
Editorial

In the wake of Karl Marx's bicentenary, and the recent centennial commemorations of both the Great War and Russian Revolutions, Issue 54 of *Socialist History* serves as a retrospective on Marxism's impact, legacy and possible future. This includes two articles, originally presented as papers at *Socialist History's* 'Echoes of Revolution' conference in Norwich in February 2018; a set of observations on Marx and Marxism for the present day, and a symposium on the history of Trotskyism. What perhaps ties each of these contributions is the notion of Marxist thought and practice as lived experience and its, often ambiguous, relationship to mass mobilisation and popular Left-wing ideals.

Sara Sewell opens this discussion with an analysis of the ideological struggle surrounding the celebration of May Day in early-interwar Germany. Following the forced suppression of the German revolutionary Left by Friedrich Ebert's Social Democratic government in 1919, the newly established Communist Party of Germany shifted its focus towards cultivating grass-root support among the urban proletariat. As Sewell's article demonstrates, throughout the early 1920s, May Day, already associated with radical protest, effectively morphed into a cultural continuation of the revolutions of 1918 and 1919. Central to this was the overt contention over how the date should be perceived, once again reflecting the heightening division within the political Left and labour movements. While Communists advocated for a day of workers' militancy and revolutionary processions, their social democratic counterparts sought to define it as a leisurely celebration of working-class tradition and communal values. Of particular significance however, is Sewell's anthropological assessment of Communist rituals and symbolic displays as a means of countering their opponents and politicising May Day as a *Kampftag* ('fighting day'). Through this interdisciplinary approach, Sewell also demonstrates how a significant section of interwar Germany's socialist rank and file sought to establish a sense of revolutionary identity through their own collective agency. This in turn, broadens our historical understanding beyond political parties and the personalities and actions of their leaders.

In the second article, Francis King offers a comprehensive evaluation of the short-lived Democratic Republic of Georgia that existed from 1918 to 1921. Created in the aftermath of the Russian empire's collapse in 1917, the DRG's brief existence represented a unique moment in the history of socialist

governance. Georgia, located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, south of the Caucasus Mountains on the Black Sea's eastern coastline was reconstituted as an independent state that brought the world's first ever elected social-democratic government to power in February 1919. Moreover, in contrast to the other short-lived 'independent states' that appeared across Imperial Russia's fragmenting territory, the DRG proved far more robust as a political entity. Prior to a military invasion by Soviet Russia in February 1921, the ruling Social Democratic Party of Georgia not only succeeded in stabilising its borders while quelling domestic unrest, but managed to resist external interferences. Nevertheless, in seeking to establish a viable sovereign state, the Social Democrats were obliged to substitute their internationalist principles for the localised practicalities of nation-building. This was further exacerbated by rising unrest among the DRG's large ethnic minority communities and a string of clashes along its borders which saw the government resort to secret diplomacy and repressive internal measures. Such practices, while consolidating the central government's authority, also served to foster a nascent Georgian ethno-nationalism. In highlighting this gulf between ideological fidelity and political pragmatism, King challenges the post-1989 tendency for characterising national revival as inherently anti-Left.

To mark Marx's bicentenary, this issue brings together some reflections on Marx and Marxism. With the cultural, economic and political tenets of the post-Cold War neoliberal consensus now under direct challenge around the world, the contributors consider the relevance of Marx's ideas as a guide to understanding history and society today.

The final contribution is a symposium held in June 2018 on John Kelly's recently published study *Contemporary Trotskyism: Parties, Sects and Social Movements in Britain* (Routledge, 2018). It comprises four review essays whose authors consider different aspects of Kelly's assessment of British Trotskyism as a political movement since 1950. These include a general overview of the book by Mark Wickham-Jones; comments from Ian Birchall based on his own experiences as a former long-term member of the Socialist Workers Party; Madeleine Davis's historical evaluation of Trotskyist engagement with, and divergence from, the 'New Left' since its conception in 1956; and Phil Burton-Cartledge's observations on the relationship between Trotskyism and the Labour Party under Jeremy Corbyn. The symposium concludes with an author's response from Kelly who addresses the contributors' questions on Trotskyism's historical and current place in left-wing British politics.

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