

Bulletin of the
Communist Workers
Organisation

Affiliate of the
Internationalist
Communist Tendency

No 40 Spring 2017

AURORA



Trump: *The Problem is Still Capitalism*

The Rise of the Authoritarian Right

The avalanche of protests at the accession of Donald Trump as 45th President of the United States is unprecedented in modern times. He is a reactionary, racist, sexist bully who peddles hatred and loathing. He responds to every criticism by attacking the messenger, a “technique” he learned from his one-time lawyer, and counsellor to the “Mob”, Roy Cohn. He has already called parts of the US state, its judiciary, its secret services, and the mainstream media, “enemies of the people” for questioning his decisions.

But he is not alone around the world. The rise of authoritarian leaders of nominally democratic regimes has been increasing across the planet. Putin, Duterte, Erdogan, Orbans, and Kaczynski all control authoritarian regimes which care little for pluralism consensus or minority rights. What has brought all these authoritarians to power (and given hope to so many others from Le Pen to the AfD in Germany and Wilders in the Netherlands that they too can win power) at this time?

Capitalism's Long Recession

The roots go back a long way. In the early 1970s the post-war boom came to an end. Ever since then world capitalism's leaders have scrambled around to try to find a way of restoring the growth rates of the past. After the Keynesian experiment failed in the 1970s they turned to “neo-liberalism”, deregulation and globalisation. Capital now went to where labour power was cheapest.

This devastated manufacturing in the richer capitalist countries. With mainly lower paid service jobs to replace them, workers earnings in the capital-rich states are today less in real terms than they were in 1979. Workers' solidarity has been eroded as communities have been destroyed. With little working class resistance globalisation has ruled. States have increasingly competed in a race to the bottom to make investment attractive (tax holidays for example) for big money. However the economic crisis has not gone away, so the capitalist system turned to deregulation of the financial sector, opening it up to speculation. Debts suddenly became “assets”. Into their network of debt the financiers dragged those who could not cope with it via subprime mortgages etc. The consequence was a massive speculative bubble which burst in 2007-2008.

Everywhere states bailed out the banks and imposed austerity on the working class. In UK small towns, in the rust belt of the USA, a layer of workers who had not shared in the dubious benefits of globalisation now had more misery to contend with. Many were thus only too ready to vote for anyone who spoke up against the damage “globalisation” had done.

We should not forget that anti-globalisation began as a movement of the left, of the “no-global” and Occupy Movements. They were the first to oppose trading blocs like TTIP, but as we warned in 2011, the real problem is not one trend (globalisation) in capitalism. What we need to oppose is the entire system of exploitation. If you don't see this then the opposite of globalisation becomes defence of the nation. The radical

right just had to add nationalism and racism to anti-globalisation to make it the toxic mix of today. In isolated places, with few if any migrants, many are all too ready to believe that if it was not migrants stealing jobs then it must be that jobs went to foreigners abroad.

The social consequences of the capitalist crisis have thus enabled Trump to unite all the right wing groups around the Republican Party from the Tea Party anti-big government types, evangelical Christians to the Alt-Right of neo-Nazis. Add to that the votes of workers, in key states left behind by globalisation, who buy into Trump's aggressive rhetoric against “them” (foreigners, migrants and “the Washington establishment”).

Handing “the Swamp” to the Crocodiles

Trump's penchant for “alternative facts” is well known but his most transparent lie was that he was going to Washington to “drain the swamp”. Instead he has nominated a swathe of Goldman Sachs bankers like Garry Cohn (head of the National Economic Council) and Steve Mnuchin (after denouncing Clinton for being close to them!). His Cabinet has three billionaires and is the wealthiest, with more ties to business, than any previous administration in US history. No surprise then that Congress has already rescinded the law that compels companies to reveal payments to foreign powers (such as Secretary of State Tillerson's former company Exxon Mobil). Or that Trump, in the presence of the chief executives of major U.S. corporations, including Dow Chemical Co, Lockheed Martin Corp, and U.S. Steel Corp, signed an executive order to place “regulatory reform” task forces within federal agencies to cut “regulations” on business. State regulations on everything from environmental protection to laws intended to prevent speculation will be shredded. As David Pilling in the *Financial Times* (22 February) noted “a Donald Trump presidency means not so much draining the swamp as handing over the swamp to the crocodiles.”

Workers who voted for Trump still live in the forlorn hope that jobs will return. Even if some do, they

will not be paid like the old ones or in the same numbers. Ford's high profile abandonment of investing in a factory in Mexico might cheer them. However the Mexican factory offered 3000 jobs whilst the replacement in the US will be more robotised with only a few hundred jobs on offer. If Trump carries out his threat to impose 45% tariffs on Chinese imports it is not going to lead to widespread import substitution – it will lead only to a higher cost of living for the working class. Workers will go on paying for the crisis just as they have done for the last 40 years.

Opposing Trump or the System that Spawned Him?

It is no accident that Trump's first target is migrant workers. Building the wall and deporting migrants is not new. Bill Clinton started the wall, Obama continued it, and Obama quietly deported 250,000 migrants last year. What is new is that Trump has loudly targeted Mexicans and Muslims. In making them his victims he is not just playing on widespread fear and loathing, he is orchestrating it. There are currently over 40 million migrants in the US of which only about a quarter are illegal. Non-white migrants can now expect nothing but harassment both from officials and racists. Trump is defining US nationalism against this “other”

In this regard Trump is like Erdogan or Putin. Their pronouncements on foreign affairs are designed for domestic consumption only and what they actually do is often at variance with their idle boasts. This is not to say that a capitalism in crisis is any more likely now to involve us all in a new conflagration than before. Trump's rhetoric may sound more aggressive but his policies are in continuity with what has gone before. “Fake news” began long ago with such myths as the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Trump didn't invade Iraq on non-existent evidence, nor did he break human rights law in setting up Guantanamo. He didn't launch a dirty war of drone strikes or devote \$3 trillion to the refinement of US nuclear weapons. All these were carried out by Bush and Obama. Trump is just more of the same, but in an increasingly

dangerous world. Ironically the one thing that is holding back the drive to war is the fact that the working class has been so passive. By not fighting attacks on living standards it has taken some of the pressure off the ruling class to be even more aggressive in their imperialist policies. Yet History, as recent events show, does not stand still.

For too long the world working class has been the passive victim of everything that the system has thrown at it. It is now time for us to begin to fight back. The question is how? Trump is so odious that the temptation is to support the immediate campaigns of the capitalist left (social democrats of all stripes but mainly in the Democratic Party) against him. For the last thirty years this left have accepted the logic of neo-liberal capitalism and colluded with the lowering of living standards. And their one palliative, of offering more welfare to buy social peace, collapsed with the end of the speculative bubble. With their distracting and misleading talk of “fascism” they only exist to get the working class to support the system on the grounds that the alternative is worse. They offer us nothing.

After years of fragmentation and restructuring there are small signs that at grassroots level, in workplaces and communities working class resistance has begun to revive, but it will be a long, slow process. We have to organise for ourselves. Revolutionaries have to be part of this revival by encouraging every struggle that goes beyond the control of those who want to keep it inside the system. We have to agitate for autonomous bodies, controlled by workers, which cannot be manipulated by the capitalist left to make them conform to what the system can tolerate. Even more, revolutionaries also have to work towards the creation of a unified political organisation in order to point out “the line of march” towards an alternative to capitalist exploitation, to environmental degradation, to oppression of minorities and to imperialist war.

We have a world to save and a world to win.

What We Stand For

Aurora is published by the Communist Workers Organisation (CWO).

We stand for a global society in which production is for need and not profit (and is therefore sustainable), where the state, national frontiers and money have been abolished, where power is exercised through class-wide organisations like workers councils. It is a society which can only be created through the activity of millions of human beings. Only such a society can rid us of the capitalist offspring of poverty, hunger, oppression and war: We call it communism but it has nothing in common with the Stalinist state capitalism of the old USSR.

In order to get there we are working to create a world proletarian political organisation: a ‘party’ for want of a better word. This organisation is not a government in waiting. It does not rule but it does lead and guide the struggle for a new world. We by no means claim to be that party but only one of the elements which will need to come together in its formation.

Write to:

BM CWO
LONDON
WC1N 3XX

email: uk@left.com.org
or visit our website:
<http://www.leftcom.org>



NHS: On The Critical List

Lies and Under-funding

There can hardly be a household that has not been affected by the decline in medical services in the UK. From inaccessible GPs and hospital appointments cancelled at the last minute to some of the most harrowing experiences that anyone is likely to undergo. Local campaigns against ward closures, A&E closures, sometimes whole hospital closures have been going on for years. Now they are supplemented by protests over cuts in the emergency services and a whole host of regional issues, including some of the most notorious examples of entrenched malpractices. When the British Red Cross issued a statement in January that the NHS is facing a “humanitarian crisis” (following the needless deaths of patients who’d been stuck on trolleys without treatment at Worcestershire Royal Hospital) it was recognising that the makeshift survival mechanisms of the NHS can no longer disguise what’s going on. Not surprisingly, opinion polls show that the National Health Service is becoming people’s “top concern”. It didn’t really need the BBC to invite everyone to “join the conversation” with their special NHS week. (As they did in February.) Certainly Theresa May and crew have not forgotten the boost Vote Leave got from the false promise that leaving the EU would free up £350m a week for the NHS. (A promise immediately denied by Farage the day after the referendum result.)

By contrast with the blatant slashing of Local Authority funds and ruthless cuts to a whole range of welfare benefits, the government does not want to appear to be undermining the NHS. But the *now you see it now you don’t* state spending plans up to 2020 (the life of this parliament) can’t disguise the facts on the ground.

With parliamentary devolution in 1999 the NHS ‘devolved’ into four national constituents, making for differences in the detail of how each service is run and in the timing of government spending cuts. (The Scottish parliament, for example, followed Wales and Northern Ireland in withdrawing prescription charges back in 2011.) But broadly the picture is the same. Since the financial crash the state has reduced its expenditure on health, starting with the Labour Government under Gordon Brown. According to the Nuffield Trust, overall health spending fell by £12 per person in the UK between 2009/10 and 2013/14. Since then the post-Brexit government insists that real spending on NHS England is due to rise by almost £10 billion by 2020. It’s a trick of course. Whilst allocating £10bn to the NHS the state will **take away** half of that amount from the Health and Social Care budget handled by local authorities. Amongst other things, this means reduced funding for the care of the elderly: hardly a judicious move at a time when “bed blocking” by old people who fall ill is being blamed for everything from overcrowded A&E departments to bumping up the cost to the NHS by hundreds of millions of pounds per year. But ever since the financial crash central government has been careful to see that the spending axe is wielded principally by local authorities. That way any resistance is already localised and broken up.

However, this cynical accounting sleight of hand is by no means the end of the projected under-funding of health care. The official auditors reckon that unless something is done, the shortfall will amount to £30 billion by the end of this decade. If left to weigh on hospital trusts and self-managed fund-holding GPs the consequence is obvious: an even bigger

dilemma for maintaining standards of treatment. Magnanimously, Theresa May has set out to keep the Tory election pledge to direct £8bn of state funds towards offsetting this deficit – provided (and here is the rub) – that the hospitals and doctors’ practices find £22bn of “savings”. And so, following an inexorable logic, the NHS trusts (two thirds of them already in the red) are looking for ways to cut spending. Since their biggest single outlay is wages, reducing the number of people on the payroll is high on management lists. Many trusts are going for the most efficient way of all: shutting down whole departments whilst pretending to offer local people a choice between which hospital should close its A&E department, maternity unit, or even be shut down all together.

And Labour’s Record?

Unlike during last year’s junior doctors’ strike, which Jeremy Corbyn hardly brought up in parliament, the leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition has enjoyed taunting May over the state of the health service. Since January he has asked more questions about the NHS than any other topic. Outside of parliament though, he is doing nothing to promote a unified NHS workers’ resistance, just as he avoided unambiguous support for last year’s junior doctors’ strike. But then, that would undermine his responsibilities as leader of Her Majesty’s Opposition. It would go against Labour’s whole being as a party for the management of capitalism: the assumption that in any situation there is a state policy option that can equally serve the interests of capitalist money-making and at the same time safeguard the health and well-being (never mind the livelihoods) of the working class. Let’s say it clearly: a health system run by the capitalist state is neither socialist nor a step towards socialism. Moreover,

when capitalism itself is in terminal crisis no sector of the post-war welfare state is immune.

The fact is that Labour is just as responsible as the Tories for the shape of the NHS today. When Tony Blair first came to power in 1997 after telling voters they had “only 24 hours to save the NHS”, his government encouraged Thatcher’s self-managed hospital trusts and fund-holding GPs to saddle themselves with more debt via the so-called Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme. The Blair government concentrated on headline news success stories, such as reduction in waiting times for hospital appointments as it injected more funds into the NHS to try and catch up with average EU spending on health per capita. It didn’t stop the loss of around 32,000 hospital beds over Blair’s first ten years in office. (Presented as efficiency measures in the light of 24 hour turn-over times after operations.) The pattern continues today: retrograde steps presented as efficiency savings. As we write the *Daily Telegraph* is running a story on the 13,681 hospital beds that have been eliminated over the past six years. Anyone who nonchalantly talks of “bed blockers” would do well to bear these stats in mind.

Like capitalism as a whole, NHS medical treatment is a contradictory and mixed bag. State of the art equipment and advanced treatments for once fatal conditions exist side by side with overcrowded waiting rooms where anonymous patients are called for a brief encounter with an anonymous doctor. In fact the British NHS measures up poorly against most other rich states. It has the second lowest level of physician cover among OECD countries, for example while overall spending on health is below the OECD average. In terms of treatment outcomes the UK is in a far from enviable position with amongst the

highest numbers of avoidable death rates in Western Europe.

The NHS crisis has reached tipping point and there can be no going back. Certainly not to Aneurin Bevan’s vision of a universal service free for everyone at the point of use. (The vision was never the reality. Hospital consultants have always supplemented their income with fees from private patients, courtesy of NHS hospital equipment. Today well over 10% of the UK population are covered by private medical schemes.) But this is not because the Labour Party has abandoned socialism. Socialism is not about a political party benignly managing the capitalist state. Moreover, although increasing involvement of finance capital with its aim of turning a profit for its investors is an obnoxious excrescence on anything pretending to be a health service, “creeping privatisation” is as much a consequence as cause of the NHS crumbling. State-run or private, capitalist health care has to be revolutionised. Like the overthrow of capitalism as a whole, this can only be done when the people whose labour power keep it going say “enough is enough” and take the running of things into their own hands – and in the process get rid of the sham parliamentary democracy which conceals the dictatorship of capital.

In the meantime, a step on the way would be for all NHS workers to join together to refuse to implement the current cuts. This is a far better way to get the support of local communities than the sham public meetings with questions by appointment only that are being put on by local Trusts. These are all about NHS managers deciding where they can cut without too much fuss. More important, a combined fight **at the same time organised collectively by all grades of staff and every branch of the service** is a far more serious way to fight. Naturally anyone pushing for such a way forward has our support.

February 1917 International Women’s Day 100 Years On

On International Women’s Day* (February 23 old style/ March 8 today) 1917, women workers from both home and factory took to the streets of Petrograd. Five days of strikes, demonstrations and over 1,300 deaths later, Tsarism had crumbled. In these events, hundreds of thousands of men also took part but,

“It was the women who initiated the action in most cases, primarily working women from the textile mills.” [Burdzhalov]

The final straw for the women workers had come with the breakdown in the bread supply at the start of February when only half the food ordered for Petrograd arrived.

“Long lines stretched in front of shops and bakeries. A winter unprecedented in severity had set in ... Shivering from cold, poorly dressed young people, women and old men waited hours for bread and often went home empty-handed. Food shortages provoked an even greater ferment among the masses ... queues had the same force as revolutionary meetings and tens of thousands of revolutionary leaflets. The street had become a political club.”

The war had brought 250,000 more women into the Petrograd workforce making the total about a million. Conditions were particularly exacting for them. Many had to work long hours in war industries after their men were conscripted for the front, as well as look after children, and spend what little free time they had in

long lines queuing for bread and kerosene. Prior to International Women’s Day bakeries had been sacked and bread shops stoned but what now transformed these bread riots into something more was that women workers (plus some male) held “stormy” mass meetings which wanted to go beyond the traditional demonstration. Having decided to down tools in one factory they then went round others, sometimes throwing snowballs at windows to attract workers’ attention. Men and women poured out of factories to take part in demonstrations. All told, somewhere between 80,000 and 120,000 workers, the vast majority of them women, went out on strike that day to demand bread, peace, and an end to Tsarism.

In launching such widespread strike action, the women workers went against the advice from all the political organisations who thought it was too early to mobilise a fully revolutionary movement. They feared it would lead to a demoralising defeat and wanted to confine this socialist anniversary, as previously, to a formal protest march against the war. Not that the women workers were without their own political leaders. Bolshevik women, encouraged by Lenin, had even produced their own paper *Rabotnitsa* (Woman Worker) which ran for 7 issues in 1914. Most socialist organisations had developed their own women’s circles after the 1905 revolution to carry out “organisation and propaganda among the female factory proletariat”. They were opposed throughout by the more affluent traditional middle class women’s organisations who simply wanted votes for women. On International Women’s Day 1916 the middle class feminists had gone round tearing down the working women’s posters to prevent strikes. In 1917, so widespread was

the anger that the working class women were not going to be intimidated again. Although organisationally weak, members of the working women’s circles were embedded in the working class districts. Some, like Anna Itkina (not then a Bolshevik), played their part in issuing leaflets calling for strikes and demonstrations. They could not, though, have predicted where the movement would end up.

Women continued to play an important role in the 5 days that followed. They knew from their experience of 1905 that the key task was to win over the garrison. The softening-up process began in earnest on February 24. Although most of the mounted Cossacks initially did what they were told, there were one or two places where some sort of fraternisation or, more accurately, “sororisation”, took place. It was, again mainly, women who went up to groups of soldiers taking hold of their bayonets, telling them about their lack of bread, explaining that their men were at the Front etc. Their aim was to make the troops ashamed of the role they were playing. It worked and the bulk of the soldiers gradually came over to the revolution.


Russia now found itself not with one new government but two. The first was the Provisional Government set up by members of the old Parliament (Duma) who had been elected on the rigged voting system of the Tsar. The other was the Soviet. However, even the early Soviet was not really representative as many factories had not sent delegates (some had not even heard the Soviet had been re-formed). Soldiers were vastly over-represented. Thus the early Soviet was dominated by the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries who wanted to continue “the war to victory”

(Kerensky). They handed leadership of the revolution to the propertied classes in the Provisional Government. The revolutionary working class fought this from the beginning.

Working women faced a parallel fight. Despite being 40% of the Petrograd proletariat, despite the significant role they had played in the revolution, not a single woman delegate was present in the first Soviet. The working class revolution had only just begun ...

** Women’s Day started in America in 1908-9 to celebrate a women workers’ strike. It became “International” after Luise Zeitz and Clara Zetkin proposed it at the 1911 second International Conference of Working Women in Copenhagen. Russian women first celebrated it in 1913 (so the next year the Tsarist police arrested the organisers to prevent a repeat). It became a festival of the Russian working class like May Day and January 9 (anniversary of Bloody Sunday 1905).*

Journal of the Communist Workers’ Organisation
Winter/Spring 2017



09

Revolutionary Perspectives

Russia, China and the USA’s New World Disorder

Class Composition in the Crisis
Labour Party: Never Any Use to the Working Class
Russian Revolution, 1918: Five Months On, Karl Radek
Review of Carcedi’s Behind the Crisis