

## Communists and Dictatorship



**WHY ARE COMMUNISTS** always the supporters of dictatorship? Well, this is a kind of trick question because, of course, communists in the West have always been at the forefront of the defence of civil liberties. Communists, in their bewildering variety, have for more than a century, been the most militant activists in strenuous left-wing campaigns and struggles against fascist, clerical, and military, dictatorships around the world.

This strikes many people as paradoxical because the left-wing militants shouting in the streets in defence of democracy and freedom, are often very quiet about the violation of human rights, personal freedom, trade unionism, and free speech, in countries ruled by communist parties. Is this simply hypocrisy or is there some other kind of explanation?

Any attempt to answer this question takes us back to the idea of 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'. In the

Marxist tradition 'dictatorship' means domination and, just to confuse matters, it also carries with it the rather more conventional political meaning that refers to a state of lawless and arbitrary rule by a tyrant or an association of tyrants.

In the former rather than the latter sense Marxists have always thought of capitalist society as 'the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie'. After all, capitalist society is founded upon the defence of private property against all comers, and the state and legal system is organized to guarantee the most favourable social and political conditions for the business owner and entrepreneur. The state in Britain, above all other concerns, protects private property, and the right of proprietors and shareholders to employ workers in order to generate private profits.

So, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' has its origin in the nature of the workplace in capitalist society. Anybody who goes to work knows that the workplace is a 'dictatorship' run by the employer, his supervisors and managers. The worker has no rights in the workplace beyond those specified in the contract of employment and the legislative framework put in place by the government. In the workplace – the rights of the employer and the investors are sacrosanct.

Indeed, the capitalist has a legal duty to put the interest of the shareholders first and foremost in the management of the firm and the deployment of its assets. The workplace is a dictatorship regardless of whether or not the advice or suggestions of the worker are welcomed. The employer has the first, second, and last word on everything. The workplace, even in a democracy, like Britain, is a dictatorship.

So, the communist idea of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat', is about extending democracy, from the choice of your MP or local councillor, to the management of your workplace, all of the country's businesses, and its wider economy.

That's the theory.

However, everybody knows that whenever communists have come to power in the past they

have immediately, from day one, instituted rule by decree, the control of social life by political police, and imprisoned or executed anybody that they don't like the look of.

In front of this reality most communists and red-hot socialists in the West, become decidedly shifty in the face of criticism. They tell us that Stalin wasn't too bad because the Red Army defeated Hitler. That although the Castro Brothers were in control of Cuba for fifty-nine years, the National Assembly of People's Power in Havana (in which the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution hold all the seats), is in all essentials democratic, "and anyway, Cuba has the best healthcare in the world". In defence of the party-state in China they point out that the Communist Party emancipated women, and has lifted millions out of grinding poverty.

East Germany, known as the DDR, *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (or the German Democratic Republic), was anything but democratic, and even built the Berlin Wall in 1961 to keep its own citizens safely inside the socialist realm. I can remember in November 1989, as the communist regime was collapsing, arguing with comrades who were defending the DDR, and the regime of Erich Honecker and Egon Krenz, on the grounds that they provided "the best childcare in the world".

Now we are witnessing the Communist Party of China saving Hong Kong from chaos and anarchic disorder by extending the arbitrary rule of the party-state, and political police, from the mainland to the former British colony.

At the end of the First Opium War in 1842, the British took control of Hong Kong Island and at the end of the Second Opium War in 1860 the British seized the Kowloon Peninsula, and in 1898 took control of the largest part of Hong Kong, the so-called, 'New Territories'.

It must be remembered, of course, that the 'Opium Wars' were about forcing the Chinese to import opium produced in British India. The British Empire sought to

undermine the independence of the Chinese Imperial Government, and open up the country to British trade and influence. Consequently, from 1840 to 1997, when London handed back the colony to Beijing, the British had never toyed with the idea of allowing democratic rule in the Chinese land it had seized.

However, although it did not permit democracy, the British did institute the rule of law. This meant that the police and the colonial government had to act inside the law. They could not arbitrarily arrest or imprison anybody. They could not seize buildings, land, or other property, or violate contracts, without due process in the courts.

Following the ending of the Chinese Civil War with the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Hong Kong developed into a centre of international trade and finance in which, the rule of law became the key to the prosperity and success of the colony. For sixty-odd years the colonial arrangement with Britain suited the tyrants in charge of China – it helped them develop China's international trade and banking. So, with the end of British rule in 1997 the government in Beijing committed itself to retaining the rule of law in Hong Kong, rather than imposing the autocratic rule of the Communist Party that prevails in the rest of China.

In the last few years, with the elevation of China's prestige to the status of a global power, the old deal with Britain concerning the rule of law in Hong Kong has become surplus to requirements. They've started issuing thinly-veiled threats from ministries in Beijing, and their embassy in London, concerning the possible cancellation of Huawei's deals with Britain, and the removal of HSBC's headquarters from London, back to Hong Kong. These menaces are linked to the decision by the old men in Beijing to extend the arbitrary rule of the Communist Party of China and its political police to Hong Kong by imposing the national security law – the Law of the People's Republic of China on Safeguarding National Security. Hong Kong now joins Tibet, and the Muslims of the Xinjiang

Uyghur Autonomous Region, along with the other 1.5 billion people living under the direct rule of the Chinese party-state.

Now, I can safely predict that the British left will mount no campaigns against the communists in Beijing, there will be no vast demonstration (virus permitting) demanding justice for the people of Hong Kong, the Uyghur's, or the numerous other peoples and ethnic groups of China. The executions, wholesale detention for re-education, mass arrests, long prison sentences, and the suppression of free speech, will pass most of the left by, without notice. The Socialist Workers Party, and the young people of Labour's 'youth-quake,' organised by Momentum, will find themselves busy elsewhere.

This is because, the socialist and communist left is guided by the idea that their main job is to oppose the governments of Britain and the United States. They operate, rather like the Stop the War Coalition, under the rubric of "the enemy is at home". On the other hand, the foreign enemies of Britain and America will always be given a free pass. Political principle doesn't come into it. Consequently, they can spare no time for opposing communist tyranny in Cuba or China, or the incipient tyranny of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela; the iniquities of British and American foreign policy must always take precedence in the battle for 'peace and socialism'.

This has the effect of making it clear to all and sundry that most communists will, when push comes to shove, always opt for state control rather than democracy. They prefer, in all events, for the management of the economy, and of society in general, to be in the hands of a party-state, and its labour movement leaders, rather than under the democratic control of working people and their families.

Since Vladimir Lenin, Leon Trotsky, Lev Kamenev, and Joseph Stalin, initiated rule by

decree, and the political police, from the Smolny Institute in Petrograd, during November and December 1917, most communists have failed to grasp that communism without democracy can only become a tragic farce, grim beyond measure. This has been borne out for well over a century, and is still being played in a variety of styles from Hanoi, Minsk, Beijing, Pyongyang, to Havana.

As long as this remains the case, we communists do not have a snowball's chance in Hell, of winning over the mass of working people to join our fight against capitalism.