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Letters

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Opportunism

Like Chris Knight, I am a member of the Radical Anthropology Group. Yet I was bemused by his October theses ([Letters, October 9](#)). I know Chris regards himself as a revolutionary and a communist. How could the author of the most compelling account of how a communist revolution made our species human over 100,000 years ago be otherwise?

However, these theses, rather than pointing to the essential tasks facing the working class and communists, foster illusions in exactly the kind of reformist, legalistic, state-loyalist political practice from which the working class has to break if it is to emancipate itself.

The early paragraphs are predicated on the assumption that the Labour Party pre-Blair and Brown was in some sense a genuine party of the working class. I and the CPGB believe in engaging with the Labour Party, but we recognise the accuracy of Lenin's characterisation of it in the early 1920s as a *bourgeois workers'* party. Ultimately, it has always served the interests of capitalism.

In many ways this remains the case; it is simply that the centre of gravity in bourgeois society in recent decades has swung to the right and the Labour Party and trade union bureaucracy has swung with the times.

Contrary to Chris's assertion, the New Labour leadership in the 1990s signalled quite clearly the path on which they embarked. It is to the shame of the labour movement that they were not held to account, but it was ever so with Labour governments. Talk of electoral fraud fails to draw the correct conclusion that what the working class needs is a Communist Party - a party committed unambiguously to the interests of the working class.

Chris goes on to talk about "treason" and the sanctity of "international law". Plenty of imperialist adventures - including the current occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan - have been conducted within the parameters of "international law". Communists should oppose them regardless. If the US and British governments had persuaded the UN security council to back their invasion of Iraq, we should still have opposed it. By what right does the self-selected security council determine the legality or otherwise of state actions for the rest of the world? In fact, no existing international institutions incorporate even the semblance of democracy or accountability.

Chris does not mention the Iraq war directly. The focus of his theses is the Afghan war. He seems to believe that al Qa'eda and the Taliban actually are one of the

Fighting Fund On the rise

We are slightly lagging behind where we need to be if we are to reach our £1,000 target for October's fighting fund. Over the past week our readers and supporters have donated £244, which takes our total to £465. But half the month has already gone.

Pride of place this week goes to comrade TR, who sends his usual £60 cheque - and very welcome it is too. And thanks go also to comrades FS and WK for their £25 and £20 respectively. Plus I have two online donations to report - a tenner from a comrade in France, JME, and £5 from JM, who added that amount to her subscription, paid via our website.

On top of which we have received £124 in new standing orders (new since the beginning of the year, that is) over the past seven days. Thank you, AM, for your tremendous £80 and CG for your £20. Other standing orders received this week are from RK (£10), GD (£9) and JS (£5).

More good news - the number of *Weekly Worker* readers is definitely on the rise again. Last week 17,286 went to the paper via the internet. Mind you, we have some way to go to get back to last year's record of 40,000-plus.

But my immediate concern is raising the money needed to make sure the *Weekly Worker* is there to be read in the first place. We must get in the full £1,000 this month - plus the £75 by which we fell short in September. Can you help?

Robbie Rix

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major threats facing humanity, requiring a “coordinated *people’s war*”. I presume he intends to organise international brigades to sally forth to the mountains and deserts of Afghanistan?

Chris deems it appropriate to accuse brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith of treason for suggesting that Britain should be prepared to sue for peace. Well, the CPGB calls for the immediate and unconditional British and US withdrawal from both Afghanistan and Iraq. We are for the defeat of our own side in an imperialist war. That makes us very much open to the charge of treason that Chris is so happy to bandy around. But then Chris, in these theses, lurches towards social-imperialism.

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Finally, Chris calls on the monarch to sack the government. But the appeal of communists to the working class is based not on bourgeois legality, or fealty to the monarch, or concepts of loyalty and treason, but to democracy and social justice. Our task is to expose the fear of democracy that lies at the heart of our state structures - most strikingly around the institution of the monarchy - not to pander to it. We are republicans.

How is it that Chris has produced such a confusing mix of downright reactionary sentiments? I think the answer is found in his penultimate paragraph, where he announces the death of global capitalism, and his last paragraph, where he invites us not to miss the revolution on October 31. Chris genuinely sees an opportunity to make a revolution right now and these theses are an attempt to appeal to the working class as they are right now, with all the reactionary and conservative ideas that capitalism inculcates.

My response is unambiguous. First, capitalism has not collapsed. We are witnessing a spectacular financial failure - for most of us, the most dramatic economic events of our lifetimes. But capitalism will not collapse of its own volition. If the working class does not take *political* power, capitalism as a social system will find a way to continue.

Second, a working class revolution is impossible without the working class consciously organising in democratic organisations to make it happen. In Europe that means that the vast majority of people have to be either active members of a Communist Party or have been won over to its ideas. Without this, even the collapse of the capitalist state cannot lead to anything positive - the military or the mafia wait in the wings. And were a minority imbued with revolutionary idealism to seize power, their venture would be crushed by counterrevolution of one form or another - bourgeois or Stalinist.

A crisis of capitalism, however severe, does not alter this essential principle. Over the last 30 years the capitalist strategy of neoliberalism has served its function in delivering a series of crushing defeats to the organisations of the working class around the world. What is more, the left has emerged scarred from almost a century in which the ideas of Stalinism and social democracy dominated the working class - and influenced the development even of anti-Stalinist trends such as Trotskyism.

That is why the focus of the CPGB is on the left itself. Unless self-proclaimed revolutionaries can get their act together and build a united, pluralistic, democratic party that is serious about revolution - ie, a Communist Party - then we can make no progress. Currently, we are not even at first base in terms of creating the kind of organisation that the working class (and, by extension, humanity) needs. Just look at the sorry, undemocratic sects that dominate the British left, which are currently wasting their efforts trying to build competing Labour Parties marks two to 10.

Years (and possibly decades) of patient, principled work rebuilding the labour movement and building a Communist Party (virtually from scratch in both cases) lie ahead of us. And we have to organise on a continental and global scale. There are no short cuts.

That said, the present crisis does present opportunities for communists and the working class. The hypocrisy at the heart of neoliberalism has been exposed. Twenty five years ago the British state engineered the closure of the bulk of the mining industry in order to destroy the militant section of the British working class.

In the current year, government employees must accept below-inflation pay rises to meet Gordon Brown’s inflation and debt targets. This week, the British government is pouring tens of billions (and ultimately hundreds of billions) into nationalising the banking industry in order to save finance capitalism. Other European governments and the US government are engaged in the same exercise at a cost that runs into a trillion dollars and more.

We can take steps to rebuild the confidence of the working class and set it on a trajectory that will change the balance of social forces. It is the question of working class organisation that is crucial. But in this endeavour communists should at all times be entirely honest and straightforward. To engage in any other kind of politics - to play the games of the bourgeoisie - is to patronise the working class and collapse into rank opportunism.

Nick Rogers

email

Act now

Mike Macnair's article does not seem to grasp the root of the crisis as one endemic in capital itself (['From boom to bust?', October 2](#)).

Mike is right to criticise *Permanent Revolution's* optimism for the future of capital. He is also right to state that the only way to escape from the tendency to crisis (what he describes as "the boom-bust cycle") is for the working class to overthrow the existing system. This means both smashing the capitalist state and the rule of capital. However, the tendency to crisis is not just "boom-bust", but towards a worsening of humanity's conditions and a threat to the survival of civilisation - indeed "socialism or barbarism".

Macnair writes of societies as "collectives" - with the qualification, "even if they are divided into classes". While capital must ensure the reproduction of living labour-power to survive, this does not mean it is capable of a rational savings scheme analogous to the provision individuals make for themselves. Capitalism has been unable and unwilling to prevent mass famines in many parts of the world, particularly where there has been no readily exploitable labour force.

Macnair writes of inflation as something that inevitably arises from money savings. This separates the financial crisis from its capitalist roots. Macnair then states that capitalist booms must be inflationary because "Credit money increases with economic activity, increasing the total money supply". However, he locates this in "the classic capitalist 'virtuous circle' of recovery and boom periods".

Prices actually fell several times in Britain during the 19th century. This was despite recurrent booms, followed by crises brought about by the contradictions of capital, in particular the tendency of the rate of profit to fall. An examination of today's crisis needs to show what changes there have been in the forms capitalism has taken since then.

The tendency for the rate of profit to fall is discussed by Marx in chapter 13 of *Capital Vol 3*. It comes about, as Macnair mentions briefly, through the increased investment in machinery relative to living labour-power. This increases labour productivity and therefore surplus value and the rate of exploitation. However, as only living labour-power can produce surplus value, the return as a proportion of total investment, and hence the 'rate of profit' falls.

As Macnair indicates, for the individual capitalist, investment in machinery means initially reduced costs through increasing productivity and hence higher profits. However, increased productivity means a fall in the value of the commodities produced, and thus: "A capitalist working with improved but not as yet generally adopted methods of production sells below the market price, but above his individual price of production; his rate of profit rises until competition levels it out."

The phrase "price of production" (rather than 'value') is significant because there is a process of equalisation of the rate of the profit that entails the transformation of values into prices of production, which may be higher or lower than the values of the commodities (although total price in capitalist society can only express total value) (*Capital Vol 3*, chapters 9 and 10).

The equalisation of general rates of profit and transformation of the values of commodities into prices of production occurs through all spheres of production. Macnair's statement that, "as the new technology is generated across the industry, it leads to falling profits in the industry as a whole" misses Marx's point. The mass of profits will still rise. As Marx summarises: "The fall in commodity prices and the rise in the mass of profit ... is in fact but another expression for the law of the falling rate of profit attended by a simultaneously increasing mass of profit" (*Capital Vol 3*, chapter 13).

Since 1948 there has been a huge expansion in credit, both among capitalists and for consumers. This has allowed capitalists to maintain profit rates through raising prices, but