

Welcome to the 21st century

THE 21st century has come a little early for Korean capitalism. The rest of us can get a glimpse of it too in the magnificent uprising of the Korean working class.

South Korea was the great success story of capitalism transplanted to fresh areas of the world and thriving there. Korean capitalism found a largely rural people, ready to be driven into factories and growing cities. Brutally, it drove them there, subjecting them to the disciplines of modern industrial production — and to the harsher and sharper disciplines of a “modern” authoritarian police state.

Korean labour movement traditions were weak and had been stifled; Korean “socialism” was the hideous Stalinist dictatorship in North Korea. In South Korea capitalism was unchallenged master, and it thrived. The Korean capitalists reshaped and transformed the world around them. You could truly say of them and their international partners what Marx said of the early European bourgeoisie: that they showed “what man’s activity can bring about... accomplished wonders”. They created wonders greater than the myths and marvels of Korean history, a Korea that was “modern”, capitalist, bourgeois. They must for a long time have felt themselves to be all-powerful and invulnerable.

And what have they really produced? The agents of their own future destruction, Korean capitalism’s gravediggers! It is in the nature of things that this is what happens to even the most spectacularly successful capitalism. For capitalism, the paths of glory lead but to the grave!

As Marx put it: “The essential condition for the existence, and for the sway, of the bourgeois class, is the formation and augmentation of capital; the condition for capital is wage-labour. Wage labour rests on competition between the labourers. The advance of industry, whose involuntary promoter is the bourgeoisie, replaces the isolation of the labourers, due to competition, by their revolutionary combination, due to association.

“The development of modern industry, therefore, cuts from under its feet the very foundation on which the bourgeoisie produces and appropriates products. What the bourgeoisie produces, above all, is its own grave-diggers. Its fall and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable.”

South Korea’s workers show the future to the working class in the rest of the developing world, and the world as a whole. Industrial revolt generates political revolt. In the process of the struggle, the workers will learn and re-learn the need for class politics and for socialism. Modern information technology now gives the workers of all the world direct access to the ideas of world socialism and to its literary traditions.

“The 21st century will be the age of the new workers’ movements that will re-create a thoroughly democratic socialism, cleansed of Stalinism.”

The twentieth century was the age of the Russian revolution, its triumph, isolation and downfall. It ended in 1989 with the collapse of the Stalinist empire in Eastern Europe. In political terms, the 21st century has already begun. It will be the age of the new workers’ movements that will re-create a thoroughly democratic socialism, cleansed of Stalinism. The message from Korea for bourgeois and socialists alike is this: no power on earth can permanently suppress working-class struggle.

Back in 1850, when capitalism was first seeding itself in Asia, Karl Marx read an account by a Christian missionary, Karl Gutzlaff, of the social upheaval and dislocation created in China by the importation of cheap machine-produced goods. Among the things Karl Gutzlaff had seen was the Taipei movement, whose adherents aspired to a primitive-socialist equality. Marx wrote: “When Herr Gutzlaff returned among

Europeans after an absence of twenty years he heard talk of socialism and asked what it was. After he was given an explanation he exclaimed with alarm: ‘Is there anywhere that I can escape that pernicious teaching? The very same thing has been preached for some time by many people of the mob in China!’”

Marx let his imagination, his hopes and his optimism soar as he dwelt on the report from distant China. He wrote in the *Neue Rheinische Zeitung Review* no.2:

“When in their imminent flight [from revolution] across Asia our European reactionaries will ultimately arrive at the Wall of China, at the gates that lead to the stronghold of arch-reaction and arch-conservatism, who knows if they will not find there the inscription: République Chinoise. Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité?”

As always Marx was optimistically telescoping and foreshortening the things he prophetically hoped for. In Marx’s fantasy the revolution which the reactionaries were fleeing would have outrun them. In Korea, conversely, the working-class militancy which the capitalists hope they have buried in the older lands of capitalism rises up out of the ground they have tilled in the promised lands of new capitalism.

When, today, the anti-socialists and triumphant arch-reactionaries — those who spread the word that the working class is a spent force, capitalism eternal, and history ended in the uncontested triumph of the bourgeoisie — look to the showcase lands of new capitalism, what they already see and hear is Marx’s old slogan, “Workers of the world, unite!” Soon — in Korea, Singapore, South Africa, in China, and in Europe and America — they will again hear it in full, echoing across the world in the mouths of revolutionary workers:

“Workers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to win.”

Northern Ireland goes back to war

NORTHERN Ireland's so-called "peace process" has less and less "peace" in it. If there still is a "process" it is moving in reverse. It has been moving backwards since the Provisional IRA bombed Canary Wharf last February.

Gerry Adams, threatening while he "comments", says "the genie" of political violence is again more or less "out of the bottle" into which it was corked for a while after the Provisional IRA ceasefire of August 1994.

Full-scale violence is not quite back yet. The Provisional IRA has not yet resumed the old all-out war in the Six Counties. It is conducting only a limited military campaign. The Protestant paramilitary groups are still on "ceasefire", even though at least one of them, the "Ulster Freedom Fighters", has a very loose understanding of ceasefire: they attack Republicans.

But war, a "restrained" war, is now again being waged in Northern Ireland, and at a quickening tit-for-tat pace. It is unlikely, if it goes on, to remain "restrained".

It is only a matter of time before such activity as the Provisional IRA rocket attack on the Courts of Justice in Belfast on 6 January — supposed to target the British state — produces an "accidental" massacre of civilians and an open and complete end of the Protestant paramilitary ceasefire.

Time and again it has been bloodily shown that only a thin line of chance and accident separates "smart" bombings from civilian slaughter. To the Provisional IRA, the Belfast Courts of Justice may be a pure symbol of British rule, but in the real Northern Ireland the building exists in the heart of a densely populated city, where most of the people — the Protestant-Unionists — see "British rule" as their self-rule.

Meantime, as the ground catches fire under their feet, the politicians go on talking about the "peace process". That is one of the problems: on every side cant and claptrap about "peace" and "democracy" dominate all discussion on Northern Ireland. The real governing issues are almost never stated plainly and honestly. Everybody appeals to "democracy" and "peace" while pursuing other goals. The British want the status quo, modified; the Provisional IRA want the British to coerce the Protestants into a united Ireland; and the mainstream Protestants want the British to crush Catholic resistance to the Six Counties state. The Provisionals have learned from, and now outdo, the mainstream politicians in duplicity, dishonesty and double-talk.

Why are the politicians paralysed? John Hume, leader of the constitutional-nationalist Social Democratic and Labour Party, says that three months ago, acting for the Provisional IRA, he put it to John Major that a new Provisional IRA ceasefire could be had, with a Provisional IRA declaration of support for the "Mitchell principles" abjuring political violence. The price? A British government declaration that a new ceasefire would win Sinn Féin immediate access to the peace talks.

Hume is now possibly too close to Sinn Féin — he wants a sectarian electoral pact with them — but he is a serious and competent politician. He brokered the 1994 ceasefire. There is no reason not to believe him.

Why then does the British government continue to let the

situation in Northern Ireland deteriorate? It is not just that Britain has a weak, lame-duck, minority government, though that must be part of it. It is also that events after August 1994 showed up the fearsome complexity of the political problem.

If Britain lets the Provisionals in on peace talks, then some or most of the Orange politicians will walk out. Seeing Sinn Féin's admission to talks as the first step in making substantial concessions to the SF/IRA position, they will "occupy the moral high ground" and refuse to sit down with Sinn Féin until the IRA has handed in its guns. That is, until it has surrendered and disarmed. It is not going to.

The truth is that in 1994 and after, "peace" only brought everybody up against the political intractability of Northern Ireland. Peace solved none of the fundamental issues; and without political solutions permanent peace is impossible. It is a vicious circle.

As always Britain balances on the basis of the status quo — and the Six Counties status quo is untenable. As always, Britain puts British political problems above "statesmanship" in Ireland. As almost always, British politicians behave towards Ireland with hardened, age-old irresponsibility and an underlying icy bourgeois indifference. As things are going, by the time of the general election — probably May — Northern Ireland may once more have spiralled back into large-scale violence.

The main responsibility for this situation lies with the British government now, and with generations of British governments in the past. Yet the Provisional IRA — whose military campaign sets the pace for other sectarian-communist military campaigns — also bears a great responsibility. Its entire military activity is futile — and utterly counterproductive for its stated goal of a united Ireland. If large-scale slaughter returns to Northern Ireland, then the direct and immediate responsibility will lie with the Provisional IRA.

Central to the unending tragedy is the fact that the labour movement in Northern Ireland has no independent policy for a democratic solution to the division in the Six Counties working class. Neither does the British labour movement. Labour's front bench maintain a militant bipartisanship with the Tories. Insofar as there is any rank-and-file labour movement activity on Ireland, it is confined to echoing the Provisional IRA's suicidally misleading and scandalously dishonest propaganda.

In this issue, *Workers' Liberty* prints the text of an important debate between us and Sinn Féin. It took place at the *Workers' Liberty* 1994 Summer School on the eve of the ceasefire. There the reader will find the issues in Northern Ireland spelled out in basic terms. The alternatives are set out, between socialism and real Irish republicanism — the republicanism of Wolfe Tone and James Connolly — on one side, and the Provisionals' communalist militarism on the other. We urge readers to circulate the debate and to discuss the issues.

It is only by educating and re-educating the British labour movement on these questions that socialists can hope to make British labour into a force working for working-class progress in Ireland. Right now it is either unconscionably indifferent or, the left, mostly talks malignant Provo nonsense.

Blair is out to kill the Labour Party

"After the rising of the 17th June [the East Berlin workers' uprising of 1953] the Secretary of the Writers' Union had leaflets handed out in the Stalinallee in which it can be read that the people had forfeited the confidence of the government, and could only win it back by renewed efforts. Would it not be simpler if the government dissolved the people and elected another?"
Berthold Brecht, "The Solution"

THE Blair groupies of the Labour Coordinating Committee have flown a kite in which they propose the effective destruction of the Labour Party. (We report on page 21). They want to abolish constituency General Committees; transform Labour Party conference into a rally; abolish the National Executive Committee and replace it with an "NEC" that deals only with organisational matters; and confine all policy-making to the parliamentary leadership.

Tony Blair and his coterie are believed to back this plan. They fear that the old trade-union-based Labour Party would be a major focus for resistance to a Blair government. Their solution is effectively to abolish the Labour Party! Though it now looks unlikely that the Blairites will go for an open and complete break with the unions, this is tactics, and not a substantial retreat from the programme revealed by Stephen Byers at the TUC last September.

The Blairites want to keep the existing union donations *as well as* securing additional finance from big business donations and the state to cover the *additional* expense of creating a network of paid agents in every constituency.

They also fear defeat if the issues are posed sharply. They wish to keep shreds of the trade union link in order to make it easier for trade union officials who back Blair to sell their anti-democratic agenda to union members. They will try to break the link and destroy internal party democracy *in practice* while pretending that no such thing is happening.

The Blairite apparatus is increasingly distinct from the old Labour and trade-union bureaucracy. The Blairite project represents and reflects an attempt to bureaucratise wider layers of British politics than the old Labour and trade-union bureaucracy ever managed to reach. They aim to diminish bourgeois democracy as well as labour-movement democracy. No less is involved when they aim effectively to drive the organised

labour movement out of politics and to substitute a bureaucratised "New Labour" parliamentary party, raised high above and — outside elections — out of all possibility of control by its supporters.

Yet — and here lies their difficulty — while hostile to the existing trade-union-based labour bureaucracy, the Blair group is still dependent on the union officials for funds and for its continued political domination of the labour movement. Without the backing or benevolent "neutrality" of the union leaders, the Blairites can not carry through their "project" and emerge as a fully-fledged independent entity.

If the trade union bureaucracy — in particular, the big three, Bickerstaffe of UNISON, Morris of the TGWU and Edmonds of the GMB — were now to launch a serious political battle *against* Blair and *for* their organisations' policies on the Health Service, full employment, trade union rights, a minimum wage, and so on, then the Blairite stranglehold would be broken very quickly.

They will have to be dragged into it kicking and screaming. And without a massive democratic revolt in the trade unions, a CLP-based resistance to Blair will stand little chance of victory in a ballot in which Blair will use the mass media to appeal to his passive armchair supporters. So, can the union ranks force the union leaders into a serious fight against Blair's attempt to drive the organised labour movement out of politics?

Evidently, the Blairites fear that they can. They are already making attempts to head off the opposition. The likes of John Prescott and Robin Cook are trying to promote a slightly less anti-union version of the Blair plan through their intermediary Peter Hain, the man who is trying to copyright the word "soft", as in "soft left". An indication of just how bad this "third option" will be can be had from the reports that John Edmonds is not worried about Labour Party conference losing its sovereignty because "we will control the fringe, and the media will be interested in us". Yeah... Edmonds will not willingly kick up a fuss in defence of the *principles* of collective democracy and of keeping the labour movement in politics.

Nevertheless, the rank and file could still force a serious confrontation between the trade unions and the Blairite cuckoos in the Labour nest.

What should socialists do? We must win the union conferences and Labour Party delegates to a commitment to defend collective, participatory democracy. If necessary, the unions must hold their own ballots on the Blair proposals, with a recommendation to the members to reject them. If rank-and-file pressure to raise the stakes is powerful enough, it can force the officials to fight Blair rather than just go through the motions of limp pseudo-opposition.

The class politics of the proposed constitutional changes must be brought out plainly and unmistakably. We must focus on winning the Labour Party in Parliament and in the country for a fight to keep the organised labour movement in politics and for the immediate demands of the trade unions — trade union rights, full employment, a minimum wage, rebuilding the Health Service and the welfare state.

Nothing less than the future of working-class politics in Britain for a long time to come is now at stake.

Workers' Liberty

Incorporating Socialist Organiser

THE WORKING CLASS WILL RISE AGAIN!



"The emancipation of the working class is also the emancipation of all human beings without distinction of race or sex." Karl Marx

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