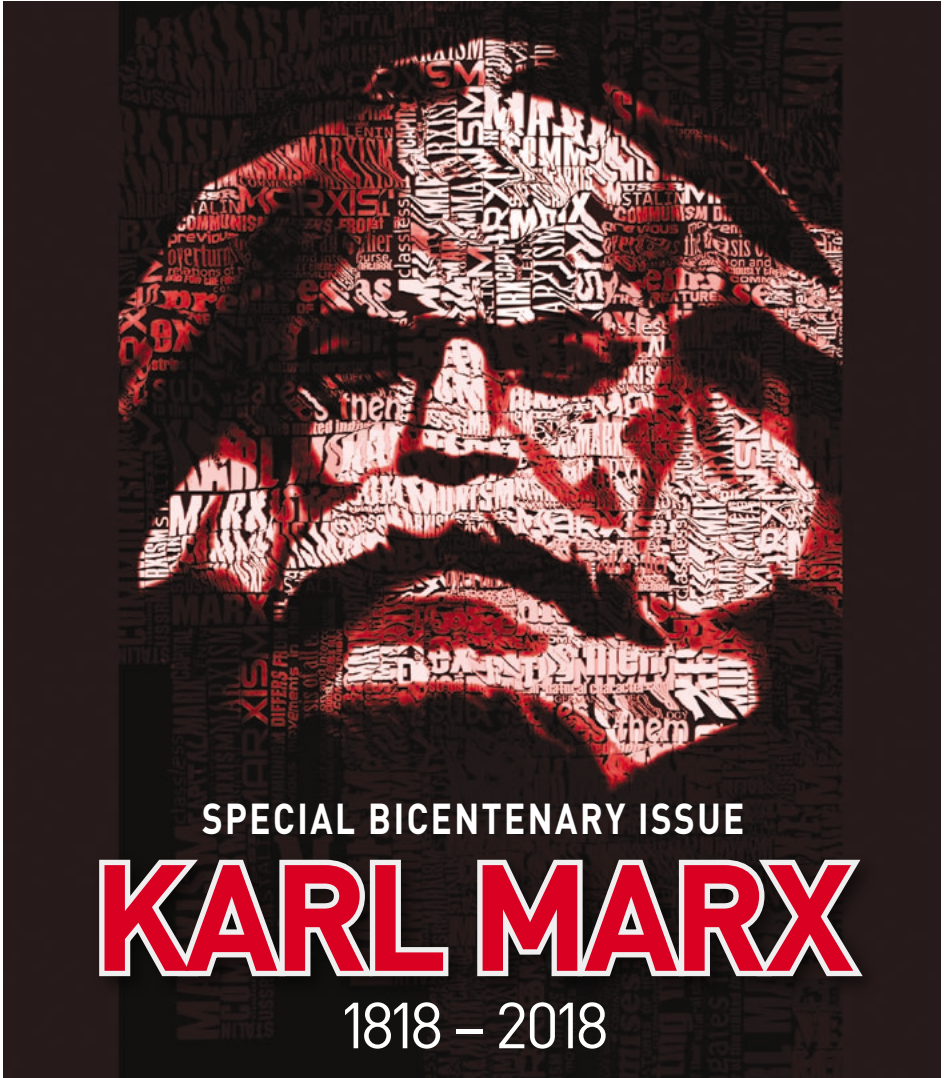




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EDITORIAL NOTES

Karl Marx 200 years on

For more than 150 years, Marx's influence has been enormous, and although a third of humanity no longer lives under governments tracing their roots to his work, his work is still relevant

Karl Marx was born 200 years ago in Triers, a small town in the western part of Germany. He died 65 years later in London where he had been living in long-term exile. At the time of his death he was in poor health and living in considerable poverty. Earlier he had half-jokingly written to his loyal companion, Engels: *“half a century on my shoulders and still a pauper. How right my mother was: ‘If only Karell (sic) had made capital instead of writing about it...”*

When he died, there were few indications that Marx's life-time work would come to have a global and enduring impact.

But within a mere 25 years of his death mass working parties, regarding themselves as Marxist, had emerged in much of Europe. In Germany the socialists came close to winning 50% of the vote. In Russia, by the beginning of the 20th century, a radical intelligentsia had embraced Marxism and their clandestine newsletters and pamphlets had begun to have an impact on the working class in the rapidly industrialising centres of St Petersburg and Moscow. Russian translations of Marx's work were carried by agitators along the railway lines of the sprawling Tsarist empire to mutinous naval bases on the Black Sea or into the vast central Asia.

In the midst of the inter-imperialist First World War, a major cleav-

age opened up in these new mass worker parties between what came to be characterised as revolutionary (communist) and reformist (social democratic) tendencies. But for many decades even the reformist parties in their majority continued to claim allegiance to the foundational teachings of Marx.

Some seven decades after Marx's death, by the mid-20th century, following the Russian and Chinese revolutions, fully one-third of humanity lived under governments ruled by communist parties tracing their legacy directly back to Marx.

But it was not just communist parties that modelled themselves upon and canonised various "official" Marxisms. A variety of left oppositional formations typically pitted an "alternative", "more authentic" Marxism against the "authoritative" (if not authoritarian) line. In the second half of the 20th century, liberation movements in the global south, in South East Asia, Latin and Central America, and southern Africa openly (or less openly) declared themselves to be Marxist (often Marxist-Leninist) while blending this association with various local traditions of national resistance.

Nor were Marxist ideas and influences the unique preserve of political parties and liberation movements. In times of popular upsurge, various strands of Marx's writings became seminal reference points. This was notably the case in the global student and youth uprisings of 1968 in which Marx's notion of "alienation" in his own early writings tapped into the spirit of the times for a post-war generation rejecting consumerism, stultifying bourgeois values, and the war in Vietnam.

Over the past century and a half, Marx has also had a major impact on scholarly research in the most diverse social fields – ranging from economics, politics, history, cultural studies, linguistics, aesthetics, philosophy and, increasingly, environmental studies. This was not because Marx practised an inter-disciplinary approach, but rather because his

body of theory enables a major synthesis of social understanding and transformative practice.

With the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1989-90 and the emergence of a US-dominated unipolar imperialist world, many believed that Marxism in its various traditions had run its course. Here in South Africa, leading ex-communists like former President Thabo Mbeki condemned Marxism with faint praise – treating it as little more than a handy tool-kit, as “tools of analysis” abstracted from a class struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

For a decade or two, globally Marxist influences in universities and in social movements waned – with a swing towards various forms of mutually excluding identity politics, reactive nationalisms, or a retreat into religiosity, while a heartless neo-liberalism was rampant.

But the pendulum has begun to swing back with a vengeance. In the context of the of the 2008 and ongoing economic crisis, even leading capitalist gurus like George Soros are proclaiming that there is much to be learnt by returning to Marx. The globalising, financialising trajectory of capitalism – exactly the trajectory that Marx had predicted – is destroying our planet. It is creating unprecedented levels of inequality. The growing precariousness of work – for those who have work – is taking a terrible toll on households and the human psyche. Break-neck technological advances are deepening capitalism’s crisis of over-accumulation, the ability to produce far more than can be sold for a profit. A vast multi-trillion dollar empire of socially useless advertising efforts, along with credit-fuelled consumerism that pitches millions into unsustainable debt, keep the markets barely functioning, until the bubble bursts and the next global crash strikes.

Marx was not just a thinker and writer. He also engaged actively in supporting practical struggles. On this front, in his own lifetime, Marx experienced several disappointments. The First International, in which

Marx and Engels played leading roles from its formation in 1864, had collapsed by 1873. Earlier Marx and Engels had enthusiastically supported the 1848 uprisings in Europe, only to be disappointed by their failures and their aftermath.

Looking back on that period in an 1863 letter to Engels, Marx writes: *“the comfortable delusions and the almost childish enthusiasm with which we hailed the era of revolution before February 1848 have all gone to hell.”*

And then he adds observations in which, 20 years after our own democratic breakthrough, many South African revolutionaries might find echoes: *“Old comrades like Werth, etc., are gone, others have dropped out or become demoralised and new blood is not visible, at any rate as yet. Added to which we now know what a part stupidity plays in revolutions, and how they are exploited by scoundrels.”*

So how are we to explain the global and continuing impact of Karl Marx?

It surely has to do, above all, with his penetrating critique of the capitalist mode of production, his uncovering of its internal laws of motion. Writing in the middle of the 19th century, he grasped like none had before him capital’s voracious and unceasing accumulation process. He analysed its inevitable drive towards globalisation. He demonstrated the inner logic of its boom-bust tendencies, its crises of over-accumulation followed by bouts of job and wealth destruction. He helped us to understand that with its insatiable appetites, with its seeming capacity to overcome its own self-generated crises with solutions that simply laid the basis for the next round of crisis, capitalism was destroying the human and natural resources upon which it depended. It is ultimately an enemy of human civilisation itself.

What will a post-capitalist society look like? Marx, of course, regarded himself as a communist, but he largely disdained sketching out

any idea of a future, post-capitalist society. Building socialist castles in the air, blueprints for communism, was, after all, what the socialist utopians had done and which he and Engels had roundly criticised in the *Communist Manifesto*. The critique of capital and of capitalism was Marx's over-riding focus.

In his own lifetime Marx would not have predicted his unsurpassed influence. Towards the end of his life he even had a sense of, if not failure, then of frustration and incompleteness. In his latter years, in response to a query about "his works", Marx is reputed to have answered with a shrug: "What works?" His greatest accomplishment, *Capital*, was only published in volume one in his own lifetime – Marx had planned six volumes. In the last decade he had hardly worked on this huge endeavour.

Yet, it is this very incompleteness, this open-endedness, coupled with its powerful foundations, that makes Marx's contribution so absolutely relevant in the present as we live through another extended period of capitalist crisis. ●

MARX BICENTENARY

Delving into the social reproduction of capitalism

Jeremy Cronin argues that the challenge of Marxism now is to tackle the fragile links between capitalism and the social reproduction it so desperately relies on. That could open the way to reuniting a range of oppositional forces in a fresh revolutionary momentum.

As we mark the bicentenary of Karl Marx's birth, the subject of Marx's immense body of analysis and critique, capitalism is once more embroiled in a multi-dimensional crisis. But a crisis of capitalism does not mean it will necessarily give way to a more egalitarian, just, and sustainable social reality. Across the 20th century, capitalism "solved" its own recurring systemic crises by displacing the burden of crisis on to working people and popular strata, or on to the societies of the periphery and semi-periphery, or through intensified plundering of the world's non-renewable natural resources. But each "resolution" has laid the basis for the next bout of crisis – as Marx long ago predicted.

While capitalism in its neo-liberal era remains a dominant and brutal reality in our world, the global economic crisis of 2008, and its ongoing impact, marked the definitive crumbling of its end-of-history triumphalism that was so ascendant in the decade following the collapse of the former Soviet bloc. Neo-liberalism's universalising claims were to have solved all of humanity's problems, with little more re-

maintaining than the need for rule by the market aided by a cadre of technocratic managers and supported by a banal political back-and-forth in electoral fortunes for centre-left and centre-right political parties indistinguishable from each other. These claims have now been seriously punctured.

At the ideological and political level, neo-liberal assumptions about the happy compatibility of liberal democracy and a globalised “free market” are being challenged not just from the broad left, but also from a resurgent, demagogic and increasingly authoritarian right, of which Donald Trump is one obvious example. At the more progressive end of the spectrum, the contemporary languages of resistance to the crisis of neo-liberal capitalism are typically diverse – feminist, ecological, nationalist, anti-racist, religious, anti-politics politics, and much more. Many of these alternatives, while producing valid if partial critiques, are not anti-capitalist as such, hoping to find solutions within a “better” capitalism.

The contemporary proliferation of resistant narratives also occurs at a time when progressive trade unions, a prime target of neo-liberalism, going back to Thatcher’s assault on mineworkers and Reagan’s on air-traffic controllers, are at their weakest in decades in many parts of the world, including South Africa. The organised labour movement, this critical presence at the capitalist point of production, has been ravaged by fragmentation, casualisation, globalised value-chains, and much more.

So how do we advance a more embracing understanding of the current capitalist crisis and therefore, most importantly, help to provide a more unifying, programmatic approach to action? Part of an answer is to appreciate that the current crisis of capitalism is not just an economic crisis in the narrow sense, but also a crisis of social (and environmental) reproduction of the system. Moreover, it is also in the sphere

of social reproduction that there are important vectors for driving anti-systemic transformation.

To better understand this we need, I believe, to return to Marx to go beyond Marx by expanding what is already implicit but undeveloped in Marxism. And part of this return to go beyond, I will argue, is to focus not just on the capitalist point of production, but to ask: what is the back-story behind capitalist production?

Both the possibility and the necessity of a return to Marx to go beyond Marx is already embedded in Marx's morally passionate but scientific critique of capital, uncovering its hidden laws of motion, obscured behind the fetish of free market exchange. Marxism's continued vitality is related to the open-ended, endlessly curious, self-correcting example of Marx's own scientific endeavour. Apart from his brilliant political conjunctural analyses, like *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852), or *The Civil War in France* (1871), his greatest achievement is to be found in *Capital*. It is a huge sprawling endeavour that wrestles with and organises an immense array of material, always engaging critically with, but also drawing upon the works of the classical political economists Smith, Malthus, Ricardo; or citing new developments in the natural sciences of his time, reading Darwin and the soil scientist Liebig; or reaching back to the classical writings of Tacitus describing the communal mode of the German tribes the better to understand the uniqueness of capitalism. In this, he is setting an example for contemporary Marxists.

Moreover, *Capital*, this remarkable achievement, is, on Marx's own account, incomplete. He had planned five more volumes. Only volume one was finished in his own lifetime. And even then he was endlessly revising different translations and new editions. Volumes two and three were drawn together by his loyal companion and collaborator Friedrich Engels on the basis of extensive notebooks and correspond-

ence between the two. Even volume one seems never to have been completed to the full satisfaction of Marx as he revised the second German edition and the French edition – “whatever the literary defects of this (a revised) French edition may be”, he wrote in 1875, “it possesses a scientific value independent of the original (first German edition) and should be consulted even by readers familiar with the German” (*Afterword* to the French Edition, 1875). In short, the Marxism of Marx is not a closed book. It is not a dogma simply to be recited and applied mechanically to the present. It certainly cannot be reduced to a prediction of guaranteed historical outcomes written into a procession of evolutionary stages.

But as open-ended as it is, the Marxism that Marx has passed on to us still rests on the sturdy and seminal foundation of what he correctly regarded as his major scientific achievement – exposing and elucidating capitalism’s hidden secret below the noisy and seemingly self-evident reality of market exchange. In *Capital* volume one Marx takes us into the “hidden abode” of capitalist production and the extraction of surplus value through the purchase and consumption of a unique commodity, labour power. It is labour power, “freely sold” as a market commodity by waged labourers who are “free” in the double sense of being freed from earlier feudal and other forms of extra-economic bondage and free of independent access to the means of production.

From this basis Marx then traces the further laws of motion of the capitalist system, an ever expanding and endless process of surplus accumulation. Towards the end of volume one, reflecting on the high level of abstraction with which he has so far dealt with capitalist accumulation, Marx writes: “But accumulation of capital presupposes capitalistic production; capitalistic production presupposes the pre-existence of considerable masses of capital and of labour power in the hands of the producers of commodities. The whole movement, therefore, seems

to turn in a vicious circle...” (*Capital*, volume 1, part viii).

So from where does the pre-existing mass of capital and labour power derive? It is at this point in *Capital* that history is introduced. Marx borrows Adam Smith’s notion (but not his version) of “previous accumulation”, or in Marx’s words “primitive accumulation”. The conditions for capitalism, or more specifically for capitalist extraction of surplus at the point of production, are created outside of (before) capitalist exploitation, among other things through the expropriation of huge wealth from the colonies, gold and silver from the Americas, on the one hand, and the expropriation of the means of production (land, in particular) from the direct producers, forcing them to sell their labour to the owners of capital in order to survive. As Marx puts it, this was “an accumulation not the result of the capitalistic mode of production, but its starting point”. So to complete our understanding of the conditions for capitalism we have to go outside the capitalist “law of value”.

This starting point is not, writes Marx, the idyllic version presented by classical Political Economy as a “natural” division of labour. “In actual history it is notorious that conquest, enslavement, robbery, murder, briefly force, play the great part.” The newly forged proletariat, “these new freed men became sellers of themselves only after they had been robbed of all their own means of production...and the history of this, their expropriation, is written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire.” (ibid.)

All of this has been well known to subsequent generations of Marxists. But has Marx gone far enough at this point? It is here that a number of present-day Marxist scholar-activists have begun to open up intriguing lines of further debate and development of Marxism itself, not by abandoning a Marxist analysis of the capitalist law of value, but by asking, as Marx does towards the end of *Capital* volume one: what are the (pre-) conditions for the law of value, for capitalist exploitation at

the point of production to come into being (and, they add, to be reproduced)? What if “primitive” accumulation is not just “primitive”? What if capitalist surplus amassed through expropriation rather than “normal” capitalist exploitation, is not only a prior condition for the reproduction of capitalism, but also an ongoing reality of the global capitalist system?

In some ways these are not entirely new questions within Marxism. Rosa Luxemburg sought to explain the ability of capitalism to overcome crises of over-accumulation due to the penury of its own working class in home markets through capitalist (imperialist) penetration of non-capitalist markets (*The Accumulation of Capital: A Contribution to an Economic Explanation of Imperialism*, 1913).

Earlier, and on a slightly different tack, in volume two of *Capital*, Marx had noted that within capitalism’s process of circulation it incorporates commodities from “the most diverse economic modes...based on slavery, of peasants...of state enterprises...or of half-savage tribes, etc., ...To replace them [these commodities] they must be reproduced and to this extent the capitalist mode of production is conditional on modes of production lying outside of its own stage of development.” (Marx, *Capital*, vol. 2, pp.109–110).

In the 1970s, South Africa Communist Party activist and theoretician, Harold Wolpe, developed this idea of a conditional dependence of capitalism on non-capitalist modes (lying “outside” of it) for its own reproduction to explain the racial capitalist system (or internal colonialism, as he called it) that was the hall-mark of capitalism in South Africa through the better part of the 20th century¹.

Drawing on Marx’s idea of commodities produced outside of the capitalist mode of production but entering into its circuit, Wolpe argued that the “native reserves” (later bantustans), characterised by a patriarchal “tribal” mode, were articulated into the dominant capital-

ist mode through the export of a particular commodity. This particular commodity was not the classical colonial exports - not cotton, or rubber, or bananas - but labour power, in the form of migrant labourers on annual contracts to the diamond and gold mines. The “native reserves” were the site of reproduction of this cheap labour (cheap for mining monopoly capital). Petty production in these reserves under colonially distorted traditional chieftainships, carried the burden of the social reproduction of male mine labourers, through child-care, care for the elderly, and care for the sick and injured (and there were many such owing to the arduous and dangerous work on the mines). This reproductive work was performed largely by women who, with pass laws and other forms of “influx control”, were penned up in the reserves.

Wolpe’s intervention was a major contribution to South African Marxist theory. It helped to bed down a more rigorous approach to understanding the racial/national question in South Africa, moving beyond liberal arguments that exonerated capitalism and attributed national oppression of the black majority simply to white racism, or to pre-capitalist ideological hang-overs. This Marxist analysis of racial/national oppression in South Africa and the description of our social formation as a “colonialism of a special type” also provided a more effective strategic and programmatic basis for the alliance between the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party.

However, there was one problem with Wolpe’s analysis. By the mid-20th century, the over-crowded and increasingly eroded “native reserves” (a bare 13% of South Africa’s surface area), were less and less able to support the reproduction of new generations of migrant labour. Wolpe’s argument rested on the articulation of a relatively advanced capitalist mode with a peripheral patriarchal mode in the reserves.

By 1950, arguably, this second mode of production had all but disappeared. What is more, the rapid development of South African capitalism, including increasing industrial development, resulted in increased urbanisation and absorption of large numbers of semi-skilled black workers – a development spurred on during the war years with significant numbers of skilled and semi-skilled white workers away, serving in the Allied armed forces in North Africa and Europe.

Non-SACP left intellectuals argued that Wolpe’s analysis no longer applied to South Africa after the mid-20th century. Moreover, they argued this also meant that the programmatic and strategic alliance of the SACP with the ANC, and the practical intersection of the class and national struggles, were mistaken. These debates have rumbled on within the broad South African progressive left, both activist and academic, for several decades. In the 1980s there was a sharp debate between what was unhelpfully characterised as the “workerists” (who tended to over-privilege the role of trade unions and struggles at the point of production) and the “populists” (who tended to over-privilege community-based struggles in black townships and informal settlements). In practice, it was the unity of these struggles in wave upon wave of semi-insurrectionary struggles through the second half of the 1970s and across the decade of the 1980s that was to prove the decisive factor in the defeat of the apartheid system. In more recent years, and in line with international post-modernist trends, symptomatic of neo-liberalism’s erosion of old solidarities, popular struggles in South Africa have often been animated by various forms of race and gendered identity politics, and the linkages between point of production and community struggles has declined to the detriment of both.

It is here that a recovery of Marxism by going beyond Marx is, I believe, appropriate. Recent work, in particular by Marxist theorists developing what they call social reproduction theory (SRT), is a valuable

contribution².

Emerging, in part, out of a feminist-Marxian critique of the trajectory of second wave feminism, Nancy Fraser and others take us beyond Marx's hidden abode of production and the truth behind the fetish of free market exchange. They take us to a second hidden abode behind the first, by asking a simple question: who/what produces the producers?

The answer is not a mystery and has been in plain sight for a long time, but the important contribution that Fraser and others make is to bring the vast domain of social reproduction under capitalist domination more forcefully into a Marxist analysis. In other words, we must understand that capitalism is not just an economic system, but also a broader reality and that our Marxism must expand beyond tendencies to a narrow economism and an exclusive focus on the point of production. The Marxism of Marx is not closed to this expansion.

It has long been recognised by progressive forces that the unwaged home-based and care-work mainly of women in capitalist societies makes a critical, non-marketised, contribution to the reproduction of capitalism and to the generation of profit for capitalists. Among the important contributions SRT analyses have made is to better theorise and include this "private" realm of reproduction within an overall Marxist explanation of capitalism. In the first place, they argue that, while various forms of patriarchal oppression clearly existed before capitalism, the particular and shifting nature of "reproductive" work under capitalism marked a definitive break with earlier societies. Like the primary division between the owners of capital and free labourers (freed from independent access to the means of production) in Marx's era of "primitive accumulation", the division between waged productive work and unwaged reproductive work was, in the words of Fraser "the result of a break-up of a previous world". In pre-capitalist times, men

and women typically did different work, but the capitalist split of “re-productive” work into a private domestic sphere concealed its pivotal social role. With money becoming the key medium of power, the structural subordination of those involved in non-monetised reproductive work was intensified.

In fact, even the distinction between “productive” and “reproductive” work is a peculiarly capitalist distinction. From a strictly working class perspective, work in the “reproductive” sphere is productive work – it produces use-values for the working class (shelter, sustenance, caring, cultural development). Only secondarily does it reproduce a commodity – labour-power for sale on the labour market. On the other hand, again from a working class perspective, work in the so-called “productive” sphere is actually alienated work, primarily producing exchange values for the owners of capital and only secondarily and indirectly use-values for the worker to be purchased on the market with a survival wage. Strictly speaking, what is productive for the working class is reproductive for the capitalist, and vice versa.

Having noted the specific, capitalist forging of this productive/reproductive division, SRT writers have also usefully unpacked the mutation of this division in different phases of capitalism. Contrary to one view that capitalism necessarily commodifies everything, Fraser argues that capitalism has always required a non-commodified sphere, that is not so much outside of it, but integral to capitalism’s functioning. Fordism, for instance, expanded capitalist growth through stimulating working class consumption, but this was based on an only partially proletarianised household, with a male industrial worker and a homemaker wife in the privatised domain of a working-class suburb.

In the course of the 20th century, in the welfare state, some aspects of social reproduction were de-privatised, but not commodified (health-

care, public transport, education, housing). Under neo-liberalism the “production-reproduction” division has mutated again, with the rolling back of the welfare state, and the re-privatisation of the provision of health-care, education, housing. But this re-privatisation, unlike under Fordism, has now also involved the commodification of these social use-values. This, in turn, has required a massive, debt-fuelled financialisation to prop up demand in these new markets – hence sub-prime housing loans, and ballooning student and health-care indebtedness. Instead of the welfare state taking on debt to expand the social wage, debt is privatised in what Wolfgang Streeck has aptly described as privatised Keynesianism (“The Crises of Democratic Capitalism”, *New Left Review* 71, September-October 2011).

For working class and middle strata households this neo-liberal mutation of the domain of capitalist social reproduction has placed increasing strains on households and communities. Moreover, the commodification of social services has also seen the massive recruitment of women into low-paid service work without lessening the burden of unpaid work in the private sphere of the household.

For South African Marxists this renewed engagement with social reproduction under capitalism has a further interest. It helps to better conceptualise formal apartheid (introduced by the National Party after its election victory in 1948) as an adaptation of colonial/racialised social reproduction of the earlier segregationist policies of the first half of the 20th century at a time when the reproductive capacity of the native reserves had declined. Apartheid was essentially an urban intervention, confining an increasingly urbanised African majority to peripheral ghettos on the outskirts of towns and cities – notionally far enough away for control, close enough to be transported into industrial centres as daily migrants. But the communities in these marginalised dormitory townships in the late 1970s and 80s inverted their

simultaneous exclusion and inferior inclusion, turning their exclusion into temporary fortresses of popular power. The townships (of which Soweto was the emblematic example) became South Africa's own urban Sierra Maestras, quasi-liberated zones in which organs of popular power were built.

The crisis for capitalism, driven by popular revolt, in these zones of apartheid-capitalism's racialised social reproduction, played the decisive role in forcing the apartheid regime (under pressure not just from the popular struggle, but also from South African monopoly capital) to the negotiating table. The democratic breakthrough of 1994 effectively handed over the crisis-ridden challenge of social reproduction for capitalism to the ANC-led government. Two decades later, as a result of an inability to radically alter either the productive or spatial capitalist economy inherited from the racist past, townships have become an increasingly ungovernable and volatile challenge for the ANC-led government and its wider movement.

Can this "ungovernable" challenge be transformed into an active, anti-systemic movement capable of transforming the South African reality in a radically progressive direction? Can the solidaristic logic of production of use-values for the working class trump the expropriating logic of the capitalists through a relative de-linking from capitalism with the active support of a democratic state? A Marxist appreciation of the critical link between capitalism and the reproductive pressures it places on popular communities (and on nature) can be the basis for re-uniting a range of oppositional currents – feminist, black-identity affirmation, ecological and much more.

A return to Marx by going beyond Marx to better theorise and therefore transform social reproduction in our concrete circumstances is, therefore, perhaps the most important way in which South African progressives might celebrate Marx's bicentenary. ●

Cde Cronin is an SACP Politburo and Central Committee member and Deputy Minister of Public Works

Endnotes

1. Wolpe, Harold (1975) The Theory of Internal Colonialism: The South African Case. In Beyond the Sociology of Development, edited by Ivar Oxaal, Tony Barnett and Kegan Paul. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. Available online at www.wolpetrust.org.za.
2. Nancy Fraser, "Behind Marx's Hidden Abode. For an Expanded Concept of Capitalism", New Left Review 86, March/April 2014. See also, Social Reproduction Theory. Re-mapping Class, Re-centering oppression, ed. Tithi Bhattacharya, Pluto Press, 2018

UPDATING SARS

Neo-liberal macro-economics choke transformation – again!

This is an extract from a draft document presented to the November 2018 Augmented Central Committee on updating the SACP's programme, *The South African Road to Socialism*

“The national debt is the golden chain by which the bourgeoisie controls the state” – Karl Marx

We have been here before. In the mid-1990s the spectre of declining foreign currency reserves, inflation and a supposed debt cliff were used to herd us into the neo-liberal Gear (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) macro-economic policy – itself largely borrowed from the outgoing National Party's Normative Economic Model.

Now it is the spectre of rising public debt against the backdrop of a technical recession in the midst of a generally weak growth trajectory that is being used by the ratings agencies, finance capital, the mainstream financial media, and leading elements within the National Treasury and Reserve Bank to choke our country's response to our all-round socio-economic crisis within a self-defeating, macro-economic austerity package.

Although our debt-to-GDP ratio is not exceptional when compared to peer group countries, payments on government and state owned corporation (SOC) interest-bearing bonds are nevertheless a major

drag on our resources. We are paying some R180-billion a year on our R2,8-trillion debt, according to the 2018 budget review. This onerous debt is partly the consequence of massive state capture looting and mismanagement of key SOCs, notably Eskom and Transnet. It has been further compounded by the deliberate Zuma-Moyane undermining of SARS, with a consequent under-recovery of tax.

But our debt exposure has deeper roots in our failure to discipline South African capital, particularly as a result of the hugely problematic financial liberalisation measures associated with Gear. Capital flight out of South Africa reached 12% of GDP in 2001. This staggering loss of investible domestic capital has resulted in two problematic realities, both of which have made us exceedingly vulnerable to the global ratings agencies and investor “sentiment”:

- A heavy reliance on the issuing of interest-bearing government bonds and SOC bonds backed by government guarantees. The interest due on these bond borrowings is directly correlated with the ratings agencies assessments; and
- A further destabilising reliance on the “carry trade” (speculative inflows on to the JSE). These speculative inflows (and the ever present threat of mass outflows) are also heavily influenced by the ratings agencies.

In the mid-1990s, while the SACP and broader left opposed the Gear package, we were unable to mount an effective macro-economic counter. This was partly due to a lack of policy capacity, and partly to the fact that we were up against the combined weight of established monopoly capital, the mainstream media and their commentariat, and, critically, key ANC personnel now in Treasury and the Reserve Bank who had been carefully cultivated by the likes of Goldman Sachs. This was at the time when neo-liberalism was, globally, at its most triumphalist.

The progressive counter to Gear tended to be based on an eclectic

tic Keynesian, contra-cyclical, demand-led approach that was often sourced to the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP). But our crises then (and now) of inequality, poverty, and unemployment are essentially structural and systemic (path-dependent). It is not just a contra-cyclical macro-economic intervention that is required, but rather the subordination of macro-economic monetary and fiscal policy to the imperative of structurally transformative interventions in the productive economy. In other words, while appropriate “demand stimulus” might well be part of any effective response, a sustainable strategy cannot simply be a Keynesian “demand” stimulus.

This is a lesson we should learn from the mid-1990s. Our opposition to the neo-liberal, Gear macro-policy package was, largely, well-intentioned demand-stimulus interventions indicated by various redistributive measures envisaged in the RDP. These were, in fact, incorporated by those leading Gear into and subordinated within an essentially neo-liberal programme as “delivery targets” dependent on “investor-friendly” macroeconomic-stimulated GDP growth. This is an approach which was also largely repeated in the National Development Plan with largely progressive social programme aspirations encased within neo-liberal macro-economics.

In the name of responding to the “dire threat” of the public debt, the October 2018 Medium Term Budget Policy Statement (MTBPS) now flatlines public spending, and in many key real economy and social sectors this will amount to an effective decrease in expenditure. The NHI continues to recede into a distant future, notwithstanding the lip-service paid to it. The so-called “stimulus package”, announced in the latter half of 2018, is not a stimulus package in any real sense of the word – it is essentially a re-packaging of earlier announcements, and re-prioritisation (some of it necessary) within existing budgets. The investment conference provided some positive indications, in par-

ticular that some sectors of South African monopoly capital, having burnt their bridges in Europe (see Steinhoff), UK (Old Mutual, Absa), Australia (see Woolworths), the US (see Sasol), China (Sasol again), or Latin America (many South African mining companies), might now be more inclined to re-invest at home and in our region. But the critical financial sector was largely absent from the investment conference, and the much-delayed Financial Sector Summit continues to slip off the agenda.

In this context, the Reserve Bank governor aggressively labels “populist” any attempt to open up a heterodox debate on possible macro-economic alternatives. The inflation target band of 3 to 6% is once more declared to be sacrosanct and “fighting inflation” the alpha and omega of the Reserve Bank. The Minister of Finance calls for the Reserve Bank “to be left alone”, and the necessary integration of monetary and fiscal policy is disowned, as is the importance of macro-alignment with key productive economic priorities, not to mention job-creation. The extent to which these pronouncements from Treasury or the Reserve Bank are a matter of conviction or merely performances for the ratings agencies and global speculators can be debated. Either way it matters little. The irony of these 2018 assertions of deep loyalty to imagined neo-liberal iron laws is that much of the global financial mainstream itself is raising questions about what was until recently considered unchallengeable orthodoxy.

In the mid-1990s attempts to counter the onslaught of neo-liberal macro-economic orthodoxy were always dismissed as “populist”, “amateurish” or “ill-informed”: economic policy was declared to be the domain of “technical experts” and those cadres who had gone through crash-course “orientation” at the likes of Goldman Sachs. Internationally, at least since the 2008 global financial crisis, this arrogance has worn thin. But locally the dismissal of anti-neoliberal arguments is

sometimes rendered easy by the crass populism emerging from some quarters – with statements like “if the rand falls, we will pick it up”, or the totally irrelevant fixation from the same quarters and from the EFF with “nationalising” the South African Reserve Bank (SARB).

It is essential, therefore, that, as the SACP we do not slip into a shallow (and easily dismissed) populism ourselves. The public debt and the exchange rate of the rand are not irrelevant, runaway inflation is clearly undesirable, and the curiosity of the Reserve Bank having private “share-holders” (who would like to be bought out at public expense, in any case) is irrelevant as they have zero impact on SARB policy.

Our public debt challenge

A first step in considering alternatives to the current austerity macro-package is to better understand the nature and extent of our national debt. Our debt-to-GDP ratio has climbed steadily over the past decade, with the current estimate from the MTBPS 2018 predicting a ratio of 55,8% for the 2018 / 19 financial year, and 56,1% for 2019 / 20.

This is unexceptional by international standards. According to the IMF, emerging market and middle-income country debt levels are projected to reach 57,6% in 2023, while advanced country debts were already averaging 105,4% of GDP in 2017.

Moreover, our debt is largely rand-denominated with only some 10% denominated in foreign currencies (essentially the US dollar). This provides us with important room for manoeuvre if we have the courage to pursue a range of possible alternative macro approaches to dealing with our debt. In this respect, our situation is significantly different from other middle-income/developing economies where the majority of their debt is dollar denominated (Argentina, Turkey, Pakistan, among others).

However, our particular vulnerability to the ratings agencies and

their fixation on our debt level relates to the huge errors of the mid-1990s when Gear-related policies allowed for massive liberalisation and the consequent capital flight out of our country.

We have, as a result, become highly reliant on the issuing of interest-bearing bonds, as well as on the “carry trade”, that is speculative investment flowing in on the expectation of quick returns, rather than fixed investment in plant and jobs. This hot money is volatile and flows in and out of our country in massively destabilising swings. It is why the Reserve Bank keeps interest rates relatively high and why the US’s move away from quantitative easing (and therefore raising its own interest rates from close to zero) threatens a drying up of this speculative flow and a return to the US and other advanced economies.

Our inflation challenge

Under the impact of neo-liberal orthodoxy, the SARB has made inflation-targeting virtually its sole mandate with a target-band of between 3 to 6%. Clearly run-away inflation would have an extremely negative impact on workers and the poor in our country. The example of Zimbabwe is often cited as a warning to us in South Africa. But what were the root causes of hyper-inflation in Zimbabwe?

The hyper-inflation in Zimbabwe (or in Germany in the late 1920s-early 1930s) was not caused by “too much money in circulation” (that is, by too much easy credit) – but by a crisis of under-production. In Zimbabwe, a crippling IMF-led structural adjustment programme (SAP) led to de-industrialisation in what had been the second most industrialised country in our region. The Mugabe regime responded in a populist manner to the resulting poverty and unemployment by unleashing the land reform programme (which was, in effect, largely an elite land grab). This destroyed Zimbabwe’s highly productive agricultural sector and the loss of foreign currency from exports. The combined effect

of the IMF-imposed SAP and the populist “land reform” programme was a crisis of under-production, and a massive shortage of consumer goods on shelves. There were also crisis shortages of imported goods, notably oil and agro-chemical inputs, as a result of a massive decline in foreign currency earnings because of collapsing exports. All of this, in turn, promoted hoarding of scarce goods by retailers and speculative price increases often on a daily and even hourly basis.

What are the lessons to be learnt from the much-cited Zimbabwe example? Certainly, as we are constantly reminded, we need to manage our public debt in a way that does not drive us into the arms of an IMF-led SAP. But this is not the only lesson. Equally important is that macro-economic policy needs actively to support (re-)industrialisation and publicly led economic and social infrastructure programmes. Excessive austerity measures one-sidedly tackling inflation can, paradoxically, as a result of suffocating productive activity, lead to the very hyper-inflation that is supposedly being attacked.

There is no doubt that excessive inflation is liable to impact most severely on the working class and poor. But what is “excessive”? The globally (and nationally) hegemonic financial capitalist sector (and its ideological adjuncts in the ratings agencies) dislike even moderate inflation for the simple reason that it devalues rentier profits by eroding the value of interest payments due on credit extended to productive capitalists or to the public and state-owned sectors. For the latter sectors moderate inflation may well be exactly what is needed.

Striking the appropriate balance between staving off excessive inflation while not choking off productive investment in any particular situation requires professional technical modelling. But it also requires a determined ideological and political battle against myopic neo-liberal orthodoxy. In this respect, the SACP has a vanguard role to play. ●

MARX BICENTENARY

Marxism and the woman question

Jenny Schreiner discusses how Marx created much of the groundwork for developing the social emancipation theory and practice crucial to understanding the conditions of women in any society or social context

Was Karl Marx gender-blind? Was he a patriarch? Is Marxism inherently gender blind? Have we had two centuries of building on theory premised on the role of a proletariat defined exclusively as men? Are these relevant questions?

Such questions can be approached from a point-scoring, academic perspective, or can be used to enable us to build on the theoretical tools and science that Marx and Engels gave us. They can be used to hone our use of Marxism as a science to better understand the complexity of gender relations within the ever-changing political economy of society, within the state, within economic production and in social reproduction. Two centuries of capitalist evolution, of colonialism, imperialism, or globalisation, the emergence of neo-liberalism and its approach to global capitalism have taken place since Karl Marx was born in 1818. Working class and socialist struggle combined with Marxist theoretical development over the past 200 years have deepened Marxism as a scientific method of social, political and economic analysis.

My starting point is that no one can define themselves as a Marxist or a Marxist-Leninist without defining themselves as a feminist, as an

anti-racist and anti-tribalist. Patriarchy, national oppression and tribalism are anathema to Marxists. My starting point is equally that if one is committed to gender equality and the emancipation of women, one's search for understanding and solutions will lead to the necessity for a Marxist-Leninist analysis and struggle for a socialist state and society. It is only the replacement of society based on private accumulation to one based on the provision of social needs that can enable the full realisation of the socio-economic equality and the emancipation of the full potential of all human beings. These are not "leaps of faith", but a consequence of embedded theory and practice in Marxism, Marxist-Leninism, and in the South Africa liberation struggle over the past century, and in our own experiences as today's activists.

This article reflects on how Marx's work has given us a methodology, tools of analysis and a body of practice that enable us to understand and change the conditions of women of any race, class, ethnicity, religion in any particular society. I will briefly reflect on some of the theoretical work done by Marxist Feminists on key elements of the woman question, and on SACP history relevant to the woman question.

One article cannot cover the breadth, or depth of Marxist work on the woman question. All that I hope to do is to whet readers' appetites for reading more deeply and further, and to continue to generate new knowledge on the woman question, globally and in South Africa. Such pursuit is required to enable socialist struggle to change social, political and economic relations in such a manner that women are emancipated to live to their full human potential and are able to live in equality with men – what in short-hand we refer to as "race, class, and gender equality."

Marxist concept of emancipation

In *On the Jewish Question* (1843) Marx outlines his concept of emancipation and importantly the relationship between emancipation and

the state: “When Bauer says of the opponents of Jewish emancipation that ‘Their error was simply to assume that the Christian state was the only true one, and not to subject it to the same criticism as Judaism,’ we see his own error in the fact that he subjects *only* the ‘Christian state,’ and not the ‘state as such’ to criticism, that he does not examine *the relation between political emancipation and human emancipation*, and that he, therefore, poses conditions which are only explicable by his lack of critical sense in confusing political emancipation and universal human emancipation” (*The Marx-Engels Reader*. Edited by Robert Tucker, New York: Norton & Company, 1978. p. 30.)

(Much as some would choose to lambast Marx for his use of the term “men”, in this article I recognise that the common usage of the term at the time often meant the “human race”, human beings in general – nowhere in *On the Jewish Question* does he draw a distinction between Jewish men and women.)

Marx goes on to argue: “... political emancipation is not the final and absolute form of *human* emancipation. The limits of political emancipation appear at once in the fact that the *state* can liberate itself from a constraint without man himself being really liberated; that a state may be a free state without man himself being a free man.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 32.

Marx continues: “Political emancipation certainly represents a great progress. It is not, indeed, the final form of human emancipation, but it is the final form of human emancipation within the framework of the prevailing social order. It goes without saying that we are speaking here of real, practical emancipation.” *The Marx-Engels Reader*, p. 35

Marx’s essential contribution in *On the Jewish Question* is reflected in the final section: “Every emancipation is a *restoration* of the human world and of human relationships to *man himself*.”

“Political emancipation is a reduction of man, on the one hand to a

member of civil society, an *independent* and *egoistic* individual, and on the other hand, to a *citizen*, to a moral person.

“Human emancipation will only be complete when the real, individual man has absorbed into himself the abstract citizen; when as an individual man, in his everyday life, in his work, and in his relationships, he has become a *species-being*; and when he has recognised and organised his own powers (*forces propres*) as social powers so that he no longer separates this social power from himself as *political* power.”
The Marx-Engels Reader, p. 46

In early works like *On the Jewish Question*, the 25-year old Marx had not yet fully developed his critique of capitalism. But already he was grasping the contrast between what he is here calling full “human emancipation” on the one hand, and “political emancipation” on the other. Later, he would more clearly characterise the latter as the important but limited democratic freedoms won within the context of a new bourgeois republican order, while full human emancipation would only be possible after the abolition of capitalism.

The South African Constitution binds the government and society to eradicate discrimination and to promote equality, including, very specifically, gender equality. But is the social power of South African citizens organised to ensure that society, culture, law and practice are crafted to realise these *de jure* rights into everyday lived experience? The relationship between political emancipation through establishment of a democratic state and the fuller emancipation of people to live in freedom from oppression, from want, from fear, and from exclusion from economic production is not a relationship between a mechanical first stage and a second stage – they are struggles in a continuum of transformation and social change. They can neither be conflated into a single event, nor held apart as separate stages, with political emancipation having to be first completed.

In *The German Ideology*, the work that lays the basis for historical materialism and defines the break with previous varieties of socialist thinking, Marx and Engels singled out the most fundamental idea that is embedded in all their subsequent work: Man (their term) – but let’s modernise language and say we, human beings – produce ourselves through social labour. People are not biologically determined; people do not have an unchanging nature; nor are people reducible to a spiritual essence. Marx and Engels show that it is social labour that changes the social conditions of people’s lives and that the social conditions shape the ideas of people. Avoiding a reductionist interpretation of Marx’s contribution (often in relation to the woman question expressed as “include women in labour/production and women will be free”), it is important to recognise that the conditions that help to form consciousness are not independent of human activity. It is precisely the human activity that forms the social relations, and hence the location of “practice” as essential to Marxism. This is expressed with great coherence in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, not only in the famous and often quoted 11th thesis, but also in the 3rd thesis:

“The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and upbringing forgets that circumstances are changed by men [read *people*] and that it is essential to educate the educator himself [*or herself*]. This doctrine must therefore, divide society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing circumstances and of human activity or self-changing can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice”.

The 8th thesis asserts: “All social life is essentially practical. All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.”

The 10th and 11th theses conclude: “The standpoint of the old materialist is civil society; the standpoint of the new is human society, or

social humanity. The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.”

The experience of many colonised under-developed countries has shown this reality that political emancipation (what Marx is referring to as “civil society” and the realisation of basic civil rights within a capitalist reality) does not in and of itself entail the full emancipation of oppressed and exploited people. To this end the work of Stephanie Urdang on women in Guinea-Bissau and in Mozambique is worth reading (*Fighting Two Colonialisms Women in Guinea Bissau*). Urdang is a South African who left in 1967 and worked in African liberation support groups in the USA. She studied women’s participation in the liberation struggle in Guinea Bissau, inspired by listening to seminars addressed by Amilcar Cabral. The title of her book reflects the challenge of women in liberation movements in ensuring that the gaining of independence is not merely the removal of the colonial power.

The South African experience, now two and a half decades into democracy, also reflects that having women in Parliament in large numbers, having the democratic right for all South Africans, men and women, to vote for the party and government of their choice, and a constitution based on gender and human equality has not fundamentally altered the quality of working class and black women’s lives. The relationship between the state as a vehicle for delivery and of society as a vehicle for change have not been able to provide equality, safety and security for the vast majority of South African women.

The Women’s Charter of 1954 and the 1994 Women’s Charter are significant documents borne out of women’s struggles. They have contributed to the development of the socio-economic rights of women embedded in the 1996 South African Constitution. The 1954 Charter was developed by South African women organised under the umbrella of the Federation of South African Women, in which many communist

women played leading roles. The 1994 Women's Charter was developed under the umbrella of the Women's National Coalition and, again, the SACP played an active role alongside a broad front of women's organisations.

Marxism on the family

Marx and Engels located women not only in capitalist relations of production, the factory or the farm, and in its forms of gross super-exploitation. They also located women in the family, and clearly state that "marriage is conditioned by the class position of the parties and is to that extent always a marriage of convenience" (Marx and Engels in *The Communist Manifesto*). This thinking is taken further in Engels' work *The Origins of the Family, Private Property and the State*.

In *Capital*, Marx discusses how in the first early industrial revolution phase, the introduction of machinery enabled capitalists to use women and children (assumed to be more dexterous and docile) in labour that had formally required greater physical strength. This mass recruitment of women and children into factory labour had serious consequences for the working class family, bringing the entire working class family under the sway of the capitalist owner. This eroded space for children's play, or their nurturing, and the general fabric of working class family life.

The terrible impact of women being involved in capitalist production on the family and hence on the children of the working class was further graphically described by Engels in *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, written in 1844: "The employment of women at once breaks up the family; for when the wife spends 12 or 13 hours every day in the mill, and the husband works the same length of time there or elsewhere, what becomes of the children? They grow up like wild weeds; they are put out to nurse for a shilling or eighteenpence a

week, and how they are treated may be imagined. Hence the accidents to which little children fall victims multiply in the factory districts to a terrible extent....

“Women often return to the mill three or four days after confinement, leaving the baby of course; in the dinner hour they must hurry home to feed the child and eat something, and what sort of suckling that can be is also evident. ... The use of narcotics to keep children still is fostered by this infamous system, and has reached a great extent in the factory districts. ...

“The social order makes family life almost impossible for the worker. In a comfortless, filthy house, hardly good enough for mere nightly shelter, ill furnished, often neither rain tight nor warm, a foul atmosphere filling rooms overcrowded with human beings, no domestic comfort is possible. ... Neglect of all domestic duties, neglect of children, especially is only too common among English working people, and only too vigorously fostered by the existing institutions of society. And children growing up in this savage way, amidst these demoralising influences, are expected to turn out goody-goody and moral in the end!” (Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*)

Engels is describing the shocking reality prevailing in England (Manchester to be exact) in the first half of the 19th century in the midst of the Industrial Revolution. Yet it is remarkable how at the beginning of the 21st century the reality he is describing is still very much in evidence in working class townships and informal settlements in South Africa and throughout much of the global South.

In *The Communist Manifesto*, jointly authored by Marx and Engels, these perspectives on the decomposition of the working class family and the related bourgeois hypocrisy about the “ideal family” are taken further. In the section on “Communism and the family”, they argue that capitalism’s hypocritical “ideal family” exists only among the

bourgeoisie, based on the privileges of private gain, while the families of the working class are torn apart with family members meeting only in the morning and at night. And even in the bourgeois family, patriarchy restricts the bourgeois wife from wider social interaction into a home-bound supervisor of servants on behalf of the patriarchal factory and household proprietor. Written in 1848, at a time when public schooling was non-existent, and where the wealthy employed private tutors for their children, the *Manifesto's* call for public education for all was seen by the bourgeoisie as a threat to the sanctity of the family and the upbringing of children. Marx and Engels expose the utter hypocrisy of this. They argue “that the bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course when its complement [the decomposed working class family] vanishes, and both will vanish with the vanishing of capital.” Marx and Engels have profoundly exposed the claptrap of the bourgeois family and of the education of children, in the context where the working-class family relations are torn asunder and the children “are turned into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labour”.

In *The Origin of the Family*, Engels pursues these points. He notes that the patriarchal family long preceded the development of capitalism: “With the patriarchal family, and still more with the single monogamous family, a change came. Household management lost its public character. It no longer concerned society. It became a private service; the wife became the head servant, excluded from all participation in social production.”

However, with the development of large scale industry, proletarianised women were at once partially “liberated” from the confines of the private household, and simultaneously more acutely oppressed: “Not until the coming of modern large scale industry was the road to social production opened to her again and then only to the proletarian wife. But it was opened in such a manner that, if she carries out her duties

in the private service of her family, she remains excluded from public production and unable to earn and if she wants to take part in public production and earn independently, she cannot carry out family duties ... The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed domestic slavery of the wife, and modern society is a mass composed of those individual families as its molecules.”

In early communal societies, while there was often a division of labour between men and women (and between old and young), all were involved in social production. There was no division between productive and reproductive work, or between a public sphere and a private sphere. The development of the patriarchal family in pre-capitalist times introduced a growing division between a public sphere and a private household sphere to which women tended to be confined. Modern industrial capitalism re-introduced the possibility of social productive activity for both men and women – but this socialised potential was also a cruel mirage. It was social productive work in a highly exploited and alienated form. It was work for a boss, it was labour to produce exchange values that produce private profits, and not socially useful work. And so, both the bourgeois wife, confined as “head servant”, in a patriarchal home, and the proletarian wife, “liberated” from the household only to be forced into exploitative work for a boss, are both oppressed in their different ways.

What Marx and Engels wrote on the bourgeoisie form of the family is significant to the science of Marxism and to socialist struggle in relation to the critical aspect of social reproduction under capitalism. They correctly defined family and household management as an area of productive activity and hence an area that in the struggle for socialist relations of production must be problematised and structured into a liberated system of social reproduction. They also argued that the “sex-love” relationship does not find its form in a natural, God-given family form.

The “til death do us part” and the household management are two distinct forms of social relationship, conflated in the bourgeois form of the family (a very clear property relationship in itself) that must be socially and differently defined in building socialism.

Alexander Kollontai in *The Social Basis of the woman question* in 1909, wrote: “Let us turn our attention to another aspect of the woman question, the question of the family. The importance that the solution of this urgent and complex question has for the genuine emancipation of women is well known. The struggle for political rights, for the right to receive doctorates and other academic degrees, and for equal pay for equal work, is not the full sum of the fight for equality. To become really free woman has to throw off the heavy chains of the current forms of the family, which are outmoded and oppressive. For women, the solution of the family question is no less important than the achievement of political equality and economic independence.

“In the family of today, the structure of which is confirmed by custom and law, woman is oppressed not only as a person but as a wife and mother, in most of the countries of the civilised world the civil code places women in a greater or lesser dependence on her husband, and awards the husband not only the right to dispose of her property, but also the right of moral and physical dominance over her ...

“Only a whole number of fundamental reforms in the sphere of social relations — reforms transposing obligations from the family to society and the state — could create a situation where the principle of ‘free love’ might to some extent be fulfilled. But can we seriously expect the modern class state, however democratic it may be, to take upon itself the duties towards mothers and children which at present are undertaken by that individualistic unit, the modern family? Only the fundamental transformation of all productive relations could create the social prerequisites to protect women from the negative aspects

of the ‘free love’ formula.”

Flowing out of what has been called the second wave of feminism of the 1960s and 1970s (the first-wave having been a period of feminist activity and thought during the 19th and early 20th century that focused on legal issues, primarily on gaining the right to vote), there has been extensive analysis of the family, much from a left psycho-analytical perspective, but with considerable attention to the relationship between the capitalist state and the family.

In a country like South Africa, with conservative and traditional cultural approaches to marriage, the family and to divorce, is this thinking a challenge too far? It certainly is not an area of socialist discourse that has gained prevalence in democratic South Africa. While the racially discriminatory aspects of marriage law have been removed, and divorce law has been significantly liberalised, the recognition that the partnership based on love between people should take the forms appropriate to their personal choices has not found much ground, with the emphasis being on ensuring that all forms of marriage are embedded in the statutes.

In the South African context, the patchwork of cultural forms of marriage and families and the development of law regulating customary law into the statute books, is an area of Marxist analysis that is, in my opinion, under-developed in the South Africa, and perhaps in the developing world in general. Many of the forms of family and marriage are pre- or non-capitalist and yet through the incorporation of them into the rigidity of the statute book, do they not become an element of control and limitation of family forms appropriate to the future?

In the 1940s and 50s in particular, the SACP identified the provision of child care to working class communities as a critical intervention to enable women to join the economy while providing socialised services to what had previously been a private family responsibility, carried out

by the women and girl children in the family. In the 1990s, the Alliance, ANC, Cosatu and SACP, established a creche for the children of the employees of the Alliance formations, and once in Parliament, a similar approach was adopted to establish a childcare facility for all of the MPs and all of the employees in Parliament. Neither of these latter two projects have been sustained. In the 1950s some of the progressive left trade unions took up the issue of workplace child care facilities and made significant strides. The gains of the Cosatu unions in the 1980s and 1990s in relation to workplace-based child care have not been sustained. The area of family form, or socialisation of productive activities historically done in the privacy of the home, is an important site of socialist struggle and one that is particularly important for the emancipation of women.

Marxist concept of social reproduction

Social reproduction has indeed been under-analysed over the centuries of Marxism, and this does have an impact on solutions for women's emancipation and socialism. However, as will be flagged, this is an area of current Marxist study.

In *Capital* Vol II, Marx addresses the issue of social reproduction, starting with the concept that annual product must both “replace capital, namely social reproduction, as well as those which go to the consumption-fund, those which are consumed by the labourers and capitalists, hence both the productive and individual consumption” (*Capital* Vol II, Chapter XX, Section 1). The central question that Marx poses is that the aim and compelling motive of capitalist production is not consumption, but rather the “snatching of surplus-value and its capitalisation i.e. accumulation.” Capital accumulation, over and above the reproduction of the means of production, takes place at the expense of consumption; and consumption is fundamental to the quality

of life of human beings and the provision of their social needs, and of their human and social development. The essential dimension of surplus value production is not whether surplus must be produced; it is critical for sustaining production and for progress. The key difference between the capitalist surplus value production and socialist surplus value production is how is it accumulated and how is it used: private accumulation for the comfort, luxury needs of the rich, versus social/collective accumulation that ensures that the surplus is used for social needs for the benefit of the collective.

Reflecting on Engels' writing, Nancy Fraser, the American critical theorist, feminist and philosopher, has neatly expressed that socialism cannot simply mean socialised ownership of the means of production, it also has to mean the collectivisation of housework and social reproduction. She has extended this into our time, stating that with cutbacks to the public sector on the one hand, and recruitment of massive numbers of women into waged work on the other, there is a new class division in the primary locations of social reproduction. For both wealthy and working class households in the advanced capitalist countries, and with the rolling-back of the welfare state, much care-work and broader social reproduction work has been privatised. But for the relatively wealthy this takes the form of an enhanced commodified provision (private health-care, private community security, private schooling, fee-paying tertiary education, a ballooning private housing market, etc). For many working class families, the rolling back of the welfare state has required taking on increasing and often unportable household debt to access these commodified services. Or, for the working class household, there is another form of "privatisation", public provision is rolled back – the return of the burden of social reproduction once more into the private domain of the household.

In the South African context, social reproduction has in part relied

on the migrant labour system, with elements of social reproduction taking place in the rural areas. It has relied extensively on the use of privately employed domestic workers in wealthy, predominantly white households, although the racial demography has been changing in this segment in the recent period. It has relied on the high levels of unemployment, on children out of schooling, and on the elderly in the working class and poor urban and rural communities for provision of care work and social reproduction functions. The scope for alternative non-capitalist forms of social reproduction through cooperatives and the social economy is beginning to emerge as an area of thought in the South African discourse, but rigorous analysis and theorisation of this approach must be undertaken.

Marxism on women in the economy

In *Capital* Marx identifies two dimensions of mechanisation and the use of female labour power, or women workers. He offers up an example of where American capitalists have developed a stone crushing machine, which English capitalists are loathe to introduce, as the manual smashing of rocks by agricultural women labourers is cheaper than running the machines. He also considers how mechanisation required workers of less powerful strength, enabling the replacement of male workers, with the cheaper option of women and children.

The complexity of women's relative inclusion or exclusion from the formal capitalist economy has changed over time, and is often ideologically justified by the ruling class through the "motherhood and apple pie" or perhaps "motherhood and pap" approach to women's role as the primary household manager, and even through religious approaches to women's status as wives. The issue of women's unpaid labour in the household has been a focus in Marxist Feminist literature in the 1970s and 1980s, with intense intellectual and theoretical work done

in “The Domestic Labour Debate” carried among others in the pages of *The New Left Review*. This body of work has focused our attention on the double day of working-class women – paid work in the economy (even if the least skilled, worst paid and most casualised) and unpaid work in the home.

The article on gender-based violence by Tithi Bhattacharya in Issue 198 of *African Communist* (2nd Quarter 2018) highlighted the impact of neo-liberalism on the position of women within the economy and on the stress placed on working-class communities and families, resulting in intensification and broadening of gender based and domestic violence across the globe.

The United Nation’s Decade of Women (1975-1985) enabled dialogue and debate between developed and developing world women. Gita Sen and Carol Grown, writing in 1988 on the issues of women and development, had the following observations to make: “Many Third World women are acutely conscious of the need for this clarification and self-affirmation. Throughout the Decade they have faced accusations from two sides: from those who dismiss them as not being truly “feminist” because of their unwillingness to separate the struggle against gender subordination from that against other oppressions, and from those who accuse them of dividing class or national struggles and sometimes uncritically following women’s liberation movements imported from outside. That is why we strongly affirm that feminism strives for the broadest and deepest development of society and human beings free of all systems of domination...”

The current focus of the United Nations in relation to unpaid work, is not only looking at unpaid work in the home, but the extent to which women and in particular working-class women are involved in productive labour of a variety of forms that are not recognised in the GDP or the National Statement of Accounts.

In the context of the under-development of the South, and the Marxist analysis of women's oppression and exploitation in the context of under-development, the focus has been less on the issue of domestic labour, and more on the undervaluing of women's economic activity in the formal economy, and the relative marginalisation of women into the informal economy. Gita Sen and Carol Grown (1988) argue that: "Women's contributions – as workers and as managers of human welfare – are central to the ability of households, communities, and nations to tackle the current crisis of survival. Even as resources to strengthen poor women's economic opportunities are shrinking, women have begun to mobilise themselves, both individually and collectively, in creative ways. It is only by reinforcing and building upon their efforts in such vital sectors as food production, commerce, and trade that the needed long-term transformation to more self-reliant national development strategies can be achieved.

"...Over the past 20 years the women's movement has debated the links between the eradication of gender subordination and of other forms of social and economic oppression based on nation, class, or ethnicity. We strongly support the position in this debate that feminism cannot be monolithic in its issues, goals, and strategies, since it constitutes the political expression of the concerns and interests of women from different regions, classes, nationalities, and ethnic backgrounds. While gender subordination has universal elements, feminism cannot be based on a rigid concept of universality that negates the wide variation in women's experience. There is and must be a diversity of feminisms, responsive to the different needs and concerns of different women, and defined by them for themselves. This diversity builds on a common opposition to gender oppression and hierarchy, but this is only the first step in articulating and acting upon a political agenda.

"This heterogeneity gives feminism its dynamism and makes it the

most potentially powerful challenge to the status quo....

“For many women, problems of nationality, class, and race are inextricably linked to their specific oppression as women. Defining feminism to include the struggle against all forms of oppression is both legitimate and necessary. In many instances gender equality must be accompanied by changes on these fronts. But at the same time, the struggle against gender subordination cannot be compromised during the struggle against other forms of oppression, or be relegated to a future when they may be wiped out.”

In South Africa, the location of women within the informal economy has been the focus of both analysis and organisation, with Pat Horn and Judy Mulqueeny, for example, contributing to our understanding of this reality. Mulqueeny argued that: “Globalisation is resulting in labour market changes that are reducing the size of the formal labour force, that is, secure, permanent, full-time employment (Horn, 2004). What used to be called ‘atypical’ work – part-time, casual, temporary, seasonal, contract, home-based, piecework and unpaid family labour – is becoming increasingly typical in the modern global labour market. It is probable that the size of the in-formalised working class continues to be underestimated.

“If the real nature of our economy’s productive work is to be revealed, we must explore ways which these forms of work, which are dominated by women, and which are greatly undercounted and undervalued, or are not recognised as work, could be better covered. There is a need to develop mechanisms which capture reproduction as well as production, and to incorporate it in the analysis of growth and structural change.

“Because most trade unions have not traditionally organised ‘atypical’ or self-employed workers in the informal economy, the organised workforce is shrinking and trade unions’ numbers are declining. While

sectional determination for domestic workers and farm workers has been won, setting basic working conditions and minimum wages, other sectors are largely unprotected by legislation. They are also marked by increasing insecurity of employment and worsening conditions of work.”

The SACP adopted a particular approach to the organisation of women into the trade unions in the 1940s, recognising that women were employed in industry and agriculture and that as long as women were not organised the strength of the working class and trade union movement would be weakened. The main sectors in which women workers were participating in the labour market at the time were the food and processing sector, the clothing sector, and the retail sector. The history of the South African trade union movement in organising women workers into unions and through unions addressing working conditions specific to women has laid strong traditions that must be defended and deepened at all times.

Marxism-Leninism on organising women

The essence of Marx’s approach to materialist theory and practice – organising women and communist parties and socialist struggle – is an under-developed aspect of the writings of Marx and Engels, but one which we find being taken forward in theory and practice from the early 20th century socialist revolutions. To this end, Alexander Kolontai, Clara Zetkin, Vladimir Lenin, Joseph Stalin wrote extensively on women in socialist construction – be it socialist industry, collective agriculture, socialist culture, public education and public health. They refer repeatedly on the annually increasing role of women in all spheres of life of Soviet society. “The gains of the Soviet system, the equality of rights of Soviet woman, her rapid spiritual and political growth, serve as an inspiring challenge to the women of the whole world in the struggle

for the happiness of the working people, for the triumph of the ideas of socialism and democracy.” (Statement on International Women’s Day, Central Committee of the CPSU, March 8, 1949)

A strong contribution by black, women socialist activists, for example Angela Davis, has resulted in the concept of the triple oppression of women – as woman, as black person and as worker – the triple strands of women’s lived experience being a product of race, class and gender.

In many liberation struggles, the relationship between women’s struggle and the liberation struggle has been complex. The SACP at its 14th Congress adopted as a chapter of the *South African Road to Socialism* the concept of the inseparable connection between race, class and gender, arguing that

- The 45% aggregate of the Party’s approximately 300 000 members, organised in working class communities and shop floors, provides the SACP with a solid and strategic basis to strengthen the women struggle.
- The SACP must ensure that the empowerment of women within inner-party structures is strengthened and this is resonated through women leading our structures.
- The SACP requires the strengthening of the left perspective in the Progressive Women’s Movement through active participation of SACP women cadres.

Therefore, resolves that:

- The organisational review and renewal process needs to include the political education of all Party cadres around the woman question;
- The establishment of a programme of women cadre development aimed at strengthening of training women commissars;
- The Party must strengthen inner-party child-care facilities during the convening of all SACP gatherings;

- In the Special National Congress to be convened as per resolution of the 14th Congress to address constitutional amendments, consideration is given, through the relevant provincial structures, to lifting the representation of women in all SACP structures to 50 / 50 gender parity representation, to a minimum of two women serving as national office bearers, and consideration of the appropriate SACP CC structure to coordinate the women's struggles and campaigns.

Conclusion

We are now two centuries richer in the depth of Marxist-Leninist feminism. We have benefitted from the work of intellectuals like Annette Kuhn and AnneMarie Wolpe who wrote *Feminism and materialism – Women and Modes of Production*, among many others. I argue consistently that a Marxist-Leninist must indeed have a feminist consciousness, must indeed understand the interconnections between race, class and gender oppression in capitalist socio-economic relations. After all a feminist is a person who supports the belief that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men, and that there should be equality between genders. As Marxist-Leninists, we are committed to building socialism as a social system, a society, a state that is based on providing for the social needs of all people, irrespective of nationality, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation.

Our task is to to deepen and build on the legacies of Marxist, Marxist-Leninist and materialist feminist contributions. As we engage with the struggle against neo-liberalism and the global economic recession; as international agencies mobilise around the contribution of unpaid work to economic success and sustainability; as we provide solidarity on global safety, peace and security issues in a period of forced migration, intranational conflict and international conflict; as we engage on land rights, marriage law, family and population policy; as we en-

gage on democratisation of our country; as we engage on childcare, motherhood, fatherhood and social services; as we struggle to build the social economy through cooperatives around social reproductive needs, financial access, and work opportunities; it is incumbent on us, as Marxist-Leninist feminists, or feminist Marxist-Leninists, to ensure that our own theoretical, analytical and organisational contributions, our strategic consistency, analytical alertness and tactical flexibility, is always taken forward with the use of a race, class and gender lens. ●

Cde Schreiner is an SACP Central Committee and Politburo member

NATIONAL QUESTION

Unravelling the national question

Buti Manamela examines the need to resolve the national question in the light of current challenges in South Africa

What should be our attitude and response to the death of Pik Botha? The ANC issued a statement "acknowledging and appreciating his contribution towards building a new South Africa", and went on to mention that he joined the ANC in 2000. Even Moeletsi Mbeki spoke at his funeral as a close friend. We all know Botha's history under apartheid as its global defender while serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs, convincing the world that the system was not a crime against humanity. This, when the regime was committing atrocities not only here at home, but in Mozambique, Angola, Lesotho, Zambia, Namibia and Botswana in trying to hound out freedom fighters. Knowing his history, and accepting that he joined the ANC later in his life and probably dedicated his last days doing what most ANC members are expected to do, are we right to mourn him?

In the same breath, what then becomes our attitude towards Terror Lekota, who now flirts with the ultra-right and almost denounces everything he stood for, was jailed for and was prepared to die for? These may sound trivial but they are crucial questions that help us determine how far we are in dealing with the South African national question, or how far we are from there?

Recent incidents indicate troubling signs that we may be suffer-

ing some setbacks on the national question, and in fact taking a few steps back. These includes Afri-Forum going all over the country and the world selling their own brand of nationalism and nationhood (including in the US were they were selling propaganda about state sponsored violence against white people, and even duped the US President into tweeting strongly about it); also appealing to narrow Zulu ethno-chauvinism in their meeting with King Goodwill Zwelithini. The king himself has threatened to secede if parliament goes ahead and starts a process with regards to communal land under the Ingonyama Trust.

There have been recent protests in two communities regarded as coloured, essentially saying “we were badly off under white rule and now we are not better off under black rule”. We’ve seen in KwaZulu-Natal a struggle among businessmen accusing the so-called Indian business elite of essentially dominating business in the province. Some incidents are more ethno-chauvinist and are ethno-conflicts such as in Malamulele in the Vhembe region of Limpopo province.

There is a toxic rise of identity politics, be it with the land question, “fees must fall”, in sport (with a significant number of black youth opting to support the All Blacks rather than the Springboks), in cultural activities, in Parliament and in many other sections of our society. It could be suggested that we are further apart today than we were as a nation in 1994, but this will need to be tested.

All of this is a reflection of the dynamism and the complexity of the national question in South Africa. Many nations emerged from struggles against colonialism, or from wars, at least intact in terms of their common national, cultural or linguistic identity. In our situation, from the first day since the constitution was adopted, there have been these complex issues that we have had to navigate.

Different national liberation movements define their national question based on the context within which they locate their struggles and

how they frame the aims and objectives of their struggles. Essentially, the national question has to do with the national struggle that a people is confronted with and how they seek to resolve it, the strategies and tactics employed, identifying who the enemy is, and the people, resources and allies to be mobilized in order to resolve this question.

There are common features of national struggles in different countries because the major strand that connects these struggles has to do with national self-determination. Whether in Puerto Rico, Cuba, China, Angola, Mozambique, Namibia or anywhere else, national struggles differed in specifics, but in essence were about national self-determination. In South Africa, we've drawn many lessons from the other national liberation movements in theorising our own national question, but had to apply those within the context of the South African struggle.

This article briefly considers:

- The theory of the national question;
- Our history within the context of the national struggle;
- Progress made since 1994 and how this has impacted on the current framing of the national question; and
- The role of the state, the ANC and the Alliance in dealing with the challenges to the national question. The aim is not to present conclusive statements on the question but pose some critical questions.

What is our theory of the national question?

The South African national question refers to the political and economic exploitation of black people in general and Africans in particular, and assumes racial, gender and class dimensions. There are also other notions of the national question based on the class, racial and gender interests of a particular group or party. Some pursue narrow African nationalism, advocating a “black republic” and “driving the

white man to the sea”. Although some in the now obscure PAC (Pan-Africanist Congress) advocate this, there are also other formations who support this.

Another approach is that of the ultra-right who advocate for an exclusive Afrikaner state, opposed to racial or any other form of integration, a modern day apartheid remix. Afri-Forum says “we are opposed to forced segregation, we believe it is wrong, but we also believe that forced integration is wrong. We must choose who we want to be with”.

Then there is ‘rainbow nationalism’ which advocates cosmetic racial and cultural integration, advancing principles such as ubuntu or some form of national patriotism. This strand of nationalism has canonised Nelson Mandela as its hero.

In the ANC-led liberation movement’s approach there is a recognition that the three inter-related aspects of class, race and gender have to be addressed as part of the national question. What is required to do this in a National Democratic Revolution (NDR)?

The national aspect of the NDR relates to nation building, national unity and the advancement of revolutionary nationalism.

What then is the definition of the nation? In a broader sense, a nation has to do with the people, borders, culture, traditions, institutions, economy, the flag, and the languages. The complexity of the South African nation stems from the multiplicity of these national features – but they are becoming the source of national polarisation. Despite this multiplicity, we have been able to create common symbols and features that define who we are as a nation. This does not mean the assimilation of other languages or cultures of certain groups into one and therefore claiming that we are building a nation. In fact, this can have disastrous consequences. To try and build such national unity would be cosmetic and undermine the ultimate goal of a broader South African nationhood.

The essence of national unity has to do with the political, economic, social and cultural features of the nation. If we deal with these four issues, then the other issues become easier to address. What appear to be the most important issues – racial or ethnic identity – mask underlying social contradictions that, if resolved, would contribute to addressing all the other issues.

The political essence refers to the transformation and strengthening of democratic institutions and their being representative, and the battle of ideas contested in various sites. It is clear that the state that emerged from the 1994 consensus is incapable of constructing a society that was envisaged historically by the national liberation movement. In fact, aspects of the state and some who serve in it have been engaged in sabotaging the NDR. There is a need for a complete overhaul of these aspects of the state if we are to build the nation we historically envisaged.

The same applies to the economic essence of the nation, which refers to the extent to which we have made progress in radically transforming our economy and ensuring common ownership by all. The economic situation is still a reflection of the historical features of apartheid. Unless aspects of the state and the economy are transformed, there will remain a sense of disaffection and hopelessness in respect to progress on the NDR.

What is the ideal South African nation?

We have made significant progress since 1994 in addressing some of the challenges posed by the national question. This ranges from the universal franchise; a new constitution; a democratic (but sometimes circus-like) Parliament; limited transformation of the state; growing black middle and upper classes; social transformation through a social wage, state housing, electricity, education and health; limited progress

in land distribution and restitution; and access to services by the majority of South Africans.

However, we are still not able to make any significant impact on income and wealth inequality, poverty and unemployment, and so we still have features that mirror some form of neo-apartheid and neo-CST (Colonialism of a Special Type). Our economy still depends on the export of raw materials to Europe (and, now, to China). We remain vulnerable to currency fluctuations and global trade conflicts between global economic super-powers. We are not producing what we consume and are mainly a consumptive economy. This is an important factor because it speaks to the neo-colonial nature of post-1994 South Africa.

In October this year, the president had to convene local and international investors, and like an auctioneer, had to ask them to commit bids as investors in our fledgeling economy. If we cannot build a stable economy based on our local capacity, or have to chop and change our policies to the dictates of foreign capital, we might have to forego our national sovereignty. If we cannot address land ownership, or economic ownership, or spatial planning or any of the aspects that relate to the changing the systemic and structural challenges that confronts us, then we have no right calling ourselves a sovereign state or a nation.

This is why, in the post-colonial era, many African countries gained their independence but became locked into civil wars, with former colonisers pulling the strings of their puppets. We obviously cannot overtly point to Britain, or the Netherlands, but we can point at multilateral and financial institutions in particular who sought to impose certain conditions on us since 1994.

So, although apartheid and colonialism are ostensibly dead, their features and legacies remain visible in our daily lives. This picture of our history and the state we are in is not a reflection that we are a happy rainbow nation but rather that there are unresolved structural

and systemic obstacles to our nationhood.

South Africa is a country with several racial and ethnic groups that sometimes refers to themselves as nations. The objective of our national struggle is to ultimately overlook these narrow definitions of nationalities, or sub-nationalities, or ethnic groups, and lead all of them into one nation. Thus, the official categorisations of the main groupings in our country being Africans, Indians, coloureds and whites. That is the basis on which to work towards an ideal South African nation.

To add to the cosmopolitan character of the post-1994 nation-in-the-making (a feature that has started emerging before 1994 with migrant labour from the neighbouring countries) is the migration of significant numbers of people from elsewhere within the continent and from other countries. These includes an estimated 3-million Zimbabweans, a growing population of Nigerians, Somalis, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis and others who see themselves, whether legally here or not, as having permanently settled. Their presence also has to be addressed in some way in the nation-building process. They have an influence on our culture, language, economy and on other aspects of the nation-building project.

We have not addressed this matter theoretically in the ANC's *Strategy and Tactics* or the SACP's *South African Road to Socialism* and other documents of the national liberation movement. The fact that we have xenophobic attacks (however you want to describe them) on foreign Africans; looting of Pakistani and Somali spaza shops; resentments towards Chinese doing business; "Naijaphobia" with every second crime committed being blamed on Nigerians living here; and antagonism towards our Zimbabweans brothers and sisters for "taking our jobs" – all attest to the fact that we cannot deal with the nation-building process without addressing these issues.

These issues are further complicated by the rapid urbanisation tak-

ing place in the country with people moving from rural areas into the big cities and towns and competing for scarce resources with those from other countries also living here. This makes for an explosive situation and provides huge challenges for the nation-building process. Once again, as so often in nation-building projects, the issue arises of the need to address people's material interests in order to address the national question effectively.

Dealing with the effects of CST

South Africa was a colony of a special type mainly because the coloniser and the colonised shared the same borders, and unlike most of the colonies post-independence, the coloniser did not physically pack up and leave. The Europeans who settled in South Africa (or their offspring) are involved in determining its future as part of the complex South African nation, as they had a hand in shaping the outcomes of our negotiated settlement towards our democracy.

The national question is made even more complex because some of the sub-nations that constitute the new South Africa settled here through violence. Imprinted in this complexity of our nation is also the history of violent dispossession of land and wealth, and forced migration and super-exploitative labour especially of black natives. It includes a history of denial of basic democratic and human rights, which rights were expressed as early as the drafting of the 1943 African Claims document and the 1955 Freedom Charter.

Any attempt to try to disconnect our history from what we are today must be rejected. The chambers that echo a new beginning are becoming ever louder, with the new generation of white South Africans disowning the violence and barbarism of their ancestors and calling on black South Africans to forget the past and do better for themselves in the new democracy. Some even insist that all the current challenges

our country faces are as a result of the failures of the new “black” government, insisting that “we cannot blame apartheid forever”. The truth is that the black majority has been bequeathed the poverty imposed violently on previous generations while the white minority has been bequeathed the wealth of the country which was violently seized from the black population. The extremes of poverty on the one hand and of wealth on the other hand are part of a continuum. Any insistence that black South Africans should forget the past to allow a fresh start should be paralleled by a willingness to forgo what was inherited by the former oppressor as a result of the violent exploitation of the black majority.

The state and the nation

Through the intensification of violence and force by the apartheid state and continued struggle for national liberation, different forms of state power shaped what we are and who we are as a nation. For example, the demand for self-rule led to the apartheid state dividing the country into phony black states called bantustans. This seriously fractured national and state cohesion, but still concentrated power in the hands of the violent apartheid state.

The foundation of the new state lies in addressing the historical injustices of land, wealth and labour exploitation that gave birth to the wealth divides of our nation and the new generation carries both the poverty and the wealth bequeathed on them through violence.

In some respects there has emerged a parallel, and affluent, state reflected by such things as gated communities with their own private security, healthcare and schools. This parallel state reflects a view that, for the rich, South Africa is a failed state. The rich have locked themselves far from the criminalised poor who are vetted before entry into these communities, although it is precisely the poor who provide labour

power to the rich. We need to also consider the impact of the ‘parallel state’ on national unity and nation building.

The role of the Alliance

What are the major issues that occupy the agenda of our Alliance structures? At the top of our list are issues such as fighting corruption, state capture, attracting investment, unity of the Alliance, the 2019 elections and ending factionalism within our ranks. These are very important issues on which we shouldn’t lose focus if we are to restore the confidence of our people in the Movement and government. However, we need to remember that the ending of corruption, the conclusion of the work of the Commission on State Capture and many of these issues will not bring to an end to the systemic and structural challenges that faces our nation-building process. For us to restore the confidence of the people in our Movement and the government, we have to radically transform the economy and ensure that wealth is redistributed into the hands of all our people.

For a number of years since 1994, we have been following some of the prescriptions of multilateral finance institutions as a way to try to stabilise the economy and ensure that we accelerate growth and redistribution of wealth in our economy. None of these have succeeded because they have not got to the bottom of the South African question, which is the disruption of the apartheid state superstructure and the building of a democratic state.

We must focus on the land question; the dismantling of the mining-energy-finance complex; a fundamental change of the export-orientation and import dependence of our economy; the disruption of the apartheid spatial planning and the integration of our communities; the transformation of our judicial system; the building of alternative, open, transparent and progressive media; the support for local and black

ownership of the economy; the robust confrontation of patriarchal and homophobic practices by applying the law; and the implementing of already existing radical policies that seeks to deal with income and other forms of inequality, poverty and unemployment.

It means focusing on these and more, without succumbing to external pressures that are aimed at halting the wheel of radical transformation. Threats made by Freedom Front Plus of civil war if we proceed with land expropriation; or of currency fluctuations if we implement certain macro- or micro-economic policies; and other forms of threats, should not cause us to succumb whilst leaving our people in further dire poverty, unemployment and inequalities.

There are issues that existed under apartheid. Compromises were necessary, and consensus reached to ensure our breakthrough – but these issues were simply postponed to a later date. It is now time for us to deal with these issues in a way that resolves the South African national question. ●

Cde Manamela is an SACP Central Committee member and the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training

MARX BICENTENARY

Marxism and the environment

Chris Williams charts socialists' commitment for environmental conservation as part of their struggle for socialism – from Marx and Engels, through Lenin and to the present

The analysis of nature into its individual parts, the grouping of the different natural processes and objects in definite classes, the study of the internal anatomy of organised bodies in their manifold forms – these were the fundamental conditions of the gigantic strides in our knowledge of Nature that have been made during the last 400 years. But this has left us as legacy the habit of observing natural objects and processes in isolation, as constraints, not as essentially variables; in their death, not in their life – Frederick Engels, Socialism: Utopian and Scientific¹

There is a widespread assumption among environmentalists that Marxism, as a “productivist” ideology, has little to say, and little concern, for the fate of the environment. Contrary to a common perception – much of it understandably based on the diabolical environmental depredations carried out in the name of socialism by the former Soviet Union, Eastern Bloc, and China – Marx and Engels had a

Footnote: This article, which appeared in issue 72 of the *International Socialist Review*, is taken from Williams' book *Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis* (Haymarket Books, 2010).

much more holistic view of humankind's place in the environment¹.

The idea that Marx and Engels were obsessed only with the conditions of workers comes from all quarters, right and left. They are often portrayed as writers who may have been ahead of their times with their economic analysis of capitalism but were typical of 19th century men enamoured of the wonderful powers of technology to solve all of society's ills. Their only contention, it is argued, was that technology should be owned and controlled by the workers, not the capitalists. Thenceforth, it could be unleashed upon the planet in the interests of the entire human race without a thought to natural limits.

According to this view attributed to Marx, through control of the means of production and mastery of nature, mankind would be set free. Most often Marx's ideas are described as "productivist". The Promethean view is shown to be true by selected excerpts from the writings of Marx and Engels and the evidence of "actually existing socialism" as it used to be in the Soviet Union and its satellites, and as it still exists in China and other "socialist" countries not known for their ecological stewardship, such as North Korea.²

This topic is important because we need not just a critique of the past but also a vision for the future, one that is rooted in historical experience and theoretical cogency that we can build on and develop. Just as socialism needs to be rescued from the distortions of some of its supposed practitioners, so the writings of Marx and Engels should be recognised for their usefulness in examining the natural world and human relationships to it. This is not to take every word of Marx and Engels as the gospel truth more than 100 years after they wrote them. Rather it is to argue that the methodology of Marxism holds key insights into our relationship to nature that are extremely useful for understanding our place in the biosphere and interaction with it.

The language of socialism and the mantle of Marx and Engels were

adopted by Stalin in the USSR, Mao in China, and other “socialist” societies not to further the course of socialism but to derail it. While going into detail on the nature of these regimes is beyond the scope of this book, it should be clear that if socialism means anything, it is the free association of the people who do the work raising themselves into power to collectively and democratically decide the future course of society.³ The workers and peasants who make the revolution should bear its fruits. That is, they democratically decide the direction of the economy and society in the interests of the vast majority; a society where production of goods is based on human need, not profit.

After the Stalinist counterrevolution in the Soviet Union of the 1920s, the interests of the ruling Soviet elite became associated with the interests of a state in economic and military competition with the West.

In other words, the same factors that propel capitalist production – the need to compete and drive out the competition – reigned within these regimes. Flowing directly from this came the need of each of these one-party states to constantly raise productivity and dispense with any environmental, democratic, or labour concerns in the manic drive toward economic and technological parity with the Western powers. It was the severe lack of power of the working class in the “socialist” countries, not its untrammelled freedom, which created the conditions for the extreme ecological vandalism seen there. As Stalin commented, what took the West 100 years to accomplish, the Soviet Union would do in 10.⁴ This (article) will therefore explore the real legacy of Marx and Engels and subsequent Marxist thinkers as it relates to enhancing our understanding of the human social relationship to the natural world.

While life will evolve and biodiversity will eventually be re-established on a planet that is 6°C warmer than today, it will do so on a

timescale vastly greater than human planning and life spans could possibly contemplate. It took 50-million years for biodiversity to recover from the Permian-Triassic mass extinction. In the interim period, 50 to 90% of species currently extant will die out as they will be unable to adapt fast enough to such rapid changes and the resulting breakdown in ecosystems within which these species are embedded. It is not just the overall amount of climatic change that will be so devastating to ecosystems, but just as importantly, the rate at which that change occurs. Alongside such drastic reductions in biodiversity, human misery will multiply. Mass migration, droughts, floods, wars, and famine will be endemic rather than periodic features of a greatly constrained human society.

Frederick Engels outlined more than 100 years ago the contradictions between an exploitative, short-term relationship of humanity to nature and the long-term problems that would inevitably engender:

“Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel out the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. When the Italians of the Alps used up the pine forests on the southern slopes, so carefully cherished on the northern slopes, they had no inkling that by doing so they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, making possible for them to pour still more furious torrents on the plains during the rainy season... Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule

over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside of nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.⁵

This failure to take into account the long-term, unintended consequences of human actions reaches its height of contradiction under capitalism where both the scale of the destructive impact of these unintended consequences, as well as the scientific and material means to overcome them, develop in tandem. Writes Engels:

“Classical political economy, the social science of the bourgeoisie, in the main examines only social effects of human actions in the fields of production and exchange that are actually intended. This fully corresponds to the social organisation of which it is the theoretical expression. As individual capitalists are engaged in production and exchange for the sake of the immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results must first be taken into account. As long as the individual manufacturer or merchant sells a manufactured or purchased commodity with the usual coveted profit, he is satisfied and does not concern himself with what afterwards becomes of the commodity and its purchasers. The same thing applies to the natural effects of the same actions. What cared the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertilizer for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees – what cared they that the heavy tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock! In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result.”⁶

Today, all the solutions to climate change are already technologically

feasible, and we have the means to implement them on a global scale, as well as the knowledge of what will happen if we don't. We are being held back not because solutions don't exist or money is not available, but because current social relations will not allow for them. As Leon Trotsky wrote in 1926:

“I remember the time when men wrote that the development of aircraft would put an end to war, because it would draw the whole population into military operations, would bring to ruin the economic and cultural life of entire countries, etc. In fact, however, the invention of the flying machine heavier than air opened a new and crueler chapter in the history of militarism. There is no doubt now, too, we are approaching the beginning of a still more frightful and bloody chapter. Technology and science have their own logic – the logic of the cognition of nature and the mastering of it in the interests of man. But technology in itself cannot be called either militaristic or pacifistic. In a society in which the ruling class is militaristic, technology is in the service of militarism.”⁷

Today, we clearly have governments overtly committed to militarism to extend the economic reach of their own national group of capitalists. As all mainstream predictions by the United Nations and the International Energy Agency point toward growing worldwide use of fossil fuel energy, waiting for real and meaningful solutions to emerge from governments guarantees humanity a desperate future and many species a short one. The *raison d'être* of capitalism is profit based on continual economic expansion. Capitalism has, in effect and in practice, alienated humanity from nature by privatising the land and making all things into commodities – even pollution itself. On this alienation from nature, Marx explains, “As for the farmer, the industrial capitalist and the agricultural worker, they are no more bound to the land they exploit than are the employer and the worker in the factories to the cotton and

wool they manufacture; they feel an attachment only for the price of their production, the monetary product.”⁸

Capitalism is an economic system irrevocably at odds with a sustainable planet, as it requires ever-greater material and energy throughput to keep expanding. According to a 2000 study carried out by five major European and US research centres: “Industrial economies are becoming more efficient in their use of materials, but waste generation continues to increase... We found no evidence of an absolute reduction in resource throughput. One half to three quarters of annual resource inputs to industrial economies are returned to the environment as wastes within a year.”⁹

Let’s dwell on that last sentence for a second: One-half to three-quarters of industrial inputs returned to the environment as wastes within a year!

Capitalism simultaneously and of necessity exploits the land and the people and sacrifices the interests of both on the altar of profit. Philosophically, the approach that capitalism takes to the environment, and the attitude it forces us to adopt, is one of separation and alienation. As a species we are forcibly cut off from the land, separated from nature, and alienated from coevolving with it.

It’s an attitude amply summed up by Marx in volume 1 of *Capital*: “Capitalist production...disturbs the metabolic interaction between man and the earth, i.e. prevents the return to the soil of its constituent elements consumed by man in the form of food and clothing; it therefore violates the conditions necessary to lasting fertility of the soil.... The social combination and organisation of the labour processes is turned into an organised mode of crushing out the workman’s individual vitality, freedom and independence... Moreover, all progress in capitalist agriculture is a progress in the art, not only of robbing the worker, but of robbing the soil; all progress in increasing the fertility

of the soil for a given time is a progress towards ruining the more long-lasting sources of that fertility. The more a country starts its development on the foundation of modern industry, like the United States, for example, the more rapid is this process of destruction. Capitalist production, therefore, develops technology...only by sapping the original sources of all wealth – the soil and the worker.¹⁰

Marx and Engels viewed humans not as something separate from the environment, as capitalist ideological orthodoxy does, but dialectically interconnected. Writes Marx on the relationship between nature and humanity: “Nature is man’s inorganic body, that is to say, nature in so far as it is not the human body. Man lives from nature, i.e. nature is his body, and he must maintain a continuing dialogue with it if he is not to die. To say man’s physical and mental life is linked to nature simply means that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.”¹¹

The organism interacts with its environment while simultaneously the environment acts back on the organism. In the process, both are changed. The environment is no longer a passive object to be shaped at will by whatever life-form comes along, but plays a role in making the organism what it is. In this view, it is impossible to speak of any living thing, humans and their activity included, as anything but deeply enmeshed with each other, in a constant process of mutual interaction and transformation. Environmental niches don’t just pre-exist so that some happy organism that just happens to wander by at the right time can slot itself in. The very idea of an environment has no meaning unless we are talking about an organism’s relationship to it. For Marx and Engels, writing in *The German Ideology*, human activity had the potential to alienate all creatures from their environments: “The ‘essence’ of the fish is its ‘being,’ water... The ‘essence’ of the freshwater fish is the water of a river. But the latter ceases to be the essence of the fish and so is no longer a suitable medium for existence as soon as the river

is made to serve industry, as soon as it is polluted by dyes and other waste products and navigated by steamboats, or as soon as its water is diverted into canals where simple drainage can deprive fish of its medium of existence.”¹²

Climate, and the earth’s ecosystem more generally, is dynamic and complex; it is best viewed as a process of many interacting factors. Every change feeds back and creates new effects on all actors. This leads to the concepts of tipping points and holism – both central within Marxism. Violent shocks to the system over relatively brief timescales have dominated previous climate swings, as have the revolutionary social changes that ushered capitalism onto the world historic stage. Rapid changes to natural and social systems can be seen to operate in analogous ways. Stresses that accumulate in climate systems and human societies often do so without much outward sign until rapid and extreme changes seem to burst forth almost out of nowhere. Under the surface however, what seem like small, inconsequential “molecular” changes were taking place that eventually led to the radical and abrupt shifts to entirely new systems.

In this sense, rapid climate change and revolutionary social change are analogous because they both exemplify the sudden transformation of quantity into quality. The great concern among scientists is that we are fast approaching just such a tipping point with regard to global climate. In the social realm, the great concern among many other people is that we are not approaching just such a corresponding social upheaval fast enough to prevent us from going beyond a systemic breakdown in a stable global climate.

To end the contradiction between humanity and nature requires “something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and simultaneously a revolution in our whole contemporary social order.”¹³ To truly end the

exploitation of nature in the service of profit requires that the profit motive be excised from society in a revolutionary reconstitution by the majority on whose labour the system depends. The right to privately own the land and the means of production, which lies at the very root of capitalist economics and forces the population at large to work for a living at the behest of private capital, must be abolished. Only by holding land, along with the instruments of production, in common and producing to meet social need will the simultaneous exploitation of nature and humanity end. Only then can we interact with nature according to a conscious plan, utilising the scientific knowledge and technique that we already possess to organise production and distribution on a completely new footing that thus establishes a more harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. The methodology developed and used by Marx and Engels offers insightful clues as to how to do that.

Socialist ecological thought since Marx

Marxism is a science, not a religion. As such it is a continually evolving body of thought, adapting and learning from new situations and knowledge. It is no surprise therefore to learn that several Marxists and socialists have made significant contributions to ecological thought.

The term “biosphere,” encompassing the entirety of an open system that supports all life and its interaction with the atmosphere and the energy coming from the sun, was coined in the 1920s by a leading scientist of the Bolshevik Soviet government, Vladimir Vernadsky. Vernadsky was one of the very first – in a prophetic speech in 1922 – to warn of the dangers of the misuse of atomic power. In 1926 Vernadsky published *The Biosphere* (this was before Soviet science became intensely productivist, anti-ecological and, in some important and notorious episodes, anti-scientific). In echoes of Vernadsky, in echoes of

Marx, wrote of the essential link and interconnection between all biotic and abiotic matter in shaping the earth: “Life is... potently and continuously the disturbing chemical inertia on the surface of our planet. It creates colours and forms of nature, the associations of animals and plants, and the creative labour of civilized humanity, and also becomes a part of the diverse chemical processes of the earth’s crust. There is not substantial chemical equilibrium on the crust in which the influence of life is not evident, and in which chemistry does not display life’s work. Life is not an external or accidental phenomenon of the earth’s crust... All living matter can be regarded as a single entity in the mechanism of the biosphere.”¹⁴

Here the biosphere, encompassing all living and non-living matter, is the system, human society is an interacting sub-system of that, and the economy a subsystem of human society, even if the key one through which society evolves. For conventional economists it is the exact reverse: the economy is the system; human society, and, to the extent that the biosphere is even considered, are both subsystems. This reversal gives rise to the idea, essential under capitalism, that the economy can expand without limits, that capitalism is a boundless system. That this runs counter to the physical and biological laws of the universe goes without acknowledgment.

The capitalist economy runs as a perpetual motion machine, the practical possibility of which was discredited in the 19th century with the enunciation of the First and Second Laws of Thermodynamics. Nevertheless, to continue, it requires a belief system that suspends knowledge of those very laws even as it utilises them in other spheres of scientific endeavour. Hence the entirely necessary but nonsensical notion under capitalism: the economy is essentially independent of nature.

Committed to the unity of theory and practice, the Bolsheviks did not limit themselves to theoretical re-conceptions of a dynamic and

interactive organic and inorganic world but actively supported little-known but nevertheless ground breaking ecological practice. The Soviet Union, particularly through the leadership of Lenin while he was alive, and Lunacharsky while he was head of the People's Commissariat for Education (before his forced resignation by Stalin in 1929), were strong backers of an ecologically minded policy toward agricultural sustainability, biodiversity, and ecological research. This was in the face of the most desperate economic circumstances bequeathed to the young Soviet state due to the deprivations of World War I and the unrestrained savagery with which the counterrevolutionary White armies and Allied Western governments prosecuted the ensuing three year civil war.

For a short period, studies in Soviet ecology blossomed as in no other country. That brief period was brought to an abrupt end when Stalin and the ascendant bureaucracy demonised “science for the sake of science” as a “bourgeois deviation”. Stalin insisted not only that true “proletarian science” must first and foremost justify itself in the interests of the economy, but also that scientific theory had as much to gain from “practice” as it did from the unearthing of scientific relationships. In other words, what was happening on the ground, with Trofim Lysenko's infamous crop-yield experiments and theory of “vernalisation,” for example, should be accepted by scientists because it was in the interests of Soviet agriculture, rather than critically examined for scientific soundness.¹⁵

Pre-Stalin, the Soviet Union in fact pioneered ecological theory and practice. The government was the first in the world to listen to its scientific and ecological researchers and implement a policy of setting aside large tracts of land that were completely inviolable to any form of human intervention other than scientific research. There was to be no logging, animal hunting, or crop growing – even tourism was banned.

These areas, linked together in a nationwide network were to serve as etalony – baseline standards similar to the surrounding region that could be used to track how virgin nature existed in order to better understand how industrialised society was changing natural habitats in non-protected areas. Russian ecologists similarly pioneered the idea that despoiled land could be rejuvenated through rational use and through the development of a regional plan on the basis of the study of etalony. It was Russian scientists who were among the first to consider the idea of plant distribution as communities (phytosociology) and initiated the concept of ecological energetics (trophic dynamics).

Two days after the October Revolution, the crucial decree “On Land” was passed, abolishing the ability of anyone to privately own “alienated” land. Because all land, forests, waterways, and natural resources were now publically owned, a rational plan for their sustainable use and renewal could be put in to action. Despite this, the journal *Lesnaya Respublika* (Forests of the Republic) reported that forests were being degraded by illegal logging and hunting and something needed to be done. In May 1918, in a meeting chaired by Lenin, the government responded by passing the decree “On Forests,” which created a central administration of forests to design a plan for reforestation and sustained yield. Forests were to be divided into an exploitable sector and a protected one. The purpose of the protected part was specifically to engage with issues of the control of erosion, the protection of watersheds, and the “preservation of monuments of nature.” Another law, the Forest Code, was adopted into law in 1923 which further enhanced the protected status of forests.

By January 1919, from a Soviet perspective, the civil war had reached its nadir. The continued existence of the worker’s and peasants’ government was in serious doubt. Bolshevik-controlled areas had been severely curtailed and the Red Army pushed back almost to the gates

of Petrograd. The government was hanging by a thread as White armies crossed the Urals and seemed headed for the desperately beating heart of Soviet power. US, British, French, and Japanese troops occupied and controlled key Russian ports, and much of the fertile Ukraine and the south were under the control of the Germans. Despite the almost hopelessly dire situation, Lenin took time out to personally meet agronomist NN Podiapolsky to hear about proposals for the first nature reserve. As Podiapolsky recounts: “Having asked me some questions about the military and political situation in the Astrakhan region, (Lenin) expressed his approval of all of our initiatives and in particular the one concerning the project for the (nature reserves). He stated that the cause of conservation was important ... for the whole republic, and that he considered it an urgent priority.”¹⁶

Lenin proposed that Podiapolsky immediately draft national legislation on conservation. After submitting the legislation, Podiapolsky received the examined draft back from Lenin the same day!

Once land was retaken by the Red Army, this decree, *On the Protection of Monuments of Nature, Gardens, and Parks* could eventually be signed in to law by Lenin in September of 1921. In May 1919 Lenin approved passage of the decree *On Hunting Seasons and the Right to Possess Hunting Weapons*, which prohibited hunting of endangered moose and wild goats and initiated closed seasons for hunting other animals to ensure sustainable yield.

In 1924, the All-Russian Society for Conservation (VOOP) was created through the Conservation Department of the Commissariat of Education to help build a mass social base for conservation and to incorporate conservation and the study of nature into school curricula. VOOP published its own journal, *Okhrana prirody* (Conservation), which carried vigorous debates inside its pages on critical academic issues in ecology, the history of ecological research in Russia, news from

national parks in other countries, including translations of Theodore Roosevelt's thoughts on Yellowstone, articles for and about children, special profiles on various endangered species, and articles for biological pest control and against monocultures. Ecology as a separate field of academic study began to appear in Russian university curricula by 1924.

All this stood as law; academic debate and research flourished and popular organisations sought to further the rational use and study of nature with governmental support, even as the most far-reaching goals were constrained by the need to feed the people and earn foreign currency through fur and timber sales. These advances were circumvented, curtailed, and ultimately reversed by the requirements of Stalin's First Five-Year Plan, when unrestrained productivism was the order of the day and animals and plants were reclassified. Species, in a mirror image of the short-termism inherent to capitalism, were now to be classified either as "useful" to the most immediate needs of "socialist construction" or "harmful" – and therefore pencilled in for extermination.

The early years of Soviet rule could not be more different from the usual picture of total disregard for the environment, leading to horrific pollution and environmental crimes. The entirety of Soviet ecological misrule is presented as a continuum from the modernising despot Lenin all the way through to Chernobyl in a smooth unbroken line. In fact, the Soviet Union under Lenin and through the 1920s was characterised by a stunning series of pioneering ecological policies, education, research, and theorising.

The ascension of Stalin, as in all other areas of post-revolutionary life, represents a clearly delineated rupture with the pioneering ecological policies and environmental research of the 1920s. Under Stalin, who had little use for any scientific theory if it didn't ideologically justify party rule or enhance economic competitiveness with the West,

meant that anyone charged with carrying out “science for science’s sake” automatically became a potential “wrecker” – the charge that precipitated trial, the gulag, execution, or frequently all three. The ecology movement, along with independent scientists, had to be broken and entire governmental departments purged, reordered, renamed, or simply abolished. To examine just the Ukraine, formerly a centre of ecological research, every single voluntary scientific or professional society concerned with conservation or nature protection was terminated in the 1930s. Many were accused of cooperating with “counterrevolutionary nationalist groups,” due to their continued opposition to economic issues taking primacy over those of conservation. This amounted to a certain death sentence; more than a third of the Ukrainian Committee for the Preservation of Monuments of Nature were executed.

In the 1930s British socialist AG Tansley, later first president of the British Ecological Society, coined the term “ecosystem,” a concept central to our modern understanding of ecosystems ecology and an academic research field of its own. Tansley wanted to explain how his materialist conception of natural communities had become fused with all physical and chemical factors such as soil and climate and so came up with the term “ecosystem” to speak effectively of this dynamic equilibrium and essential unity. As he explained: “It is the systems so formed which ... are the basic units of nature. Our natural human prejudices force us to consider the organisms as the most important parts of these systems, but certainly inorganic “factors” are also parts – there could be no systems without them, and there is constant interchange of the most various kinds within each system, not only between the organisms but between the organic and the inorganic. These ecosystems, as we may call them, are the most various kinds and sizes. They form one category of the multitudinous physical systems of the universe, which range from the universe as a whole down to the atom.”¹⁸

And, in an image of how Marxist dialectics can help us understand the constant motion and interconnectivity of life processes, Tansley goes on to explain how “the systems we isolate mentally are not only included as parts of larger ones, but they also overlap, interlock, and interact with one another.”¹⁹

These examples illustrate that a central preoccupation of socialists, beginning with Marx and Engels, but including scientists and leading Bolsheviks from the 1920s among others, has been our relationship to the environment. Socialists have made serious and fundamental contributions to ecological or “green” thought and practice. In addition, socialists were thinking along these lines and were able to make these contributions precisely because they were socialists. Marxism provides by far the best framework for understanding the concept of sustainability.

This is in contrast with much of green thought that for far too long has neglected the issue of class and the nature of the economic system. Many people truly concerned with environmental degradation and global warming view sustainability through the lens of individual responsibility – working within the system to reduce one’s personal carbon footprint, biking to work, not eating meat, making sure to recycle, or not drinking bottled water. There is a focus on individual lifestyle changes in order to show in practice what an alternative, more sustainable life would look like and prefigure a sustainable world, one person at a time. I am all for making those personal choices if you can, but it shouldn’t be confused with a political strategy that will actually bring about the change everyone wants to see.

Marx was concerned with taking a long-term view of the earth more than a century before the UN discovered a problem. In the third volume of *Capital* he essentially defines sustainability: “From the standpoint of a higher socio-economic formation, the private property of

particular individuals in the earth will appear just as absurd as the private property of one man in other men. Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together, are not owners of the earth, they are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations, as *boni patres familias* (good heads of household)].”²⁰

Nature and society cannot be seen as diametrically opposed but should co-develop with one another as natural history and human history become different aspects of the same thing. For Marx it was necessary to heal the “metabolic rift,” to use his term, created by capitalism between humanity and nature. ●

Williams is an environmental activist and professor of physics and chemistry at Pace University, New York. This article, which appeared in the International Socialist Review, is taken from his book Ecology and Socialism: Solutions to Capitalist Ecological Crisis (Haymarket Books, 2010).

Endnotes

1. Frederick Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1910) chap.
2. For articulate challenges to these assumptions, see, for example, John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology: Materialism and Nature* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000); Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature*; and Burkett, *Marxism and Ecological Economics: Toward a Red and Green Political Economy* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2009).
3. For details on how Marxism became distorted by states calling themselves socialist and how the Soviet Union decayed into a state-run dictatorship of extreme exploitation and oppression see John Molyneux, *What Is the Real Marxist Tradition?* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2003) and Anthony Arno et al., *Russia: From Workers' State to*

State Capitalism (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2003).

4. "We are fifty to a hundred years behind the advanced countries. We have to make good this distance in ten years. Either we do this or they crush us." Quoted in J. Miller, "A Political Economy of Socialism in the Making," *Soviet Studies* 4, no. 4 (April 1953): 418.

5. Frederick Engels, "The Part Played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man," in *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (New York: International Publishers, 2007), 260–61.

6. *Ibid.*

7. Leon Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973), 317.

8. Quoted in Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 132.

9. Quoted in James Gustave Speth, *The Bridge at the End of the World: Capitalism, The Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability* (New Haven, CT.: Yale University Press, 2008), 56.

10. Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 505–07.

11. Quoted in Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 72.

12. *Ibid.*, 112.

13. Engels, "Part Played by Labour."

14. Vladimir Vernadsky, *The Biosphere* (New York: Nevrault Publishing Company, 1998), 57.

15. Trofim Lysenko was the director of the Lenin All-Union Academy of Agricultural Sciences under Stalin. His theories of vernalisation backed the disproven ideas of Lamarck concerning acquired characteristics. Lysenkoism has become synonymous with the idea of science and scientists backing certain scientific ideas based on their political expediency rather than their scientific rigor.

16. Douglas Weiner, *Models of Nature: Ecology, Conservation and Cultural Revolution*

in Soviet Russia (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh, 2000), 27. Information in this section, including the Podiapolsky quote, is taken from here.

17. *Ibid.*, 169.

18. A. G. Tansley, "The Ecosystem," reprinted in *Keeping Things Whole: Readings in Environmental Science* (Chicago: Great Books Foundation, 2003), 191.

19. Quoted in John Bellamy Foster, *The Ecological Revolution: Making Peace with the Planet* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 159.

20. *Ibid.*, 181.

MARX BICENTENARY

Marx predicted today's crises – and the solution

This is a shortened version of **Yanis Varoufakis'** introduction to the *Communist Manifesto*, published by Vintage Classics in April 2018

The *Communist Manifesto* foresaw the predatory and polarised global capitalism of the 21st century. But Marx and Engels also showed us that we have the power to create a better world.

For a manifesto to succeed, it must speak to our hearts like a poem while infecting the mind with images and ideas that are dazzlingly new. It needs to open our eyes to the true causes of the bewildering, disturbing, exciting changes occurring around us, exposing the possibilities with which our current reality is pregnant. It should make us feel hopelessly inadequate for not having recognised these truths ourselves, and it must lift the curtain on the unsettling realisation that we have been acting as petty accomplices, reproducing a dead-end past. Lastly, it needs to have the power of a Beethoven symphony, urging us to become agents of a future that ends unnecessary mass suffering and to inspire humanity to realise its potential for authentic freedom.

No manifesto has better succeeded in doing all this than that published in February 1848 at 46 Liverpool Street, London. Commissioned by English revolutionaries, the *Communist Manifesto* (or the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, as it was first published) was authored by two young Germans – Karl Marx, a 29-year-old philosopher with a taste for

epicurean hedonism and Hegelian rationality, and Friedrich Engels, a 28-year-old heir to a Manchester mill.

As a work of political literature, the manifesto remains unsurpassed. Its most infamous lines, including the opening one (“A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism”), have a Shakespearean quality. Like Hamlet confronted by the ghost of his slain father, the reader is compelled to wonder: “Should I conform to the prevailing order, suffering the slings and arrows of the outrageous fortune bestowed upon me by history’s irresistible forces? Or should I join these forces, taking up arms against the status quo and, by opposing it, usher in a brave new world?”

For Marx and Engels’ immediate readership, this was not an academic dilemma, debated in the salons of Europe. Their manifesto was a call to action, and heeding this spectre’s invocation often meant persecution or, in some cases, lengthy imprisonment. Today, a similar dilemma faces young people: conform to an established order that is crumbling and incapable of reproducing itself, or oppose it, at considerable personal cost, in search of new ways of working, playing and living together? Although many communist parties have disappeared from the political scene, the spirit of communism driving the manifesto is proving hard to silence.

To see beyond the horizon is any manifesto’s ambition. But to succeed as Marx and Engels did in accurately describing an era that would arrive a century-and-a-half in the future, as well as to analyse the contradictions and choices we face today, is truly astounding. In the late 1840s, capitalism was foundering, local, fragmented, and timid. And yet Marx and Engels took one long look at it and foresaw our globalised, financialised, ironclad, all-singing-all-dancing capitalism. This was the creature that came into being after 1991, at the very same moment the establishment was proclaiming the death of Marxism and the end of history¹.

Of course, the predictive failure of *The Communist Manifesto* has long been exaggerated. Even left-wing economists in the early 1970s challenged the pivotal manifesto prediction that capital would “nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish connexions everywhere”. Drawing upon the sad reality of what were then called Third World countries, they argued that capital had lost its fizz well before expanding beyond its “metropolis” in Europe, America and Japan.

Empirically they were correct: European, US and Japanese multinational corporations operating in the “peripheries” of Africa, Asia and Latin America were confining themselves to the role of colonial resource extractors and failing to spread capitalism there. Instead of imbuing these countries with capitalist development (drawing “all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation”), they argued that foreign capital was reproducing the development of underdevelopment in the Third World. It was as if the manifesto had placed too much faith in capital’s ability to spread into every nook and cranny. Most economists, including those sympathetic to Marx, doubted the manifesto’s prediction that “exploitation of the world-market” would give “a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country”.

As it turned out, the manifesto was right, albeit belatedly. It would take the collapse of the Soviet Union and the insertion of two billion Chinese and Indian workers into the capitalist labour market for its prediction to be vindicated. Indeed, for capital to globalise fully, the regimes that pledged allegiance to the manifesto had first to be torn asunder. Has history ever procured a more delicious irony?

Anyone reading the manifesto today will be surprised to discover a picture of a world much like our own, teetering fearfully on the edge of technological innovation. In the manifesto’s time, it was the steam engine that posed the greatest challenge to the rhythms and routines of feudal life. The peasantry were swept into the cogs and wheels of

this machinery and a new class of masters, the factory owners and the merchants, usurped the landed gentry's control over society. Now, it is artificial intelligence and automation that loom as disruptive threats, promising to sweep away "all fixed, fast-frozen relations". "Constantly revolutionising ... instruments of production," the manifesto proclaims, transform "the whole relations of society", bringing about "constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation".

For Marx and Engels, however, this disruption is to be celebrated. It acts as a catalyst for the final push humanity needs to do away with our remaining prejudices that underpin the great divide between those who own the machines and those who design, operate and work with them. "All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned," they write in the manifesto of technology's effect, "and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses, his real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind". By ruthlessly vaporising our preconceptions and false certainties, technological change is forcing us, kicking and screaming, to face up to how pathetic our relations with one another are.

Today, we see this reckoning in millions of words, in print and on-line, used to debate globalisation's discontents. While celebrating how globalisation has shifted billions from abject poverty to relative poverty, venerable western newspapers, Hollywood personalities, Silicon Valley entrepreneurs, bishops and even multibillionaire financiers all lament some of its less desirable ramifications: unbearable inequality, brazen greed, climate change, and the hijacking of our parliamentary democracies by bankers and the ultra-rich.

None of this should surprise a reader of the manifesto. "Society as a whole," it argues, "is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps, into two great classes directly facing each other." As production is mechanised, and the profit margin of the machine-owners becomes

our civilisation's driving motive, society splits between non-working shareholders and non-owner wage-workers. As for the middle class, it is the dinosaur in the room, set for extinction.

At the same time, the ultra-rich become guilt-ridden and stressed as they watch everyone else's lives sink into the precariousness of insecure wage-slavery. Marx and Engels foresaw that this supremely powerful minority would eventually prove "unfit to rule" over such polarised societies, because they would not be in a position to guarantee the wage-slaves a reliable existence. Barricaded in their gated communities, they find themselves consumed by anxiety and incapable of enjoying their riches. Some of them, those smart enough to realise their true long-term self-interest, recognise the welfare state as the best available insurance policy. But alas, explains the manifesto, as a social class, it will be in their nature to skimp on the insurance premium, and they will work tirelessly to avoid paying the requisite taxes.

Is this not what has transpired? The ultra-rich are an insecure, permanently disgruntled clique, constantly in and out of detox clinics, relentlessly seeking solace from psychics, shrinks and entrepreneurial gurus. Meanwhile, everyone else struggles to put food on the table, pay tuition fees, juggle one credit card for another or fight depression. We act as if our lives are carefree, claiming to like what we do and do what we like. Yet in reality, we cry ourselves to sleep.

Do-gooders, establishment politicians and recovering academic economists all respond to this predicament in the same way, issuing fiery condemnations of the symptoms (income inequality) while ignoring the causes (exploitation resulting from the unequal property rights over machines, land, resources). Is it any wonder we are at an impasse, wallowing in hopelessness that only serves the populists seeking to court the worst instincts of the masses?

With the rapid rise of advanced technology, we are brought closer to

the moment when we must decide how to relate to each other in a rational, civilised manner. We can no longer hide behind the inevitability of work and the oppressive social norms it necessitates. The manifesto gives its 21st-century reader an opportunity to see through this mess and to recognise what needs to be done so that the majority can escape from discontent into new social arrangements in which “the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all”. Even though it contains no roadmap of how to get there, the manifesto remains a source of hope not to be dismissed.

If the manifesto holds the same power to excite, enthuse and shame us that it did in 1848, it is because the struggle between social classes is as old as time itself. Marx and Engels summed this up in 13 audacious words: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles.”

From feudal aristocracies to industrialised empires, the engine of history has always been the conflict between constantly revolutionising technologies and prevailing class conventions. With each disruption of society’s technology, the conflict between us changes form. Old classes die out and eventually only two remain standing: the class that owns everything and the class that owns nothing – the bourgeoisie and the proletariat.

This is the predicament in which we find ourselves today. While we owe capitalism for having reduced all class distinctions to the gulf between owners and non-owners, Marx and Engels want us to realise that capitalism is insufficiently evolved to survive the technologies it spawns. It is our duty to tear away at the old notion of privately owned means of production and force a metamorphosis, which must involve the social ownership of machinery, land and resources. Now, when new technologies are unleashed in societies bound by the primitive labour contract, wholesale misery follows. In the manifesto’s unforgettable

words: “A society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.”

The sorcerer will always imagine that their apps, search engines, robots and genetically engineered seeds will bring wealth and happiness to all. But, once released into societies divided between wage labourers and owners, these technological marvels will push wages and prices to levels that create low profits for most businesses. It is only big tech, big pharma and the few corporations that command exceptionally large political and economic power over us that truly benefit. If we continue to subscribe to labour contracts between employer and employee, then private property rights will govern and drive capital to inhuman ends. Only by abolishing private ownership of the instruments of mass production and replacing it with a new type of common ownership that works in sync with new technologies, will we lessen inequality and find collective happiness.

According to Marx and Engels’ 13-word theory of history, the current stand-off between worker and owner has always been guaranteed. “Equally inevitable,” the manifesto states, is the bourgeoisie’s “fall and the victory of the proletariat”. So far, history has not fulfilled this prediction, but critics forget that the manifesto, like any worthy piece of propaganda, presents hope in the form of certainty. Just as Lord Nelson rallied his troops before the Battle of Trafalgar by announcing that England “expects” them to do their duty (even if he had grave doubts that they would), the manifesto bestows upon the proletariat the expectation that they will do their duty to themselves, inspiring them to unite and liberate one another from the bonds of wage-slavery.

Will they? On current form, it seems unlikely. But, then again, we had to wait for globalisation to appear in the 1990s before the mani-

festos's estimation of capital's potential could be fully vindicated. Might it not be that the new global, increasingly precarious proletariat needs more time before it can play the historic role the manifesto anticipated? While the jury is still out, Marx and Engels tell us that, if we fear the rhetoric of revolution, or try to distract ourselves from our duty to one another, we will find ourselves caught in a vertiginous spiral in which capital saturates and bleaches the human spirit. The only thing we can be certain of, according to the manifesto, is that unless capital is socialised we are in for dystopic developments.

On the topic of dystopia, the sceptical reader will perk up: what of the manifesto's own complicity in legitimising authoritarian regimes and steeling the spirit of gulag guards? Instead of responding defensively, pointing out that no one blames Adam Smith for the excesses of Wall Street, or the New Testament for the Spanish Inquisition, we can speculate how the authors of the manifesto might have answered this charge. I believe that, with the benefit of hindsight, Marx and Engels would confess to an important error in their analysis: insufficient reflexivity. This is to say that they failed to give sufficient thought, and kept a judicious silence, over the impact their own analysis would have on the world they were analysing.

The manifesto told a powerful story in uncompromising language, intended to stir readers from their apathy. What Marx and Engels failed to foresee was that powerful, prescriptive texts have a tendency to procure disciples, believers – a priesthood, even – and that this faithful might use the power bestowed upon them by the manifesto to their own advantage. With it, they might abuse other comrades, build their own power base, gain positions of influence, bed impressionable students, take control of the politburo and imprison anyone who resists them.

Similarly, Marx and Engels failed to estimate the impact of their writ-

ing on capitalism itself. To the extent that the manifesto helped fashion the Soviet Union, its eastern European satellites, Castro's Cuba, Tito's Yugoslavia and several social democratic governments in the west, would these developments not cause a chain reaction that would frustrate the manifesto's predictions and analysis? After the Russian revolution and then World War II, the fear of communism forced capitalist regimes to embrace pension schemes, national health services, even the idea of making the rich pay for poor and petit bourgeois students to attend purpose-built liberal universities. Meanwhile, rabid hostility to the Soviet Union stirred up paranoia and created a climate of fear that proved particularly fertile for figures such as Joseph Stalin and Pol Pot.

I believe Marx and Engels would have regretted not anticipating the manifesto's impact on the communist parties it foreshadowed. They would be kicking themselves that they overlooked the kind of dialectic they loved to analyse: how workers' states would become increasingly totalitarian in their response to capitalist state aggression, and how, in their response to the fear of communism, these capitalist states would grow increasingly civilised.

Blessed, of course, are the authors whose errors result from the power of their words. Even more blessed are those whose errors are self-correcting. In our present day, the workers' states inspired by the manifesto are almost gone, and the communist parties disbanded or in disarray. Liberated from competition with regimes inspired by the manifesto, globalised capitalism is behaving as if it is determined to create a world best explained by the manifesto.

What makes the manifesto truly inspiring today is its recommendation for us in the here and now, in a world where our lives are being constantly shaped by what Marx described in his earlier *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* as "a universal energy which breaks every limit and every bond and posits itself as the only policy, the only uni-

versality, the only limit and the only bond”. From Uber drivers and finance ministers to banking executives and the wretchedly poor, we can all be excused for feeling overwhelmed by this “energy”. Capitalism’s reach is so pervasive it can sometimes seem impossible to imagine a world without it. It is only a small step from feelings of impotence to falling victim to the assertion there is no alternative. But, astonishingly (claims the manifesto), it is precisely when we are about to succumb to this idea that alternatives abound.

What we don’t need at this juncture are sermons on the injustice of it all, denunciations of rising inequality or vigils for our vanishing democratic sovereignty. Nor should we stomach desperate acts of regressive escapism: the cry to return to some pre-modern, pre-technological state where we can cling to the bosom of nationalism. What the manifesto promotes in moments of doubt and submission is a clear-headed, objective assessment of capitalism and its ills, seen through the cold, hard light of rationality.

The manifesto argues that the problem with capitalism is not that it produces too much technology, or that it is unfair. Capitalism’s problem is that it is irrational. Capital’s success at spreading its reach via accumulation for accumulation’s sake is causing human workers to work like machines for a pittance, while the robots are programmed to produce stuff that the workers can no longer afford and the robots do not need. Capital fails to make rational use of the brilliant machines it engenders, condemning whole generations to deprivation, a decrepit environment, underemployment and zero real leisure from the pursuit of employment and general survival. Even capitalists are turned into angst-ridden automatons. They live in permanent fear that unless they commodify their fellow humans, they will cease to be capitalists – joining the desolate ranks of the expanding precariat-proletariat².

If capitalism appears unjust it is because it enslaves everyone, rich

and poor, wasting human and natural resources. The same “production line” that pumps out untold wealth also produces deep unhappiness and discontent on an industrial scale. So, our first task – according to the manifesto – is to recognise the tendency of this all-conquering “energy” to undermine itself.

When asked by journalists who or what is the greatest threat to capitalism today, I defy their expectations by answering: capital! Of course, this is an idea I have been plagiarising for decades from the manifesto. Given that it is neither possible nor desirable to annul capitalism’s “energy”, the trick is to help speed up capital’s development (so that it burns up like a meteor rushing through the atmosphere) while, on the other hand, resisting (through rational, collective action) its tendency to steamroller our human spirit. In short, the manifesto’s recommendation is that we push capital to its limits while limiting its consequences and preparing for its socialisation.

We need more robots, better solar panels, instant communication and sophisticated green transport networks. But equally, we need to organise politically to defend the weak, empower the many and prepare the ground for reversing the absurdities of capitalism. In practical terms, this means treating the idea that there is no alternative with the contempt it deserves while rejecting all calls for a “return” to a less modernised existence.

There was nothing ethical about life under earlier forms of capitalism. TV shows that massively invest in calculated nostalgia, such as *Downton Abbey*, should make us glad to live when we do. At the same time, they might also encourage us to floor the accelerator of change.

The manifesto is one of those emotive texts that speak to each of us differently at different times, reflecting our own circumstances. Some years ago, I called myself an erratic, libertarian Marxist and I was roundly disparaged by non-Marxists and Marxists alike. Soon after, I

found myself thrust into a political position of some prominence, during a period of intense conflict between the then Greek government and some of capitalism's most powerful agents. Re-reading the manifesto for the purposes of writing this introduction has been a little like inviting the ghosts of Marx and Engels to yell a mixture of censure and support in my ear.

Adults in the Room, my memoir of the time I served as Greece's finance minister in 2015, tells the story of how the Greek spring was crushed via a combination of brute force (on the part of Greece's creditors) and a divided front within my own government. It is as honest and accurate as I could make it. Seen from the perspective of the manifesto, however, the true historical agents were confined to cameo appearances or to the role of quasi-passive victims. "Where is the proletariat in your story?" I can almost hear Marx and Engels screaming at me now. "Should they not be the ones confronting capitalism's most powerful, with you supporting from the sidelines?"

Thankfully, re-reading the manifesto has offered some solace too, endorsing my view of it as a liberal text – a libertarian one, even. Where the manifesto lambasts bourgeois-liberal virtues, it does so because of its dedication and even love for them. Liberty, happiness, autonomy, individuality, spirituality, self-guided development are ideals that Marx and Engels valued above everything else. If they are angry with the bourgeoisie, it is because the bourgeoisie seeks to deny the majority any opportunity to be free. Given Marx and Engels' adherence to Hegel's fantastic idea that no one is free as long as one person is in chains, their quarrel with the bourgeoisie is that they sacrifice everybody's freedom and individuality on capitalism's altar of accumulation.

Although Marx and Engels were not anarchists, they loathed the state and its potential to be manipulated by one class to suppress another. At best, they saw it as a necessary evil that would live on in the

good, post-capitalist future coordinating a classless society. If this reading of the manifesto holds water, the only way of being a communist is to be a libertarian one. Heeding the manifesto's call to "Unite!" is in fact inconsistent with becoming card-carrying Stalinists or with seeking to remake the world in the image of now-defunct communist regimes.

When everything is said and done, then, what is the bottom line of the manifesto? And why should anyone, especially young people today, care about history, politics and the like?

Marx and Engels based their manifesto on a touchingly simple answer: authentic human happiness and the genuine freedom that must accompany it. For them, these are the only things that truly matter. Their manifesto does not rely on strict Germanic invocations of duty, or appeals to historic responsibilities to inspire us to act. It does not moralise, or point its finger. Marx and Engels attempted to overcome the fixations of German moral philosophy and capitalist profit motives, with a rational, yet rousing, appeal to the very basics of our shared human nature.

Key to their analysis is the ever-expanding chasm between those who produce and those who own the instruments of production. The problematic nexus of capital and waged labour stops us from enjoying our work and our artefacts, and turns employers and workers, rich and poor, into mindless, quivering pawns who are being quick-marched towards a pointless existence by forces beyond our control.

But why do we need politics to deal with this? Isn't politics stultifying, especially socialist politics, which Oscar Wilde once claimed "takes up too many evenings"? Marx and Engels' answer is: because we cannot end this idiocy individually; because no market can ever emerge that will produce an antidote to this stupidity. Collective, democratic political action is our only chance for freedom and enjoyment. And for this, the long nights seem a small price to pay.

Humanity may succeed in securing social arrangements that allow for “the free development of each” as the “condition for the free development of all”. But, then again, we may end up in the “common ruin” of nuclear war, environmental disaster or agonising discontent. In our present moment, there are no guarantees. We can turn to the manifesto for inspiration, wisdom and energy but, in the end, what prevails is up to us. ●

Varoufakis is a Greek economist, academic and politician, who served as the Greek Minister of Finance from January to July 2015

Endnotes

1 See, for example, Francis Fukuyama’s *The end of history and the last man* (1992): “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution ...”

2 “Precariat” refers to the increasing numbers of people among the proletariat who depend on temporary work and have neither work security nor related labour rights.

SAMIR AMIN

Towards a new internationalism

Egyptian-born **Samir Amin**, who died on 12 August at 86, was one of the world's great revolutionary thinkers, contributing to our understanding how the imperialist North exploits the capitalist 'periphery' (the Third World).

This interview, by Indian journalists Jipson John and Jitheesh PM for their journal *Frontline*, was his last, a few months before his death. In it, Amin focuses on the need to overhaul the current sorry state of Left internationalism into a Fifth International. Amin, director of Third World Forum for 40 years and chair of the World Forum for Alternatives, was a prolific writer and a pioneer of dependency theory in the 1970s, demonstrating how resource flow from the countries of the periphery enriches the core countries of the North.

He argued that this process, which he termed 'imperialist rent', prompted the emergence of 20th century liberation struggles in the South. He hoped for a similar resistance from the South to monopoly finance capital in this century, arguing that capitalism has had two protracted crises – from 1871 to 1945 (triggering Third World liberation struggles), and from 1971 (and ongoing). The material conditions of what he terms capitalism's 'obsolete stage' keeps alive the necessity of socialism as a choice before humanity, Amin argues, declaring that if we are to emerge from this 'long tunnel', it will be into socialism, a society able to transcend 'the legacy of unequal development inherent to capitalism' by offering 'all human beings a better mastery of their social development'.

Q You define contemporary globalisation as part and parcel of the generalised monopoly capitalism of our age. How do you trace and locate the history of this globalisation?

A Globalisation is nothing new. It is an old and important dimension of capitalism. You Indians would know better than anyone else. You have been conquered and colonised by the British starting in the 18th century and ending in the 20th century. That was also globalisation. Not the globalisation you wanted, but you were integrated into the global capitalist system. Colonisation was one form of globalisation. But the people of India struggled against it and reconquered their Independence even under a leadership which was not a socialist revolutionary leadership but was a national-populist leadership of Gandhi and Nehru. The Congress party, which was founded at the end of the 19th century, developed its actions in the 20th century until you reconquered your Independence in 1947 but at two costs. First, an important part of India, which now happens to be Pakistan and Bangladesh, of the western and eastern part of the country, was separated from India. That was a criminal act of the colonialist. The second thing during the reconquering of your Independence is that it was reconquered by the bourgeoisie of India led by the Congress party with a wide popular alliance, including the alliance of the working class. After Independence in 1947, we had another pattern of globalisation. A pattern of globalisation that I would call *negotiated globalisation* resulted in the *Bandung Conference of 1955*. In 1955, the representatives of the people of China, India, Indonesia and a number of other countries met for the first time in Indonesia. It was just a few years after India reconquered its Independence, a few years after the Chinese Communist Party had entered Beijing; it was also a few years after Indonesia reconquered its independence from the Dutch.

Then we witnessed another pattern of globalisation. It is usually fashionable today to say that globalisation after World War II was bipolar between the United States and the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] and that bi-polity was accompanied by the so-called Cold War between the two. That is basically wrong. The globalisation we had after World War II, to say from 1945 to 1980 or 1990, is what I have called *negotiated globalisation*. It was not between the US and the USSR but between a number of partners, at least four families of partners: one, the imperialist alliance of the US and Western Europe with their allies Japan, Australia and Canada. The second actor was indeed the Soviet Union with its allies from Eastern Europe at that time. The third actor was China, which, in spite of belonging to the so-called socialist camp, had from 1950 a policy which was clearly independent. The other partners were the countries that met at Bandung, which created the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). This was a camp of not only Asian countries but included most of the newly independent countries of Africa at that time.

The Portuguese colonies joined later and South Africa also joined later. Cuba was the only country from Latin America, which joined the group. I call the regimes of the fourth family national-populist systems of India, of Nasser's Egypt¹, of Algeria and a number of countries of Asia and Africa. Therefore, we had another pattern of globalisation, which was a multipolar globalisation, negotiated between the four families of partners.

From the point of view of the people of Asia and Africa, that was a time when imperialism was compelled to make concessions and to accept the national-popular programmes of India and other Asian and African countries. Instead of the countries of the South adjusting to the needs and demands of globalisation, it was the imperialist countries which were compelled to adjust to our demands. That

was *negotiated globalisation* between the imperialist countries on the one hand and the countries of the socialist bloc, including the Soviet Union and China and also most of the countries of the South, on the other. *Negotiated globalisation* of that period, which is usually called the 30 years of post-World War II, had three pillars: one was the Western, particularly European and also North American and Japanese, pattern of so-called welfare states which was a result of the victory of the working class, particularly in Europe the victory of the working classes for their role in the defeat of fascism and Nazism along with the Red Army.

The second was the variety of socialist experiences: the Soviet pattern and the Chinese pattern, and we can also add the Vietnamese and Cuban patterns of socialism. We also had a third pillar of India, of the Congress at the time of Nehru, and after Nehru, Indira Gandhi in particular. It was also a time of Nasserian Egypt and also of the so-called socialist advances in many of the Middle East [West Asia] countries and Africa. The three pillars went out of these progressively and reached historical limits, and they gradually broke down. Some breakdowns were brutal, like the Soviet Union in 1991. Not only was the country divided and split into 15 republics, the majority of which moved to Europe and entered the European Union and Nato [North Atlantic Treaty Organisation] but social democracy in the West was also defeated. I mean the defeat of the communists in the East was not the victory of social democracy in the West. It was also the defeat of the social democracy of the West, which became social liberal.

Now there is no difference between social democratic or socialist ruling in Western Europe and the normal, traditional right party's ruling. They are all social liberals. It means that they are in alliance with the policies of *global monopoly capital*.

The third pillar, our pillar, also broke down in different ways. In some cases there are coups d'état. In cases such as India, they are moving right and accepting the new conditions and patterns of the so-called liberal globalisation. That was the case with India under Indira Gandhi and more so under her successors. It was similar in the case of Egypt also. After the death of Nasser, Anwar Sadat said (who was the first one to say) that we had nothing to do with this “bullshit” called socialism, and we shall go back to capitalism, go back to the alliance with the US and others. The Chinese went their way differently after the death of Mao [Zedong] and moved to a new pattern of globalisation but with some specificity. It is not only the political specificity of the communist party maintaining its rule over China but also its economic-social specificities which differentiate China from India. The enormous difference between China and India is that China has done a radical revolution; India hasn't done that yet.

So we had a variety of patterns. And it is the breakdown of these three systems, the so-called social democracy in the West, the Soviet system and ours, which provides the conditions for imperialist capitalism to go on the offensive and enforce its new pattern of globalisation.

Q What are the characteristics of this new pattern of globalisation, what is its *modus operandi*?

A This increased offensive is not only related to our defeat of the socialists or communists or the national populists, it is also related to the changes in the imperialist-capitalist countries of Europe, the US and Japan. *Monopoly capitalism* is nothing new. *Monopoly capitalism* started at the end of the 19th century, as analysed by social democrats like John A Hobson and Rudolf Hilferding. But the political conclusions of Lenin at the time articulated that *monopoly capital* meant that capitalists moved to servility, and therefore on the agenda now were

socialist revolutions. Actually, all those socialist revolutions took place in the periphery of the global imperialist system.

Beginning in the semi-periphery, the *weakest link*, Russia, and then in real peripheries such as Vietnam and Cuba. But nothing happened in the West. There was no socialist revolution on the agenda in the US, in Western Europe or in Japan.

As far as *monopoly capital* is concerned, it is nothing new and it has moved through stages. The first stage of *monopoly capital* was from the end of the 19th century to World War II; that is a long period of more than half a century. During that period, *monopoly capital* was national in character. There was British imperialism, US imperialism, German imperialism, Japanese imperialism, French imperialism, etc. And they were not only conquering and subjugating the peripheries but also fighting among themselves. The struggle among themselves led to two World Wars. What has changed is that after World War II, progressively and suddenly as of the middle of the 1970s *monopoly capital* in the West moved to a new stage, which I would call the stage of generalised *monopoly capital*. Two things happened. One, *monopoly capital* was successful enough to submit all the other forms of social production to subcontract for it, which means that the value produced through human activities is to a large extent absorbed by *monopoly capital* in the form of imperialist rent and this happens with our countries also. In this new globalisation, our countries are invited to be subcontractors for imperialism.

Q What are the challenges posed by this globalisation for the countries of the South?

A The challenge for us today is to look and strive for the alternative. We have to move out of this pattern of globalisation. Globalisation has to be qualified. In the earlier days, it was colonial globalisa-

tion for India and other nations. After our victory, the victory of the people of India along with the victory of the Chinese and others, we have had *negotiated globalisation*. Now we are back to the so-called *liberal globalisation*, which is unilaterally decided by the countries of the G, that is the US, Europe and Japan. The challenge before us is not to accept this pattern of globalisation. Not to have illusions about this globalisation. For the African countries, this globalisation means plunder of their national resources of oil, gas, minerals and also arable land. For India, just as for many other countries of Latin America and South Asia, it takes other forms. This includes taking advantage of our cheap manpower, transferring the values created in our countries to the benefits of the monopoly rent of the imperialist system. This is the challenge before us.

Q You have written that capitalism has become obsolete. Are you saying that the end of capitalism is on the horizon? What makes capitalism an obsolete social system?

A There is a structural crisis of capitalism now. In the mid 1970s, the rates of growth of the capitalist developed centres, the US, Europe and Japan, fell to half of what they had been in the previous 30 years. And they have never recovered. This means that the crisis continues and is even deepening from year to year. And the announcements that we are moving out of the crisis because the growth rate in Germany or elsewhere is rising from 1.2 to 1.3 is just laughable.

This is a systemic crisis. It's an L-crisis. A U-crisis, which is the normal type of capitalist crisis, means that the same rationality that has led to the recession, after minor structural changes, brings back growth. An L-crisis means that the system cannot move up out of recession. It means that the system has to be changed. It's not only minor structural changes which are needed. It means that we have reached the point where

capitalism is moving into decline. But decline is a very dangerous time. Because, of course, capitalism will not wait quietly for its death. It will be more and more savage in order to maintain its position, to maintain the imperialist supremacy of the centres. And that is at the root of the problem. I don't know what people mean when they say "dangers of war are greater than ever". The war started in 1991, immediately after the breakdown of the Soviet Union, with the Iraq war.

There has also been war in Europe, with the breakdown of Yugoslavia. And now, in my opinion, we can see that the European system itself has started imploding. And you can see it not only in the negative results of austerity policies. Not only, of course, negative for the people but negative even for capitalism because they aren't bringing back growth, capitalist imperialist growth. They are not bringing it back at all. Simultaneously, you can see by a number of political responses which are not responding to the real challenges such as Brexit. You can see it in Spain and Catalonia, and you will see more and more such responses. You can see it with the ultra-reactionary chauvinistic governments of Eastern Europe.

Therefore, we cannot discuss how to prevent war because war and situations more chaotic are inscribed into the logic of this decaying system.

Q Economists like Thomas Piketty and others have empirically documented the magnitude of the growth of inequality. Piketty says that a universal wealth tax or progressive taxation is the mechanism to check it. Do you think that this solution is possible under capitalism?

A These data are correct or at least the best ones that could be found. Yet the analyses provided, coming after having presented the symptom reflecting the recognised fact (inequality growing fast in the last 50 years), remain weak to say the least. The fact that inequality is growing everywhere needs to be explained. Is there a unique reason for that? Is

the pattern of growing inequality similar for all countries? And if there are different patterns of inequality, why is it so? For instance, the [The World Inequality] Report [2018, by Thomas Piketty, Gabriel Zucman, Emmanuel Saez, Lucas Chancel and Facundo Alvaredo] does not make a distinction that I consider crucial, that makes the difference between, on the one hand, cases of inequality growing but accompanied by the growth of income for the whole population (or almost) and, on the other hand, inequality accompanied by pauperisation of the majority.

Comparing China and India is very significant in that respect. In China, the growth of income has been a reality for almost all the population even if that growth has been much higher for some than it has been for the others (the majority).

Therefore, in China, growing inequality has been accompanied by reduction of poverty. This is not the case for India, Brazil and almost all other countries of the South. In these countries, growth (and in some cases significant high growth) has benefited only a minority (from 1% in some cases such as Equatorial Guinea to 20% in cases such as India). But this growth has not benefited the majorities, who have even been pauperised. Some indicators suffer in this respect from being insufficient to show that difference, the Gini coefficient, for instance. China and India may have the same Gini coefficient, and yet the social meaning of the same apparent phenomenon (growing inequality) is very different.

The second thing is that the policy recommendations of the team are limited and perhaps even naive. Progressive taxation is certainly welcome in all cases. But it has a limited effect in its results as long as it is not supported by significant changes in the general economic policies. Progressive taxation along with the continuation of a so-called “liberal” policy allowing capital (which today is monopoly capital) to operate freely will give little results. Moreover, it will be considered

“impossible” and therefore be rejected by the rulers who are at the service of that monopoly capital.

The same can be said with respect to establishing minimum wages. This is welcome of course but will turn out to be of little effect as long as a liberal general economic policy is pursued. Wages will then suffer from inflation, reducing its reality. That is the argument given by the liberals to reject the mere idea of having minimum wages through legislation. More equal access to education and health must be the targets of any legitimate system of ruling the society. Moreover, it is a prerequisite for any serious attempt to “emerge”. But such a choice implies growing public expenditures, and liberalism considers such growth as unacceptable! Moving towards offering “better jobs” is therefore simply an empty phrase if it is not supported by systematic policies of industrialisation and of modernising family agriculture. China is partly attempting to do it, but not India.

Liberals insist on the need to reduce public debt. And the authors of the report support that view. Yet, the growth of public debt should be explained: of which policies is it the result? I submit that this growth is simply the unavoidable result of liberal policies. It is even wanted because it offers to excess capital opportunities for financial investment. Thirdly, the coordinators of the project are all liberal economists, as their other writings, which I happen to have known, show. That means that they do not question two issues which I consider decisive: 1) they believe in the virtues of an open free market as little regulated as possible by political interference and 2) they believe that there is no alternative to a pattern of open globalisation allowing as freely as possible capital moving from one country to another, and that is the precondition for global development and eventually poor countries catching up with the more developed. They are at best “reformist” of the [Joseph] Stiglitz type. They strongly believe that poor countries can “catch up”

with more developed ones by pursuing and even deepening their integration in the global capitalism system. Yet five centuries of history of continuous and deepening unequal development should at least lead to questioning this hypothesis.

Q Then what are your suggestions to check this alarming growth of inequality?

A I submit that liberalism precisely condemns any attempt to formulate realistic policies of an authentic development (i.e. a development to the benefit of the whole people) in order to remain shallow, to say the least. Any society (state power and people) which aims at “emerging” cannot avoid 1) entering into a long process of building a modern integrated industrial system centred on the internal popular demand as far as possible, 2) modernising family agriculture and ensuring food sovereignty, and 3) planning the association of the two targets identified above through a consistent non-liberal policy. That implies to imagine moving gradually on the long road to socialism.

Such policies imply, on the one hand, regulating the market and, on the other hand, controlling globalisation, i.e. struggling towards another pattern of globalisation, reducing as much as possible the negative effects of hegemonies. Exactly what [they are] the authors of the report do not imagine. Only such policies can create the conditions for eradicating poverty and eventually reducing inequalities. China is partly on this road; other countries of the South are not. In the absence of such a radical critique of liberalism, talks on poverty and inequality remain rhetorical and wishful thinking. The report does not move beyond that.

Q How to get out of the crisis of neoliberal globalisation is an important question. You suggest a delinking from globalisation as the basic edifice and

agenda of any alternative economic policy. How could we delink from the vortex of globalisation?

As you know delink is a slogan. I use it as a slogan. The actual problems of delinking are always relative. You cannot delink totally, or hundred%. But a gigantic country like China, India and some others can delink to a large extent, can delink 50% or delink 70%. The Soviet Union and China at the time of Mao had delinked 80 or 90% but not totally. Still, they had trade with Western countries and with others. Delink does not mean that you forget about the rest of the world and move to the moon. Nobody can do that, and it would not be rational to do that. Delinking only means compelling imperialism to accept your conditions or a part of those conditions. When the World Bank speaks of adjusting, it always has a unilateral vision of adjusting.

In the case of your country, today what we see is India adjusts to the demands of the US But India could choose the path of not adjusting to imperialism. This is what Nehru tried in his period. This is what Indira [Gandhi] tried successfully. This is no more what the present Modi-led government of India is trying to do. So you have to go back to delinking. And you can. You have the space for it. Of course, it is often true that some small countries in Africa or in Central America or some areas of Asia would have more difficulty delinking with others.

But if we recreate the atmosphere of the NAM, if we recreate the political solidarity between the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, then we are not minority. We represent 85% of humankind. And we shall represent more than 85% in a few decades. So we are not so weak. We can delink and we can successfully delink to various degrees in accordance not only with our size but also in accordance with our alternative political block, which would replace the core imperialist blocks which are holding our countries today.

Q There is a perception held by many people that initially colonialism and subsequently globalisation and integration of the peripheral Third World economies with the world market helped bring modernity to these societies. Could societies become modern without going through the stage of capitalist development?

A When Mr [Manmohan] Singh [former Indian Prime Minister] thanked the British for introducing the railways and other things, he said a very small and short part of the reality. Simultaneously, the British destroyed Indian industry, which was more advanced than British industry. It was destroyed. At the same time, the British colonial powers had turned those who had political power into economic power.

The zamindars, who were not owners of the land earlier but had collected only tributes and duties for various princely states in India from the peasant community and others, with the rule of the British became new landowners. This is how the class of big landowners was formed in the Bengal province in the east, Punjab province in the northwest and also in western and northern parts of India. They have done land grab also. Mr Singh should have remembered that the British introduced not only railways but brutality, destruction and oppression in different forms also.

We need to know what kind of modernity. Capitalist modernity or socialist modernity; both are modernity. We cannot simply speak of modernity and say global integration brings modernity. It brings perhaps the mobile telephone in India, but it also brings pauperisation of 80% of the Indians and that is not a small thing. So we have to qualify modernity. What do we want? Of course, we want modernity. And we should understand that the delinking is not a passage or it is not a going back to old India, colonial India. It is bringing a new pattern of modernity in India as well as elsewhere.

Q In your essay “The Return of Fascism in Contemporary Capitalism”, you make the argument that the crisis of contemporary capitalism creates fertile conditions for the return of fascism in the present world. This is evident from the emergence of various right-wing forces in different parts of the world. Are you pointing to a repetition of classical fascism?

A The system of so-called neoliberal globalisation is not sustainable. It creates a lot of resistance, heroic resistance in the South, and China is also trying to play with it. It has created a huge problem for the people of the US, Japan and also Europe. Therefore, it is not sustainable. Since it is not sustainable, the system is looking to fascism as a response to its growing weakness. That is why fascism has reappeared in the West. It is also exported to our countries. Terrorism in the name of Islam is a form of local fascism. And today you have in India Hinduist reactions. That is also a type of fascism.

Though India is a country where Hinduism is followed by the majority of its people, those who did not refer to Hinduism are also equally accepted. Now the new regime in India, which I would call a kind of semi-soft fascism, not so soft for everybody, can and will move harder and harder with the people of India. We have the same [situation in] almost all countries of the Islamic world, starting with Pakistan and moving to Iraq, Syria, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco and others. This is also penetrating now in many other countries.

Q What are the prospects and challenges for the Left in the contemporary political scenario?

A In my book *Ending the Crisis of Capitalism or Ending Capitalism?*, I say that we cannot move out of this pattern of crisis without starting to move out of the system itself. It’s a gigantic challenge. The solution will not be found in a few years anywhere, neither in the North nor in the South. It will take decades and decades. But the future starts

today. We cannot wait until the system has led to a gigantic war and ecological catastrophe to react. We have to react now.

This requires that the Left, the radical Left—or, I would say, the potential radical Left, which is much broader than the actual small number of heirs of the Third International, the communist parties and their milieu, much broader than that—acquires audacity. At present, there are resistance movements everywhere in the world, in some cases quite strong resistance movements. Working people are fighting perfectly legitimate struggles, but they are on the defensive. That is, they are trying to defend whatever they have gained in the past, which has gradually been eroded by the so-called neoliberalism. That is legitimate, but it is not enough. It is a defensive strategy which allows the power system of monopoly capital to maintain the initiative. But we have to move from there to a positive strategy, that is to an offensive strategy, and reverse the relation of power. Compel the enemy—the power systems—to respond to you instead of you responding to them. And take the initiative away from them. I am not arrogant. I have no blueprint in my pocket for what a communist in Austria should do, for what communists in China or those in Egypt, my country, should do.

But we have to discuss it frankly, openly. We have to suggest strategies, discuss them, test them and correct them. This is life and struggle. We cannot stop. I want to say that what we all need in the first place is audacity!

Now, it can start to change if the popular movements move from resistance to an aggressive alternative. That could happen in some countries. It has started happening, but only in some countries of Europe: Greece, Spain and Portugal. In Greece, we have seen that the European system defeated that first attempt. And the European people, even those who are very sympathetic to the Greek movement, have been unable to mobilise an opinion strong enough to change the attitude of Europe. That is a lesson. Audacious movements have to start, and

I think they will start in different countries. I discussed this with, for instance, people from “La France Insoumise”.

I did not propose blueprints, but I generally pointed to strategies starting with the renationalisation of big monopolies and specifically financial and banking institutions. But I’m saying that renationalisation is only the first step. It is the precondition for eventually being able to move to the socialisation of the management of the economic system. If it stops at the level of just nationalisation, well then you have state capitalism, which is not very different from private capitalism. That would deceive the people. But if conceived as a first step, it opens the road.

Capitalism has reached a level of concentration of power, economic and therefore also political power, that is not comparable to 50 years ago. A handful, a few tens of thousands, of enormously large companies and a smaller handful, less than 20, of major banking institutions alone decide on everything. Francois Morin, a top financial expert who knows this field, has said that less than 20 financial groups control 90% of the operations of the global integrated monetary and financial system. If you add to this some 15 other banks, you go from 90% to some 98%. It is a mere handful of banks. That is centralisation, concentration of power, not of property, which remains disseminated, but that’s of less importance; the point is how property is controlled. This has also led to control of political life. We are now far from what the bourgeois democracy of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century was.

We have now a one-party system. With the social democrats having become social liberals, there is absolutely no difference between the conventional Right and the conventional Left. That means we are living in a one-party system, as is the case in the United States where Democrats and Republicans have always been one party. This was not the case in Europe, and therefore, capitalism in the past could be re-

formed. The social democratic welfare reforms after World War II were big reforms. In my view, they were progressive reforms even if they were associated with the maintenance of an imperialist attitude *vis-a-vis* the countries of the South. Now this is becoming impossible, and you can see it in the one-party system, which is losing legitimacy. But this also opens up a drift to fascism, to neofascism, which is on the rise everywhere, in the North and the South. This is one of the reasons why we have to dismantle this system before reconstructing it.

Q Can these isolated struggles in different countries pose any challenge to generalised monopoly capital, which is truly international in character? What about the need for some kind of international cooperation or for the spirit of internationalism of the struggling masses?

A I think that we need a Fifth International. We not only need a revival of internationalism as a fundamental part of the ideology of the future, but we also must organise it, that is, try to interconnect the struggles in different countries. Now, this international cannot be a reproduction of the Third. Because the Third International came after the victory of the October Revolution and a strong new state, the Soviet Union, and therefore survived, for better or worse, as a model for the others. We are not in such a position now, and therefore, we must imagine another pattern for the new international. If we look at the Second and Third Internationals—the Second up to the First World War, not after—they shared the idea of “one country, one party”—the correct party, all the others being “deviationists” or even “traitors”.

Moreover, when we look at the Second International, we discover that there was indeed one party in Germany, but this party was half-Marxian and half-Lasalleian. There was one party in France, but it [was] really associated [with] three currents. There was one party in Britain, but it was a mix of trade unionism and Fabianism. So they were differ-

ent from one another, but they all had in common their pro-imperialist colonialist attitudes and, as was proven in 1914, they worked with their bourgeoisies against one another. The Third International recognised only “one country one party”—the 21 conditions [for membership to Comintern]—all the others being traitors and revisionists.

Today, we are in a different situation. We have potentially radical, pro-socialist, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist forces, different in each country. We have to bring them together. We have to understand that what we share in common is more important than the differences among us. We have to discuss the differences and discuss them freely without arrogance and proclaiming: “I am right and you are wrong.” What we have in common is more important, and that should be the basis for reconstructing internationalism. I am saying that for the North and the South as well. Each has its specific conditions, and conditions are different from one country to another. The general view is similar but conditions are different. At any rate, this is my vision on how to start the process.

There are these ambiguities and we cannot avoid them. We shall have broad alliances with people who have never thought that socialism should be the answer to the crisis of capitalism. They will still think that capitalism can be reformed. So what? If we can work together against this capitalism as it is today, it will be a first step.

But we have to think ahead about how to create a Fifth International. I don't have a blueprint for this. It is not about establishing a secretariat or organisational leadership bodies. First, the comrades have to be convinced of the idea, which is not always the case. Second, Europeans have abandoned anti-imperialist solidarity and internationalism in favour of accepting the so-called aid and humanitarian interventions, including bombing people. That is not internationalism. I think that national policies—we use this word because there is no other word—

are still the result of struggles within the borders of countries. Whether these countries are indeed nation states or rather multinational states, they struggle within defined borders.

But the existing problems do not refute the idea that change has to start from the base and not from the top. And the base is the nation. Don't expect a United Nations conference with all the governments of this world deciding anything good and effective. That will never happen. Don't expect that even with respect to the European Union. It has to start from below. It is [about] changing the balance of forces within countries, which then starts changing the balance of forces at the international level. Therefore, the task for internationalist solidarity, that of a Fifth International, should be to minimise the conflictual aspects of these changes and make them complementary to one another. This is true internationalism. ●

Endnotes

1. Gamal Abdel Nasser Hussein, progressive and anti-imperialist president of Egypt from 1956 to 1970. He led the 1952 overthrow of the Egyptian monarchy and, as one of his first presidential actions, nationalised the Suez Canal.



WHERE TO CONTACT THE SACP

HEAD OFFICE

4th Floor Cosatu House
110 Jorissen Street
Braamfontein, 2017
JOHANNESBURG, 2000

Tel: (011) 339 3621/2

(011) 3393621/2

Website: www.sacp.org.za

Twitter: SACP1921

Facebook Page:

South African Communist

Party: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/South-African-Communist-Party/115354128489821>

EASTERN CAPE

Block A Unit 1 Bisho Business Village Siwani
Avenue BISHO, 5605

Tel/Fax: (040) 635 0463

Email: ecape@sacp.org.za

FREE STATE

1st Floor Moses Kotane Building
44 Fichardt Str, BLOEMFONTEIN, 9300

Fax: (051) 430 7571/4480303

Email: freestate@sacp.org.za

GAUTENG

4A Floor Samwu House
Cnr. Frederick & Von Brandis Str
JOHANNESBURG, 2000

Tel: (011) 333 9177

Fax: (011) 331 3017

Email: gauteng@sacp.org.za

LIMPOPO

Jorissen Street, Adams Forum
NUM HOUSE, 0700

Tel: (015) 297 8128

Fax: (015) 297 7643

Email: limpopo@sacp.org.za

MOSES MABHIDA

321 Anton Lembede Street 7th Floor SADTU
House DRBN

Tel: (031) 301 3806/301 3763

Fax: (031) 301 5470

Email: kzn@sacp.org.za

MOSES KOTANE

4th Floor; Room 406, Vannel Building, Cnr:
OR Tambo & Boom Street KLERKSDORP,
2570

Tel: (018) 462 5675/8230

Fax: (018) 462 5675/4322

Email: northwest@sacp.org.za

MPUMALANGA

NUM Offices, Smart Park Building
WITBANK

Tel: (013) 656 2045/73

Fax: (013) 690 1286

Email: mpumalanga@sacp.org.za

NORTHERN CAPE

17 Graham Street Street,
KIMBERLEY, 8300

Telefax (053) 831 4180

Email: ncape@sacp.org.za

WESTERN CAPE

No 8 Beverley Street Athlone,
Code: 7764 CT

Tel: 021 762 9719/9748

Fax: (021) 421 4170 / 424 4667

Email: wcape@sacp.org.za

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