starts off in a bedroom of a "tripe-shop and lodging-house" where "All the windows were kept tight shut ... and in the morning the room stank like a ferret's cage".¹⁹ The bedrooms were bad enough but the tripe, appetisingly available in white or grey, "and the ghostly translucent feet of pigs, ready boiled",²⁰ were the main commodities of the shop that disgusts Orwell, but he is particularly disgusted by Brooker, the "astonishingly dirty" landlord who

"prepared most of the food, and like all people with permanently dirty hands he had a peculiarly intimate, lingering manner of handling things. If he gave you a slice of bread-and-butter there was always a black thumb-print on it."²¹

Orwell does justify his revulsion after seeing the landlord on numerous occasions "carrying a full chamber-pot which he gripped with his thumb well over the rim",²² and it is not difficult to see Orwell perpetually cringing in horror, moving from cramped bedroom to foul drawing room. He finds little respite regarding food, which usually breaks up the day and is one of the few pleasures to look forward to, but it is

"uniformly disgusting. For breakfast you got two rashers of bacon and a pale fried egg, and bread-and-butter which had often been cut overnight and always had thumb-marks on it."²³

Despite trying, Orwell could not get to slice his own and the landlord "would hand it to me slice by slice, each slice gripped firmly with that broad black thumb".²³ The people he writes about are two-dimensional with no emotions, no passion, and more astonishingly no sense of humour, something which the English have fine-tuned in the pub, at the match, at school, or with friends. For Orwell, Brooker is just a walk-on part.

Orwell decides to leave when he finds "a full chamber-pot under the breakfast table" and rightly so, but then says that "the most dreadful thing about people like the Brookers is the way they say the same things over and over again".²⁴ The "most dreadful thing" is surely the poverty, bleakness, and lack of options that were available to working-class people in a heavily industrialised community. Orwell cannot understand that it is the dismal narrow circumstances working-class people are born into, that unlike him they cannot escape, that constructs the world that appears to them, whether miners, tripe shop profiteers, or disabled factory workers. This also means they are not as articulate as him due to a lack of public school education, or any education, as well as having no opportunity to experience other places or interact with other people different from themselves because they are not able to move more than a few miles from where they were born.

At times, Orwell sounds like an alien who has crashlanded on planet poverty and blames those who have had few opportunities in life for their own small perspective. He writes:

"[I]t is no use saying that people like the Brookers are just disgusting and trying to put them out of mind. For they

exist in tens and hundreds of thousands; they are the characteristic by-products of the modern world."

Which is a good start but then as if in an empirical exercise he says:

"It is a kind of duty to see and smell such places now and again, especially smell them, lest you forget that they exist; though perhaps it is better not to stay there too long."²⁵

Unless you have to live there, that is.

There is no doubt that Orwell's investigative journalism, seeing and documenting the hardships of working-class life up close, then reporting it to a wider audience, is outstanding, but his weakness is how such poverty is overcome. His semi-skimmed socialism is not based on radical change but on a more humane management of capitalism, and his Eton education ill-prepared him for black tripe or grubby sandwiches.

In his review of *The Road to Wigan Pier*, Harry Pollitt, then General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain, was encouraged by Orwell's criticisms about housing and conditions in the mines, but wrote that "the chief thing that worries Mr Orwell is the 'smell' of the working-class".²⁶ Pollitt was from Droylsden, west of Manchester, and had worked as a boilermaker, so Orwell was really sniffing around an area whose industries he knew well. Pollitt wrote that *The Road to Wigan Pier* criticised people for how they look rather than whether they were trying to "build a new society", and neither did he ask "what is the best way in which we can help them?"²⁶

Down and Out in Paris ...

Down and Out in Paris And London (1933) is divided into two parts: the first section describes life in Parisian restaurant kitchens, a hectic, overheated, aggressive environment where Orwell is inside, warm, and fed; which he then contrasts in the second section with his peripatetic experiences with tramps in England, stuck outside with cold and hunger.

In Paris, Orwell wanders around and "discover[s] the boredom which is inseparable from poverty",²⁷ but eventually gets a position as a *plongeur*, or kitchen porter, at the lowest end of the kitchen brigade. The life he describes in the kitchens is relatively unchanged, with the intense heat, stress, and volatility that many contemporary chefs would recognise. Kitchen workers remain poorly paid, stuck in a hierarchy full of dramatic insanity, all within a couple of metres from the oblivious customers.

Orwell's world is pre-health & safety legislation with no lists of allergens or digestive quibbles. He writes that:

"It was amusing to look round the filthy little scullery and think that only a double door was between us and the dining-room".²⁸

"In the kitchen the dirt was worse. It is not a figure of speech, it is a mere statement of fact to say that a French cook will spit in the soup – that is, if he is not going to drink it himself."²⁹

Orwell is the lowliest employee and observes the chefs' hands with typical horror:

"He picks [the steak] up in his fingers and slaps it down, runs his thumb round the dish and licks it to taste the gravy, runs it round and licks again ... with his fat, pink fingers every

one of which he has licked a hundred times that morning.”³⁰

But it is not only the chefs who disgust him: “the waiter... dips his fingers into the gravy – his nasty, greasy fingers which he is for ever running through his brilliantined hair”.³¹ Orwell concludes that “the more one pays for food, the more sweat and spittle one is obliged to eat with it.”

Outside the kitchens, things are no less disgusting. Travelling to work on the Paris Metro, he is “jammed in the swaying mass of passengers, nose to nose with some hideous French face, breathing sour wine and garlic”, as if he himself did not radiate the smell of stale tobacco, alcohol, sweat and grease.³²

... and London

“Seen in the mass ... they were a disgusting sight; nothing villainous or dangerous. But a graceless mangy crew, nearly all ragged and palped underfed.”³³

Leaving Paris, Orwell looks forward to an England of “bathrooms, armchairs, mint sauce, beer ...”³⁴ but ends up in a hostel with bad tea, bread and margarine, and dog-ends off the street which offer no relief from the lodging houses or work-houses for itinerants. Orwell then submerges into a tedious existence and pawns his suit for clothes that “were not merely dirty and shapeless” but had “a patina of antique filth, quite different from shabbiness”.³⁵ Choosing such rags – “the worse the better” – seems like self-flagellation.³⁶

Orwell hooks up with an Irish tramp who shares plentiful insight but “smelt very unpleasant, which was unsurprising when one learned how many diseases he suffered from”.³⁷ “The tramp”, the gentleman of the road, with his pipe, stick and bundle, was a common English caricature that has since been supplanted by “the homeless”, an amorphous mass of individuals living a semi-troglodytic existence with their “hungry and homeless” signs, who should embarrass the fifth-largest economy in the world for its callous disregard of them. Unlike the tramp, homeless people are not only on the streets but caught up in bed-and-breakfast joints, temporary accommodation, squatting or sleeping on any available sofas or floors. “I opened my eyes and saw... one of the sailor’s feet, sticking out of bed close to my face.”³⁸

Although Orwell writes about proximity to others, he reveals little intimacy, apart from two weeks with the Irish tramp, and he records no friendships or personal conversations, whilst any closeness with others is tempered with disgust. Covid did not invent social distancing, the English bourgeoisie did, and Orwell would have thrived during lockdown.

Whilst Orwell’s descriptions are evocative and make readers understand the misery of destitution and his dedication to exposing it, yet again he offers no solution to the problems he presents. He complains about the conditions, as he should, but cannot see the reason why they exist or offer any solution to them.

Down And Out was published in 1933, and much of the source material was generated between 1928 to 1931; but Orwell cannot connect the impoverishment of the English and French working classes, or the homeless and socially disenfranchised, with the global economic depression caused by capitalist speculation, the rise of fascism, and the English class hierarchy. The social conditions he describes were created by the industrial revolution and the Victorian upper classes, who believed in charity rather than social reform, providing temporary minimum relief for those who suffered most.

Orwell’s List

Newsinger writes that:

“[Orwell] had been ferociously hostile to Stalinism since Spain but whereas his concern had always been to fight Communist influence within the left, with the beginning of the cold war he came increasingly to see the Soviet Union as a threat requiring the taking of sides.”¹⁴

It is this that provides the context for Orwell’s list: “He worried about Communist infiltration ... and kept a notebook of suspects.”³⁹

Graham Stevenson writes that “Orwell had been under MI5 surveillance in the 1930s”,⁴⁰ whilst Ken Fuller reports that, after being a suspect, Orwell became an informant in 1949 and “passed a list of those he suspected of being Communists or supporters to the Information Research Department (IRD), an anti-communist propaganda unit of the British Foreign Office”.⁴¹ This list “was based on a notebook containing 135 names, which Orwell had been compiling since the mid-1940s”. As Fuller has also noted, the revisionist anti-communist Franz Borckenau, who wrote *The Spanish Cockpit*, had left the Communist Party of Germany in 1929, and in 1945 would “become a founding member of the anti-communist Congress for Cultural Freedom (CCF), arguing that the only conflict worthy of note in the world was that between communism and “democracy”. Then “in the 1960s, it was revealed that the CCF ... was funded by the CIA”. Fuller writes that Orwell “originally came up with the idea of the CCF in 1946; Orwell had planned the formation of an international anti-communist organisation.”

Newsinger is critical of Orwell’s relationship with the IRD but tries to downplay this by saying that

“It is important here to acknowledge Orwell’s relationship with these organisations but also to insist on how limited his relationship with them was” because Orwell was “certainly not the champion of a British McCarthyism.”¹⁴

Yet Orwell’s wife Sonia had worked for the IRD, who later translated and distributed Orwell’s parable *Animal Farm* and the novel *1984* that discredited the Soviet Union. In 1949, in keeping with the family business, Orwell reworked this list of alleged Communist subversives and sympathisers that included Charlie Chaplin, Michael Redgrave, and Sean O’Casey, and also Hugh MacDiarmid, a Scottish poet and Communist whose *Hymn to Lenin* clearly stated where his politics were.⁴² As Michael Crick recounts:

“A notebook of 1949 ... contains 86 names of Communists or Communist sympathisers in columns under ‘Names’, ‘Jobs’, and ‘Remarks’. Most of the entries are by another unidentified hand but with frequent annotations by Orwell, and some of the original entries are by him. Many of the entries are plausible as possible underground or front members, but a few seem far-fetched and unlikely, listed simply for ‘Communist-like’ opinions.”⁴³

The issues here are not whether the names on the list were known, or whether they suffered unduly, but that Orwell made it in the first place and willingly became a police informant. Why would Orwell write such a list unless he intended to use it somehow?

After the Red Army had effectively defeated the Nazis in the east, and the war in Europe had ended, the USA turned Western governments against the Soviet Union, and became concerned over Russia's influence in Poland, East Germany, Hungary and other mainland countries. The IRD, meanwhile, was involved in combatting the armed liberation struggles in Malaya (1948-60) and Kenya (1952-60), in supporting the military butcher Suharto in the mass murder of communists in Indonesia (1965) and in the fight against republicanism in Northern Ireland (1968-1998).

Conclusion

Orwell's descriptive skills are not in doubt, his political analysis is. No matter how far he submerges into the abyss of poverty and desperation, he can generate no solidarity or emotional relationship with those he meets. The people appear as characters, his disgust about dirt is phobic, he maintains his distance and, despite writing about the harmful effect of industrial capitalism, this is not the same as organising against it.

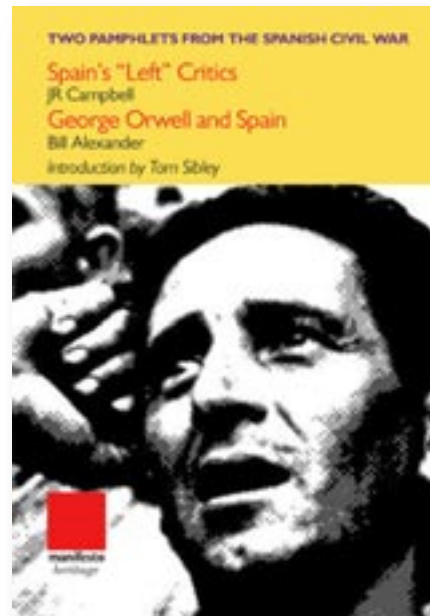
The term 'Orwellian' should be, perhaps, redefined as a smaller ineffectual McCarthyism, a right-wing bureaucracy with teacups; but it is also worth noting that if Orwell had been up against the House Un-American Activities Committee in the United States he would have been blacklisted for his membership of the POUM militia in Spain in 1937.

■ *Let George Do It* was the title of a 1940 British black-and-white comedy musical war film starring George Formby.

Notes and References

- 1 G Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, Penguin, London, 1979, pp 157-158.
- 2 *Ibid*, p 159.
- 3 *Ibid*, p 166.
- 4 *Ibid*, p 173.
- 5 *Ibid*, p 174.
- 6 *Ibid*, p 183.
- 7 Orwell, *Shooting an Elephant*, Penguin, London, 2009, p 185.
- 8 G Wheeler, *To Make the People Smile Again*, Zymurgy, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2003, p 44.
- 9 P Preston, *The Spanish Civil War*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1990, p 165.
- 10 <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/spilling-the-spanish-beans-2/>.
- 11 <https://international-brigades.org.uk/news-and-blog/remembering-bill-alexander/>.
- 12 https://archive.org/stream/OrwellViewsFromTheLeft/Orwell+Views+From+the+Left_djvu.txt.
- 13 Orwell, *Catalonia*, *op cit*, p 203.
- 14 J Newsinger, *Orwell and the Spanish Revolution*, at <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/writers/newsinger/1994/xx/orwell.htm>.
- 15 Orwell, *Catalonia*, *op cit*, p 182.
- 16 B Crick, *George Orwell: A Life*, Penguin, London, 1980, p 637.
- 17 R Coll, *George Orwell: English Rebel*, Oxford University Press, 2013.
- 18 J Newsinger, 'Defusing George Orwell', review of Coll, *op cit*, in *International Socialism*, No 143, Summer 2014.
- 19 Orwell, *The Road To Wigan Pier*, Penguin, London, 1969, p 6.
- 20 Trotters were traditionally served with black peas. Neighbouring football team Bolton Wanderers was nicknamed The Trotters supposedly because of the pigs' feet that were given to the players before the match that were also on sale in pubs and shops surrounding Burnden Park stadium. For Orwell, trotters are simply not cricket.
- 21 Orwell, *Wigan Pier*, *op cit*, pp 7-8.
- 22 *Ibid*, p 11.
- 23 *Ibid*, pp 13-14.
- 24 *Ibid*, p 15.

- 25 *Ibid*, pp 15-16.
- 26 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Road_to_Wigan_Pier.
- 27 Orwell, *Down and Out In Paris and London*, Penguin, London, 1979, p 17.
- 28 *Ibid*, pp 60-61.
- 29 *Ibid*, p 71. NB This bizarre kitchen habit was also mentioned by former Communist, African-American writer Richard Wright: "One morning, as I passed the sizzling stove I thought I heard Tillie [the chef] cough and spit An hour or so later I heard Tillie clear her throat with a grunt, saw her cough and spit into the boiling soup." (*Black Boy*, Vintage Classics, 2020).
- 30 *Ibid*, pp 71-72.
- 31 *Ibid*, p 72.
- 32 *Ibid*, p 80.
- 33 *Ibid*, p 127.
- 34 *Ibid*, p 113.
- 35 *Ibid*, p 115.
- 36 *Ibid*, p 114.
- 37 *Ibid*, p 124.
- 38 *Ibid*, p 117.
- 39 Crick, *op cit*, p 556.
- 40 <https://grahamstevenson.me.uk/2013/02/05/orwellian-mischief/>.
- 41 K Fuller, 'Distortions of the Spanish Civil War', in *CR80*, Summer 2016, pp 2-7.
- 42 T Garton Ash, 'Orwell's List', in *New York Review of Books*, 25 September 2003; online at <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2003/09/25/orwells-list/>.
- 43 Crick, *op cit*, pp 637-638.



Two pamphlets in one. Available in both printed and e pub form.



Doc Ritchie is the author of Marx, work and the 21st century



'THE PEACE QUESTION AND IMPERIALISM': A REPLY TO GREG GODELS

ARVINDER KANDOLA



The aftermath of the Rana Plaza disaster, Bangladesh.
Creative Commons

“denying the ‘foundational’ role of superexploitation in modern imperialism obfuscates the extent to which workers in the Third World and in the imperialist nations are oppressed and exploited in common, and also turns a blind eye to the differences.”

IN HIS ARTICLE in *CR104*, ‘The Peace Question and Imperialism’, Greg Godels seeks to correct what he views as certain tendencies within the left in relation to its response to the war in Ukraine.¹ He suggests that some “well-measured comrades ... remembering the Cold War stand-off between the US and its allies and the Soviet Union and its allies, conflate today’s Russia with the Soviet Union.” Thus, Godels argues, the recognition of the Soviet Union’s role in checking US imperialism leads to an error – by some – in which Russia is seen as performing a similar role, and the emergence of a “multipolar world” is welcomed. Opposing this view, Godels argues that Russia aspires to “great power nationalism” and employs a policy of “capitalist opportunism”. Whether or not Russia succeeds in its aims, we will not be “any closer to a world of peace and justice”.

Godels then responds to an article by Jenny Clegg in the *Morning Star* (‘Imperialism, Hegemonism, Multipolarity’, 19 April 2022) in which she views the emergence of competitors to the US “as establishing the first steps towards a multipolar world”. He takes issue with this and the fact that she identifies “unequal exchange between the highly developed countries and the developing countries as the principal contradiction defining imperialism and anti-imperialism”.

Clegg’s suggestion is summarily brushed aside with reference to the “centre-periphery distinction” which “was popular and influential among independent Western ‘Marxists’ in the era when the working classes in the centre – the West – were generally tamed by social-democratic opportunism”. Godels invokes Marx and Lenin to reinforce his point:

“Marx went to great lengths to show that exchange, under capitalist relations of production, was not generally unequal – values exchange for values. But these same relations of production always produce and reproduce inequality. The locus of inequality – capitalist exploitation – is embedded in the capitalist system, not in the thievery of unequal exchange. As Lenin elaborated, uneven development is a feature of relations between people, social institutions, firms in the same industry, between industries, and between countries, and even continents. It is not unequal exchange that accounts for the uneven development, but differences in the pace of development, cultural and social practices, political and other institutions, and most importantly, especially in the epoch of imperialism, the stunting effects of colonialism, neocolonialism and their legacy.”

Nevertheless, Godels’ appeals to Marx and Lenin mask something amiss in his line of argument, something which leads him, firstly, to ascribe a different role for those “oppressed by imperialism” to those “at home” – and, secondly, to theoretically detach the poorer nations’ struggles to attain equal footing within global institutions from the struggle against “classical imperialism”. We’re even treated to the example of “rising standards in developing countries”, as if to suggest that the existence of unequal exchange may be a little overstated.

Essentially, Godels argues, imperialism and inequality are not a consequence of the “organised thievery” of unequal exchange. Rather, “Intense competition between players – big and small – for markets, resources, labour and capital is the essence of capitalism and imperialism. There is no sharp line between this competition and war.” The overall result of these theoretical mistakes, Godels concludes, is a “weak understanding of capitalism and its stages of development”. Despite the horrors perpetrated by US imperialism, the struggle against it, “like the struggle against its predecessor, the British Empire, will ultimately be resolved at home when the people finally refuse to continue paying the price for their rulers’ grand designs”.

Perhaps in anticipation of objections, we are reassured:

“Of course, those oppressed by imperialism play an equally important role, that of resisters, though imperialism, like rust, never sleeps. It is an imperative, a demand made by capitalist accumulation – if it is defeated in one place, it will surely find another place to satisfy its lust. This dynamic only finally ends when our world finds socialism. The wishful thinking of a benign capitalism with all participants peacefully on an even playing field is just that – a wishful thought.”

I will argue, firstly, that denying the ‘foundational’ role of superexploitation in modern imperialism obfuscates the extent to which workers in the Third World and in the imperialist nations are oppressed and exploited in common, and also turns a blind eye to the differences; secondly, that the development of supranational entities such as the World Bank, IMF, International Criminal Court, and EU are part of the superstructure enabling that superexploitation; and, thirdly, that the various forms which the state may adopt in the nations exploited by imperialism should be considered as various forms of imperialist state. Here, I will rely heavily on the work of Aijaz Ahmad, who very effectively makes use of the “centre-periphery distinction”. I will then try to draw conclusions regarding what a

correct stance towards the ‘emerging multipolarity’ might entail. Of course, I too will invoke Lenin:

“The interests pursued in exporting capital also give an impetus to the conquest of colonies, for in the colonial market it is easier to employ monopoly methods (and sometimes they are the only methods that can be employed) to eliminate competition, to ensure supplies, to secure the necessary ‘connections’ etc.

The non-economic superstructure which grows up on the basis of finance capital, its politics and ideology stimulates the striving for colonial conquest. ‘Finance capital does not want liberty, it wants domination’, as Hilferding very truly says. And a French bourgeois writer ... writes that social causes should be added to the economic causes of modern colonial policy: ‘Owing to the growing complexities of life and the difficulties which weigh not only on the masses of the workers, but also on the middle classes, impatience, irritation and hatred are accumulating in all the countries of the old civilisation and are becoming a menace to public order; the energy which is being hurled out of the definite class channel must be given employment abroad in order to avert an explosion at home.’

Since we are speaking of colonial policy in the epoch of capitalist imperialism, it must be observed that finance capital and its foreign policy, which is the struggle of the great powers for the economic and political division of the world, give rise to a number of *transitional* forms of state dependence. Not only are the two main groups of countries, those owning colonies, and the colonies themselves, but also the diverse forms of dependent countries which, politically, are formally independent, but in fact, are enmeshed in the net of financial and diplomatic dependence, typical of this epoch.”²

Here Lenin is drawing attention to “the connection between what might be called the purely economic and the socio-political roots of modern imperialism”, a connection which he reminds us even “the leading British bourgeois politicians” of the time were conscious of.³ Furthermore, he points to the existence of various forms of state dependency, which we can assume would require the development of correspondingly different forms of state. I think the above passage from *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* identifies the key components which help us to grasp the inherent contradictions of modern imperialism, as well as aiding us in constructing the political strategies to resist it.

Lenin did not see democratic struggles for national independence as distinct from class struggle. It followed that if it was important to look “towards the East, towards Asia, Africa, and the colonies, where this movement is a thing of the present and the future”,⁴ it was clear, then, that the national struggles occurring there were necessarily a part of class struggle and the struggle against imperialism.

Incidentally, we may note that it is not only Marxist-Leninists who recognize the pivotal role of Lenin, and the power of his ideas. Writing about the decline of the Swadeshi movement in India after 1905, the author Sunil Khilnani succinctly betrays the fears of liberals everywhere:

“Its decline had multiple factors: the variegation of Indian culture; movement infighting; detachment from the concerns of low wage workers and peasants; and the lack – thankfully – of an Indian Lenin.”⁵

Khilnani would be well-advised to refrain from cracking open the champagne just yet.

The superstructure of imperialism

The revolutionary moment represented by Lenin’s ideas and the upsurge of anticolonial, national sentiments during the period of the First World War was met by the ‘counter-revolutionary’ reaction exemplified by Woodrow Wilson’s *Fourteen Points*. As Adom Getachew points out in her book *Worldmaking after Empire – The Rise and Fall of Self-Determination*, it was not until February 11, 1918, that “Wilson used self-determination for the first time”.⁶ Getachew suggests that, due to the “United States’ dominant economic and military position after the war, Wilson’s appropriation was successful, as Wilsonism and self-determination came to be viewed as synonymous”. Further, she argues against suggestions that the survival of Europe’s colonies represented the end of the “Wilsonian moment” or the implementation of a “truncated” version; instead, “Wilson and Jan Smuts, a fellow architect of the League of Nations, recast self-determination in the service of empire.”⁷

Smuts’ vision of the League of Nations was inspired by what he saw as the values of the British Empire, the “principles of national freedom and political decentralisation”. Perhaps, more in line with the actual values of the Empire, he felt that self-determination, as Getachew puts it, “would have to be fitted for the capacities of different peoples”. What emerged was a “distinctive set of institutional and discursive legacies in the League that preserved racial hierarchy by laying claim to the ideals of self-determination and equality for nations”, a project “meant only to change the commercial label of colonial slavery”.⁸

The basic point is that the elaborate global institutional architecture – economic, social and legal – developed after the First World War has been one in which self-determination has been acknowledged only to the extent that it serves the interests of imperialism. Even after the Second World War, the optimism generated by the ‘universal ideas’ some saw embodied in the UN Charter, the Atlantic Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, was matched by the anxiety of those who “argued that invocations of a right to self-determination in the UN were abusing the principle by unsustainably extending it to mean economic as well as political sovereignty and claiming that it should apply to all colonised people”.⁹

However, the struggles that colonised and newly independent nations have fought for democratic recognition within those institutions, in particular to have economic rights recognised as human rights, are an inherent part of class struggle. In particular, not because I’m suggesting that only economic struggles are part of class struggle, but because economic rights have clearly been the ones with which imperialism has had a particular problem.

The instrumentalist approach which imperialist nations have adopted toward international law is another example of the disparities promoted by the superstructure of imperialism. As I write, the International Criminal Court based in The Hague has just issued an arrest warrant against Vladimir Putin. Perhaps the most apposite response has been provided by the South African Communist Party which has condemned “the imperialist bias” of the Court which “has proven itself to be a supranational institution at the service of imperialist states under their hegemony”.¹⁰

Criticisms of international law are not new and have not been directed only from the left. For many it has been “a kind of soft law without bite, highly dependent for compliance on the

good will of states rather than the usual sanctions of domestic law”,¹¹ as Costas Douzinas says. He identifies the months leading up to the 2003 Iraq War as the moment when international law “came briefly out of its closet of well-oiled diplomatic lunches and obscure academic seminars and glorified in a few months of fame”, and suggests that this “short period of international glory” ended after 2003. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine may signal an attempted resurgence, at least until it has served the immediate purposes of the United States and NATO.

A correct understanding of imperialism and its motives enables Communists to oppose the wars of imperialism regardless of the fickleness of international law. If, however, international law blows hot and cold, US policy is far more predictable. Douzinas reminds us that

“The often violent imposition of neoliberal economic policies upon the rest of the world has been a consistent policy of recent American administrations. ... It was President Clinton, first, who argued that globalisation is the historical stage of American dominance and adopted policies promoting the penetration of American capital around the world”.¹¹

Clinton’s vision of “globalisation” sounds remarkably like imperialism, and neither is it too troubled by the demands of international or humanitarian law. As Douzinas succinctly puts it:

“American foreign policy promotes and helps financially, militarily and through technology transfers capitalist client states irrespective of their political systems or human rights records.”¹²

We can be forgiven our scepticism when Western imperialists invoke the nebulous ‘international rules-based order’ to criticise Russia, China, or, for that matter, any country at all. The architecture of that ‘rules-based order’, a facet of the non-economic superstructure of imperialism, is one which many liberals would like to see strengthened, as long as it can be confined to the parameters of Western imperialist hegemony, parameters which have been wide enough to allow a succession of imperialist wars and interventions and the neocolonialist mockery of self-determination.

The reality of superexploitation

We hear much talk in the West of ‘jobs being exported abroad’ or, as Godels writes, “rising standards in developing countries”. If we were to accept these statements at face value it would be difficult to refute the suggestion that the material interests of workers in the Western imperialist nations are opposed to those of the Third World. If reality confirmed this view, we wouldn’t hesitate to accept it. Reality, however, suggests something different.

John Smith’s book *Imperialism in the 21st Century* begins with an account of the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh in 2013, when the structural collapse of a commercial building containing a garment factory resulted in the deaths of 1133 people and injuries to 2500. Bangladesh, he points out, is the country with the lowest factory worker wages in the world.¹³ He cites an investigation by a UK Parliamentary committee which acknowledged that “cheap labour and its corresponding low unit costs” represented Bangladesh’s “sole asset value”. The mark-ups on commodities produced by Bangladeshi workers, given the low cost of labour, are, therefore, extraordinarily high, the result of superexploitation.¹⁴

Smith also criticises the response to the disaster from some

Western labour organisations:

“Yet unions in Western Europe and North America outsourced the organisation of protests to anti-sweatshop activists and campaigning charities and did nothing to mobilise their members in solidarity.”¹⁵

Instead, he says, the response involved acting “in partnership with imperialist governments” to reinforce protectionist measures which seek to exclude Bangladesh from tariff-free access to the US market.

He seeks to show that exploitation of workers in the Third World is a result of wages being driven below the value of labour power and that “conditions in labour markets are at least as important as conditions in product and capital markets.”¹⁶ The accumulation of capital may be the primary cause of these developments but, as Smith writes, they have been “urged on them [the Global South] by imperialist governments, international financial government institutions (IFIs) and mainstream academics”.¹⁷

Even if Bangladesh isn’t a colony as such, it doesn’t need to be. Lenin’s words still bear repeating: “The non-economic superstructure which grows up on the basis of finance capital, its politics and ideology stimulates the striving for colonial conquest.” If the ferocious, coercive power of this superstructure were absent, it may be possible to speak of values being exchanged at values. However, then we could only blindly speculate about how capitalism may have developed, or whether it would be capitalism at all.

Smith debunks the notion that international differences in wages are determined by respective differences in productivity. Rather, he maintains that wages paid to workers in the Global South are affected by factors arising from conditions in the labour market and social structures and relations affecting the reproduction of labour power, including the suppression of the free movement of workers “between imperialist and low-wage countries”.¹⁸

It doesn’t follow, of course, that the developments on which John Smith shines a light ameliorate the contradictions of imperialism. In the final chapter of *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism*, Lenin explains the dialectical relationship between the decay and growth of capitalism:

“The extent to which monopolist capital has intensified all the contradictions of growth is generally known. It is sufficient to mention the high cost of living and the tyranny of the cartels. This intensification of contradictions constitutes the most powerful driving force of the transitional period of history, which began from the time of the final victory of world finance capital Monopolies, oligarchy, the striving of domination and not for freedom, the exploitation of an increasing number of small or weak nations by a handful of the richest or most powerful nations – all these have given birth to those distinctive characteristics of imperialism which compel us to define it as parasitic or decaying capitalism. More and more prominently there emerges, as one of the tendencies of imperialism, the creation of the ‘rentier state’ the usurer state, in which the bourgeoisie to an ever-increasing degree lives on the proceeds of capital exports and by ‘clipping coupons’. It would be a mistake to believe that this tendency to decay precludes the rapid growth of capitalism. It does not. In the epoch of imperialism, certain branches of industry, certain strata of the bourgeoisie and certain coun-

tries betray, to a greater or lesser degree, now one and another of these tendencies. On the whole, capitalism is growing far more rapidly than before; but this growth is not only becoming more uneven in general, its unevenness also manifests itself, in particular in the decay of the countries which are richest in capital (Britain).”¹⁹

To grasp the reality of superexploitation under the conditions of modern imperialism – characterised by the prominence of international globalised finance – Smith notes that capitalism “like any organic system, moves through stages of immaturity, maturity, and decay” and corresponding forms of “surplus value extraction”. He recognises that there is no sharp dividing line between stages, and at any stage, all three forms may operate.²⁰

In the “immature phase of capitalism” – corresponding to the era of “the most barbaric forms of primitive accumulation” – “absolute surplus value was the predominant form of the capital-labour relation”. The extraction of relative surplus-value predominated during the next stage as “capital took control of the production process”, leading us to our present juncture where

“the capitalist ruling class controls a greater portion of world wealth than ever in history and that wealth is growing faster than ever before, while the fraction of it being invested productively has never been lower. Global labour arbitrage – superexploitation – that is, forcing down the value of labour power, the third form of surplus-value increase, is now the increasingly predominant form of the capital-labour relation.”²⁰

I have leaned heavily on John Smith’s book, so it is useful to consider possible objections, at least those of fellow Marxists. Michael Roberts²¹ has responded to Smith’s claim²² that Marxist economists have “ignore(d) the fact that a substantial part of the surplus value that is captured by firms in imperialist countries and realised as profit was extracted from workers in low-wage countries”. Roberts cites his own work which shows that “one of the features of the post-1945 period is that the rate of surplus value has risen in the major economies while the rate of profit has fallen (on a secular basis)”. He further states that “although the levels of rates of profit are higher in the South, they too have fallen despite rising and higher *s/v*, whether caused by absolute surplus value, relative surplus value or superexploitation.” Roberts is not convinced “that Smith has proved that ‘superexploitation’ is the dominant characteristic of modern imperialism.” After all, he says, Smith himself shows that

“imperialism of the 19th century also relied on superexploitation of the masses in the colonies (to the level of slavery) and that, in the industrialisation of imperialist countries like Britain in the late 18th and early 19th century, driving wages below the value of labour power, was a powerful factor in the exploitation of labour”.²¹

It follows that superexploitation is not a purely Third World phenomenon but is also a feature in imperialist countries:

“‘Zero-hour’ contracts, where workers are at the beck and call of employers at all hours for minimal pay, now affect two million workers in Britain. Across Southern Europe, where youth unemployment rates are around 40-50%, young people are forced to live with their parents and earn pitiful amounts in low-wage retail and leisure jobs.”²¹

Furthermore, alongside superexploitation,

“there is also exploitation in the South through absolute surplus value and through the use of the latest technology to save labour (relative surplus value) just as there was in the development of industrial capitalism in the 19th century onwards.”²¹

It would appear, then, that the differences between Smith and Roberts amount to whether one believes that superexploitation is a permanent and ubiquitous feature of capitalism, reproducing itself through all of the latter’s stages, or whether it is only in the present phase of international globalised finance that superexploitation becomes dominant. What we can say for certain is that capitalism has always, and necessarily, relied heavily on profits obtained from superexploitation, whether of slaves, women, the young, migrant labourers, or workers in the poorer nations.

But what are the mechanisms implemented by the ‘Washington institutions’ in enabling this superexploitation? Prabhat Patnaik, writing at the close of the 20th century, suggested that as well as “providing space” for “the interests of globalised finance capital”, the institutions

“enforce a comprehensive set of measures involving deflation and devaluation upon the primary commodity-producing Third World economies, whose overall objective is to ensure price stability in the metropolitan centres which act as the entrepôt for global finance”.²³

The working class in the “metropolitan centres” is no disinterested spectator. As Patnaik notes, “large-scale unemployment in these centres which breaks the back of the trade union movement helps in the process.” However, the priorities of the Washington institutions are clear, and hugely detrimental to the poorer nations. Patnaik explains that

“the viability of a system based on monetary contracts depends crucially upon the rate of price increases within strict limits. Inflation, however, arises essentially as a result of competing claims which cannot be reconciled, that is, when the *ex ante* claims upon output of the workers, the capitalists and the raw materials producers add up to more than the output itself.”²³

How to resolve the situation? According to Patnaik,

“If at least one of the claims itself could be squeezed *ex ante* to the required level, then there would be no cause for inflation whatsoever. Since workers in the primary commodity sector are often unorganised, and are also located within vast labour reserves, their *ex ante* claims are in any case squeezable, a fact which underlies the social stability of metropolitan capital, but this diminution of the *ex ante* claims of the primary producers ... is further helped by the IMF’s policy package. Since all countries, even if they constitute competing exporters of the same primary commodity and of nothing else, are asked to implement the same package which involves all of them in competitive deflations-cum-devaluations in the name of promoting exports, this helps to lower the absolute level of the dollar price of the relevant commodity in the midst of ongoing inflation Thus, the IMF package ... is conducive to the interests of financial capital.”²⁴

Of course, the “social stability of metropolitan capital” seems far less certain now. On 22 March 2023, the BBC reported that Ukraine will become the first country at war to receive an IMF loan.²⁵ Indeed, the IMF “like rust, never sleeps”. None of the neoliberal prescriptions has resolved the structural crisis of capitalism, which has been accompanied by a ‘crisis of democracy’ in the West – a symptom of which is the liberal hysteria concerning the ‘rise of populism’. The rage of French workers at Macron’s undemocratic pension reforms has been met with savage police brutality. Just how attached is “metropolitan capital” to the principles of bourgeois democracy and just how different are the functions of the French state from those of the state in any country of the Third World?

The state in the periphery

The Indian Marxist Aijaz Ahmad provides an essential insight into the role of the “intermediate and auxiliary classes and strata” in nations of South Asia and the Middle East. Influenced by Antonio Gramsci’s analysis of the Southern Question in Italy, he looks at the class structure of peripheral societies and their role within the state. Why is it necessary for Marxists to pay close attention to intermediate and auxiliary classes and strata? Because

“Capitalism ... is comprised, principally, of a capitalist class and the proletariat. This principal aspect does not, however, exhaust the totality of that mode of production, and ... of the society based on that mode. The reproduction of any mode occurs within a complex social organisation which includes a number of forms of property, countless ways of appropriating labour, and myriad tasks of circulation, administration, education, and so on. Intermediate and auxiliary classes are reproduced in that wider space and would include, initially, all classes which are not the polar classes of a particular dominant mode of production.”²⁶

These classes are important because they “occupy a strategic field in the economy and politics of their country, thus making it possible for them to struggle for political dominance over other classes, including the bourgeoisie”. This in itself doesn’t determine whether they will “align themselves with the class above or the class below” However,

“[As] the balance of forces is usually in favour of the bourgeoisie and the landed elite, and since imperialism usually inserts itself into the dominated periphery in collaboration with those upper classes, the intermediate classes are normally predisposed to work within that alignment.”²⁷

In essence the intermediate classes are free to align themselves with any class or “mélange of class fractions”, in pursuit of their own interests. In addition, the “overdevelopment” of the state in relation to civil society in peripheral countries – a state constructed before capitalism is significantly developed – leads to

“a certain fetishisation of the state, and the creation of a whole range of mutually contradictory ideologies – eg Western style developmentalism, the ‘socialism’ of the radical nationalists with its emphasis on ‘nationalisations’, the ethno-religious fascism of the Khomeini variety – which are nonetheless united in viewing the state as the principal agency of social transformation.”²⁸

Whatever the precise combination of forms, a general feature is the “comparative weakness of the polar classes, namely the owners of large scale landed property on the one hand, the peasantry and the working classes on the other”. Ahmad insists²⁹ that none of these complexities is “unintelligible to the Marxist method”. Due attention must be paid to the transitional character of these social formations,

“where capitalism is dominant but not universal and where a variety of non-capitalist forms exist not only alongside capitalism, occupying their own effective space, but also intertwined with the capitalist mode itself, with profound effects on the social relations of capitalism”

On the question of nationalism, there is, therefore, no “class content that is integral to it prior to its emergence in particular historical circumstances.” The class content is determined, rather, in the very process of its emergence, by the power bloc that appropriates it. A feature of nationalism which lends particular appeal to the intermediate classes, is “its predilection to suppress the class question and to pose the question of liberation on the level of the ‘people’ or even on the level of the (classless) state”. This “supraclass appearance” of nationalism confers “immense mobilising power” on any class which can claim hegemony on its basis.³⁰

Of course, as Ahmad concludes, “intermediate classes do not forever seek to reproduce themselves as ‘intermediate’”. Where “the dynamic of capitalism has been much stronger after decolonisation, intermediate fractions seek to transform themselves into fully-fledged bourgeoisie, often through the agency of the state”.³¹ Here, I am reminded of John Smith’s observation:

“The Bangladeshi government, many of whose top officials are factory owners, responded in the same way to previous upsurges in 2006, 2010, and 2012 – with violent repression.”³²

If it is true, as Ahmad contends, that

“the distinguishing characteristics of the peripheral state ... arise not from the specific experience of colonialism as such, but from the historical peculiarities of capitalist development in these regions, and from the assimilation of these societies to the objective requirements of the expanding world market”,³³

then we can assume a similar connection between the nature of the state in poorer nations and the objective requirements of modern imperialism. Ahmad exposes the futility of studying the capitalist state in the periphery at a “theoretico-abstract level”, rather than considering the development of the specific class forces in each nation.³⁴

We can certainly reject the notion that “capitalism and democracy” are “linked virtually as Siamese twins”.³⁵ It becomes clearer why the ‘neoliberal experiment’ had to be conducted in Pinochet’s neofascist Chile. Ahmad’s work also helps to expose the naivety of debates which simplistically pitch ‘socialism’ against ‘nationalism’. The complexities of class, caste and ethnicity within peripheral nations lend themselves to the emergence of nationalisms which simultaneously sow division at home, and submit to the diktats of imperialism. On the other hand, as Prabhat Patnaik reminds us,

“there is a ‘nationalism’ that can play a historically progressive role ... which is anti-imperialist, secular, democratic, inclusive, and has an agenda of emancipation of the people through an improvement ... of their material conditions”.³⁶

It becomes necessary to defend those functions of the state which would make such projects possible, precisely those functions which the superstructure of imperialism seeks to diminish or remove.

Conclusions

Greg Godels, I acknowledge, does not deny the reality of uneven exchange; he simply asserts that unequal exchange is the outcome of uneven development. Along those lines, one may as well argue that slavery definitely existed, however, it was simply the outcome of uneven development. Is it possible to contemplate the arrival of socialism without a strategy which joins workers in both imperialist and Third World nations in struggles against unequal exchange? Confronted by capitalism, which can only survive through the exploitation of differentials between rates of exploitation, shouldn't the working class everywhere wage war on every aspect of exploitation and oppression? Are these not all essential components of class struggle?

There is a remarkable section in Godels' article:

“While one might happily concede that aspects of US power and influence have been challenged and dampened, while one might add that the US shows many signs of economic, political and social decline, it does not follow, nor is it likely, that any new ‘distribution of wealth and power’ will be more equitable or just. And most importantly, even if wealth and power were more equitably distributed between countries, there is little reason to believe it would more equitably distributed within those countries.”

Are we only expected to fight against the exploitation of the Third World after careful analysis of the class composition of each ruling class? Should we conduct checks for ‘good governance’ before we decide whether people deserve to eat? We may turn to Vijay Prashad's article in *CR106*, ‘Viewing Decolonisation Through a Marxist Lens’. Here Prashad explains the reaction within poorer nations to the war in Ukraine. He quotes the Indian foreign minister, a member of the right-wing BJP government who, when asked why India was continuing to buy oil from Russia, replied: “You know, I have been looking into this. The Russian oil that India buys in a month, Europe buys in an afternoon.”

Vijay Prashad also points out the hypocrisy of many in the West and the lack of

“focus on other wars that are ongoing on the planet, including the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo That country ... over the last 30 years has seen a death toll in the millions – perhaps up to 8 million dead – and almost zero international interest in that conflict.”³⁷

Is this not indicative of a lack of class solidarity?

If multipolarity is not a policy, but an emerging reality, the dynamic of that emergence must of course be closely studied. In response to those emerging conditions, workers and other exploited groups will devise strategies to resist the life-destroying and planet-destroying demands of imperialism. For poorer nations the emergence of multipolarity may offer respite and

opportunities which US domination has denied. Is anybody – any socialist or communist – really suggesting that this implies rejecting the need for dismantling capitalism or building socialism?

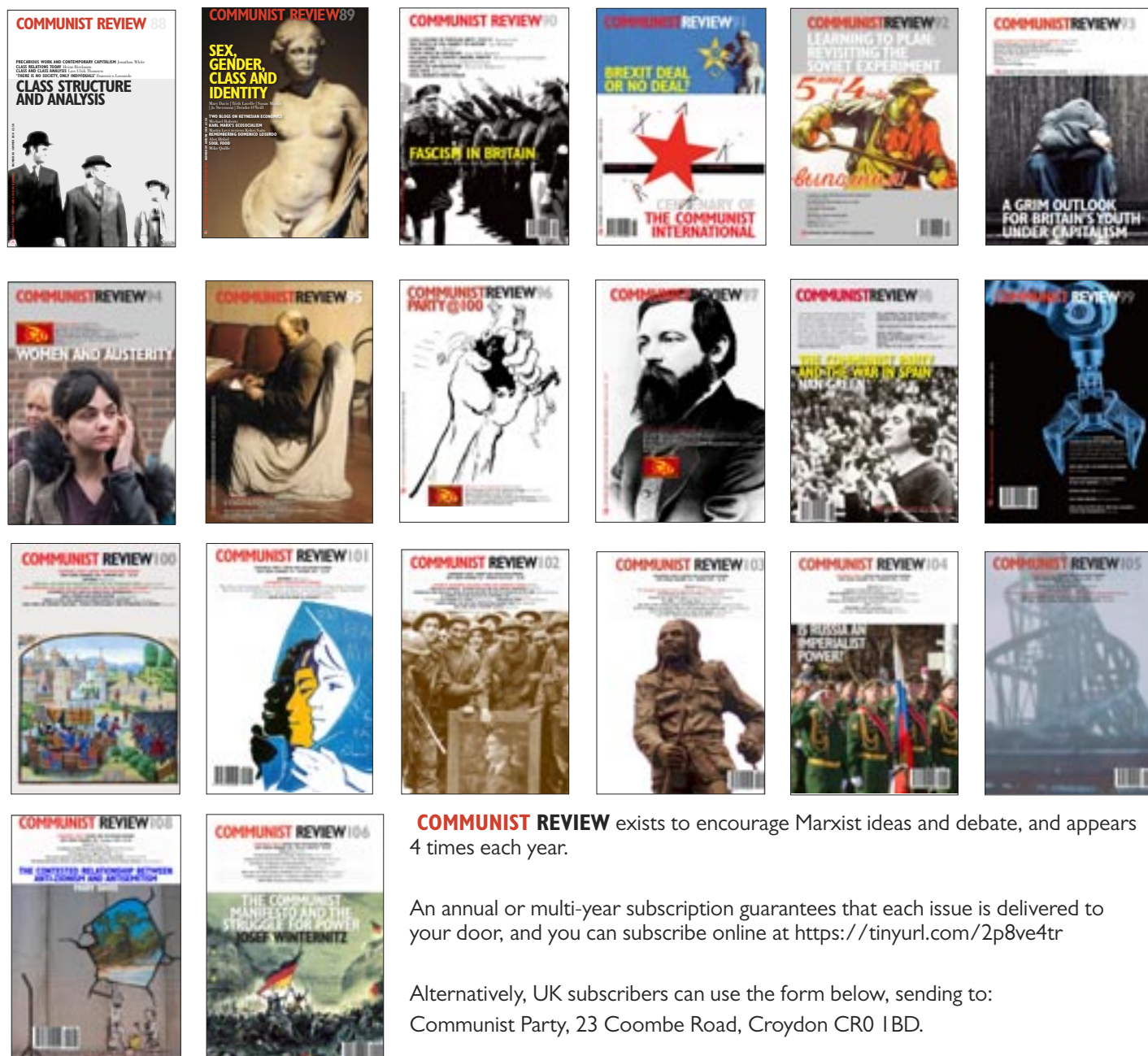
Communist Review has, over several issues, provided a platform for discussion of the Ukraine War, and in particular, whether Russia can be considered imperialist. It's clear that many comrades have differing views. I am also sure that the vast majority oppose the war, however they characterise the Russian state. I would suggest, though, that, whatever one's position, the question of peace in Ukraine is no more and no less a class question than the struggle against uneven exchange. Otherwise, our anti-imperialism would simply be guilty of mirroring the racialised legacies of the superstructures of imperialism.

Notes and References

- 1 G Godels, ‘The Peace Question and Imperialism’, in *CR104*, Summer 2022, pp 11-13.
- 2 Lenin, ‘Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism’, in *Lenin Selected Works*, Vol 1, Progress Publishers, 1977, p 697.
- 3 *Ibid*, p 692.
- 4 Lenin, as cited in A Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire – The Rise and Fall of Determination*, Princeton University Press, 2019, p 38.
- 5 S Khilnani, *Incarnations: India in 50 Lives*, Penguin/Random House, 2016, p 330.
- 6 Getachew, *Worldmaking after Empire*, *op cit*, p 39.
- 7 *Ibid*, p 40.
- 8 *Ibid*, p 51.
- 9 *Ibid*, pp 75-6.
- 10 *Morning Star*, ‘South African Communists denounce International Criminal Court's imperialist bias’, Sunday 19 March 2023; online at <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/south-african-communicists-denounce-international-criminal-courts-imperialist-bias>.
- 11 C Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, Routledge-Cavendish, 2007, p 198.
- 12 *Ibid*, p 192.
- 13 J Smith, *Imperialism in the Twenty-First Century*, Monthly Review Press, 2016, p 14.
- 14 *Ibid*, p 14-15.
- 15 *Ibid*, p 19.
- 16 *Ibid*, p 35.
- 17 *Ibid*, p 66.
- 18 *Ibid*, pp 33, 167-186.
- 19 Lenin, *Imperialism*, *op cit*, pp 727-8.
- 20 Smith, *op cit*, p 250.
- 21 M Roberts, ‘Imperialism and Superexploitation’, review of J Smith's book, at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/03/07/imperialism-and-super-exploitation/>, 7 March 2016.
- 22 Smith, *op cit*, p 248.
- 23 P Patnaik, ‘The Globalization of Capital’ in Patnaik, *The Retreat to Unfreedom: Essays on the Emerging World Order*, Tulika Books, 2003, p 29.
- 24 *Ibid*, pp 29-30.
- 25 ‘Ukraine to clinch first IMF loan to nation at war’, at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-65034765>.
- 26 A Ahmad, ‘Class, Nation and State’ in Ahmad, *Lineages of the Present: Political Essays*, Tulika, 1996, p 45.
- 27 *Ibid*, p 46.
- 28 *Ibid*, p 47.
- 29 *Ibid*, pp 47-52.
- 30 *Ibid*, p 68.
- 31 *Ibid*, p 71.
- 32 Smith, *op cit*, p 15.
- 33 A Ahmad, *op cit*, p 55.
- 34 *Ibid*, p. 49.
- 35 B Warren, cited in Ahmad, *Lineages*, *op cit*, p 29.
- 36 P Patnaik, ‘War, Peace and Nationalism’ in Patnaik, *op cit*, pp 45-6.
- 37 V Prashad, ‘Viewing Decolonisation through a Marxist Lens’, *CR106*, Winter 2022/23, pp 8-13.

COMMUNIST REVIEW

JOURNAL OF THEORY AND DISCUSSION



COMMUNIST REVIEW exists to encourage Marxist ideas and debate, and appears 4 times each year.

An annual or multi-year subscription guarantees that each issue is delivered to your door, and you can subscribe online at <https://tinyurl.com/2p8ve4tr>

Alternatively, UK subscribers can use the form below, sending to:
Communist Party, 23 Coombe Road, Croydon CR0 1BD.

Please send me a **Communist Review** subscription

name _____

address _____

_____ post code _____

I enclose a cheque as follows 1 year, £18 2 years, £28



THE KENYA RESISTANCE ARCHIVES AND LIBRARY ADD MISSING LINKS TO THE HISTORY OF KENYA

SHIRAZ DURRANI

THE OFFICIAL or ‘normal’ history of Kenya ignores or downplays resistance to capitalism and imperialism by the people of Kenya. Mostly ignored are organisations of those who opposed the rule by the comprador bourgeoisie. Some examples of such downplaying can be seen in many public sources. None of these, including most of the texts used for teaching in Kenya,¹ pays attention to the resistance to capitalism and to the struggle for socialism waged by many organisations and their members. Also ignored are class and ideological struggles waged by those resisting capitalism and the rule of the comprador class.

In recent years, *The Kenya Socialist*,² *Communist Review*³ and Vita Books⁴ have published a number of studies of Kenyan movements and personalities who have contributed to the struggle for liberation from colonialism and imperialism, both before and after independence. Many of these articles have challenged the traditional history of Kenya and added class and resistance dimensions which are missing from official history, as well as from history as taught in schools, colleges and universities in Kenya.

What may not be obvious at the first readings of such material are the sources used. Many of them are from the Kenya Resistance Archives (KRA), which consists of material from the underground resistance in Kenya, mostly from the 1980s to about the 1990s. Those movements, their ideology, leadership and activities do not feature in the mainstream history of Kenya. Their very existence is denied or passed over lightly.

The Kenya Resistance Archives and Library (KRAL) originated in the work of one of the cells of the underground December Twelve Movement (DTM)^{2h,3f} – the Kabete Cell,⁵ with its main sub-cells, Ngara and Nairobi. It thus does not include material collected by other DTM cells. Security consideration required minimum direct contact between the cells. The KRAL also does not include publications from before the formation of the Kabete Cell, around 1975. It is known, however, that some earlier material is available with some founder members of the DTM. Similarly, material on the DTM’s successor organisation MWAKENYA (MK)^{2h,3f} is available with its former officials; while much of the archives of UMOJA, which merged into MWAKENYA, was lost through administrative mishap, although some key documents are available in the KRA.

The Kenya Resistance Archives

The KRA is a unique collection brought together and looked after by political activists and independent institutions not funded or supported by public bodies. It is, indeed, part of resistance which it documents. No public library, archive or research

institute in Kenya has collected, disseminated or archived the material that is available in the KRA. This is an aspect of the class struggle in Kenya, where the ruling class decides what is ‘history’, which it sees from its own class perspective, while working people record and disseminate their version of history in their own ways. The former is consolidated through government policies, education and the mass media, while the latter is allowed to gradually die. However, it is stored in people’s memory and disseminated through oral and alternative media.

It was the British government that destroyed the archives and libraries of Mau Mau before being forced to give independence to Kenya. The full story of the collection and the destruction of these records is available in various records.⁶ The comprador bourgeois government under Jomo Kenyatta and KANU, handed power by the departing colonial power, made sure that resistance and its documents were not allowed to see the light of day. President Daniel arap Moi then followed Kenyatta’s *nyayos*⁷ in repressing resistance and not allowing the documents to be collected. It is then remarkable that the KRA has been preserved, having survived journeys to and from London, and can be seen in Nairobi at the Ukombozi (‘Liberation’) Library today. The lesson from this experience is relevant to resistance organisations in Kenya and elsewhere, to ensure that their documents are well preserved, otherwise their history will not be recorded or survive.

The Kabete Cell

Many of the documents held by the Kabete Cell in 1984 had to be destroyed once one of its members was interrogated by the Special Branch of the Kenya Police. While it did not have all the underground publications of the DTM, the cell had some significant titles as well as many working papers and work in progress, together with the typewriter used for some underground publications, the DTM rubber stamp and other equipment. All this had to be destroyed. Yet some important material was saved and sent to London in 1978 by another member of the cell. In the late 1990s, this was then sent in small batches to MK-DTM in Nairobi. The material was passed on to Ukombozi Library once it was set up in 2017 by Vita Books, MK-DTM and the Mau Mau Research Centre.

The material included documents of the Kabete Cell and the main cells under it – the Nairobi Cell (based at the University of Nairobi, but including many worker and peasant members under its sub-cells) and the Ngara Cell, where the DTM’s main library was located. The Kabete Cell split into a number of semi-independent cells after the suspension of its

“The comprador bourgeois government under Jomo Kenyatta and KANU, handed power by the departing colonial power, made sure that resistance and its documents were not allowed to see the light of day. President Daniel arap Moi then followed Kenyatta’s *nyayos*⁷ in repressing resistance and not allowing the documents to be collected. It is then remarkable that the KRA has been preserved, having survived journeys to and from London, and can be seen in Nairobi at the Ukombozi (‘Liberation’) Library today.”

leader by members around 1983-84, and material from these cells is not included in the KRA. However, Kabete cell members in London later re-established links with Upande Mwingine, formed from the earlier Ngara Cell. Some of its material was used for MWAKENYA publications, and these are also part of the KRA.

The Kabete Cell also had, as its library, many Marxist and progressive Kenyan titles, as well as books from socialist and revolutionary countries around the world. While the main DTM Library at the Ngara Cell included many more titles, this was also a substantial collection which could not be sent to London. Other cells, now independent of the Kabete cell, were reluctant to connect with it for security reasons, once one of its members had been identified as ‘an enemy agent’ by the Special Branch. It was therefore decided to pass on these key books to contacts at the University of Nairobi and among communities around Nairobi. A member of the Kabete Cell took great risks and deposited the books among those needing them. They were used and distributed among other cells and progressive individuals.

An important collection that the Kabete Cell had was the 36 carvings on Mau Mau by Wakamba carver activists. Photos of some of these accompanied an earlier *CR* article.^{3c} The carvings were too heavy to be transported to London when the Kabete cell came under attack, nor was it possible to pass them onto other cells because of the security concerns already mentioned. A Kabete Cell member later contacted Willy Mutunga⁸, a trusted member of DTM who, despite having been previously detained, was willing to support the cell by taking the carvings for safe keeping. A small number of the carvings were taken to London after Moi was no longer in power and it became possible for cell members to return to Kenya. The remaining carvings were distributed among various rural communities in Kenya as part of the people’s heritage.

An important DTM document that was saved and taken to London was *Publishing, An Annotated Bibliography and Study Guide*. It was an internal document to inform DTM publishing activities, and a copy is included in the KRA.⁹ Among the articles listed were:

- Marx, *Debates on Freedom of the Press*¹⁰
- Engels, *Marx and the Neue Rheinische Zeitung* (1848-49)¹¹
- Lenin, *Draft of a Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra and Zarya*¹², *Declaration of the Editorial Board of Iskra*,¹³ *The Character of Our Newspapers*¹⁴.
- Stalin, articles for the Georgia revolutionary press 1901-1911¹⁵
- Mao Zedong, *Introducing ‘The Communist’*¹⁶, *Introducing ‘The*

*Chinese Worker’*¹⁷, *Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing*¹⁸, *Talks at the Yen’an Forum on Literature and Art*¹⁹

● Stanley Harrison, *Poor Mens’ Guardians: A record of the struggle for a democratic newspaper press, 1763-1973*.²⁰

An interesting feature of the work of the Kabete Cell was that it contributed a large number of articles to local and international journals. Some of these were later published by Vita Books, Nairobi, in a number of books. These include *Information and Liberation: Writings on the politics of information and librarianship* (2008) by Shiraz Durrani. Some more articles written at a later period are to be included in a forthcoming book, *Guerrilla Incursions into the Capitalist Mindset: Essays with focus on Kenya, 1979-2023*.

A decisive period for the Kabete Cell was an article by Shiraz Durrani on Pio Gama Pinto, published in the *Standard* in 1984. Events after this led to the exile of the Kabete Cell to London (one of whose members and the leader having earlier been suspended). But the early drafts of the material on Pinto, as well as other manuscripts on Makhan Singh, Mau Mau and the history of publishing, were all written in Kenya prior to the exile in 1984. They would have been published in Kenya, but the intervention by the Special Branch interrupted this process. However they were all published later by Vita Books, initially based in London but moving to Nairobi in 2017.

The Nairobi Cell

Among the material saved from the work of the Nairobi Cell, now available in the KRA, are the proceedings of a number of workshops for working-class librarians at the University of Nairobi and other libraries in Nairobi. These were reproduced in the *University of Nairobi Library Magazine*, later renamed *Sauti ya Wakutubi*. Four issues of the magazine were printed and published at the Library.

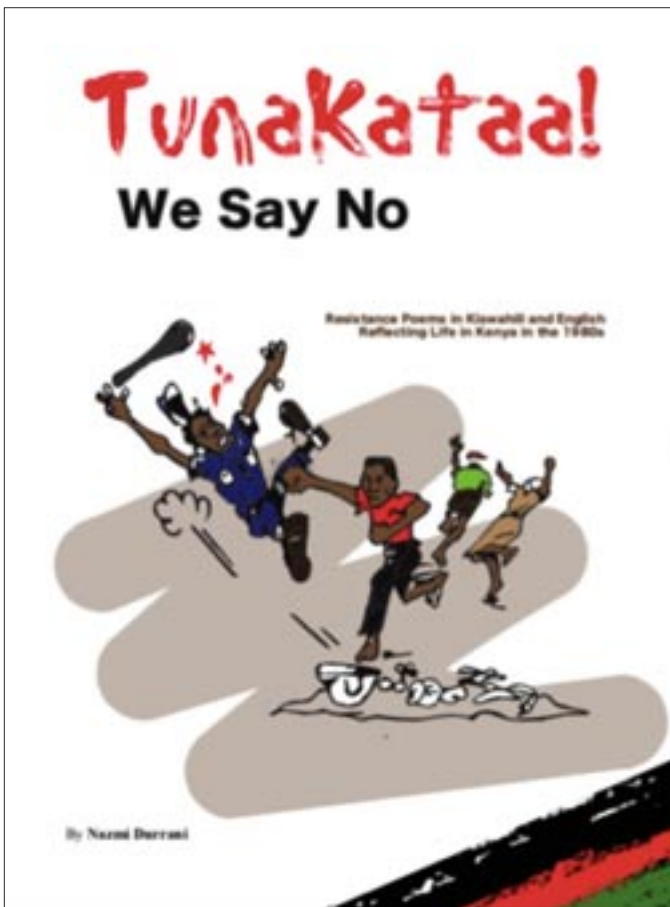
The Nairobi Cell also created a Sehemu ya Utungaji – creative wing – for artwork and creative activities. It also co-produced the play, *Kinjikitile, Maji Maji* with Takhto Arts, a Nairobi play group.²¹ The play ran at the University of Nairobi Education theatre in 1984 and was directed by a member of the Kabete Cell. The KRA has full documentation, including photos, of the play.

The focus of material collected in the KRA moved to London where the former Kabete Cell members were active in UMOJA and MWAKENYA. The material they collected form the rest of KRA. The histories of DTM, UMOJA and MWAKENYA have been documented in recent years^{2h,3f} or in forthcoming articles.²²

The Ngara Cell and the Kenya Resistance Library (KRL)

The Kabete Cell was formed around 1977-78. It soon began to expand and formed other cells under it. The first one to be set up, around 1978, was the Ngara Cell, which in time became one of the most productive cells in the Kabete 'cell family'. Its publications are held in London and will be moved to Ukombozi Library in due course.

Some details of the work of the Ngara Cell are mentioned in *Liberating Mind*²³, which "consists of biographies of progressive South Asian Kenyans written by Nazmi Durrani. Originally published in Gujarati in the 1980s, they are available here in English for the first time, together with the original Gujarati." This was in the tradition of DTM activists to write on the history of their nationalities. The cell member also wrote resistance poems in Kiswahili and translated them into English, with accompanying drawings. The poems are to be published by Vita Books in 2023 under the title *Tunakataa! We Say No!* There are many unpublished works by the cell which are included in the KRA.



It is, however, the information and documentation work for which the Ngara Cell is better known. It produced a large number of regular publications which give a clear picture of the class struggle in Kenya. These are aspects that have been ignored by most historians and they indicate the political orientation of the DTM. The publications included:

- *Article 5*: a monthly journal inspired by Article 5 of the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights, which states that "No-one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment." *Article 5* collected newspaper cuttings highlighting the regime's human rights abuses.
- *Hali Ya Nchi* ('State of the Country'), a fortnightly summary of events in Kenya, highlighting repression by the regime, acts of resistance by Kenyans and important events on the economic, political and social fronts.

- *Upande Mwingine* ('The Other Side'), a monthly summary of resistance to the regime by workers, peasants, students and generally by all democratic-minded Kenyans. It included strikes, demonstrations and other activities.

The Ngara Cell at this period took up different names on its publications, but is known generally as *Upande Mwingine*, and this is the name used here to distinguish its work from the earlier Ngara Cell. In the 1990s, the Kabete Cell members in London re-established links with *Upande Mwingine* and exchanged a large amount of information and activities.

Besides the publications mentioned above, *Upande Mwingine* started a photo-documentation work of the main resistance fighters against colonialism. It sent to London over a hundred photographs, with details of sources and brief histories. The plan was for Vita Books to publish these in the 1990s as a pictorial history of resistance in Kenya; but this was forestalled by the death of the key member of *Upande Mwingine* (as described in *Liberating Minds*). Since then, lack of resources and other difficulties have prevented publication. However, all the material, photos and notes are available in the KRA, currently in London to be transported to Ukombozi Library in due course.

The work of *Upande Mwingine* is acknowledged by MWAKENYA which used the research by the group for its 1987 publication, *Kenya, Register of Resistance, 1986*, which says:²⁴

"Upande Mwingine – Register Of Resistance

We here present this analysis of the actions of the workers, peasants, students, small traders for the year 1986, to expose the lies of the Moi-KANU regime. The analysis is based on the very brilliant, meticulous monthly and annual documentation of the resistance deeds and actions of workers, peasants, and students etc in industry, commerce, plantations, schools and colleges, carried out by *Upande Mwingine*, the underground workers' organ. *Upande Mwingine* has systematically compiled this Kiswahili register of strikes and demonstrations by the working people over a number of years. But we have chosen 1986 deliberately. 1986 saw the heightening of repression in Kenya under the guise of hunting for MWAKENYA cadres. The Register shows quite clearly that it is the mass movement of Kenyans that is basically frightening the regime. The regime fears that MWAKENYA will give the correct political direction to this mass unrest."

All these documents, MWAKENYA's *Register of Resistance* and many publications from *Upande Mwingine* are available at the Kenya Resistance Archives. The Archives are indeed an important resource of a period of resistance that would otherwise remain undocumented and hence unknown to future generations.

The Library

Besides all the above work, it is the Ngara Cell's Library that remains a lasting legacy to the cell and the DTM. It was set up by teacher and librarian Nazmi Durrani, and contained over a thousand books, including complete sets of *Selected Works* of Marx, Lenin, Stalin and Mao. Such publications were banned in Kenya, and anyone found with them was likely to be detained. In addition, the Library included key works from resistance movements around the world. It was located in Nazmi's house in the Ngara district of Nairobi, hence the name Ngara Cell. After Nazmi's death in an accident in 1990, the books were looked after by members of his family and later

passed on to other members of the (reconstituted) Ngara Cell. It was in 2017 that the books were transferred to the Ukombozi Library on its foundation.

Vita Books and the Ukombozi Library are the two organisations that continue to support the DTM Library and archival legacy of the DTM, and move it forward to meet today's needs. While the Archives and Library would not have survived without their support, their history remains outside the scope of this article. However, the following interviews and articles provide some background to their work and history:

- 1 Shiraz Durrani and Kimani Waweru, interviewed by Stephanie Kitchen (2017), at <https://www.readafricanbooks.com/publisher-profiles/shiraz-durrani-and-kimani-waweru/>.
- 2 Shiraz Durrani and Kimani Waweru, *Vita Books, The Home of Kenya Left and the Forgotten Radical Histories*, at https://www.academia.edu/93677210/Vita_Books_The_Home_of_Kenya_Left_and_the_Forgotten_Radical_Histories.
- 3 Kimani Waweru and Loren Balhorn, *Kenya's First Socialist Library*, at <https://www.rosalux.de/en/news/id/41361/kenyasfirst-socialist-library/>.
- 4 Kimani Waweru, 'Ukombozi Library', in *The Kenya Socialist*, No 5, 2022, pp 31-2.

A previous article in this journal^{3c} also gave a brief introduction to the Ukombozi Library.

Conclusion

While a number of public institutes, libraries and archives in Kenya have important documents on the country's history, none, as far as can be ascertained, holds material like that contained in the Kenya Resistance Archives. This is a reflection of the ongoing class struggle in Kenya, where the ruling class controls what information and documents should and could be collected by public institutions. It is possible that foreign libraries such as the Library of Congress and the British Council Library hold such material. If so, they are not shared with Kenyan public. This points to the importance of KRA as perhaps the only publicly available record of resistance material in Kenya.

Notes and References

- 1 See, for example: *A Brief History of Kenya*, at <http://www.kenyarep-jp.com/en/kenya/history/>; (2) A Boddy-Evans, same title, at <https://www.thoughtco.com/brief-history-of-kenya-44232/>; (3) *History of Kenya* at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/> (all accessed: 28.06.2023).
- 2 *The Kenya Socialist* (TKS) articles include the following: (a) 'Socialism Is The Way Ahead', TKS No 1, 2019, pp 4-5; (b) 'Kenya Resists: Artists Challenge the Hawk in the Sky', TKS No 1, 2019, pp 19-25; (c) 'Battles of Ideologies in Kenya: The Hidden Face of Capitalism', TKS No 2, 2020, pp 15-18; (d) 'Assessing Fitz de Souza's Role in the Liberation of Kenya: Life & Times of de Souza', TKS No 2, 2020, pp 9-22; (e) 'Kenya: Repression and Resistance from Colony to Neo-Colony, 1948-1990', TKS No 3, 2020, pp 7-25; (f) 'Kenya: Repression and Resistance: From Colony to Neo-Colony, 1948-1990, Part 2: Illustrations', TKS No 4, 2022, pp 23-45; (g) 'The World is Changing; Will Kenya Follow Suit?', TKS No 5, 2022, pp 1-4; (h) 'Lessons from the Underground: How DTM Linked Theory With Practice in Kenya', TKS No 5, 2022, pp 5-18.
- 3 The *Communist Review* articles include the following: (a) S Durrani, 'Mau Mau, the Revolutionary Force from Kenya', Part 1, CR67, Spring 2013, pp 2-8; Part 2, CR68, Summer 2013, pp 10-15; Part 3, CR69, Autumn 2013, pp 8-13; (b) S Durrani, 'Reflections on the Revolutionary Legacy of Makhan Singh in Kenya', CR73, Autumn 2014, pp 10-17; (c) S Durrani, 'Kenya Resists: Artists Challenge

- the Hawk in the Sky', CR91, Spring 2019, pp 15-19; (d) M Levy, 'A significant step forward for Kenya socialists: review of *The Kenya Socialist*, No 1, edited by Shiraz Durrani and Kimani Waweru, CR94, Winter 2019/20, p 31; (e) S Durrani, 'The Ideological Struggle between Capitalism and Socialism in Kenya', CR103, Spring 2022, pp 2-7; (f) S Durrani, 'Lessons from the Underground: Kenya's December Twelve Movement Linked Theory with Practice in the 1970s', CR105, Autumn 2022, pp 2-11.
- 4 Books published by Vita Books are available at <https://www.africanbookscollective.com/search-results?form.keywords=vita+books>.
- 5 Some aspects of the work of the Kabete Cell are covered in S Durrani, *Progressive Librarianship: Perspectives from Kenya and Britain, 1979-2010*, Vita Books, Nairobi, 2014. See especially the section, 'The Library Cell', pp 94-102.
- 6 See for example, DL Barnett and K Njama, *Mau Mau from Within: Autobiography and analysis of Kenya's peasant revolt*, Monthly Review Press, New York, 1966; online at <https://archive.org/details/maumaufromwithin00dona/page/n5/mod/e/2up>, and republished by Awaaz, and Daraja Press, 2021.
- 7 = footprints in Swahili.
- 8 Dr Willy Mutunga was the Chief Justice and President of the Supreme Court of Kenya from 2011 to 2016.
- 9 Some details of the bibliography are available in S Durrani, *Progressive Librarianship, op cit*, pp 98-102.
- 10 In K Marx and F Engels, *Collected Works (MECW)*, Vol 1, pp 132-181.
- 11 In MECW, Vol 26, pp 120-8.
- 12 In Lenin, *Collected Works (LCW)*, Vol 4, pp 320-330.
- 13 In *Ibid*, pp 351-6.
- 14 In LCW, Vol 26, pp 96-8.
- 15 In Stalin, *Works*, Vols 1 and 2.
- 16 In *Selected Works of Mao Tse-Tung*: Foreign Languages Press, Peking (MSW-P), Vol 2, pp 285ff; Lawrence & Wishart, London (MSW-L), Vol 3, pp 53-65.
- 17 In MSW-P, Vol 2, pp 403-5; MSW-L, Vol 3, pp 175-6.
- 18 In MSW-P, Vol 3, pp 53-68; MSW-L, Vol 4, pp 46-62, as *Oppose the Party's 'Eight-Legged Essay'*.
- 19 In MSW-P, Vol 3, pp 69-98; MSW-L, Vol 4, pp 63-93.
- 20 Lawrence & Wishart, 1974.
- 21 See Note 3c, pp 16-17.
- 22 'UMOJA Seen Through its Documents, 1987-1990: The United Movement for Democracy in Kenya takes up the baton from December Twelve Movement', to be published in two parts in TKS; MWAKENYA: Questions from the 'Sunday Nation', Nairobi (forthcoming).
- 23 N Durrani, *Liberating Minds, Restoring Kenyan History: Anti-imperialist resistance by progressive South Asian Kenyans, 1884-1965*, Vita Books, Nairobi, 2007.
- 24 MWAKENYA, *Kenya, Register of Resistance*, 1986, p 7.



Vita Books is an independent Kenyan publisher supporting people's struggles to create societies based on the principles of equality and justice. It aims to redress working people's lack of power over information, communication and the media which then restricts their access to ideas and experiences to resist imperialism. Vita Books strives to connect and unite progressive people everywhere in their battles for justice and equality for everyone. It was formed in 1986 in London by Kenyans forced to seek asylum by the oppressive government under President Daniel arap Moi. It publishes material with focus on people's resistance to imperialism and their struggle for socialism. <https://vitabooks.co.ke>



SOUL FOOD FRAN LOCK BUT BILLIONAIRES ARE PEOPLE TOO (POETRY AND THE REDRESS OF UNEQUAL SYMPATHY)



Imprinted at London, for G. Lawrenson, April 23. 1649

A MIDST ROLLING NEWS coverage of the Titan sub disaster, I scrapped the first draft of this column, and began again, forcibly struck as I was – as I continue to be – by the alarming differential of media attention, public sympathy, and international aid between those with money and those without. While futile search and rescue efforts were underway for the OceanGate submersible, a tragedy of arguably far greater magnitude was occurring off the coast of Greece, where a fishing trawler carrying more than 700 ‘migrants’, including over 100 children, capsized. At time of writing, 82 passengers are confirmed dead, and over 500 people are still missing. The UN reports that since 2014 more than 26,000 people have died or gone missing in desperate attempts to migrate by sea. It felt important to address the inequality of response afforded the poor and vulnerable, on the sea and on the land.

The loss of the Titan has been widely pitched as a morality tale, where a monumental sense of entitlement and a fatal lack of humility met in a moment of catastrophic and vividly embodied hubris. What else is there to say? I was contemplating this as our morally compromised ex-PM weighed in via his *Daily Mail* column to describe the passengers of the Titan as “heroes”, who died while “pushing out the frontiers of human knowledge and experience” and that their tourist trip to the wreck of the *Titanic* filled him with “pride”.

The Tory government – and economic elites generally – desperately need the irresponsible personal choices of privileged individuals to be rebranded as in some way inherently beneficial for wider society, and a mainstream media content to peddle the myth that when rich people do it, ‘risk-taking’ is, in some nebulous and ill-defined way, noble, brave or glamorous. They need this toxic ideology to legitimate their daily gambles with financial markets, health and housing infrastructure, and with our very lives. Such logics brought us the housing crisis of 2008, the callous mishandling of a global pandemic, and the heart-rending tragedy of Grenfell Tower, where the recklessness and greed driving deregulation meant that working-class people could be legally housed in fatally unsafe properties. In this way the rich have always recuperated their stupidity and failure as value, however many of us (or each other) they kill along the way. The double standard is breathtaking. I find myself thinking about the way that victims of the Hillsborough disaster were blamed for their own deaths and injuries, by government, by the police, and in the press. We saw this victim-blaming post-Grenfell too. If you’re rich you can do no wrong, money sanctifies you. If you’re poor, you can never be innocent or suffering enough not to be blamed for your own sad fate.

I am thinking once again about the impossible choices people make when they undertake a small-boat (sometimes a trawler, more often just a dinghy with an outboard motor) crossing for the chance of a better life. Many are fleeing war, persecution, and various registers of abject poverty in their own country. They get on those boats, not in the confident expectation that some aura of specialness will protect them, but because the slim chance they have in the water is better than the no chance they have back on land.

Research conducted earlier this year by Liberty Investigates¹ found that, in November of 2021, hundreds of vulnerable migrants appear to have been abandoned to their fates when the UK coastguard “effectively ignored” reports of small boats in distress. Around 440 would appear to have been left adrift after the coastguard failed to send any rescue vessels to 19

reported small boats carrying ‘migrants’ in UK waters. While government rhetoric paid lip-service to concern by denouncing smugglers and traffickers for ‘endangering lives’, it is telling that, in four cases from November 2021, “reconnaissance planes and drones entered the airspace” near the vessels in distress, but that these aircraft were incapable of providing direct assistance to those aboard. They did nothing to prompt assistance to be sent either. According to *Tech Monitor*, in the five years to 2022, the UK had spent more than £1 bn on surveillance technology for use in the Channel.² None of that was earmarked towards rescue efforts.

The right wing – in Britain and abroad – operates a sick hierarchy of ‘grievability’ that says some lives are worth neither saving nor mourning. I make this observation in the context of the so-called Illegal Migration Bill working itself through the Westminster Parliament. The Bill sets out a plan that will effectively render the asylum claims of anyone who arrives “irregularly” into the UK “inadmissible”. The Refugee Council quite rightly points out that there is little-to-no evidence that the measures set out in the Bill will act as an effective deterrent to those crossing the Channel in small boats; the Bill does nothing to tackle the reasons people undertake such dangerous and difficult journeys; it merely criminalises and further persecutes those who have lost everything.

The poems here make room for a radical expression of sympathy. They do so in various ways: through the direct and compassionate acknowledgement of the lives that have been lost, by affording those lives the space of the page, and by foregrounding them in consciousness with a meticulous care seldom afforded them as human beings. These are also poems of accounting, poems that understand that a reckoning with power and with the powerful is the chief duty we owe to the dead. All perform the special dual operation of poetry: addressing two audiences simultaneously, so that at their most furious and excoriating they also give us their most tender expression of care.

Sunken Levels, by Jim Aitken, addresses the sinking of the ‘unnamed boat’ directly. The poem is a meditation on the backgrounding of individual lives (and deaths) that reduces poor, brown human beings to absent subjects within wealth-obsessed neoliberal culture. It also calls our attention to the invisible nature of class itself, and the ways in which a collective denial of its existence only serves to perpetuate harm. The poem takes on the idea of sinking in both its figurative and literal sense: poor people sink beneath the threshold of attention, class is a submerged but ever-present threat to life. One of the most striking things about Aitken’s poem is the way in which it recognises the passengers on board the Titan as fellow-victims of this mindset. Only in a society that venerates money, and where the glamour of wealth is allowed to generate its own aura of invincibility, would you find those willing to pay “£200,000” to descend 4,000 meters below the ocean surface.

Aitken’s poem operates with deceptive simplicity: the reader is lowered down through levels of newsworthiness, from billionaire submarine passengers to Pakistani refugees, to the “thirty-nine Vietnamese/ lives lost, found inside a container lorry”. By expanding the focus to encompass those lives, Aitken shifts the poem from the binary of basic comparison to evoke a far more complex global enmeshment in the machinery of capitalism.

In the tenth stanza the poem performs a reversal, and begins to engage with the act of restitution and ‘raising’. While individual lives may be irrecoverable, the poem dares to hope

that as a society we are not beyond redemption; that we might be propelled to the surface, might “raise the many”, through a vigorous and collective questioning of the systems that dominate our lives and the cultural myths they spin around us.

Land Law in England 1070-1890, by Patrick Davidson Roberts, takes a different approach, engaging the broad sweep of history. Using the cadences and rhythms of an early-modern folk ballad, it tells the story of how the rich cement their will to power as written law and moral right, the better to crush generations of working men and women: from agrarian commons, through enclosure and privatisation, to the industrial revolution and the grim reality of work in factories, mills and mines. As with Aitken’s poem the poor are disappeared: physically removed from the land they used to tend, but also “held down” as numbers, bound “in their catalogue”, reduced to statistics, figured as faceless economic units to be administered, or as problems to be solved within the language, apparatus and collective imagination of the state.

While Roberts’ poem covers a wide span of historical ground – from the Norman Conquest, by which the king acquired (stole) the ultimate title to all land in England, through the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381, where King Richard II met with Wat Tyler at Smithfield to make promises he would not keep, and where Tyler was killed by the Mayor of London, up to the Diggers’ Occupation of St George’s Hill in 1649, where they began to cultivate the common land in contravention of the law and to pull down enclosures – use of the personal collective pronoun “us”, and the centring of the poem within particular local places, creates a sense of continuity within a class struggle that is more typically framed as a series of disconnected incidents. This allows us to apprehend the deliberate steps by which the poor are divested of their rights, and by which the rich and powerful naturalise their superiority and dominion. While the poem’s trajectory is ultimately despairing, its uncanny temporality calls forth a solidarity with our forefathers and forebrothers, stretching back into the past. It provides us with a vision of our history that is seldom taught and often hidden from sight.

The language of *Land Law in England* is truly Blakeian. The final lines of the fourth stanza could equally belong in Winstanley’s *Diggers’ Song* or Blake’s *Jerusalem*. This feels vitally important: the poem is proposing poetry and song as an alternate account and way of reading history, a language of reply and resistance to that other, official language of the law.

The title of *Salvage*, by Bridget Frances Keating, is an eerie riff on the idea of maritime salvage. In this poem the sea-changed voices of the dead extend a sinister welcome to a group of unspecified addressees numbered amongst the recently drowned. In the opening two stanzas the sunken wreck of a ship is evoked with the macabre theatricality of a haunted mansion in a Victorian Gothic romance: “This frontier of fog”, “this conceit/ of stricken timbers”. “Conceit” in particular creates a sense of fun-house unreality, as if the wreckage were a ride in a theme park, and not a real, historical grave site. In the third stanza the poem breaks into accusatory direct address, with the use of the heavily emphasised “you” to lay responsibility for the diminishment of the ocean, its dangers, and its tragedies firmly at the feet of those recently arrived interlopers.

The most disturbing and arresting lines of the poem come, I think, in the fourth stanza where eels (presumably pelican eels that can live at depths of up to 3000 meters) are “spooning/ the futureless sea into/ every broken mouth from port to starboard”. Invoking the “broken mouths” reconnects the

dreamy unreality of the poem to the literal bodies of the dead, and the idea of “the futureless sea” suggests both the irrecoverable permanence of the sunken state, and the strange simultaneous time of the ocean, where all disasters occupy the same endless and uncanny ‘now’.

In the final two stanzas Keating seeds references that suggest the central theme of the poem is the circular hubris of the rich and powerful. “We were once like you” say the dead, now transformed into shoals of fish, the “silvered coin” of their “own realm”. These signifiers of riches suggest that the speakers of the poem may well be the Titanic’s wealthy passengers. Their addressees could be the crew of the Titan, but equally they could be any wealthy seafarer whose arrogance and entitlement proved terminal. The reader is left wondering who or what is “salvaged”, rescued, retrieved or preserved? As all are “changed” into the members of a more diverse and equal biotariat³, perhaps what is salvaged is something like the soul.

Sunken Levels by Jim Aitken

It was the first item on the news
for days, the Titan submersible
taking a group to see the Titanic wreck.

The loss of life was indeed tragic, as was
the £200,000 fee charged to those on board
to view the wreck and never return home alive.

Less newsworthy was the unnamed boat
that sunk in stormy seas off the Grecian coast
with the loss of eighty lives, mainly Pakistanis.

And less newsworthy the thirty-nine Vietnamese
lives lost, found inside a container lorry. Neither
the Pakistanis or the Vietnamese had names, it seems,

Unlike those in the Titan submersible who were all
named. The difference was all to do with wealth,
with class status, for the migrants were simply poor

And those in the submersible had cash to throw away.
It reminded me of Bezos and his rocket into space
thanking his Amazon workers for this unseemly waste.

With a media that worships wealth and despises the poor
both at home and abroad, though especially abroad,
the difference in coverage was class-ridden and
predictable.

Yet they say that class is over these days; that it doesn’t
matter anymore. Yet, there is no level to which the wealthy
will sink to stay wealthy – should this not be learned anew?

Or do we all sink together so that the wealthy can
continue to be wealthy at the expense of the world’s poor
as the land burns and the sea levels rise to sink even them?

Or do we instead talk of rich and poor all over again and
give
place for egalitarian dreams to flourish; to challenge the all-
consuming, insatiable appetites of the few and raise the
many?

Land Law in England 1070-1890
by Patrick Davidson Roberts

Four years from the battle they cut the fields with salt.
The terror-tongue amongst us and our own old words
burned out.
They held us down as numbers: our lives, our homes, our
cattle.
They bound us in their catalogue, ten years from the battle.

These few months from Smithfield, where his promises
made fools.
So you are you shall remain and worse. The law of rule.
They broke upon us as a curse. We broke ourselves to
yield
and the rain fell all the harder, these few months from
Smithfield.

Weeks on from St George's Hill; our work there done in
vain,
our captains sent to silence, the gangs and mob both came
to meet the spade with violence and beat us down until
it is only words that grow there, now, on St George's Hill.

Days toward the devil's smoke, our lives lashed as our
harness.
Their rents and fences hammered in, they pointed us to
darkness.
Named it law and rightly done, to send us from the fields to
choke.
To slum and factory, illness, death, in the devil's smoke.

Salvage
by Bridget Frances Keating

frontier of fog, distance
and depth. the shattered
caress of an oar, a claw.

here, in this conceit
of stricken timbers,
this nursery of tempered
threat.

you have squared the odyssey
inside a bottle; foreshortened
the mariner's monologue into
a drunken text.

silent now. handmaidens all,
coronate damsels, the long
anguilliform thrust of them.
eels, like sullen ladles, spooning
the futureless sea into every
broken mouth from port to
starboard.

no, we are not all equal, but
we are all changed. and we –
aphotic sticklers, the lanterns
and the hatchets – were once
like you.

silent now, and fathom-gilded.
a shoal, a raving multitude. silvered
coin of our own realm.

Jim Aitken is a poet and dramatist living and working in Edinburgh. He is a tutor in Scottish Cultural Studies with Adult Education and he organises literary walks around the city.

Patrick Davidson Roberts was born in 1987 and grew up in Sunderland and Durham. He was editor of *The Next Review* magazine 2013-2017, and in 2019 he ran *All My Teachers*, the all-women reading series. In 2018 Vanguard Editions published *The Mains*, his debut collection, and in 2023 Broken Sleep Books published his long-awaited second collection *The Trick*. He lives and works in London.

Bridget Frances Keating is the author of two poetry pamphlets, *Party Like its 1381* (2018), and *Totally F**king Disco* (2021), both published by the late lamented Two Yellow Dogs Press. She is in the process of moving to London. London better be ready.

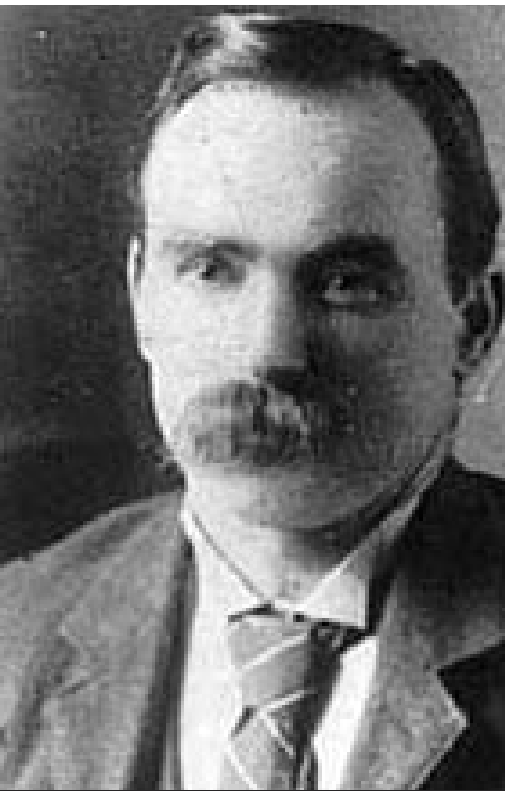
Notes and References

- 1 <https://libertyinvestigates.org.uk/articles/horror-beyond-words-inside-the-uk-coastguard-in-the-weeks-before-the-channel-disaster/>
- 2 <https://techmonitor.ai/government-computing/uk-spent-1bn-drones-prevent-migrant-crossings>.
- 3 A term coined by Canadian poet Stephen Collins: "that portion of existence that is enclosed as a 'resource' by and for those who direct and benefit from the accumulation of wealth"; <https://www.counterpunch.org/2020/03/03/bernie-and-the-biotariat/>

Illustration

The Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England;
Date: 1649

"The Declaration and Standard of the Levellers of England; delivered in a speech to his Excellency the Lord Gen. Fairfax, on Friday last at White-Hall, by Mr. Everard, a late member of the Army, and his Prophetie in reference thereunto; shewing what will befall the Nobility and Gentry of this Nation, by their submitting to community; With their invitation and promise unto the people, and their proceedings in Windsor Park, Oatlands Park, and severall other places; also, the Examination and confession of the said Mr. Everard before his Excellency, the manner of his deportment with his Hat on, and his severall speeches and expressions, when he was commanded to put it off. Together with a List of the severall Regiments of Horse and Foot that have cast Lots to go for Ireland., Imprinted at London: for G. Laurensen, 1649."



CONNOLLY BOOKS

Connolly Books is named after James Connolly, Ireland's socialist pioneer and martyr

- ★ Irish history
- ★ politics
- ★ Marxist classics
- ★ feminism
- ★ environment
- ★ radical periodicals
- ★ progressive literature
- ★ trade union affairs
- ★ philosophy

43 East Essex Street, Dublin

between Temple Bar and Parliament Street.

Hours: Tuesday to Saturday 10- 5.30

www.connollybooks.org

Praxis Press

Praxis Press is an independent publisher, specialising in titles about Marxism, socialist theory, communist history, global politics and the labour movement.

Praxis Press <https://redletterspp.com>



I read the Morning Star because I want to read a paper I can trust.

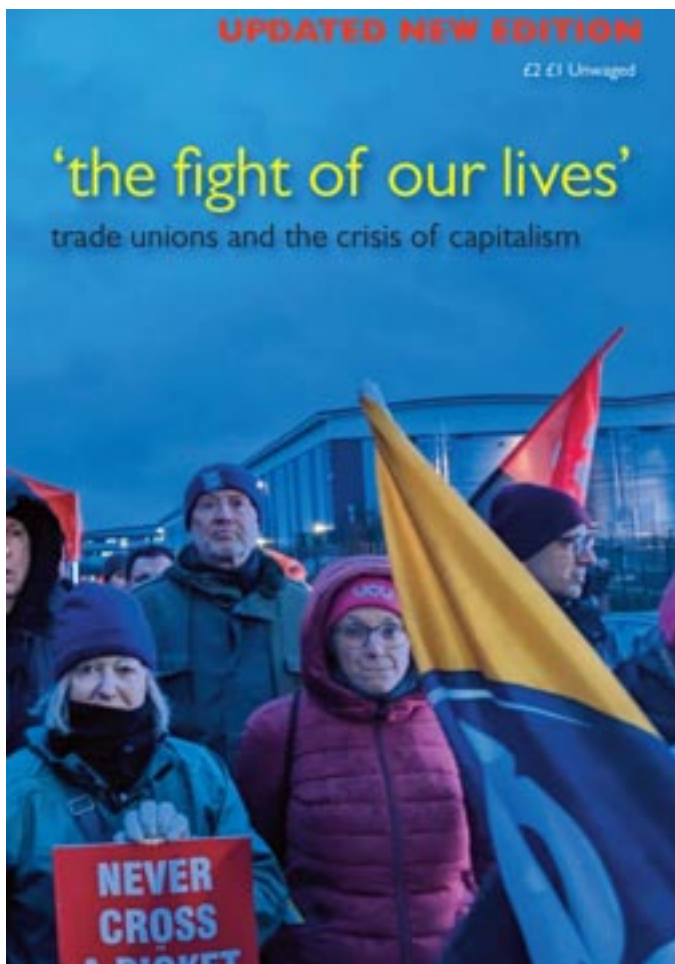
It tells me about the issues I want to read about, the news I want to read about. It touches on issues the other papers don't.

MAXINE PEAKE
MORNING STAR AMBASSADOR



morningstaronline.co.uk/subscribe

Sign up to the Morning Star e-edition and online pdf – exactly the same as your printed paper



Author of *Our Trade Unions* and well known union activist Nigel Flanagan says of the pamphlet, “The gift of clarity is an essential one for revolutionaries. To be able to offer clear analysis and firm explanations is an essential part of the work inside the working-class movement. This pamphlet is clarity – in itself a massive achievement. It is thoroughly recommended to all working class and trade union activists who are trying to make sense of what is going on and most of all it gives answers.”

<https://tinyurl.com/4d7pfuhc>



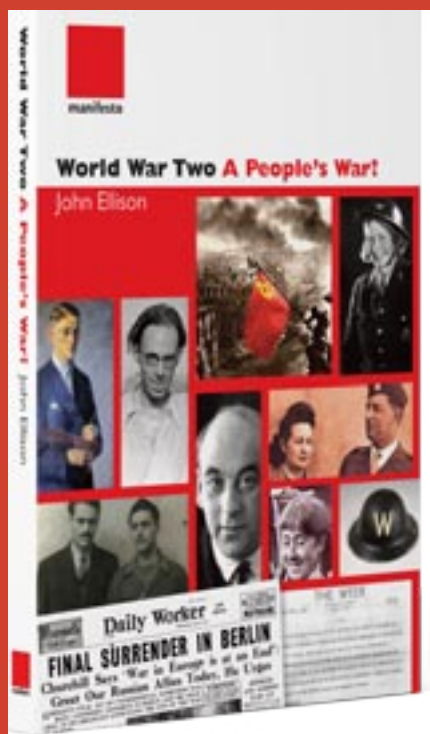
Podcasts for the Struggle

Our CommieCast series includes features/interviews on peace, internationalism, housing, education, transport, community building and fighting crime, the state of health and Progressive Federalism.

To view CommieCast go to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC-DB6XpwhNZ722afKn-iZLQ>



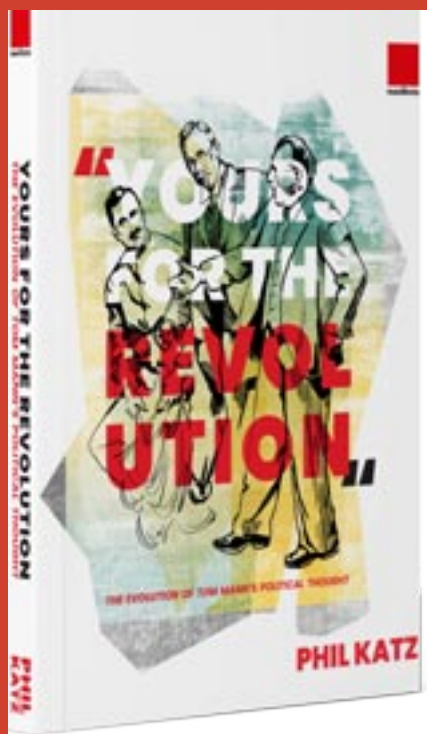
www.culturematters.org.uk



John Ellison interrogates diverse accounts of World War Two to bring out the inadequacies in various mainstream historical narratives, in which imperial and anti-communist motives underlying war policies of French and British governments lie mainly hidden.

He asks the question: 'How much was the war fought for the interests of the ruling elites of the Western Allied Powers against the expansionist ambitions of Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Italy, and militarist Japan; and how much of it was fought for the benefit of the mass of the peoples threatened by that aggression and by the military occupations that went with it?'

The front cover images of various anti-fascists represent the millions of those committed in the struggle to radical post-war change. This study highlights the significance too of the struggle for independence on the part of the people of colonial India, while the war's consequences and follow-ups offer connections to today's dangerous return of war in Europe.



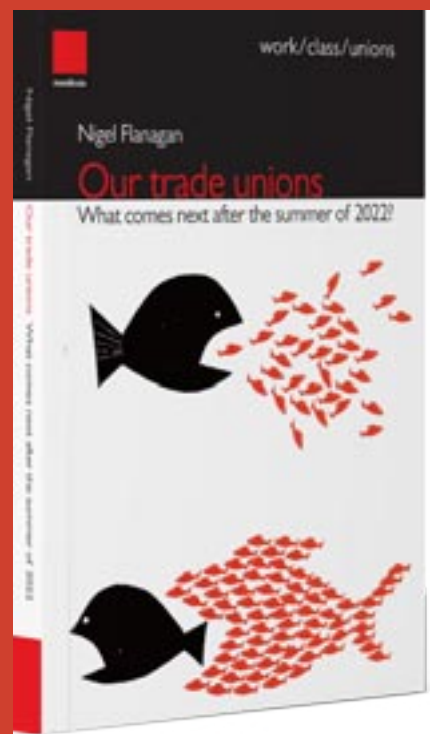
Tom Mann, Britain's pioneering trade union leader, exemplary internationalist and the leading socialist working class leader for several generations is the subject of Phil Katz's study, *All for the Revolution*.

The breadth of his contribution to the development of the working class movement as a whole is summed up in his memorable phrase: "I am not afraid of the terms, Socialist, Spartacist, Bolshevik or Syndicalist. I know that in essence these all mean the thorough application of the principle of true cooperation, and I unmistakably stand for cooperation and the wiping out of the capitalist system."

Mann's theory of socialism and class organisation was forged in the fiercest and most decisive union battles, extending over a fifty year period.

All for the Revolution helps us understand today's tumultuous union battles.

Lavishly illustrated with many historical images and with new drawings the book is designed and produced by the Corata design group working with Manifesto Press.



The hot summer of 2022 anticipated an even hotter 2023. Railworkers, post and telecom staff, train drivers, teachers, health workers, higher education staff all took their place in a wave of strike ballots and – unprecedented in years – a real strike wave.

What is distinctive about this phase of union action are the massive ballot majorities which speak to anger at runaway inflation, fantastical energy prices and rising rents but also to waves of human solidarity.

When picket lines are universally respected, when the police sense that imposing the legal limit of six 'official' pickets is a nonsense, when each picket line is greeted by a cacophony of car horns and cheers and the public sees in the militant action of strikers the embryo of their own urge to action, employers and government have cause to think again. Union leaders have become media stars and their utterances dominate social media.

Our trade unions, what comes next after the summer of 2022 is a Manifesto best seller now on its 6th printing. and a new edition.