

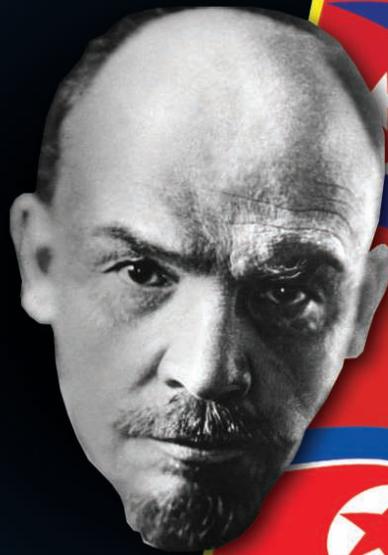
# socialist standard

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## THE LAST OF LENIN'S LEGACY

*N. Korea  
Vietnam  
China  
Cuba*



*also: Death of Monarch  
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# socialist standard

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## Introducing the Socialist Party

The Socialist Party is like no other political party in Britain. It is made up of people who have joined together because we want to get rid of the profit system and establish real socialism. Our aim is to persuade others to become socialist and act for themselves, organising democratically and without leaders, to bring about the kind of society that we are advocating in this journal. We are solely concerned with building a movement of socialists for socialism. We are not a reformist party with a programme of policies to patch up



capitalism.

We use every possible opportunity to make new socialists. We publish pamphlets and books, as well as CDs, DVDs and various other informative material. We also give talks and take part in debates; attend rallies, meetings and demos; run educational conferences; host internet discussion forums, make films presenting our ideas, and contest elections when practical. Socialist literature is available in Arabic, Bengali, Dutch, Esperanto, French, German, Italian, Polish, Spanish, Swedish and Turkish as well as English.

The more of you who join the Socialist Party the more we will be able to get our ideas across, the more experiences we will be able to draw on and greater will be the new ideas for building the movement which you will be able to bring us.

The Socialist Party is an organisation of equals. There is no leader and there are no followers. So, if you are going to join we want you to be sure that you agree fully with what we stand for and that we are satisfied that you understand the case for socialism.

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## 1917 – The Left-Overs

THE NEW Bolshevik regime inspired the formation of ‘communist’ parties worldwide. After the Second World War, many of these parties were elevated to power in those countries that were under Soviet occupation, that is in Eastern European and North Korea. Elsewhere, they came to power either through civil war or through anti-colonial struggles.

The Chinese Communist Party, which was formed in 1921, rose to power after successfully mobilising the peasants in the countryside to resist the Japanese occupation forces during the Second World War, and subsequently defeating the Kuomintang Government forces in the Chinese Civil War in 1949. It is worth noting that Stalin backed the Kuomintang against the ‘Communists’, thus giving the lie to the fiction that the Soviet Union was a beacon for global communism. What emerged was not socialism, but an authoritarian regime of state capitalism.

Mao Tse-tung, the Chinese leader, developed his own Leninist theories, commonly known as “Maoism”. The main tenet is that the rural peasants are the driving force in the revolutionary party and that support should be given to third world nationalist struggles

against the first world ‘imperialists’. In the 1960s and 1970s, Maoism was popular in the universities and provided the ideological basis for guerilla groups, such as the Naxalites in India. After the split between China and the Soviet Union in the 1960s, Maoist parties broke off from the pro Soviet ‘communist’ parties. In the United States, the so called New Left and the Black Panther Party were influenced by Maoism. The latter added to the confusion that already exists about socialism.

In 1954, after the Viet Minh, a self styled ‘communist liberation’ group, defeated the French forces in a guerilla war in Vietnam, the country was partitioned between a ‘Communist’ North and an openly capitalist South. Soon after, war broke out between the North and its Vietcong allies on one side and the South, which was heavily supported by the United States, on the other. It ended in 1975, when a victorious North Vietnam united the country under its rule.

In Cuba, a ‘communist’ state was established after a group of insurgents led by Fidel Castro overthrew the Batista regime in 1959. In Yugoslavia, the

Communist Party, which led the Partisan resistance to the Axis powers, emerged as the dominant political force and established a ‘communist’ state.

In the late 1980s, the East European states began to collapse, along with the Soviet Union. Yugoslavia descended into civil war. Both China and Vietnam have effectively abandoned ‘Maoism’ and have introduced market reforms, in some cases inviting investors from the ‘imperialist’ countries. Cuba and North Korea are stagnating economically.

These regimes were never socialist, but state capitalist, where the state operates the wages system and tries to plan the market. Not only did they maintain the lie that they were socialist, but that the struggle for socialism is a nationalist one. In line with Leninist thinking, they have promoted the cult of leadership with Lenin, Stalin, Mao Tse-tung, Ho Chi Minh, Che Guevara and Fidel Castro venerated as icons. Apparently, without them, socialism could not exist. So much for the materialist conception of history. In North Korea, there is even a ruling dynasty. No wonder workers are so confused as to what socialism is.

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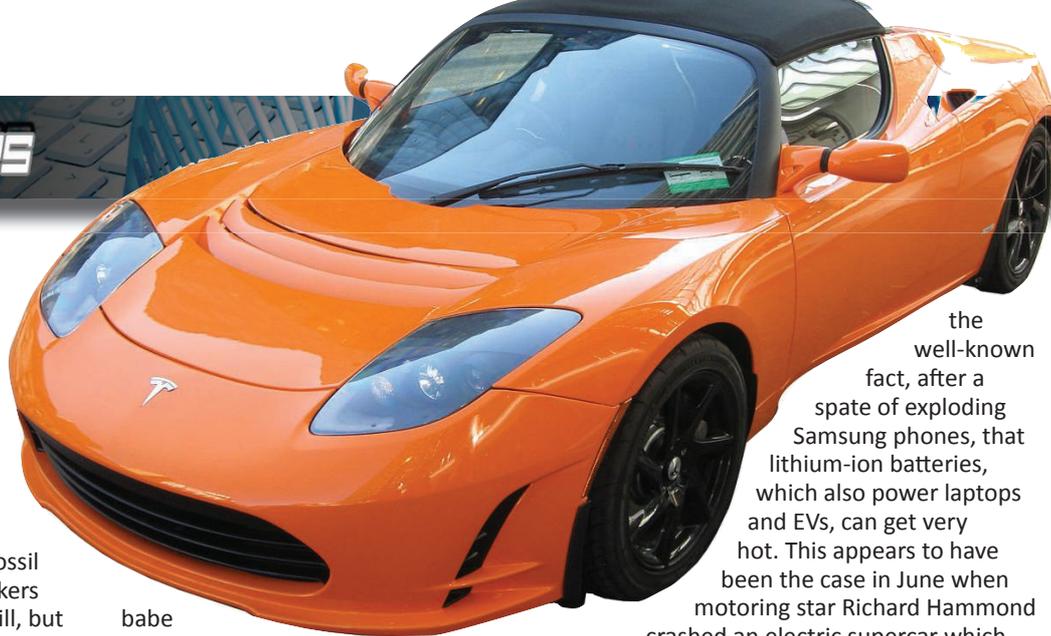
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## The fall and rise of the electric car

CONNOISSEURS OF outlandish conspiracy theories will fondly remember one set of nerdy non-petrol-heads who, a few years ago, were desperate to tell us at great length why and how the electric car industry had been effectively 'killed' by the existing fossil car producers. Not that the carmakers were entirely innocent of any ill-will, but the failure of this early horizon tech at that time didn't require any complicated or conspiratorial explanation. There was simply a lack of market demand and social infrastructure including charging stations. Fast forward a few years and these same nerds must now be mourning the death of their pet conspiracy, killed off by a changed political, environmental and commercial landscape. Now that France has announced a plan to phase out all diesel and petrol cars by 2040, and the UK has followed suit with a similar scheme, the electric car industry is well and truly plugged in and heating up once again.

Just last month UK inventor James Dyson announced plans to launch an electric vehicle (EV) by 2020, a time-scale some commentators say is close to impossible, given the densely-packed hurdle race of regulations the EV will have to negotiate first (*Guardian*, 26 September). The design is being kept under wraps, very possibly because there isn't one: 'We don't have an existing chassis ... We're starting from scratch. What we're doing is quite radical', says Dyson, which might be code for 'we're making it up as we go along'. But he clearly means business as he's already invested around a billion in battery technology and now plans to invest a further £1.5bn in developing the prototype. What's not a secret is that it'll be a high-end vehicle made in China for the China and East Asia market, the market which is most keen on 'clean' technology and which also buys the most luxury cars. So don't expect your next school run or shopping trolley to be a Dyson. Wags will say it sucks anyway.

The conspiracy nuts do have one small consolation while mourning the corpse of their theory – they were right that the car industry as it was would not innovate into EV development, and that the impetus would have to come from outside. And so it did, with Elon Musk's Tesla start-up, which somehow managed to sell thousands of cars last year while still making a loss. Now Dyson's involved you'd really expect intrepid balloonist and media



babe Richard Branson to pile in some cash too, but Mr Galactic has instead plunged his millions into Elon Musk's weird and wacky maglev tube idea, which proposes to fire people across the country in bullet-pods with their faces presumably contorting into rippling G-force playdoh (*Guardian*, 12 October).

It's no longer just outsiders who are making the EV play. All the carmakers are scrambling to meet the deadlines set by the UK and French governments. Jaguar Land Rover aims to have 'clean' versions of all its range by 2020, and BMW is working on an electric Mini, while Nissan is already selling its Sunderland-made Leaf EV.

Alert readers might wonder why the word 'clean' appears here dressed in quote marks. The filthy truth is that the electricity that powers these cars has to come from somewhere, and that somewhere is almost certainly going to be a power station using gas, oil or coal for fuel. All that an EV owner can truthfully claim is that they have shifted their carbon footprint out of sight by a sleight of hand. Naturally carmakers are not inclined to emphasise this point. When Tesla markets cars with the proud label 'Zero emissions' they are actually dealing in 'Zero admissions'.

And why not indeed, when governments propose do the same thing and call it a carbon-trading scheme? In this conjuring act, heavily polluting countries buy and use the 'polluting potential' of cleaner (because poorer) countries. They then don't have to clean up their own act, which means they can continue to clean up on sales. Meanwhile the poor countries at the watery end of climate change, like the Maldives, can use these carbon credits to buy themselves whatever they like, such as rubber rings or scuba equipment.

Currently what's putting off most potential buyers of electric cars, apart from the fancy prices, is 'range anxiety', the fear of being stranded somewhere remote with a flat battery. Added to this is

the well-known fact, after a spate of exploding Samsung phones, that lithium-ion batteries, which also power laptops and EVs, can get very hot. This appears to have been the case in June when motoring star Richard Hammond crashed an electric supercar which then caught fire and burned to a crisp. One reason why Dyson is avoiding liquid batteries and opting for the less-volatile solid-state alternative.

Technical niggles aside, the EV is sure to find ready approval among the more moneyed liberal set who don't realise their trendy wood-burning stove is a much worse domestic polluter than gas central heating, whether the fuel is North Sea, Norwegian or fracked methane, or that their family dog is in carbon terms roughly equivalent to running two SUVs. But in the bigger picture, isn't there something more fundamentally off-course about electric cars? Instead of building a whole new generation of EVs to run people over, clog cities and sit idle in motorway tailbacks, shouldn't we be asking ourselves whether the world really needs individual modes of transport on this vast scale?

Well, some people do ask that question. But capitalism isn't about what people need, it's about what people want and are willing to pay for. And if people want personal transport, because public transport by 'loser cruiser' is not an aspiration of the upwardly-mobile, then that's what the machine will gear up to produce, to the detriment of any logical public transport solution.

We often say that socialism is a system of society based on material abundance, however the word abundance can be taken the wrong way. It doesn't mean that everyone can have everything they can possibly imagine, including their own palace and ocean-going yacht, or 'Cartier for everyone' as propounded by optimistic advocates of Fully Automated Luxury Communism. 'Abundance' is perhaps better thought of as 'sufficiency', and sufficiency entails some prioritisation of production. When ordering those priorities, what socialism will have in mind first is food, shelter, sanitation and healthcare for every individual on the planet. In this context, the idea of building individual electric cars or other adult toys is likely to take a back seat.

PJS



## Throw away the stick

Last month's headlines were dominated, to the surprise of many, by the revelation that a Hollywood producer was in the habit of using his position of power and influence to get aspiring young hopefuls to have sex with him.

This can't have been news to anyone but the naive. Theatre like everything else in capitalism has been reduced to a squalid money business where the rich exploit the efforts, and sometimes the bodies, of young people desperate for advancement and not rich enough to say no. Actors are workers and workers have to sell themselves as commodities on the labour market. That labour market is nearly always a buyer's market, and when the buyer is a man who has sex instead of scruples on the brain, it's not hard to grasp what is likely to happen.

Some of the online comments from readers of these news stories accused the women who had spoken up of being prostitutes who had been willing to sleep their way to riches and were now hypocritically whingeing about it. Many of these comments were from women. The anger and bitterness behind such trolling is all too obvious. To poor people, there's no such thing as a rich victim. The fact that male actors can get ahead without supposedly resorting to prostitution didn't enter the debate.

What became plain, as the story grew, was how widespread the problem is. Women often experience harassment in some form, whether it's being whistled at, groped, or inappropriately chatted up. They generally keep silent because they feel powerless. Society generally keeps silent because it doesn't care. And this is just the everyday stuff. Underneath this culture of silence lies a nightmarish landscape which includes rape, domestic abuse and murder. Any woman living in this terrifying landscape is almost bound to think that the world is primarily defined by male power and dominance.

Historically there's no question that this has been true, and still is in many parts of the world where the hangover of the pre-capitalist past still hangs heaviest. In advanced capitalist countries the trend has been more towards political, legal and economic parity, partly so that employers can cherry-pick exploitable workers from the largest possible bowl. But these limited

freedoms have been offset by an intensifying commodification of women through advertising, the media, and the film and music industry, a commodification now also turning its attention to men. We are not even human beings anymore, just products with a package and a price and a sell-by date.

If society is primarily patriarchal, as some think, then most men are doing astonishingly badly out of it. This is really because they, along with women, are ultimately in thrall to a higher power, a tiny fraction of people who own and control all of society and most of the world. What is decisively important about this power elite is not actually their gender at all but their property portfolio.

To socialists, it doesn't matter what colour or gender you are. What matters is that you are a worker. The politicisation of gender, like ethnicity, helps keep the working class divided and thus too weak to break out of its own misery. Capitalism is a master at instilling its oppressive and divisive structures at an early age. The task of revolutionaries is to identify and break those structures. And we can do it, so long as workers are willing to try to understand each other. Women have been speaking out, and must continue to do so in order to lift the veil of silence. For their part, men need to understand that ignoring women's subjective experience of patriarchy is the same as perpetuating it. Either you are fighting oppression or you are complicit in it. When a man suffers rage, helplessness and frustration, he is experiencing what it means to be a worker. But when he takes his rage out on a woman he is doing the bosses' dirty work for them and he is a class traitor. A class that wants to be free also has to know how to take responsibility. Socialism is not possible otherwise.

There is, incidentally, nothing in the rules of capitalism that forbids it from being gender-neutral. In a gender-neutral capitalism, workers would still be poor, overworked, exploited, powerless and bitter. And capitalism would still be hell-bent on self-destruction through war and environmental damage. The *identity* of the oppressor can and has changed among and between cultures and over time. What hasn't changed, and what will never change in capitalism, is the *ability* of some to oppress others. This is one reason why socialists call for the abolition of the property-owning principle. Private ownership is a big stick, whoever wields it. If you don't want to be beaten, you need to throw away the stick.

PJS

# Russia 1917 - as we saw it

'Will the Bolsheviks Maintain Power'. By N. Lenin. Price 1s 6d. Labour Publishing Co., Ltd.

The above is an article written by Lenin in October, 1917, in answer to the claim of the opponents of Bolshevism that the Bolsheviks "would not attempt to take complete power on their own initiative."

Though written so long ago, this appears to be its first publication in English. Lenin's reply rebuts the claims of his opponents, in his usual vigorous fashion, and the fact that five years later the Bolsheviks are still ruling in Russia justifies the position he then took up.

In this article, Lenin makes the claim, often repeated afterwards, but now definitely refuted by the publication of

the Russian Soviet Constitution, that the Soviet system is superior to the political system in the Western world:--

"In comparison with bourgeois parliamentarism it is a step forward in the *development of democracy* which has a historical world significance" – P. 43 (Italics ours.)

The absurdity of this claim has been fully exposed in the *Socialist Standard*, July, 1920; while deference to democracy is now treated by the Bolsheviks and their supporters as "an out-of-date shibboleth", "a bourgeois notion", etc.

Another piece of evidence supplied by the article is on the view held by Lenin and his party at the time of the Revolution, that the workers of the Western world were practically ready for the social Revolution. On page 101 he says:--

"It [the Russian Revolution] will conquer the whole world, for in all countries the Socialist transformation is ripening."

It is our great regret that even now, let alone then, the mass of the workers are so far from the mental development necessary for the Socialist Revolution. (from *Socialist Standard*, December 1922)



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## The 'Engels pause'

'ENGELS PAUSE' is the name given by an economic historian, Robert C. Allen, to the period in Britain when Engels wrote his *Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844*. It was brought up by David Smith, the Economics Editor of the *Sunday Times*, in an article in the *Times* (4 October) discussing the flurry of defences of private enterprise capitalism provoked by Corbyn's speech at the Labour Party Conference.

Corbyn was reported as saying that capitalism was in crisis. Actually what he said – and he was just quoting the *Financial Times* – was that capitalism was facing a 'crisis of legitimacy' (which it is, and a good thing too). He wasn't opposing capitalism, only the so-called 'neo-liberal' policies pursued by governments over the past decades, and was merely calling for more state intervention to stimulate private capitalist investment. Even the *Times* (28 September) recognised that he couldn't be opposing capitalism, not even private enterprise capitalism:

'Labour aides could not say whether Mr Corbyn's new economic model would be capitalist, hinting only that a majority

of assets would be privately owned.'

Smith's argument was that capitalism was currently in the same sort of situation of rising profits and stagnating wages that it had been when Engels wrote:

'Engels bemoaned the plight of the "propertyless millions who own nothing and consume today what they earned yesterday". Industrialists, he said, were growing rich on the "misery of the mass of wage earners".'

Economic historians, Smith went on, have confirmed that in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century 'real wages stagnated' and 'profits rose strongly and the profit share of GDP increased', but

'Capitalism adjusted, almost as soon as Marx and Engels published the *Communist Manifesto* in 1848, and well before Marx's *Capital* two decades later. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, rising real wages and rising productivity went hand-in-hand. The Marxist diagnosis of permanently downtrodden workers was replaced by one of rising living standards.'

Did Engels argue that the conditions he described in Manchester in 1844 – people living in hovels sometimes alongside pigs, no sewage system, rampant adulteration, no limitations on the hours of work, employers swindling workers by obliging them to buy from the company store – were the permanent lot of the working class under capitalism? Was this really the 'Marxist diagnosis'?

In a word, no. Engels lived to see what happened in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (he died in 1895) and described what and why in the Preface he wrote to the 1892 publication of the English translation of his book:

'The state of things described in this book belongs today, in many respects, to the past, as far as England is concerned. (...) The revival of trade, after the crisis of 1847, was the dawn of a new industrial epoch. (...) ...England has thus outgrown the juvenile state of capitalist exploitation described by me ...'

In other words, Engels recognised that the conditions he had described in 1844 were those of an early stage of capitalism. He listed the changes as the introduction of Factory Acts (which improved conditions for factory workers), the acceptance of trade unions (which pushed up the wages of skilled, engineering and building workers), and sanitation improvements (to prevent the spread of cholera, etc).

Marx's *Capital*, published in 1867, takes into account these changes. By then the bigger capitalists had come to realise how short-sighted and counter-productive it was to underfeed and overwork the geese that laid the golden eggs. The workers were still exploited – in fact they produced more surplus value than before – even though they were not as 'downtrodden' as in the 1840s. They still are. There has been no pause in that.



## Adonis As It Is?

ANDREAS ADONIS. Since May 2005 Life Peer Lord Andrew Adonis. With a record which justifies him, according to which discipline he is involved in, being identified as a politician, an academic, a journalist and author of a number of well-received, solidly quoted books. At present he is in the Chair of something called The National Infrastructure Commission – the meaning of which will be varied according to who is discussing it. In this it may be instructive to bear in mind that he was the first holder of such a post, appointed by two Tory Chancellors in George Osborne and Philip Hammond. Osborne was in no two minds about this: 'I am delighted to tell you that the former Labour cabinet minister and transport secretary Andrew Adonis has agreed to be the commission's first chair. He'll now sit as a cross-bench peer and help us create Britain's plan for the future...' This was in spite of the fact that the Adonis roots were originally unpromising. His father came to England from Cyprus, to work in London as a waiter. His mother left the family when Andrew was three years old and did not return, from which it followed that he was placed in the care of a local authority. In this his talents came early into bloom so that he went to Oxford University where he sucked up a First Class degree in Modern History and proceeded to a Doctorate with a thesis on 19th century British aristocracy. At Nuffield College he was appointed a Fellow in History and Politics.

### Capricious

These qualifications should have opened a real prospect of a political career for Adonis but it was hampered by his capricious choice of which party to favour with his loyalty. In the flow of the time he joined the 'Gang of Four' and their desperate ambition to flush away the Labour Party, to the extent that he was elected as an SDP councillor for Oxford City. Four years later Adonis was persuaded that he would be better as a councillor under another banner and he chose to do this as a Liberal Democratic City Councillor for another ward in Oxford. But the frustrations ingrained in that party's ambition to squeeze its way into some prospects of power led to him changing to the Labour Party, newly hopeful under Blair, Gordon Brown and the rest. He was selected as the Labour candidate for a local council election but he refused this in favour of less

controversial prospects.

In 1997 he accepted a job in Tony Blair's Policy Unit with its brief to fashion Labour's stand on constitutional and educational matters. This put him in charge of the policy, not universally popular, of replacing comprehensive schools which were deemed to be failing with others which would be known by the classier title of academies, to be independently managed. In May 2005 his position was solidified by him being transformed into a Life Peer, which enabled his appointment to supply some energy in the drive to get the policy for academies under way. When he left Education in 2008 there were almost 150 academies in existence with some 300 more in the offing. The whole policy was against the wishes of a significant wedge of trade unionists in teaching and of Labour Party members. But it found favour on the other side, including the Tory Education spokesman Michael Gove who identified himself; 'We are on the same page as Andrew Adonis'.

### Vice Chancellors

But the exact 'page' occupied by Adonis and Gove together was never confidently identified. From being an ardent advocate of academies as the major enforcer of what is termed 'education', and of the financial requirements under which it operated Adonis began abruptly to display an awareness of some accompanying inconvenient problems. This was the devastating publicity given to the increased payouts to retiring university vice-chancellors. For example, it has been estimated that Chris Higgins at Durham got a total of £90,000 a year pension with a lump sum of £270,000 with a

similar amount for Anthony Chapman at Cardiff Met. Particularly notable and embarrassing was the case of Glynis Breakwell of Bath with a total of £406,000. Adonis has expended a lot of energy in trying to evade the fact that he bears a great deal of the responsibility for that very situation. Speaking from those red leather benches in the House of Lords he denounced the Vice Chancellors' 'opportunism and greed' and asked 'How did we get from the idea of a reasonable contribution to the cost of university tuition – the principle of the Blair reform, for which I was largely responsible, to today's Frankenstein monster of £50,000 plus debts for graduates on modest salaries?' He also suggested that the fees for which he admits to being responsible should be abolished – all of which went a long way to justify the assessment of him from Labour's Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell that he is 'a chameleon'.

### Blair vs Brown

How this was to fit into the political scene was revealed with the approach of the 2010 general election, influenced before the polling stations had even opened by the uncertainty of Tony Blair's intentions about holding on as Prime Minister against the maniacal bludgeoning ambitions of Gordon Brown. Blair was convinced that he still had a chance provided the voters were able to forget a few minor diversions such as the war in Iraq and other blood-soaked tragedies in the Middle East. However it seemed that it would need a special talent to encourage him to accept this record of those times. In his account of them (*A Journey*) Blair justifies his delaying tactics against the pressures to resolve the matter. And in this he received some essential support from someone he describes as 'typically brilliant'; which of course has to be Lord Adonis. Blair records a letter from Adonis which said 'in my view it is strongly in the public interest that you continue in office until conference 2007, and possibly beyond into 2008... Your political authority appears to me more than sufficient for this...' Except that in the event the pressures of mutual admiration between Blair and Adonis could not prevent Brown making it to Number Ten.

As a politician Adonis is unusual for his style in being so ready to change his line to take advantage of the persistent need to mislead what he has interpreted as any pressures from the voters. But any real progress for a humane society will need significantly more than that.

IVAN



Andrew Adonis

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**The wages trap**

IN JUNE we commented on a claim made by novelist Fay Weldon that women going out to work had halved the male wage (which she mistakenly blamed on feminism). We noted that, while this was a wild exaggeration, once married women going out to work became the norm this was bound to have some effect on male wages. Married women bringing in an income would mean that employers would no longer need to include in a man's wages an element to cover maintaining a wife at home.

Under the headline 'Single-earner families sliding into poverty as wages stagnate', the *Times* (10 July) reported on a study which lent some substance to this:

'The income of families with stay-at-home mothers is no higher than it was 15 years ago, with half now in relative poverty, new research reveals today. An analysis by

the Institute for Fiscal Studies found that the incomes of two-earner families were 10 per cent higher than in 2002-03 but those where only the father worked had stagnated. It said that the discrepancy was due to the disproportionate increase in women's wages while men's wages had barely risen. Over the past 20 years earnings of working fathers have been growing at 0.3 per cent a year on average but mothers' earnings have grown by more than 2 per cent a year.'

Over this period, then, male wages, irrespective of whether the man's wife was working or not, stagnated. This suggests that the reason will have been that employers no longer needed to pay to maintain a wife as she was earning her own income. This would not come about by the male wage being directly reduced but by it not increasing as they otherwise would. With a wage-working wife the total family income goes up (though there are the extra costs of paying for child-minding) even if the part brought in by the man doesn't. On the other hand, men – and their families – whose wife was, contrary to the norm, not working for a wage suffer. In fact, according to the

study, had it not been for the subsidy to employers that tax credits represent then their standard of living would have actually fallen:

'Researchers said that the only reason single-earner family incomes had grown at all since the mid-1990s was that benefit and tax credit payments to this group had doubled in the same period. Without this the average earnings of a working father in a single-earner couple were 6 per cent lower in real terms than in 1994-95.'

This illustrates the same point that if workers get an income from some other source – for instance, because their wife is working or because the state is paying them something – then the employer is relieved of paying this element of the cost to workers of reproducing their labour-power. Women staying at home do of course work – quite a bit – but they are not bringing in an income. If they were paid for this work, as the 'Wages for Housework' campaigners want, this would have the same effect as married women getting a wage from an employer.

What capitalism giveth with one hand, it taketh away with the other.



## Catalonia: referendum *why not*, nationalism *no*

*'It's about class. I don't have a problem with the person standing next to me, it's the one above me who's the problem.'*  
Pepe Martínez (Guardian, 30 September)

IN 2014 Scotland held a referendum for independence. This 1 October it was the turn of Catalonia although in this case the process was conducted under adverse conditions as the Constitutional Court had declared the referendum illegal and the Spanish government did their utmost to thwart it. So, the referendum was no longer simply about Catalan independence but a question of the practice of democracy.

The World Socialist Movement's commitment to freedom of expression means our response regarding this one particular aspect could only be, 'Let the referendum give voice to the will of the people. Let the people speak.' We defend the right to ask people what they think and what they want (although history has taught us to be cautious about the motives of those posing as friends of democracy in some plebiscites).

The opinion polls had placed the Remain in Spain camp in the lead, so if the government had simply let the independence referendum happen there would quite likely have been no constitutional crisis nor the ensuing civil disorder. What now unites Catalans and quickly led to a general strike – with even Barcelona footballers taking part – was the repressive manner in which Prime Minister Rajoy ordered police from other

regions to sabotage the referendum. As it was, 90 percent of the 2.26 million Catalans who cast their ballots (out of the 5.3 million eligible) voted for independence with Catalan officials saying 770,000 votes were lost due to disruption which resulted from polling stations being raided and ballot boxes commandeered by Spanish police.

How the situation will develop is now in the realm of speculation but we can be sure of one thing – the working class will once again be called upon to defend one section or another of the boss class. This is because nationalism is nothing but a change of masters.

Whether it is Catalonia or Caledonia (or Kurdistan), movements for national sovereignty do not serve the interests of the working class. Socialists declare that the nationality of feuding employers and their lackeys in government is an irrelevance. One of the factors for Catalan independence was that Catalonia pays a disproportionately higher share of tax revenues than other regions to the central state and the prosperous local capitalists are reluctant to dilute their profits to subsidise the poorer parts of Spain any longer. The Catalan nationalists thus baited their appeal with fake promises of prosperity for the local working class. Capitalism pits the interests of the employers and workers against each other, sooner or later all nationalist parties are forced to take sides and we know what the choice always has been. They declare that one way or another the 'national interest' is supreme, which is the interest of business.

Nationalism is a ruse to lure workers into supporting the rights of the business class to make profits at their expense.

We state unambiguously our opposition

to the views of both the Cortes (central parliament) of Madrid and the Barcelona Generalitat (regional government).

Socialists call for the end of exploitation and an end to the domination of the privileged few over the majority, not for its replacement by another, more local elite. We view our fellow-workers as the revolutionary force that could overthrow the tyranny of the capitalist system, freeing people and breaking their chains of wage-slavery, if only they can halt the virus of nationalism from spreading. Socialism needs to be placed at the heart of a new approach to living, locally, regionally, and globally. It is a unifying sharing principle that will encourage cooperation, which, unlike nationalism, brings people together and builds social harmony.

Class-consciousness as opposed to nationalist sentiment was never more needed than now. Workers here in London or Edinburgh, Madrid or Barcelona have common cause with the workers of every other country. They are members of an international class, faced with the same problems, holding the same interests. **Socialism is about solidarity, coming together and uniting.**

**Rather than seeking a new capitalist state as the answer, Catalan workers should set out to grow their own strength so that one day it is their own independent power which helps to build socialism.** As class-consciousness rises amongst the workers in all lands, the organisation of referendums will focus on the abolition of capitalism's nation-states and the construction of a worldwide co-operative commonwealth. **Ours will be free unions of free people in free associations.**

**ALJO**

# KOREA: CAPITALISM IN A MAO SUIT



*The global system of capitalism takes various national forms, including the 'state capitalism' in North Korea that has been passed off as 'socialism'.*

**N**orth Korea presents an image to the world of a society existing in a sort of Stalinist time warp, embodied in the very appearance of its latest 'supreme leader', Kim Jong-un, who fills out his Mao suit with the same corpulence as his grandfather, Kim Il-sung, and even tops off the look by paying him a hairstyle homage.

The main development within the country that has gained the attention of the outside world is its nuclear weapons programme. But people's everyday lives within the country are still shrouded in considerable mystery. A general lack of information about economic and social life in the DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea) makes it hard to know what is going on. And the government, which has not published a statistical yearbook since the early 1960s, is content with this situation.

Two important sources of information about the DPRK have been the approximately 30,000 North Korean refugees living in South Korea and the companies (mostly Chinese) doing business with North Korean firms. A book published this year, *Unveiling the North Korean Economy* by Kim Byung-yeon, draws on surveys from those two sources to uncover the state of the North Korean economy and ponder where it may be headed. The subtitle of the book, 'Collapse and Transition', refers to the period of extreme crisis the DPRK underwent after the end of the Soviet Union and to its current transition that the author views as a gradual shift from 'socialism' to capitalism.

## Capitalism by another name

Before looking at some of the findings of the book, it's necessary to say a word about the author's belief that the DPRK is a 'socialist' country. For Kim, the state ownership of the key means of production, combined with the existence of central planning, is sufficient for an economic system to merit the label 'socialism'.

However, as numerous *Socialist Standard* articles have pointed out, the nationalisation of certain means of production is simply a change in the form of ownership, not the negation of property rights to bring social wealth under the common control of all members of society. Ownership remains under restricted control, in the hands of state bureaucrats and the heads of firms. And since the aim is 'economic growth' (capital accumulation), not the direct satisfaction of human needs, as democratically determined by the members of society themselves, any 'planning' carried out under this system is geared toward that end.

The history of the twentieth century should make clear that nationalisation of industry and the existence of planning do not threaten capitalism in the least. What capitalism could not exist without, rather, are such economic forms as money, profit, wage labour, and commodities—all of which are present in the DPRK. So we cannot help but conclude that the DPRK is capitalist, not 'socialist' as Kim claims, although we refer to it more specifically as 'state

capitalist' because of the predominance of state ownership.

Kim describes socialism as a 'grand-scale experiment of an economic alternative to capitalism' based on 'human design', unlike capitalism's basis in the 'natural evolution of society'. More specifically, he fingers Karl Marx as the culprit, who apparently 'designed and initiated implementation of the ideal of socialism', although Kim doesn't specify where Marx presented his plan or in what country he began to implement it.

The editors at Cambridge University Press also let Kim get away with stating, without any reference, that Marx (who was anything but a moralist) 'believed that capitalism was the "root of all evil"' and 'wrote' that 'central planning as the coordination mechanism can be designed to maximise both economic growth and social fairness'.

If Kim had read enough Marx to at least get his quotes right he might have gained the basic understanding of capitalism needed to recognise its existence in the DPRK. Nevertheless, the facts on North Korea provided by the author confirm that fact.

## A 'plan-less' planned economy

Even though the existence of 'central planning' is one of the reasons cited by Kim for defining the DPRK as 'socialist', his book demonstrates that such planning has been limited and full of contradictions from the outset.

Kim argues that even after the DPRK, under Soviet tutelage, nationalised large enterprises and collectivised agriculture in the early 1950s, the leaders 'lacked the necessary requirements' to establish a 'fully working, centrally planned economy' since they did not have reliable data on nationalised forms or the institutions and technocrats needed to direct the system. This situation grew even worse after the Soviet Union reduced its technical help and subsidies later in the 1950s due to worsening bilateral relations after Khrushchev's criticism of Stalin (denounced by the DPRK and China as 'revisionism').

Kim notes that the weaknesses in the DPRK's planning capacity forced its government to rely on the mass mobilisation of the population to meet certain production goals. One example was the 'Chullima Movement' from 1958 to 1961 that sought to speed up production, much like China's 'Great Leap Forward'. Such mass mobilisations have been more common in the DPRK than China, and the author views them as evidence that 'the country is unable or unwilling to devise and implement coherent central planning'.

Adding to the confusion of planning is the existence alongside the central plans of the Juseok Fund and 'on-the-spot guidance'. In the early 1970s, Kim Il-sung introduced the Juseok Fund to 'ensure a sufficient supply of inputs for high-priority sectors'. The fund is administered by the top DPRK leadership and is used to 'circumvent the bureaucracy associated with central planning' and lessen its power. The fund is also related to the practice of 'on-the-spot' guidance, where the 'supreme leader' tours a production site and issues specific directives.

Kim points out how the arbitrary intervention by the supreme leader in the planning mechanism 'actually disrupts the allocation of resources and production in accordance with

the plans' and is thus 'incompatible with the centrally planned economy'. Firms prioritise the imperatives of the Juseok Fund and on-the-spot guidance over the central plans.

The author uses the odd expression of a '*plan-less* planned economy' to describe this situation, which suggests that the anarchy of capitalist production also reigns in North Korea.

### State-owned, profit-driven

Just as 'central planning', upon closer scrutiny, turns out to have been chaotic, so do we find that the DPRK's state-owned firms are by no means monolithic or exempt from the profit motive.

The author notes the many distinctions among the nationalised firms, which are 'classified into several categories (i.e. Special, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, etc.) in terms of their size and their importance in the national economy'. There is also a distinction between 'national' firms that are 'directly controlled and supported by the central planning body, and the lower priority 'regional' firms that belong to regional governments.

In addition to the various categories of firms, there are other distinctions regarding the state institutions to which firms are connected. As the DPRK gradually decentralised its enterprise sector, firms became connected to one of four state institutions: the army, the Workers' Party, the cabinet, and the regional governments. The largest share of the resources produced in North Korea' are controlled by either the Party or the army, which have their own affiliated trading companies. This disintegration of the economy into those four institutional sectors, the author argues, means that 'central planning has been virtually destroyed in North Korea'—confined only to a few areas.

The decentralisation of state-owned firms was accelerated in the early 1990s as a response to the severe economic crisis that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. The author lists four key changes that emerged out of the crisis: (1) 'Implicitly' allowing trading in markets, (2) Opening the DPRK economy to the outside world and creating Special Economic Zones, (3) Decentralising the planning process to the level of firms and districts, (4) Allowing firms to have more autonomy for decision making.

Another aspect of decentralisation has been the liberalisation of foreign trade. Already in the late 1970s the DPRK began to permit certain large firms to engage in trade with foreign companies. A second wave of foreign trade decentralisation in the early 1990s allowed trading firms to 'plan and execute foreign trade for themselves on the basis of their output capacity and economic conditions'. And the third wave of decentralisation, starting in 2002, made it possible for trading companies to directly sell imported goods to consumers.

According to the author, 'the decentralisation of foreign trade meant the *de facto* destruction of the central planning system' because the autonomy to engage in foreign trade 'implied that central planning could no longer control all the activities of these bodies'. Apart from the firms in the Special category, which 'are given inputs in accordance with central planning', all the other firms 'must seek their own means of survival'.

Existing alongside that 'official economy', wherein nationalised firms are scrambling for profits, is an enormous 'informal economy'. The author claims that North Koreans earn 62.7 percent of their 'individual total income in the informal economy' and obtain 59.7 percent of their food and 67.4 percent of their consumer goods through markets rather

than the rationing system and official channels. Another remarkable characteristic of life in the DPRK is widespread bribery and corruption. The author writes that the 'average spending on bribes in total household expenditures from 1996 to 2007 was 8.95 per cent, which translates into 6–7 per cent of GDP'.

In short, the closer one looks at the reality of state-owned firms, not to mention the huge informal economy, the clearer it becomes that profit is the driving force of production, as in every other capitalist country.

### What was state capitalism?

The findings of *Unveiling the North Korean Economy* make it perfectly clear that the DPRK today is not 'socialist', probably even according to the author's narrow view of that concept as centring on state ownership and central planning. But one still might wonder why industry was nationalised and agriculture collectivised in the first place. Why, in other words, was state capitalism (or what the author calls 'socialism') adopted as an economic model in many countries?

It's no accident that most of those countries were only at the outset of capitalist development, with huge peasant populations and little heavy industry. In other words, they were in a position not unlike that of Japan or Germany in the mid-nineteenth century. And just as the state in those two countries drove industrialisation, so was it a driving force of capital accumulation in China and North Korea in the mid-twentieth century.

The methods of the state-capitalist system were crude but effective in forging the material conditions and 'human resources' required by capitalism. But once state capitalism had swept aside the fetters on capitalist development and achieved rapid industrialisation, the system itself began to impede the 'efficient' (profitable) operation of individual capitalist firms.

In the Soviet Union, state capitalism was already reaching that impasse by the 1950s, as reflected in the economic reforms of Khrushchev. But the DPRK and China, still in the midst of their industrialisation, viewed the profitability of individual firms as less important than the pace of overall capital accumulation. Kim Jong-il and Mao Tse-tung denounced the Soviet leaders as 'revisionists' or 'capitalist-roaders' not merely to save their own skins as dictators but also because the contradictions of state capitalism had not yet become apparent in their countries.

Later, of course, the DPRK and China followed the same path as the Soviet Union, introducing similar economic reforms to give state-owned firms greater autonomy to pursue profit. Marx once wrote, in looking at the development of capitalism in his time, that 'the country that is more developed industrially only shows, to the less developed, the image of its own future'. And this was the pattern in the twentieth century as well, with every state-capitalist country obliged to eventually implement Soviet-style reforms.

The DPRK leadership is walking the same tightrope, with even less room to manoeuvre because of its rigid political dictatorship. The 'supreme leader' and his cohorts recognise that providing too much autonomy to firms could undermine their own political legitimacy. And yet, in the end, even the dictator must follow the dictates of capital.

**MIKE SCAUERTE**

# WHATEVER HAPPENED



*In the 1960s leftwing demonstrators used to chant 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh' and 'Victory to the Vietcong'. We look at what sort of society emerged following their victory in 1976.*

In 1956, during a brief relaxation of censorship, a Vietnamese literary journal published a story by Tran Duy entitled *The Giants*. The giants in the story are created by God to help mankind fight the devils, but they end up trampling and killing more people than devils. The allegory was readily deciphered: the giants were the 'communist' party leaders, while the devils were the hated French colonialists, recently defeated at Dien Bien Phu (1954).

The history of the 'communist' movement in Vietnam cannot be summarised in a short article, but the timeline will help the reader place events in context.

## Top-down organisation

The Vietnamese 'communist' movement emerged from the struggle against French colonial rule as a top-down organisation. The leadership was a self-appointed and self-perpetuating group from the very start. The process of party formation began among Vietnamese emigrés in Canton – the French Sûreté (security police) made it too risky to place the central leadership inside the country. In 1925 Ho Chi Minh, backed by the Comintern, put together a group called the Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League, personally recruiting its members and deciding which of them should sit on its Central Committee (CC). In 1930 the League merged with other small groups to form the Indochinese Communist Party, later renamed the Vietnam Workers' Party or *Lao Dong*.

As with other vanguard parties of the Bolshevik type, the internal functioning of the Vietnamese 'communist' party has always been guided by the principle of 'democratic centralism'. Lower bodies are strictly subordinate to higher ones. Debate is allowed only until a definite policy is adopted, after which all members must support and implement that policy.

In practice, local party branches in Vietnam in the 1930s seem to have had considerable autonomy due to the difficulty of maintaining communication between them and the CC in China. However, once the leadership returned to Vietnam in 1945 control was tightened.

The activity of rank-and-file party members has almost always been confined to tasks assigned from above. On training courses they might be invited to raise objections to the policy of the leaders, but the purpose of this is merely to convince them that the leadership is right. Only during the brief thaws of 1956 and the late 1980s have they had greater freedom to criticize party policy.

At higher levels there has been freer discussion at certain periods, permitting the emergence of conflicting factions. (The most persistent though not the only important factional division has been that between supporters of a pro-China orientation and advocates of closer ties with European 'socialist' countries.) Such periods, however, alternate with others in which a narrow clique imposes rigid control. Thus the 'anti-revisionist' purge of the mid-1960s, in which hundreds of critical party and government officials and military officers were imprisoned without charge, inaugurated the 'rule of the two Le's' – Le Duan (general secretary) and Le Duc Tho (head of the CC's Organisation

Department, in control of appointments, and negotiator at the Paris talks). This was just one of recurrent purges that frighten people and inhibit debate.

## Relations with other political groups

The 'communist' party was not alone in fighting against French rule. There were also various 'bourgeois' nationalist parties, Trotskyist organisations and religious sects. At times the 'communists' judged it expedient to cooperate with this or that group. At other times they ruthlessly suppressed rivals who did not seem susceptible to their control, even resorting to assassinations and betrayal to the Sûreté (also a source of funds).

Especially dramatic were relations between Stalinists and Trotskyists. In the early to mid-1930s the 'communists' in Saigon cooperated with local Trotskyists – a practice denounced by the Comintern in 1937 and Ho in 1939. After the Vietminh took power in Hanoi in 1945, Trotskyists were hunted down as 'traitors' and they were almost all killed.

A sole survivor, Ngo Van, escaped just in time to France, where he wrote a valuable memoir (*In the Crossfire: Adventures of a Vietnamese Revolutionary*, AK Press, 2010). His political views evolved in exile: he rejected Bolshevism and became a council communist.

The 'communists' again cooperated with other 'patriotic' forces in the fight against the Americans. Most members of the National Liberation Front (NLF) in the South were not 'communists' (the moniker 'Vietcong' – Vietnamese Communists – is misleading). After victory the NLF was suppressed (see: Truong Nhu Tang, *A Vietcong Memoir: An Inside Account of the Vietnam War and Its Aftermath*, Vintage Books, 1986). NLF veterans remained a disgruntled group in society. Taking advantage of the thaw of 1986, they set up a Club of Former Resistance Fighters, with a journal entitled *Spirit of Resistance*.

## Outer and inner power elites

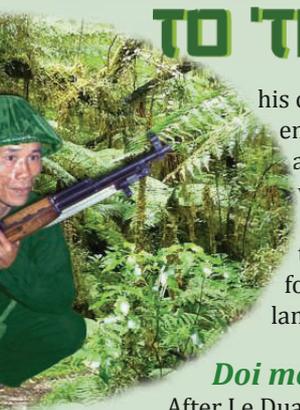
Within the party we can identify an outer power elite of 150–200 members of the party's Central Committee (CC) and an inner power elite of 15–20 top leaders – members of the Politburo and occupants of important positions in the CC apparatus. The top leaders have chauffeur-driven cars and live in luxurious villas with guards, servants, and personal libraries. Other members of the CC have lesser though still substantial privileges, such as use of a special store in Hanoi stocked with goods not available to ordinary mortals and a spacious apartment (most people live in very crowded conditions).

There is also a graduated system of access to information. Certain periodicals are published specially for the power elite. A digest of the world press has a fairly wide circulation. Some documents like Politburo minutes, however, are restricted to the inner elite.

## Ho Chi Minh

A few words on 'Uncle Ho'. He was the creator and symbol of Vietnamese 'communism' but he was not a dictator like Stalin or Mao, nor did he have any pretensions as a theorist. His power declined over time. In her novel *The Zenith*, Duong Thu Huong portrays the ageing Ho as virtually a prisoner of

# TO 'THE VIETCONG?'



his colleagues. Like Lenin, after death he was embalmed and placed on public display in a mausoleum in defiance of his expressed wishes (he wanted to be cremated, just as Lenin wanted to be buried). His last testament was published but in censored form (thus his call for a moratorium on the land tax was deleted).

## *Doi moi*

After Le Duan's death in 1986 the Vietnamese leaders embarked on a policy called *doi moi*, meaning 'renovation'. Initially, like Gorbachev's perestroika, this was envisaged as a process of political as well as economic reform. Later, wishing to avoid the fate of the Soviet elite, they switched to the Chinese strategy of encouraging private enterprise and foreign investment while consolidating the power structure.

As we have seen, the old state-capitalist system had its inequalities. However, the new mixed system of state and private capitalism has generated inequalities that are more extreme and, perhaps above all, more conspicuous. This has given rise to feelings of nostalgia for the old days. In particular, the period of the war against America, for all its hardships and suffering, is recalled as a time of sharing and mutual aid.

I was told of a man who was surprised one day to find on his doorstep someone who had served with him in the same unit. His pleasure turned into shame when his old comrade-in-arms told him that he was destitute and begged him to take him in as a servant. He said that he was not asking for money: he would be satisfied with food to eat and a roof over his head.

## The more things change...

The Vietnamese Revolution certainly brought changes in the composition, structure and ideology of the ruling class. But what changes did it bring to working people?

Many changes were more apparent than real. Here are a couple of examples.

One of the main demands raised by 'communists' and others under French rule was abolition of the *corvée* – a feudal institution that made peasants toil without pay on public works for a certain number of days per year. Under the Vietminh the same practice continued under a new name – citizen labour service.

Again, after 'land reform' (1954–56) peasants no longer had to pay rent to a landlord for the land they tilled. But instead they had to pay a land tax to the state. And the amount of the land tax happened to be about the same as the rent previously paid to the landlord. Later, after the collectivisation of agriculture, the same surplus was extracted by the state from the collective farms.

As the proverb says: 'The more things change, the more they remain the same.'

The French colonialists and their American successors placed little value on the lives of the 'natives'. But the 'communist' leaders too placed little value on the lives of their people. Even if one accepts the dubious propositions that the country had to be reunited and that this could be achieved only by war, the goal could have been reached at a much lower price in blood. For instance, the 'Easter offensive' of 1972, which cost the lives of almost an entire cohort of poorly trained 16-year-old boys, served no rational strategic objective. It was already clear that the US was withdrawing – all that was needed was a little more patience.

Impoverished by decades of war and devastation, Vietnam now lies alongside Bangladesh on the bottom tier of the global economic hierarchy, with wage levels only one half of those now prevailing in China. Chased out at such vast cost, the 'imperialists' are welcomed back to exploit Vietnamese workers and resources as foreign investors.

STEFAN

## VIETNAMESE 'COMMUNISM' TIMELINE

1880s French complete conquest of Indochina

1925 Ho Chi Minh sets up Vietnam Revolutionary Youth League (VRYL) in Canton

1930 VRYL merges with other groups to form Indochinese Communist Party (ICP)

1941 Ho creates Vietnam Independence League (Vietminh)

1945 Japan surrenders. Vietminh takes power in Hanoi. Ho proclaims Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). ICP officially disbands

1945–54 Resistance War Against France

1951 ICP reappears as Vietnam Workers' Party (Lao Dong)

1954 Geneva Agreement divides Vietnam into northern zone (DRV) and southern zone (Republic of Vietnam)

1954–56 'Land reform' in DRV

1959 Collectivisation of agriculture begins in DRV

1960 National Liberation Front (Vietcong) established in South

1960–75 Resistance War Against America

1969 Ho dies. Le Duan becomes general secretary of party Central Committee

1976 Country reunified as Socialist Republic of Vietnam

1977 Collectivisation of agriculture begins in South

1978 Vietnam invades Cambodia

1979 Border war with China

1986 Le Duan dies. Start of *doi moi* (renovation)

1988 De-collectivisation of agriculture legalized



# CUBA: NO 'NEW MAN'

EXCUSE ME YOUNG MAN,  
YOU TOOK A WRONG TURN,  
THIS IS NOT THE ROAD TO  
SOCIALISM!



completely' (*Nouvel Observateur*, 17 September 1967).

Quite apart from considerations of how voluntary for some workers 'voluntary work' really was, this was never going to succeed because people in Cuba were not

living in socialist conditions. Socialism presupposes that plenty for all is being produced. People can't be expected to behave in a socialist way in conditions of continuing scarcity, such as existed in Cuba. Marx and Engels pointed this out in a passage in *The German Ideology* which is the perfect answer

to Lenin's question (though Lenin was not aware of it since this work wasn't published until 1932). Discussing 'the alien relation between men and what they themselves produce' when there is private property, they wrote:

"This "alienation" (to use a term which will be comprehensible to the philosophers) can, of course, only be abolished given two practical premises. For it to become an "intolerable" power, i.e. a power against which men make a revolution, it must necessarily have rendered the great mass of humanity "propertyless," and produced, at the same time, the contradiction of an existing world of wealth and culture, both of which conditions presuppose a great increase in productive power, a high degree of its development. And, on the other hand, this development of productive forces (which itself implies the actual empirical existence of men in their world-historical, instead of local, being) is an absolutely necessary practical premise because without it want is merely made general, and with destitution the struggle for necessities and all the old filthy business would necessarily be reproduced."

Moral exhortations cannot overcome the economic reality of material scarcity. Scarcity means that people are obliged to try to get as much money as they can, not for its own sake but to get access to what they need to live. In other words, 'material incentives' will prevail.

There was a rather less appealing side to the attempt to create 'the new man' as it also involved the 'revolutionary vanguard' stopping people hearing further the capitalist-individualist ideas that had been inculcated in them before the revolution. In practice this meant suppressing these ideas and the parties and individuals (imprisoning some) deemed to be advocating them, including some of the original Cuban revolutionaries who thought that the revolution's aim was political democracy rather than socialism (actually, this had been Castro's view at the time too).

Castro and Guevara were of course well aware that socialism (or communism as they called it) was not possible in isolation on the island of Cuba, but they did believe that progress towards it could be made. Fifty years later, however, there is still production for sale, money still exists, and 'material incentives' prevail.

The fact is that Lenin could not have been more wrong in imagining that progress towards socialism could be made where its essential prerequisites did not exist, neither objective (a sufficient development of productive capacity) nor subjective (a working class with a sufficient degree of culture wanting and understanding socialism). All a socialist minority that seized power in the absence of these conditions could do would be to preside over the further development of capitalism in one form or another; which, granting that Castro and Guevara did want socialism, was what happened in Cuba. State capitalism was supposed to be a step on the way to socialism but that's where it stopped.

**ADAM BUICK**

Seen in its most favourable light (and not just as a theory of political dictatorship that it is), Leninism can be seen as the view that the way to socialism is for a minority of socialists to seize power at the head of a discontented but non-socialist working class and then using this power to educate this majority into becoming socialists.

This accepts that socialism is a classless, stateless, wageless, moneyless society based on common ownership and with voluntary work and free access to goods and services, and also that such a society can only function with majority support and participation. (Leninists call it 'communism', confusingly reserving the word 'socialism' to describe the state-capitalist regimes they establish when they come to power.)

This view is based on the premise that, due to capitalist control of the idea-forming apparatus, a majority can never come to be socialists while capitalist rule lasts; only a minority can and therefore it is their duty to seize power to liberate the majority. Lenin did not invent this view; he merely followed a tradition that went back to Babeuf's 'Conspiracy of the Equals' in the French Revolution.

One Leninist who took this seriously was Che Guevara who was a minister in the Cuban government in the early 1960s. He liked to quote from a review Lenin wrote in January 1923 of a chronicle of the Russian Revolution written by the non-Bolshevik Russian revolutionary Nikolai Sukhanov:

'You say that civilization is necessary for the building of socialism. Very good. But why could we not first create such prerequisites of civilization in our country by the expulsion of the landowners and the Russian capitalists, and then start moving toward socialism? Where, in what books, have you read that such variations of the customary historical sequence of events are impermissible or impossible?' ([www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/16.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1923/jan/16.htm)).

Answer: in everything that Karl Marx wrote.

Guevara wanted Cuba to 'start moving towards socialism' straightaway by, among other things, creating 'the new man'. This meant the 'revolutionary vanguard', as the government, educating people into becoming and behaving like socialists, in particular getting them to participate in the running and work of society on a voluntary basis because they realised this had to be done in the common interest. Hence he favoured 'moral incentives' over 'material incentives'.

In *Socialism and Man in Cuba* Guevara said that creating 'the new man' had to involve moving away from commodity production (production for sale):

'The commodity is the economic cell of capitalist society. So long as it exists its effects will make themselves felt in the organization of production and, consequently, in consciousness.' ([www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm](http://www.marxists.org/archive/guevara/1965/03/man-socialism.htm)).

Castro took the same view, declaring in an interview with a French magazine in 1967:

'I am against material incentives because I regard them as incompatible with socialism ... What we want is to demystify money, not rehabilitate it. We even intend to abolish it

# CHINESE 'MARXISM': *Not Even Trying*

China has been run on supposedly Marxist lines for nearly seventy years, yet nowadays its rulers do little more than pay lip service to the idea that there is anything Marxist about the social system there. 'Socialism with Chinese characteristics' is the standard official description of the wages-prices-profits set-up that is really one form of capitalism.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was founded in 1921. Last year at a conference held to mark its 95th anniversary, Xi Jinping, general secretary of the party's Central Committee, gave a speech. Xi, who is also the country's president, argued that Marxist principles had to be adapted to what was happening in China. 'The changes in the times and the range and depth of China's development are far beyond the imagination of classical Marxist writers,' he said. Certainly Marx never envisaged socialism as a society with billionaires, or as one that protected the trademarks of multinational companies, but that is not what Xi had in mind.

According to the CCP's constitution, the party is based on 'Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important thought of Three Represents and the

Scientific Outlook on Development'. But as for what these actually mean, there is very little information. For instance, the Scientific Outlook on Development supposedly 'puts people first and calls for comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development', while 'Mao Zedong Thought is Marxism-Leninism applied and developed in China'.

China's constitution, adopted in 1982, states that there are no longer exploiting classes, but that class struggle will continue for some time. According to Article 6 there is socialist public ownership of the means of production, and the principle of 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his work' applies.

A 1988 amendment added that 'The State permits the private sector of the economy to exist and develop within the limits prescribed by law.' This was an official recognition of the growing influence of the non-state economy, with the establishment in effect of a mix of state and private capitalism (not stated in such terms, of course). In 1999 a further amendment accepted the existence of a variety of modes of distribution, so not just to each according to their work: again, no details, but perhaps an implicit acknowledgement that

some people became very rich through exploiting others.

As for Deng Xiaoping Theory, this is the idea behind China opening up to the global economy and to the growth of private capitalism. Deng's statement that 'It doesn't matter whether a cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice' was a way of saying that economic success is more important than a politically correct policy. Xi Jinping is often seen as overseeing a return to 'Communist orthodoxy' compared to his predecessors as leader, but this does not go beyond platitudes such as 'Marxism ... does not end the truth, but opens the door and paves the way to reach the truth'.

In October 2015 a 'World Marxist Congress' took place in Beijing, intended to be the first in a series to be held every two years. Four hundred supposed Marxist scholars attended, many from outside China. Xin Xiangyang, described as 'a research fellow on Marxism at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' stated that 'China faces an increasing number of problems in the midst of its economic slowdown and deepening reform, such as corruption and the growing income gap, which require the country to use Marxism to explain and solve them.' Presumably these are unlikely to be explained as being part and parcel of capitalism.

Not everyone in China was impressed by the gathering. According to the *Washington Times* (15 October 2015), some people suggested that Marxism be used to study the murderous Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.

'Marxism' is taught in schools at all levels, but presumably this is just a Chinese version of Bolshevism. The rulers of China hardly even pretend that there is anything Marxist about the exploitative and unequal society they lord it over.

**PB**



# DEATH by CONSULTATION



*Monday 2 October, 8.00am: 2,100 Monarch Airlines staff woke up to learn on BBC News that they had no job. Monarch had maintained complete secrecy until midnight on Sunday when the final rescue deadline expired with the Civil Aviation Authority and the company went into administration. Monarch destroyed thousands of holidays, and two thousand working lives, with zero notice and zero decency. But mass redundancies aren't always so brutal. Sometimes they are done on the sly.*

Things seemed to be looking up recently in my area when a long-derelict piece of ground overgrown with scrubby weeds was invaded by a small army of diggers and 'dozers and men in hard hats and neat stacking portacabins. The recession was over, this hive of sudden activity seemed to say. Banks must be investing again. Capitalism is moving out of slump towards its boom phase.

As if to confirm the excitement, there was around the same time a flurry of mail through the door offering credit cards sweetened with zero-interest loan periods. What did it all mean? Where was all this new cash coming from?

But this isn't new cash, it's old cash that's been in hiding. Recessions aren't times of no money, they are times when the people who have money don't want to lend it. Idle money may not earn them anything, but with firms going bust every day the risk of not getting their money back is just too great. Nor is there any incentive to lend, because the central bank will have flooded the interest rate in order to keep people spending and borrowing and thus keep the economy moving. But it's a Catch 22, because the same trick also means that nobody wants to lend.

In a recession businesses can't get loans so they go to the wall, sometimes taking whole supplier networks with them, while new businesses can't start up. To people on the street with nothing but fluff in their pockets and negative figures in their bank accounts, it will look as if there is no money anywhere, as if it's all mysteriously vanished into some cosmic black hole. Which in a way is true. The banks have sucked all the money out of the system and are sitting on huge piles of it, stashed away in their credit ledgers.

Eventually things change, if only because things can't stay that way forever. People with money need to lend almost as much as the rest of us need to breathe. They dare to

become confident again, or at least their venality finally overcomes their caution. The economic lights turn from red to amber. The green light is coming, and engines start to rev.

Looking back on the start of the recession is like looking at an elephants' graveyard, a mass culling of under-financed and over-exposed businesses including the shock collapse of seemingly-invulnerable giants. In this late period one might still see the odd outlier like Monarch, but mostly it's a long tail of rasping last gasps drawn by small and medium businesses which had somehow hung on grimly under the radar and, cruelly, started to believe they were going to make it.

## Death of a company

You don't hear about these small deaths because they don't reach the news. Their passing is marked by barely noticeable details. Boards go up, tombstone-like, across windows which yesterday were alive with deals and special offers. Workers in a car park manoeuvre large numbers of used office desks and other furniture into a removal van. A skip is piled high with rain-soaked office jumble: filing shelves, brochure containers, birthday cards and old Christmas decorations.

As in nature, businesses don't necessarily enjoy a serene passing. Smelling blood, the sharks close in, and there is a feeding frenzy of takeovers, asset-stripping and closures. It is a wonderful chance for those with money to pick up plant, equipment, patents, licences and customer databases, all at rock-bottom prices.

Cannibalising a company is not straightforward though, and buyers must be careful to step gingerly through the regulations, known as TUPE, which relate to takeovers. Specifically, you are not allowed to buy a company and immediately sack its workforce, because you will be successfully sued at a tribunal for unfair dismissal. Neither can you get around this by offering, or appearing to offer, similar employment in some distant city, as this will fall foul of the rules around constructive dismissal.

Instead, the clever thing to do is to buy the company and tell the nervous staff that you have no idea what you plan to do. You issue a 'Letter of Measures' which includes an innocuous clause suggesting that 'some redundancies' may not be ruled out. You then embark on a period of

'Consultation' with the staff in order, supposedly, to determine the best way forward for their company. You encourage them to open up honestly about systemic problems in the company and when they do, you are all ears and sympathy. You want to find solutions. You are here to help. If staff want to know what the future holds, you answer helplessly that nobody can predict how the Consultation will turn out. If staff are tempted to desert the company before you are ready to let them, you encourage them to stay and assure them that there is no reason to fear the worst. You beg them for the sake

of everyone's future to maintain business confidentiality and not divulge any information to business associates, or even to their friends. You maintain an impenetrable air of fairness and open-handedness.

When the consultation period is over you can announce 100 percent redundancies, citing systemic problems and confident that you have followed TUPE procedures to the letter if not the spirit. The devastated staff know that they do not have a legal leg to stand on. However you are still not in the clear, because you now have to abide by Part IV, Chapter II of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, which stipulates that you must represent your intention to close the business as a 'proposal' and allow a further minimum 30 days for more 'Consultation' with the staff. You duly do this, inviting the staff as per regulation to come forward with any alternative suggestions (eg not getting sacked) which they may be able to come up with. Of course you have no intention of seriously considering these suggestions and when they materialise, you destroy them comprehensively by any means necessary including using financial data which is confidential to the business and to which the staff have no access. The proposed closure is at this point a 'proposal' in name only, a fact evident to everybody but which you must continue to deny at every point. With no other recourse, the staff sit at their desks pretending to work and await the inevitable. When the staff fail to produce any further suggestions to avoid their fate, you can regretfully proceed with the closure. The staff have had every opportunity. Procedures have been followed. No chance of ACAS becoming involved.

## Working lives trashed

When the bottom line demands it working lives get trashed, either brutally and all at once, or slyly and through a prolonged pantomime of consultations. Workers ought to understand this and some do but somehow many don't. Instead they insist on believing in decency and fair play, not realising that these are only found among the working class and in fairy tales but not in business or among the rich. First comes the hope, then the shock, then the bitterness. Too late comes the cynicism.

But the knife twist is worse than this, if one considers how the business came to fail in the first place. Like the

captain of a ship who runs it aground or into an iceberg, the boss of a company may refuse to take good advice from their officers and crew. Such bosses, emotionally attached to their own authority and deeply distrustful of those around them, may refuse to delegate and attempt to micro-manage every part of the business until, exhausted and unable to tell good decision from bad, they make a final and fatal error. The 'wisdom of crowds' is not a concept understood by bosses. Democracy is anathema in business and reviled as 'mob rule'. So even when the enterprise is sinking the workers are kept in the dark for reasons of confidentiality, to maintain authority and to avoid early desertions. They are victims of capitalism's obsession with hierarchies, in which pecking orders matter more than rational decision-making and corporate status alone decides whether a worker has a voice.

So the ship goes down and the workers then discover, if they didn't know it already, that debt is an ocean it's easy to drown in. They flounder in this ocean, holding their families up and trying to hail passing boats, but the boats are all full or not looking in their direction. If a boat approaches with a spare seat, there's no question of being automatically hauled on board. Instead, the worker must go through the interview process. Why this boat, and not some other boat? What can you bring to this boat? Are your skills a match for what this boat needs? Why should we rescue you and not someone else? Describe a situation where you helped a boat row faster. Describe a problem involving boats which you solved. The worker concentrates hard on playing the game and giving the clever answers while trying to tread water and look cheerful. Nobody wants you when you're desperate.

And that is not even the final twist, which is that the boss has meanwhile got a handsome pay-out by the takeover company and an executive job on their board. When the captain of the Costa Concordia ran his ship aground in 2012 and fled before bothering to see his passengers safe, he got 16 years in jail. When similar things happen in business nobody thinks anything about it. It's nothing personal. It's just business.

Gradually the global recession lifts. New companies start up and new job opportunities will appear. Eventually a new generation of wage workers will also appear to fill these posts, brought up to aspire to better things than their parents had, but inevitably facing all the same groans and gripes and office politics that wage slavery engenders. And they will persist in the cruel delusion of their forebears, that if you work hard for a company, the company will work hard for you, and that if you defend capitalist society, that society will defend you. One would like to think that workers can learn from their mistakes, but some never recover from the experience of being scrapped like a rusty hulk, and sink into the murky depths of self-worthlessness and nihilism.

Some workers do get over it though. Maybe they talk to other people, maybe they just figure it out for themselves, but they understand where the real blame lies. Underneath the corporate courtesies and the glossy paintwork is a submarine class war that's as deep as it is dirty, a war that could not exist if all the oceans of power and money were drained right out of the world. Those workers know that the class war is being won today by the bosses because workers don't even realise they're in a fight. And they also know that doing nothing about the class war is the same as giving in.

That's why there are socialists in the world.

PJS

# Ideology & Revolution Part Two



*In the second part of this three-part series we look at the French Revolution*

On the 4<sup>th</sup> April 1727 a leading French intellectual was present at the state funeral of Sir Isaac Newton in London. His name was Voltaire and what he found most impressive about the grand occasion was that although Newton was born a commoner his work had gained him such prestige as to warrant so high a national honour. Such a thing could never have happened in France at that time where only members of the nobility could hope to provoke such national recognition. This was a testament to the complete political domination of the English bourgeoisie who, after their revolution in the 1640s, had fought off an attempted counter revolution in 1688 and installed a constitutional monarch, an act of religious tolerance, free trade and even a 'bill of rights'; something which the French middle class could only dream of. The new English ruling class embraced the symbiotic relationship of science and technology which was soon, through the imminent 'industrial revolution', to make them far wealthier than many of the petty European feudal monarchies. Isaac Newton became one of the first icons of the intellectual movement that turned its focus from religious faith to scientific reason in what we now call 'The Enlightenment'. Newton presented society with a universal natural mechanism that had the potential to explain everything – including, in the hands of philosophers and political radicals, the perceived intellectual and moral progression of human cultural activity through history. It was to be the French intellectuals who were to transform this radical philosophy into a political ideology with which to fuel their own bourgeois revolution.

We have seen that it was the Protestant Reformation that enabled the English bourgeoisie to intellectually challenge the might of reactionary international Catholicism and which, in turn, informed the ideological propaganda used in their revolutionary struggle with their king. In France the Reformation was only ever partially successful

and eventually almost entirely succumbed to the 'counter reformation'. As a result the capitalist mode of production was continually handicapped by the very same feudal economic relationships that had so frustrated the English middle classes in the first part of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. This underlying class struggle was simmering and waiting to burst into revolution in France by the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century. As we have seen, it was the French intellectuals' use of Enlightenment philosophy

which was to reflect this remorseless economic and political tension. Foremost among these was Denis Diderot's Encyclopaedia which attempted the complete reformulation of knowledge from an enlightenment perspective. Together with writers such as Rousseau and Voltaire he began work on this monumental undertaking which was immediately recognised as a threat to the establishment by those who sought to defend the 'Ancien Régime'. Another surprising element that served to weaken the paradigms of continental Catholicism came from a most unlikely source. Portugal had always been devout and, like its neighbour Spain, a bastion of reactionary autocracy. In 1755 a mighty earthquake hit its capital Lisbon destroying most of the city including many churches together with their congregations. A reciprocal tsunami augmented the devastation and death toll. Many believed this to be a breach of the covenant with the Christian god and served to seriously weaken belief in traditional religion and the social structures that went with it. All of these uncertainties, new intellectual paradigms and the manifest injustices of feudal autocracy were about to find their political expression as part of the explosion that was the French Revolution.

## Action replay

It all started, as almost an action replay of the English revolution, when the French king was forced to call a parliament (Estates General) to deal with a financial crisis. France was near bankruptcy as a result, ironically, of Louis XVI helping to finance the American republican struggle against England. This parliament was composed of three 'estates': nobility, clergy and the commons. Although the deputies of the commons represented over 90 percent of the French people they only had a third of the votes, the other two thirds belonging to the nobility and clergy. This made it inevitable that they would be out-voted by the other two estates on most issues of contention. Upon being called to Versailles the members of the commons produced a book of grievances which addressed, together with many other problems, this profoundly anti-democratic arrangement. Unsurprisingly the other estates prevaricated and the commons lost patience and proclaimed itself as a National Assembly which represented the entire population of France and on its return to Versailles, some days later, to begin its work the delegates found themselves locked out of their former meeting place. Undeterred they proceeded to the nearest large interior space within the massive palace complex (a tennis court) where they took an oath not to separate until they had produced a political national constitution.

Thus began the revolution on 20 June 1789. Despite a provocative build-up of reactionary military forces the Assembly quickly got to work abolishing feudalism and producing a Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen (again very reminiscent of the English parliament's Petition of Right and then its revolutionary 'Grand Remonstrance' of some 150 years before). In Paris, meanwhile, the decades of oppression of the poor had exploded into violence which culminated in the storming of the Bastille and the subsequent arming of the 'sans culottes' (proto working class) who were to defend the revolution against traitors within the country and then to fight the revolutionary wars against the other nations which sought to destroy the new regime. The French bourgeoisie originally, as had the English, wanted a constitutional monarchy rather than a Republic but when Louis, like Charles I, was proven a traitor he was executed. By now the Assembly had moved to Paris where it came under the influence of a radical republican group (the Jacobins) and their most prominent member Maximilien Robespierre who, arguably, took the revolution in a direction that the moderate members of the bourgeoisie had never intended and which certainly did not correspond with the values of the Enlightenment.

These radicals would have been unable to take control of the revolution without the confluence of a series of events; civil war, international war, inflation and sectarian rivalry all contributed to what we now call 'The Terror' and the reign of Madame La Guillotine. In some ways this goes to prove that the ideology of the Enlightenment was, at best, only an idealistic aspiration and, at worst, merely empty propaganda to motivate those who did the fighting. Certainly when Napoleon Bonaparte came to power during a coup d'état in 1799 and subsequently 'exported' the revolution to most of continental Europe it was seen eventually for what it really was – an empire of exploitation and plunder. Oliver Cromwell had preceded Napoleon in this by his violent imperial activities in Ireland and both individuals represented the realities of bourgeois rule, stripped of its high minded rhetoric.

Since the days of these capitalist revolutions many millions of workers have continued to kill and be killed in the name of high ideals such as liberty, fraternity and equality. This does not, of course, invalidate these ideals and the integrity of those like Rousseau and Diderot who believed in them but, like the radical Christian ideals of the Puritans, they captured the 'zeitgeist' of their time, and as such, were open to manipulation by the powerful. That power, in the end, derived not from ideals but from economic and political forces which were little understood at that time. Both the French and English revolutions

had the same result – the coming to power of the capitalist class despite the use of seemingly opposite ideologies (philosophical reason as opposed to religious faith); dialectically speaking such ideas are taken up because they seem to contain, however vaguely understood, antithetical elements with regard to the prevailing paradigms that rationalise the existing system. Such ideas always find an audience because of the oppression and exploitation necessary to sustain any private property system. These ideas are catapulted into the political spotlight when economic and historical circumstances make revolutionary change inevitable. Socialists, with the invaluable help of Karl Marx, have understood this for over a hundred years but, ironically, this political insight also fell victim to the manipulation of a new ruling class – namely the Bolsheviks during the Russian Revolution. Does this imply that Marxism/socialism is merely just another form of idealism that can be manipulated and used as propaganda by power elites?

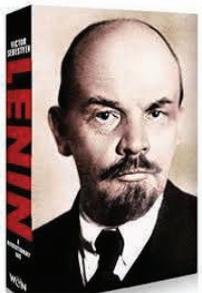
In part three we investigate the relationship between the revolutionary events in Russia in 1917 and the political theory of socialism and what both owed, if anything, to the Enlightenment.

**WEZ**



## Lenin the Democrat?

*Lenin the Dictator: An Intimate Portrait.*  
By Victor Sebestyen. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. 2017



Lars T. Lih in his 800 page 2009 work *Lenin Rediscovered: 'What Is to Be Done?' in Context* argues that Lenin 'must be thought of as a Russian Social Democrat because his fundamental

project was to help build a party in Russia that was as much like Western social-democratic parties as conditions allowed – and where conditions did not allow, to change them to the revolutionary overthrow of the Tsar.' Victor Sebestyen's new book is the antidote to this.

Sebestyen observes that Lenin's first published work was a bitter attack on the Populists, and Lih admits that *What Is to Be Done?* though 'enshrined ... as the founding document of Bolshevism' 'was written to score off some very specific opponents'. Sebestyen comments that Lenin's style of argument 'was nearly always domineering, abusive, combative and often downright vicious'. He battered opponents into submission with the deliberate use of violent language which he acknowledged was 'calculated to evoke hatred, aversion, contempt ... not to convince, not to correct the mistakes of the opponent, but to destroy him, to wipe him and his organisation off the face of the earth.' 'Those who disagreed with [Lenin] were 'scoundrels', 'philistines', 'cretins', 'filthy scum', 'whores', 'class traitors', 'silly old maids', 'windbags' (one of his favourite epithets found frequently in his writings) and 'blockheads'. In modern Leninist parlance this could be criticised as 'sectarianism'.

Sebestyen claims that 'after looking over Lenin's [1903 resolution on party membership criteria, Martov] told him 'but that's dictatorship you're proposing'. Lenin replied 'yes, there's no other way.' 'Without doubt Lenin was the main cause of the bitterness. ... He was constantly on the offensive, cajoling, hectoring and abusing delegates.' 'When Lenin at this time referred to the 'enemy' he meant his old friend Martov and the Mensheviks – 'when you see a stinking heap you don't have to touch it to know what it is. Your nose tells you it's shit and you pass by.'

Although Lenin 'never wore anything resembling a military uniform as so many dictators favoured' he did argue that 'those who do not prepare for armed uprising must be ruthlessly cast out ... to the ranks of the enemies as traitors or cowards.' And he once rebuked 'how can you make a revolution without firing squads?'

Once in power Lenin censored the press and threatened to close down opposition newspapers. He ruled by decree setting up the Cheka secret police. The Soviet became a rubber stamp body and remained so.

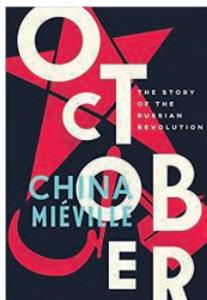
Social Democrats fundamentally support free elections. Lenin did not and demonstrated this as soon as he was in a position to do so. The Bolsheviks failed to win a majority in the January 1918 elections to Russia's first freely elected parliament, the Constituent Assembly 'which made a nonsense of the claim they were supported by the masses'. 'Lenin fired the neutral electoral commissioners... a 1918 demonstration for 'All Power to the Assembly' was fired upon by Red Guards.' Thereafter Lenin then gave the orders to dissolve the Assembly.

Actions, as always, speak louder than words.

DJW

## A Whiff of Cliff

*October: The Story of the Russian Revolution.* By China Mieville, Verso, 2017.



This is the latest book by China Mieville, a founding editor of *Salvage* magazine and an award-winning author.

It is structured with a chapter for each month and covers

a lot of ground. However October is the last narrative chapter so it feels like a long time coming. The writing is exciting and events proceed with a lively pace. Insofar as a book of some 300 pages can manage there is much detail on what happened – but little room is left for analysis of why.

For example, 'Lenin was referring to his supporters as hard, and his opponents as soft, and the distinction will generally remain glossed in such terms ... though this is not to deny the substantial range and evolution of opinions on each side.' Analysis also occasionally tends towards the binary 'hard', 'soft', 'right', 'left', 'legal Marxists', etc.

He writes of Lenin that 'to his enemies he is a cold mass-murdering monster, to his worshippers a god-like genius, to his comrades and friends – a shy quick-laughing lover of children and cats.'

Mieville also uses the translation 'Russian Social Democratic Workers Party (RSDWP)', rather than the more common 'Russian Social Democratic Labour Party (RSDLP)'. Surely it wouldn't be to do with the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) that Mieville left in 2013, would it? The SWP were founded by Tony Cliff, who wrote a three volume biography of Lenin. In

Mieville's further reading he mentions this and calls the works by E. H. Carr and I. Deutscher as 'magisterial' and Trotsky as 'towering, vivid, historically vital'. Orlando Figes' work is credited but described as 'unconvincing tragedianism for some lost liberal alternative.' *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* by Figes, first published in 1996 is award-winning, nearly a thousand pages and acts as a counter to Mieville's book.

An interpretation too generous to Lenin is given to the 1903 Bolshevik-Menshevik dispute over membership criteria and Trotsky is more lauded than not, as 'hard to love but impossible not to admire. He is at once charismatic and abrasive, brilliant and persuasive and divisive and difficult.' Whereas Stalin is described as 'the butcher, key architect of a grotesque and crushing despotic state.' Surely Lenin was the key architect of this, with Trotsky as the butcher?

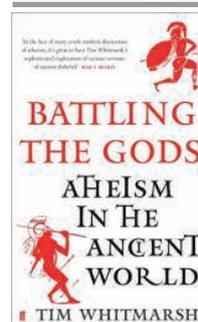
Some interpretations come over as Cliffite; '[Bolshevik activists] were more concerned to focus on the masses in the streets.' and '[Moscow crowds in February 1917] were shouting 'Down with the Tsar!' It's worth pointing out the 'streets' and their 'demonstrations' were a violent liability for the working-class (often involving getting shot at), 'anger' and 'rage' often meant mob rule, and the 'masses' were neither socialist nor even supportive of the Bolsheviks for the most part. Decisions, such as the coup itself, were taken among small groups of Bolsheviks with support from the military seizing various centres of power to carry it out.

Mieville concludes 'October is still ground zero for arguments about fundamental radical social change. Its degradation was not a given.' By this he means degradation from the early Bolshevik party. But there was no substantive degradation. The early Bolshevik party before October was already degraded. October didn't of itself lead to Stalin – Lenin and the underpinning ideology of Bolshevism did.

DJW

## Long Time No Gods

*Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World.* By Tim Whitmarsh: Faber & Faber £9.99.



The ancient Greeks and Romans believed not in god but in gods, and lots of them. There were gods of music, air, war, wine, love, the sea, and so on. But not everyone accepted the standard faith

in gods, and there were advocates of atheism, discussed in this informative volume. There are many problems in interpreting the sources and coping with the chance nature of which texts have survived, but there clearly were people who not only questioned the existence of gods but indeed denied that they existed at all.

The gods of the Greeks had lots of human weaknesses, such as being sometimes stupid and certainly not omnipotent. They actually lived in this world, even if it was high up on a mountain, and those worshipped varied from place to place. There were no sacred texts, and priests just carried out sacrifices rather than making spiritual pronouncements. In the sixth century, Xenophanes pointed out that believers were just projecting human physical and behavioural characteristics onto the gods.

The classical period (fifth and fourth centuries BCE) saw many objections to blaming gods for human actions, and some saw human action as free from divine intervention. Protagoras (born in the early fifth century) said he could not be sure the gods existed at all, and Diagoras (who lived later in that century) may have been 'the first person in history to self-identify in a positive way as an atheist'. This was the period when Athens rose to power, and heterodox religious beliefs came to be seen as a threat to the state's foundations. The charges against Socrates may have included not recognising the city's gods, though the sources are not clear on this.

In the Hellenistic era (fourth to first centuries BCE) there was religious worship of rulers such as Alexander. Then under the Roman Empire (from the first century BCE) there was claimed to be a divine mandate for Roman rule. A significant atheist 'movement' existed in the pre-Christian Empire, and there were different gods worshipped in different locations. But in the fourth century CE Constantine provided financial support for christianity, and in 380 an imperial decree established it as the official imperial religion, which all subjects had to follow. Heresy now became treated as a crime against the state, and believing in a god other than the christian one was counted as atheism. Monotheism was far less tolerant than polytheism had been.

It is sometimes argued that atheism is a development of the last few centuries, but Whitmarsh shows that it is older than christianity or islam, and of a similar age to judaism. From a historical point of view, 'what is anomalous is the global dominance of monotheistic religions and the resultant inability to acknowledge the existence of disbelievers.'

PB

## Wyndham Lewis: Life, Art, War

Vorticism is sometimes seen as Britain's only avant-garde art movement. It was founded in 1914 by Wyndham Lewis (1882–1957), who is now the subject of a sizeable retrospective at the Imperial War Museum North in Salford Quays, on until the end of the year.

The First World War inevitably limited the spread and impact of Vorticism, and Lewis himself fought in an artillery regiment before becoming an official war artist. After the war he produced a variety of art works, together with a series of books (novels, criticism, polemics), most long out of print. He seems to have been a contrarian with a rather prickly personality, and he disliked privileged cliques such as the Bloomsbury Set. He was vehemently against Bolshevism, and his experiences in WW1 made him very much opposed to war. Unfortunately, these considerations led him to some sympathies for Nazi Germany and to describing Hitler as 'a man of peace'. He changed his mind on these matters after visiting Germany in 1937, but by that time he had already made himself rather unpopular in many cultural circles.

Many of Lewis's paintings from

WW1, however, contain significant and perceptive comments on the fighting. Drawings from 1918 show violence and death, with soldiers reduced to the status of machines. His 1919 picture 'A Battery Shelled' is an impressive work which depicts dehumanised figures running for cover as the shells rain down, while three more realistically-depicted men watch or simply ignore what is going on. This was considered too controversial to be an appropriate memorial painting, and it was passed from the Imperial War Museum to the Tate.

'The Surrender of Barcelona' (1936) refers to the city being captured by Spanish forces in the fifteenth century, but surely relates to the Spanish Civil War as well. 'Inferno', dating from 1937, is a pessimistic presentation of corpses and the flames of hell, as Lewis combines his hatred of war with an expectation that another large conflagration is approaching.

The IWM publicity describes Lewis as 'Britain's original rebel artist', and he did set up the short-lived Rebel Art Centre. Despite his – to say the least – dubious political views, many of his paintings undermine the role of official war artist and reveal both the boredom and the horror of war.

PB



*A Battery Shelled, 1919 (detail)*



## Music For The Masses

THE MOST oppressive regimes of the last century didn't only use their military strength to maintain a hold over people. As the documentary *Tunes For Tyrants: Music and Power with Suzy Klein* (BBC4) shows, both the Russian and German states used music to reinforce compliance. The series' three episodes cover the years between the end of the First World War and the end of the second, when both states were moving towards totalitarianism, reminding us of the similarities between the extreme left and right wings of capitalism. They endorsed and encouraged particular styles of music, but the styles they suppressed reveal just as much about politics and culture during this turbulent era. In the programme, alongside archive footage and performances by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, Klein talks with experts and people who played music at the time.

In the first years after the Russian Revolution, its state used music to try and engineer a cultured and united working class, such as through the appropriation of *The Internationale* as an anthem. Another approach was the founding in 1922 of the Persimfans orchestra to bring classical music to the populace. The orchestra played without a conductor to emphasise its collective approach and egalitarian principles, a method which Klein snippily compares to communism itself: 'a good idea in theory but hard to achieve in practice'. Around the same time, avant-garde music was used to promote Russia as forward-thinking and experimental, such as the Lenin-sponsored tour by Leon Theremin of his eponymous electronic musical instrument, and composer Arseny Avraamov's *Symphony of Factory Sirens*, which also incorporated car horns, machine guns and foghorns. Avraamov called for the destruction of all pianos, as they were a symbol of the old order, and because the Russian word for 'grand piano' also translates as 'royal'. These lofty ideals quickly became corrupted as the Russian state solidified its power. In a more brutal way than Lenin, Stalin wanted



music to be infused with the state's values, and those outside this narrow vision risked being sent to the Gulag. The careers of composers like Dmitri Shostakovich and Sergei Prokofiev hinged on whether their work met with Stalin's approval. Theremin moved out of Russia before the end of the 1920s, while Avraamov fell out of favour with the elite and died in poverty.

In Germany of the 1930s, the Nazis also began controlling what music was considered acceptable. They devised the notion of 'degenerate music', that which was judged to 'contaminate' German 'purity' because it was influenced by other traditions. Jewish musicians were all branded 'degenerate', and the *Jews and Music ABC* directory blacklisted thousands of people, from prominent composers like Felix Mendelssohn and Gustav Mahler to part-time pianists. Other 'degenerate music' included the avant-garde and modernist, cabaret music (which had embraced satire, pacifism and gay rights in its lyrics) and jazz. This music provided an outlet for expression and a sense of community for those who played and appreciated it, these groups being targeted by the Nazis. So, the notion of 'degenerate music' is more about oppressing others than any abstract idea of 'pure' art. Perhaps surprisingly, music was permitted in concentration camps, as long as it helped subdue or control the prisoners. Camps had their own orchestras (Auschwitz had 12), and footage of the concerts they performed was used as propaganda to downplay the holocaust.

The classical music of which the Nazis approved gave them 'a veneer of respectability', according to Klein. Hitler admired Richard Wagner's operas for conveying fantasies about nationalism, heroism and mythology, and ordered performances of them to be staged before rallies, and even as a show of strength as the Nazis were close to defeat. For Klein, the toxic spirit of the age is summed up by *Carmina Burana* by Carl Orff (1937), popular with both Nazis and later aftershave advertisers. For Klein, this tune has become a 'cliché of macho apocalyptic glory'.

A state – especially a totalitarian one – needs its citizens to accept an ideology and situation that isn't in their best interests. Trying to convince someone to do this through rational arguments isn't likely to work, so states have capitalised on how music affects us on a non-rational, emotive level. Strident, passionate music like *Carmina Burana* and Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries* is undoubtedly rousing to hear. As Professor Erik Levi says in the documentary, Wagner's music can be overwhelming, bypassing thought to seduce the audience. The effect is amplified if music is part of a rally, with thousands of people marching in time, the scene dressed up with flags and banners. Such an imposing spectacle could sweep someone up, deafening them to the vile ideas behind. The same process applies to the patriotic anthems sung by organisations like the Hitler Youth and Pioneer Movement; a choir of people all singing the same song implies and forges unity. In Britain, music encouraged by the state reflected the stoicism and respectability seen as the values which would win the war; Vera Lynn's songs were judged to be too 'slushy in sentiment' by the BBC. Radio programmes like *Workers' Playtime* and *Music While You Work* were broadcast to and from factories, intended to boost morale and improve productivity among the workforce.

Although states no longer use music to manipulate to the extent they used to, the same kind of bombastic marching songs are still played at military parades, whether in Russia, America, North Korea or Britain. Music's power to stir our emotions has instead largely shifted to the market, where it's been commodified, whether through advertising jingles or Ed Sheeran albums. The working class has still kept a hold on music's ability to reinforce a message, through protest songs, punk, rap, rave, even through the chants heard at football matches. As *Tunes For Tyrants* usefully explores, it's the message, the ideology behind music that we should listen out for.

**MIKE FOSTER**

# 50 Years Ago

## Scarborough Follies

ANOTHER YEAR, another autumn, another Labour Party conference. We have, by now, got the message. In 1963, again at Scarborough, Labour heard Harold Wilson say that a better life was just around the corner, as soon as we had a Labour government to set the scientist free.

In 1964 they heard Wilson—then Prime Minister—assure them that, with Labour in power, better times were definitely on the way.

In 1965 Wilson was on the defensive, struggling to justify his government's incomes policy and what he called redeployment—not, he insisted, unemployment. All of this was, he said, a necessary preliminary to the better days which everyone knew lay ahead.

In 1966 it was an outright wage freeze, credit restrictions—



in fact everything which under the Tories had been stigmatised as stop-go—which Wilson said must be endured before we could come into Labour's Promised Land.

This year it was the same old story. Better times are coming—in fact, Wilson can actually see the hoped-for improvements which prove to him that we are almost round the corner. But before that, there is a little matter of wage restriction, unemployment and cutting the unions down to size which must be gone through.

So it goes on, year after year.

Party conferences, as everyone now knows, have little meaning other than as exercises in public relations. This year the Labour leaders used their gathering to defend their records and, with one or two exceptions, they did it with diabolical skill.

The delegates accepted it. The wonder is that they never tire of hearing the same weary promises, the same cynical justification of broken pledges, the same old visions of prosperity just over the horizon.

Labour Party members, it is clear, are content that they will never arrive at the Promised Land. But surely even they must see that they are not even travelling hopefully? (from Review, *Socialist Standard*, November 1967)

## Declaration of Principles

*This declaration is the basis of our organisation and, because it is also an important historical document dating from the formation of the party in 1904, its original language has been retained.*

### Object

**The establishment of a system of society based upon the common ownership and democratic control of the means and instruments for producing and distributing wealth by and in the interest of the whole community.**

### Declaration of Principles

The Socialist Party of Great Britain holds

1. That society as at present constituted is based upon the ownership of the means of living (i.e. land, factories, railways, etc.) by the capitalist or master class, and the consequent enslavement of the working class, by whose labour alone wealth is produced.
2. That in society, therefore, there is an antagonism of interests, manifesting itself as a class struggle between those who possess but do not produce and those who produce but do not possess.
3. That this antagonism can be abolished only by the emancipation of the working class from the domination of the master class, by the conversion into the common property of society of the means of production and distribution, and their democratic control by the whole people.
4. That as in the order of social evolution the working class is the last class to achieve its freedom, the emancipation

of the working class will involve the emancipation of all mankind, without distinction of race or sex.

5. That this emancipation must be the work of the working class itself.
6. That as the machinery of government, including the armed forces of the nation, exists only to conserve the monopoly by the capitalist class of the wealth taken from the workers, the working class must organize consciously and politically for the conquest of the powers of government, national and local, in order that this machinery, including these forces, may be converted from an instrument of oppression into the agent of emancipation and the overthrow of privilege, aristocratic and plutocratic.
7. That as all political parties are but the expression of class interests, and as the interest of the working class is diametrically opposed to the interests of all sections of the master class, the party seeking working class emancipation must be hostile to every other party.
8. The Socialist Party of Great Britain, therefore, enters the field of political action determined to wage war against all other political parties, whether alleged labour or avowedly capitalist, and calls upon the members of the working class of this country to muster under its banner to the end that a speedy termination may be wrought to the system which deprives them of the fruits of their labour, and that poverty may give place to comfort, privilege to equality, and slavery to freedom.

## Meetings

For full details of all our meetings and events see our **Meetup** site: <http://www.meetup.com/The-Socialist-Party-of-Great-Britain/>

### LONDON

#### Clapham

**Sunday 19 November 3pm**

THE BASIC INCOME SCHEME: Why it won't work as intended

Speaker: Adam Buick

Socialist Party premises, 52 Clapham High Street, SW4 7UN (nearest tube: Clapham North).

#### Chiswick

**Tuesday 21 November 8pm**

REMEMBERING WHAT? Reflections on Remembrance Day

Speaker: John Critchfield

Committee Room, Chiswick Town Hall, Heathfield Terrace, W4 4JN (nearest tube: Chiswick Park).

#### EC Meeting

**Saturday 2 December 2017**, 52 Clapham High Street, London, SW4 7UN.

Correspondence should be sent to the General Secretary. All articles, letters and notices should be sent to the Editorial Committee.

### Picture Credits

p4: Tesla Roadster, PD

p5: Men against violence against women, Irene Scott/AusAID, 2013, CCA 2.0

p7: Lord Adonis, National Archives, OGL v1.0

p9: Catalonia strike, Clàudia Abancó, Oct 2017, CCA-SA 4.0

p22: Tunes for Tyrants, BBC

p23: Harold Wilson, Allan Warren, 1986, CCA-SA 3.0

## Corbynism or socialism?

Real socialism has recently been the subject of two articles in mainstream media in as many weeks. Such occurrences are very rare even during elections in which socialists campaign, leaving us to agree with Oscar Wilde when he stated *'the only thing worse than being talked about is not being talked about'*. Neither thesun.co.uk (28 September) nor nationalreview.com (6 October) score top Marx for accuracy, but many of their readers will have been shocked to see excerpts from our twitter account – @OfficialSPGB – such as *'outdated failing capitalism must be eradicated and replaced with socialism and forget about wanting to manage capitalism to make it nicer'*. The Sun is as superficial as ever, but National Review's Jonah Goldberg tries harder. His best effort at critique invokes John Rawls: 'any attempt to create a "true socialist" society runs into the *Iron Law of Oligarchy*. Every organization requires some small group of people to make important decisions.' But no leadership has emerged since our formation in 1904 and our structure is based on democratic accountability and delegated function. Our registered 'leader' for electoral purposes is no different from any other member – other than that he had the misfortune for his name to be drawn from a hat!

## Premier league parasites

Revolutionary change can only come about as a result of, as Marx and Engels put it, 'the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority'. Until then, capitalism with its wars and want will remain. Until then, leaders and social parasites will continue to parade their privilege. 'The Sultan of Brunei celebrated his 50 years on the throne of the tiny oil-rich nation in typically understated style. Dressed in gold brocade and festooned with medals, the sultan entered the capital – with his wife Queen Saleha and their children – on a gilded chariot pulled by 50 members of staff. The five-kilometre procession through the streets of Bandar Seri Begawan was part of a month-long celebration of his golden jubilee... Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu'izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa'adul Khairi Waddien Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam is... the world's wealthiest

monarch and was once the world's richest man, with a personal wealth estimated at £15 billion (\$20bn) in 2008. He lives in a 1,788-room palace and owns one of the world's most valuable collections of high-performance supercars' (ibtimes.co.uk, 5 October). Two others playing in the same league, Russia's dictator Putin and the Saudi king, met recently. 'Asked about ties with Riyadh during a panel discussion at an international energy conference Wednesday, Putin responded that Moscow doesn't see close US-Saudi relations as an obstacle for closer cooperation with the Saudis, and added that alliances tend to shift. "Is there anything in the world that stays unchanged?" Putin said. "I think that all things change"' (abcnews.go.co, 4 October). Which for the 99 percent means the more things change, the more they stay the same.



## ICAN! UCAN'T!

Unsurprisingly, 'NATO gave a chilly reception to nuclear disarmament group ICAN's Nobel Peace Prize win Friday, saying efforts to end the atomic bomb must take into account the "realities" of global security.' The reality is that nations compete over natural resources, trade routes and areas of domination. Such competition can and does result in war. ICAN, 'the Geneva-based organisation, recognised by the Nobel committee for its decade-long campaign, was a key player in the adoption of a treaty symbolically banning nuclear weapons, signed by 122 countries at the UN in July. NATO, which has three of the world's nuclear powers in its ranks, strongly criticised the treaty, saying it risked undermining the international response to North Korea's atomic weapons programme. Jens Stoltenberg, the alliance's secretary-general, welcomed "the attention given to the issue" of disarmament by the Nobel Committee and said NATO was committed to creating conditions for a world without nuclear weapons' (en.prothom-alo.com, 6 October). UCAN'T expect peace in a capitalist world where war is endemic. Why focus on one type of weapon of war when the solution is to get rid of them all, and war itself by establishing socialism? *'Our house is burning because it is made of inflammable materials— and people will keep dropping lighted matches. It is useless to tackle each fire as it breaks out. We must build ourselves a new house'* (A Message for Aldermaston Marchers, April 1960).

