

The Oxford Left Review

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Editorial

As the current economic crisis becomes a political one, the Left needs to get beyond common reactive thinking to develop a coherent yet radical response. We need to understand the issues underlying the poverty of the 'mainstream Left', the ineffectiveness of many activist approaches, and the limitations on more creative thought. This issue of the OLR begins to address these imperatives, and looks to combine economic and political critique with a new cultural, moral and intellectual engagement.

The response also involves following Left currents outside the mainstream, and responding to the hegemony of market-based ideas by returning to neglected elements of Left tradition. This will entail recognizing questions of national, political and community identities, as well as culture and dynamism: ideas that can counter the motivating ideas of individualistic markets and the exploitative power of capital. Only by way of these can we develop a radical political and economic critique.

Such ideas have been a recent focus of Left discussion in Oxford, most prominently in the form of 'Blue Labour'. Andelic, in his analysis of this project (pp. 4-8), draws out from its curious blend various national, moral and historical strands, but draws attention to its underdeveloped critiques, as well as its significant shortcomings. Meanwhile, Derbyshire's piece (pp. 64-65) reviews a lecture given by Jon Cruddas which brought the 'Blue Labour' group together in Oxford. It highlights the crisis of political representation as well as the continued reservations about the political risks of 'radical patriotism'.

The debate around 'Blue Labour' also deals with themes that are becoming important on a wider scale. Two such themes in particular are addressed in this issue. On the one hand, Hill (pp. 28-35) addresses culture as a concept that the Left needs to use, in order to offer a dynamic rather than mechanistic conception of society and allow us to re-assert moral control of our way of life as a whole. On the other hand, two articles address the question of national identities, brought to prominence not only by recent debates but also by the increasing disunity of the United Kingdom. Roberts (pp. 17-20) notes the important questions concerning nations to which the Left is beginning to return, and Gallagher (pp. 21-27) looks at national and political identity in Britain in particular. He recognizes the increasing tendency of politics to play out in separate national spheres (most notably in Scotland), but argues that the Left must not neglect common British traditions, experiences and political concerns that will continue to be shared. This emphasis on issues of culture and national identity draws on a humanistic socialism that goes beyond simply economic responses. As Jimmy Reid put it, in his Glasgow University rectorial address: "Our aim must be the enrichment of the whole quality of life. It requires a social and cultural, or if you wish, a spiritual transformation of our country."

This raises the question: is the current crisis not principally an economic one, and shouldn't the Left be trying above all to formulate new economic theories? This issue is addressed by Srnicek (pp. 38-42), who argues that the lack of coherence and confidence in Left economic theory is a cause for concern, and offers some potential areas of future Left focus. But Burt (pp. 9-12) makes the important point that we have to go deeper than the

present terms of economic debate, and articulate a new economics based on more fundamental conceptions of value. Economics can only have value in the context of a broader understanding of how economic and political conditions influence the whole texture of our lives. What Hill brings out is that we need to base our new political and economic conceptions on a basis of morality and humanism, and Niven (pp. 36-37) echoes this in his insistence that not only must we keep writing, but that we should maintain a moral impetus for our writing, and for sharing ideas. We need to keep formulating ideology, but not for the sake of it – we must understand the moral impetus that drives us to do this.

So much for the theory: what about concrete political engagement on the ground? Hacillo (pp. 13-16) addresses the effectiveness of Left campaigns in bringing theory to practice, and in his consideration of the Living Wage Campaign argues that while our work must have a moral basis and purpose, campaigners must avoid being moralistic to the stage of self-righteousness, or acting out of mere individualism. And though he goes so far as to suggest that the Left should draw on forms of communalism, he makes clear that even well-intentioned campaigns will be ineffective unless they engage with genuine working communities.

The continued importance of activism in the new political culture is clear from in the wave of student protests since last winter, and in the occupations ongoing as we go to press. But Carless (pp. 43-47) sounds a warning note, criticizing over-reliance on what will happen 'come the revolution'. He calls instead for a radical but practical programme that responds directly to the current political and economic situation, and argues that we need a substantial set of commitments and policies for the very short term – a new Manifesto for the Left.

Hill brings out the creativity of both ideas and practice to be found in the student activist movement, as well as the conviction that drives this political culture. In his review of *Fight Back!* (pp. 66-70), he contrasts this dynamism with the staleness of mainstream political argument in Progress' *The Purple Book*. But he also makes the point that in order to be genuinely effective, the Left must operate across the divide between 'mainstream' and 'radical', drawing in students, trade unionists as well as a much broader public: it cannot afford to ignore the everyday issues addressed by the political 'mainstream'.

The power of new techniques of activism is highlighted by both Sussman and Pitman. As Pitman suggests (pp. 48-53), the internet and the ability of the young generation in particular to use it have contributed to new possibilities of political action, and the Left must take account of the new political culture represented by internet activism. Another emerging aspect of this culture, and one of the most remarkable phenomena to appear in world politics since the last issue of OLR, is the global Occupy movement, and Sussman (pp. 54-59) acknowledges the massive effect this has had on the US political scene.

But the Occupy movement is not calling for any agenda. Its attitude is one of rejection rather than construction inspired by an alternative vision. What this directionlessness indicates is the need for the Left both to acknowledge the new activist culture and to provide it with the resources for a coherent critique of capitalism and a positive socialist aspiration. And here we must return to the sphere of intellectual debate and theory, for many of these resources already exist in the intellectual traditions of the Left. The reviews of Wilkinson, Matthews, Kennedy and Bhattacharya point to different elements of Left tradition, but also to the dangers of only a limited understanding. Bhattacharya (pp. 79-81) argues that

a genuinely independent political philosophy is needed; being too close to public policy decisions leads one to merely adapt to the status quo. In her review of Eagleton's *Why Marx Was Right* (pp. 76-78), Wilkinson warns against the dangers of trying simply to popularize left-wing thought: she criticizes Eagleton for highlighting 'appealing' aspects of Marx's thought, such as his environmentalism, while neglecting the complex substance of his insights, such as elements of dialectical materialism. Similarly, Matthews (pp. 71-75) argues that what Hobsbawm's book *How to Change the World* offers is not so much a programme for changing the world as a way of understanding it. There are other Left traditions than that of Marx, and he argues that the mainstream Marxist tradition (represented by Hobsbawm) has neglected utopian socialist and moral strands that also form part of the tradition of the Left. Singh and Barber's article on Einstein's socialism (pp. 60-63) gives one example that reminds us of the continuing humanist underpinnings of the Left's socialist outlook. Kennedy, in his review of Curtis' documentary (pp. 82-84), shows us that it is relatively easy to criticize neoliberalism, but much harder to really understand the tradition and history we are a part of. He argues that to understand the growth of neoliberalism, as well as the continuing social problems that arise from capitalism and commodification, and Left alternatives to them, we need to study historic models of economic and social organization such as New Lanark, and to follow criticism that stretches back through Continental theorists of the 20th century, to Marx and Engels, and others.

What is suggested overall by this issue of the OLR is that on the one hand the Left would be unwise to dismiss either the diversity of its own traditions or the importance of these moral underpinnings; and on the other, that only a radical reconsideration of our way of life is an adequate response to the crisis we find ourselves in. We therefore need both to broaden the debate, but to ensure that different strands do not lose touch with each other. It is no light task. In the face of international crisis, and of a government unleashing the dehumanizing powers of markets across the country, the idea that the Left can have a clear and powerful alternative seems a distant hope. Yet we can find motivation in the fact that we are not inventing these ideas anew, but drawing on strands of thought that existed and persisted, although marginalised, through recent times and back through history, especially through periods of crisis. As Raymond Williams wrote in *Culture and Society* in 1958: 'The human crisis is always a crisis of understanding: what we genuinely understand we can do.'

Editors-in-Chief: Cailean Gallagher and Peter Hill
Associate Editors: Hannah Wilkinson
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 Aweek Bhattacharya
 Matthew Kennedy

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BLUE LABOUR, BLUE BRITAIN?

Patrick Andelic

Gallons of ink have been spilled over the failure of the left to capitalise on the financial crisis of 2008. As the crisis delivered what should have been a death blow to the free market doctrines which have dominated public policy since the 1980s, surely left-wing parties across the world should have found themselves propelled into office? Yet the European crisis of social democracy continues unarrested. In Britain, one explanation is obvious: the ostensibly left-wing party was in power when the economy crashed. The social democratic ambitions of the Blair-Brown governments, such as they were, had been bankrolled by tax revenue creamed from an under-regulated and over-heating financial sector. Consequently, when the crash came, Labour had no alternative narrative to hand, no way to excuse its own culpability.

The party's post-election post-mortem was briefly enlivened by the emergence of "Blue Labour", an insurgent political tendency touted by a group of academics and Labour politicians (among them Dr. Marc Stears of Oxford, Professor Jonathan Rutherford of Middlesex University, Jon Cruddas, James Purnell, and Chuka Umunna). Their embryonic plan was radical, even heretical, and sought to win back the four million votes, mostly among the working class, that the Labour party lost from 1997 to 2010. At the centre was Maurice Glasman, a lecturer at London Metropolitan University who was elevated to the House of Lords in the 2011 New Year's Honours List. A Jewish, trumpet-playing, roll-up-smoking academic, a pithy phrasemaker at times (in his first book he defined politics as 'a public struggle over the definition of sanity'), and a self-declared 'conservative socialist' Lord Glasman became the Labour Party's swashbuckling iconoclast du jour.¹ A Labour 'insider' reportedly described Glasman as 'the Labour Party's Norman Mailer. He smokes, he drinks, he swears and he slays sacred cows.'² From his often indiscreet public remarks it's clear he has the temperament of an intellectual bomb-thrower.

By mid-summer, however, Lord Glasman's unguarded tongue threatened to derail the whole project. In July, he gave an interview to the Daily Telegraph in which he called for a temporary, and total, moratorium on immigration. Outrage followed. Jonathan Rutherford and Jon Cruddas reportedly informed Glasman that they no longer wished to be associated with the project, in its present form, and commentators breathlessly performed benedictions over the cooling corpse. In response, Glasman wrote a mea culpa in the New Statesman apologised for the 'crassness and thoughtlessness' of his remarks which he attributed to 'bad political craftsmanship.'³ Nonetheless, it did seem briefly as though Glasman's apparently reactionary comments would overshadow the ideas he had been advocating. Such an outcome would greatly impoverish the debate within the post-New Labour left, however, and it is encouraging that Glasman's foolish remarks have not been used to junk 'Blue Labour' in its entirety.

At the heart of Blue Labour is a critique of the unaccountable power of finance capital. As its very nature is to guarantee the maximum return on investments, argues Glasman, unchecked capitalism transforms people and nature into tradable commodities.

The Labour tradition, as Glasman understands it, is of organised democratic resistance to the destructive power of such markets. Rooted in an Aristotelian conception of the 'common good', Blue Labour's biggest intellectual influence is the Austro-Hungarian political economist Karl Polanyi, whose 1944 master-work, *The Great Transformation*, argued that each person is dependent upon both their physical context and other people to meet their needs, and that the economy requires social institutions which disseminate skills and knowledge, and preserve the status of humans and nature as something other than commodities.⁴ These ideas have been refracted through the memory of Glasman's beloved mother, Rivi, whom he has described as 'very conservative Labour with a very strong commitment to work, faith, [and] country.'⁵

The credo also owes much to Glasman's prior involvement with London Citizens (now Citizens UK), an alliance of faith organisations, universities, schools and trade unions which orchestrates a variety of community projects in the capital. He has participated in campaigns for the Living Wage and against usury (the practice of charging exploitative interest rates on mortgages and personal loans), and has become known within the capital as an implacable critic of the City of London, the ancient square mile of the metropolis which bounds the financial district and lies beyond the jurisdiction of Parliament. When nominated for his peerage, then-Dr. Glasman requested that his title be Lord Glasman of the City of London. After some confused vacillation, he was told that the request was both 'unprecedented' and 'unacceptable.' He was forced to settle for Lord Glasman of Stoke Newington and Stamford Hill.

The critique of finance capitalism is undoubtedly the most radical element of Blue Labour and undermines glib assertions that it is simply a rehash of early Blairism. Its conservatism (the 'Blue' prefix) emerges from Glasman's assertion that the Labour movement has always been about organising democratically to defend loved ones and places, as much as to advance progressive ends. Community organisation through intermediary social institutions (churches, local banks, trade unions, post offices, hospitals, schools, football clubs) is at the centre of the Blue Labour vision. Glasman is a champion of Saul Alinsky, and soon after Barack Obama's election, wrote that the most remarkable aspect of that bright Tuesday evening was not the candidate's race but 'the fact that someone who trained and worked as a community organiser on the South Side of Chicago had become Commander in Chief of the United States Armed Forces.'⁶

Glasman has characterised the Labour tradition at its best as the 'cross-class marriage' of 'a decent working-class Dad and an educated middle-class Mum.' 'Dad' was the trade unions, the co-operative movement, the building societies and the mutuals; 'Mum' the Fabian Society, H.M. Hyndman's Social Democratic Federation, and the Anglican Church.⁷ So what went wrong? Essentially, 'Mum' became too dominant (this deeply un-PC metaphor has, unsurprisingly, drawn accusations of sexism). For the Blue Labourites, 1945 was the watershed moment when the vibrant democratic socialism of the Labour Party ossified into Fabianism, beginning the slow decline into a managerial culture of scientific bureaucratic statism, increasingly dominated by an isolated Oxbridge-educated liberal elite. The growth of the state destroyed those social institutions which guaranteed democracy within the economy. Community disintegration was the result as society's 'ethical glue' melted. New Labour was hardly better and its embrace of neoliberalism only exacerbated the malady. The Labour Party, argues Glasman, needs

to rediscover its tradition of trade unions, building societies and co-operatives, and the values which they embody: mutuality, reciprocity and solidarity. For Glasman, the German social market presents a better economic model, with worker representation on management boards, works councils, co-determined pensions, and regional banks.⁸

If this is all sounding a little 'Big Society' then that's hardly surprising. Glasman's work is an explicit rejoinder to the work of the 'Red Tory,' Philip Blond, whose ideas caused a great deal of excitement in 2009 before their progenitor rather vanished from public view. The nominal debt is obvious. Glasman's response to Blond's emergence was one of discomfort: values he thought of as distinctive components of the Labour tradition were being appropriated by conservative thinkers. Blue Labour, in one sense, began as an assertion of intellectual property rights.

The principle *bête noire* of Blue Labour is liberalism, particularly in its economic manifestation. Glasman prefers to speak of 'the Liberal-led government,' in wry contrast to Labour representatives who, apparently growing tired of denouncing beleaguered and moist-eyed Liberal Democrats, have taken to describing the Coalition as 'Conservative-led.' The fundamental weakness of the 'Big Society', contend Blue Labourites, is that it offers no countervailing power to the free market forces that have been fetishized within the Conservative Party since Thatcherism. Blond, at least, was as horrified by Tesco as he was by Whitehall bureaucracy. However, society's foundations cannot rest only on the volunteerism which the prime minister is so fond of lauding. In the political economy of Blue Labour there is a role for the state, though radically different to that which the Labour Party previously envisioned for it.

It is now clear that the present government equates diminishment of the state with the sale of publicly-owned assets to the private sector. Privatisation has always been an easy policy option for governments in straitened circumstances to raise some ready cash. In the early days of Thatcherism, Harold Macmillan wearily described this practice as 'selling off the family silver.' Coalition efforts to implement such policies have run into public opposition, however, much to the delight of Blue Labourites. Government plans to sell swathes of the nation's forests were halted by a public campaign that drew support from environmental groups and *The Sunday Telegraph*, among others. Glasman has advocated, for example, transferring ownership of Sherwood Forest to the people of Nottinghamshire in perpetuity, thereby excluding developers from the land. This opposition to the commodification of treasured parts of English heritage finds Blue Labour at its most romantic and its most radical. Glasman has told an interviewer that he 'would like to see Ed [Miliband] on the white cliffs saying: "This is forever England."' ⁹

As such curious outbursts suggest, Glasman's narrative of the pre-1945 Labour tradition is a romantic one. Some have criticised what they perceive as the retreat to a comfortingly nostalgic conception of England as illusory as John Major's 'old maids cycling to evensong.' Former deputy leader Roy Hattersley has dismissed 'the idea of Arcadian England, the idea that there was some mythical time when we all loved each other.'¹⁰ The Labour tradition which Lord Glasman is peddling is, of course, an incomplete one. However, all political ideologies develop a distinct historical narrative to support their philosophy and policy agenda. And nostalgia has been a recurrent feature of progressive movements. Glasman's regular invocation of the 'rights of free-born Englishmen'

is by no means an alien trope within the Labour tradition; the Levellers, for example, marched under a similar rhetorical standard. Nonetheless, there is something worrying about too exclusive a focus on 'Englishness.' As the political philosopher David Runciman points out, in a brilliant dissection of the Blue Labour phenomenon, the Labour Party is dependent on MPs from the Celtic fringe in order to form a government: 'To put it bluntly, the party needs Scotland to govern England.'¹¹ Electoral necessity compels Labour to articulate British vision or be consigned to minority status.

It is Blue Labour's social conservatism that has encountered the lion's share of the resistance. References to 'family, faith and flag' have made some uncomfortable, and not without cause. Those three words, in that order, formed part of the subtitle of Sarah Palin's second book, for example. Any good lefty would pause when in such dubious company. None of this, however, is alien to the British left, as numerous historical examples could attest, from Keir Hardie's Christian socialism to George Orwell's sentimental patriotism. The doctrine's conservatism is inseparable from its economic communitarianism: Blue Labourites argue that progress, however desirable, cannot come at the expense of human relationships and community ties.

The issue which has drawn some of the most hostile responses has been Blue Labour's stance on immigration. Glasman's comments in the *Telegraph* this summer are certainly disconcerting. Other statements – such as his remark that Britain 'is not an outpost of the U.N.' – seem to reveal a lack of generosity that borders on the callous. Immigrants make convenient scapegoats, particularly in times of economic distress, and, as Ed Rooksby has noted, there is nothing progressive in 'pitching "whites" (working class or not) against immigrants and ethnic minorities.'¹²

But we must not be too hasty in condemning Glasman as a xenophobic Little Englander. His credentials belie such a characterisation. He was previously involved, for example, with the 'Strangers Into Citizens' campaign which advocates 'earned amnesty' for illegal immigrants. Glasman's position on immigration is animated not by nativism, but by a concern for labour rights. He argues that poorly controlled immigration, bulwarked by neoliberal arguments about the free movement of labour, has inflicted enormous damage on the working class. The Labour Party, citing the false determinism of 'globalisation', failed to defend their jobs and their communities, inadvertently fueling the rise of fringe far-right parties. This disconnect was exemplified, for Glasman, by Gordon Brown's infamous encounter with Gillian Duffy during the 2010 election. Albeit clumsily, Duffy was, Glasman contends, articulating the disorientation of many working class voters faced with multiplying economic and social dislocations, and a metropolitan political class indifferent to their insecurity. Whether justified or not, significant portions of Labour's electoral base have identified uncontrolled immigration as the cause. Labour must find some way of addressing their concerns.

There have been clear signs that Ed Miliband is sympathetic and seeks to incorporate Blue Labour themes into his leadership. After all, he elevated Glasman to the upper House. Glasman has remarked that the Blue Labourites 'have the potential to be as significant for Labour as the Institute of Economic Affairs was for the Tories in the 1970s.'¹³ Given that this think tank nurtured and honed the economic nostrums that were to become Thatcherism in the succeeding decade, this is ambitious indeed. Quite how, or

even if, these noises will be translated into a policy agenda remains to be seen. Tony Blair similarly littered his speeches with warm endorsements of communitarian values, only to jettison them when faced with the exigencies of government.

There are problems with Blue Labour, and some of them have been touched upon in the previous pages. Nonetheless, it was certainly encouraging to see thinkers struggling to rediscover the party's historical purpose. Harold Wilson supposedly declared that the Labour Party 'is a moral crusade or it is nothing.' But a crusade for what and on behalf of whom? It is, for instance, refreshing to see senior figures within the party pursuing a systemic critique of finance capitalism, rather than utilising a few bankers as moustache-twirling pantomime villains towards whom public anger can be directed. Glasman remains an engagingly idiosyncratic presence in the contemporary political scene (how many other commentators would, with a straight face, assert that they want the modern state to be 'magical'?) and 'Blue Labour' is a provocative challenge to the complacent orthodoxies of New Labour. It would be profoundly disheartening if Lord Glasman's runaway mouth was used as a convenient excuse to mute a debate that the Labour Party sorely needs. The intellectual hangover of New Labour's accommodation with neoliberalism has been particularly deleterious. Labour can never go back to the days when the token resistance offered to the domination of finance capital was the Chancellor of the Exchequer delivering the Mansion House speech in a lounge suit rather than white tie and tails.

1. Maurice Glasman, *Unnecessary Suffering: Managing Market Utopia* (London, 1996), 2.
2. Dan Hodges, 'Labour's Norman Mailer Is Making The Tories Edgy,' *New Statesman*, 26th May, 2011.
3. Dan Hodges, 'Exclusive: The End of Blue Labour,' *New Statesman*, 20th July, 2011; Samira Shackle, 'Maurice Glasman: "I Intend To Take A Vow Of Silence For The Summer",' *New Statesman*, 28th July, 2011.
4. Glasman, *Unnecessary Suffering*, 5-6.
5. Toby Helms, Julian Coman, 'Maurice Glasman – The Peer Plotting Labour's Strategy From Inside His Flat,' *The Guardian*, 16th January 2011.
6. 'Maurice Glasman On The Secret Of Obama's Success' from *The School Of Life*: http://theschooloflife.typepad.com/the_school_of_life/2008/11/maurice-glasman-on-the-secret-of-obamas-success.html.
7. Glasman, 'Labour As A Radical Tradition,' Maurice Glasman, Jonathan Rutherford, Marc Stears and Stuart White (eds.), *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (2011), 21.
8. Glasman, 'My Blue Labour Vision Can Defeat The Coalition,' *The Guardian*, 24th April, 2011.
9. Helms, Coman, 'Maurice Glasman – The Peer Plotting Labour's Strategy From Inside His Flat,' *The Guardian*.
10. Dominic Sandbrook, 'Family, Faith, and Flag,' *New Statesman*, 7th April, 2011.
11. David Runciman, "Socialism in One County: True Blue Labour," *London Review of Books*, June 2011.
12. Ed Rooksby, "Don't Underestimate Toxic Blue Labour," *The Guardian*, 21 May, 2011.
13. David Goodhart, 'The Next Big Thing?' *Prospect*, October, 2011.

The Blue Labour 'manifesto' *The Labour Tradition and the Politics of Paradox* (2011) can be accessed at: <http://www.soundings.org.uk/>

Patrick Andelic is a D.Phil. student in U.S. History at St. Anne's College.

BEING (RIGHT) AND NOTHINGNESS

Sam Burt

We are living through a very peculiar period in world politics. The rules of the game for the last forty or fifty years have been discredited by the events of the last few years. But by following these rules we have created a world where we cannot realistically conceive of an alternative to the status quo. And when you begin to reason this through, things start to get surreal - for example, Presidential hopefuls in the U.S. line up to threaten China with expulsion from the international community unless it agrees to “play by the rules”, even as these rules change from day to day. Rather than seriously debating our interpretation of the values underpinning the old rules, in order that we might create new and better ones, we seem to be doing one of only two things - rushing blindly towards reinstating the status quo, or stagnating as we wait for a hegemon to emerge with the political will to coercively impose a new settlement.

So much for the bizarre hall of mirrors that is global economic governance today. A useful framework for analysing the microfoundations of the present economic situation - and the unimaginative responses emanating from governments on both sides of the Atlantic - is the tripartite model of human behaviour elaborated by Thomas Risse . At the most basic level, in deciding which course of action to pursue, both the amount of time spent and the effort exerted will vary; but it seems reasonable to suppose that most people will choose which action they believe will serve their interest. If the choice situation renders this criterion insufficient for a determinate choice, we might instead opt for what we believe we ought to do; that is, what choice best conforms to some social role that we identify with. Finally, if we find that roles and rules will not make the choice for us, we may be compelled to re-define these to fit with the situation - but as they are essentially social constructs, we require the consensus of others to validate such changes.

This helps to make sense of the present. We constructed an economic system - the “rules of the game” - based on the notion that in reality people only operate at the level of calculating interest and/or following rules. The mainstream economic theories that have dominated the profession in recent decades - most notably, the ‘efficient markets hypothesis’ - were premised on the notion that private markets were superior to public institutions at calculating and managing risks. This was held to be so because price signals in efficient markets were seen as the most reliable measure of people’s true desires and preferences. Consumer preferences changed, but usually in altogether unpredictable ways. General customs and traditional roles in society were also expected to change over time, but these were only thought of as influencing individuals’ decisions when circumstances made the determination of self-interest too difficult. Therefore, at the level of both self-interest and rule-following, market mechanisms were regarded in mainstream economic theory as at least as good as and usually superior to, political processes in allocating society’s resources for maximum output at minimum risk.

There is another crucial aspect of the mainstream economics profession that has its origins in the “rational expectations revolution” of the 1980s. Most economists pride themselves on building theories that assume that the individuals whose behaviour it purports to explain share the same information as the economist who is doing the theorising - including the knowledge of human behaviour described in the preceding paragraph. It follows that the doctrines lending a veneer of intellectual respectability to “neo-liberal” policies were premised on an expectation that most people, as rational agents, would come to see democratic politics as an ineffective - even unsafe - decision-making procedure. They would accordingly shun the prospect of political commitment and choose to define themselves as free consumers. The New Right always had a more subtle and sophisticated conception of human behaviour than many critics on the left have acknowledged. “Neo-liberalism” neither assumes nor requires that people always act out of self-interest. The ideology of the era can easily accommodate apparent acts of altruism, even at the expense of self-interest, with theories of “bounded rationality” which make explicit the cognitive constraints on our instrumental reasoning.

What it can not accommodate is Sartre’s “bad faith” - scenarios in which neither self-interest nor rules and roles are reliable guides to action; instances where one adapts a rule or a tradition to the demands of the situation with only the “presumed consent” of other participants in the discourse. This type of everyday self-deception was the blind spot of neo-liberalism and its eventual undoing, because it eroded the credibility of a system that prided itself on its rules-based neutrality. It is an inherently self-reinforcing pathology, because one cannot acknowledge one’s own bad faith without recognising the same capacity for self-deception in others. To recognise the problem is simultaneously to fall into despair at the prospects for organising a collective solution - at least as long as political issues are framed only in terms of self-interest and rule-following, rather than liberation or self-actualisation. Liberal democracies drained of real democratic accountability and popular sovereignty were sustained by cognitive dissonance; that is, the sensation of uncomfortable tension which comes from holding two conflicting thoughts in the mind at the same time. This feeling is at its most powerful when we act in ways that we know, on reflection, conflict with our self-image. For example, to imagine one’s self as “simply following the rules”, even when one knows that the rules are under-specified and a leap of imagination is required to identify the underlying intent of the rule-makers. And the most basic fact about cognitive dissonance is that we long to escape it - to do so is in our self-interest in the most immediate sense, even if it requires altering our most deeply-held beliefs and values.

This is where the contradiction at the heart of how we have governed ourselves is at its most stark. We have neglected the public spaces and institutions which we need to be able to credibly disclose ourselves to each other, and to continuously negotiate, contest and re-negotiate the set of values for which our laws and our institutions are mere allocating devices. As rational beings, we encounter choice

situations that we cannot evade and that we must somehow rationally justify to ourselves, but where prescribed roles and personal utility provide no traction. We routinely re-define our social roles, and the rules that govern them, to provide a satisfactory solution to choice situations like these. But under present political conditions, this causes a sense of unease because we lack warranted confidence that our particular conception of a role is the one that our fellow citizens would reasonably agree with. In such a state, to the extent that the public sphere is eclipsed by the mass citizenry, there exists a tendency to populism and demagoguery. It is fuelled by people's immediately felt need to break out of the tension of cognitive dissonance by uniting around some organised core of shared belief. This process is not symptomatic of the "irrationality of crowds", it is the opposite - it is the likely outcome of rational people living under an irrational system of society (where the rationality of a social system is not an ahistorical question).

It has been said that economic crises are ineradicable cyclical features of capitalism because eventually the last man who remembers the last crisis passes away, and with him go the lessons that his generation promised to learn. But the other lesson that recent generations were supposed to have learned was that politics with a capital-P was dangerous, dirty, explosive stuff that doomed all who came within its orbit to disappointment or worse. The younger generation in the post-Soviet states and in post-Maoist China epitomised this - student activists who witnessed the brutal repression of the demonstrators in Tiananmen Square made their peace with the status quo and discovered designer clothes and pop-rock. One such student lamented that 'getting involved in politics always does more harm than good. It will eat you up and destroy you.' As a mantra for the ideology of contemporary developed societies, this seems about right. The lessons from modern history were allegedly that material affluence satisfies our desires, whilst principled and substantive political activity will at best only frustrate the fulfilment of these desires. ("Symbolic" gesture politics - politics of plain moral postures has always been tolerated, even actively encouraged, especially by mainstream economists who held a simplified view of politics, like Jeffrey Sachs. This was because it functions to salve our conscience and all too often draws public attention away from underlying structural causes.) The idea that less popular sovereignty could mean more demagoguery, or that mass political actions could be functionally equivalent to retail therapy - these were alien to the general elite consensus, before and after the global financial crisis got underway.

If we are to find a way out of this morass, and if those of us on the Left want to return to something better than we had before, we must keep at the forefront of our mind that the roots of the economic crisis are political. I want to emphasise this point, at a time when parties of the Left across Europe seem to be focussed on restoring credibility to left-wing analyses of economics. I do not deny the pressing need for this effort (on the contrary, I maintain that the Left needs a less naive interpretation of neoliberalism, because our attacks will cause the most damage to the self-confidence of the Right when they ring true), but because I don't want us to swing too far in the opposite direction. Here I cannot hide my inner methodical

Marxist, as wary of economic models that can't encompass all three of Risse's decision-making levels as I am of political campaigns comprising nothing more than vacuous moral slogans. I don't even need to reach for Marx - social democrats like J. K. Galbraith and Will Hutton have made careers out of analysing the seamless binds of economic and constitutional reform.

The central case that I have argued here is nevertheless quite distinct from theirs. I have argued that the steady erosion of democratic accountability and the extended reach of the marketplace in developed democracies have generated inevitable contradictions over the course of recent decades. In particular, as the public sphere has shrunk, so too have the opportunities for substantive deliberation about what are our social values and priorities. This structural change, in conjunction with our unchanging need for communal identity and validation, has embedded bad faith deep in our culture. These tensions have rendered the state of public opinion increasingly volatile and malleable, which has in turn only made politics appear more irrational and inefficient in the public imagination. These were the political conditions that enabled the banks to feel safe taking insane risks, on the assuming that the state would swiftly intervene to shore up the status quo. As events have shown, our febrile political culture can no longer tolerate uncertainty, however fleeting, and we demand the quickest response available, as if speed was the only criterion that mattered. Unfortunately, the fastest solution is often attempting to restore an unviable status quo that we are all most familiar with.

Even having the most carefully-argued, "credible" and morally persuasive economic plan will never be enough to change the world for the better unless we also reform our political system and create an inclusive national forum in which we can meet the fight for the authoritative allocation of value. Only when the concrete political terrain exists will it be consequential for the left to have a credible economic battle-plan, although any left-of-centre political economy worth its salt ought to achieve progress on both of these fronts.

Sam Burt studied PPE at Lady Margaret Hall. He graduated last year.

A GENTEEL REVOLUTION

COMMUNITY ORGANISING IN OXFORD

Alex O'Connor

At the 2008 Republican national convention, Sarah Palin, vice-presidential hopeful and arch-nemesis of anyone with half a brain cell, bravely likened her previous occupation as the mayor of Wasila, Alaska (population: 5,469), to that of a community organiser. Standing above a chaotic mess of red, white and blue, she announces in deep, intellectual tones: "Being a small-town mayor is sorta like being a community organiser". A moment of panic sweeps the crowd, the Republican faithful are dumbstruck, betrayed! The mob briefly turns; a cry of pre-emptive fury fills the hall. The bulldog remains unfazed, and with all the courage of the mother of one of the Mighty Ducks, she continues: "Except with actual responsibilities." Redemption.

Palin's comments referred to Obama's pre-political career as a community organiser in the Chicago projects, uniting faith groups and decaying industrial unions to work for common social goals: the removal of asbestos from residential buildings, the establishment of community sports and schooling programmes, and so on. Palin's comments reflect a common perception, that anything involving the word 'community' must be nothing but namby-pamby timewasting. Indeed, the word 'community' has been appropriated so often for political capital that you could be forgiven for instinctively reading 'community organiser' as political jargon, akin to Cameron's stated aim of giving power back to 'communities' through the 'Big Society' programme. Community organising, however, is something inherently practical. It is rooted neither in the theoretical abstractions of Whitehall nor in the callous accumulation of partisan political support. It involves the reconciliation of diverse groups, conflicting interests and entrenched prejudices in order to aim towards a common good, and as such it has its feet firmly on the ground. It is not limited to the smog-choked tenements of the inner cities of the American rust-belt: there are a number of groups striving to unify communities here in Britain. Groups such as London Citizens have united faith and community groups and successfully lobbied for the introduction of a London Living Wage of £8.30 per hour by both the Greater London Authority and a number of transnational corporations operating in the capital. Closer to home, the Living Wage Campaign operates in Oxford, calling for the payment of a living wage based upon the regional cost of living.

There is very little about this, and particularly the Living Wage, which can be seen as objectionable. At first glance it appears to be an issue which even the most recalcitrant Tory and your average Red barbarian could find common ground on. The living wage itself is fantastic, if applied uniformly across a sector, as it has been in London; its effects upon unemployment are minimal; and it provides a much needed lift in living standards in some of the most expensive areas of the country. The real problems emerge with the community organising itself, particularly here in Oxford, where the Living Wage Campaign largely fails to achieve meaningful goals or engage with those it purports to want to help. These two problems appear to go hand

in hand, and it seems that the Living Wage Campaign's failure to make much headway in its campaign to improve conditions for cleaners at Oxford colleges is due to its abject failure to involve employees. Without this involvement, the Oxford Living Wage Campaign carries the unpleasant stench of Victorian philanthropy, a disagreeably Gladstonian aura of self-proclaimed elites sympathetically striving to better the conditions of those too wretched to do it themselves. This was not the movement's stated aim, but this antiquated attitude is evident in the social composition of the campaign, which consists entirely of students. Upon my arrival at Oxford, the big success of the Living Wage Campaign was the staging of a rally outside Balliol college, attended by around two hundred students, at which a scout (yes, an actual real-life scout) spoke. Since then, there have been some more concrete successes: Corpus Christi now acknowledges that it pays its staff above the threshold for a Living Wage. The problem is that it did anyway, and that the Living Wage Campaign in Oxford currently has no way to award the college formal, legal accreditation as a Living Wage Employer, as London Citizens can. Thus the prospects of creating a "domino effect", with college after college agreeing to pay the Living Wage, still seem remote.

In fairness, the criminally precarious employment of cleaning staff by colleges makes the development of any employee-led initiative incredibly difficult by any standard, and the Living Wage Campaign has reacted to this by seemingly retreating from student-led initiatives targeted at Oxford colleges, aspiring to adopt an organisational model more based upon the community-centred approach of London Citizens, focusing upon Tesco. Tesco is seen as something of a Holy Grail for the Living Wage Campaign, with chief executive Philip Clarke seen as being less aggressive than his predecessor Terry Leahy. So on 9th June, Oxford LWC organised local churches, a mosque and other community groups to participate in a day of action around Tesco. Yet the aims of this action were vague and ill-defined, apparently involving a total of around 60 people entering three Tesco shops across Oxford, handing out flyers and asking questions. The hope seems to have been that this would build up some sort of relationship with Tesco store managers and employees, facilitating the loving co-operation of Tesco executives, employees and community groups overseen by the guiding hand of the LWC. But little seems to have been achieved, and the preponderance of students in the action was reflected by the fact that the Tesco action was covered by the *Cherwell*, but ignored by the local Oxford press.

Perhaps there is some sense, on a fundamental level, in this co-operative, non-adversarial approach to social reform. Surely it would be wonderful if Tesco executives were bowled over by the strength of community support and, with philanthropic tears in their eyes, agreed to pay their employees a hearty wage. Other retailers would soon follow suit, and soon enough poverty would be confined to the history books. This all seems wonderful, doesn't it? Should these aspirations of the LWC be fulfilled, it would be near impossible to find any source of criticism. However, this strategy, the LWC's essence, remains cloaked in an ideology of pity. Testimonials are extracted from downbeat employees, their misfortunes paraded to faith groups, to the middle classes, to the saviours of these wretched creatures. Posters reading 'Adopt your local Tesco' are distributed. Adopt your local Tesco, as you would an abandoned child or an abused dog. These campaigns and these promotions carry the fetid stench of elitism and of class division. The LWC is imbued with an unavoidable sense of moral and intellectual

superiority: the working classes are children, unable to comprehend what is best for them or understand what they must do to achieve their goals. The aim of community organising is help various communities forge links in order to obtain various common objectives (and this article should not be misunderstood as an attack upon community organising as an occupation). Such organisation is essential, but where it fails is when it ceases to be something growing from the community itself, and comes to be something imposed externally. The Living Wage Campaign in Oxford is just this, the pet project of a few students, playing philanthropy before entering the real world. If social reform is to have an emotional basis, it should be one of anger, rather than pity.

But what if the Living Wage Campaign achieves its aims? What if the people of Britain become so impassioned about the plight of low-paid employees that a Living Wage is implemented by business after business? This would be wonderful, though somewhat far-fetched. It must be remembered, however, that this success would not be due to any fundamental movement by employees, nor would it even amount to Henry Ford-style industrial philanthropy. The Living Wage Campaign does not seek to reform the economic basis which is ultimately the source of poverty and injustice, instead working strictly within the margins of post-industrial capitalism. The reason the chief executives of Tesco, Primark or any other large corporation would increase the wages of service staff is not due to a sense of fundamental human decency, nor is it due to a desire to increase productivity. Instead, it is based upon the preservation of an ethical image. If Primark can get away with paying its workers below subsistence wages, it will (and does). However, should the knowledge that Primark indulges in unethical employment practices be sufficiently detrimental to its image that the money lost from decreased sales is greater than that gained by paying its factory workers a meagre wage, then it will improve the pay of its workers in order to increase sales. The Living Wage Campaign therefore adjusts the market by selling the concept of ethical consumerism to the customer: if people think that Tesco's employees are exploited, then they are potentially less likely to shop there. This cuts both ways, and does not necessarily entail the scaring away of customers by presenting Philip Clarke as bastard-in-chief, consequently forcing Tesco to grovel to its staff and customers. Instead, it allows retailers to surround themselves in an aura of ethical responsibility, to affix a shiny LWC kite-mark to their products solely because they have kindly agreed to pay their employees an extra twenty pence an hour. The beneficial effect on the employee can be outweighed by the sense of complacency and moral satisfaction it instils in consumer and employer alike. Further reform is hindered by a sense of smugness, by a blithe perception that a satisfactory ethical good is being done simply because a chocolate bar or a supermarket bears a shiny logo. Would the success of the Living Wage be better than nothing? Certainly, but in the long term it is not the employees, but the economic system it entrenches that stands to benefit most. People forget that feeding a family on £7.20 as opposed to £7.00 an hour is still horrendously difficult. Such schemes as the living wage undoubtedly provide a short term material benefit, and this is good. What they also do is make it far easier to sweep poverty under the rug, to forget about the suffering still endured by those on low wages. The failures of capitalism are concealed by a veneer of moral acceptability; the activists of the Living Wage Campaign are well-intentioned, but become the unwilling ad execs of consumer capitalism.

The Living Wage Campaign and the London Citizens model of community organisation are the post-industrial equivalents of trade unionism. Unlike the trade unions, the LWC does not seek to direct the policy of business from the ground up, seeking the course of action most beneficial to its members. Instead, the Living Wage Campaign is something imposed upon businesses and employees externally, by members of churches, mosques and universities. It therefore has a larger practical failing in that it is unable to combat the undesirable economic consequences of its success. If implemented solely by Tesco, then it is highly possible that the number of people they employ would fall accordingly. The overall expenditure on wages would not change, but the ratio of the number of employees to the average wage would be altered. To put it simply, people would lose their jobs. The purpose of a trade union would be to prevent such an outcome; to secure not just a higher average wage, but higher expenditure on wages by the employer. Ideally, Tesco could be regulated from the bottom up, as a co-operative owned by its employees.

Why then must groups such as the LWC exist to campaign for the rights of Tesco employees? Why can't this be done by the employees themselves, or the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers? I suspect that members of the LWC would point to popular political apathy, or even ignorance. This is a lazy conclusion, and the truth is that it is symptomatic of a de-industrialised Britain. The post-industrial service economy has precipitated a decline in communalism. Employment is increasingly transitory and temporary, rarely accepted as a stable end in itself: sons do not follow their fathers onto the checkout tills of Tesco as they once did down the mines or to the shipyards. Trade unionism is the natural product of stable, communal employment in industry. It is unwise to idolise industry, but with its decline our society has become more aspirational, more atomistic. Man is a social animal, and belonging to a community is integral to human happiness and well-being. This is something we are losing in our futile pursuit of affluence: society is becoming a collection of individuals; for all our wealth we are living in a colder, less caring Britain. It is telling that London Citizens is composed largely of faith groups, the loyal congregations of churches and mosques: religious groups are perhaps one of the few places where a sense of warmth and community has survived. But these are limited and exclusive communities: they do not encompass the majority of people. In a city as diverse and multicultural as London or Oxford, faith groups alone cannot provide the broad basis needed for a radical drive for reform. The fight against poverty must not seek to impose a religious moral code, and it must not fall back upon tired Victorian philanthropy and the language of pity. Community organisers cannot sell a skewed sense of individual moral satisfaction, nor can they scrabble amidst the wreckage of declining communities in order to piece together a ragtag coalition. If change is to happen, if poverty is to be eliminated, it must be done through the reinvigoration of old communities, and the forging of new ones. The myth of the rugged individual must be destroyed, and communalism resurrected.

Alex O'Connor studies history.

PROGRESSIVE NATIONALISM, PAST AND PRESENT

Richard Roberts

The relationship between self-designated ‘progressives’ and the idea of nationalism has been a decidedly complicated one over the last century. In the decades directly preceding World War I, the so-called progressives in both Britain and America confidently embraced a rhetoric of popular democratic nationalism. They stood for ‘the nation’ or ‘the people’ against ‘privilege’ and ‘the interests’. Between the 1920s and the 1990s, this rhetoric was all but forgotten as the Left embraced a more pluralistic conception of politics and learned to speak in terms of a more fragmented society, presided over by a beneficent state. ‘Nation’ and ‘people’ began to feature less frequently in the rhetoric of the Left, as the emphasis shifted towards ‘classes’ or ‘interests’. At the turn of the 21st century, progressives are trying to re-familiarise themselves with the language of democratic nationalism, as they attempt to find a way of combating the popular anti-statism and market fundamentalism that has been resurgent since the 1980s.

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The problem of constructing a national community and a democratic public was the challenge that pre-occupied many of the most profound and most influential progressive thinkers in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century America. The startling growth of industrial and corporate capitalism in the late-nineteenth century led to the emergence of what Woodrow Wilson called a “new era of human relationships.” The old face-to-face communities were displaced by vast and impersonal webs of interdependent, mostly commercial, relationships.

Faced with this revolution in social relations, some progressives longed to return to a bygone era of “free and fair competition” between relatively equal individuals. Others saw that reversing the trends of the last third of the nineteenth century was not a viable option and advocated government regulation of big business as the solution. This, however, required a revolution to be effected in the way people viewed government. The prevailing ideology of the age was laissez-faire liberalism and its chief prophet, the English political theorist Herbert Spencer had, in *The Man versus the State* (1884), driven a wedge between “state” and “people” just as effectively as Reaganite Republicans and Thatcherite Tories would a century later.

In this context, progressives attempted a fusion of nationalism and democracy. This new-fangled democratic nationalism would legitimize the expanded role for the national government in the economy that progressives saw as essential. Rather than seeing the state as posing a threat to individual liberties, progressives saw it as potentially a force for good, so long as it could be made to represent the collective will of the people. In other words, to cope with the nationalization of society and commerce that had taken place in the decades af-

ter the Civil War, progressives proposed to nationalize “community” and “state”.

Their success in shifting the locus of political power from the states to the national government has been well-documented. Through the creation of institutions like the Interstate Commerce Commission (1887), the Federal Reserve System (1913), the Federal Trade Commission (1914), and the ratification of the Sixteenth Amendment, allowing Congress to levy an income tax (in 1913), the Federal government acquired, for the first time, the ability to regulate the national economy. Even nature was placed within the legitimate purview of the federal state with the creation of the national parks system.

This programme to re-make government was linked to a complementary programme to re-make democracy. Progressives rallied behind proposals to establish a more direct democracy. At state level, this frequently involved innovations such as referenda, citizen’s initiatives, and the right to recall unpopular legislators. At the national level, the Seventeenth Amendment (1913) made it mandatory for senators to be directly elected, and the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) established the right of women to vote.

The creation of a nationalized democracy was crucial to legitimizing the creation of a more powerful national state. But as many progressive intellectuals realized at the time, this required more than institutional reform. Progressives sought to create a national democratic public that was committed to democracy as a “way of life”. Democracy to the philosopher John Dewey and his followers meant much more than elections; it was an ethical, social and cultural ideal as much as it was a political one. Indeed, political democracy was worthless unless it was based on a social and cultural democracy, in which the necessary opportunities and resources were available for every individual to realize fully his or her particular capacities and powers. This is why progressive reformers placed great emphasis not only on social reform, but also on the need to democratize knowledge, by means of responsible journalism to publicise ‘facts’, and the provision by the state of a better education for all.

The progressive faith in the ability of the emergent mass media to both educate and represent ‘public opinion’ turned out to be hopelessly naïve. Similarly, Herbert Croly’s hope that the President could become the embodiment of the national will, whilst also using the “bully pulpit” he occupied by virtue of his high office to lead public opinion, seems both naïve and dangerously authoritarian from today’s perspective. World War I led to the shocking discovery that strong executive leadership and the mass media could just as easily become organs of propaganda, shattering the progressive faith in ‘publicity’ as the panacea for the problems of American democracy. By the 1920s it was clear also that the mechanisms of direct democracy established by the progressives could be used by political advertisers to subvert the progressive ideal of a deliberative democracy. Propaganda and political advertising successfully pitted different groups in society against one another, and rather than encouraging deliberation and resolution of their conflicting views and interests, accentuated the contrasts and deepened the rifts.

Meanwhile, the legitimate purview and capabilities of the state were vastly expanded during and after the two World Wars. This represented a partial victory for pro-

gressive nationalists, who had long called for the state to play a more active role in regulating business and society. But the state that emerged as all-powerful after the two World Wars was not the democratically-controlled state envisaged by early-twentieth century progressives but rather a bureaucratic or administrative state that sought to place supposedly neutral experts in control of both society and the market.

The complementary aim of progressive nationalists to create a single national democratic public had largely failed. The notion of a single nation or public whose will could be represented by the state was displaced by a new conception of politics: 'interest group democracy'. Whereas in the deliberative, participatory democracy envisaged by earlier progressive nationalists, it had been assumed that any conflict between different groups and individuals could and would be resolved in the process of democratic deliberation, in this new conception of democracy, it was the state that would mediate between the various competing interests that existed within society. Hence, in the middle of the twentieth century, the Left became increasingly statist in its approach to social problems, but the state had been significantly de-coupled from the national democratic public whose will it was intended to serve. By the 1950s, this meant that neither the Democrats in America, nor Labour in Britain could shake off the accusation of elitism. Douglas Jay's famous comment that "the gentleman in Whitehall really does know better what is good for people than the people know themselves" became symbolic of the Left's anti-democratic top-down statism.

By the last decades of the twentieth century, it was clear that appeals to a specific class or interest were no longer a viable platform for parties seeking national office. Moreover, the sanctity of the welfare state created by the 'New Deal Democrats' in America and the post-war Labour governments in Britain was being called into question as the state came under serious attack from neo-liberal economists and popular right-wing governments in the 1980s. And the state has not, and is not likely to recover from this onslaught of anti-statism, at least not in its old mid-twentieth century form.

In the context of the vacuum created by the eclipse of 'state' and 'class' in the late twentieth century, both Right and Left have been forced to re-introduce ideas of 'nation' and 'people', but they have done so in very different and in some cases rather novel ways. The Right, especially in the US since the 1980s, has captured a populist rhetoric that was once the exclusive property of left-wingers. By driving a rhetorical wedge between the people and the government, the modern American Right has turned "We the people" into an anti-government slogan.

The Left, on the other hand, has found the re-emergence of 'nation' and 'people' more difficult. It has spent most of the twentieth century back-peddalling from its professed commitment to democracy, as it has successively discovered that most of 'the people' are ignorant, prejudiced, irrational, apathetic and easily manipulated. Appeals to 'nation' have also become difficult for the Left with the apparent discovery by historians that nationalism has traditionally been allied to jingoism, militarism and imperialism. Hence in the immediate aftermath of de-colonization and the Vietnam debacle, the Left in both Britain and America found itself in the rather awkward position of being in favour of everyone else's nationalism, but not their own. Instead they embraced

diversity and 'multiculturalism' as the way of the future. But this caused problems for the fulfilment of their other traditional ideal: solidarity. The Left's embrace of 'multiculturalism' has made society more atomistic, even if it is also more tolerant.

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The efforts of progressives at the turn of the last century to forge a national democratic community ran into unforeseen problems. The sense of national community forged during wartime turned out to be disappointingly ephemeral. Through the middle of the twentieth century progressive nationalism gave way to a liberal universalism that became the main ideological force behind the Left on both sides of the Atlantic. But at the turn of the 21st century, progressive nationalism has made something of a comeback. After the traumatic electoral defeats for parties of the Left in the 1980s, a new progressive nationalism seemed, to many on the Left, to offer a potential solution to the declining sense of solidarity that has resulted from the combined influence of mass immigration, globalisation and affluence.

21st century progressive nationalists seek to bolster support for the national (welfare) state, consolidating the gains made by the Left in the last century. Ideally they would like that support to emerge organically from the ideals of reciprocity, mutuality and solidarity fostered in close-knit communities, but in actuality close-knit communities are increasingly a thing of the past. Hence, 21st century progressive nationalists are less optimistic than their predecessors were about the possibility of creating a national democratic community from the bottom-up. They are also constrained by the statist tradition of the mid-20th century Left. They still look instinctively to the state, rather than society, as the agent with which to solve social problems. They therefore wish to re-invigorate a sense of national citizenship, mostly by using the power of the national state to educate and inculcate citizens with a sense of their rights and responsibilities.

At first glance, one might suppose that the generation of progressives who signed up to Richard Ely's platform for the American Economic Association in 1885, behind the slogan, "we regard the state as an educational and ethical agency whose positive aid is an indispensable condition of human progress," would have few qualms about using the state to promote a civic nationalism. But it seems likely that they would in fact be highly critical of the state in the form it takes today in Britain and America. They envisaged an expanded role for the state as the instrument of a communitarian democracy. Today it has become principally the instrument of an administrative elite, presiding over an atomistic society. The problems of creating a national community and a democratic state have not been resolved, and they present just as great a challenge today as they did a century ago.

Richard Roberts studied history at St Peter's College.

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LEFT WITHIN BRITAIN:

THE UNION, THE SOCIAL UNION, AND THE LEFT

Cailean Gallagher

As the United Kingdom tends to disunity the unionist politicians in London take every opportunity to talk up 'Britain', disregarding the devolution of power to Scotland and Wales – for one of countless examples, see the recent rhetoric of 'getting Britain building' that heralded the Coalition's initiative to underwrite mortgage risk, a policy specific to England¹. But this is a cross-border tendency: Scottish Unionists talk stubbornly in British terms, in the vein of Gordon Brown's less-than-substantive exploration of our shared 'British values', and his clunker of a book *Moving Britain Forward*. This approach is reflected and emphasised in the media: BBC News tends not to make it clear that most cuts and policies only directly affect England, and the bulk of the content of the London online media is England-specific. Top-level politics and media act in denial of the major shifts in political power and identity that are taking place on this island.

The changes are most obvious north of the border. Broadly speaking, Scotland has a much more developed political identity than the rest of Britain. The sort of political identity relevant here is some attachment to and consciousness of politics being played out in a national context. Scotland will soon have much greater autonomy and capacity for self-determination, if not through total independence then at least through 'independence-lite' or some other form of radical transfer of power to Edinburgh. Each major Scottish party is now independent of London, in statute if not in practice. Ministers from the London Coalition crossing the border meet with general derision, and are dismissed by Scottish opinion when they claim to speak for Scotland. And Scots continue to turn away from the London media, frustrated at the constant English bias, to the Scottish print and web media, and to the increasingly-Scottish editions of the London papers.

New identities are also developing south of the border. Increasing numbers are rejecting a British identity for an English one (a recent poll showed that 63% identified as English rather than British, compared to 41 per cent in 2008²). This is, however, still far short of becoming an English political identity, of politics played out in an English sphere. But it is moving in this direction: there are more frequent calls for an English parliament, or for more regional power in England, despite the dismissals from London. (The major comparison here will be a Scotland-England one, mostly due to limited exposure the Welsh situation. The impression is that Wales' national identity is much more developed than even Scotland's, but its political identity less so.)

Although the top politicians and media in London do not take an English perspective, parts of the Left in England have realised the importance of the crisis of identity. The thinkers and writers involved in Blue Labour are one example,

along with Jon Cruddas and others connected to Compass, though their position is in need of clarity.³ On online sites debates are beginning to develop on these themes (see, for instance, the 'For England's Sake' section of the OurKingdom site, for an ongoing debate on English and British identities). Even in *The Purple Book* from the New-New Labour think-tank Progress there is an article that nods to the debate, and talks vaguely of 'ensuring English-specific issues get a fair hearing'. There is growing recognition that the Left will have to come to terms with these changing identities which will continue to develop, despite London's obstinacy.

But while unionists talk of Britain in a reactive and desperate effort to strengthen the UK, and as parts of the Left begin to address England's political and national identities, opportunities also arise for rethinking British identity in more positive terms. And this rethinking is coming from unexpected quarters. It is testimony to the confidence and foresight of the SNP, as well as the firmness and confidence of Scotland's political identity, that at the recent SNP conference a keynote speech addressed this question of Britishness. In arguing that a British identity poses no threat to the SNP, Professor James Mitchell made the crucial point that 'Britain' does not mean 'UK': even if the Kingdom disunites, there will still be a sense of Britishness. He called for us to recognize 'the real parameters of what is proposed' by the SNP, constitutionally, politically and socially. And he argued that in addressing the question of Britishness there is 'an opportunity to help shape debate, perhaps even find some common ground'; that despite the separation of political spheres, we can come to more of a consciousness of our collective past and shared identity. The term 'British', he said, is 'as useful and accurate a description of the collection of continued links within these Isles as anything'.

Britain after Britain

Mitchell framed these continued links in terms of a sort of British 'social union'. And speaking to an audience about to fight a vigorous campaign to break up the Union of 1707, he bravely joked: 'Who would have thought it? The SNP is the true social unionist party.' But for Mitchell this union is not especially complex: he talks of this social union only in terms of 'the family and personal links that will continue regardless of Scotland's constitutional status' – and an SNP audience would not want to hear of any union deeper than this.

Yet looking to the substantial cross-border society that is sure to live on, even as identities develop, it is clear that such social bonds are, and will continue to be, much more substantial than family and personal links. Such connections are important, but so too are the links made by commuters and cross-border workers, as well as cultural, institutional, and media connections. People from both sides of the border will still need to work for companies based in London or Edinburgh; there will still be a society of economic and social mutual dependence; there will still be organizations and communities that cross the border. It is in these working and living societies, rather than in family holidays, that the substance of the social union can be found.

These social bonds developed through a shared history: a degree of uniformity in economic and industrial development, and in government policy. Glasgow is said to be more similar to Liverpool than it is to Edinburgh, problems of post-industrial society are replicated across the island, and many other characteristics are British rather than nation-specific. In an island with such a history, the bounds of society will be far broader than the borders of nations and states.

This is illuminated by the attitude of Johann Lamont, candidate for the Labour leadership in Scotland, who addressed the continuing inequalities, the importance of society and the continued need for labour values despite the possibility of independence. Lamont is chiefly concerned with the Scottish political sphere, but the message can be extended: on both sides of the Tweed socialists should not lose consciousness of the many connections that constitute this social union.

Mair nor a social union

Take by way of illustration the British welfare state. For most of the century it was a bastion of social unity and protection, extending out from London to the far corners of the Isles. Though the nations and regions were never quite integrated, and though much of the administration was local, the welfare state and especially the NHS continued to be common across Britain. Now England's welfare system is being ravaged and dismantled, while Scotland's is largely preserved. Mitchell draws attention to the fate of the welfare state, pointing to the assertion made in the Calman Commission that the British social union is concerned with 'some common expectations about social welfare'. Clearly if such 'common expectations' do exist, they are being let down on a horrific scale.

In a sense, Calman is wrong to make sweeping generalisations about vast and diverse populations, suggesting they have 'common expectations'. Such characterizations are a danger for many obvious reasons; but one consequence is that they allow Scots to content ourselves with our situation, assured that English people have fundamentally different ideologies, and 'different expectations'. Contrary to Calman's intentions, the statement does unionists no favours – it provides little incentive for Scots to maintain links with the UK as they look on at the Coalition's assault. It is this position that leads to the tempting claim that Scotland is more left-wing than England⁴, a temptation we should resist for many reasons. Though many parts of England and Wales, particularly in the South, are predominantly conservative, vast areas have many expectations in common with Scots, and face common problems.

But Mitchell's response to the assertion is not to call for reaffirmation of this shared expectation for social welfare, nor to hold up Scotland's capacity, as a smaller polity, to live up to this expectation. Instead he rejects Calman's claim outright: 'the problem with the Calman Commission's definition of a social union is that there is an absence of common expectations about social welfare – there is no union'. But I think Mitchell is wrong: the fact that the welfare state is under attack from London is no reason for us to take the changes in England as indicating a

lack of common social welfare expectations on the part of the English people.

So even if we should resist attributing homogeneous expectations to a population of 60 million, and even if Calman's motives for making the claim were to bolster reactionary unionism, the suggestion is significant – there are certain expectations, or, to put it more positively, certain aspirations, that resonate across Britain. To dismiss vast swathes of people as not having the same expectations for social welfare, is to neglect the overwhelming need, in an atomistic society, for social solidarity between those living under the powers of capital and finance, powers that can only be resisted through common struggle. There is a collective sense of moral social worth and mutual support, not necessarily expressed by governments, but which can be understood if we take this island to be a social union.

Paradoxically, this unity finds evidence in the divisions and resentment arising from the fates of different areas and nations: from England, frustration that Scotland has it better; and in Scotland, the relief with which we read, week after week, the announcements of execrable policies that will affect only England. But there is also much more positive evidence for this common union: the fact that a movement has risen against the dismantling of the welfare state – a movement common across Britain. It is in this movement – which I believe is popular – rather than in the policy decisions of a cabinet in London, that we can witness a British political consciousness, and an expression of a social union. (Of course, calling it British is not to claim that such a consciousness is unique to Britain, or specifically British in flavour, or that it is not to be found in other parts of the world. The key is for us to understand ourselves as part of a social union in Britain; and to be conscious that this struggle can be fought in a British context, just as others struggles must be played out in local, national, or global spheres.)

The significance of this social union is not to be overplayed - clearly the tendency will be towards a separate focus in the different nations of Britain. The focus in England will be on resisting the Conservatives' attack, and finding alternatives to catastrophic 'reforms' which are having less impact on the devolved welfare state in Scotland. Meanwhile, Scotland (and to some extent Wales) will continue to use national parliaments to lobby against welfare cuts, and will seek measures to block the reforms from being imposed on them.

But if Calman is right, as I think it is, this common British union has the potential for expression and development. And it motivates, in part, our solidarity or mutual despair, that feeling that wherever we live we have a duty to resist and fight against the ideological attack of the Coalition. This is the case in response to those parts of the attack which are UK-wide – like the cruel changes to conditions for receiving disability and unemployment benefit. But it is also true of those elements that only affect England (and to some extent Wales): the destruction of the NHS, the removal of legal aid, the imposition of university fees, and numerous other cuts.

It is this social spirit that brings convoys of buses down from Glasgow to London to

protest in resistance to the welfare cuts Britain-wide, but also to fight against specifically English ones, just as it is a similar social solidarity that brings students down to protest against fees that will not affect Scottish universities, and to carry out a series of wild-cat occupations in opposition to the introduction of fees for non-Scottish students in Scottish universities – a campaign that was almost totally overlooked by the London press⁵. Workers are workers, students are students, people are people, wherever they are; and common aspirations for social welfare, education and well-being should not be downplayed in response to governments' policy differences.

This social unity was demonstrated by Omar Ibrahim, a Glaswegian now serving 18 months in prison for throwing a toy smoke bomb at a window in London during the protests last year. On the other hand it is the reason why there is nothing inconsistent in being a member of the Labour party, and in favour of Scottish (or English, or Welsh) independence. Insofar as the 'social union' extends into spheres of work, trade unionism, activism and the role of the state, the 'social union' becomes a 'political union'. These shared experiences and conditions offer the basis for a common, and active, British Left, not just a vague and passive sense of family ties. And it is a political union with the potential to be based not on nations or states, but on the common struggle for socialism.

The Scottish Shock

The message here is imperative in terms of the welfare state, but it goes much broader. This continued awareness of our common struggle, and with it the opportunity for wider radical change, is why many on the Left in Scotland hesitate to talk in terms of nationalism, although more and more are 'pro-independence'. This is a position shared across the Scottish Left: by revolutionary Marxists, trades unionists, republican socialists, social democrats. The fight for independence is coupled with an aspiration that this national independence will benefit more than just Scotland.

We counter this with a belief that there is the potential for freedom and democracy in both countries: freedom from the old state-driven control of London, and the power of capital; and democracy in new modes of popular self-determination and political engagement. Many Scots hope that independence will inspire shifts south of the border. Something significant needs to change in the Kingdom as a whole; some shock to alter the setup of power, to take it away from a political class that is dominated by market ideology and the interests of the wealthy. The desperate talk of the unionists in London betrays a fear: that Scottish independence will prove to be that shock.

Independence will not result in stasis for the rest of the island. It might, for instance, inspire resurgent English or English-regional political identities, leading to demands for self-determination, and for removing power from the political elite in Westminster. Such potential will be most effective if we maintain a shared social and political consciousness. Otherwise, the nationalist movement in Scotland will be seen as a rejection or a detachment, rather than an expression of self-determination within a broad social union.

What's the British Left to do?

One great concern is that if Scotland gains its independence, those south of the border will be doomed to eternal Tory rule. This argument relies on the premise that there is something inherently right-wing about the rest of the UK. The same was said once about Scotland. But in neither case is it true; and it is an untenable position for one on the Left to hold, that a country of 50 million, with its patchwork of areas and histories, will always be right-wing. And a common British political union can help change the right-wing tendency.

This must not be overplayed: the Left should develop the opportunities of new political identities, with different priorities in different nations and regions. The English Left might look to develop a sense of English identity which can become a force for political engagement and re-democratisation, where new radicalism can develop. And despite occasional mentions of Britain at SNP conferences, the Scottish Left will mostly be concerned with its own political sphere. But the point is that despite this divergence of policies, states and some aspects of civil society, and despite the increasingly separate national and political identities, it is incumbent upon the Left not to neglect the broad British social and political union we have described, nor to forget the links between the different parts of this island. The crucial paradox is that even as the spheres tend apart, the question of what remains of the British Left becomes more important. In the short term, this means continued joint activism across Britain to fight cuts and resist austerity, trades unions standing together in UK-wide strikes such as that on 30th November, and the sharing of skills and knowledge in the struggle against austerity. And in the long term, ensuring that even while we work to develop in the context of differing national and political identities, we are aware of the fact that our work is not just for the benefit of people in our own region or country. So even if we witness the break-up of the Union, to best achieve new forms of socialism and left-wing currents we need to develop a common British Left identity, as well as common social and political identities.

We cannot simply allow our national spheres to drift apart; nor can we blur England and Britain. Through consciousness of social unity and mutual struggle, of economic and other cooperation, the Left has the opportunity to change politics in particular parts of the island and to strengthen the social, political and ideological bonds. This is most important for England's sake, for it has the further to go to develop its own political and Left identity; in the short term the left-wing governments of Scotland and Wales will provide a positive contrast to the Coalition's rule from London, and might generate an aspiration for more regional self-determination.

But it also gives an opportunity to draw from and continue an intellectual tradition that otherwise will fade: that of the British Left. This is important for Scotland and Wales, which like any small nation or region may not have the capacity to develop powerful Left spheres of their own. But equally the English Left would be unwise to lose its context in a wider British tradition. It is a phenomenon of British Left his-

tory that most major elements did not emerge merely from one country or another. Co-operativism, trade unionism, the ILP, the Labour party, the CPGB, the growth of welfarism, the Fabians, the New Left, and so on – all developed in the context of Britain, not England, and were essentially *British*. Through our social and political union, and common history, we share in an intellectual union. It is one element of this eminently British intellectual Left that I hope to explore in the next issue.

1.<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-15810966>

2.http://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/english_move_away_from_british_1_1975522

3. At the lecture given by Jon Cruddas last month (see Derbyshire's review in this issue of the *OLR*, pp. 64-65), he gave much away by correcting himself in talking about the "Engli-... British Left". More concrete evidence of the unclear position is found in Glasman's chapter in *Blue Labour's Soundings*: www.soundings.org.uk.

4. A tendency evidenced in a favourite chant of Scottish students used during recent protests in England: 'We're fae Scotland, we're fae Scotland, We hate Tories more than you! We hate To-ries more than you!' And variations on the theme.

5. These protests continue: see the recent march on the Scottish Parliament objecting to fees for non-Scottish students, under the slogan of RUKidding (rUK: rest of the UK).

Cailean Gallagher is a third-year PPE undergraduate at Balliol College. He is joint Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Left Review, and is on the editorial committee of OurKingdom.

WEAKNESSES OF OUR CONCEPT OF CULTURE

Peter Hill

Diagnosis: Mechanism and Dynamism

Mechanism and dynamism. That's how Thomas Carlyle summed it up in 1829, in a world – England of the industrial revolution – which had elevated mechanism, the how of getting things done, over dynamism, the why of doing things at all, the impulse that drives the mechanism. To show that this 'mechanical' diagnosis still applies to our society, at least as expressed in mainstream discourse, we need take only a few recent examples. Examine first the debate between mainstream Right and mainstream Left over the economic crisis. The overwhelming stress has fallen upon the how of getting the country back on its feet. Is it better to 'tighten our belts' generally, as the Right would have it, or to spend money on encouraging growth, as the Left believes? Throughout, the debate has been about means. The end has been the same: economic recovery, the restoration of the status quo ante. Crucial questions have not been asked, or have been asked only in the margins of the great 'How?': Was that status quo in fact satisfactory? Is 'economic recovery' all we need? Would it not be preferable to live in a society poorer overall, but more equal? And so forth.

Our second example has relevance for English society, but extends to a world arena. It is the reaction of the media to the revolutions of the 'Arab spring', and the rush to attribute their success to instruments, to means – namely, social media networks. The Egyptian Revolution became the Facebook Revolution. There is perhaps an urge to make the revolution seem up-to-date and Western – a creature of the internet age – rather than anything so archaic as an expression of moral values, let alone Islamic ones. This road leads to the denial of human agency, of people's capacity for moral action. The same attitude came through in the government's response to the recent riots: the suggestion (soon dropped) that they could be stopped by banning social media; that they were in some degree a technical problem, permitting of a technical solution (banning social media). They refused to see it as a human problem – a problem with the way humans feel and think and act – and assumed it was an instrumental one, a question of what resources people have at their disposal; or a police one, of how they may best be controlled and disciplined. Once again, mechanical factors are privileged over dynamic: Facebook causes revolutions (in Egypt, where it is a good thing) – or Twitter causes riots (in London, where it is bad). Either way, the instrument is elevated into the cause.

As a counterpart to mechanism, Carlyle put forward dynamism, the moral impulse to do things, to change things. Potentially wrong-headed and self-defeating, potentially wise and life-giving, either way indispensable to a living society. Carlyle himself was a kind of embodiment of this principle in his time. What has become of it, one wonders, in ours? Where are the pulpits? Where is the crusading Nonconformist Conscience, where is the prophetic 'Hebraic' spirit described and criticised by Matthew Arnold (*Culture and Anarchy*, 1869)? How, we must ask, has this concern with 'right doing',

urged on – as Arnold claimed – by the overwhelming consciousness of sin, been damped down? How has the ‘hunger and thirst after righteousness’ been dulled?

Moral exhortation is not, now, a particularly fashionable mode. Indeed, there is so little of it about that even the words once used to ridicule it (‘priggish’, ‘moralistic’) are seldom heard. Tabloid moralising is one exception, recognised as important in deference to the tabloids’ recognized political power, but it displays the worst of our cultural life: often either hypocritical or bigoted; rarely offering genuine, impassioned demagoguery; expressing instead a kind of grotesque of moral outrage, alongside a display for titillation and entertainment – as when we see a mock-moralistic article about the promiscuity and over-sexualisation of society opposite a Page Three model.

Tabloids aside, public discourses are dominated by rhetoric of expediency and profit. To talk in these terms is a proof of rational good sense, and anything else is apt to be taken as a sign of naivety, of a woolly-liberal or religious or Communistic variety. The mainstream Left been at pains to defend itself from such charges, and has essentially abdicated any moral authority. New Labour did not meet the challenge of Thatcherism, but was a concession to it. Ever since the 1980s, the Left has been on the defensive. Already before Thatcher, the Left was over-dependent on ‘mechanism’ – not the right-wing mechanism of the Market, but the left-wing mechanism of the State machine, run for the presumed good of all. Post-Thatcher, they became committed to making the State and Market machines one great machine, running smoothly together – again, for the presumed good of all. Actual political positions have, to their credit, continued to be based on morality: greater equality of incomes, a better position for women, alleviation of poverty for disadvantaged children. But they have felt the overwhelming need to defend these positions in practical, ‘hard-headed’ terms: thus equality of income is defended, in part because it is right and fair, but also because it will make ‘the economy’ grow better than right-wing policies. A benefits reform is defended on the ground of efficiency, of making the state machine run better. The moral side of the reform is of secondary significance.

There is a similar picture in much mainstream journalism and academia. If a journalist or scholar seeks to do good by her work, she is forbidden from expressing it overtly. She must smuggle it in under the cloak of scholarly or journalistic objectivity: a pure concern with the truth for its own sake, or with reporting the facts as they happened; ignoring as far as possible the point that any account of ‘the truth’ or ‘the facts’ is necessarily coloured by one’s own world-view. They are writers and thinkers, not from a moral impulse to do good, but from a dispassionate concern with ‘truth’ – or perhaps simply because it is a job, which they are paid to do. If there is virtue here, it is of a dispassionate, intellectual kind. Culture of this kind, without morals, without humanism, becomes distant from the real world we live in, and still more remote from any possibility of changing it.

One of the few places one can still find moral arguments seriously and openly made is, in fact, in the columns and speeches of the political Right. The Right can proclaim that Britain is ‘broken’, that laziness and dependency on the State

are sapping the life of the nation – whereas the mainstream Left is only now beginning to imitate them in using such language (see, for instance, Ed Miliband’s speech at the recent Labour Party conference, where he talks of ‘values’ and ‘responsibility’). Precisely how the political Right maintained the prerogative of moralistic comment, when the Left lost it, appears at first glance somewhat mystifying. Have the Right not been, since Thatcher, the advocates of the restriction of moral control to private life, to the abdication of responsibility over the political and economic spheres to convenience and ‘the market’? Such is indeed the standard left-wing view, but it ignores to persistence of an older, more complex, and far better Toryism, beneath the Thatcher-and-Reagan free-market dogmas.

It is one of the worst effects of political partisanship that one comes to assume that one’s enemies are not only mistaken, but lying. Thus the Left tends to see the Right’s proclaimed belief in a concept like ‘the Big Society’ merely as cynical camouflage for the dismantling of the Welfare State (‘big society, little state’). This it may indeed be in practical effect, but we must recognise that the principle it represents – of community spirit, of common social life – is still widely believed on the Right. There is a ‘dynamism’ of the Right as well as of the Left – just as there is a ‘mechanism’ of the Left (the all-sufficient State) as well as of the Right (the all-sufficient Market). And the tyranny of a free-market doctrine is maintained, not only over left-wing ideas of morality and social life, but over right-wing ones as well.

So far, I have confined my attention largely to those voices which are a power in the land. If we look instead at the margins of political and intellectual life, we hear a multitude of isolated voices, preaching from ramshackle, wayside pulpits: activists in any number of causes; the odd maverick politician or trade-unionist; the odd religious figure; many diverse and incoherent voices from the blogosphere. Here explicit moralizing, even preaching, may be found in abundance, if we look for it. Now a good deal of hope, in my view, lies in these marginal energies – more perhaps than in the mainstream of discourse. But they are in too many cases incoherent and indecisive: there is a great deal of discontent but very few productive outlets, and very little unity. And to the mainstream discourse they are either harmless cranks and eccentrics or dangerous fanatics; either way they are excluded from any serious debate.

In all of these cases, we must examine the reasons why those who attempt moral discourse are kept at bay, beyond the bounds of the mainstream; why the tabloids only do it tongue-in-cheek; why, when a mainstream politician or journalist, or an academic ventures into such territory, people look at her askance. There is a powerful attitude which says, frankly, good riddance to the Victorian kind of moralising – which was largely hypocrisy anyway. We are better off – to use a metaphor of Carlyle’s – with the naked truth, than with the illusions it has been clothed in (see *Sartor Resartus*). Moralising prevents objectivity and introduces extraneous concerns into whatever domain it touches. But here we must ask: to what exactly are moral concerns extraneous? We may accept that they are extraneous to statistics, chemistry, even history – but are they extraneous to politics, society, our way of life in general? The kind of language generally used to discuss these seems to suggest that many

people think they are. This is mechanism once again – the idea that if you set the machine up correctly, it will sort everything out by itself. But all engineers and computer scientists know that a machine only does what you tell it to do. However good the mechanism, there is still a need for a dynamism, a conscientious mind to control it.

Again, even if much moralising is inevitably hypocritical, what is better – a society where people pay lip-service to ideals they have ceased to live by, or one where they no longer bother even to do that? The old, Victorian respectability was drab and narrow; was frequently hypocritical; yet it was based on the ‘dynamical’ principle that one should do things, and try to do what is right. The current dependence on mechanism, whether of Market or State, has made a virtue out of doing nothing, out of cancelling that dynamic impulse to do things, whether good or bad. There is a satisfaction, a relief in abdicating responsibility for our collective life to some impersonal machine. ‘They know that someone else is gonna come and clean it up...someone always does’, in the words of the Radiohead song (‘A Wolf at the Door’, from *Hail to the Thief*). The aptest symbol of this attitude is perhaps the ‘tea-drinking’ groups on Facebook at the time of the English riots, where people declared that they were not rioting or looting, but – sitting at home drinking a cup of tea. That is what, in our liberal, laissez-faire world, good citizens do: nothing at all. They do not riot – oh, no – nor do they try to prevent riots – as long as they do not have one in their own backyard. They sit and wait respectably for somebody else – the Police or the Army, with plastic bullets or lead ones – to come and sort it all out. Someone always does. What is more, they make use of our new, ‘revolutionary’ social media to celebrate their inaction and complacency. ‘Donothingism’, Carlyle’s satirical name for laissez-faire, has never had a more exact expression.

Analysis: Three Weaknesses of ‘Culture’

It seems to me that at least part of the reason for this state of affairs in our social and political life lies in our failure to make use of the potential strengths of that the concept of ‘culture’, in the tradition outlined by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society 1780-1950*. In the introduction to this book, Williams gives a useful summary of its meanings in the historical context of the tradition. Formerly meaning ‘the “tending of natural growth”, and then, by analogy, a process of human training’, it took on, at the time of the Industrial Revolution, new meanings. It came to mean, first, “a general state or habit of the mind”, having close relations with the idea of human perfection. Second, it came to mean “the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole”. Third, “the general body of the arts”. Fourth, later in the century, “a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual”.

There are number of current weaknesses in our concept of ‘culture’. The first weakness takes the form of an imbalance. ‘Culture’, potentially at least, unites two sets of principles or virtues, the intellectual and the moral. Matthew Arnold drew, in the 1860s, a contrast between these: the love of right reason, of sweetness and light, of clear thinking, on the one hand; and the love of uprightness, of correct conduct, of right doing, on the other. The first he called the ‘Hellenic’ spirit – the spirit of

Socrates, of free inquiry and self-questioning, concerned with right knowing; the second was the 'Hebraic' spirit – that of an Old Testament prophet, of strictness and the moral law, concerned with right doing. For Arnold, Carlyle was the embodiment of this principle in his time. (See Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*, 1869).

We live now in an environment far removed from that in which Arnold was writing. For him, there was an imbalance in the England of his time: the Hebraic spirit was in the ascendant, and the Hellenic neglected. Now it is the Hellenic spirit that is dominant. The ideas of reasonableness, tolerance, liberty, the rights of the individual, are current – they are the very basis of our political and social thought. The ideas of moral duties, of equality and fraternity, the rights of the community – these are things one hears very little of. This is not at all new: E. P. Thompson warned against something very similar in 1957 when he spoke of a 'retreat from humanism'. He addressed the same basic distinction as Arnold, between intellectual and moral virtues, though he spoke not of Hellenism and Hebraism, but of 'the liberal gods' and 'the humanist gods'. 'The liberal Gods—justice, tolerance, above all intellectual liberty' are not indeed 'the humanist Gods of social liberty, equality, fraternity' – we must admit, with Thompson, the contrast and the antagonism. (See 'Socialism and the intellectuals' in *Universities and Left Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1). But we can see, too, the point of keeping them united, in contact, in the one conception of culture. Our culture has signally failed to keep this unity and balance: instead of 'doing what is right' we pride ourselves now on 'doing as we like', and in doubtful cases, doing nothing. Against this, we must stress, again with Thompson, the virtues of a balance between 'justice, tolerance [and] intellectual liberty', and 'social liberty, equality, fraternity.' It is precisely such a balance that any non-authoritarian socialism must believe in and work for – despite the predictions of sceptics, that the two sets of 'gods' are irreconcilably opposed, that one cannot have both justice and equality, or tolerance and fraternity, or social and intellectual liberty. And when it comes to achieving such a society, we can see the benefits of an alliance between the intellectual and the moral virtues. It is a way to achieving what Marxists call a praxis: a union of thought and action, of right knowing and right doing. The second weakness in our conception of 'culture' takes the form of an incoherence. A second great strength of 'culture' is that it – again, potentially – permits attention to 'the whole form of our common life' (*Culture and Society*). In order to do this, though, the distinct meanings of 'culture' outlined by Williams must be kept in contact, in productive tension with each other. We have seen how 'culture' may mean: (a) personal culture or cultivation, a 'habit of mind' (b) 'high culture', 'the general state of intellectual development, in a society as a whole' and 'the body of the arts' and (c) 'a whole way of life'. Thus it comes to have the apparently mystical property of referring to both a whole (culture as whole way of life) and a part of that whole (culture as distinct sphere or set of activities within that way of life). It also has the important and similarly baffling power of transcending the public/private divide: it was both a personal ideal (cultivation or *Bildung*) and a social one (the arts as collective activities, and the 'whole way of life'). What is the use, we may ask, of such a vague and self-contradictory concept? Why is it at all useful to keep these three distinct meanings in contact, to believe that

they are all, in some sense, the same thing? The value of this multiple concept of culture is, firstly, that it provides us with a means to link together all the varied aspects of our collective life. We can understand, what we are often so resistant to understanding, that there is a distinct and unified pattern to our common life, that we are formed and shaped by our common experience – we are not mere free-floating subjects, making free-floating subjective decisions, but deeply implicated in a nexus of social relations. But having made us aware of this, the concept of culture enables us to free ourselves also from the opposite danger: that of feeling so deeply the bonds of our common way of life, that there seems to be no potential for action within it at all. By providing a means of both reflecting on and acting on our common life, both collectively and individually, it demonstrates that we are not condemned merely to repeat inherited and ingrained habits. It is this paradox of an entity which both forms us and is formed by us that is so valuable. As with the problem of the liberal and the humanist gods, we must register that our current concept of ‘culture’ has failed with respect to this problem of whole and parts. The attempt to keep the three meanings in contact, by however mystical or alchemical a process, has not been overly successful. Still, in England, ‘the arts’ are seen as an ivory-tower-dwelling domain remote from ‘ordinary’ life. The latter is the sphere of something called ‘popular culture’, whose relations to ‘high culture’ or ‘personal culture’ are distant, to say the least. And the public/private divide still makes it difficult to see the relations between a private activity of self-improvement – reading, listening to music, etc. – and the social world, a ‘whole way of life’. Thus there is a deep confusion and dividedness in our sense of ‘culture’. There is no one conception of culture we can appeal to. The idea that culture can provide the basis for understanding – and even changing – ‘the whole form’ of our collective life, seems a chimera. Culture is split into a number of notions, each having relevance only to one department of our life.

This brings us to the third great weakness of our concept of ‘culture’, which takes the form of a disunity or schism. Even if we can see culture as a ‘whole way of life’, we live – so we are told, in a ‘multicultural’ world, one of different and even ‘opposing’ cultures. One of the few areas in which the idea of ‘culture as a whole way of life’ has retained any relevance is that concerning different religious and ethnic communities. This goes back to the origins of this sense of culture: it came out of early social anthropology, in the high age of British imperialism. Williams traces it back to E. B. Tylor, the Oxford anthropologist, who published in 1871 a book called *Primitive Culture*. The patronising idea that a whole, unitary culture belongs only to people who are in some way ‘primitive’, can still be detected in the current English assumptions about the ‘cultures’ of ‘minorities’. ‘It’s a cultural thing,’ people say, when faced with some evidence of difference – meaning not a difference between their culture and ours, considered as equally complex and diverse entities, but a difference of their culture, a unitary, hard-edged thing, from the surrounding, normal, way of life. Only ‘they’, the minorities, seem to have ‘a culture’ that genuinely encompasses all aspects of their life, and thus restricts their capacity for independent action: we shy away from the humility of seeing that we do as well.

And we shy away, too, from seeing that if properly understood, there is a culture, a whole way of life, that encompasses both 'us' and 'them', who seem so rigidly held apart by concepts of 'different cultures' or 'clashes of civilisations'. In England at least, the net effect of the prevailing conceptions of 'multiculturalism' has been to maintain the separation between different 'cultures'. It is under the auspices of the 'liberal gods' alone – toleration, justice, intellectual liberty – that 'multiculturalism' has hitherto existed (for an analysis of this, see my article, 'Islamophobia and Multiculturalism', in *OLR 4*). We have never quite made the leap into humanism – into seeing those of 'other' cultures as not only tolerable but equal, not only to be treated justly under our laws but fraternally within our community. 'Multiculturalism', in its current English form at least, actually prevents us from seeing how much we share of a common life. Not only between people who are supposed to be 'culturally different' within one country, such as England, but also between populations of different countries, there exist an incalculable number of mutual bonds of interdependence. At no time is this more apparent than in a period of apparently worldwide crisis, such as the recent and ongoing economic one. It is no longer quite safe to assume, at such a time, that it is only particular groups – the poor, or those in some far-off country – who will suffer the effects of political and social failure. The spectre of total economic meltdown has reminded us that we are still all in this together. Yet even when we admit this interdependence, we tend to see it as existing merely on a material level. It is only 'economically', or 'politically', that our lives are bound up with those of other peoples. We retreat to 'mechanism', when what is required is a fuller view: we must see that, insofar as we are subject to the same conditions, we share a 'whole way of life'. And insofar as we share that, we share a common culture.

The 'mechanistic' view of our social and political life has prevailed for a long time. Since the early days of the Welfare State, through Thatcherism and New Labourism, we have assumed, as E. P. Thompson put it, 'that politics is concerned with more than oiling and servicing an economic machine—adjusting and neutralising competing self-interest here or there—which no-one can control' ('Socialism and the intellectuals'). What is more difficult for it to survive is a total change, a total crisis. The recent economic upheavals have made our lack of control over the conditions of our life seem more dangerous than it had for some time. Control over the conditions of our collective existence seems vital once again. We begin to see that we need a firmer basis for our social life than merely a balance or neutralisation of competing self-interests.

In order to respond to this challenge, our concept of culture needs to overcome the three weaknesses outlined here: that of imbalance (the neglect of morality and humanism); that of incoherence (the division between the various senses of culture); and that of disunity (the splits between 'different' cultures). They are all deeply bound up with one another, and the solution to any one of them must necessarily address the others. For the first two at least, we have rich and valuable resources to draw upon: the Victorian tradition, represented here by Carlyle and Arnold, and the socialist tradition, represented by E. P. Thompson and Raymond Williams. The one we are perhaps least equipped to deal with at present is the third: the issue of 'different' cultures or cultural differences, the issue of unity-in-diversity.

We may see our failure to address this problem as a major block to any solution to the other two. How can we address the imbalance between the moral and the intellectual, when we are morally divided? How can we address the incoherence of our idea of culture, when that in itself seems so split into different 'cultures'? I have previously ('Islamophobia and Multiculturalism') described some pragmatic attempts at a cultural syncretism which offer a certain basis for this. What we lack, however, is a theory to address this problem of unity-in-diversity. To one possible model of such a theory I hope to turn my attention in my next essay.

Peter Hill is reading for an MSt in Arabic literature at St John's College. He is joint Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Left Review.

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WRITING FOR THE WORLD

SOME FUNDAMENTALS OF LEFT PUBLISHING

Alex Niven

Suddenly I had the impression that I was the world and the world was me.

- Juliette, *Deux ou trois choses que je sais d'elle*.

Why do we write? For most of us, raised on a diet of relativism and aspiration rhetoric, the answer is likely to be: we write for ourselves. The formulation sounds empowering, and perhaps in the very short-term we will derive a powerful fillip from turning inwards and trying not to worry about what the world thinks. If our society is a cynical one, a corrupt one, then isn't this self-reflexive turn a necessary survival strategy? Won't we be damaged sooner or later by forces beyond our control if we don't start from a position of impregnable enclosure and stoicism?

Perhaps. But in practice, of course, this standpoint is risky. Most dangerously, as the history of the left over the last thirty years shows, such a retreat is often merely the first step in a process of conversion and assimilation, one in which scepticism is quickly exchanged for an ethos of cynical self-interest. The longtime failure of mass movements for political change has led many to seek solace in the embrace of personal ambition and a goal-oriented culture. It probably goes without saying that almost all Labour Party politicians long ago stopped believing in the cause and replaced it with a devout belief in the pursuance of nothing but their own glittering careers.

But the disease of self-interest has spread far beyond these most visible, concentrated sites of power and world-betrayal. It affects all of us. I'm perhaps especially conscious of this structural moral deficiency right now, because I've recently published a book. Publishing a book in the second decade of the twenty-first century – even a very short, low-key publication on a small independent press – seems to be unavoidably attached to attitudes of careerism and self-aggrandisement. There seems to be a suggestion that this is a first step on the career ladder, that publishing anything (no matter what it is) is fantastic CV fodder, that I should use it as a means of self-promotion, a means of initiating a person-sized intellectual brand. There's a compulsion to produce online bios complete with cheesy photos, to promote yourself on Facebook, to use the "impact factor" that comes with publication to make contacts and capitalise on advantageous networking opportunities. I was even approached by a Newcastle Labour MP (for whom a family friend is a local campaigner), who said that it would be possible to hire a room in the House of Commons should I want to have a book launch there. It took me scarily longer than it should have done – and the advice of an intelligent friend – to realise that there might be something dubious about launching a book called "Folk Opposition" in such rarefied surroundings.

The fact that some of these things might also help to disseminate an argument that I believe is in some small way important, is beside the point. The point is that in all walks of contemporary life, one of the biggest obstacles standing in the way of solidarity and col-

lective change right now is an all-consuming market culture founded in atomism and the profit motive, one that tries with all its might to convince us that everything we do is ultimately reducible to exchange value and an ethos of self-motivated individualism.

Even on the supposedly anti-market left we are caught in this trap, one that emanates from the hegemonic, competitively-run academic and culture industries, and which quickly recruits our own worst instincts of pride and ambition so that the possibility of communication of a greater argument in a meaningful democratic context is stifled before we have even had a chance to begin speaking properly. Job avarice is pandemic. Racking up CV points and raising one's profile is the principle underlying a vast majority of writing and thinking, for leftist writers just as much as for lifestyle liberals and Tory aristos.

Because of the anti-egalitarian reforms of the past thirty years, the left-intelligentsia today is a well-meaning but largely middle-class tendency consisting of those who can still afford access to a now almost wholly privatised higher-education system. To an extent, this is a macrocosmic development that can only be reversed by a concerted collective effort and radical reform of the overarching political system. But the problem has relevance on a microcosmic level too. The wall around this newly separated-out intellectual caste is further cemented by the fact that as individuals we find it difficult to resist positioning ourselves in contexts where personal glamour and a desperate desire to build a professional reputation counts for far more than speaking to the wider community and forging links with a working class that is daily passing into oblivion and abandonment. Even those making worthwhile arguments about social division seem to quickly become tenured media celebrities, talking heads offering a caricature of radical chic and suave quasi-subversion.

So what is to be done? How can we possibly rise above this culture of insidious careerism and ensure that sophisticated critique and intellectual thinking do not become ghettoised and instrumentalised to the point of total irrelevance? How to prevent politicised discourse from becoming nothing more than a lightly risqué diversion for elite junior professionals seeking to make a bit of radical noise to attract attention and acclaim? Trying to posit an easy answer to these questions here and now would be a thankless – not to mention a vain and self-aggrandising – task. But I don't think it presumptuous to suggest that, aside from throwing all our efforts into a revolutionary reform movement that seeks to democratise education, the media, culture, and political representation, one fundamental thing we can all try to do is to recover a basic moral and ethical impetus to every intellectual act we take part in. The taboo on "moralism" that accompanied postmodernism's ascendancy was a tragedy from which we are still trying to recover. The embargo on grand narratives ruled out the possibility that we might be able to communicate something meaningful to each other, that by consenting to a process of self-abnegation and belief in something more important than ourselves, we might one day achieve a fairer, more egalitarian society. One way to begin to realise this goal is by treating individualism and careerist self-interest as the most dangerous enemy within, and by being unafraid to answer the question about why we write in the following way: we write for each other, and for the world.

Alex Niven is a D.Phil student working on modernist poetry at St John's College

HAS THE LEFT GIVEN UP ON ECONOMICS?

Nick Srnicek

With the biggest economic crisis since the Great Depression slowly unfolding, one of the most surprising consequences has been a non-event: the dearth of high-quality economic theorizing in leftist groups.¹ This is in spite of the opportunity the crisis presents for alternative economies, and in spite of the economic conundrum that developed economies find themselves in: too indebted for stimulus and too weak for austerity. This gap between austerity and stimulus indexes the insufficiency of either, and yet few have taken up the necessity of thinking of proper alternatives.

The leftist response to the economic crisis has instead mostly been to focus on piecemeal reactions against government policies. The student movement arose as a response to tuition fee and EMA changes; the right to protest movement arose as a response to heavy-handed police treatment; and leftist parties have suggested a mere moderation of existing government policies. The project to bring about a fully different economic system has been shirked in favour of smaller-scale protests. There is widespread critique, but little construction.

Admittedly, the left is not entirely devoid of high-level economic theorizing. Rather, the more specific problem is that those few who do such work are a tiny minority and are typically marginalized within the leftist scene. The attention and effort of the leading intellectuals of leftism (at least in the UK) are devoted to social issues, race issues, rights issues, and identity issues. All important, to be sure, but there is no equivalent attention paid to economic issues.

The current academic literature on leftist economics is little better. Following Alex Andrews, this body of work can be roughly separated into three general tendencies:

1. Marxists – They tend to operate in a critical mode. They provide the best analysis of the conditions of capitalism on the left. But when it comes to discussing the potential economics and organisation of a post-capitalist society, the analysis is rather thin. This is partly because economics was historically associated with a vulgar economism (which Marxism is not, ultimately), that was linked to Stalinism. And it is partly, of course, to do with the idea that the democracy of the workers' movement would generate a post-capitalist economics of itself.

2. Critical Realists, the “Post-Autistic” school, Tony Lawson, the Cambridge Social Ontology group – They have a strong critique of neoclassical economics, but lets be honest, this is shooting fish in a barrel. They have no positive project. Unlike mainstream economics that never talks about methodology, they only talk about methodology.

3. Keynesians – They have no class analysis, no wider politics, no understanding of why Keynesianism may have failed politically, or how it is the flip-side of the current

crisis.

As Alex Andrews notes, none of these approaches is sufficient on its own. Yet even more worryingly, I have been present at a number of events where it is argued that leftists needn't worry about such issues right now. Instead, it is suggested that all we need is to bring about a revolution (as though revolutions were some clean break with the past, rather than being a complex mixture of diverse social forces). The presumption implicit in this response is that once leftists are given the opportunity to create a new society, the answers will just become clear. Perhaps consensus decision-making – against all evidence – will provide a sophisticated answer!

But the risk of relying on such unreflective 'people power' is that when the opportunity comes to effectuate change, the actors involved fall back on habitual ideas simply because they can't imagine an alternative. This is a crisis of imagination, but also – more significantly – of cognitive limits. Very few have done the hard work to think through an alternative economic system. And as a result, we remain embedded within capitalist realism – unable to think outside the socio-economic coordinates established by an all-encompassing capitalist imagination. Slavoj Žižek has been a popular exception here by consistently arguing for the necessity of thinking about 'the day after tomorrow'. Yet few appear to have taken up his call, and he seems to have ignored it himself.

The Turn away from Economics

This then raises the question of why it is the case. It seems to me there are three primary reasons for this neglect of economics in contemporary leftist circles. In the first place there is the continued adherence to a form of 'folk politics' – the avoidance of systemic and abstract thinking in favour of immediate and bodily forms of action. Getting struck by a cop at a protest becomes a sign of success, at the same time that it displaces the conflict from incorporeal structures to physical individuals. Yet the systems that determine economic outcomes are complex and abstract, making them alien to everyday experience. We experience their outcomes, but only at a deferred distance². It is much more intuitive for individuals to protest and occupy spaces than it is to trace out causal chains and uncover more abstract spaces of contention (e.g. bank capital reserve requirements). Yet the latter are exponentially more effective in the long-run, albeit much less exciting. (This has led some to posit a protest trilemma between being effective, being risk-free and being exciting.)

Another part of the explanation for the missing economic analysis has to point towards the cultural turn of the 1980s in the theory and activist scenes. Rather than continuing to read Sraffa, Hilferding, Baran and Sweezy, a generation of students grew up focusing more on the issues of identity politics and the post-structuralist critique of subjectivity and desire. This is not to begrudge cultural theory its achievements, but simply to point out that this became the dominant pathway for most students during this time. Those with a broadly leftist sensibility were immersed in this milieu, and opportunity costs dictated this was at the expense of economics training. This leads to the third, and most important, explanation. Even though most leftist

students have been raised in an era of cultural theory, one would still expect the current crisis to have brought about a major turn in leftist circles. One would expect a massive surge of leftists suddenly interested in economics and the scholarly work it requires. Yet, for the most part, this shift remains unseen. It seems to me that, as a result of the training of students in cultural theory, many leftists consider themselves to be incapable of doing proper economic work. We can make broad claims about cuts and austerity, but ask a leftist to analyse the consequences of a change in eurozone bank collateral and most are lost. Thus, the third major explanation of the lack of economics in leftist circles is that we do not have the basis of training required to grapple with the nuances and details of modern economies. This, to put it simply, is a major failing. And moreover, it is one that cannot be solved overnight.

So there is a massive gap at the heart of contemporary leftism, yet there is also space for collaboration. There are pockets of interesting work being done. From modern monetary theory (MMT) to complexity economics to ecological economics to Parecon, along with anthropologists like David Graeber, and economic journalists such as Doug Henwood and Paul Mason, trajectories of innovative thought are still being launched.

Modern Monetary Theory

Among the more moderate versions of leftist economics, modern monetary theory proposes a way to lead capitalism towards both price stability (the standard goal of monetarists) and full employment (the classic goal of Keynesians). Keynesian capitalism eventually stumbled in the 1970s when faced with the dual problems of rising inflation and rising unemployment. The standard policy prescriptions to resolve these problems were in contradiction with each other, leaving Keynesians paralysed. In came the monetarists, who focused their attention on price stability – a policy which has been the guiding aim of central banks since. The goal of full employment has either been given up, or redefined to simply mean what is ‘natural’ for a stable price regime (typically 4-6% unemployment).

MMT begins its proposals from an alternative view of the nature of money. Money, in this view, gains its legitimacy neither from being government-issued (the fiat money view) nor from having a grounding in some material (the gold standard view). Instead money has value because it is what is accepted by the state for payments of taxes (a view found in Adam Smith, John Maynard Keynes, and Hyman Minsky, among others).

This is combined with a description of how government spending functions in modern economies. Contrary to the folk political metaphors of government spending being analogous to household spending, the two are in fact immensely different – for the dual reason that governments can create money and governments can impose tax liabilities on the public. The credit card metaphor of government spending is therefore a complete misrepresentation of how central banking and modern money works. In the first place, government finances its action not through bond sales or through tax revenues, but instead by creating fiat money. The standard view which sees gov-

ernments as having to raise money through taxes and bonds is exactly the reverse of the reality. Government has no need to 'raise' money; it simply creates it. When this is combined with the imposition of taxation, the demand for government-created money arises. So rather than money coming from the public to the government and then being spent, the actual operation of modern monetary systems is for the government to spend/create money (the process is simultaneous), which goes out into the public and is then partially brought back in through taxation. This, as MMTers are constantly pointing out, is simply a description of how modern monetary systems work.

The policy solutions that spring from these insights are rather shocking to today's austerity-obsessed age. In contrast to the current 'common-sense' orthodoxy, MMT argues that government debts are a natural thing, and are in fact necessary for the smooth functioning of a modern economy. A balanced budget is in fact a deflationary goal that will lead economies to stagnate. Instead of maintaining price stability by actively slowing down economies and creating unemployment in the process, Randall Wray argues that the opposite is true: price stability can and should stem from full employment policies. The government, he writes in his 1998 book *Understanding Modern Money*, should act as the 'employer of last resort', able and willing to hire anyone who wants to work for a set minimum wage. This not only guarantees employment for anyone who wants it, but it also sets a price stabiliser akin to the gold standard, thereby generating price stability. In an age of austerity, therefore, the various versions of MMT instead call for greater government debt and larger numbers of public-sector workers as the solution to today's economic crisis.

Parecon

Other alternatives have gone even further in their rethinking of economies. Parecon (short for participatory economics) is perhaps the most famous and most fully thought-out option in this mould. In contrast to the centrally planned economies of the twentieth century, Parecon proposes a non-capitalist economy grounded upon worker and consumer self-management.

Their envisioning of an alternative economy is established upon removing ownership of the means of production from society, and creating worker and consumer councils at various levels of scale (from neighbourhood up to national levels). These worker councils would democratically decide over what to produce, how to make an item, what the working conditions should be, and so on. Similarly, consumer councils would make democratic decisions over what to purchase – parks and playground equipment for the neighbourhood, basic infrastructure for cities and regions, etc. With private ownership excluded, the allocation of a society's resources would be determined not by profit motives for individuals, but by and for collectives at every level.

Jobs, in this system, would be replaced by job complexes whereby individuals would take on a variety of different roles over a working week. These job complexes would attempt to balance out the varying difficulties and rewards of specific jobs, so that

everyone would put in a relatively equal share of the effort required. As a result, compensation for personal effort – the most equitable way to remunerate individuals – would be roughly equal across society, thereby ensuring equality of opportunity. Individuals who were born into better family situations wouldn't be intrinsically better off, nor would those who were lucky in the genetic lottery.

In contrast to MMT, Parecon provides a more ground-up approach to economies and an emphasis on democratic self-control at every level of society. MMT, on the other hand, points toward technical solutions to the problems of underemployment and price stability that fit in with nicely leftist values. Both theories present serious alternatives to the existing order.

The problem with these existing attempts to think of alternatives is not, therefore, that they have not gone far enough. Rather, it is that they remain disparate and independent of each other. The efforts of groups like MMT to re-think the potential of central banking, the project of complexity economics to understand why financial crises recur, along with anarchist and socialist economics and their insights into what economies are for, should all be combined into a widespread discussion amongst the left. This, it seems to me, is only possible if leftists in general are more literate about economic matters and stop surrendering this ground to the scholars of capitalist realism.

1. I should be clear from the start that the 'left' referred to here excludes the broadly Keynesian group ranging from Paul Krugman to Christina Romer to Matthew Yglesias. While considered to be on the left in the United States, these thinkers are more accurately situated in a moderate centre position. The term 'left' here instead indexes a mostly non-Keynesian group of thinkers – typically with Marxist tendencies, but more generally interested in post-capitalism.

2. See the author's previous blog piece, 'On the Abstraction of Contemporary Crisis' for more on this: <http://thedisorderofthings.com/2011/09/12/on-the-abstraction-of-contemporary-crisis/>

Nick Srnicek is a PhD candidate in International Relations at the London School of Economics. He is the co-editor (with Levi Bryant and Graham Harman) of The Speculative Turn and co-author (with Alex Williams) of Folk Politics, forthcoming from Zero Books.

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COME THE REVOLUTION?

A DEMOCRATIC SOCIALIST MANIFESTO FOR WHILE WE WAIT

Scott Carless

Toward the end of the summer that I should dearly love to forget, there suddenly appeared in the disused fishing tackle factory unit at the end of Randolph Street a group of squatters who, having established the free university known as 'Plebs College', invited neighbours and residents to a community dinner. It was a pleasant distraction from the almost suicidal atmosphere of our wretched town house and I found myself teaching a Latin class on one of their 'free university' days, surprising perhaps mainly myself by the fact that it turned out I actually did understand the subject I'd been studying for the previous two years. Plebs College has long moved out (and is newly established in Cowley, at 51 Union Street) and the fishing tackle factory is now performing its old social function of sitting at the end of Randolph Street making the place look neglected, rather than providing something positive to the local residents; we can all rest assured that law, order and the principle of private property triumphed once more in preventing a descent into complete anarchy. Nonetheless it was several months later when I bumped into a certain Professor Emeritus I happen to know who lived in the same area; upon seeing me he slowed his bicycle to a halt and hailed me with:

'I heard you've been teaching Latin at Plebs College!'

I replied affirmatively, unsure what to expect. (Perhaps I would be dismissed at once for bringing the august subject of literae humaniores into disrepute: 'Hand over your badge and gun, Carless, you're off the case!')

'Excellent,' he grinned, 'they were a nice bunch of people; I went 'over the wall' myself.'

'Are they still there?'

'No, no they've all been moved on now.' He sighed regretfully and then went to cycle on.

'Come the Revolution eh?' he said in a slightly wistful fashion, and then bidding me farewell he continued on his way.

'Come the Revolution': it is by no means the first time I've heard the term, nor will it be the last. In fact, come to think of it, I've probably used it myself on occasion; though for some reason I always seem to end up against a wall in my own hypothetical speculations. Still, 'Come the Revolution' – it smacks a little of Millennial religious expectations of a reckoning: come the return of Christ, boy you'll regret stealing that Kinder Egg Surprise from the off-license! I'm not intrinsically opposed to the idea of a revolution, don't get me wrong, I just feel that a desire for a revolution has become more reactionary and more hopeless as time has gone by. It has become a wistful phrase, the summary of a thought process that runs, 'this is not the world in which I wish to live; come that day of reckoning all will

change'. Fundamentally this is the stuff that human progress is built on, but only if it is tied wholly to a constructive thought process that posits affirmatively what we want to replace the structure with, once we have knocked it to the ground.

The question perhaps we should ask ourselves, before we get too hot under the collar and look to bring the whole rotten mess crashing down around our ears, is: what do we want in place of the current system? It seems to be the case that at present, demonstration marches and protests seek "change", but there is often very little in the way of a firm opinion on what they want to change, other than to flush out the ancien régime. It seems that at times the cry of the modern protest may as well be

'What do we want?
We don't know!
When do we want it?
NOW!'

Now I don't wish to mock or belittle those people who have been out in protest, I don't wish to snidely point an accusatory finger at those who have occupied the square in front of St. Paul's Cathedral in London. That is not my objective, because it seems that the entire Left has been floating in a rather indecisive void as regards positive and progressive policy: the heart is there for sure, but what we need is the alternative not just the opposition. So I'll put a hypothetical case, and I would ask that many of my readers might do the same. Presuppose that by whatever means, parliamentary or revolutionary, you or your group of friends have ended up with a working majority in the House of Commons and the political clout to push through legislation. Your opposition is cowed, the reins of power are firmly in your grasp, now build something.

We would all probably have different priorities, but here are some of the points of policy that I'd be looking to push through and I hope that they might act to get you thinking. First and foremost, we need a revamp of our taxation system, sure we're all big on taxing higher incomes at a higher rate – but what's the best way to do this? Perhaps we should ask the question: why the hell it is that we have such inflexible and unvaried tax bands? Gradations in income aren't limited to four tiers, so why have a four tier tax system? What if we were to bring in a greater number of gradations, tax lower incomes at lower rates across a far more selective band? Say 8% on £10-15,000, 16% on £15-20,000, 20% on £20-25,000, and so on. The beauty of this scheme is that as earnings increase, the tax band increases with them, so the more you earn the more you'll pay; yet on lower to middle incomes you'll end up paying less tax overall. For multi-millionaires we're talking about taxation rates that break the 50% barrier and start climbing, but since rates have been lowered at the lower end of the scale, the middle/professional class won't start squealing and we've got a solid electoral base from which to operate. In conjunction with this we can look to reduce VAT and duty and make up for the shortfall by direct income taxation, thereby ensuring that this most regressive of taxes stops hitting the poorest the hardest. Now how about something a whole lot more radical in the form of introducing a Universal Basic Income? But rather than the controversial policy of simply scrap-

ping our entire welfare system and replacing it with UBI, we could use a Basic Income as a means of Income Support in conjunction with Disability, Housing, Child Support etc. The outcome would be a redress in the balance between labour and employment and an immediate way of contributing to workers' rights in this country. Much rather than the 'something for something' nonsense being bandied about by our currently clueless Labour Party, we could make the bold leap of faith in stating 'this is something for people, this is socialism, and damn you I'm not ashamed of it, none of us should be, and I am not going to talk in childish sound-bites!'

Moving on now to the big issue of Constitutional Reform, I'll admit that after the stunning failure of AV I fell into a rather deep well of political despair supplemented only by copious amounts of Jack Daniels and a small forest fire's worth of Marlboros – but the spirit has crept back in again. The desperate need for a revamp of the electoral system has not gone away, and so the full implementation of AV+ would be high on "Scott's List of Parliamentary Reforms". An increase in accountability and a reduction in wasted votes as well as greater representation for parties such as the Greens, would be to UK politics as a full strength black coffee is to me on a winter's morning. Nor would Lords reform be left out of this manifesto. To hell with all this 'two-thirds elected' compromise twaddle, here's the plan: we make the House of Lords fully elected but we retain the sense of expertise that goes with it, in that those who stand have to fulfil certain criteria. For instance, they should have a certain level of experience within an industry, have served for a certain period of time within the House of Commons, or have a degree in a relevant subject, and they should have to argue why they'd contribute to the Parliamentary process. This might not sound particularly inclusive, but the House of Commons would remain open to all and sundry and in such a manner we might retain the benefits of a bicameral system and make both houses fully accountable to the electorate. There are further ideas: introduction of a living wage, increased public funding for schools and universities, abolition of the monarchy, nuclear disarmament, a complete overhaul of the idea of remuneration by basing it on 'social value', nationalization of public utilities... I could go on. You will note of course that everything I have described could be brought about through reform, with public demonstration lending support and weight. I'm not being too idealistic to think that this might be possible, am I?

What we need is a new Democratic Socialist Manifesto and one that actively seeks to posit a new model, as opposed to simply criticizing the current one. The above ideas are just some that could form part of a radical new alternative in the political equation; and as it has become quite clear that the current Labour party has all the direction of the Bismarck after her rudder jammed, there's everything to be gained in getting the entire movement back on track. Even in its current dire state the Labour Party is enjoying a polling average of 41% and if it were to actively push a credible and progressive manifesto as opposed to the baby-talk of Progress' The Purple Book, it seems a fair conclusion that it could sweep the Conservative and Liberal Coalition straight out of power. It would seem to be folly to ignore the sheer potential that such a shift in politics could present to a determined left-wing party at this critical time: the desire for radical reform has grown in the face of yet

another failure by Capitalism, and the inherent injustice of austerity measures, not only in the UK but across Europe, has fuelled this growing sense of dissatisfaction.

So how does this fit in the picture of the left? As the disparity between protagonists of reform and revolution seems as great as ever, does this mean that we should turn our backs on the idea of revolution, and aim for reform? Could I be bold and blend the two ideas, by saying that large-scale reform is revolution? I know that might upset a fair few people, and I don't wish to appear as though I'm attempting to undermine the often admirable spirit of those who take to the streets in protest at the many injustices that mark our current system of politics. I prefer to see it in terms of achievable objectives, and I see wresting control of a political party and utilizing it to achieve one's goals as a far more achievable objective than wresting control of the State from the government. I should not say that achieving the latter is either impossible or inherently prone to risk or danger, for I would be wrong in doing so. I would simply say that in attaining a better tomorrow one must seek to win every battle one can, and that the methods and routes to doing so often lie in reformist tactics. A consideration of the past hundred years of the Labour Party should remind us of the enormous potential that lies in legislative reform: we should recognize that when will and vision are present there is almost nothing that can stop the Left from forwarding the goals of Democratic Socialism. Where the light of progress heads the way, Conservative opposition has the tendency to be led as though it were some great dumb animal with a brass ring through its nose.

Thus we may see a form of revolution in attempting to revitalize the Labour Party and pushing forward a wide-ranging manifesto that would fundamentally alter our system of politics and our system of economics. That desire for a reckoning, that yearning for a change from our wretched situation, that hope for a radical restructuring of the world around us does not have to wait for a general uprising. We do not have to wistfully sigh 'Come the Revolution', for every day, every second of our lives, we can be involved in bringing that desired change about. We do have power, however diluted it has become, and we must not allow ourselves to be shut out from the very system by which we are meant to have a say over our own lives. To sketch out a credible alternative and to provide a model that we can look to achieve, as opposed to pointing to that we wish to avoid, is the heart and soul of progressive politics. So we may find that once we have such reforms being pushed with strength and determination, the momentum would build, and that longed-for revolution would not come as some dramatic and sudden event but would become an irresistible and ongoing process. This would be no 'conservative' revolution of palliative measures but a genuine, determined and directed left-wing revolution that would utterly transform the world around us – and we might stop hoping for that day of reckoning and know that it was already upon us. The energy of revolution must be honed for progression and construction: we should not feel that to reform is to compromise. Instead, we should see that it can play a role in redefining the rules, it can act as a tool of revolution and it can be turned to our benefit rather than becoming an obstruction. We do not have to see reform and revolution as inevitably opposed. We should challenge the distinction

by seeing reform as revolution and going about reform in a revolutionary manner. You find the world as it is, then you wrench the controls from the hands of those who have reduced the democratic process to a pallid ghost of itself, and you use every tool you can to bring about the hopes and the dreams of a better tomorrow.

And then all *will* change.

Scott Carless is a third-year Classics undergraduate at Balliol College.

CLICK IF YOU 'LIKE' REVOLUTION

Jamie Pitman

Modern economic thought provides us with a useful analogy for the growth of the internet. Positive feedback theory, an update of the Keynesian multiplier, states that as people earn more, so they spend more. This in turn creates more jobs and more money- and so on and so forth. This supplies us with a simple paradigmatic parallel to the growth of the internet, particularly in its 2.0 incarnation, in which the internet is painted as the grand facilitator of global communication creating the means to connect us all to its network, with no barriers to entry and a technological indifference to time, space or Malthusian concerns about population numbers. Political philosophers from Aristotle to Marx posited communication as a constitutive element of our essential humanness. Therefore it only requires the smallest logical leap to see that people will naturally gravitate towards any mechanism that makes communication easier. At which point, the model of exponential growth described by the positive feedback theory begins, eventually amassing the two billion plus users online today.

This quantitative multiplier has also heralded qualitative changes. Somewhat ironically, the 'old media' have helped to construct a dominant narrative in which Barack Obama tweeted his way into power, while Gordon Brown (then Prime Minister) stated that the internet effectively ruled out the possibility of events like the Rwandan genocide ever happening again.

To varying degrees, our modes of both life and production have been reconfigured to accommodate these new communication technologies. With the possible exception of air flight, ICTs have become ubiquitous. With much less fanfare, the free market has been similarly remodelled: more than fifty per cent of US trading is now algorithmic – occurring between 'matching engines', huge computer systems that are housed in capacious warehouses, often miles away from the traditional trading pits of urban financial centres. More broadly, transactions that occur in microseconds, when aligned with the deterritorialisation of capital, form the underpinnings of the globalisation project.

On Monday 15th June 2009, widespread unrest at the results of the recent presidential elections in Iran spilled onto the streets of Tehran. The New York Times reported that 'Iranians are blogging, posting to Facebook and most visibly coordinating their protests on Twitter, the messaging service.'

As the story unfolded, the Guardian reported that proposed maintenance work by Twitter had been delayed at the behest of the new Obama administration so that Twitter could continue to facilitate the anti-government protests. The events in Iran came to be dubbed the 'Twitter revolution' – thereby replacing Moldova, where another uprising, barely two months previously, had also been christened the 'Twitter revolution' in the Guardian.

True to the new convention, revolutionary events in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya were branded 'Twitter revolutions' and the role of social media was given a primacy in most commentaries dealing with similar events elsewhere. As Peter Beaumont wrote in the *Guardian*: 'The barricade today do not bristle with bayonets and rifles, but with phones.'

As we can see, plenty of ground has been provided for the cyber-utopians to stand upon and evangelise. Somewhat predictably however, these narratives laden with technological determinism have been problematised and contested by other commentators - generally decrying their lack of empiricism and cultural materialism. Shortly after the Moldovan revolutionaries forced a re-count of the controversial election, Natalia Morar, the woman credited with starting the uprising, was forced to go on the run from the authorities. Fearful of detection if she used the internet or her mobile phone, she told the newspaper: '[It is] ironic that the tools [I] used to launch a revolution could now potentially betray [my] whereabouts.'

Another stumbling block to our uncritical acceptance of the role social media played in these uprisings is provided by statistical evidence. One commentator states that: 'Analysis by Sysomos, a social media analysis company, found only 19,235 Twitter accounts registered in Iran (0.027 % of the population) on the eve of the 2009 elections. As many sympathisers of the Green Movement began changing their Twitter location status to Tehran to confuse the Iranian authorities, it became nearly impossible "to tell whether the people tweeting from Iran were in Tehran or in, say, Los Angeles"'

Similarly, advocates of digital media were quick to point out how Twitter usage spiked during key moments in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Green Square in Tripoli and throughout the walls and gates of Damascus in Syria (there were approximately 40-45 tweets per minute from Egypt and 30-35 per minute from Syria and Libya). But internet penetration across the middle-East and North Africa stands at 21.1 %, whilst Facebook penetration is only 4.5 %. The apparent aporia between these two poles of commentary is further compounded by the fact that, as has been pointed out, 'internet access and PC ownership remains almost exclusively available to the upper and upper middle classes'.

This is not easily integrated into the reported social composition of the demonstrators. This statement from an independent trade unionists' meeting in Cairo on 19 February is representative: 'Egypt's youth, students, workers and the poor are the owners of this revolution. In recent days a lot of elites, parties and so-called symbols have begun to ride the wave of revolution and hijack it from their rightful owners.'

It seems reasonable to assume that the reference to 'symbols' might be levelled at certain social media sites and network providers, particularly Vodafone for whom the Egyptian revolutionaries reserved particular ire after the company released an advertisement seemingly suggesting it had inspired the revolution. The advert closed with the claim: 'We didn't send people to the streets, we didn't start the revolution ... We only reminded Egyptians how

powerful they are.' There remain certain philosophical and moral problems with this trend of grafting corporate identities onto the names of revolutions.

The concrete reality that Mubarak (as well as the Syrian, Tunisian, Libyan, Yemeni and Jordanian regimes) shut down the internet might seem to confer a devastating blow to the case laid out by the cyber-utopians. I would argue that it actually poses more of a dichotomy. That there seems to have been minimal to no internet usage at all during critical moments of struggle certainly dissolves those commentaries that effectively reify and propel ICTs onto centre stage. However, the actuality of governments scrambling to find an internet 'kill-switch' also undermines the opposing notion that the internet's role has been dreamed up by 'lazy' journalists looking for easy copy. Furthermore, it is not only 'unenlightened' and 'despotic' regimes who wish to appoint themselves as the gatekeepers of their subjects' internet freedoms. As the Independent has reported: 'The [UK] Civil Contingencies Act and the 2003 Communications Act can both be used to suspend internet services, either by ordering internet service providers (ISPs) to shut down their operations or by closing internet exchanges. Under the protocol of the Communications Act, the switch-flicking would be done by the Culture Secretary.' Meanwhile, President Obama has sought to enshrine identical powers within the US constitution with the 'Protecting Cyberspace as a National Asset Act'.

But it seems fair to adjust our lens somewhat and proceed in agreement that ICTs are indeed a tool used by modern protestors. It also seems reasonable to dismiss the claims that ICTs and attendant social media constitute a paradigm shift that transcends traditional activism or the socio-economic factors that remain as central to revolution today as they did in 1789, 1848, 1917, or indeed 1989.

The symbiosis between the latest communication technology and revolution is not without precedent. Abraham Lincoln would hastily assemble a telegraph network so that he could co-ordinate his troops via telegram during the American Civil War. More recently, newly-invented cassette tapes of Khomeini's sermons found their way all around the world and into Iranian markets during the 1970s.

If we take a lead from Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum that 'the medium is the message', then we cannot possibly hope to evaluate the ICTs' suitability as a protest tool without understanding the role that they play in wider society. Even the most stubborn neo-luddite has probably had their life altered by ICTs in some less than obvious way. The declining minority who do not own a computer or a mobile phone would, most likely, have felt the shockwaves of the economic meltdown that is still reverberating through the eurozone and elsewhere. Whilst 70% of the world's population still aren't online, many of the global South have experienced the turmoil brought about by globalisation. Again, it is the ICTs that have allowed capital to extend its reach into the planet's peripheries. This affects us all.

In 2003, Alan Greenspan announced that the economic product of the United States had become predominantly conceptual. According to *The Economist*, this

translated to at least a 30% compositional growth rate since the early 1980s, which meant that as much as 75% of the value of limited companies now came from intangible assets. Greenspan, in his speech, then explained how the internet promised to solve one of capitalism's biggest dilemmas – the problem Marx termed 'the tendency of the rate of profit to fall': 'In the physical world, the usual situation is that each additional unit of output is more costly to produce than the previous one; that is, production, at least eventually, is characterized by increasing marginal cost. By contrast, in the conceptual world, much of production is characterized by constant and perhaps even zero, marginal cost. For example, though the set up cost of creating an on-line encyclopedia may be enormous, the cost of reproduction and distribution may be near zero if the means of distribution is the Internet.'

Greenspan's speech goes on to underline the need to combat the internet's metaphysical 'openness' (where potential profits could simply dissolve into cyberspace), by enclosing it within a robust framework of intellectual property law. Therefore, the dominant conception of the internet that had flourished in the 1990s – 'as the transcendence of markets in an open source utopia', according to one definition – was itself transcended by an aggressive expansion of intellectual property rights (IPRs).

There has been much online debate about the historiography surrounding the erosion of the 'digital commons'. Some argue it began in the 1990s under the Clinton administration in the USA and Tony Blair's new 'Labour' here in the UK. This argument contends that the root cause was 'Third Way' politics, which embraced globalisation and the cultural zeitgeist, and thereby allowed the WTO to oversee IPRs through the TRIPs agreement. For others, the trend is more recent, and stems from corporate over-reaction to civil society groups such as 'Copyleft' and 'Creative Commons', who advocate an 'access for all' ethos, inspired by anarchist and autonomist political philosophy.

Perhaps here I am guilty of concentrating on the destination rather than the journey itself. This is not to suggest that revolution is an end in itself; within our normative framework, it would mark the beginning of the real task of building a better society. Our assessment, then, must consider what utility ICTs offer in the here and now.

From all the existing repertoires in the activist's toolkit, I would argue ICTs have made the biggest impact upon the process of mobilisation. In terms of disseminating information, for example, they enable an exponential increase in the division of labour. The necessity for people to spend hours performing laborious tasks such as stuffing envelopes has been eradicated. Furthermore, ICTs can create and respond to both components of the spontaneity and organisation dialectic, identified by both Luxemburg and Gramsci as a vital ingredient of any mass action.

ICTs also distinguish themselves from existing repertoires in terms of economies of scale. The same paradigm that boosted encyclopaedia sales in Alan Greenspan's vision applies equally to campaigning. ICTs do away with the need for activists to continuously restructure their operational activity in response to the organic growth of a successful campaign. The same email or post on a social net-

work site can be sent to one or to thousands easily. Social media sites are also quite easily maintained and invite 'micro-participation', helping to give the impression of, if not create, a 'permanent campaign'. ICTs are also uniquely positioned to respond to quickly changing events. The uprising in Libya, for example, created an opportunity for revolutionary organisations to rapidly transform support for the rebels into domestic mobilisation against the NATO intervention. However, this inherent adaptability also carries its own risks. There is the danger of replacing a considered position with the cyber equivalent of a pithy sound-bite.

In December 2010, UK Uncut proposed a deviation from their usual repertoire, which had entailed direct action aimed at certain corporate stores exposed in the mainstream press for tax avoidance. A day of action was proposed where activists would not only bring about the temporary closure of stores such as Vodafone and Boots, but would also visit John Lewis outlets and present staff with badges and chocolates. This was motivated by a decision to highlight the John Lewis business model as a Weberian 'ideal type'. In some ways, UK Uncut became a victim of its own success and structure. The campaign, which began with a small action in October 2010, gathered the sort of pace characterised by the positive feedback model through its utilisation of old media, a centralised website and numerous Facebook 'event' pages – becoming a national movement within weeks. However (and I write this reflexively, as somebody who participated in some of the first actions), many of those initially attracted to UK Uncut were people already active in other groups such as 'Climate Camp' or the Socialist Workers' Party, experienced activists who often had strong pre-formed ideologies. As a result of that, when the UK Uncut website requested a mass mobilisation for the John Lewis day of action (entitled 'The Feeling is Mutual'), some activists felt betrayed. For them, the robust rhetoric of the website did not seem to tally with the notion of lionising any form of capitalism (however co-operative).

Whilst the internet had enabled the meteoric rise of UK Uncut, it had also dictated a breakneck pace, a new 'rhythm' for campaigners – one in which substance is easily neglected. According to Micah White, this dichotomy creates cause for concern. White contends that the epistemological break made by online activists has been to surrender effective activism for the logic of capitalism itself: 'The trouble is that this model of activism uncritically embraces the ideology of marketing. It accepts that the tactics of advertising and market research used to sell toilet paper can also build social movements. This manifests itself in an inordinate faith in the power of metrics to quantify success. Thus, everything digital activists do is meticulously monitored and analysed. The obsession with tracking clicks turns digital activism into clicktivism.'

White's so-called 'clicktivism' resonates with Morozov's 'slacktivism' (2009) – both neologisms describe the substitution of productive campaigning for an inferior cyber facsimile. For White, the problem is a paradigmatic one; by challenging capitalism through communicative capitalism, the means inevitably undermine the end. Morozov is simply asserting that internet activism is the easier option, a pale imitation of the real thing.

Jodi Dean, a Professor of Political Science, expands on Morozov's postulation in 'Blog Theory: Feedbacks and Capture in the Circuits of Drive' (2010). In Dean's psychoanalytical account, which borrows heavily from Jacques Lacan and Slavoj Žižek, Dean asserts that communicative capitalism marks the dawn of a 'new ideological formation' (p. 5). While White's notion of 'clicktivism' depends upon a degree of 'false consciousness' amongst its subjects, Dean suggests that activists might be fully aware of the inherent weaknesses of online campaigning but nevertheless become 'captured' in the titular 'circuits of drive' as the internet becomes a fetish object. The idea of activists knowingly surrendering their activism to passivity in a modern-day version of the Hegelian dialectic seemed fanciful to me, until Dean located the concept in a reflexive example: '...I know that quizzes on Facebook are ingenious ways of collecting information from me and my friends, but I take them anyway... The psychoanalytic notion of fetishism provides a convenient shorthand: "I know, but nevertheless...."'

Dean goes on to talk about a 'decline in symbolic efficiency', in which the proliferation and instantaneous flow of information that has been enabled by ICTs inflicts such a dizzying attack upon its subject that 'master signifiers' are displaced and forgotten. This in turn, leads the subject into a postmodernist tailspin, as countless micro-narratives replace the meta-narrative of globalised capitalism. The corollary of this, Dean insists, is to strengthen the relationship between subject (the activist) and fetish object (the internet) as the subject journeys deeper into the virtual world to find or replace the missing signifier. Dean's work here is drawn from the early work of Žižek, and I believe that there are some valuable, if somewhat obfuscated, insights to be found within it. The loss of the master signifier, for example, is put into less disembodied terms by Paul Mason in his 2007 account of the global working class, 'Live Working or Die Fighting': '...there is the culture of individualism born of technological progress. The communications revolution has created a young generation that thinks more individualistically, cares more about its individual rights than its collective ones, and is – to the frustration of union organisers – less inclined to join organisations... today they are adept at playing with multiple identities.'

Whilst there is a tension between the two versions (the shift towards atomisation seems to be a more evolutionary process for Mason, rather than the violent rupture Dean suggests), there is a broad consensus that ICTs have forced a break with the Durkheimian organic solidarity that arose from industrialisation and the division of labour. For me, this is the most pressing problem in the relationship between ICTs and revolutionary activism, for it was from this solidarity that Marx's revolutionary subject drew its confidence. Lievrouw and Hands both regard this new turn as a functional strength. But I worry that the 'network society', as it has been called, leaves a vacuum where there once stood a revolutionary subject.

Jamie Pitman is a third year Sociology, Politics and Economics student at Ruskin College. He is an activist and has written for various publications including Pambazuka and the Socialist Review.

DEMOCRACY IN OUR TIME

OCCUPY WALL STREET AND THE END OF CORPORATOCRACY

Sam Sussman

Democracy in Our Time: Occupy Wall Street and the End of Corporatocracy "The Times They Are a-Changin'", blasting from the centre of Zuccotti Park, was an appropriate sound to greet me as I approached the epicentre of the Occupy movement on a blustery autumn day last month. Indeed, 'the order is rapidly fading' in American politics. Three years after a financial crisis that delegitimised 'let the rich rule' economics, Americans are voicing outrage at the chronic infection of money in our politics. By putting its finger on this simple fact, Occupy Wall Street has suddenly changed American political discourse.

The movement could not come at a better time. For thirty years, the financial sector has shifted wealth and political power toward the wealthiest 1%. As the relatively egalitarian political and economic order of the early post-war period has been steadily eroded, the left has lain dormant. We have been defeated intellectually by the powerful simplicity of 'government is the problem' sloganeering, and electorally by the coordinated incursion of corporate cash.

It is tempting to understand these changes in terms of personalities: the charming Ronald Reagan leading the conservative revolution, the finagling Clinton as the traitorous triangulator. But these fundamental political changes relate instead to the structural transformation of the American economy. What has effectively happened is that manufacturing – which created a plethora of middle-class jobs – has given way to finance, which has disproportionately concentrated income and political power.

Occupy Wall Street's anger at the present arrangement can only be understood against the background of the society that has been lost. In the first three decades of the post-war period, the United States was far from a perfect society, but it was relatively egalitarian and socially mobile. Public universities, federal mortgage assistance, Keynesian demand management and social security ensured a secure middle class that could count on rising incomes. This arrangement rested on the fact that profitability in the industrial economy depended on coordination between high and medium income earners. The automobile industry, for example, required both high-paid managers and engineers and an assembly line of unskilled workers. In times bygone, corporations might have used the truncheon to control labour, but after the federal government recognized the right to unionize in 1935, corporate America had no choice but to share the bounty of Pax Americana.

Tragically, this arrangement did not endure. By the mid-1970s, American manufacturing was being challenged overseas. This linked with the collapse of Bretton Woods, the international monetary management system

that relied on stringent capital controls. Increased capital mobility combined with changing technologies to globalise banking. As American manufacturing prowess waned, the ascendant finance sector seemed the best replacement.

Coaxed on by Wall Street and an exuberant Reagan Administration, Congressional Democrats agreed to a Faustian deregulatory pact that reduced leverage requirements and abolished minimum mortgage down payments. With each new deregulatory act, financial markets became more volatile. Freed to make riskier decisions, insolvent Saving & Loans associations were requesting a \$130 billion bailout (granted) by the end of the 1980s. Throughout, the financial sector continued to grow: between 1981 and 1989, the size of the financial sector as a proportion of GDP increased by 50%, while manufacturing employment declined by 27%.

Volatility was not financialisation's only malignant effect. By replacing middle-class manufacturing jobs with a smaller number of high-paying Wall Street jobs, financialisation wrought income inequality unseen since the Great Depression. Since 1979, the income of the wealthiest 1% has increased by 275%, while the real median income increased by just 2%.

Underpinning this inequality has been a shift in political power. Unlike in manufacturing, financial sector profitability does not require cooperation with middle-income earners. In an investment bank, corporate law firm or management consulting house, employees in the top 5% of income earners report to bosses in the top 1%. In essence, financialisation unbound corporate America from the post-war power-sharing arrangement.

Management's first response was to challenge the very notion of collective bargaining. In 1983, Reagan, the figurehead of corporate America, appointed three vehemently outspoken anti-labour advocates to the five-member National Labor Relations Board. The board cut in half the number of complaints it heard, and, in those cases it did hear, sided with employers three-quarters of the time. Because most of these cases involved workers fired for unionization attempts, the message was unmistakable: government would no longer guarantee workers' right to unionise. By the end of the Reagan years, the private sector unionization rate had fallen from 33% to 11%.

With labour sidelined, the right moved to undermine the existential core of the post-war consensus: progressive taxation. During the Reagan years, the highest income tax rate was reduced from 70% to 28%, while taxes that affected the wealthy – on capital gains and estates – were slashed. These cuts were offset by increases in the regressive payroll tax. Consequently, the percentage of the nation's wealth owned by the top 1% increased from 24.8% in 1981 to 35.7% in 1989.

Organized labour's decline and the concentration of wealth exacerbated the historically corrosive influence of money in politics. No longer able to rely on labour for sufficient backing, the Democratic Party lurched dramatically to the right to appeal to corporate donors. Thomas Ferguson, the preeminent scholar of money in American politics, has documented how banking interests pushed the Democratic Party away

from expansionary fiscal policy in the 1980s and 1990s in favor of deficit reduction, a priority for bond trading investment bankers. Wall Street's influence grew as the financial crisis approached: between 1998 and 2008, investment firms, commercial banks, hedge funds, real estate companies and insurance conglomerates spent \$5.125 billion on campaign contributions and lobbying. That's the GDP of a small country.

Equally effective were Big Business's efforts to capture the political dialogue. Beginning in the 1970s, a crop of think tanks – funded by the financial, oil and defence sectors – sprang up to create a pseudo-analytic framework for the deregulatory agenda. In one example, the energy conglomerate Koch Industries, the U.S.'s second largest privately held corporation, spent at least \$41 million founding think tanks that push reductions in corporate taxes and environmental regulation. While less than intellectually genuine, the research impacts on policy: fourteen of the twenty-three environmental regulations overturned by the Bush Administration were identified by the Koch-funded Mercatus Center.

When financial elites are not funding the think tanks that produce policy ideas or the political campaigns that popularize them, they are staffing the agencies responsible for their implementation. The campaign against regulating derivatives was led by former Goldman Sachs CEO Robert Rubin in his capacity as Clinton's Treasury Secretary. Rubin was hardly the only one walking through the revolving door between Wall Street and Washington: many of his undersecretaries, as well as many mid-level regulators, were Wall Street alumni. So it was no surprise when, in 1999, Clinton repealed the Glass-Steagall Act, the cornerstone of the New Deal regulatory structure. The act divided commercial and investment banks, with government insurance for the former alone. Glass-Steagall's repeal ensured that when the bubbles in which investment banks were betting eventually burst, the entire banking system would face the dark abyss of default – and the government would be on the hook.

The triangle of campaign donations, regulatory capture and pseudo-intellectual think-thanks has seriously undermined American democracy. While Americans disagree on much, majorities support a millionaire's surtax (81%), reduced defence spending (76%), increased education spending (67%), and preserving Medicare (76%) and Social Security (81%). Yet public preference has persistently been overruled by the 1% – the CEOs of health insurance companies, hedge fund managers, defence contractors or oil tycoons.

Beyond normative difficulties, this arrangement has proved unsustainable. Just as in the 1920s, when productivity outpaced wage increases and the difference was funnelled into ever-riskier investment instruments by the wealthy, the lethal combination of deregulated capital markets and sky-high income inequality ensured an inevitable crisis. The fact that, by 2007, 40% of corporate profits were in finance, merely guaranteed that when the crisis struck, it would threaten the entire economy.

That crisis came when the mortgage bubble began to burst in 2007, and culminated in the collapse of Lehman Brothers amidst a wreckage of overleveraging and speculation in September 2008. The crisis exacerbated a nas-

cent recession brought on by insufficient demand, itself caused by the skewed income distribution of the past decade, when 65% of growth went to the top 1%.

The kicker of financialisation is not that it caused the financial crisis. Rather, it is that the stranglehold of finance over the political system meant that the government response to the crisis was nearly entirely focused on Wall Street. As a former Goldman Sachs CEO, then Secretary of the Treasury, designed a \$700 billion bank bailout without lending requirements, compensation caps, or stipulations of any sort, foreclosed-upon homeowners were left out in the rain with a copy of *The Wealth of Nations* and a lecture on personal responsibility.

* * *

Once or twice a century, there is a watershed moment in American politics in which the obvious bankruptcy of the present arrangement leads to paradigmatic transition. In the 20th century, mass unemployment engendered the New Deal in the 1930s, and stagflation gave rise to the New Right in the late 1970s. So when Barack Obama assumed office in January 2009, amidst the worst economic crisis in living memory, with 70% approval rating and the promise of “hope and change”, the moment to reverse the cancer of financialisation seemed to have finally arrived.

What would such a moment have looked like? It would have used the full force of government to help those most adversely affected by the economic crisis, and, in so doing, restore public faith in government. In the immediate term, the Administration should have pursued a public jobs program that put the unemployed to work in areas of urgent social need, like public infrastructure and education. Next, the Administration should have negotiated an aggressive mortgage-relief program, forcing bank compliance by threatening to withdraw Troubled Assets Relief Program funds or deny access to the discount window, and its juicy near 0% interest rates.

Recognizing financialisation’s unsustainability, the Obama Administration should have shed the silly ‘Wall Street and Main Street rise and fall as one’ rhetoric and moved expeditiously to build a post-financialised economy. This means large-scale investments in clean energy, perhaps the only burgeoning sector with the potential to create significant numbers of middle-class jobs. Simultaneously, the Administration should have clamped down on Wall Street by reinstating Glass-Steagall, strict leverage requirements, regulating the derivative market, and instituting a tax of 0.1% on all financial transactions to discourage speculators’ high-frequency trading.

Looking beyond a financialised economy means recognising that international competition requires investment in human capital. For all the right-wing nonsense that unions undermine competitiveness, the U.S. will never compete with developing nations in terms of cheap labour. The natural alternative is superior human capital. During the Bush years, the public treasury was emptied for tax cuts for the wealthy and the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars. The Obama Administration must radically redefine public priorities by investing in early childhood education, higher education, job training and health care.

To institutionalise this paradigmatic transition, the Administration should have worked toward political structures more conducive to populist democracy. In 2010, collective bargaining came under attack in Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana and Ohio. The President should have seized the opportunity to rekindle the historic alliance with labour by vociferously rushing to its defence. Rhetorical support should have been coordinated with a legislative push of the comprehensive Employee Free Choice Act, which strengthens penalties on employers that violate workers' rights. More vitally, comprehensive public campaign financing – including matching funds for outspent candidates and those targeted by independent attack groups – should have been the centrepiece of Obama's New Deal 2.0.

This agenda would have sent an unequivocal message to the American people: after three decades in which the rich wrote the rules, we are offering a fundamentally different alternative in the spirit of egalitarian democracy that traces its root from Jefferson to Roosevelt and, now, to Obama.

The Obama Administration achieved essentially none of these reforms. Instead, it passed a stimulus effective enough to stymie the loss of 800,000 jobs a month, but too small to create positive job growth; financial reform that hovers self-consciously around the edges of the financial casino house; a mortgage relief program that has been as impotent as it is miniscule; and, most disappointingly, a continuation of the language of apprehensive liberalism that constantly apologises for the very fact that government must exist in the first place.

In short, it has been a time of profound frustration for the left. But the emergence of Occupy Wall Street speaks to the fact that the left has taken the right message from the Obama era: the electoral dimension is insufficient. The transition from an industrial to a financialised economy has left us with the formal rules of a democracy without the infrastructure to give it meaning. The only way to effect populist reform is to combine electoral and extra-electoral tactics. This has always been the essential logic of progressive change. FDR surely deserves credit for the New Deal, but it was populist activism – the Bonus March of 1932; the strikes, totalling a million and a half workers, of 1934; spontaneous unemployment and eviction prevention councils – that pressured him to create the infrastructure that birthed the middle-class society of the post-war period. If we are to reclaim such a society in our own time, the same participatory spirit is essential.

Enter Occupy Wall Street. What is so special about the movement is that it understands that, just as in the 1930s, participatory democracy is the only way to counter the corrosive influence of money. It is a spirit summed up by David, a high school student holding cardboard that read, 'I can't afford a lobbyist so I made this sign.' He told me, 'Nobody is lobbying for me to go to college, for me to have a job when I graduate. I can't influence politicians.' Then he pointed upwards, to the financial institutions that contributed \$155 million to political campaigns in 2008. "But they can." David is not alone: polls show that as much as 54% of the public supports Occupy Wall Street. This evidences what those on the ever-shrinking left of the Democratic

Party have been arguing for decades: the United States remains in its heart a New Deal society. Now is the time to harness the energy of the disenfranchised left and build on the ruins of financialisation a new temple of American prosperity. The redemptive beauty of Occupy Wall Street is that it offers that chance. In just six weeks, with a shoe-string budget (now beginning to grow) and little organizational muscle, the movement has shown us the way back to the society that we have lost. If we emerge a more prosperous society from this winter of our discontent, it will be because the Occupy movement, in the spirit of Dylan, forces Washington to 'admit that waters around us have grown,' and that the only way to reconstruct the socially mobile, egalitarian society of the early post-war period is to reverse the scourge of financialisation.

Sam Sussman is an American writer, student and activist. Last year he read PPE as a visiting student at Christ Church College.

REREADING EINSTEIN ON SOCIALISM

Pritam Singh and Tamsin Barber

Consideration of Einstein's ideas on socialism, published first in a leading socialist journal of the post-war period,¹ is important now as the crisis of global capitalism is deepening and the alternatives to capitalism are debated widely from a range of different perspectives. The fact that Einstein (1879-1955) was and remains a seminal figure in the field of physics not only highlights the significance of a physicist's perspective on socialism, it is also of huge educational value from the viewpoint of popular dissemination of the idea of socialism as an alternative to the current crisis-ridden capitalism.

Einstein's political radicalism

Einstein's endorsement of socialism in 1949 for the inaugural issue of the *Monthly Review* was not a one-off act of left-wing radicalism. He had opposed the two World Wars from a position of active pacifism – though he had also contributed to the knowledge and technology of war in his work towards developing the atom bomb, something for which he expressed much regret later on. He had a lifelong commitment to humanism and served on the advisory board of the First Humanist Society of New York. He was a supporter of ethical culture and on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the New York Society for Ethical Culture he noted that the idea of ethical culture embodied his personal conception of what was most valuable and enduring in religious idealism. He had eloquently denounced American racism in a 1946 essay, 'The Negro Question'. He had suffered persecution as a Jew and had opposed anti-Semitism, but had also revealed his political vacillation when he made a mild defence of the creation of the Zionist state of Israel. One of his most remarkable acts of political radicalism was his vigorous and public support for the anti-Franco forces in the Spanish Civil War.²

Einstein on socialism

The key issues that formed the focus of Einstein's article on socialism were: the concept of human nature and its implications for the socialist perspective; the need for an ethical perspective on social life; the inbuilt tendency under capitalism towards concentration of economic and political power; the crippling of human capabilities under capitalism and the contradictory role of education and media in this; and finally the dangers to democracy from an over-centralised planned economy and society.

Einstein viewed human nature as contradictory in character. He located the roots of this contradiction in the conflict between the self and the social. He wrote:

'...our feelings and strivings are often contradictory and obscure and ... they cannot be expressed in easy and simple formulas. Man is, at one and the same time, a solitary being and a social being. As a solitary being he attempts to protect his own existence and that of those who are closest to him, to satisfy his personal desires, and to develop his innate abilities. As a social being, he seeks to gain the recognition and affection of his fellow human beings, to share in their pleasures, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to improve their conditions of life. Only the existence

of these varied, frequently conflicting, strivings accounts for the special character of a man, and their specific combination determines the extent to which an individual can achieve an inner equilibrium and can contribute to the well-being of society.³

It is possible to locate Einstein's criticism of both the individualistically oriented capitalism and the bureaucratic and over-centralised planned economy in his conception of the dualistic character of human nature. Capitalism promotes individualism, competition and selfishness, and weakens the social aspect of human character; an over-centralised planned economic system, by contrast, narrows the avenues for individual initiative and articulation.

Einstein ascribes the individualist or selfish strivings of human beings to heredity or what he called the 'biological constitution,' and the social strivings to what he called the 'cultural constitution'. The biological constitution, in his view, was fixed, but the 'cultural constitution' was a human construct. He argued: 'Modern anthropology has taught us, through comparative investigation of so-called primitive cultures, that the social behaviour of human beings may differ greatly, depending upon prevailing cultural patterns and the types of organisations which predominate in society'. His support for socialism derived from his belief that the 'cultural constitution' of socialism would promote human behaviour that is more conducive to social solidarity, cooperation and mutual cultural enrichment. Looking at the capitalist society around him, he argued that 'the essence of the crisis of our time ... concerns the relationship of the individual to society'. His criticism of capitalism was that the capitalist 'cultural constitution' accentuates egotistical drives and leads to deterioration of social drives. This process of deterioration, he argued, makes human beings 'feel insecure, lonely, and deprived of the naïve, simple, and unsophisticated enjoyment of life'. In his view, humans can find meaning in life only through devoting themselves to society. This, according to Einstein, provided the social-ethical justification for socialism.

It can be argued that capitalists also engage with society and, in fact, they can realise their profits only by engaging with society.⁴ However, there is a fundamental and qualitative difference between capitalists' engagement with society and socialists devoting themselves to society. Capitalists' engagement with society, even when they are participating in apparently charitable activities, is aimed at extracting short-term and long-term private benefits. In sharp contrast, socialists' engagement with society is non-exploitative in character and is based on the premise that an individual's holistic development can be realised only through contribution to the economic and cultural enrichment of other fellow human beings. This point about the dependence of human well-being on relationship with other human beings is important to highlight given the contrasting neo-liberal emphasis on the atomistic individual.

Einstein criticised the economic organisation of society under capitalism for the concentration of economic and political power and the crippling effect of this on individuals. According to him, the concentration of economic power was partly the result of competition among the capitalists, and partly due to technological developments and the increasing division of labour, which encourages the formation of larger units of production at the expense of smaller ones. This was the standard Marxist analysis of the process of capital accumulation – an analysis which Einstein extended to the political sphere. He argued that the concentration of economic power leads to concentration of political power: while the members of the decision-making legislative bodies are chosen by the political parties, these parties are dependent for their finances upon private capitalists

who have concentrated economic power in their hands. This phenomenon led Einstein to an important political conclusion: he argued that the combination of economic and political power weakens democracy because the members of the legislative bodies become more closely associated with wealthy financiers than with the ordinary voters who elected them. This leads to what Einstein called the separation of the electorate from the legislature. In his words, 'the consequence is that the representatives of the people do not in fact sufficiently protect the interests of the underprivileged sections of the population'. The weakness of democracy under capitalism is, therefore, structural in character.

This weakening of democracy is further accentuated by the private capitalists' control of the sources of information ('press, radio, education'). This is what the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser called the control of the ideological state apparatus. According to Einstein, capitalists' control of the main sources of information makes it difficult for an ordinary citizen 'to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights'. The economic insecurity and political powerlessness of individuals lead to what Einstein called the 'crippling of the social consciousness of individuals' which he identified as 'the worst evil of capitalism'.

Einstein criticised the education system under capitalism for its part in the crippling of the social consciousness of the individual, because this education does not encourage values of social solidarity. Instead, the bourgeois education system inculcates a competitive attitude. The student is trained to see education in an instrumentalist fashion, as the route to a future career geared towards the acquisition of material wealth. Instead of valuing the intrinsic worth of knowledge, capitalism tends to commodify education. The commodified education system reinforces the culture of competition and private aggrandisement. Undoubtedly, Einstein's observations on education and media are very valuable in understanding the role of education and media in promoting hegemony of the bourgeois ideology. Yet what Einstein did not capture is the progressive potential of education and media. Education can and does act in a subversive way, however limited, in undermining established ideas and practices. Similarly, the media, especially the growth of the internet, expands the democratic space for dissent, communication and networking. The balance between bourgeois control and the democratic potential of education and media varies from country to country, and depends upon the historically evolved character of educational and media institutions in each country.

To overcome selfish drives and strengthen social drives among human beings, Einstein looked to two aspects of the socialist alternative to capitalism. One was the organisation of the economy through the planning mechanism to fulfil needs of the community; the other was the development of an education system oriented towards social goals. Such an education system, Einstein hoped, would develop the innate abilities of the individual and also inculcate values of responsibility towards fellow human beings, rather than looking upon them as competitors for money and power. It is only through such a socially oriented economic and educational system that the power of the 'biological constitution' can be overcome by a progressive 'cultural constitution'.

Einstein concluded his essay on socialism by highlighting the difference between a planned economy and socialism. He thought that there were real dangers of centralisation of economic and political power even under a planned economy. He obviously had in mind the example of Stalinist planned economies in the USSR and Eastern Europe. His vision of socialism, in

contrast, was one where the rights of the individual are protected and where democracy is institutionalised in such a way that it acts as a counterweight to the power of the bureaucracy.

Two central weaknesses of Einstein's essay

The great merit of Einstein's essay on socialism is its emphasis on a holistic conception of socialism: democratic and based on developing not only a new economic system, but also a new ethical value-system. However, there are two main weaknesses in his essay. He entirely neglects the role of women in the reproduction of labour power under capitalism, and their central role in the building of an alternative socialist society. This goes along with the clear male bias of the language of his essay, where he uses words such as 'man' and 'his' for human beings instead of their gender-neutral equivalents. The second weakness of his essay is the almost complete neglect of ecology, both in relation to the destructive character of capitalism and in imagining an alternative socialist vision. Einstein can be excused for both these flaws in his concept of socialism: his generation was generally not adequately aware of the gender dimension and almost entirely ignorant of the ecological dimension of the functioning of the capitalist economic system. However, any future conception of socialism which builds on Einstein's must acknowledge firmly the centrality of these two dimensions.

In conclusion, Einstein's essay, notwithstanding its flaws, remains a document of immense importance in the history of ideas. Its precision and clarity combined with the towering intellectual stature of its author, makes this a document that socialists need to circulate widely.⁵ In the current crisis of capitalism, as the mainstream media looks almost exclusively to financial bailouts and very occasionally to Keynesianism as a way out of the crisis, it is important that socialism as an alternative to capitalism is placed firmly on the global intellectual and political agenda. That would be a true tribute to Einstein as an outstanding public intellectual of the last century.

1. The intellectual impetus for this article came from a reading of Einstein's article at a meeting of the Oxford Capitalism Study Group on 29th November, 2008. The reading prompted critical admiration for Einstein's political vision and foresight. We have benefitted from the discussions at this meeting, but responsibility for the views expressed here is entirely ours.
2. For a detailed account of Einstein as a political radical, especially his anti-racism, see John Simon, 'Albert Einstein, Radical: A Political Profile', *Monthly Review*, Vol. 57, No. 1, May 2005. For a critical evaluation of his many radical positions and the contradictions in those positions, see David Renton, 'Remarx: Albert Einstein's Socialism', *Rethinking Marxism*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (Summer 2001), pp.132-45.
3. Albert Einstein, 'Why Socialism?' *Monthly Review*, Vol 1, No. 1, May 1949.
4. At the initiative of a member of the Oxford Capitalism Study Group, Einstein's essay has now been translated in Nepali, published and widely circulated in Nepal. Nepal is the first South Asian nation state to have a government in which the socialists (Maoists) have a hegemonic position.

Pritam Singh teaches economics and Tamsin Barber teaches sociology, both at Oxford Brookes University.

THE BLUE LABOUR BAND GETS BACK TOGETHER

Jonathan Derbyshire

It was ‘quite a moment’, said Jon Cruddas, to be considering the legacy of Clement Attlee. The Labour MP for Dagenham and Rainham had been invited to deliver the inaugural Attlee Memorial Lecture at University College, Oxford. Addressing an audience of about a hundred people – dons undergraduates and a handful of distinguished visitors off the train from London – in a scruffy second-floor lecture room, Cruddas drew attention to a set of demands issued earlier the same day (28th October) by Occupy LSX, the group encamped by the steps of St Paul’s Cathedral. (His son is involved in the Occupy movement in Edinburgh, where he is at university.) In calling for ‘democratisation’ of the institutions of the City of London, Cruddas observed, the protesters had evoked the memory of Labour’s greatest Prime Minister – Attlee once declared that the City of London was a ‘convenient shorthand for a collection of financial interests . . . able to assert itself against the government of the country’.

Now, we tend not to associate such expressions of unalloyed radicalism with the man disparaged by his first Chancellor of the Exchequer, Hugh Dalton, as a ‘little mouse’ and belittled by Michael Foot as the ‘beneficiary [in 1945] of a victory he had done little to contrive’. More familiar, though, is what Cruddas called the “orthodox Attlee” – bloodless, taciturn and modest (a man with ‘a lot to be modest about’, as Churchill is supposed to have said), a ‘centraliser and a statist’ whose administration took it as axiomatic that the man in Whitehall knows best and treated nationalisation not as a means to the ends of social justice, but rather as an end in itself.

It has been powerfully argued, Cruddas went on, that Attlee’s victory in 1945, far from being the party’s high-watermark, was in fact the moment that it all started to go wrong for Labour – that this was when the party forgot about the depredations of unaccountable power of the kind represented by the City and began instead to make a fetish of collective ownership. Cruddas noted, with a smile, that among those who have made this argument was the Labour peer and leading light of “Blue Labour”, Maurice Glasman, who was sitting in the audience.

Glasman cometh

In late 2010 and early this year, Glasman and Cruddas, along with the Oxford academic Marc Stears and the cultural theorist Jonathan Rutherford – both also present at the lecture – participated in a series of seminars designed to re-evaluate Labour’s political philosophy and held at University College (where Stears is a fellow). The seminars led to the publication of an e-book in May, which was widely reviewed at the time, but whose importance was subsequently overshadowed by the controversy that followed injudicious remarks about immigration that Glasman made in

an interview with the Daily Telegraph. Many observers assumed that l'affaire Glasman had put an end to Blue Labour, at least as a collective intellectual endeavour, as opposed to a solo, freelance enterprise. Yet here they were, the main players, Cruddas, Glasman, Rutherford and Stears, all in the same room. It was, whispered someone in the audience, like seeing your favourite band re-form for one last hurrah.

Attempting to rescue Attlee from the condescension of posterity, Cruddas played some familiar Blue Labour tunes: an emphasis on the politics of duty and virtue; the rejection of 'individualism, empiricism and utilitarianism', pillars of a Fabian outlook that Attlee, for all his early collaboration with Beatrice Webb, seems to have rejected. (Cruddas's version of Labour history, like Glasman's, is decidedly Manichaeic, pitting rationalistic, pseudo-scientific Fabianism against an ethical, Romantic tradition that goes back to William Morris.) Attlee's most significant achievement, for Cruddas, was neither overseeing the establishment of the National Health Service nor slaying the "giants" of squalor, ignorance, want, idleness and disease. It lay not in 1945, but rather in 1940, when, by participating in the wartime coalition government, Attlee banished the lurking spectre of the Zinoviev letter and made Labour at last a national party.

This emphasis on Attlee's "radical patriotism" might seem eccentric, or worse – certainly many on the centre left have recoiled at Cruddas's invocations of "flag, faith and family". Yet he is right to point to 'festering English resentment' and to a crisis of political representation in England that the prospect of a referendum on Scottish independence will only make more acute. The question, unstated in the lecture but implied in everything Cruddas said, is whether the current Labour leader – like Attlee, a quiet man who makes a virtue of his lack of charisma – is capable of meeting that challenge.

Jon Cruddas delivered the Attlee Memorial Lecture on Friday 28th October at University College.

Jonathan Derbyshire is culture editor of the New Statesman.

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REVIEW: *FIGHT BACK!* AND *THE PURPLE BOOK*

Peter Hill

The Purple Book: Biteback, £9.99, September 2011.

Fight Back!: openDemocracy, Free, February 2011.

<http://opendemocracy.net/ourkingdom/ourkingdom/fightback>

These two anthologies are poles apart. *Fight Back!*, published in February, documents the 'winter of discontent', the student protests of 2010-11. *The Purple Book*, published in September, sets out the ideas of Progress, the New Labour think tank, for the future of the Labour party. Both belong, then, in some nominal or residual sense, to the English Left, but in attitude and tone, the differences are enormous. Among the contributors to *The Purple Book* (*TPB*) there is a preponderance of ex-ministers and ministers-in-waiting, (such as Liam Byrne, Peter Mandelson, Tessa Jowell, Liz Kendall and John Woodcock). Despite a few flashes of radicalism and creativity (Tristram Hunt on mutuals and Steve Reed and Paul Brant on community organising) it is the middle-of-the-road, give-the-swing-voters-what-they-want arguments of Mandelson and Robert Philpot (head of Progress and editor of *TPB*) that dominates. There is a stress on localism and citizen empowerment, in an effort to reappropriate the 'big society', backed up by ritualistic references to Labour's decentralising heritage; but in the end, this is still much the same old New Labour.

Fight Back! (*FB!*), on the other hand, is dominated by students, bloggers, activists, journalists – young and not engaged with any of the traditional political parties. The editorial 'kettle' were all kettled by the police at some point in November and December of 2010. Again, there are a few others: a Lib Dem peer who rebelled against his party on Higher Education reform (Trevor Smith); the Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research (Nick Pearce). But the overall tenor is given by Laurie Penny, Guy Aitchison, James Butler; the vigorous and sometimes violent rhythms of the student protests are ever-present. Celebration of the protests' achievements, and condemnation of mainstream party-politics and its hierarchies, are dominant themes. The buzz and vigour of much of the writing in *FB!* makes *TPB* seem a very staid and stodgy collection of policy pieces.

These two political cultures are only in very partial communication with each other. The most powerful comment of *TPB* on the various campaigns, protests, and occupations that have sprung up over the last year, is to ignore them. It operates almost wholly within the sphere of mainstream politics, responding to the Tory-Liberal successes and the Blue Labour tendency. It does not bother, at least not explicitly, to reject the idea that there might be a growing mood of dissatisfaction in this country and in the world, not just with Labour or New Labour or statism or Toryism, but with capitalism in some more fundamental way. The mainstream political world has managed to 'keep calm and carry on' in the face of political upheaval, as the

business world did in the face of financial crisis (see Jeremy Gilbert's analysis in *FB!*, 204-13). For all the talk of past figures such as Keir Hardie or William Morris, certain fundamentals are taken as read which they would certainly have disputed, and which many protestors and campaigners now would dispute too. For the writers of *TPB*, some issues are simply not part of the debate. There is a certain sense of anxiety, even, that they should be kept out of the debate: witness Mandelson's strictures against 'naive anti-capitalist posturing' (38) and his insistence that there is 'no future for us as a party of class' (43). This is perhaps a very distant echo of the diffuse discontent with capitalism, and of the danger (to Mandelson) of radical influence within the Labour Party under the supposedly 'left-wing' leadership of Ed Miliband. The fact that Mandelson still has to make such arguments suggests that there is still some radicalism latent within Labour. But his Whiggish ideology of 'progress' assumes that we have got beyond all that. It is under the umbrella of 'our political heritage' (262), as a part of the past that, in *TPB*, we encounter R. H. Tawney (constantly), William Morris and Keir Hardie (briefly), cooperatives and friendly societies, and – the trade unions.

FB!, on the other hand, treats the unions not as relics but as part of a radical tradition that has persisted: witness the whole section of *FB!* on 'The Unions', and Guy Aitchison's recognition (314) that the labour movement, with seven million members, is 'the largest organised force in this country'. *FB!* also offers some genuine re-exploration of radical history (rather than simply quoting snippets from R. H. Tawney as supposed inspirations for the New New Labour project). In the context of the violence of the student protests and their repression, Daniel Trilling's recalling of Raymond Williams' 'A Hundred Years of Culture and Anarchy' (200-1) and the violence of the Parliamentary Reform agitation of 1866, is timely. So is Jeremy Gilbert's evocation of the tradition of radicalism: 'The realisation that humans working together can transform their world, and are the source of all meaningful change, is at least as old as the belief that they must be prevented from doing so by wise authority... We should look to this tradition for inspiration and information, even while we seek out genuinely novel routes to changing the world' (213). There is also definitely a sense that the contributors to *FB!* address dimensions the writers of *TPB* cannot. Owen Hatherley attacks the Coalition as 'philistine' (119); Peter Johnson speaks of education as 'a shared adventure in human self-understanding' (167). There is a strong emphasis on the aesthetics of the protests (Dan Hancox' 'This is our riot: POW!'; Adam Harper's 'Images of Reality and Student Surrealism'). Such writers demand not only that the world should be well-organised, but that it should be exciting and beautiful – a concern very remote from those the contributors to *TPB* address. The passion, verve, and stylishness of writers like Hancox or James Butler is in itself a criticism of the clumsy policy-journalistic style of much of *TPB*.

All the same, it has to be said that there are things the student protest movement, and the extra-parliamentary Left in general, could learn, if not from the mainstream, at least from the radical tradition. There are signs of overdependence in *FB!* on the aesthetic and rhetorical. Adam Harper recognises this, admitting to a 'slight nerv-

ousness about doing aesthetics – about aestheticising – during a time like this.’ (271) We do have to live in, and deal with, and attempt to change, the world as it is – one of the few places this is recognised in *FB!* is in Joanna Biggs’ picture (100-6), of the duller work of organising and coordinating that goes on at occupations. *TPB*, for all its flaws, goes further towards dealing with the boring facts and statistics that represent brute reality – of course, the drudge-work will have been done by interns, but it is done nonetheless, more than in *FB!*. And this does represent a genuine commitment to political work – despite the assumption, latent in many of the pieces in *FB!*, that the mainstream Left is composed solely of careerists and time-servers.

In this connection, it is worth noting that the only one of the Purple Book pieces that comes close to the best contributions to *FB!* in vigour and strength of personal commitment is by Peter Mandelson: Labour’s Lord of Spin, the man who commissioned the Browne Review and thus spawned the fees-and-cuts programme for Higher Education. Two pages of his essay are taken up with simply listing New Labour’s achievements in office. Schools built, crime reduced, wages rising – point after point is piled on, leading up to his statement: ‘This is what a “progressive state” means in practice.... So let’s not fall for the canard that voting doesn’t change anything.’ (34). And the argument, as far as it goes, is undeniable: New Labour was better than Thatcherism, or Cameronism. We should not neglect the scale of the differences, or the real impacts party-politics has on people’s lives: the Educational Maintenance Allowance, which so many students and school pupils came out to defend last winter, was a New Labour initiative. Voting does change some things.

But there are things it does not and in the current political environment cannot change. The habits of the present political elite are too deeply ingrained – as *TPB* reveals. There is a concerted effort to address ‘localism’ and ‘empowerment’; yet the language used in explaining this is revealing. Local activists are to ‘feel that they are the leaders’ in their ‘relationship’ with the state (Jowell, 184); ‘Citizens must... feel they can exercise control’ (Ivan Lewis, 233). Later on, they are even to be given the opportunity to act as “shareholders’, active participants and cheerleaders’ (Lewis, 240; my emphasis throughout). One wonders if it is actually power these people are talking of redistributing, or merely the illusion of it. As Patrick Diamond reminds us: ‘Trusting people is risky because people can be wrong’ (*TPB*, 100). To minimize this risk, it seems, the state will control the conditions of its relationship with people. It is on the basis of a non-controversial identity – as ‘local people’, ‘citizens’, or ‘individuals’ – that people are to be connected with the ‘relational state’. People are to be allowed to have their own ideas on how their bus service is run or what day their bins are collected. But what space is there for people who want to be not just ‘individuals’ or ‘citizens’, but ‘activists’ or even ‘radicals’? What space is there for a larger reassessment of the way we live our lives? It is only non-controversial groups and identities that *TPB* seems to be interested in connecting with; it steers clear of anything with any distinctiveness, either socialism or radicalism, or indeed the white working-class identities Blue Labour appeals to. Actually ‘giving away power’ seems remarkably difficult to do. The fact is that *TPB* belongs to, and speaks

to, the central Labour Party machine. It talks of localism and discusses how to implement it – from the top.

The contributors to *FB!* are far better placed to discuss localism and empowerment: they speak from and to a set of grassroots, decentralised campaigns and protests. They are aware of all the problems of centralisation: ‘Within these top-down organisational models the abundant collective knowledge, skills and social networks of “the membership” was neglected often to the detriment of the causes they championed’ (52). Aitchison and Peters are referring here to protest movements such as Stop The War or NGOs such as Make Poverty History, but the argument applies even better to political parties. They go so far as to claim that ‘The necessity for ... hierarchical ‘organisation’ ... is ... fast being rendered obsolete as a pre-requisite for facilitating large groups of people to act together in a common interest.’ (50) At this point, I think, a note of caution is necessary. Aitchison and Peters effectively allow a condemnation of hierarchy to become a condemnation of organisation itself. This tendency is echoed in celebrations of the autonomy of protests: ‘Freedom to act autonomously empowers individuals and groups. Attempts to manage and control this movement will lead to disillusion and abandonment.’ (Markus Malarkey, 310).

The fear of organisation (as the road to ossification or co-optation) is, in its way, as habitual to student protestors as the fear of local empowerment (as the road to anarchy) is to New Labour. And if the emphasis on localism and decentralisation in *TPB* does not really succeed in overcoming New Labour’s fears, it is by no means clear that the emphasis in *FB!* on the need for continuity and solidarity overcomes those of the student movement. This emphasis is certainly there, in the references to ‘concrete and lasting relationships of support and co-operation’ (Aitchison and Peters, 45), to ‘a coherent alternative [which] the whole movement can unite around’ (Len McCluskey, 238) – above all in Laurie Penny’s caution: ‘our protest movements are atomised and fragmented, and too often we focus on fighting for or against individual reforms.’ (32). But there is a failure to recognise that the uncritical celebration of ‘spontaneity’, of the Protean formlessness of protests, and the fear of anything with a whiff of permanency about it, is a block to cohesion and continuity. The dangers of lack of direction and focus are just as likely to lead to ‘disillusion and abandonment’ as those of excessive ‘control’. Again, the uncritical adoption of the language of freedom, autonomy, individualism, comes dangerously close to the ‘I want’ sloganising exposed by Hatherley: ‘The advertisements for Middlesex courses... illustrate how the neoliberal student is conceived of as a series of demands that are alternately hedonistic and utilitarian,... Headed by “I want to be more employable”, one of them continues: “I want to be the best. I want to do my own thing. I want to excel. I want to go to the gym. I want to study business law. I want to see West End shows. I want business sponsorship.” And with particular bathos: “I want to see what’s possible”.’ (*FB!*, 119).

Similarly, *FB!* contributors come close to allowing a condemnation of factionalism to become a condemnation of ideology as such. Aitchison states: ‘one of the wonderful things about the occupations (at least the ones I witnessed) was how they

prioritised practice over ideology' (317). As with 'spontaneity', I am not convinced that this is something to be unequivocally celebrated. There is a distinction to be made between ideology as factional dispute and indoctrination, and ideology as constructive debate. We cannot expect a vision of the society we want and how to achieve it to spring spontaneously from the soil of activism: we must make a conscious effort to think through these issues. Cailean Gallagher's 'From the Reactive to the Creative' is one of the few pieces in *FB!* that explicitly recognises this.

This is not to deny the real passion and imagination shown by most of the writers of *FB!*, which puts them in a very different league to the contributors to *TPB*. Such energies have no place in 'New New' Labour's politics, because they pose more fundamental questions about the way we live our lives. In *TPB*, the really major decisions about the shape of our existence have been taken in advance. Or rather, they are not decisions at all, but inevitable realities we have to accommodate to: politics can offer only ways of 'managing the change' (Philpot, 15). Within these narrow confines, the book's final call for Labour to be once more 'the author of its own fortunes' (Philpot, 303) sounds hollow. The 'Progressive Future' of *The Purple Book* resembles the future proposed by the tired liberalism of William Morris' day: 'a counting-house on the top of a cinder-heap, with ... a Whig committee dealing out champagne to the rich and margarine to the poor in such convenient proportions as would make all men contented together' (Morris, *How I Became a Socialist*, 1894).

The student protests, and along with them the other campaigns that have sprung up in opposition to the cuts, embody a necessary rejection of this dispiriting future, and the beginnings of a wider and stronger vision. But they remain, as yet, fragmented and incoherent, little more than 'eruptions' (see Paul Mason, *FB!*, 295). If New Labour and 'big society' Conservatism constitute, at best, what Raymond Williams called a 'constrained reformism', under which 'change is happening, but primarily under the direction and in the terms of the dominant social order itself', then the rebellion of students and others amounts to what Williams saw as a characteristic response to such reformism, 'an anarchism: positive in its fierce rejection of domination, repression, and manipulation; negative in its willed neglect of structures, of continuity and of material constraints' (*Culture and Materialism*, 203). The overall tenor of *TPB* suggests that the 'constrained reformism' of New Labour is unlikely to alter significantly any time soon – though other tendencies in the Labour Party may prove more fruitful. Whether the motion of rejection represented by the student and other protests will lead to a more coherent vision, a more united movement, remains to be seen: certainly the intelligence and commitment exhibited in the best of the *FB!* pieces offers grounds for hope. As for any substantial dialogue between the two, the possibility seems, for the present, remote.

Peter Hill is reading for an MSt in Arabic literature at St John's College. He is joint Editor-in-Chief of the Oxford Left Review.

REVIEW: *HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD: MARX AND MARXISM 1840-2011* BY ERIC HOBSBAWM

Wade Matthews

How to Change the World: Little, Brown, £25, January 2011.

Eric Hobsbawm's biography attests to an intellectual integrity and constancy that is rare in contemporary academia. His encounter with Marxism now stretches over more than half a century: from 1932 when, as a young man in Berlin, he joined the German Communist Party. He was a long-time member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) - a stubborn association that survived Krushchev's 'secret speech' and the Soviet invasions of Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), and which only ended with the break-up of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. Hobsbawm's new book, *How to Change the World: Marx and Marxism 1840-2011*, provides insight into this commitment. It also stands as a swift rebuke to the fashion-dictated careerism associated with those who inhabit today's business university.

Taking as its touchstone recent discussions of Marx in the mainstream financial press, *How to Change the World* is a collection of Hobsbawm's essays on Marx and Marxism, many of which have either not been published before or have not before been published in English. The earliest was written in the mid-1950s, though quite a few were written over the last decade or so. As an account of a Marxist's encounter with the Marxist tradition it has few competitors; perhaps only Isaac Deutscher's *Marxism, Wars, and Revolutions: Essays from Four Decades* can match it.

The nucleus of the book is six essays that Hobsbawm wrote for the multi-volume *Storia del Marxismo*, first published in Italian in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Taken together, these essays are a tour de force and constitute an exemplary introduction to Marxism's influence on European intellectual culture. They are unlikely to be surpassed anytime soon, not least given the author's familiarity with both Marxism and nineteenth- and twentieth-century European history. Among these, a chapter which offers an overview of the publishing and translating history of Marx and Engels' work is especially illuminating, providing a superb guide to which works of the founders of scientific socialism were available in which places and at which times.

The remaining essays in the collection have diverse origins. One of the essays - 'Dr. Marx's Victorian Critics' - hangs like a single sock on a washing line. Initially published in the communist dissident journal *New Reasoner* in 1957, this essay offers an overview of Marx's early intellectual antagonists. It was an uncommon contribution to this journal, and not just because *New Reasoner's* editors, unlike Hobsbawm, resigned from the CPGB after 1956. Other essays - the

first and the last two - have more recent origins, being primarily reassessments of Marx's value in light of repeated, and repeatedly worsening, economic crises. Included, too, are a number of short introductions to particular writings of Marx and Engels - *The Condition of the Working Class in England*, the *Communist Manifesto*, and the *Grundrisse*. Of these, Hobsbawm's overview of Marx's writings on pre-capitalist social formations stands out for its ability to relate Marx's vision of historical development - a vision, as Hobsbawm suggests, at odds with later reductionist accounts - to the historical knowledge then available to him. Finally there are two essays devoted to Gramsci, the only twentieth-century Marxist thinker to receive extended treatment in this collection. This is no surprise given Hobsbawm's emotional and political attachment to Italian communism.

This collection, it should go without saying, is to be welcomed and has much to recommend it. However, there is something mushy about assessments of Hobsbawm's writings in the present socialist republic of letters. His commitment to socialism has been so inveterate, his argument for Marx's value has been so consistent and consistently honest, and his history-writing has been marked by such care for evidence and argument - for all these reasons Hobsbawm has been much praised, and rightly praised, from all sides. It may then seem churlish to offer any sort of rebuke to his contribution, even more so because many from a younger generation - that generation of Marxists bred in the 1960s and 1970s - have repudiated the socialist politics of their youth, traveling easily and without any sense of responsibility to a political movement down the road from Marx. Nonetheless, because Hobsbawm's collection rides on the coat-tails of much dissatisfaction with capitalism, and because it seemingly fits well with a widespread contemporary mood for change, it is important to outline some of the limitations of this book.

The first limitation of these essays is the absence of any exploration of actual ideas. Hobsbawm is temperamentally ill-suited to intellectual history. Indeed, he's never had much time for theory, even Marxist theory, a gruff shopkeepers' dismissal of 'cranks' and 'gurus' being characteristic of his negotiation of the history of ideas. Consequently it should come as no surprise that many important twentieth-century Marxist thinkers are passed over in *How to Change the World*. Even when they are mentioned by name we get little sense of what they thought or how they transformed Marxist theory. Some of these essays, then, can make hard reading. Not because they deal with recondite and esoteric intellectual debate, but because Hobsbawm renders the electric history of Marxist ideas somewhat humdrum. The one, partial, exception to this rule is Hobsbawm's discussion of Gramsci, although I suggest this has more to do with Hobsbawm's politics than simply being due to the fact that Gramsci was among the most important Marxist thinkers after Marx.

Hobsbawm's aversion to ideas derives from a second limitation of this collection of essays. It is unsurprising that a Marxist, especially one formed in the Germany of the 1930s, should be interested in politics. But this focus can provide a distorting lens on Marxism's intellectual and political history. Hobsbawm has always

admired orthodox communism because it got things done and, I suspect, because it achieved power. Hobsbawm has had less time for other Marxists, such as those attached to dissenting Marxist traditions, who made less of a mark on elections or didn't assume positions in government. This instrumentalism explains much of his impatience with Marxist philosophy. But it also explains his unwarranted dismissal of utopian forms of socialism. It was much to the detriment of Marxism that by the 'mid-1840s Marx and Engels had, on the whole, learned all they could from pre-Marxian socialism.' Marx and Engels' repudiation of socialist utopianism led later Marxists to the nonsensical idea that Marxism was 'scientific'. This inheritance was not only unjustified - there was much that wasn't scientific about Marxism, as Hobsbawm demonstrates - but allowed later Marxists, including Hobsbawm, to ignore issues associated with values and morality - aspects of the utopian heritage that Marxists would have done well to attend to.

In many of his essays Hobsbawm affects a God's-eye view - at one point, preposterously, he refers to his own position as that of a 'neutral observer' - above the fray of the sort of debate and dialogue that constituted much of Marxism's intellectual history. This stance is harder to make convincing in his discussion of Marxism's influence between the wars. The inter-war period was when Hobsbawm first became a communist and he is at pains, in this essay and others, to defend the Comintern's policy of 'popular front' - a policy which Hobsbawm explains as a necessity and a strategic advance, at least in those historical conditions where revolution was not an imminent possibility. The complexities facing communists in the 1930s should not be underplayed. But neither should the fallacies associated with the popular front - especially as these were acted out in Spain and in relation to the colonial world. Nor, finally, should we overlook the fatal damage done to socialism in this period. International communism played a leading part in defeating fascism. However, it was precisely in these years that socialism as a world movement was defeated too - and defeated mostly by the intrigues of Soviet politics. Hobsbawm's suggestion that 'Stalin' was 'a Russian problem, however shocking' could not be further from the mark.

These limitations aside, there is also something lopsided about *How to Change the World*. There are a number of missing chapters from Hobsbawm's encounter with Marxism, a series of arguments that don't find representation in this book. These mostly appeared in the CPGB journal *Marxism Today*, which, under the editorship of Martin Jacques, enjoyed a certain popularity in the 1980s. They were mainly contributions to debates within the Labour Party, and were later collected in Hobsbawm's *Politics for a Rational Left*. Here, Hobsbawm, drawing on a popular front strategy, opposed Bennism and argued for Labour's 'modernization' - the reinvention of a "'people's party" of progressive change,' as Hobsbawm put it. The end result was Tony Blair and the Third Way. 'We wanted a reformed Labour,' Hobsbawm later said, 'not Thatcher in trousers.'

Hobsbawm might defend this encounter with Labour politics with reference to

Gramsci. In his reflections on Gramsci, Hobsbawm argued that one of the key political insights of the Sardinian Marxist was his insistence that socialist politics must be based 'on the real working class with its mass organisation' and not on 'a notional working class'. 'The organized working class as it is and not as in theory it ought to be was the basis of [Gramsci's] analysis and strategy.' This is a useful correction to a certain sort of socialist politics. However, capitalism produces workers, not a socialist working class. It is the job of socialist political action to make socialists, not simply reflect the conservatism of the working class.

Hobsbawm's politics have been very moderate indeed over the last 30 years or so and have not been much concerned with changing the world in the sense meant by Marx (which makes the title of this book something of a misnomer). The difficulties of being a socialist in these years should not be overlooked. However, as Hobsbawm's politics became more moderate his intellectual star rose. In 1998 he was appointed a Companion of Honour, an appointment he shares with John Major and, most recently, Lord Howard of Lympne.

Hobsbawm's fondness for external affirmation should not be the last word on his encounter with Marxism. If, in this reviewer's opinion, the quality of Hobsbawm's politics has diminished over time, his scholarship has not. The qualities of that scholarship - clarity of prose; resistance to intellectual fashion; breadth of historical consciousness; and wealth of insight - are fully in evidence in this collection. Also in evidence is Hobsbawm's regard for the practice of history, as something worthwhile in itself and as something worthwhile for socialists - offering a bracing contrast to the sense of an 'eternal present' produced by capital's ruthlessly anti-historical perspective.

It would be unfair to expect a coherent argument to emerge from a collection such as this. Surprisingly, one does. According to *How to Change the World*, Marx's writings not only constitute the best guide to an understanding of capitalist development, but also form the touchstone for any serious attempt to understand world history as a whole - from the stone-age to the nuclear age, as Hobsbawm once put it. However, what is of much less value, Hobsbawm argues, is Marx's political vision - that is, his assertion that the proletariat would constitute capitalism's gravedigger and that world socialism would inevitably prove the end-point of mankind's historical development. Indeed, Hobsbawm suggests, there was a fundamental fracture in Marx's work - his predictions about socialist revolution do not logically follow from his critique of political economy. In short, Marx can help us understand the world, but his writings offer limited help to those who want to change it.

If there is another coherent argument in the collection it only emerges in the more-recently written contributions. In these essays Hobsbawm advances an argument for what might be called the mutual ruin of contending ideologies. The state socialism practiced in the Soviet Union, the social democracy instituted primarily in north-western Europe, and the laissez-faire capitalism

associated most prominently with Britain and the USA have all, according to Hobsbawm, proved practical failures, though for different reasons. In his view, none of Lenin, Bernstein or Friedman has much to offer the twenty-first century.

There is some benefit to be gained from Hobsbawm's Olympian pessimism. An unsentimental analysis of socialism's prospects is better than the reproduction of the manifold illusions which have sustained some versions of socialist politics. However, unless this analysis is connected with political innovation, and political innovation in particular places, it can lead to desiccation. If socialism is to be re-made - and some sort of socialism seems the only barrier against the recurring crises of capital, environment and human conflict - then it will be made from below. A new socialism will have to attend to values as much as economics, to ideas as much as organisation, and to other traditions of socialism as much as the Marxist tradition. It will have to be invented without the industrial proletariat of the Communist Manifesto, at least in places like Britain. And it will have to be invented without socialism's traditional emphasis on production. However, it won't be made unless we return to class and class struggle, and link these to a vision of what socialism is for. On this last point, at least, I think Hobsbawm would agree.

Wade Matthews recently finished a postdoctoral fellowship at York University, Toronto. He is soon to publish a book on the New Left.

REVIEW: *WHY MARX WAS RIGHT*

BY TERRY EAGLETON

Hannah Wilkinson

Why Marx Was Right: Yale University Press, £16.99, April 2011.

The bold, marketable promise to reveal ‘Why Marx Was Right’ is the weakest aspect of this otherwise powerful argument for substantial, uncompromising left-wing ideas. Eagleton successfully hammers home a view of Marx as neither idealist nor doom-monger, but as a visionary thinker whose ideas could inspire the Left today, if only we had the courage to defend them. The book tries to prove two things simultaneously: that Marx was correct about history, and that his ideas are relevant today. It is when Eagleton is stressing the latter that his writing is most pertinent, and best captures Marx’s emphasis on the value of ideas as lived things, not just abstract concepts, and the need not only to interpret the world, but to change it.

Eagleton asks us to consider the possibility that the world could be different, and in the course of doing so he highlights the oddness of our current predicament. To express the desire for a better world is commonplace. But whether we are talking about ending disease, war, or poverty, the suggestion that the way to achieving these grand goals might be by organizing our economic activities differently remains far more controversial, if it is discussed at all. While the popular political dialogue on both sides of the centre may constantly pay lip service to ‘progress’, the suggestion that progress goes beyond ‘more of the same’ doesn’t get a look in. So it is to the shame of the Left, as well as to Eagleton’s credit, that his question, ‘was capitalist modernity really necessary?’, resonates uniquely in contemporary thought. He emphasizes one claim superbly: Marx’s criticisms of capitalism were neither unfounded nor irrelevant. As an assessment of our present situation makes clear, ‘under capitalism, we are deprived of the power to decide whether we want to produce more hospitals or more breakfast cereals.’

Part of the problem for those on the Left who want to effect change seems to lie in the indeterminacy of the better future which Marx emphasized. If ideology is the ‘ideas that legitimate the system’, the difficulty of envisioning a new ideology is clearly substantial. Marxism could help us overcome this by offering not a blueprint for the future, but by his suggestion that ‘the future is open, but it is not totally open.’ Drawing on this theoretical core, misrepresented as determinism, to emphasise the difficult but not impossible task ahead – only by doing this can the Left mobilize to affect a change in the order of things and people. This is made all the more difficult by mainstream currents against change. Eagleton’s discussion makes stark the contradiction between the short-termism of shareholders wanting to maximize their monopoly share of capital at a given moment, and their desire to maintain the system indefinitely. This contradiction results in swathes of people being employed to predict that the future will be alright, to ‘peer into the entrails of the system and as-

sure its rulers that their profits are safe.' The emphasis on myth and idolatry here is important. Removed from its context and placed amongst Marx's ideas, the idea that doing more of the wrong thing will make everything right seems simply bizarre. Capitalism has been promising trickle-down effects for over a century. Yet the poor aren't getting any less poor yet, and the myth that one day they will is far less credible than the vision of collective ownership of capital that Marx put forward.

One thing Eagleton highlights, but fails to explain, is why the argument he is making seems so remarkable, or why credible opposition has never been able to emerge out of Marxism in the developed world. He describes the anticapitalist movement as 'flourishing' but it sometimes appears that the opposite is true, and, as Žižek has suggested, the Left currently shies away from crisis, distracted from changing the future by saving the capitalist present. If a great deal of prehistory, which is how Marx defines the prerevolutionary past, has been shaped by the need to produce more to stave off hunger, then why are we unable to adjust to less scarcity, and relish ideas without fear that they will undermine our ability not to starve? Eagleton is quick to note that 'maoism and stalinism were botched, bloody experiments.' But it seems unlikely that history alone can account for our fear to question a system which is failing to provide humane standards of living for billions. For 'famine, imperialism and the slave trade,' not to mention the blood shed in the Great War, have led few to turn away, disgusted, from capitalism's prescriptions.

Less urgently relevant but just as pertinent is the discussion of human nature, in which Marxism could still provide a powerful force against the arguments of the Right. 'Human nature' is frequently used as a tool for justifying individualistic, selfish behavior. Eagleton draws on Marx to formulate an important insight to the contrary: 'we have a history because we are creatures of lack.' Part of the failure of mainstream economics can be situated in its tendency to start with the individual as the base unit, when in fact 'we can fulfil our natural needs only by social means'. Our one-time position as predator and prey, and the decisions we must make to satisfy our natural need to eat enough, lead us to recognise that we are 'part of nature as well as part of history'. Through this insight Eagleton reconciles the idea of universal laws of history with the fact that human beings make individual decisions that shape their futures. What is possible is defined by our need to grow enough food as much as it is by the laws of physics, and these material needs shape society and politics more than we want to acknowledge. But such limits are far broader than the dominant ideology at any moment in time would suggest.

Eagleton, as a literary critic, tries to draw distinctions between the aspects of Marx's texts to be taken literally, and those to be reinterpreted. This sort of understanding, which draws on biographical details, is somewhat at odds with the main argument: that Marxist insights are valid despite the failure of Marxist-influenced governments. Much of what stands out is Eagleton's intelligent application of ideas to the twenty-first century, including his conceptualization of slum-dwellers as a core component of the mass working class, more easily organizable than service sector workers who have been co-opted into the capitalist vision of prosperity. To some extent, the guise of Marxism allows him to make suggestions he wouldn't have been able to otherwise make, such

as 'how could such a formidably complex phenomena as colonialism, stretching as it does over a range of regions and centuries, have produced not a single positive effect?' At other times insights which are important to his underlying argument - that the Right have not won yet - are constrained by the structure of the book, framed as it is as a defense. His insight that it wasn't the success of capitalism, but the failure of many to see a way of defeating it, that caused the shift rightwards in the political consensus in the 1980s, is one example of an idea whose development is hindered by such a structure.

When Eagleton is on the defensive, he is at his weakest. When he argues that 'China and the Soviet Union dragged their citizens out of economic backwardness into the modern industrial world, at however horrific a cost,' the point seems to be that alternatives to capitalism have their own costs and benefits which need to be considered rather than disregarded. Yet so far the Left has not proven Marx right (even if there was a post-revolutionary Russia's Women's Congress). He is proven right by the Right: that is, by the continuing tendency of capitalism to oppress and sideline. And this is why we are now in urgent need of his ideas.

Marx is portrayed as a proto-environmentalist and feminist, with Engels' criticisms of women's oppression employed as evidence in the case of the latter, undermining the point that Marx's key ideas are powerful in their own right and don't need engineering. At the same time, trying to prove that other people have interpreted Marxism wrongly seems less important than exploring what is right about it, and arguments making this point come across as somewhat tired, such as when Eagleton argues 'Marxism insisted its followers be "internationalist socialist" rather than bourgeois-nationalist. For the most part, this insistence fell on deaf ears.' Part of the problem with this personification is that it suggests there have been visionaries as powerful as Marx, inspiring, shaping, guiding the Left, when in the second half of the twentieth century there has been a distinct lack of such voices. When Eagleton promotes Marx's environmentalism, but leaves dialectical materialism aside, one feels that he is seeking merely to market Marxism, rather than to explain it.

Eagleton's work reflects simultaneously the best and worst of the contemporary Left. Why the revolutions of the twentieth century amounted to so little is an important question, but rationalising them devalues the extraordinary potential which Marx and those inspired by him could have, if used to shape the future. Throughout the book the idea is reinforced that human nature, or at the very least the conception we have of it, can change. Eagleton puts forward ideas which have the power to effect this change. But the fact that despite the ubiquity of the term, Marxist thought is as revolutionary now as when it was first expounded, shows that this isn't a process which will happen without individuals making ideas reality. Only then will we be able to declare that Marx Was Right. Until then, it remains the job of the Left to prove it.

Hannah Wilkinson is a third year undergraduate reading Economics and Management at LMH, and an Associate Editor of the Oxford Left Review.

REVIEW: *ETHICS AND PUBLIC POLICY*

BY JONATHAN WOLFF

Aveek Bhattacharya

Ethics and Public Policy: Routledge, £17.99, May 2011.

With many academic disciplines, it is at least arguable that there is nothing wrong with scholars remaining in their ivory towers, unconcerned about the practical or social implications of their work. Political philosophy has always been different. It is not really a subject that lends itself to pure disinterested curiosity, knowledge for knowledge's sake. There is almost a performative contradiction involved in espousing a certain conception of social justice or a different view of our moral rights, but being indifferent as to whether these are realised.

Inevitably, then, political philosophers have sought to put their ideas into practice, meeting with varying levels of success. Some, like Burke or J. S. Mill, found themselves relatively at home in the cutthroat world of real politics. Others, such as Bentham, proposed ideas that were too radical for their contemporaries. Others still were so subversive as to be chased out of their homelands: for instance, Marx and Rousseau. It will be noted that these figures are much more famous for their philosophical ideas and their inspiration of others than their practical contributions. Nonetheless, political philosophers have continued to wade into the sphere of public policy, undeterred.

Nor should they be deterred, argues Jonathan Wolff in his latest book, *Ethics and Public Policy*. Wolff is Professor of Philosophy at University College London, and he contributes to a number of government advisory committees – most prominently, the Gambling Review Body. The book is in part a memoir of these engagements with public policy. It is also an excellent, user-friendly overview of the philosophical arguments around social issues such as drug laws, animal testing and crime and punishment. However, its main interest for philosophers is its advocacy of what Wolff calls the 'bottom-up (problem-driven)' approach to ethics (sometimes also called 'non-ideal theory').

Moral and political philosophers, according to this argument, should not obsess about abstract ideals and first principles, but should divert their focus to trying to resolve real life conflicts of values. Wolff is just one member of a growing movement within philosophy calling for greater direct contribution to practical political debates – he explicitly acknowledges the influence of Amartya Sen and Colin Farrelly, while others such as Raymond Geuss carry a similar message. Yet he is unusual in providing an account of how he has lived up to these principles; an account that exemplifies the compromises and ideological sacrifices philosophers must make if they want to help formulate public policy. Wolff thus provides, despite himself, strong evidence for why we need ideal theory.

Many of the recommendations Wolff makes to philosophers are commonsensical and unproblematic. He observes that while academics face strong incentives to emphasise their distinctiveness, and to stress the minor differences that separate them from their colleagues, policymaking requires a more consensual approach, starting from basic agreed principles. He insists that the empirical claims philosophers make need to be backed by genuine evidence, not just intuition or armchair social science. He makes the valid point that ideal laws may not always be enforceable. For example, even if we believed gambling should be illegal in principle, we would still have to accommodate the likelihood that many people would flout any prohibition.

However, much of the rest of Wolff's advice is deeply alarming to anybody committed to philosophy as a critical activity. For a start, Wolff is explicitly conservative, arguing that "Debate has a 'status quo bias' and in policy terms we are stuck with this, however much we feel it is philosophically unjustified" (82). Wolff vacillates between characterising this as a regrettable, but pragmatically necessary move, and actually defending it. In one breath he echoes Burke: "There is, after, all, something to the idea of the wisdom of ages" (7). In the next, he observes with Mill the danger of leaving prejudice unexamined. After all, the longer a policy or idea or assumption has been in place, the likelier it is to be outdated.

Ultimately, whether we think established practices are generally better or worse than untested alternatives should be irrelevant. Each should be considered and retained or rejected on its own merits. But Wolff's arguments seem to suggest that we should suspend our critical faculties when it comes to already existing institutions because they are harder to change.

Moreover, philosophers engaged with public policy should restrict their analysis to only superficial, obvious problems. They should tackle symptoms, but leave root causes unexamined. This is the inevitable implication of Wolff's aversion to first principles. He argues against starting from a moral theory like Kantianism or utilitarianism and working out the implications. Rather we should feel free to appeal to whatever principles seem relevant, in addressing specific moral dilemmas. But this presumes that it is obvious what is and what isn't morally problematic. Systematic moral theories can expose inconsistencies and confusions in our thoughts and actions that we never realised were there. Uncovering and testing our basic principles is crucial to working out whether and why we value a certain course of action. So, for example, two people may favour a policy which they believe promotes equality of opportunity. However, closer examination of their beliefs may reveal that only one of them is interested in equal opportunity for its own sake, and the other sees it only as instrumentally useful as a means to self-realisation. If it turns out that the policy in question does not in fact best promote self-realisation, then the agreement was spurious and misleading.

Wolff offers another argument for conservatism by observing that many of the extreme claims that philosophers make are likely to be so out of sync with popular sentiment as to discredit them. For example, he makes the case for se-

lectively ignoring J. S. Mill's harm principle (that only acts harmful to others may be legitimately banned) on the grounds that its implications "simply could not be accepted in current policy discussions" (60). The validity of the argument comes to seem irrelevant in the face of the norms of political debate.

Wolff's perversion of rigorous philosophical inquiry does not end there. It is not enough for philosophers to selectively censor themselves – they also need to ignore the basic rules of logic if they are inconvenient. In his discussion of drug laws, Wolff claims: "if we find out – as we seem to have – that the treatment of ecstasy and alcohol is inconsistent, then so what?" (82). Inconsistency is a weapon that loses its force outside the seminar room, and philosophers ought to accept the inevitability of illogical thinking.

Notice, then, how pliable a political philosophy must become before it can make a telling contribution to the policy process. Wolff's book begins as though its aim is to improve philosophy – all else being equal, it is surely better for philosophy to be oriented to real world problems. What he ends up showing, though, is how damaging such an engagement can be. We set out wanting to unite rigorous philosophy and public policy – we end up, it seems, having to choose between the two.

Of course, all philosophy is not geared towards the same ends: different approaches are relevant in different contexts. Wolff may well be right that it is better to have some philosophical input to the real political process than none at all. In his conclusion, he argues for a division of labour between ideal and non-ideal theory: some philosophers should try and tailor their insights to practical questions, while others should be left free to think the unthinkable. Otherwise, as he concedes, nobody would be forcing the radical change that society often needs.

Wolff's position is more moderate and considered than that of the realists who condemn anything abstract and apparently irrelevant. Yet I still wonder whether his approach may do more harm than good. Philosophers such as Rawls and Hegel have seen it as a legitimate function of political philosophy that it should 'reconcile' society to existing institutions. That is, it should try to offer a philosophical defence of the status quo, whatever it is. My worry is that this is all that political philosophers who follow Wolff into the world of public policy will end up doing. Sometimes in the book it seems as though philosophy is there only to argue for a conclusion that has already been reached. Not only is this an act of bad faith in itself, it also offers succour and resources to conservatives to resist radical criticism. Perhaps what Wolff ultimately shows is that philosophy has only a limited place in the constrained and pragmatic world of public policy, and that it is better suited to the slower, more arduous task of revolutionising public opinion.

Aveek Bhattacharya studies Politics and International Relations at Somerville College.

REVIEW: *ALL WATCHED OVER BY MACHINES OF LOVING GRACE* BY ADAM CURTIS

Matthew Kennedy

A three-part documentary shown on BBC2 from 23 May to 6 June 2011. It can be viewed online at: <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/all-watched-over-by-machines-of-loving-grace/>

The title of Adam Curtis' latest documentary, shown earlier this year, is taken from a collection of poems published in 1967 by Richard Brautigan. The work envisages a world where cybernetics has achieved a harmony between man and nature, eliminating the need for human labour. Cybernetics, the study of human society as a system, forms the focus of Curtis' documentary, as he plots the rise of the dream of a world organised by machines, in which people are truly free. Although Curtis' signature montage style and achingly-cool soundtrack create an aesthetically engaging experience, he fails to analyse the domination of computers in the late-20th and early 21st centuries as part of a longer history of objectification and alienation.

Episode One of this three-part documentary starts with a brief history of Ayn Rand and her Objectivist political philosophy, highlighting its adoption as a credo by the Silicon Valley technocrats and entrepreneurs. Whilst the anecdotal evidence – testimony, company names, offspring names – suggests a close alliance between Rand's Objectivist philosophy and the rise of no-holds-barred capitalist enterprise in West Coast America, this seems rather conveniently simplistic. The belief in the American entrepreneurial spirit and the by-your-bootstraps hero-worship dates from long before the publication of Rand's novels in the 1950s. Perhaps it would be more accurate to view the technocrats' acclamation of Rand as an ex post facto response. In Rand's work they found an intellectual, philosophic position which supported the common-sense ideology: Greed Is Good – much in the same way as the ideas of Hayek became the intellectual support behind Thatcher's neo-liberalism in the 1970s and 80s.

Key to the Californian Ideology and the New Economy, however, was that their utopian vision was purportedly a-political. The advances in computer technology, they thought, would allow people to become truly free from all forms of control – social and political – because it would allow people to interact simply as nodes in a vast system, mediated by personal computers. Loren and Rachel Carpenter's 1967 'Pong Experiment' in which they managed to get two sides of a room full of people to play a game of pong using coloured paddles without any prior information, gave further credence to this belief in the possibility of a self-stabilising system mediated by computers.

The only problem with this New Economy, however, was that it was not a-political. Perhaps one of Rand's most faithful followers was Alan Greenspan, who, while Chairman of the Federal Reserve under Clinton, sought to implement Rand's ideas in US domestic and foreign policy. On the home front, Greenspan

told Clinton that the budget deficit had to be cut, and that the most effective way of achieving this was by having faith in the markets and the free flow of capital. On the foreign stage, this free flow of capital was to be extended to US foreign investments, in particular in South East Asia. For a while, the US economy seemed to be growing and growing and growing. However, in 1997 the bubble burst, as first the Thai then the South Korean and Indonesian economies faltered. Naturally, the IMF stepped in to prevent further contagion, bailing out those affected with billions of dollars in loans. The western investors' expectations could not be restored, however, and millions of dollars poured out of Asia as investors stampeded to recoup. Exchange rates plummeted across the board, with the Indonesia rupiah losing 80% of its value. Three years later, as the markets opened for the first time since 9/11, the US market experienced the biggest single drop in history. The holes in Greenspan's Objectivist economic plan seemed to be widening. One month later, in October 2001, the Enron scandal broke. Undeterred, Greenspan slashed rates, flooding America with cheap money. The plan? Desire would stimulate growth.

A number of points here are of interest. Curtis' analysis of the 'machine dream' fails to take into account Marxist work done on the influence of technological advancement. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx plots the consequences of mechanisation: put simply, as capital efficiency increases, working-time falls, wages fall and the proletariat are reduced to sub-human levels of existence in which they must revolt or die. Writing in the 1960s, Herbert Marcuse highlighted the fact that despite further technological advancement, working times were not decreasing. Marcuse argued that the reason for this was the creation of false needs by advanced industrial society which necessitated blue- and white-collar workers to labour for longer. That is to say it was desires – in this case thought to be false ones – which were forcing people to keep working, and therefore making the American economy grow.

Of perhaps even greater interest is the implicit assumption in Greenspan's advice to Clinton at the start of his Presidency: have faith in the markets. What Greenspan meant by implication was: have faith in the computers that underpin the markets. A recent article [1] in the London Review of Books by Donald MacKenzie highlights not only how much of the trading volume is controlled by algorithms but also why this faith could be very dangerous indeed. On 6 May 2010, US shares and index futures contracts – bets on share price – fell by almost 6% in 5 minutes. The problem was that most algorithms are programmed to protect a company against changes in overall market positions. The result was that "[i]n the 14-second period following 2.45 and 13 seconds, more than 27,000 futures contracts were bought and sold by high-frequency algorithms, but their aggregate net purchases amounted to only around 200 contracts. By 2.45 and 27 seconds, the price of index futures had declined by more than 5 per cent from its level four and a half minutes earlier. The market had entered a potentially catastrophic self-feeding downward spiral." Luckily there is a program which detects spirals such as this and issues a stop order allowing human traders time to assess the position. In this case the stop lasted 5 seconds. Crucially, it was human input which stopped the 'self-feeding downward spiral' not the self-stabilising algorithms. The fragility of the computer-operated trading system is clear to see.

This combination of low-interest rates and financial algorithms was in part responsible for the financial crash of 2007/8. Greenspan's slashing of interest rates created cheap credit which was made available to previously untouchable debtors. Moreover, these debts were bundled into Collateralised Debt Obligations (CDOs) which were then sold by algorithms on the markets with meaningless AAA ratings. As the markets began to fail, the CDOs began to be seen as less secure forms of investment. Fear of toxic debt – partly in the form of CDOs – fuelled the liquidity crisis, leading to the downward spiral which saw Merrill Lynch and Bear Stearns, amongst other, go under.

Why then did the machines fail to create a self-stabilising system? Curtis argues that the financial crises of 1997-8, 2001 and 2007-8 reveal that Greenspan et al's faith in the ability of computers to regulate financial markets and guarantee growth didn't do away with power and politics, but rather transferred power away from the traditional political elite and into the hands of Wall Street. Whilst it is undoubtedly true that there are no computer systems which are able to factor in the vast complexities of human society and political organisation, it is not so much that those people who sought to develop a free society based on the interaction of free individuals through computer screens failed to overcome the entrenched system of political power: it was rather that they were always part of that system of entrenched power. As Slavoj Žižek recently said, anything claiming to be non-ideological is a sure sign that it is very ideological.

Curtis briefly highlights the observations of one prominent blogger, Humdog, who sought to debunk the myth of the democratising power of the Internet. Rather, she argued, the Internet was commodifying us. The Internet's latest currency was the commodification of human emotion for the purpose of entertainment. For proof of this one need look no further than YouTube. Remember the 'Leave Britney Alone' video from 2007 or LonelyGirl15 from 2006. The 2011 pseudo-documentary 'Catfish' represents the apotheosis of this online trend so far. This commodification, though, is nothing new – it is simply the latest chapter in the history of human reification. The presentation of the market as a force unto itself in the 20th and 21st centuries is part of the history of the process of objectification which Marx spoke about in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and later in Volume 1 of *Capital*. Although Curtis' presentation of the 'rise of the machine dream' is as lucid as ever, he fails to acknowledge that the political and social problems associated with cybernetics, computer utopianism, and the Californian ideology are simply a continuation of those tendencies analysed by Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin in the 20th century, and Marx and Engels in the 19th. And to be properly understood, Loren Carpenter's 1967 'Pong' experiment must be seen in continuum with the foundation of New Lanark in 1786 by Robert Owen and David Dale.

Matthew Kennedy a graduate of St. Hugh's College and an Associate Editor of the OLR.

[1] 'How to Make Money in Microseconds': <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v33/n10/donald-mackenzie/how-to-make-money-in-microseconds>

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<http://oxfordleftreview.wordpress.com/olr/>

oxfordleftreview@gmail.com