

Bulletin of the
Communist Workers
Organisation

Affiliate of the
Internationalist
Communist Tendency

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AURORA



200 years on

Marx Still Haunts Capitalism

Karl Marx – political thinker, historical materialist, economic analyst of capitalism and its class society; above all, revolutionary fighter – was born in Trier, Germany on 5 May 1818. For anyone today fighting for an end to capitalism his life is cause for celebration. Marx's work enabled us to understand the basic dynamic of capitalism, its place in the history of civilisations, and learn from the historical ebb and flow of the class struggle. As Engels said at the grave-side of his friend:

Marx was before all else a revolutionary. His real mission in life was to contribute, in one way or another, to the overthrow of capitalist society and of the state institutions which it had brought into being, to contribute to the liberation of the modern proletariat, to make it conscious of its situation and its needs, and conscious of the

conditions for its own emancipation – that was his real life work.

Marx was not the first person to recognise the struggle between classes or to hold out the prospect of communism springing from the revolt of the oppressed against the powerful and wealthy who robbed them of the product of their toil. But when the *Communist Manifesto* was published in 1848 it was also revolutionary in a deeper sense. It took the age-old struggle for a classless society out of the realm of utopian dreams and millenarian uprisings and put it firmly onto historical, materialist ground.

It is fashionable to regard the *Manifesto* as a brilliant piece of prose by a young Marx before he became an intolerant dogmatist in later years. There is no denying the inspirational style of the document which Marx re-shaped out of Engels' drafts. From its famous opening: *A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism*, to its defiant: *Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win*, the *Manifesto* was a rallying call to the working class. This was a time when revolution was threatening the old feudal regimes throughout much of Europe, a time when the working class was already organising on its own account but not yet in a position to overthrow the rule of capital. But the *Manifesto* should not be dismissed as a romantic flight of fancy by an over-exuberant young Marx.

Ever since joining the Young Hegelians as a student at Berlin University Marx had devoted his considerable brain power to challenging existing institutions and ideas, including religion, philosophy, history, politics and the economic basis of society itself. Underpinning it all was the historical materialist approach which he and Engels worked out as they undermined and went beyond the Young Hegelians. Like all revolutionary ideas, historical materialism did not spring from nowhere and it is essentially uncomplicated. (In fact too straightforward for most academic Marxists.) Starting from the insight that ... *life involves before everything else eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life itself. ... the whole of human history appears in a different light. Instead of the actions of 'great men', the power of religious beliefs or the ideas of philosophers being the key to shaping the world, we can see that underlying it all is the class struggle over who controls the production and distribution of life's necessities. In this light the various civilisations of the past can be understood in terms of how one class in society – the people whose labour produces life's necessities – are denied ownership or control of the land, raw materials and tools they work with as well as the product of their labour. Much less than a 'social contract' the domination of the ruling class is reinforced by laws, religious precepts, military force – in other words, the state. So*

far all the epochal changes in history have been the result of the struggle of a rising class to consolidate their economic hold over the means of production by getting control of the state. However, when it comes to the proletariat, the working class, who live by wage labour whose numbers are growing with the expansion of capitalism:

They have nothing of their own to secure and to fortify;... All previous historical movements were movements of minorities, or in the interest of minorities. The proletarian movement is the self-conscious, independent movement of the immense majority, in the interest of the immense majority.

The only way we proletarians can become masters of society at large is by destroying the basis of our exploitation – i.e. capitalism and its wages system – by putting the means of production back into the hands of society as a whole so that everyone can participate in deciding how best to meet human needs. In the process the state, that weapon for securing the domination of one class over everyone else, will fade away as:

In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonism, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.

Need for Political Struggle

There is nothing inevitable about this. Marx's materialism is far from a religious creed. While it's true that his later economic studies enabled him to explain capitalism's inbuilt tendency to crisis and collapse, Marx never argued that capitalism's economic crisis would in itself lead to communism. On the contrary, precisely because the working class has no property to use to build up its own power within capitalism, the struggle for communism has to be a conscious political struggle where workers as a whole can see the prospect of a different world beyond their day-to-day skirmishes with capital. In other words, the onus is on the Communists, those who have the advantage of clearly understanding the line of march, the conditions, and the ultimate general results of the proletarian movement to form a distinct political party which will spearhead the struggle.

This is not to say that the communist programme was set in stone in 1848. Marxism is nothing if not a method to learn and preserve the lessons from historical experience in order to frame a clear guide for action to the wider working class movement. Marx devoted much of his life to the First International whose members accepted that, *"To conquer political power has therefore become the great duty of the working class."* [Marx's Inaugural Address, November 1864] When it collapsed after the defeat of the Paris Commune the historical calamity is that this was due to Marx's 'statism'. (For the anarchists the need for political

struggle was equated with taking over the existing state.) Nothing could be further from the truth. As the International at first accepted:

One thing was especially proved by the Commune, viz, that "the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery and wield it for its own purposes."

[*The Civil War in France*; Address of the General Council of the International Workingmen's Association, written by Marx.]

This is one of the cornerstones of the communist programme today but it is not the only issue. Now, when world capitalism is facing a crisis of existence, when the next financial crash is waiting to happen; as more and more proletarians are excluded from 'the labour market', when trade wars are already on the agenda and the carnage in Syria is openly presented as a global proxy war ... In short, when it is more urgent than ever for the global working class to recognise that they alone hold the possibility of a civilised alternative to capitalist barbarism, the most important lesson we can draw from Marx today is the urgent need to form a political organisation which can *always and everywhere represent the interests of the movement as a whole.*" This party will not be a government in waiting but a political compass for the wider class movement which, through the communal organisations it creates, can alone build a new society.

It is vital that 21st century Marxists, who have rejected the old lie that Stalinism = communism or that state ownership is a step towards communism, should be ready to engage in the urgent political work needed for forming the international revolutionary party. Understanding how the falling rate of profit provokes crises; recognising that beyond hierarchy and elites there is a ruling capitalist class and a working class; investigating the real working and living conditions of today's wage workers; encouraging workers to resist and organise for themselves: all these are part of today's communist work. We just need to remind ourselves of the need to create that international political body which understands the line of march of the proletariat towards a truly human future.

Saturday 12th May

2.00pm @

Quilliam Brothers Tea House
Barras Bridge Road,
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
(subject to change - check
leftcom.org for details)

Marx's Relevance
For Today

Film and discussion hosted by
The Communist Workers Organisation
All welcome.

What We Stand For

The CWO stands for a global society where production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where collective power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. This has to mean the active, daily participation of the majority aiming for the interests of all. Only then can the world be rid of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but this vision has nothing in common with Stalinist state capitalism and the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a 'party' for want of a better word: Not a government in waiting but a guide in the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but we do aim to be one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation. As the working class is more and more faced with the consequences of a crumbling capitalist system it will have to unite and confront capitalist power.

We are not in competition with other organisations but we seek to unite on a clearly agreed political programme to prepare the way for the majority of the world's population, the exploited of the earth, to overthrow the capitalist system and its bloody imperialist appetites.

Write to:
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website: http://www.leftcom.org
Facebook: Communist Workers
Organisation
Twitter: @CWOUK

New Class Composition, New Struggles

After years of falling wages and worsening working conditions are we now seeing a new shape to the working class? When the post-war boom ended at the start of the 1970s, capitalists the world over attempted to make us pay with speed-ups and real wage cuts. Workers resisted so that the 1970s became a period of massive class confrontation. Faced with this serious working class resistance, capitalists across the world abandoned defence of the so-called "commanding heights" of the economy. Capital was written off and from 1979 on manufacturing investment was transferred to low wage economies in the so-called "developing world" where greater profits could be made. This was a key part of globalisation. [For more on this see <http://www.leftcom.org/en/articles/2017-02-13/class-composition-in-the-crisis>]

In the UK, for example, the number employed in manufacturing fell from 27% to less than 8% today. And it was not just in the "industrialising world" that low wages prevailed. In the older capitalist states workers' real incomes today are lower than in 1979 despite a massive rise in productivity (i.e. exploitation) in manufacturing. Even the bosses' media admit it. Given the job losses (especially in heavy industry), globalisation, and capitalist restructuring over the last four decades, there are plenty who think that the working class in the older capitalist states has lost "its identity".

A New Class Identity?

Changed its identity we would say. The shape of the working class has constantly changed throughout capitalist history. Today in the UK 83% of the workforce is in the services sector, which includes such

socially necessary areas as health and education. As the system slides into deeper and deeper economic crisis these sectors cannot be funded adequately. The result is that once-privileged 'professionals' with years of education and training behind them are in the frontline of capitalist attack. Their working conditions are becoming increasingly like those of every other worker. From doctors to lawyers, script writers to teachers, a whole range of professionals are finding they have no more control of their job decisions than people controlled by "apps" in warehouses or the gig economy (another sector of the class where resistance is on the rise).

We got a taste of how the professions have been proletarianised in the UK junior doctors' strikes two years ago and in the Durham and Derby teaching assistants' fight last year. Now it is the turn of education workers across the world.

As we go to press, Kentucky and Oklahoma teachers have just gone on strike. In Kentucky, over pension cuts. In Oklahoma it's about a 28% cut in the education budget (since taxes have been cut) which has made some schools go on a 4 day week. Arizona teachers are likely to follow them soon. No doubt they are all encouraged by the long struggle animated by West Virginia teachers who took on the state with virtually no support from their union.

In Kenya and Zimbabwe strikes of lecturers have been going on for weeks. In Kenya these have been accompanied by strikes of nurses, some of whom face long arrears of pay. That these workers are now part of the proletariat would have come as no surprise to the young Karl Marx. He predicted that capitalist development would polarise

society and destroy the middle class, reducing the vast majority to the condition of proletarians.

"The bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked up to with reverent awe. It has converted the physician, the lawyer, the priest, the poet, the man of science, into its paid wage labourers." The Communist Manifesto

UK University Strikes

In the UK we have been able to observe this up close and personal. Lecturers and support staff have been on strike for weeks over changes to their pension schemes. They have already rejected one dirty deal done behind their backs by the UCU union and many are preparing to fight on. In this they have been given tremendous support by students and some ancillary workers who have transformed what could have been a mere sectional dispute into something wider.



In the course of their struggle some education workers are gaining a new sense of class consciousness. After all, half of the lecturers are part-time, precarious workers on short-term or no contracts. The strike has also led to reflections amongst some of the

lecturers about the purpose of their work and the nature of the society they are living in. True, this is only amongst a radical minority, but this represents some danger for a system which is churning out graduates when there are fewer and fewer graduate jobs. If under-employed graduates beyond the educational environment start to question what's happening they could be part of a wider, more radical working class movement. Such a movement would have to break down the divisions of nationality, race, gender, ability, profession and union affiliation enforced on us.

Inevitably this would involve challenging the boundaries of sectionalism and legalism imposed by the state, something that the unions are never going to do. In the daily struggles over wages and conditions working people have only one weapon and that is their collective ability to withdraw cooperation with the employers. Both the ongoing UCU strike over pensions and that of West Virginia teachers were stirred by ordinary members but the union officials have been quick to do deals behind the workers' backs. In West Virginia the teachers were simply told by automatic phone message that the strike was over, despite the fact the Governor had signed no agreement. In the UCU dispute the union is trying to sell the bosses' trick of postponing the pension cuts for a year so they can prepare better for the next round. They have been halted by votes in meetings in branches and on picket lines. The union's next step is likely to be an online ballot to undermine the solidarity of the strike. The problem here is not just that the union bureaucracy is unaccountable but it is part of the legal framework of the state. All unions exist to haggle over

the terms of wage labour on behalf of the system. Any questioning of this, whether practical or otherwise, is ruled out.

What the bosses and 'authorities' are truly afraid of is the kind of self-organised action of the working class that we have seen in West Virginia and the UK. Once we go beyond the trade unions' rituals and the existing structures, that's when we become dangerous, especially as more workers see the need to get involved. In the past workers often created their own structures which put the struggle directly into their own hands (be they neighbourhood assemblies, strike committees, workers' councils, or even just independent workplace groups). Though often short-lived, genuine fighting bodies appear and disappear as struggles come and go. In terms of decision making, delegation, not representation, has been the classic method of organisation for the working class, from as far back as the Paris Commune. This cannot be accepted by the state and employers, and so they would much rather have unions control us instead.

The capitalist crisis is not going away. The system has nothing left to offer but increasingly stressful, poorly-paid and precarious working conditions for us all. Its continued existence is more and more at odds with the survival of humanity itself (since capitalism, in its never-ending search for profitable "growth", is wrecking the planet for everyone). Every day the need to get rid of class society and create a human community conditioned by our needs and not profit becomes all the more urgent ...

3 April 2018

We Don't Need Borders: in Ireland or Anywhere Else

Brexit's can of worms in Ireland

Despite recent evidence to the contrary, capitalists are generally not fools when it comes to looking after their own interests. For almost 100 years the Irish and British ruling classes have operated a system where a "national border" has separated the North East from the rest of Ireland. This was not intended to significantly disrupt trade, a crucial moment in realising capitalist profits. The ruling class on both sides have always looked for a way to reconcile the contradiction between a state border and the capitalists' need to buy and sell. This has been very obvious since the United Kingdom and the Irish Republic simultaneously joined the European Economic Union (now EU) in 1973.

After the Brexit vote Theresa May and her ministers talked about a commitment to "No hard border" in Ireland. In fact the "frictionless border" all the players pay lip-service to is far from reality.

For the Brexiteers the crucial question is how to extricate the UK from the EU's "shared sovereignty" while keeping most of the trading advantages it enjoyed inside the EU. It's called having your cake and eat it. EU states all belong to a customs unions (EUCU) which means a common tariff is applied to all goods imported from outside the EU. The other side of the bargain is that no tariffs are allowed on goods travelling within the EU. In line with the Eurosceptic wing of the Tories, the public position of May's ministers is that leaving the EUCU must definitely be part of Brexit. This does not square with a "frictionless border".

May is under pressure to reach a deal that leaves Northern Ireland's trading position

unchanged. But this would upset the Eurosceptic Tories and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) whose support she needs to keep her government and party intact. Despite the referendum in Northern Ireland going **against** Brexit, May procured the support of the DUP. This has only increased the political paralysis which has existed in Northern Ireland since an ugly row over bribery and corruption brought the collapse of 'power-sharing' last year. The smell of sleaze didn't stop the Tories passing £1 billion to the DUP which has become a "pole of attraction" for the most backward-looking elements in Northern Ireland: those who want to go back to the original model of a part-province marked by its loyalty to the British state.

Against the Tories' paralysis a broad coalition has emerged in favour of special arrangements to allow the border to actually remain "frictionless". In Northern Ireland Sinn Fein is leading the call for "special status" with the Republic, and this is more or less the approach of both the Irish government and the EU negotiators.

Still, May's government is pressing on with its commitment to leave the Customs Union and refuses to consider any "special status" for Northern Ireland. So far, *Make Britain Great Again* looks like a Little Englander project to hold the Tory party together, in the process creating trade barriers between Northern Ireland and the 26-county Republic.

No borders – why and how

State borders are part and parcel of capitalist class society. The people with the wealth and power need to ensure that the wage workers they exploit, as well as any capitalist

competitors, understand who is in control in their own territories.

The confusion about the border in Ireland highlights, in one tight geographic area, the contradictions faced by national ruling classes across the planet. Despite nation states remaining the bedrock political structure for capitalism, the global economy poses questions that can only be answered by transcending national boundaries. Not only is production and distribution scattered across many states but the role of trans-national trade in realising the bosses' profits has grown exponentially. The European Union is a prime example of how the ruling class attempts to square the circle between their desire to have a functioning "World Economy" and their need for bastions of power and control embodied in nation states.

The EU's free trade agreements include the "free movement of people" which, as everyone knows, has helped many firms in the richer EU core reduce their wages' bill by employing migrant workers from poorer countries. In the process racism has been stirred up amongst the working class, with the Brexit vote itself the most dramatic example so far of the rise of so-called 'populism'.

Elsewhere in the world, there are numerous "Free Trade Areas" which allow free flow of goods but restrict the rights of workers to move across borders. NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) certainly works in favour of the US, Canadian and Mexican ruling classes but, of course, keeps the many Mexican dispossessed workers from legally moving to work in the USA or Canada.

Needless to say, migration control only applies to those of us who only survive by working for others' profits. The leeches who suck the wealth are able to buy their way around the

world. The UK charges £2m for a 'golden visa' which gives residency status for 3 years. For another £5m or £10m fast-track citizenship can be obtained. While thousands of desperate people risk, and often lose, their lives in the Southern Mediterranean it is a very different story for those who can spare a few million Euros. Both Cyprus and Malta shamelessly sell citizenship and a European Union passport to rich bourgeois individuals. No death trap boats or appalling holding camps for ruling class parasites!

We are not utopian dreamers. Gentler capitalism is not an available option. The idea of a borderless class society is an impossible fantasy. In the long run it is only the overturning of the global capitalist order – revolution by the working class – that will destroy borders and all the other detritus associated with humanity's class based pre-history. But to make that a reality we need to get organised ...

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