

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity



weekly **worker**



Supplement: celebrate the Russian Revolution, but never forget the counterrevolution

- NHS funding crisis
- Genetics and creativity
- 2007 crash, 10 years on
- Communist University

No 1167 Thursday August 10 2017

Towards a Communist Party of the European Union

£1/€1.10

LORD OF CHAOS



LETTERS



Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

Wild Wales

Your readers will be interested in some scandalous Labour Party developments in Wales. The right wing here still exerts a disproportionate influence at the leadership level and this, predictably, has produced crude restrictions on our democratic rights.

As part of the preparations for the next general election, members in key marginals in England will be allowed to elect the panels responsible for selecting their shortlist for potential MPs. This is an important change from the previous protocol that stipulated that only NEC members would sit on these panels. Handing responsibility over to general committees or to all-member meetings for an election of a selections committee to oversee the process would mean greater democratic accountability. It would also go some way to recompense rank-and-file comrades for their exclusion from candidate selections in the lead-up to the June general election.

Labour in Wales - like Scotland - is a devolved political entity, however. This degree of autonomy - sensible enough, given the specifics of politics down here - has been abused to deny our members a voice in these key elections.

The July meeting of the Welsh executive committee (WEC) heard a general secretary's report from Louise Magee, setting out the parallel procedure to the English arrangements. After some consultation on gender balance in the six "offensive" Welsh seats (priority marginals), the selections would take place immediately in all of them - using the established, restrictive procedures.

WEC member Darren Williams (the comrade is also a CLP representative on Labour's national executive committee) reports that his proposal for adopting the more democratic English template was "heavily defeated... and the paper [ie, the general secretary's report - DH] was adopted as originally tabled".

After this, the right clearly felt it was on a roll. The latest news is that the Welsh Labour leadership now intends to widen this disenfranchisement to every seat in Wales where Labour has an MP - all 28 of them. In the lead-in to June's general election, the Labour leadership nationally simply confirmed incumbent MPs, arguing that, given the 'snap' nature of the contest, there simply was not enough time for trigger ballots around the country. But this was to be a one-time deal, we were assured: special measures, given the tight timetable.

But the *Skwawkbox* blog - an outlet reputedly close to leading national figures in the party - reports that the Welsh Labour leadership "plans to [repeat this] pre-emptively, by arranging now, with no time-pressure in play, that all its 28 existing MPs have been confirmed in place for the next general election, whenever it is."

Skwawkbox understates it a tad when it suggests that many Labour Party members down here are going to be very "frustrated" with the right's cavalier attitude to us. But the thing to remember about the right wing of our party is that, when it comes to having a motivated and engaged membership, it really couldn't give a shit. Or rather, it is positively *against* such a madcap, insurrectionary notion.

The recent visit to west Wales by John McDonnell illustrates this perfectly. This leading comrade was given a cynical run-around by the Welsh Labour leadership. It seems that his visit was known about several weeks in advance - some comrades say three, some say more. Either way, Constituency Labour Party secretaries

were put under heavy manners *not* to even tell people about it - let alone put out a barrage of publicity; book a decent venue, with an overspill capacity of some sort; arrange the transport, the stalls, the balloons, the whistles, the dry ice and laser show finale. To make the big deal out of what was a big deal, in other words.

At the last minute, comrade McDonnell's meeting was shunted out of Haverfordwest (population: over 12,000) to a *bijou* church hall in the snug hamlet of Roch (hall capacity: around 150; population 825). It was only the hard work of local party members and Momentum activists that partially salvaged the event.

'Never again', is now the mantra in Wild West Wales.

Dai Hard

Ystradgynlais

Clusterfuck

Assuming it has been possible to hack through the almost farcically dense undergrowth of corporate media 'black' propaganda on the same matter, surely there's a blossom-like beauty to be found within the fact that a Venezuelan constituent assembly has now been formed.

What might be called the wafting scents from that flower of anti-imperialism, allied to solid working class consciousness, should be breathed deep into the lungs of anyone, anywhere on planet Earth, who claims to be a communist.

Indeed, despite our entirely valid criticisms of the soundness or otherwise of the Hugo Chávez-originated Bolivarian movement (and latterly of president Maduro's political direction), all communists should suck into their very soul that core awareness of dignity and fairness; that proud sense of destiny; that remarkable fervour; as all continues to flourish amidst Venezuela's many far-left-leaning citizens. It could be said, flourishing against all demonic odds.

In this context, who the hell are we to criticise? After all, if only UK communists had managed to generate such formidable and vibrant engagement or replicate such mass involvement, we might be a damned sight closer to securing what are, as currently things stand, far-distant to the extent of almost mythical goals.

Maybe there are those who would counter that Jeremy Corbyn and his team have now come along to dig over and beautifully replant our socialist garden (so to speak). Well, all that can be said in response is: be prepared for witnessing my conniption fit!

In summary, a large dollop of humility on the part of UK communists - combined with lashings of optimistic solidarity - might offset that tendency of ours for a dispiriting purity and correctness in relation to matters such as the Venezuelan struggle. That being how those policies or that stance can be perceived, at any rate.

Of course, it may well be profoundly disturbing to acknowledge this tragic agglomeration, this 'clusterfuck', of facts. However, it's also being coldly honest with ourselves and thereby 100% constructive to do so.

In my humble but nevertheless heartfelt opinion, appropriate time should be made available during the CPGB's Communist University to discuss in detail these general problems and crucial challenges.

Bruno Kretschmar

email

Hegemony

When the USA wanted regime change it used to be done in secret by the CIA, but in the last few decades it has grown bolder. The 2017 Venezuela regime change project has gone public.

The mainstream media spreads the propaganda that president Nicolas

Maduro is a dictator. That Maduro is repressive and killing his own people on peaceful demonstrators. That the elections have been a fraud. That the opposition are patriots who are demanding democracy. That Maduro has singlehandedly destroyed Venezuela's economy.

None of the above is true. Not since it was a co-conspirator for the Bush-Cheney administration's illegal invasion of Iraq in 2003 has the mainstream media been so guilty of spreading false propaganda supporting illegal US foreign policy aggression. The US has been perfecting its regime change techniques, camouflaging them as 'democracy promotion', funding subversion through the state agencies and coopted NGOs. The public justification for ousting a democratically elected head of state is cynically said to be democracy promotion and human rights. The real motivation is to recruit a compliant head of state.

The US is imposing world hegemony by military might, political arm twisting and economic domination. Nothing and nobody takes preference ahead of US military and economic world hegemony. The number of people who have been killed directly and indirectly to that end since 1991 is in the millions. The number killed for the sake of democracy and human rights is zero.

David Pear

email

Engels' 'update'

Although both David Sherrief and John Hutton have replied to me (August 3), neither addressed the main theme of my letter (July 27) concerned with the ending of the era of cheap energy and the consequence for capitalism: that is, if a new source of energy comparable to cheap oil is not found.

Modern societies need a steady supply of energy to keep going. Take away this energy and our cities, transport systems, farms and factories will collapse overnight. The rising of energy prices, consequent on oil production peaking, and imposing supply constraints in a period of rising demand for energy, is a very challenging prospect indeed. I relate the idea that money makes the world go around to theories of society which do not begin with energy: for instance, Marxism.

Firstly, Sherrief misunderstands what I mean when I argue that for Marx it was money which made the world go around. This statement simply refers to the circulation of capital, depicted in the formula Marx used - ie, M-C-M'. Jack Conrad also seems to have misunderstood me on this matter, so perhaps I should have stated more clearly what I was referring to. The comrade turned to a quote from the *Communist manifesto*, where Marx declares: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle", to refute the 'money makes the world go round' argument, not realising that I was referring to M-C-M'. Without being aware of Engels' update, I pointed out that Marx's statement in the *Communist manifesto* was incorrect. Obviously, like me, comrade Conrad seems to have been unaware of Engels' update - why else did he use the non-updated quote, and without any explanation?

Sherrief thinks Engels corrected Marx because he was responding to the kind of pedantry supposedly displayed by myself. Here's a simpler explanation. Engels corrected Marx because the latter was plain wrong. Going out of your way to defend an error is a form of gross opportunism, so rather than defending Marx's error Engels simply corrected it. Unlike Engels, Sherrief wants to defend Marx's mistake from my criticism,

while at the same time using Engels' update against me. Clearly, like me, Engels saw the flaw in Marx's position. While pointing at Engels' update of Marx's position in the *Communist manifesto*, Sherrief tries to protect Marx from criticism by claiming that primitive communism had a form of class struggle. This ludicrous claim can only be made by someone who doesn't understand that classes, at least in Marxism, refer to ownership of property, or lack thereof. So, whatever struggles were taking place in primitive communism between alpha males and society, they were not class struggles. You can't have class struggles if there were no classes, although other types of struggles and conflicts are possible.

Sherrief's claim that Engels was responding to pedantry when he updated Marx's mistaken position falls flat on its face with the intervention of John Hutton, who provides us with a quote which shows how mistaken Marx was, although Hutton is trying to defend Marx's mistake. Hutton writes that Marx gave the following famous statement in the preface to the German edition of the *Communist manifesto*: "... ever since the dissolution of the primeval communal ownership of land, all history has been a history of class struggles, of struggles between exploited and exploiting, between dominated and dominating classes at various stages of social evolution".

If this quotation by Hutton is accurate, it would clearly suggest that Marx had a tendency to absolutise the class struggle, which, by the way, he made no claims to have discovered in the first place. To claim that "all history" has been one of class struggles following the end of communal ownership of land is obviously ludicrous. History is not only made up of class struggles. For instance, the wars of the Roses in England (1455-86) were not class struggles, but dynastic struggles between the House of York and the House of Lancaster for the throne of England. The religious struggles in England following Henry VIII's break from Rome were not class struggles. The American war of independence was not a class struggle, nor was World War I, while World War II only assumed a dual class character after the

invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. I could cite many more instances, like the struggle for Irish independence or the Iran-Iraq war. Clearly Marx had a flawed theory of history, which Engels saw fit to correct.

Sherrief claims that I closed my "gallant defence of peak oil theory by once again rubbishing Karl Marx". This is a sweetener before he puts the knife in. Obviously Sherrief belongs to the 'Marxism is flawless' school of thought, which is unable to grasp its contradictory nature. On the one hand, Marxism stands on the side of the working class and socialism, but, on the other hand, the doctrine contains certain fundamental flaws, which go beyond the claim that all history following the end of primitive communism has been class struggles. It is for these reasons that I no longer use Marxism to rationalise my support for social ownership of the means of production. For me social ownership takes precedence over defending the flaws in Marxism. These flaws were not all corrected by Engels and he contributed to some of them.

It is the contradictory nature of Marxism that individuals like Sherrief fail to grapple with. At the philosophical level these flaws began with the Marxist claim that social being determines social consciousness, whereas in reality, in the dialectical relationship between being and consciousness, it is the latter - consciousness - which determines social being. The Marxist claim that being determines consciousness is like saying that when a person crosses the road the decision was made by his legs rather than his consciousness.

This is not just an abstract philosophical dispute with no relation to reality - as was seen by the sudden collapse of the Soviet Union, which, under Marxist leadership, failed to transform the consciousness of the masses in the direction of a democratic socialist society, making it easier for the capitalist roaders to take over. In other words, lack of socialist consciousness contributed to the demise of the Soviet Union, because social ownership of the means of production - ie, being - does not automatically lead to socialist consciousness.

Tony Clark

Labour supporter

Summer Offensive Magnificent

Our Summer Offensive got a big boost this week with the magnificent donation received from comrade PK - no less than £680 for our annual fundraising drive! According to the comrade, he was only doing his little bit for the SO - very modest! (And I hear he has given up a lot of things in order to afford it, even including visits to the barber.)

In truth though, PK's contribution helped us out quite a bit this week, accounting for more than half of the £1,380 that came in. Mind you, we had a bit of trouble accessing our bank account just before collating the latest figures, and suspect that some donations might not have been included. So the running total of £13,924 might be a little understated - especially with only 10 days to go before the end of this year's campaign.

But, as I said last week, our week-long Communist University - which starts on Saturday August 12 - is when the cash really starts to flow. So I'm not too disheartened at not having got halfway to our

£30,000 target yet. I know for a fact that a number of comrades are saving their final (and biggest!) contributions for next week.

In the meantime, comrade PB handed over a nice £80 to the CPGB at last Sunday's special London Communist Forum, and a further £64 was raised from other comrades present. When it came to the *Weekly Worker*, CG (£30), AC (£30), GD (£25), BK (£25) and DV (£20) were the most generous this week (but unfortunately there were no PayPal donations from any of our 2,209 online readers).

However, to repeat, I'm not disheartened. I am confident that we are going to reach that £30K target. And we will know for sure by the time the next *Weekly Worker* comes out. That will be in three weeks time on August 31 - yes, we are just about to start our annual two-week break. Watch this space!●

Peter Manson

Fill in a standing order form (back page), donate via our website, or send cheques, payable to *Weekly Worker*

USA

Lord of chaos

Donald Trump's reign is turning into a fiasco, writes Paul Demarty, who is concerned about his plans to regain the initiative

Towards the end of Barack Obama's time in the White House, there was an increasing sense of complete deadlock. Congress was ever more dominated by Republicans, and the Republicans ever more dominated by Tea Party types, for whom Obama's presidency was *prima facie* illegitimate and the result of some vast conspiracy. It seemed that things could not possibly get more gridlocked.

What little we knew. Among the many assumptions about the state of the American body politic upended by the country's 45th president, a good few had to do with how paralysed things can get in Washington. We were used to wars between the Capitol and the Oval Office, but it has been a while since the executive branch itself was locked in fratricidal factional manoeuvres.

We need look no further than the peculiar case of Anthony 'the Mooch' Scaramucci, who was plucked from his life in the company of exotic financial instruments to become Trump's director of communications - from the world of alternative investments, as it were, to that of alternative facts. His appointment had been resisted stubbornly by the White House chief of staff and die-hard 'Grand Old Party' loyalist, Reince Priebus, who no doubt was somewhat perturbed by Scaramucci's rather protean political sympathies (he supported Obama in 2008) and habit of running his mouth off at the wrong times.

The Mooch's arrival heralded the departure of Priebus's creature, Sean Spicer, the modern American master of the barefaced lie; thus began what sometimes seemed like a 10-day-long *Saturday night live* sketch. Scaramucci, having begun (as they all do) with a promise to do things differently, in a more conciliatory way, promptly made himself busy hunting for leaks from White House staff - so bored by his day and a half in PR that he decided to switch to counterespionage. In this, we may surmise that he got very little support from Priebus, as the latter's fears about Scaramucci were confirmed, one by one. The whole farce came to head when the *New Yorker* writer, Ryan Lizza, blew the gaff on a dinner with various Fox News bigwigs; Scaramucci responded by telephoning Lizza demanding to know his source and denouncing his enemies in forthright, four-letter terms, neglecting at any point to state that any of this was off the record.

By this point, Trump's patience with Priebus was exhausted, and he was replaced with retired general John Kelly, whose seat was barely warm under him before Scaramucci was dispensed with, not a week and a half after his hiring. No doubt he is back in New York, crying into his vast piles of money.

The leaks continue to dog the administration, of course, and Scaramucci is not the only one to be concerned. In this respect, he was only following the priorities of his employer, who views people strictly in terms of whether or not they are unswervingly loyal to him. The leaks are unforgivable betrayals. In all this, of course, he is not entirely wrong; we can surmise from the ease with which American journalists are able to break embarrassing inside stories that the Trump administration is riddled with people who will not be putting it at the top of their CV in years to come, and are horrified at the direction their pursuit of a career in public service has taken them.

A big part of all this, of course, is the Russia allegations, which continue to gather steam. It is quite undeniable

at this point that key participants in Trump's campaign met with this or that Russian functionary; the question is merely whether any 'dirty tricks' originating in Moscow took place with the knowledge or collusion of Trump's lieutenants. We now know (thanks, of course, to leaks) that a grand jury is beginning its work on the Russian interference business, and we all look forward to finding out who gets a grilling. Robert Mueller, the former FBI chief appointed to investigate all this, looks pretty untouchable at the moment (and, were Trump to put heavy manners on him, the precedents are not good - Richard Nixon's moves against special counsel Archibald Cox at the height of the Watergate scandal precipitated his final slide into disgrace). At the department of justice, Jeff Sessions's loyalties are doubtful, although he has reluctantly agreed to look into the leaks.

Fragile

How to characterise this deeply dysfunctional administration? Its key component parts seem to be close family members and die-hard followers of the tanned *consigliere* himself: grizzled military men who might have stepped right out of some Hollywood movie in which Tough Decisions Must Be Made; shameless Wall Street plutocrats fresh from the champagne jacuzzi; and the sort of conspiratorial rightist cranks one is liable to meet on the internet's underbelly at three in the morning. These are hardly mutually exclusive categories - the Mooch's spectacular flame-out demonstrated, among other things, that financiers, even those who had previously denounced Trump, can become zealous superfans, and Michael Flynn combined the military fatigues with the tinfoil hat.

What is clear is that the whole thing is extremely fragile. Those figures in the administration closest to the Republican mainstream are considered little better than race traitors by Steve Bannon's head-banging white nationalists; they are also increasingly tarnished with the various Russian innuendos and general chaos that surrounds them. The generals are looking after the military; the Goldman Sachs alumni are looking for a big pay day. At the centre of it all is the president - a paranoid, narcissistic man-child.

Thus general Kelly has his work cut out. Sure, he can fire Scaramucci. When the time comes, he can fire Bannon (who he wouldn't piss on to put out a fire). He can fire advisor Kellyanne Conway. But he can't fire the most impulsive, ranting loudmouth on staff - the president himself. He may even - who knows? - go after the leakers, but what would be the point? The fish rots from the head down - we are witnessing the reign of the most indiscreet president in American history. Who needs leakers when you have @realDonaldTrump, publicly denouncing his subordinates and digging himself a new hole every day?

So it goes. Paradoxically, of course, legislative failures like the Obamacare debacle further incentivise Trump to fall back on his core political tactic of outrageous public statements, threats and generalised defamation. In such light must we view recent rattle-raising curveballs on the status of transgendered soldiers and further immigration clampdowns: they are, after all, matters for the White House rather than congress. Hence also the escalating hostility to the media and other traitors in America's midst.

Is it working? Apparently not. Trump's approval ratings continue to slide. Worryingly for him, parts of his core demographic are flaking away - for the first time, he has a net negative approval rating among whites without a college education, 65% of whom cast a ballot in his favour last November. Sound and fury will get you so far - but only so far, when you have promised effectively to abolish unemployment, restore the dignity of the white working man and in general make America great again. He may froth about the treachery surrounding him in the Beltway, but then he assured the world that he would be successful in sweeping such elements away.

Faced with irrationality, it is proper for Marxists to dig away for the 'rational kernel' hidden within it; what is incoherent in its inner logic may yet be coherent within a wider system encompassing it. We do not follow certain mullahs of Iran's Islamic republic in search of the well hiding Muhammad al-Mahdi: we seek instead the secret of their power in the legacy of the cold war's closing sequence, the balance of class power under the shah and after his fall, and so on. In the murk of history as it is actually lived, unfortunately, we rarely find the capitalists lined up neatly on one side, and the class-conscious proletariat arrayed as one against them. Otherwise, one suspects that we would be done with the revolution already.

Trump's regime is an extreme example of the inherent difficulty of the task. His base is familiar enough, as the most atomised elements of the (especially rural) working class and petty bourgeoisie unite in supplication to the Master, who will bring rain and sunshine from above - here we have the picture of Bonapartism. Except it is a very funny sort of Bonapartism we encounter, when Bonaparte himself is so obviously constrained and hemmed in at every turn. His cabinet superficially resembles the establishment, lacking only the technocratic wonks, against whom he ran on principle; yet he does not successfully discipline them under his own will. Judges rebel; billionaires declare themselves for 'the resistance'; faced with the trans business, military chiefs pointedly ask if it is an order. It appears that we are witnessing a botched suicide attempt on the part of the American republic.

Trump is unlikely to face impeachment in the short term; if there is any stone-cold guarantee that his hard-core following - the trucker-capped whites of the rustbelt and elsewhere - should cleave closer to him, a serious attempt on the part of the intelligence apparatus, the *haute bourgeoisie* and the Democrats to unseat him on the basis of what remains - alas! - the sort of insinuations Fox News would make about Hillary Clinton would do it. The Democrats know it, and actually so does the GOP. The present gridlock in congress and chaos in the White House is likely to come and go in the year-and-change until the midterms, after which a more serious political reckoning may be on the agenda.

If Donald wants to get people back on side in time, his options are limited. We should all be very, very worried that a historically successful one for men and women in his position is the theatrical spectacle of war. On that point, the list of possible targets is already worryingly long, and getting longer ●

paul.demarty@weeklyworker.co.uk

ACTION

London Communist Forum

Sunday August 13 and Sunday August 20: No forum
Sunday August 27, 5pm: Weekly political report from CPGB Provisional Central Committee, Calthorpe Arms, 252 Grays Inn Road, London WC1. Followed by open discussion and reading group: study of August Nimitz's *Lenin's electoral strategy from Marx and Engels through the revolution of 1905*. This meeting: chapter 2, 'Revolutionary continuity'.

Organised by CPGB: www.cpgb.org.uk; and Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk.

Against fire and fury

Friday August 11, 1pm: Protest, US embassy, 24 Grosvenor Square, London W1. No to Trump's inflammatory behaviour towards North Korea.

Organised by Stop the War Coalition: www.stopwar.org.uk; and Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament: www.cnduk.org.

No to the arms fair

Saturday August 12, 10am to 4pm: Workshop, Friends Meeting House, 188 Woodhouse Lane, Carlton Hill, Leeds LS2.

Organised by Stop the Arms Fair: www.stopthearmsfair.org.uk/events/leeds-stop-arms-fair-workshop.

Das Kapital and Marx's economics

Thursday August 31, 7pm: Educational, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. With professor Ben Fine. Hosted by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

Crafting peace

Saturday September 2, 11am to 6pm: Anti-war craft fair, Mill Hill Chapel, City Square, Leeds LS1.

Organised by Leeds Coalition Against War: www.lcaw.co.uk.

Stop arming Israel

Monday September 4, 9am till late: Protest, Western Terrace, Excel Centre, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16.

Organised by Palestine Solidarity Campaign: www.palestinecampaign.org/events/stop-arming-israel-arms-fair-protest.

Radical bargains

Saturday September 9, 11am to 3pm: Book sale of radical left and Marxist literature, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

No to the arms trade

Saturday September 9, 10am: Art exhibition, ExCeL Exhibition Centre, London Docklands, Royal Victoria Dock, 1 Western Gateway, London E16.

Organised by Art The Arms Fair: <https://artthearmsfair.org>.

Scrap the pay cap

Sunday September 10, 1pm: Rally at TUC Congress, Arundel Suite, Holiday Inn, 137 King's Road, Brighton BN1. Confirmed speakers: Mark Serwotka (PCS), Steve Gillan (POA), Ronnie Draper (BFAWU), Sean Hoyle (RMT), Amy Murphy (Usdaw).

Organised by National Shop Stewards Network: <http://shopstewards.net>.

Living with trauma

Tuesday September 12, 6.30pm: Meeting, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. How to cope in Iraq.

Organised by Tadamun (Iraqi Women Solidarity): <http://solidarityiraq.blogspot.co.uk>.

No to war

Wednesday September 20, 6.30pm to 8.30pm: Rally, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1.

Organised by North London Stop the War: www.facebook.com/nlondon.stwc.7.

Social histories of the Russian Revolution

Thursday September 28, 6.30pm: Discussion meeting, Birkbeck, University of London, 26 Russell Square, London WC1. 'Taking power: remaking the family, levelling wages, planning the economy'. Speaker: Wendy Goldman.

Organised by Social Histories of the Russian Revolution: <https://socialhistories1917.wordpress.com>.

Tories out!

Sunday October 1, 12 noon: National demonstration on opening day of Conservative Party conference. Assemble Castlefield Arena, Rice Street, Manchester M3.

Organised by People's Assembly: www.thepeoplesassembly.org.uk.

Making a world without war

Monday October 2, 7.30pm: Talk, Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1. Speaker: Dr Scilla Elworthy.

Organised by Conway Hall Ethical Society: <https://conwayhall.org.uk/ethical-society>.

Capital and historical materialism

Thursday October 5, 7pm: Lecture, Marx Memorial Library, 37A Clerkenwell Green, London EC1. Marx's approach to the analysis of capitalist society. Speaker: Dr Jonathan White (*Theory and Struggle*). Organised by Marx Memorial Library: www.marx-memorial-library.org.

CPGB wills

Remember the CPGB and keep the struggle going. Put our party's name and address, together with the amount you wish to leave, in your will. If you need further help, do not hesitate to contact us.

Weekly Worker

Our paper is just about to start our two-week summer break, so there will be no *Weekly Worker* on August 17 or 24. Issue 1168 will be published on Thursday August 31.

NHS

Not a commodity

The growing trend towards rationing treatment is a disgrace, writes James Linney

In July, the *British Medical Journal* (*BMJ*) carried an article relating to an increase in the number of appeals made by doctors on behalf of their patients, known as individual funding requests (IFRs), to gain funding for a range of different treatments.¹

The *BMJ* had sent freedom of information requests to all the clinical commissioning groups (CCGs) in England, asking for a breakdown of the number and outcomes all IFRs recorded for the years 2015-17. I will forgive you if the story passed you by: it only registered a small ripple in the media at the time. In this article I am going to look in more detail at this information and its consequences, which I feel is much more significant than the media coverage it was given. If we scratch at the surface of this data, we reveal the startling reality of a whole new level of Tory-sponsored undercutting of the NHS.

The *BMJ*'s investigation found that in the past year there had been a 47% increase in the total number of doctor-led IFRs (50,200 requests, increasing to 73,900). In itself these numbers are not huge, but, as we will see, they are just the beginning. Yet, more than the quantity, it is in the qualitative change of the *type* of IFRs that we make our most ominous discovery.

The IFR procedure was introduced in the early 2000s, and they have traditionally been made by doctors on behalf of patients for treatments that would not routinely be funded by the NHS, where the doctor feels an exception should be made. For example, despite what the rightwing media would have us believe, cosmetic breast surgery is not routinely carried out by the NHS; but if a patient requires a breast reduction due to having chronic back pain as a result of a large breast size, then the funding would need to be applied for by either the patient's GP or surgeon via the IFR procedure. A panel would then assess the case and decide if funding should be granted.

It is worth pointing out that the composition of the panel is not, as common sense would dictate, made up of people best placed to make these decisions: ie, doctors. Most panels require input from just one doctor, who will have never met the patient and who does not even have to attend the appeal hearing personally. The other panel members - the ones who actually make the final decision - include an "IFR lead manager" and an "IFR business manager". In other words, the panel has cost-saving as its priority - the reason why about half of the IFR appeals in the last 12 months were refused. So, since the introduction of these IFRs, as one *Guardian* headline put it, "Doctors [are] forced to plead with NHS for treatments for their patients".²

The number and type of treatments which doctors had to take through the IFR process has historically been limited. However, what we have seen over the past 12 months is an introduction by the vast majority of CCGs of an unprecedented widening of the type of treatments that are no longer available routinely on the NHS. These treatments, varying slightly from area to area, come with restricting conditions (termed "clinical thresholds"). The only option then is for the doctor to make an IFR request. These new (long) lists of treatments are not the rare and exceptional, like the plastic surgery example I mentioned above, but include very common treatments, the withholding of which potentially leads to people having to live with



Despite growing needs and capabilities, less will be provided

devastating disabilities and chronic pain. The CCGs defend this introduction by claiming that they have picked certain treatments that are of "limited clinical benefit", and so in the name of saving the NHS money they will no longer be available routinely. Treatments included in most CCG lists are: cataract surgery, certain mental health services, excision of benign skin lesions, hernia operations, varicose vein operations, gallstone removal, fertility treatments, knee and hip joint replacements ... I could go on: as I say, the list is extensive. If you want to see which treatments are being limited in your area, they will be available on your local CCG website.

What these new CCG-dictated clinical thresholds mean is that the provision of all the listed treatments are now no longer considered on an individual, case-by-case basis. Instead, if the arbitrary conditions, as stipulated by the CCG, are not met, the treatment is automatically refused - irrespective of how beneficial the GP or hospital consultant feels it would be for their patient. This is rationing the likes of which we have not seen before.

Two examples

Before I look in more detail at the consequences of these changes I would point out that I am not against all 'rationing'. For example, this year the NHS banned the use of homeopathy on the NHS - good! Not a minute too soon. Even if the NHS had significantly more resources available to it, to offer a treatment that has absolutely no proven benefit is a waste and a disservice to its users. However, by looking in more detail at two examples from the list, we will see that these new restrictions are not driven by what is or is not clinically proven to be beneficial, but by the implementation of further 'efficiency savings'. I will be referring to the criteria as defined by the CCG from the area where I work, but

broadly they are similar in CCGs across the country.

Firstly, the provision of knee and hip joint replacements. These are some of the most common elective operations performed by the NHS - about 160,000 annually.³ As we age, our large joints degenerate as a consequence of supporting our body weight; for some people this degeneration (called osteoarthritis) can lead to significant pain and disability. Non-surgical treatments, such as analgesic medications and physiotherapy, can help to reduce symptoms and delay deterioration, but for many people these treatments fail and the only definitive option is to remove the diseased joint and replace it with an artificial one. This is a big operation and not one that any competent doctor would offer without first considering less invasive options or taking the patient's overall health into consideration.

However, two new CCG-defined criteria state that no hip or knee operation will be carried out unless the patient has a body mass index (BMI) of less than 35. If it is over 35 they are forced to complete six months of documented weight management intervention and if afterwards they still have a BMI above 35, the operation will not be funded, but their GP can use the IFR to appeal. On the face of it this does not sound completely unreasonable: if someone is overweight they should obviously be helped to lose weight - this can help reduce their symptoms, slow down disease progression and help aid recovery. Of course, we must keep in mind that people in this situation are facing a cruel catch 22: their chances of losing weight are significantly decreased if every time they take a step they are in terrible pain. And, yes, generally the more overweight the patient is, the greater the risks of surgery. However, there is no supporting

clinical evidence that a BMI above 35 equals worse surgical outcomes and my CCG does not attempt to offer any. In addition, the National Institute of Clinical Evidence (NICE) states in its guidelines that "patient-specific factors (including age, sex, smoking, obesity and comorbidities) should not be barriers to referral for joint surgery".⁴

What we are seeing is the use of an arbitrary numerical cut-off chosen to deny treatment. And it gets worse. In their wisdom, my CCG has also decided that only people suffering intense pain and severe functional limitations will get the operation they need. This is defined as being in "almost continuous pain" and are "largely or wholly incapacitated". In other words, unless you have end-stage joint disease you are out of luck. This is in opposition to most clinical evidence - there have been several extensive studies, which have found that offering joint replacements at a late stage of disease leads to worse outcomes.⁵ Again NICE agrees, recommending that we should "refer for consideration of joint surgery before there is prolonged and established functional limitation and severe pain".⁶

Then there is cataract surgery. Cataracts are an age-related disease of the eye, which with time loses its transparency. As the lens becomes cloudier, it leads to poor vision - initially only causing mild impairment, but untreated it leads to profound visual loss, usually affecting both eyes. This is another very common condition and represents the leading cause of visual impairment worldwide. Surgery (removing the diseased lens and replacing it) is the only proven treatment. The new CCG criterion introduces a scoring system for operating: the first eye with a cataract will be operated on only if it is having a significant impact on someone's daily activities. The second eye will only be operated on if

the visual acuity is '6/18' or worse: ie, if the patient can only see at six metres what someone with normal vision would be able to see at 18 metres. Again this contradicts NICE's guidelines, which states cataract surgery should not be restricted in either the first or second eye on the basis of visual acuity, but on the impact the condition has on the person's life.⁷

So the new reality is that being able to walk without pain and having two working eyes can be considered of "limited clinical value". I have used the above two examples to demonstrate how these new CCG clinical thresholds for treatments represent a fundamental new stage in the withdrawal of NHS services. The human cost of these new restrictions are profound. Withholding joint replacements results in horrendous pain and disability, leading to the inability to work, and the loss of mobility and independence. Similarly, the denial of cataract surgery leads to social isolation, the risk of increased falls and the inability to perform basic functions, such as reading. It is obvious that in both these examples the greatest burden of harm falls on those who are already the most vulnerable: ie, those who are less likely to have social support, those who cannot afford private treatment and those who are more likely to have other comorbidities. In other words, the poorer you are, the more you suffer: the consequence of not having a comprehensive health service that is free at the point of need.

And this is just the start - the list is due to be extended and a second wave of restrictions is going to be rolled out in the coming year. The CCGs are performing just as the Tories hoped they would: as local, isolated vehicles for the implementation of cuts. By driving the NHS to the point where it can no longer provide what people need, and no longer cope with the demand for treatment despite the best efforts of its hard-working staff, the Tories hope to reach their real ideological prize - full privatisation. Just this week we have also had news about maternity wards being forced to close, severe hospital staff shortages and the lack mental health placements for the most needy.

Our immediate goals must be to halt these savage funding cuts. The gains made by Corbyn's Labour Party in June's election and the weakness of the current government's position hopefully represents the start of this fight. But to win the battle we need to do much more than argue for a fairer distribution of resources under capitalism: we need to reject the entire rotten system. Only then can the idea of human suffering as a commodity go to where it belongs - in the waste bin of history ●

Notes

1. G Iacobucci, "Exceptional requests for care surge as rationing deepens": www.bmj.com/content/358/bmj.j3188.
2. www.theguardian.com/society/2017/jul/05/doctors-forced-to-plead-with-nhs-for-treatments-for-patients-bmj-finds#img-1.
3. www.njrcentre.org.uk/njrcentre/Patients/Jointreplacementsstatistics/tabid/99/Default.aspx.
4. <https://pathways.nice.org.uk/pathways/osteoarthritis#path=view%3A/pathways/osteoarthritis/management-of-osteoarthritis.xml&content=view-node%3Anodes-referral-for-consideration-of-joint-surgery>.
5. PR Forin *et al*, "Timing of total joint replacement affects clinical outcomes among patients with osteoarthritis of the hip or knee *Arthritis Rheum* Vol 46, 2002; R Roder *et al*, "Influence of preoperative functional status on outcome after total hip arthroplasty" *Journal of Bone and Joint Surgery* Vol 89, 2007.
6. www.nice.org.uk/guidance/gid-cgwave0741/documents/short-version-of-draft-guideline-4.
7. *Ibid*.

SUPPLEMENT

The birth of a new system

As well as celebrating the Russian Revolution, says Jack Conrad, we should never forget the counterrevolution

Every society engages in planning to one degree or another. Our original communist ancestors planned hunting expeditions according to the phase of the moon, the season and the desired game animal; Roman emperors planned the building of ports, aqueducts, roads and temples; feudal kings planned marriage-bed alliances, military campaigns and castle-building programmes. And, alongside the development of monopolies and the expanding role of the state, capitalism became planned capitalism within whole industries, within certain markets and to a degree even across state borders.

But none of these societies can be compared with the Soviet Union. There planning was celebrated as “an objective necessity, an economic law”.¹ Indeed the claim was that Marx’s vision of a socialist economy had been realised with the completion of the first five-year plan. A claim that was widely accepted at the time, but which can easily be disproved, if we go to the trouble of examining the prehistory and history of the first five-year plan.¹

Prehistory

Starting with 1925, various drafts of a five-year plan were produced by what was then Gosplan’s relatively small staff of economists, accountants, mathematicians and political leaders. There had been advocates of two-year plans, seven-year plans, general plans covering 10-15 years, etc. The five-year period was chosen because it supposedly conformed to the cycle of industrial investment; the cycle of construction for electrical power stations, mainline railways and inland canals; it was also believed that a five-year period would eliminate the effects of cyclical fluctuations in harvest yields, etc. Needless to say, the idea of long-term planning was to direct the various branches of the economy with a view to efficient, coordinated and speedy development.

Initial drafts were a vast but imprecise statistical exercise. However, by 1927, the quality had markedly improved with republics and regions being assigned their own distinct control figures (targets). The state planning committee, Gosplan, also built in a range of variants. At the maximum end, there would be high tempos of growth because of favourable conditions (eg, foreign loans and bumper crops). Such circumstances result in the five-year plan being fulfilled early. At the minimum end, unfavourable circumstances might lead to the five-year plan lasting six or seven years.²

Undoubtedly, Lenin’s first thoughts on the matter of practical planning were inspired by what he had read about Germany’s 1914-18 *Kriegswirtschaft* (war economy). Germany’s chief of general staff, Paul von Hindenburg, and his deputy, Erich Ludendorff, introduced a series of harsh measures in 1916 designed to double the output of military goods. The *Oberster Kriegsam*, or supreme war office, attempted to control and coordinate all aspects of the economy. Eg, more than two million people were forced out of agricultural work and into arms production. Obviously Lenin was impressed. Indeed he devoted a whole chapter of his pamphlet *Leftwing childishness and the petty bourgeois mentality* (April 1918) to Germany. Here, after all, was the “most concrete example of state capitalism” and “the last word” in “modern, large-scale capitalist engineering and planned organisation”.³ Lenin’s intention was for the Soviet regime to preside over a mixed economy, using a combination of binding directives, state purchases, tax incentives, etc. However, that proved impossible because of capitalist sabotage, imperialist intervention and spontaneous takeovers by workers’ factory



'The victory of the five-year plan is a blow against capitalism'

committees.

Great hopes had been placed in the factory committees. They mushroomed in the spring of 1917 and served brilliantly as organs of revolutionary struggle. Factory committees set up workers’ militias to replace the hated police. The men and women who joined up kept their day jobs and served “according to a rota drawn up by the factory militia commission” (on full pay).⁴ In April 1917 the Red Guards were established by decision of factory delegates and, of course, they played a vital role in October. But the factory committees were completely inexperienced in management and, having chased out the old directors and technicians, they often had to beg them to return. No less damning, the factory committees took many decisions in “light of the interests of the workers in a particular factory” - that could include selling off plant and stock.⁵ Wider needs went unseen. This was syndicalism, not socialism, and risked total collapse. Therefore the swift move towards the nationalisation of “every important category of industry” (preceded by the enforced trustification of whole branches of the economy: eg, sugar, oil, railways).⁶

A crude form of planning was already in

place both centrally and regionally, depending on the size and importance of the enterprise. Annual targets were the norm. Overall, though, Soviet Russia “remained fundamentally a market economy”.⁷ Around 50% of national income was still accounted for by agriculture.⁸ Even within industry - certainly after the introduction of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1922 - relations between enterprises were based on rouble exchanges. And, though there were proposals to include workers and consumers in the running of nationalised enterprises, one-man management soon became a mantra. So, while ownership changed, the workplace hierarchy remained largely unaltered. It should be stressed, therefore, that the planning being pursued in the mid-1920s was far removed from what the Marx-Engels team had envisaged (systematic control from below, the end of money and a society of abundance being taken as a given).

Planning

For planning to really be planning, no matter what the society, over time - ie, with repetition - there has to be a strong, positive correlation between initial aims and final results. Certainly when

it comes to complex societies, for planning to really be planning there has to be more than the issuing of commands from above. Branches, sectors and units must match up and smoothly move forward together. Eg, to produce additional steel requires an extra quantity of pig iron and coal. To increase the output of coal requires the introduction of new machinery. That machinery requires metal, the production of which requires coal, etc. By the same measure, the installation of new machinery in that mine must see the presence of labour with the requisite skills, the availability of spare parts and regular maintenance. Without that there will be bottlenecks and ever-widening circles of disruption.

Under capitalism the supply of new machinery, raw materials, labour, etc, is normally ensured spontaneously, through the market, through the law of value. This is what gives capitalism its relative coherence. However, at the most elemental level, capitalism is characterised by a disjuncture between production and consumption. Some sellers cannot find buyers. Capital, though, strives for endless expansion. Eventually this must lead to overproduction. Commodities cannot be sold at their value. Surplus value cannot be realised. Production has to be curtailed. Workers find themselves unemployed or on reduced hours. Demand falls. Slumps are therefore predictable (their timing, depth, duration and effect are an altogether different matter). Companies see meticulous global plans, financial projections and marketing strategies torn to shreds by the anarchic workings of the system. Even state plans can go badly awry. On September 16 1992, Black Wednesday, money markets forced the British government to oversee a disorderly withdrawal of the pound sterling from the European Monetary Union - it entailed a £3.4 billion loss to the UK treasury. In short, with capitalism, planning can only but be severely limited.

What about the Soviet Union? Instead of celebrating Gosplan’s initial draft plans as the “mighty historical music of the progress of socialism”, to quote Leon Trotsky,⁹ it is, perhaps, better, less fanciful, more accurate, to describe them as blueprints for the post-reconstruction period in the Soviet Union. This involved proposals for reshaping existing industry and agriculture, assessing possible input-output ratios, estimating maximum growth rates, locating sources of investment, detailing new factories, etc.¹⁰ The dream was of an economy that functioned like a single enterprise. Nepman trade and *kulak*-dominated agriculture were, however, more than planning nightmares. It is worth noting, in this context, that, while Yevgeni Preobrazhensky sought to achieve “a certain coexistence” between the two economic systems operating in the USSR - ie, the socialist-commodity sector and the petty commodity capitalist sector - he stressed the “antagonistic” nature of these two systems and their “two different economic laws”.¹¹ And having to deal with these two fundamentally incompatible economic systems, unable to count on any meaningful aid from abroad and burdened with notoriously unreliable statistics, Gosplan had to resort to plenty of guesswork, assume a degree of coercion when dealing with the countryside and at the end of the day bank on gallantly muddling through, if its ambitious goals were to be realised.

Death and birth

Still in charge of Comintern and editing *Pravda*, with allies dominating the trade unions, topping the government, the Moscow party organisation, etc, Nicolai Bukharin castigated the widespread assumption that the fast growth rates notched up during the period of reconstruction that followed the civil war could be taken as the norm. He fired off a series of Aesopian polemics against Trotsky and the “super-industrialisers”. His real target, of course, was Joseph Stalin.

Incidentally, there is no secret as to how the

1. What we have here, in this *Weekly Worker* supplement, is part of a much bigger study of the Soviet Union. In fact, at the moment, it is chapter 32. I have done my best to edit it so that it reads as a coherent whole. Nevertheless, the reader is assumed to have some basic knowledge of the Soviet Union, its history, its institutions, its leading personalities and its economic categories.

SUPPLEMENT

impressive growth rates were achieved during reconstruction. When the production of coal had, for example, been thrown back to a tenth of what it had been prior to World War I, as it had, all that was required to double output in the space of a single year was to repair and put x mines back into operation. But, so argued Bukharin, attempts to maximise the extraction of "tribute" from the countryside, with a view to building innumerable new, gigantic enterprises, risked finally snapping the already strained link with the peasantry. These voracious projects would "give nothing, but take enormous quantities of the means of production ... and the means of consumption".¹²

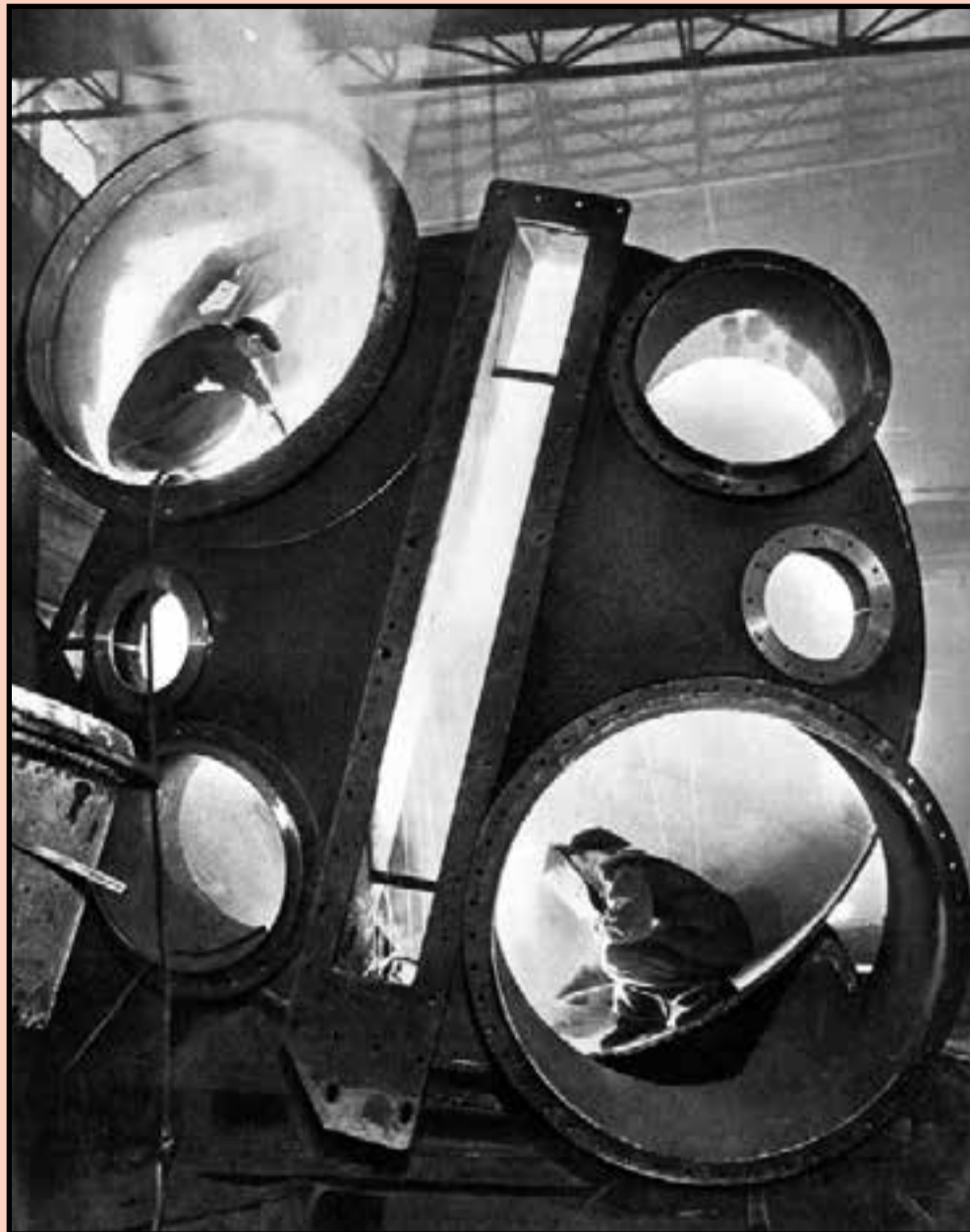
Needless to say, Bukharin's insistence on serving the peasant market, of balanced economic growth between industry and agriculture, etc came under concerted attack. Calls for rapid industrialisation, especially of the production of the means of production, as against going at the pace of the peasant's nag, grew louder and louder. Stalin came out with a shrewdly worded statement: "in order to preserve and accelerate our present rate of industrial development, in order to ensure an industry for the whole country, in order to raise further the standard of life of the rural population", temporarily there had to be an "additional tax levied on the peasantry". Naturally, though, this "additional tax" was going to be paid "in a situation in which the living standards of the peasantry are steadily rising".¹³ Stalin could, that way, maintain his centrist image, while simultaneously abandoning his old centrist programme. Yet the fact of the matter was that the economic crisis was getting worse with every day that passed. NEP was about to die. A new society was about to be born.

The 1927 minimum variant of the draft five-year plan proposed only slightly reduced growth rates. In its maximum variant, growth rates were higher - quite considerably so for the last year of the plan. But Gosplan clearly lent in the direction of the minimum variant. The draft called for the development of "industries concerned with national defence" at the fastest possible rate; however, a "moderate approach" to appropriating resources from agriculture was adopted. Indeed Bukharin's warning against the danger of "excessive" investments in large-scale projects seems to have been recognised: they would tie up huge resources and only come on stream after many years of hugely costly construction.¹⁴

The "definitive text" of the first five-year plan came in three hefty volumes: volume one, general outline; volume two, part one, programme for construction and production; part two, social problems, problems of labour, distribution and cultural problems; volume three, regional subdivisions of the plan. Over their 2,000 pages the plan's objectives were presented in hard, exact figures that had allegedly been carefully calculated, taking into account the manifold interconnections and technical potential of every branch and unit of the Soviet economy.

The projections were certainly impressive. In the maximum variant industrial production was to increase by 179% (the minimum variant was 135%). In line with that trajectory, pig iron was set to reach 10 million tons from a 1928 base of 3.3 million tons; steel was to follow a similar upward curve. Besides defence, particular emphasis was placed on agricultural machinery, chemicals and machine building. There was to be import substitution, when it came to wool, leather and cotton. Proposed investments were accompanied by sources of taxation, credit facilities, production surpluses, etc. Branch by branch, region by region, the authors - chief amongst them being Gleb Krzhizhanovskiy, Grigory Grinko, Emanuel Kvirning and Stanislav Strumilin - describe known or potential natural resources, the possibility of applying new techniques and obtaining substantial increases in production.

There are general estimates of other necessary balances: eg, the chapter on electric power links coal mines, power stations and projected levels of consumption. In the section on labour there are estimates of the optimal distribution between agriculture and towns, the distribution of workers by branch and a "precise computation of labour productivity by sector". There is also an assessment of national wealth, national income and its distribution, as well as the rouble flows between the state and the countryside. The market for consumer goods and the supply of production goods are discussed with a view to achieving a sustainable balance. Interestingly, the aims for fuel production were set rather low. Coal output was targeted to go from 35 to 75 million tons and oil from 11.6 to 22 million tons. Somewhat amusingly, coal was favoured over oil: supposedly oil would not have the same importance "as over



Poster 1931. Workers: always a shortage

the last 15 to 20 years".¹⁵

Collectivisation would progress, but with studied caution. By the end of the first five-year plan 12.9 million people were to be organised in *kolkhozi* and *sovkhozi* (collective and state farms) out of a total rural population of around 134 million. So individual peasant farms would still account for the great bulk of agricultural production even by the end of 1933. Private trade therefore continues. Moreover, the expansion of industry would not be achieved at the expense of consumption levels. The five-year plan promised to increase living standards by between 77.5% and 85%.¹⁶

Doubtless, especially to the untrained eye, the "definitive text" of the first five-year plan appeared well founded, thoroughly researched and exhilaratingly far-reaching. But would it result in efficient, coordinated and speedy development? Serious doubts were raised by a number of prominent economists. Eg, VG Groman and VA Bazarov - the first a former Menshevik, the second, a co-thinker of Alexander Bogdanov. Both occupied responsible positions in Gosplan.² In tandem they warned of bottlenecks, inflation and how rising incomes could not be reconciled with high rates of growth in plant, machinery and overall output. Events were to prove them more than right.

While its maximum variant was surely unfulfillable, conceivably, given favourable conditions, the minimum variant might have been fulfillable. The party's two principal spokespeople in Gosplan, Krzhizhanovskiy and Strumilin, were, implicitly, willing to accept some inflation and coercive measures in the countryside, "for the sake of promoting industrialisation".¹⁷ Secondary problems, such as bottlenecks, could be dealt with as part of the muddling through - provided, one presumes, the minimum variant was adopted.

Maximum

However, having attained near autocratic status, Stalin ensured that the party's 16th Conference (April 23-29 1929) and then the 5th Congress (Vladimir Groman apparently retained his allegiance to Menshevism, but in the 1920s collaborated closely with the Bolshevik regime. He regularly contributed to the journal *Ekonomicheskaya Zhizn* and in 1928 was appointed chair of Gosplan's internal economy section. Vladimir Bazarov worked on planning theory and methodology with a view to answering that most fundamental of questions in Marxist political economy: how to ensure the victory of socialism over capitalism? His conclusions were edited up into a book, *Capitalist cycles and the economic restoration process in the USSR* (1927). See N Jasny *The Soviet economists of the twenties* Cambridge 1972.

of Soviets (May 29 1929) voted unanimously to approve the maximum variant. And he was determined to go still further and still faster. He had the annual plan for 1929-30 drawn up with targets that effectively rode roughshod over even the maximum variant. Catching up with the west had to be achieved in the "shortest possible time".¹⁸ During the course of 1929-31 the leadership relentlessly upped targets in the name of achieving "the maximum capital investment in industry". One "high tension" figure leapfrogged another till the initial targets were nearly doubled.¹⁹ The norms expected from workers followed the same giddy path.

All this was only partially due to impatience. Shortages plagued every sector. Instead of reigning back the pace of development in one sector, in order to bring it into line with another, again and again Stalin urged higher targets in every industry and in every enterprise in the attempt to overcome backlogs. Predictably, this approach of maximising everything without taking into account who was a tortoise and who was a hare added to what became a bewildering confusion. Enterprise managers, including the well connected, responded to the higher targets by, firstly, feeding back exaggerated reports, secondly, reducing the quality of output to a bare minimum and, thirdly, insistently demanding more allocation of raw materials and labour. It was always better to have too much in the way of inputs than just enough. Stalin, we can be sure, knew there were countless lies, but, simultaneously, he needed to accept them *in toto* if his five-year plan was to be credited as a dazzling success. Gosplan could only have had the vaguest idea of what was really going on. The true state of affairs lay hidden behind a thick smog of fakery contrived at every level. And, of course, any notion of this being an example of rational planning is utterly risible.

Creating absolute pandemonium, collectivisation suddenly appeared as an objective to be directly realised throughout the country. Petty commodity production was to be cut down, minimised, shackled. The *kolkhozi* and *sovkhozi* universalised. Stalin drew a parallel with Peter the Great: the tsar whom Alexander Herzen described as a "crowned revolutionary" ruthlessly subordinated the whole of society to his will in the attempt to modernise the Russian state and its armed forces. But, whereas Peter and the "old classes" failed to "break out of the grip of ... backwardness", Stalin was determined to

succeed.²⁰ The country would be transformed from above using what he called Bolshevik methods.

Industrialising and collectivising would overcome "external conditions" of being surrounded by technically and militarily more advanced capitalist countries and the "internal conditions" of resentful rural and urban basic producers.²¹ Through industrialising and collectivising, the Soviet Union would build an unbeatable Red Army. Through industrialising and collectivising, the rural and urban workforce would become disciplined, cultured and their productivity greatly enhanced. Such were Stalin's stated goals.

The first five-year plan triggered a genuine wave of popular enthusiasm, most notably amongst the younger generation of workers. Each chemical plant, engineering factory or blast furnace opened up was greeted as a victory for human liberation; or, more prosaically, a chance for promotion into the lower ranks of management. The soaring targets, the scientific aura, the promise of national glory appealed to modernising, socialistic and patriotic traditions ... and the desire for personal betterment. Whether it be through some misplaced collectivity, or merely individual aspiration, the most 'advanced' workers overcame the 'normal' intensity of labour. They willingly performed miracles to meet targets.

Others bitterly complained of sweated labour, bad living conditions, inadequate food supplies, pressure to sign up as shock workers and growing managerial privileges. Workers, including former *kulaks* and other refugees from collectivisation, quietly connived with go-slows, messing up orders and undermining shock brigades. Not infrequently they gained support from rank-and-file communists and Komsomol (Young Communist League) members. And it was these people who often took the lead in escalating actions. There was a short-lived but intense outbreak of wildcat strikes. Textile workers, building workers, engineering workers, miners, dockers and shipyard workers were all involved. In Moscow, Leningrad, Ivanovo-Voznesensk, Gorky, Minsk and Odessa strikers from different workplaces joined together in protest marches. In Odessa "a portrait of Lenin" was carried at the "head of the procession". Bread shortages and bad food were a common cause of complaint. Sometimes the authorities conceded, sometimes strikes were forcibly broken, sometimes ringleaders were arrested and disappeared.²²

Strikes were as much against the trade union secretary as against the enterprise director. Over the course of the first five-year plan, trade unions became ever more an arm of management. The idea of trade unions defending workers against a so-called workers' state was denounced as a petty bourgeois deviation. And, to ensure that trade unions did not defend workers, draconian legislation, resolutions and other such measures followed. Trade unions lost any right to have a say over the appointment of personnel (February 2 1929); management was given powers to punish or dismiss workers without consulting trade unions (March 6 1929); the Central Trade Union Council ordered local branches to respect the right of managers to exercise full and unfettered control (March 17 1929); the Central Trade Union Council resolved that it would not defend workers' rights in the courts (March 26 1929); etc, etc.²³ Within the enterprise, the director was expected to exercise supreme power and set pay rates without the least reference to the trade unions. Piece-work individualised labour, reduced productivity, prematurely wore out machines and increased accidents. But it discouraged any tendency of workers looking towards collective solutions to their problems. By the mid-1930s the workforce "had been both reconstituted and politically broken".²⁴

Politics

As already mentioned, Bukharin responded to the first stirrings of the 'second revolution' cryptically, with renewed criticisms of Trotskyist "super-industrialising". Not surprisingly, this line of attack suited Stalin perfectly. Bukharin's polemics both missed their intended target and secured Stalin talented allies from amongst the conciliatorist wing of the left opposition - Preobrazhensky, Radek and Pyatakov among many others. The living dead. Stalin could afford to treat them with contempt. If Bukharin ever seriously had a right-left bloc in mind, he played his hand with an extraordinary lack of skill. Firing at the left, and not directly at the Stalinites, ensured that the rapprochement Bukharin seemingly attempted with Lev Kamenev came to nothing. It also assisted Stalin in another way. He agreed that there needed to be a struggle against the left. But, stating the obvious, it had been very much weakened due to

his efforts. However, with food shortages in the towns and turmoil in the countryside being blamed on the *kulaks*, Stalin could, quite logically, claim that the main danger now came from the right.

Bukharin, therefore, found himself completely outmanoeuvred. NEP had reached its limits. Yet the right had no *genuine* alternative except, maybe, constituting the Nepmen and *kulaks* as a political base and offering the apparatus the prospect of becoming full-blown capitalists. At the time such a programme probably lacked any traction. The apparatus was committed to socialism ... albeit socialism in one country. That included Bukharin (as evidenced by his *Philosophical Arabesques* written in 1937, when he languished in the dungeons of the Lubyanka²⁵). The restoration of capitalism, by the apparatus for the apparatus, while it flowed from the right's overall approach, was, at the time, both unsayable and unthinkable.

No less to the point. Stalin controlled the apparatus. The positions occupied by Bukharin and his allies, even those supposedly at the very apex of power, could be attacked from the middle and below, with the full blessing and connivance of the *real* apex: ie, the general secretary. Stalin began with denunciations of anonymous rightists, in the press, in the trade unions, in party meetings. Subordinates in Comintern, the trade unions and Moscow duly rebelled. Stage-managed meetings, resolutions and exposures were then used to undermine, demote or remove. The whole exercise was deftly orchestrated from Stalin's office. Rumours of an armed rightist plot followed. Arrests were made by the GPU secret police.

Stalin's *coup de grâce* came in January 1929. Despite impassioned, tearful objections from Bukharin, Tomsy and Rykov, the politburo agreed to Trotsky's deportation. He was to be exiled in Kemal Atatürk's Turkey in order to end his "counterrevolutionary activities".²⁶ Almost immediately afterwards, so-called left oppositionists handed out leaflets in Moscow. They, conveniently, reproduced the text of the conversation between Bukharin and Kamenev from July 1928. A provocation surely directed by Stalin. The GPU had, after all "an extensive network of agents among the oppositionists".²⁷ Whatever the truth, Stalin got what he wanted. Bukharin and the right could be accused of factionalism, with people now officially branded counterrevolutionaries.

It was not only the right that was politically neutered. The ruling party which had previously functioned - albeit to a diminishing degree - as a political organisation, with debate, with majorities and with minorities, was remade into a rigidly hierarchical structure similar to a military institution.

Planless plan

In February 1931, Stalin talked of fulfilling the five-year plan in "the basic, decisive branches of industry", not in four, but in "three years".²⁸ This was the same speech where he issued his famous justification: "We are 50 or 100 years behind the advanced countries. We must make good this distance in 10 years. Either we do so, or we shall go under."²⁹ Alec Nove, obligingly, half apologetically, adds the obvious, but highly charged, fact that "1941 was 10 years away".³⁰

Stalin might well have had a premonition of the coming war. Certainly, by demanding the maximising of output in every branch, in every enterprise, the economy was shunted forward. But it could only but be in a chaotic manner. For instance, the target for oil production was supposedly reached in two and a half years. Naturally this was cause of much official rejoicing. But it completely disrupted and overwhelmed auxiliary sectors. Storage, refining and transport facilities failed to achieve the pace of growth needed to adequately handle the premature triumph. Such unevenness is, of course, the very antithesis of planning. Obviously, no coordination existed between what were closely related branches of the economy. And, while oil that cannot be refined and transported had plan-value, it had no use-value.

Where in the petroleum industry there was a discrepancy between output and the facilities needed to handle it, in engineering there was a discrepancy between output and the raw material and labour inputs. The plan was fulfilled in three years and output increased fourfold. Yet steel production fell short by some 40%. How machine tools, pumps, turbines, etc, were built without the planned inputs of steel is probably explained by extravagant managerial lies, the very low base level in this sector and the ability of enterprises to circumvent the plan by unofficially obtaining scarce raw materials and labour - thus denying others. Hence, whereas spontaneity gives

capitalism a certain coherence, in the Soviet Union spontaneity could only but drain any coherence there might otherwise have been.

The plan was, in other words, inherently planless. This salient fact was recognised at the time by a number of observers. Amongst them were the left Mensheviks Aaron Yugov, Solomon Schwartz, O Domenevskya, Fedor Dan and Yu Braginskaya organised around the émigré journal *Sotsialisticheski Vestnik* (Socialist Herald). Braginskaya insisted that the projected growth of the Soviet economy in general, but especially in areas such as machinery and construction, could not be sustained by the iron and steel industry. The execution of the plan "has hardly been sinned against by being overly well thought out", she damningly wrote.³¹ Existing capacities and potential had been wilfully ignored. There was no organic interconnection between *all* branches of industry and *all* stages of development. Gosplan simply decreed the maximum growth of each industry. But overfulfilment in one sector resulted in underfulfilment in another sector. The economy was therefore liable to fly apart at any moment.

Christian Rakovsky, one of Trotsky's co-thinkers, shared much of this critique. He too pictured the first five-year plan as planless:

Today they increase the programme for coal and iron to make it possible to fulfil the programme for machine building; tomorrow it will be necessary to expand the programme for machine building to make it possible to fulfil the enlarged programme for coal and iron, in order to guarantee the new programme for machine building. In the midst of this spiral it suddenly turns out that it is posing tasks for transport that transport will not be able to cope with, unless the latter receives an appropriate supply of iron and steel - and so the programme for coal and iron is boosted again and the circle begins anew. Hence the exaggerated tempos, the exaggerated figures, the exaggerated plans, which collapse as soon as they come into touch with reality.³²

Rakovsky - along with Bukharin and the *Sotsialisticheski Vestnik* Mensheviks - thought that the attempt to overcome the underaccumulation of the means of production (ie, Russia's historic backwardness) in the shortest possible time by maximising the development of every sector, every branch, every unit in department A, had to result in an unsustainable unevenness. A crisis of disproportionality was therefore inevitable. Eg, the construction of a new iron and steel complex requires reliable transport facilities and the delivery of cranes, electric cable, steel girders, concrete, bricks, furnace parts, boilers, etc. But if there are constant transport delays and constant shortfalls in the production of component parts, the new iron and steel complex will never be completed. The projected iron and steel complexes, chemical plants and engineering factories of the first five-year plan were, therefore, follies, destined to slowly fall into ruin like the pyramids of ancient Egypt. So reasoned Rakovsky, Bukharin and the *Sotsialisticheski Vestnik* Mensheviks.

Obviously, a mistaken prediction. By the late 1930s these follies were successfully churning out steel, artificial fertilisers, tractors and tanks. Nevertheless, the gigantic projects tied up enormous resources ... and the problem of delayed construction became a permanent feature of the Soviet economy.

And, even with the deliveries of steel, artificial fertilisers, tractors and tanks, shortages remained chronic. As Tajar Zavalani observed - he had first-hand experience of the Soviet Union during the first five-year plan - the only way the authorities could cope with the mayhem they had created was "to improvise, to waste precious materials and leave other things undone".³³ The regime was compelled to cut across its own chains of command and impose its own priorities to make sure what was absolutely critical got done. The armed forces, key construction projects, strategically important enterprises had to be granted privileged status.

Exaggeration

The results of the first five-year plan were in comparative terms unarguably impressive - the rest of the world had been sent reeling by the great crash. In the leading capitalist countries industrial production fell by 10%-50%, while in the Soviet Union it officially doubled. At the end of 1932 *Pravda* triumphantly announced that the five-year plan had been fulfilled in four and a quarter years. In 51 months, it was claimed, the gross output of Soviet industry leapt from 15.7 to 34.3 billion roubles - 93.7% of the planned target for the five-year period. The minor shortfall being

due to foreign provocations and the necessity of devoting more resources than expected to the armed forces (1932 witnessed the beginning of a series of border clashes with imperial Japan in Manchuria that only ended in 1939).

However, in the "main link" - ie, "heavy industry" - there was overfulfilment, boasted Stalin.³⁴ He admitted that developing heavy industry involved enormous investments of raw materials and labour-power. But, he claimed, the party - ie, himself - had "declared frankly that this would call for serious sacrifices, and that it was our duty openly and consciously to make these sacrifices if we wanted to achieve our goal".³⁵ Put another way, the promise to *increase* living standards by between 77.5% and 85% proved to be a cruel hoax.

Nowadays, there is no serious doubt that official claims about the first five-year plan were absurdly exaggerated. Recomputations by western experts, even in the 1940s, reveal much lower increases. Their estimates for growth in the USSR's national income between 1928 and 1937 - ie, two five-year plans - vary from between 33%, 64% and 74% (the discrepancy largely resulting from the use of US 1925-34 prices, US 1940 prices or real 1926-27 Soviet prices as statistical weights).³⁶ Nevertheless, even allowing for rouble inflation and the gross inaccuracy of Soviet figures, the production of waste and the effective destruction of the statistically invisible, but economically significant, handicraft, small workshop and domestic sectors, a "great deal was achieved".³⁷ The engineering works of Moscow and Leningrad were comprehensively updated with the purchase and installation of foreign technology, the giant Dnieper hydroelectric dam started to generate electricity, the Magnitogorsk iron and steel complex rose vast from nothing, and, all in all, a total 1,500 new factories and other industrial enterprises were put into operation. Albeit at enormous cost in terms of resources and labour-power, the Soviet Union was being modernised.

Agriculture

As already mentioned, the aim of "total" collectivisation was absent from the "definitive text" of the first five-year plan. Events forced Stalin's hand. The industrialisation drive, by its very chaotic nature, precipitated a goods famine and, as its speed was relentlessly upped month by month, runaway inflation punctured the value of the rouble. The real worth of the fixed price paid for agricultural products sunk below the cost of production. If there had been something to buy, the peasants still might have gone to market. But there was not. Hence the state's options effectively closed. Higher *real* agricultural prices would divert - maybe halt - industrialisation, and reassert the peasants' bargaining power with a vengeance. Extraordinary measures - ie, forced grain requisitions - inevitably resulted in a sowing strike and diminishing returns. Stalin, following the line of least resistance, had to go for "total" collectivisation.

On January 5 1930 a decree was issued to all rural organisations, instructing them to "lead the spontaneous growth" of collectivisation. An obvious euphemism. Behind the facade of voluntary union there was brute force and untold human suffering. The real history of collectivisation was written not by Stalin's propagandists, but harassed regional and local officials. Their bland reports bear truthful, though unintended, witness to the saturnalia

of confiscations, the arbitrary arrests, the savage treatment of *kulak* families, the torture, the starvation, the emaciated feral children, the batches of executions and the all-round dehumanisation.³⁸

In the 13th century Genghis Khan and his immediate successors - Ögedei Khan and Batu Khan - laid waste to 'old Rus'. In the 1930s Stalin did the same to the new Russia. He unleashed a 'silent' civil war on the countryside. Orders were issued demanding the liquidation of the *kulaks* - an altogether vague category - as a class. Eg, a hard-working, former hero of the Red Army, could easily find himself branded as a blood-sucking *kulak*. Not surprisingly there was widespread resistance. Anyone deemed to be a *kulak* was to have their property expropriated. Everything was to be taken. By quota 63,000 were shot or imprisoned, 150,000 exiled to remote regions like Siberia. The rest were to be forcibly moved out from *kolkhoz* land.³⁹ Perhaps 1.5 million people were affected, among them so-called 'ideological' *kulaks*: ie, those middle or poor peasants who opposed collectivisation. Family relationships, dependency relationships, friendship ties, hatred of local communist officials, loyalty to the Orthodox church meant that were many potential *kulaks*.

Numerous protest demonstrations and revolts occurred - including the *babski bunty* 'women's rebellions'.⁴⁰ Daring local Communist Party members, Komsomol members, soviet officials and militiamen to attack them, they scored numerous, albeit fleeting, successes. Horses, grain and other property was regained. In Siberia, the North Caucasus, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldavia and the Crimea peasant revolts assumed near civil war proportions. Red Army regulars, GPU troops, militia units and even military aircraft had to be used to suppress them. These revolts involved not only *kulaks*, but middle and poor peasants too. Amongst their leaders were serving militia lieutenants and former Red Army officers.

Though at the cost of many thousands of peasants' lives, Stalin was forced to retreat. He issued his famous 'Dizzy with success' speech in *Pravda* (March 2 1930). Cadres were blamed for being carried away and using excessive force. But while low-quality and marginal land was once again divided into individual holdings, there was the promise to return to the offensive. Agriculture would be totally collectivised and *kulak* resistance finally broken. By 1932 that promise had been delivered.

When it came to agriculture, therefore, Stalin deviously tried to shift the focus. Instead of output, instead of surplus product, instead of improved productivity, he reported that the first five-year plan had been fulfilled "three times over". Now there were 200,000 collective and 5,000 state farms. Far above the original five-year plan target ... and this went hand in hand with the "routing of the *kulaks* as a class".⁴¹ Imagine a newly hired journalist being told to do a 1,000-word piece on a vital vote by lawmakers and then two days early, before the debate opened, turning in 3,000, utterly confused, words. They proudly boast that the assignment had been fulfilled "three times over". Such a talent would likely find themselves promptly escorted from the building by security. But Stalin was, in effect, both editor ... and in charge of security.

Collectivisation had nothing to do with civilising, let alone socialising agriculture. Robert Conquest is quite right when he says that the "idea of smoothly planned progress was quite



Peasants: fought against Stalin's forced collectivisation

SUPPLEMENT

inapplicable".⁴² Collectivisation was carried through barbarically and resulted in agriculture being hurled backwards, not least by the peasants' glutinous attempt to retain what was theirs. Mikhail Sholokov's 'socialist-realist' novel *Virgin soil upturned* (1932 and 1960) vividly conveys the orgy of eating that accompanied collectivisation:

Not only those who had joined the collective farm, but individual farmers also slaughtered. They killed oxen, sheep, pigs, even cows; they slaughtered animals kept for breeding. In two nights the horned cattle of Gremyachy were reduced to half their number. The dogs began to drag entrails and guts about the village, the cellars and granaries were filled with meat. In two days the cooperative shop sold some 200 pounds of salt which had been lying in the warehouse for 18 months. "Kill, it's not ours now!" "Kill, they'll take it for the meat collection tax if you don't." "Kill, for you won't taste meat in the collective farm." The insidious rumours crept around. And they killed. They ate until they were unable to move. Everybody, from the youngest to the oldest, suffered with stomach-ache. At dinner-time the tables groaned under the weight of boiled and roasted meat. At dinner-time everybody had a greasy mouth, everybody belched as though they had been at a funeral repast in memory of the dead. And all were owlish with the intoxication of eating.⁴³

Even when the butchery finally stopped the collectives were lacking in the expertise necessary for handling what little livestock remained. Neither the peasants nor the mobilised workers sent from the towns had been prepared or resourced for the technical consequences of collectivisation. Tending two or three cows was within the grasp of any half-competent peasant. Milking, feeding, sheltering and reproducing herds of 200 or 300 was an entirely different matter. Not surprisingly many animals "died from neglect".⁴⁴ The net result was that between 1928 and 1932 the number of cattle fell from 70.5 to 38.4 million, pigs from 26 to 11.6 million and sheep and goats from 146.7 to 52.1 million. Shortages of draft horses, due to slaughter and lack of fodder, the absence of tractors to replace them and sheer ignorance also disastrously reduced the grain harvest to below 70 million tons between 1931 and 1935.

True, the grain possessed the same colour, same weight and same size as before. However, a new "social soul" entered its body.⁴⁵ Grain had been cultivated on a mass of tiny, independent farms. Now it was cultivated under the direction of a *kolkhoz* chairman, a *kolkhoz* party secretary, a *kolkhoz* agronomist and a *kolkhoz* accountant. Once the grain belonged to the individual peasant. Now it no longer belonged to them. And, despite the poor harvests, given urban expansion and the need to fulfil export contracts, state procurements followed an upward trajectory.³ Workers ate much less meat, but those in the countryside ate much less of everything, to the point where in the catastrophic years 1932-3 starvation took many lives. Michael Ellman gives a figure of five million.⁴⁶ Robert Conquest quotes Soviet sources in 1988, which claim that the "deaths in the terror-famine cannot have been lower than six to seven million".⁴⁷ Here was the human cost of Stalin's *voluntary* collectivisation.

It is worth quoting Nikita Khrushchev's memoirs. A member of Stalin's inner-circle, and his effective successor, Khrushchev reckoned he had "no idea" how bad "things were" during the period of collectivisation.⁴⁸ Unbelievable. The surely less well informed correspondent of the *New York Evening Post*, Hubert Nickerbocker, could pun at the time: "The plan is a method for Russia to 'starve itself great'".⁴⁹ And there can be no doubt that it took some considerable time for Soviet agriculture to recover in absolute terms from the *catastrophe* of collectivisation. Indeed, when it came to agriculture, the Soviet Union remained hopelessly inefficient right through

³The plan demanded a 40% increase in the value of exports, including exports of grain, in order to pay for imports of foreign machinery. However, there was a big problem. The world economic crisis resulted in a precipitous fall in basic commodity prices. Hence to keep its imports up to plan requirements the Soviet Union would have had to increase the volume of exports by 57%. That proved impossible. Imports could only be increased by 35%. The foreign correspondent of the *New York Evening Post* reported that "many factories in the Soviet Union failed to receive important orders because imports had lacked coming up to plan by 5%" and that the export drive meant that "there was still less for the population to eat, wear and use" (HR Nickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p192). Perceptively this US bourgeois stressed that under Stalin's plan "it is the state that is to become at once more powerful, not the population that is to become better fed, clothed, more comfortable and happy... Power for the state has become an end in itself under the five-year plan" (*Ibid* p236).

till Gorbachev and the fall in 1991. Despite that, peasants would never again engage in economic blackmail. Because of collectivisation, grain strikes, sowing strikes, etc were now impossible - and surely that, for Stalin, is what counted.

The *kolkhoz* robbed the peasants of their economic independence. The *kolkhoz* chair treated general meetings as a rubber stamp and acted to all intents and purposes in a manner little different from the old *pomeshchik* (landlord). In public the peasants held him in the greatest respect, if not awe. They would approach the *kolkhoz* chair cap in hand.⁵⁰ Of course, the *kolkhoz* chair had no property rights. He was an agent of the state. He could be replaced at any moment, for any reason. So, unlike the post-1906 capitalist farmers of tsarist Russia, the *kolkhoz* chair was under no compulsion to cut costs, experiment with new crops, introduce innovative machinery or new forms of labour organisation. The main quality that distinguished the *kolkhoz* chair was conformity and being seen to implement directives coming from above.

Accumulation

Controversy has raged over whether or not, or to what degree, agriculture provided the surplus product necessary for primary accumulation. Agriculture, according to Alec Nove, "made a decisive contribution to the financing of the plan".⁵¹ Standard Soviet historiography also claims that a "substantial contribution to industrialisation was made by the Soviet countryside".⁵²

Tony Cliff seems to hold a more nuanced view: "Collectivisation has resulted in the freeing of agricultural products for the needs of industrial development, the 'freeing' of the peasantry from the means of production, the transformation of a section of them into reserves of labour-power for industry, and the transformation of the rest into part-workers, part-peasants, part-serfs."⁵³ Because of collectivisation and the dramatic fall in the numbers of cattle, pigs and horses there was more grain, cabbage and potatoes available to deliver to the towns (there were fewer animals to feed and the peasants were allowed to go hungry).

Yet, whether or not this represented a *net* transfer of surpluses from agriculture to industry for purposes of primary accumulation is open to serious question. Some researchers argue that agriculture, as a source of surplus, declined in relative and maybe absolute terms. Eg, in 1928 "agriculture contributed 54% of accumulation for industrial growth, but in 1933 the figure dropped to 25%".⁵⁴ The US expert, James R Millar, believes that collectivisation was actually counterproductive and became a drain on industry and industrialisation.⁵⁵ He largely bases himself on the Soviet researcher, AA Barsov - who, understandably, using official statistics, argues that there was a *slight* reduction in unequal exchange (probably higher in 1913 and 1928 than in the late 1930s).⁵⁶ An assessment echoed by Robert Conquest.⁵⁷ In other words, agriculture could well have received "tribute" from industry.

Often the whole issue revolves around the problem of calculation - eg, there was a huge divergence between the roubles the *kolkhoz* received from the state and the roubles *kolkhoz* members could gain on the free market. What is beyond doubt, though, is that peasants were subjected to a regime of often lethal exploitation, while producing less. True, when it came to *deliveries* of grain, cabbage and potatoes, there was an increase, but this hardly covers the increase in surplus product necessary for industrialisation. Unless the cities were to starve too, the state had to divert considerable resources to the countryside. Extensive agriculture requires tractors, combine harvesters and artificial fertilisers from industry. Because of the politically motivated rush to total collectivisation such means of production were largely absent during the first five-year plan. They were, though, with the second five-year plan, supplied, and on a substantial scale. Hence, the state eventually presided over a slow, but steady rise in agricultural production. However, results were always disappointing.

When it comes to primary accumulation, Ellman rightly emphasises the role of coercion, not the manipulation of prices, along with, of course, the "fall in urban real wages".⁵⁸ Force became a prime economic mechanism. Force atomised the industrial workforce, force expropriated the *kulaks*, force enrolled the peasants into *kolkhozi*, force supplied the gulag system with its human inputs and force made them work. And, yes, real wages in the first five-year plan may well have fallen by some 50%. True, overall, urban living standards did not decline by anywhere near the same degree. That was due to the ending of unemployment, social provisions, managerial connivance, etc.

Dekulakisation and collectivisation certainly

provided for a much expanded workforce. Former *kulaks* were vital for projects such as Magnitogorsk and millions of others made their way to the towns 'voluntarily'. They preferred speed-ups, low wages and crowded living conditions in industry to hunger and starvation in the countryside. In the course of the first five-year plan the number of registered workers shot up from 11.3 to 22.8 million. The urban population reached nearly 40 million (compared with the projected 32.5 million). Here, in the simultaneous fall in average living standards and the huge increase in the absolute number of workers made available by collectivisation, we surely find the main source of primary *bureaucratic* accumulation. Hence, industry "developed chiefly on the basis of its own resources".⁵⁹ Stalin's plagiarised version of Preobrazhensky, and his programme of unequal exchange between agriculture and industry, resolves itself into exploitation within industry.

Expectations of radically boosting productivity failed to materialise. That despite the initial enthusiasm for the first five-year plan, the shock brigades, production communes and socialist competition. When the new plant and machinery came on stream, productivity did rise. But it is clear that the surplus needed for primary accumulation came mainly from squeezing the living standards of urban industrial workers. The figures speak for themselves. Eg, the *proportion* of national income devoted to accumulation rose in 1928 from "19.4% to 30.3% in 1932".⁶⁰ Longer term, estimates of *total* private consumption in 1952-53 show a rise of between 22% and 31% from the base year of 1928. An extremely modest increase. Yet over the same period what was available for the state, including for accumulation, grew by some 11 or 13 times over.⁶¹

True, a sizable chunk of the initial workforce had before it the prospect of promotion into the new intelligentsia of technicians and administrators - during the first five-year plan more than 100,000 party members entered higher education.⁶² A privileged stratum, which was not going to oppose the uninterrupted five-day week nor reductions in the real wages of unskilled workers. New workers (mainly former peasants, women and youth), they were in no position to collectively resist - draconian laws, police spies and the threat of the gulag saw to that. Hence, as Stalin's triumphal world of target values went from one new high to another, their world descended into hardship, rightlessness and fear. Desperate, they trekked from job to job in search of better pay and conditions and doubtless, as part of establishing negative workers' control, imposed nod-and-wink go-slows and from there progressed to sabotaging machines and inflicting punishment beatings on snitches, norm-busters and uncooperative foremen. Stalin responded by introducing yet still further legislation: workers were forbidden to change jobs without permission (1930). Absenteeism became a criminal offence (1932). Internal passports for industrial and transport workers were introduced (1932) and then for all workers (1938). Workers were meant to show their labour book when applying for a new job. And the legislation became ever more draconian.

The first five-year plan was clearly a historic turning point. Relations of production and relations of distribution became relations of exploitation. Members of the apparatus came to expect luxuries, they were supplied with servants, their apartments were spacious and well-furnished. Meanwhile, the living standards of ordinary workers and collective farmers were uniformly low. Legally the full might of the state was turned against them. Workers were re-enslaved. Collective farmers were re-enslaved. The position of women, national minorities and young people underwent a pronounced retrogression too. Perhaps Stalin really did believe that the first five-year plan would take the Soviet Union in the direction of communism. But objectively his 'second revolution' was a counterrevolution within the revolution.

And, of course, confounding the ideologues of the Soviet Union being a form of state capitalism - not in the Lenin-Zinoviev sense of working class rule over capitalist relations of production - this counterrevolution against the masses went hand in hand with the final uprooting of capitalism. Not the transformation of the bureaucracy into a "ruling class" that sought to "accumulate capital" as quickly as possible.⁶³ Yes, in Soviet textbooks investment in plant and machinery was often called "capital".⁶⁴ Stalin did the same. But there was no "capital" in the Marxist sense of self-expanding value. The law of value did not drive the inner-workings of the system. Nor were other categories of capitalism operating as determinants. Most products were just that: they were not commodities.

Nor did labour-power appear as a generalised commodity. The rouble was not money. Exchange took place via Gosplan's allocations, targets and unofficial barter arrangements. The market became a mere vestige.

In the 1930s its main human representatives, the Nepmen and *kulaks*, were liquidated as a class. Stalin had, of course, already coined his 'Marxist' justification for inflicting ever further violence on society: the "intensification of the class struggle" under socialism. Because these "capitalist elements" were in *decline*, they supposedly increased their "resistance".⁶⁵ Here was the ideological justification for the purges to come ●

Notes

- GA Kozlov (ed) *Political economy: socialism* Moscow 1977, p98.
- See E Zaleski *Planning for economic growth in the Soviet Union, 1918-1932* Chapel Hill CA 1971, pp50-73.
- VI Lenin *CW* Vol 27, Moscow 1977, p339.
- See SA Smith *Red Petrograd* Cambridge 1983, p99.
- EH Carr *The Bolshevik revolution* Vol 2, Harmondsworth 1976, p78.
- Ibid* p104.
- EH Carr and RW Davies *Foundations of a planned economy* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1974, p835.
- See A Markevich and M Harrison: www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/mharrison/data/greatwar/appendix.pdf, p6.
- L Trotsky *The challenge of the Left Opposition 1923-25* New York 1975, p324.
- EH Carr and RW Davies *Foundations of a planned economy* Vol 1, Harmondsworth 1974, p893ff.
- EA Preobrazhensky *The new economics* Oxford 1965, p138.
- SF Cohen *Bukharin and the Bolshevik revolution* New York 1971, p302.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 11, Moscow 1954, pp167, 169.
- E Zaleski *Planning for economic growth in the Soviet Union, 1918-1932* Chapel Hill CA 1971, p56.
- Ibid* p60.
- See *Ibid* p61.
- Ibid* pp69-70.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1955, p41.
- Ibid* Vol 11, p256.
- Ibid* Vol 11, p258.
- Ibid* Vol 11, pp262-63.
- See D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1986, pp81-87.
- M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1978, p110.
- D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialisation* London 1986, p102.
- N Bukharin *Philosophical Arabesques* Delhi 2007.
- I Deutscher *The prophet unarmed* Oxford 1982, p468.
- M Reiman *The birth of Stalinism* London 1978, p100.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, p32.
- Ibid* p41.
- A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p189.
- Quoted in D Filtzer *Soviet workers and Stalinist industrialization* London 1986, p40.
- C Rakovsky, "The five year-plan in crisis" *Critique* No13, 1981, pp48-49.
- T Zavalani *How strong is Russia?* London 1951, p15.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, p177.
- Ibid* p178.
- See N Jansy *The Soviet 1956 statistical handbook* Michigan 1957, p32.
- A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p194.
- In July 1941 the invading German army captured the archives of the Smolensk oblast (area) Communist Party. Consisting of 536 files and totalling about 200,000 pages of documents, they were eventually seized by the US army. The archives cover the period 1917-38 and include reports from local party committee meetings, central committee directives, letters of complaint from ordinary Soviet citizens, party purges, the financing of state farms, Komsomol activities and the collectivisation drive (see M Fainsod *Smolensk under Soviet rule* New York 1958). Besides this material there are the surprisingly frank accounts carried in the regional Soviet press. And then, of course, there is the work of post-1991 historians who have been given access to the Moscow archives (see *The Russian Review* Vol 61, No1, January 2002).
- R Conquest *The harvest of sorrow* London 1986, pp120-21.
- Ibid* p157.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 13, Moscow 1953, pp193-94.
- R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1990, p20.
- M Sholokov *Virgin soil upturned* Harmondsworth 1977, pp127-28.
- A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p174.
- K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1970, p746.
- See M Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p106n.
- R Conquest *The great terror - a reassessment* London 1988, p20.
- N Khrushchev *Khrushchev remembers* London 1971, p58.
- HR Nickerbocker *The Soviet five-year plan and its effect on world trade* London 1931, p240.
- See G Guroff and FV Carstensen (eds) *Entrepreneurship in Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union* Princeton NJ 1981, p267.
- A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p212.
- Istoriya sotsialisticheskoi ekonomiki* SSSR Vol 3, Moscow 1977; quoted in *Socialism: theory and practice* April 1979.
- T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia* London 1974, p54.
- Ibid*.
- See JR Miller *Soviet Studies* July 1970 and *Slavic Review* December 1974.
- www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/staff/mharrison/public/jds85postprint.pdf.
- R Conquest *The harvest of sorrow* London 1986, pp170-71.
- Ellman *Socialist planning* Cambridge 1989, p107.
- Ibid*.
- A Nove *An economic history of the USSR* Harmondsworth 1982, p196.
- See N Jansy *The Soviet 1956 statistical handbook* Michigan 1957, p43.
- See S Fitzpatrick *Education and social mobility in the Soviet Union 1921-34* Cambridge 1979, p187.
- T Cliff *State capitalism in Russia* London 1974, pp153-54.
- GA Kozlov (ed) *Political economy: socialism* Moscow 1977, p98.
- JV Stalin *SW* Vol 12 Moscow 1953, p37.

GENETICS

The social gradient

Mike Belbin completes his series of articles on genetics, racism and human character

If we reject the discrimination of racism and psycho-geneticism - the idea that character is determined by biology - what are we left with? A human being that is 'blank' at birth, one who acquires a personality by their own struggle and decision-making, one who makes their life through their own efforts, no matter where they are born, the example of a self-sufficient individualism?

But this would lead us back to focusing on the individual's *personal* weaknesses and strengths? If the individual is weak, their weakness belongs to their body or mind and is not dependent on other influences - social and familial. These characteristics must therefore be somehow physically inherited. We would not be 'blank', but strongly 'wired'. So individualism does not get us beyond heritability: if you fail and cannot 'hack it', it must be something *in you*.

Disabled activists for one have long since rejected such physical fatalism and instead talk of the 'social model'. Because someone is blind or in a wheelchair does not mean there are lots of things they cannot achieve - only that they are not being allowed to do so because of bad design. It is the inadequacies of social provision which limit their capability: society is what disables. Until quite recently you never saw a wheelchair user on a bus; then, because of a policy achieved through struggle, it became an everyday occurrence.

According to Michael Marmot, there is one determinant of bodily health that is definitely not genetic. He calls it the "social gradient". Working as a GP, Marmot came to the conclusion that "in general, the lower the social position, the higher the risk of heart disease, stroke, diseases of the digestive tract, HIV-related disease, tuberculosis, suicide, other 'accidental' and violent deaths".¹

This is not just a general observation that being poor make you poorly; his book illustrates the small and greater differences in illness among all classes with graphs and statistics, often comparing populations over decades. In fact he not only shows that there is a difference with regard to the very rich and very poor, or between people in the developed and developing world, but that there are variations in health and life expectancy within the spectrum of the middle classes. For example, mortality from coronary heart disease is still greater in people occupied in clerical positions than at the administrative and professional levels. "Who you are," he declares with precision, "leads to where you end."

Marmot argues that this is not just due to material conditions of living, but of the varying lack of control over one's life and how this leads to unhealthy lifestyle choices through ignorance or emotional compensation. Lack of autonomy is unhealthy and leads to overeating: the confined get fat. Poor health then reinforces lack of social mobility.

A study by Michael Wadsworth of people born in 1946 showed that it was sick children in the sample who were less likely to be upwardly mobile - and they may be made sick, or sicker, by their living conditions. It is the fitter than average that tend to rise. "If your father had little education," comments Marmot, "and you had a PhD from Harvard, the chances are your health will [have been] better than someone from a similar background..."² Factors all through life, from where you are born to that locality's lack of educational provision, reinforce one another.



Future humans: genetically designed

That said, Marmot does not want to give in to stereotypes. For example, the majority of children born to parents of deprived social position do not end up in crime. Only about 30% of young black men in Washington DC will in fact be arrested and then only for drug-dealing, not gun violence.

Marmot concludes:

What happens during a critical period has an enduring effect on disease risk in subsequent life. Second, there may be accumulation of advantage and disadvantage throughout life. Third, where you start out does affect where you end up... early life experiences may be vital not because they affect health directly, but because they change the child's chance of ending up in a favourable social [and health] situation in later life.³

These *post-natal* social influences are not unalterable, but they are a strong force. Class is what counts for your wellbeing over a lifetime - anyone who claims to believe in human equality will seek to act on this arbitrary influence. Alternatively, the consequence of adopting psycho-geneticism is that technology - often in this case, pharmaceuticals - is promoted as the cure that can solve our social problems, especially when these are other angry people. Chemistry replaces politics and we have a new racism, a new discrimination against those categorised as genetically inferior.

The creative animal

Speaking of class, what of Marx and Engels? Did they believe in a blank slate, an 'empty' being, which is then totally conditioned by society's requirements? Or did they favour the existence of an original human nature, which is essentially good and cooperative, but perverted by civilisation? Are we robots or are we angels (albeit fallen)?

As materialists, Marx and Engels did not forget the body - that legacy of the animal state. The human being is an entity constituted by biology. Like other animals, it seeks survival, shelter and pleasure, pursuing safety and satisfaction. Unlike other species, however, it has developed a 'second-nature' - society and culture - with its variety of tools and institutions. From early on in his writings, Marx recognised both of humanity's aspects: the satisfaction-seeking biology and the mind's invention.

Incidentally, there is a difference of emphasis between Marx's view of the human being and Sigmund Freud's. While Marx's stresses satisfaction, or pleasure-seeking, Freud sees the organism as *pain-avoiding*, which often means control or mastery of external stimuli, a state one might call comfort.

But Freud acknowledges the risk of comfort-seeking - it can be destructive and selfish, power-driven for the sake of attaining imperviousness: an ambition Freud calls the death instinct. For example, in seeking to master nature, it can wear away at sustainability. In this way, exploitation can make a tragedy out of comfort and mastery, the destruction of the very natural and human basis of our world.

To pinpoint Marx's view of the human essence, our starting point is those preliminary notes for his research programme called the *Economic and philosophical manuscripts*. In this Marx presents the difference between animal and human - our 'species-being' - as the ability to *labour*, another word for which is *creativity*: that is, an action which makes retainable objects, whether tools or the format of an institution.

Marx comments:

In creating a world of objects by his practical activity, in work upon inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species-being... Admittedly animals also produce. They build themselves nests, dwellings, like the bees, beavers, ants, etc. But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, whilst man produces universally. They produce only under dominion of immediate physical need, whilst man produces even when free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.⁴

Seeking security - humans developed clans, structures that gained them greater safety, but involved a certain loss of their creativity, especially for women. In making the human world, for survival and comfort, societies created ideas and institutions that were no longer recognised as human products, so that the creative powers of the species were denied. Marx further comments: "An immediate consequence of the fact that we are estranged from the product of our labour, from our life activity, from our species-being, is the estrangement of the individual from others."⁵

Separated from the satisfaction of human creativity and control, the human being is put into antagonism with other people: we are each in competition with others. Socialism, or real communism, is the opposite of this. This does not mean that there will then be no conflicts, but these will not be fundamental to a system of livelihood that is a zero-sum game - many people losing so that some can win.

At first, these constructed roles were inherited, passed down as traditions (though often modified surreptitiously), but, with the rise of science and social revolution over the 17th and 18th centuries, the concept of conscious change emerged. These were revolutions

that would mean not the liberation of a particular human character - our original personality - but the freeing of human labour to create a better world, deliberately and mutually. It is not that there is some prehistoric simplicity which must be reclaimed - one which existed before we were 'corrupted': rather we must give space to what distinguishes all humans - this creativity, including moral judgements, which can make a satisfying and sustainable world; a talent which is the distinctiveness of our being.

Human inventiveness, even if in improvisation, is useful for any working society. In fact we are required much of the time, however cowed, to be 'flexible', adaptable and innovative as workers and consumers. In *Capital* volume 1, Marx comments that workers' needs - their natural wants, such as food, clothing, fuel and housing - vary according to the climatic and other physical conditions of the country:

... the number and extent of [the worker's] so-called necessary wants, and also the modes of satisfying them, are themselves the product of historical development, and depend therefore to a great extent on the degree of civilisation of a country - more particularly on the conditions under which, and consequently the habits and degree of comfort in which, the class of free labourers has been formed.

Human desires and expectations are not static, but depend on a particular stage of social organisation and culture. Therefore, Marx continues: "there enters into the determination of the value of labour-power a historical and moral element".⁶

By being the creative/labouring animal, we are good at learning: we are not fixed to certain skills and preferences. In any social arrangement we do what we perceive is best for us, choosing from the options. We also learn new skills, through experience and education; we negotiate the milieu we are presented with. We can rebel, sometimes with ferocity or in madness: we are ready to search out survival strategies and compensatory satisfactions.

If we perceive the social network as unsatisfactory we can develop different approaches to cope with it - we may make war on others or seek some kind of cooperation, become psychopaths or seek help. The anthropologist and primatologist, Sarah B Hrdy, has observed how mothers - animal and human - may kill or abandon those offspring they do not have the resources to rear. There is no 'maternal instinct' or for that matter, an 'infanticide gene' - just "trade-offs between quality and quantity" in particular situations.⁷ Just as we are not programmed to speak particular sentences, we are not programmed to behave like a robot or an angel/demon, 'born good or evil'.

Recent research has shown what it is that is valued by those who get to be creative people today. In fact, monetary reward is quite low as an incentive; rather, qualities like autonomy, mastery and purpose are sought: that is, deciding on tasks, becoming more adept at them and having clear aims. Daniel H Pink found that a high monetary reward only works with boring jobs and can in fact, at the highest levels, make for skimpy performance: the job suffers when money is the thing.⁸

Conclusion

We are 'wild cards': that is, granted our value and power by class position, family interaction and other enabling conditions

or disturbances. The economy rises and falls, people feel good or frustrated. No institution intends to produce serial killers, but they still emerge and they can also change with help. What distinguishes Marxism is the idea of a *collective* movement against social fate, just as experimental science, according to Francis Bacon, is *collaborative*. We are certainly part of a situation, but because we are not fixed we can judge it and change it.

In the early 19th century the bourgeois believed in a revolution - the freedom and power that came from science under capitalism. That version of modernity was challenged by another kind - the idea of socialism - and, as the European empires expanded (for example, in Africa), bourgeois optimism gave way to 'scientific' racism: the conservative notion that grades of people have a fixed nature or character.

But people always say it is a mix of nature and nurture. This is a dialectical-sounding formulation, but not sufficient. A certain physical capacity is inherited genetically, but culture and experience are also needed - even when chemicals and physical bias contribute to character, they are not a straightjacket. Life is a drama, not a diagram - the cast includes parents and the economic system; it is not a monologue by chromosomes.

No intellectually respectable person blatantly espouses a fixed idea of racial character, but ideas of fixed character by genes come close. While racism arose from the requirement to justify unequal treatment of 'heathens' during slavery and colonialism, psycho-geneticism discriminates between individuals as 'natural' winners and losers, in our global society of widening social differences. A residual concept of the soul, of an inborn and inherent personality, still lingers from traditional belief and provides support for the notion that character and not just physique is inherited. Total notions of heritability are also useful for pharmaceutical profits: a pill for every psycho-biological ill.

Humanity is historical: biological disparities are indeed genetic, but character is psychological and often due to the existence of social inequalities. Human beings are shaped by their context, but not irrevocably attached to it. Therefore we can change it. We are not reducible to structures, but informed by them and often in contradictory ways. People are not instinctual like most animals, yet neither are we objects of programming: that is, robots. The same person could turn out to be a serial killer or a Damien Hirst, depending on the way their life goes. If human beings do not have to do the worst thing, then there is a flexibility to them being, in the circumstances, brave, rational and committed to the public good, depending on their recognition of the benefits and their own self-image and morale.

If capitalism is now at a dead end, the only alternative is the human ability to go down a different road with the knowledge of the ages. The greatest opportunity for all of us is to be enabled by society to be the best we can and, because we are all able to grow, all of us have an equal 'human right' to this gift. To be human is to develop, one way or another ●

Notes

1. A Marmot *Status syndrome* London 2015, p23.
2. *Ibid* pp60-61.
3. *Ibid* p241.
4. K Marx *Economic and philosophical manuscripts of 1844* London 1977, pp73-74.
5. *Ibid* pp74-75.
6. K Marx *Capital* Vol 1, London 1954, part 2, chapter 6, p168.
7. SB Hrdy *Mother nature: natural selection and the female of the species* London 1999.
8. DH Pink *Drive* New York 2009.

ECONOMICS

Ten years later

What has the bourgeoisie learnt from the 2008 crash? Not a great deal, writes **Michael Roberts**

It is exactly 10 years since the global financial crash began with the news that the French bank, BNP, had suspended its sub-prime mortgage funds because of “an evaporation of liquidity”.¹

Within six months, credit tightened and inter-bank interest rates rocketed. Banks across the globe began to experience huge losses on the derivative funds set up to profit from the housing boom that had taken off in the US, but had started to falter. And the US and the world entered what was later called the great recession - the worst slump in world production and trade since the 1930s.

Ten years later, it is worth reminding ourselves of some of the lessons and implications of that economic earthquake.² First, the official institutions and mainstream economists never saw it coming. In 2002, the head of the Federal Reserve Bank, Alan Greenspan - then dubbed the great maestro for apparently engineering a substantial economic boom - announced that ‘financial innovations’ (ie, derivatives of mortgage funds, etc) had ‘diversified risk’, so that “shocks to the overall economic system will be better absorbed and less likely to create cascading failures that could threaten financial stability”. Ben Bernanke, who eventually presided at the Fed over the global financial crash, remarked in 2004 that “the past two decades had seen a marked reduction in economic volatility” that he dubbed the “great moderation”. And, as late as October 2007, the International Monetary Fund concluded that “in advanced economies, economic recessions had virtually disappeared in the post-war period”.

Once the depth of the crisis was revealed in 2008, Greenspan told the US Congress: “I am in a state of shocked disbelief”. He was asked by House Oversight Committee chair Henry Waxman: “In other words, you found that your view of the world, your ideology, was not right - it was not working?”. He answered: “Absolutely. You know that’s precisely the reason I was shocked, because I have been going for 40 years or more with very considerable evidence that it was working exceptionally well.”

The mainstream economists were no better. When asked what caused the great recession if it was not a credit bubble that burst, Nobel Prize winner and top Chicago neoclassical economist Eugene Fama³ responded:

We don’t know what causes recessions ... We’ve never known. Debates go on to this day about what caused the great depression. Economics is not very good at explaining swings in economic activity

... I’d love to know more what causes business cycles.⁴

Soon to be IMF chief economist, Olivier Blanchard, commented in hindsight that the crash “raises a potentially existential crisis for macroeconomics”.

But then most of the so-called heterodox economists, including Marxists, did not see the crash and the ensuing great recession coming either. There were a few exceptions: Steve Keen, the Australian economist, forecast a credit crash based on his theory that “the essential element giving rise to depression is the accumulation of private debt” and that had never been higher in 2007 in the major economies.⁵ In 2003, Anwar Shaikh reckoned the downturn in the profitability of capital and the down wave in investment was leading to a new depression.⁶

And yours truly in 2005 said:

There has not been such a coincidence of cycles since 1991. And this time (unlike 1991) it will be accompanied by the down wave in profitability within the down wave in Kondratiev prices cycle. It is all at the bottom of the hill in 2009-10! That suggests we can expect a very severe economic slump of a degree not seen since 1980-82 or more.⁷

As for the causes of the global financial crash and the ensuing great recession, they have been analysed *ad nauseam*. The crash was clearly financial in form: the collapse of banks and other financial institutions and the “weapons of mass financial destruction”, to use the now famous phrase of Warren Buffett, the world’s most successful stock market investor. But many fell back on the theory of chance, an event that was one in a billion: a “black swan”, as Nassim Taleb claimed.⁸

Alternatively, capitalism was inherently unstable and occasional slumps were unavoidable. Greenspan took this view:

I know of no form of economic organisation based on the division of labour, from unfettered *laissez-faire* to oppressive central planning, that has succeeded in achieving both maximum sustainable

economic growth and permanent stability. Central planning certainly failed and I strongly doubt that stability is achievable in capitalist economies, given the always turbulent competitive markets continuously being drawn toward, but never quite achieving, equilibrium unless there is a societal choice to abandon dynamic markets and leverage for some form of central planning, I fear that preventing bubbles will in the end turn out to be infeasible. Assuaging the aftermath is all we can hope for.⁹

Most official economic leaders saw only the surface phenomena of the financial crash and concluded that the great recession was the result of financial recklessness by unregulated banks or a ‘financial panic’. This coincided with some heterodox views based on the theories of Hyman Minsky, radical Keynesian economist of the 1980s, that the finance sector was inherently unstable, because “the financial system necessary for capitalist vitality and vigour, which translates entrepreneurial animal spirits into effective demand investment, contains the potential for runaway expansion, powered by an investment boom”. Steve Keen, a follower of Minsky, put it thus: “... capitalism is inherently flawed, being prone to booms, crises and depressions. This instability, in my view, is due to characteristics that the financial system must possess if it is to be consistent with full-blown capitalism.” Most Marxists accepted something similar to the Minskyite view, seeing the great recession as a result of ‘financialisation’ creating a new form of fragility in capitalism.¹⁰

Of the mainstream Keynesians, Paul Krugman railed against the neoclassical school’s failings, but offered no explanation himself except that it was a “technical malfunction”¹¹ that needed and could be corrected by restoring “effective demand”.¹²

Marxist answer

Very few Marxist economists looked to the original view of Marx on the causes of commercial and financial crashes and ensuing slumps in production. One such was Guglielmo Carchedi, who summed that view up in his excellent, but often ignored *Behind the crisis*¹³ with:

The basic point is that financial crises are caused by the shrinking productive base of the economy. A point is thus reached at which there has to be a sudden and massive deflation in the financial and speculative sectors. Even though it looks as though

the crisis has been generated in these sectors, the ultimate cause resides in the productive sphere and the attendant falling rate of profit in this sphere.

Agreeing with that explanation, the best book on the crash remains that by Paul Mattick Jnr: *Business as usual*.¹⁴ And indeed profitability in the productive sectors of the capitalist major economies was low historically in 2007, as several studies have shown. In the US, profitability peaked in 1997 and the rise in profitability in the credit boom of 2002-06 was overwhelmingly in the financial and property sectors.¹⁵ This encouraged a huge rise in fictitious capital¹⁶ (stocks and debt) that could not be justified by sufficient improvement in profits from productive investment.

The mass of profit began to fall in the US in 2006, more than a year before the credit crunch struck in August 2007. Falling profits meant overaccumulation of capital and thus a sharp cutback in investment. A slump in production, employment and incomes followed: ie, the great recession.

Since the end of that recession in mid-2009, most capitalist economies have experienced a very weak recovery, much weaker than after previous post-war recessions and in some ways even weaker than in the 1930s. A recent Roosevelt Institute report by JW Mason found that

there is no precedent for the weakness of investment in the current cycle. Nearly 10 years later, real investment spending remains less than 10% above its 2007 peak. This is slow even relative to the anaemic pace of GDP growth, and extremely low by historical standards.¹⁷

So the great recession became the “long depression”, as I described it¹⁸ - a term also adopted by many others, including Keynesian economists like Paul Krugman and Simon Wren-Lewis. Why did the great recession not lead to a “normal” economic recovery to previous investment and production rates?¹⁹ The mainstream economists of the monetarist school argue that governments and central banks were slow in cutting interest rates and adopting “unconventional” monetary tools like quantitative easing. But, when they did, such policies appeared to have failed in reviving the economy and merely fuelled a new stock market and debt boom.²⁰

The neoclassical school reckons that debt should be cut back, as it weighs on the ability of companies to invest, while governments ‘crowd out’ credit because of their high levels of borrowing. This ignores the reason for high government debt: namely the huge cost of bailing out banks globally and the slump in tax revenues from the recession. In opposition, the Keynesians say the long depression was all due to ‘austerity’: ie, governments trying to reduce spending and balance budgets. But the evidence for that conclusion is not compelling.²¹

What the neoclassical, Keynesian and heterodox views have in common is a denial for any role for profit and profitability in booms and slumps in capitalism! As a result, none look for an explanation for low investment in low profitability.²² And yet the correlation between profit and investment is high and continually confirmed,²³ while profitability in most capitalist economies is still lower than

in 2007.²⁴

After 10 years and a decidedly long, if very weak, economic recovery phase in the ‘business cycle’, are we due for another slump soon? History would suggest so. It will not be triggered by another property slump, in my view. Real estate prices in most countries have still not recovered to 2007 levels and, even though interest rates are low, housing transaction levels are modest.

The new trigger is likely to be in the corporate sector itself. Corporate debt has continued to rise globally, especially in the so-called emerging economies. Despite low interest rates, a significant section of weaker companies are barely able to service their debts. S&P Capital IQ noted that a record stash of \$1.84 trillion in cash held by US non-financial companies masked a \$6.6 trillion debt burden. The concentration of cash of the top 25 holders, representing 1% of companies, now accounts for over half the overall cash pile. That is up from 38% five years ago. The big talk about the hegemoths like Apple, Microsoft, Amazon having mega cash reserves hides the real picture for most companies.²⁵

Profit margins overall are slipping and in the US non-financial sector corporate profits have been falling. And now central banks, starting with the US Federal Reserve, have started to reverse ‘quantitative easing’ and hike policy interest rates. The cost of borrowing and existing debt servicing will rise, just at a time when profitability is flagging.

That is a recipe for a new slump - 10 years after the last one? ●

Michael Roberts blogs at <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/>

Notes

1. www.nytimes.com/2007/08/09/business/worldbusiness/09iht-09bnp.7054054.html.
2. See <https://thenextrecession.files.wordpress.com/2011/11/the-causes-of-the-great-recession.pdf>.
3. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/10/14/the-noblest-fama-and-shiller>.
4. www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/interview-with-eugene-fama.
5. See www.debtdeflation.com/blogs.
6. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/04/04/capitalism-and-anwar-shaikh>.
7. M Roberts *The great recession* London 2009.
8. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2012/11/22/bayes-law-nate-silver-and-vooodoo-economics>.
9. *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* spring 2010, p218.
10. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2016/04/18/jack-rasmus-and-systemic-fragility>.
11. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/08/16/its-a-technical-malfunction/>
12. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2012/05/27/krugman-and-depression-economics>.
13. Leiden 2011.
14. London 2011.
15. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2011/02/15/america-from-progressive-to-rentier>.
16. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/05/29/excessive-credit-rentier-capital-and-crises>.
17. <http://uk.businessinsider.com/us-economy-has-not-really-recovered-relative-to-pre-crisis-expectations-2017-8>.
18. M Roberts *The long depression* London 2016.
19. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/02/10/why-is-there-a-long-depression>.
20. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2015/11/11/keynes-marx-and-the-effect-of-qe>.
21. See <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/07/13/will-reversing-austerity-end-the-depression>.
22. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2013/11/20/a-keynesian-or-marxist-depression>.
23. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/06/13/investment-profit-and-growth>.
24. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2017/07/26/profitability-and-investment-again-the-ameco-data>.
25. <https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2014/03/24/awash-with-cash>.



**October 24 2007:
Merrill Lynch goes
down**

COMMUNIST UNIVERSITY

Who is speaking and when

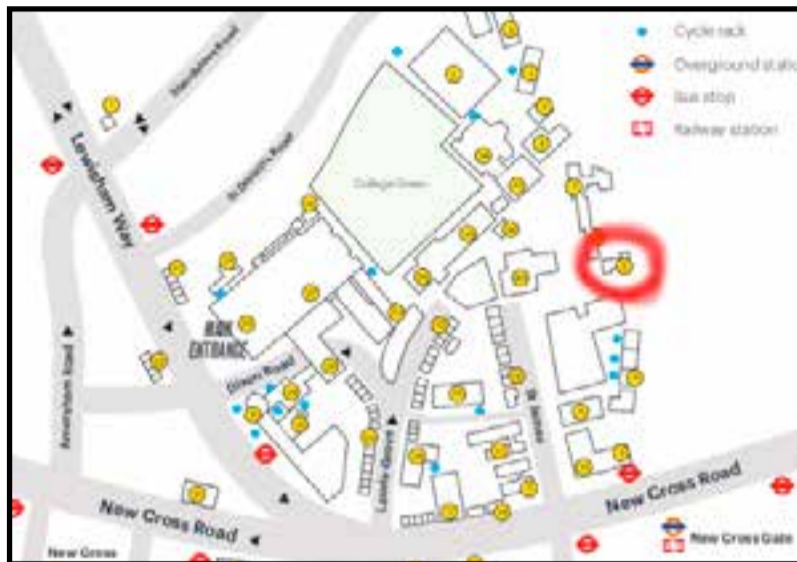
Communist University is the annual summer school of the Communist Party of Great Britain, it is jointly sponsored this year by Labour Party Marxists. Naturally on the 100th anniversary of the October Revolution there is a particular emphasis on the Bolsheviks, Russia and the nature of the Stalin regime.

Communist University is different to the run-of-the-mill schools put on by other left groups. Plenty of time is allocated for contributions from the floor. Needless to say, there are no one minute time limits. Moreover, critical thinking is positively encouraged, as can be seen by our impressive list of speakers.

Moshé Machover: Born in Tel Aviv in 1936, he has been active in and written extensively on Middle Eastern politics. In 1962 he co-founded the Israeli Socialist Organisation, Matzpen. He was a lecturer in mathematics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and, having moved to London in 1968, he was reader in mathematical logic at King's College London and then professor of philosophy at the University of London. Together with Shimon Tzabar and others, comrade Machover established the Israeli Revolutionary Action Committee Abroad. He is a regular writer for the *Weekly Worker* and has recently published a collection of essays: *Israelis and Palestinians* (Chicago 2012).

Hillel Ticktin: He is emeritus professor of Marxist studies at the University of Glasgow and edited the journal *Critique* for 34 years. Originating as an anti-Stalinist journal of Soviet studies, *Critique's* initial aim was to analyse the empirical reality of Stalinism, but since the collapse of the Soviet Union it has become a more general journal of socialist theory. Comrade Ticktin's articles have featured regularly in the *Weekly Worker*.

Yassamine Mather: Acting editor of *Critique*, she is an Iranian socialist who joined the Fedayeen Minority. She worked in Kurdistan, becoming editor of the organisation's student monthly journal *Jahan*. She was on the coordinating committee of Workers Left Unity Iran and has been a central



Goldsmiths, University of London, St James Garden Room (Loring Hall), entrance on St James, London SE14 6NW

figure in *Hands Off the People of Iran*. At Glasgow University she was deputy director of the Centre for the Study of Socialist Theory and Movements. **August H Nimitz Jr:** Professor of political science and African-American and African studies at the University of Minnesota. He is the author of a number of books on the Marxist tradition, focusing in particular on the contribution of Marx and Engels to the fight for democracy. See www.bookdepository.com/author/August-Nimitz.

Bob Arnott: A medical archaeologist, who was director of the Institute of Medical Law at the University of Birmingham until 2008, he is also a fellow of the Royal Historical Society. His writings have ranged from disease and medicine in the Aegean and Anatolian Bronze Ages to campaigning articles on the provision of healthcare.

Marc Mulholland: Fellow in modern history at Oxford University, his research interests concern Ireland since the famine, political thought since the French Revolution and the history of socialism. He is the author of a number of books, including *Northern Ireland: a very short introduction* (Oxford 2003).

Chris Knight: Research fellow at the department of anthropology, University College London, his books include *Blood relations: menstruation and the*

origins of culture (Yale 1991). He has developed a groundbreaking theory of human culture. His latest work is an attempt to grapple with the emergence of language. He regularly contributes to the *Weekly Worker*.

Camilla Power: A social anthropologist and senior lecturer at the University of East London, she combines Darwinian and behavioural ecology with hunter-gatherer ethnography. Her fieldwork has been with Hadza hunter-gatherers in Tanzania, where she researched gender ritual.

Neil Davidson: A former member of the Socialist Workers Party, his works include *The origins of Scottish nationhood*, the Deutscher Prize winner *Discovering the Scottish revolution*, and *How revolutionary were the bourgeois revolutions?* - the latter being the subject of his CU talk.

Michael Roberts: Working in the City of London as an economist, he has closely observed the machinations of the global financial system from the dragon's den. He regularly discusses this from a Marxist perspective on his blog, *The next recession* (<https://thenextrecession.wordpress.com>).

Tony Greenstein: A political activist for all his adult life. His main areas of work have been Palestine solidarity, anti-racism and anti-fascism. Tony is

a founding member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and Jews for Boycotting Israeli Goods. Currently suspended from the Labour Party under the rightwing 'Anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' campaign, he has recently authored *A history of fighting fascism in Brighton and the South Coast*.

Another regular *Weekly Worker* contributor, he also features in *The essentials of philosophy and ethics* (London 2006).

Jack Conrad: The founder editor of *The Leninist*, first published in November 1981, he is also a long-standing member of the CPB Provisional Central Committee. He has contributed numerous articles to the *Weekly Worker* and written a number of books and pamphlets - the latest being the second edition of *Fantastic reality*, a study of Marxism and the politics of religion.

Kevin Bean: Lecturer at the Institute of Irish Studies - University of Liverpool. He has contributed to a number of books, including chapters in *The politics of fear? Provisionalism, loyalism and the 'new politics' of Northern Ireland and Civil society, the state and conflict transformation*, where he discusses the politics of the nationalist community in the Six Counties.

Mike Macnair: A member of the CPGB's PCC and author of *Revolutionary strategy* (London 2008), he is currently working on a second edition. Based at the University of Oxford, his political speciality is Marxist theory, its application to understanding law as a social and historical phenomenon, and the 'limits of law'.

Anne McShane: Has a long history of involvement in the workers' movement, both in Britain and Ireland. She has stood in a number of elections in Britain, for the CPGB and the Socialist Alliance. Today she is active in Cork, where she is a member of the United Left Alliance and continues to struggle for a united revolutionary party in Ireland.

Paul Demarty: Is a member of the CPGB's PCC. He is a regular writer for the *Weekly Worker*. He has a particular interest in the media and new technology.

What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called 'parties' on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed 'line' are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question—ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, 'One state, one party'.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin's Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism—a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

The *Weekly Worker* is licensed by November Publications under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International Licence: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/legalcode>. ISSN 1351-0150.

	10am-12.30pm	2pm-4.15pm	4.45pm-7pm
Saturday August 12	Registration and access from 12.30pm	After the June 8 general election Jack Conrad	Marx and Engels and the democratic breakthrough August H Nimitz Jr
Sunday August 13	How revolutionary were the bourgeois revolutions? Neil Davidson	Lenin, Bolshevism and the tsar's duma August H Nimitz Jr	Challenges ahead for global capitalism Michael Roberts
Monday August 14	Anti-Zionism is not anti-Semitism Moshé Machover Tony Greenstein	Political economy of Stalinism Hillel Ticktin	Bolshevism, soviet elections and the Constituent Assembly August H Nimitz Jr
Tuesday August 15	The real alternatives when socialism in one country seemed inevitable Hillel Ticktin	Lessons of the October Revolution Chris Knight	1967 and all that: the Sexual Offences Act Mike Macnair
Wednesday August 16	The 'rule of law' delusion Mike Macnair	The revolutionary sex Camilla Power	Colonisation of Palestine in historical perspective Moshé Machover
Thursday August 17	Computer says no Paul Demarty	Women and the Russian revolution Anne McShane	Trump and the Middle East Yassamine Mather
Friday August 18	Populism, nationalism and the new/old politics in Europe Kevin Bean	The birth of Soviet healthcare Bob Arnott	The Bolshevik problem of breaking from capitalism Marc Mulholland
Saturday August 19	The <i>Sunday Worker</i> and the National Left Wing Movement Lawrence Parker	Bolshevism vindicated Jack Conrad	3.30pm-4pm Evaluation of school

weekly Worker

Mosul before and after 'liberation'

Oppression from all sides

Iraqi communist Haifa Zangana addressed the London Communist Forum on August 6

Firstly, a few words about the recent history of Mosul, so we can understand the context of what is happening today. I will deal with the aftermath of the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, leading to the declaration of an Islamic caliphate in Mosul and then the victory claimed by the Iraqi government. That will pose questions about the future of Iraq in general and of Islamic State in particular.

Personally I lived in Mosul in the 1970s, when I was a medical student at the university - then one of the best in Iraq, but now largely destroyed. Some of my family are still in the city and I am in continuous contact with them, so I am able to get a reasonable picture of what is going on there.

Mosul is the second largest city in Iraq and it is renowned for its ethnically and religiously diverse community. Whatever Middle East religious or ethnic group you can think of is likely to be represented there. The majority is Arab and Muslim, but there are Christians, Yazidis, Armenians and many other different ethnic and religious backgrounds - they have been in Mosul, which was part of the Ottoman empire, and in the surrounding area since ancient times.

Its population is around two million, many of them well educated - in fact Iraq as a whole is famous for its yearning for education. For many of us in the 70s and 80s having a degree was not enough - we wanted to go on to post-graduate studies. In many ways this was similar to the attitude you might expect in many parts of Europe, and in terms of education Mosul was the best after Baghdad.

Mosul has also been a centre of officer training since the establishment of the Iraqi army at the end of the 1920s. Officers from Mosul became prominent in the army during the Iraq-Iran war of 1980-88. However, in 2003 they surrendered to US invasion forces a few days after the fall of Baghdad. So there was no real resistance from Mosul. The US established one of its largest military bases in Mosul under the command of general David Petraeus (later to become US commander in the Middle East and eventually CIA director).

His policy was to 'buy' the people, especially women, and this was practised first of all in Mosul before being applied to the whole country. Part of Petraeus's policy was based on coopting local women into the US military's counterinsurgency efforts. His reasoning was that if women could be controlled then so could their families and their men.

While oil money was providing Iraq the highest proportion of its budget in modern history, little was spent on improving people's basic needs. Vast sums were swallowed up by corrupt practices, while almost a third of the population were struggling below the poverty line.

In mid-2003, the resistance began in earnest against the American and British occupation, including in Mosul. But, whenever there was an attack on US troops, the response was one of collective punishment, leading to a huge increase in the anger and despair of the people, who were trying to rebuild their city.

Many of Mosul's men were being arrested and the numbers seemed to go on increasing. I was involved with some of the human rights organisations in Mosul and Baghdad. We used to receive pile after pile of documents and photographs of tortured people. Many were arrested solely on the word of a secret informer, or accused of being a terrorist just because their name was similar to that of a resistance fighter.

The government was in denial, refusing to look into what was happening to the ordinary people in Mosul, where the treatment seemed to be particularly brutal. But in 2009 the scandal came out into the open. Detainees were being subjected to the same sort of treatment seen in Abu Ghraib - only it was being practised by Iraqi security forces, not the US.

Details came out concerning Iraqi's secret prisons - in fact they were so secret that just about everyone knew about them! They had been under Iraqi control since Abu Ghraib. The Americans were no longer directly involved in the torture - they had been keeping their hands clean and were now claiming to be very concerned about 'human rights violations'. So those due to be 'interrogated' were handed over to the Iraqis to deal with.

A horrifying report by Human Rights Watch titled 'Iraq: detainees describe the treatment:

interrogators and security officials sodomised some detainees with broomsticks and pistol barrels and, the detainees said, raped younger detainees, who were then sent to a different detention site. Some young men said they had been forced to perform oral sex on interrogators and guards. Interrogators also forced some detainees to molest one another.¹

One of the victims of torture was Ramzi Shihab Ahmed, a former general in the Iraqi army and a British citizen who lives in London. I knew him and his wife, Ramzi. He was arrested after he returned to Mosul from London to find his son, who had been detained. His jailers refused him medicine for his diabetes and high blood pressure. "I was beaten up severely, especially on my head," he told Human Rights Watch. "They broke one of my teeth during the beatings ... Ten people tortured me - four from the investigation commission and six soldiers ... They applied electricity to my penis and sodomised me with a stick. I was forced to sign a confession that they wouldn't let me read.² After a 10-minute 'trial' without legal representation he was

sentenced to 15 years in prison.

During interrogation security officials mocked the detainees and called them trash. Under torture many offered false confessions - it was very similar to what happened in Abu Ghraib. Religious figures too were the victims and there were stories of children being raped in front of their parents to make them 'confess'.

Islamic State

It was this situation that provided IS with the fertile ground it needed. People were desperate.

Was there peaceful resistance? Yes, There were vigils and demonstrations, but Iraqi forces from outside the city erected checkpoints, at which people had to face humiliation every day. The anger was building up, until finally in August 2014 a group called Daesh, which no-one was really familiar with, entered Mosul. There were only 300 of them, but suddenly the Iraqi army in their thousands discarded their uniforms and ran away, leaving the city to IS, which they took over within two days.

How did the people react? Some were happy: surely things under IS could not be any worse than what they had had to endure for so many years? They did not know much about IS, but they thought that at least it would be able to provide some assistance. In fact in the first couple of months it looked as though Daesh might be able to institute some changes. For example, there were no more checkpoints and people were able to move about more freely. But there seemed to be a change in policy and gradually IS became more and more oppressive, imposing their own religious prejudices and making more and more arrests. In such a diverse city people were shocked. IS demanded that everyone either convert to Islam, pay a fee or risk being killed. Soon the mass killing and destruction started, forcing many people to flee.

The response of the Iraqi and Kurdish regional governments was to join a US-led coalition, which began a programme of continuous air strikes. They were supposedly 'smart' strikes, but the number of casualties increased day by day. In fact the destruction, fear and death caused and the resulting danger was a bigger factor for some than the presence of IS - civilian victims of the 'war on terror' began to exceed the victims of the 'terror' itself.

During the battle to 'liberate' Mosul, one million civilians were displaced, and 90% of the west side of the city - where the hospitals, university, libraries, power and water supplies and so on

were located - was reduced to rubble. Bridges and roads were destroyed, meaning that it was impossible to transport supplies. The foreign minister of the Kurdish regional government has estimated that 40,000 people were killed in nine months - a figure which Baghdad claims is an exaggeration. Nor does the government want to mention the number of young people, including volunteers, who died. Responding to the call by government-backed clerics they were often sent to the front to fight IS without adequate training.

In addition to the destruction of the infrastructure and the number of deaths and displaced people caused by Mosul's 'liberation', the problem for the authorities is how to deal with people suspected of being surrogates or members of IS, not to mention the families of killed IS fighters. It is clear that when suspected IS members are arrested, they are immediately tortured and killed - hundreds of pictures and videos bear testimony to this on the internet; and many international organisations, including the United Nations, Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International, have provided verification.

After Mosul was retaken, an army general claimed that IS suspects would be treated as prisoners of war - but he soon feared for his own life. Forget it - suspects have to be 'dealt with' immediately and there are no prisoners of war. This horrendous situation is a mirror image of how Daesh treats people - hardly the way to rebuild Iraq. Nor will it eliminate IS or some other terrorist group in the future - it is a vicious circle with no end in sight.

The prime minister not only denies all claims of torture, but says that such stories are themselves 'inciting violence' and instigating killings. That was exactly the reaction of the Americans to claims of torture at Abu Ghraib. The failure to acknowledge these deaths even deprives Iraqis of knowing that their loved ones are dead. There is a common thread here - like the US before it the government is denying the existence of such atrocities.

Back in 2010, following the publication of the report of the torture of 430 prisoners in Muthana secret prison, arrest warrants were issued

for around 100 officers and interrogators in the Iraqi army and police. But nothing happened and the report was forgotten. Torture happens with impunity.

'Liberation'?

So what is the situation now? Should we be celebrating the victory of Mosul's 'liberation'? Thousands of Iraqis from all sides have been killed, from young fighters duped by clerical leaders telling them to sacrifice themselves for the jihad, to civilians trying to survive.

Despite its defeat in Mosul, Islamic State is still occupying other towns, including Tal Afar, just to the west of Mosul, and Hawija, near Kirkuk. There is talk of moves against these remaining strongholds, but, especially in Tel Afar, the government is worried about Turkish interference, because Turkey has warned that it will not tolerate a change in the demographic balance.

The map of Iraq is indeed different, compared to 2003, as a result of the migration and displacement of thousands. People want to go back to their homes, including in Mosul, but they fear for their lives, while for others that is ruled out because of the destruction of every facility. Who will take responsibility for reconstruction? Iraq, as we know, is amongst the most corrupt countries in the world and this can only add to the sense of social fragmentation. Meanwhile, a range of other regional powers - from Turkey and Iran to Saudi Arabia - have their own particular interests, as well as the United States, of course.

All this makes for a very gloomy picture, but the Iraqi people are resilient and I am sure they will be able to surprise us. One thing is certain: salvation lies neither with IS nor the current Baghdad regime, nor the US or other outside powers ●

Notes

- www.hrw.org/news/2011/02/01/iraq-secret-jail-uncovered-baghdad.
- www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/27/iraq-detainees-describe-torture-secret-jail.



Subscribe			
	6m	1yr	Inst.
UK	£30/€35	£60/€70	£200/€220
Europe	£43/€50	£86/€100	£240/€264
Rest of world	£65/€75	£130/€150	£480/€528

New UK subscribers offer: 3 months for £10

UK subscribers: Pay by standing order and save £12 a year. Minimum £12 every 3 months... but please pay more if you can.

Send a cheque or postal order payable to 'Weekly Worker' at:
Weekly Worker, BCM Box 928,
London WC1N 3XX

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel: _____

Email: _____

Sub: £/€ _____

Donation: £/€ _____

Standing order

To _____ Bank plc _____

Branch address _____

Post code _____ Account name _____

Sort code _____ Account No _____

Please pay to Weekly Worker, Lloyds A/C No 00744310 sort code 30-99-64, the sum of _____ every month*/3 months* until further notice, commencing on _____ This replaces any previous order from this account. (*delete)

Date _____

Signed _____ Name (PRINT) _____

Address _____