



# CLASS AND CULTURE

PROVOCATIONS FOR CULTURAL DEMOCRACY

A DISCUSSION PAMPHLET  
BY THE CULTURE COMMISSION OF THE  
**COMMUNIST PARTY OF BRITAIN**



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“Capitalist ownership and control continually undermine the social, unifying and liberating potential of the arts and other cultural activities for working class people, both as producers and consumers. Capitalism increasingly produces ‘culture’ as it does other commodities – for sale at a profit and for ideological reasons – regardless of social need or the social good. ‘Popular culture’ can thereby be turned into a commercial, conservative force that promotes ideas of selfishness, greed and individualism. Monopoly capitalist society is one in which the price of everything is proclaimed, while the real value of things to society as a whole is denied or distorted.”

“On the cultural front, the left and the labour movement have to develop and sustain a cultural struggle against capitalism. This means recognising and valuing the essentially social, liberating nature of the arts and of many popular cultural activities. The state has an important role to play in promoting, supporting and regulating cultural activities which are too essential to human development and wellbeing to be left to the ‘free market’ to deliver. A wide range of campaigns need to be developed to initiate and extend working class and popular participation, self-organisation, creativity, democratic control and social ownership.”

“The ruling capitalist class wages its political struggle on three main, distinct but interconnected fronts: the economic, **the political and the ideological and cultural** [our emphasis]. This requires corresponding responses from the labour and progressive movements.”

*Britain's Road to Socialism*

## ***Cultural Democracy***

*Robert Walton*

*Image by Theresa Easton*

come in and see the painters dancing,  
come in and see the poets painting scenes of park life,  
come in and see the dancers writing love letters,  
come in and see the knitters cueing up the 8 ball,  
come in and see the swimmers knitting a scarf for the match,  
come in and see a thousand things happening all over the city,  
come in and talk and put the kettle on,  
come in and post something to amuse your cousin and your friend,  
come in and sing a hymn to each and every one of us.



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## RON BROWN & MIKE QUILLE

### INTRODUCTION

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**D**iscussing rail strikes in a TV interview in 2022, Eddie Dempsey used the phrase 'they're having a disco!'. He was talking about the capitalist class, who have created a 'cost of living crisis' for the working class by hiking up commodity prices and suppressing wages to protect their profits from increased production costs.

Although Eddie Dempsey used the image of a disco, it's unlikely that he was trying to articulate a cultural dimension to the class struggle in the interview about rail strikes, but he did imply that the working class aren't at the disco – which is true. We don't have the connections, we can't afford to get in, and we're not made to feel welcome anyway – this is how most working-class people experience the world of culture in Britain.

Raymond Williams said: "Culture is ordinary: that is where we must start." This means that culture includes all those learned human activities which give life purpose, meaning, and value, and which human beings engage in for enjoyment, entertainment, and enlightenment.

Culture therefore includes sport, television (and the media, more generally), eating and drinking, fashion, education, religion, and many other popular activities. Fundamentally, human cultural activities are social, unifying, and egalitarian. They express our common humanity and natural solidarity against divisions of class, gender, race, and other social divisions.

Access to cultural careers, resources, and experiences depends far too much on what families can afford, whether our parents engage in cultural activity, and whether it is possible to secure connections in cultural industries through social networks. The resources to provide opportunities to people without this kind of capital have been cut back dramatically in the name of 'austerity.' Just as access to a good education and decent health provision was only available to the well-off a hundred years ago, so access to culture, as workers and as consumers, is only realistically accessible to a thin, well-off slice of the population.

Most of us are destined never to enjoy the disco. We won't be able to learn an instrument, produce or decide what music is played at the disco, or say where it is held or who it is for. Someone on a low income is also less likely to be able to afford to go to a Premier League football match, eat out, wear designer clothes or go to Glastonbury.



## **Culture and class**

This *matters*. Culture matters because taking part in cultural activities sustains our health, wellbeing, and happiness, and is essential to our development and flourishing as human beings. But most of the cultural experiences on offer in today's society – whether it's a football match, an art exhibition, a television programme, or a music concert – are being produced by a creative and cultural industry heavily riven by class-based discrimination, often intersecting with sex and race discrimination.

As members of the working class, we are not fairly represented in the organisations that produce and manage cultural experiences; nor are we fairly represented as consumers, in audiences, readerships, congregations, and crowds; nor are we fairly represented in the content of those experiences. We are excluded from ownership and control of our culture, just as we are excluded from ownership and control of the economy and polity.

To win the battle of ideas in Britain, we therefore need to campaign for democratic models of ownership and control over our cultural spaces so that they become inclusive and representative of the working class. This pamphlet, produced by members of the Party's Culture Commission, aims to stimulate discussion and debate on these issues.

In 'Creating Cultural Democracy', Mike Quille outlines the central argument about the nature of the problems and the kind of measures needed to tackle them across all kinds of cultural activity. His contribution is followed by a series of short essays on particular issues in different areas of culture.

Ben Lunn, in 'Arts Funding in Britain for Classical Music', outlines the politics of funding and advocates a vision for the arts led by artists that can reverse the trend of managed cuts and declining opportunities available to people across the regions of Britain.

In 'Why Poetry Matters', Kevin McCann recounts his experiences working in schools, writers' groups, psychiatric units, and prisons to remind us that, despite widespread perceptions of poetry as elitist, there is a poet in every one of us. His suggested solutions include promoting platforms such as Culture Matters as part of a wider strategy to build a socialist cultural landscape, and for trade unions to engage in the cultural struggle by developing cultural education and cultural activities for members and local communities..

In 'A Virtual World to Win', Scott Alsworth explains the relationship between the multibillion-dollar gaming industry and the military-industrial complex and suggests possible strategies for building on recent advances Marxism has made into the world of gaming.

In another article, 'Reclaiming Literature', Scott laments how creativity in the world of literature is held back by the commercial interests of publishing monopolies and appeals to communists to form a Writers' Group – a collective basis from which to challenge this trend.

Nathan le-Bas gives an example of a Marxist critique of a cultural topic, in 'People's Modernism: a Marxist approach to popular cinema' and Brent Cutler does something similar in 'A Marxist Critique of Television'. In it he draws attention to the role of the BBC as a propaganda institution of the British ruling class and appeals for a more detailed critique of mainstream television in leftist publications, such as the Morning Star.

Taking a similar approach to the press, Alan McGuire in 'Misinformed – Monopoly Press and Bourgeois Hegemony' uses the example of the recent royal funeral to show how the mainstream press and media generally maintain cultural hegemony.

In 'Religion and Culture', James Crossley asks the question 'does religion matter?', looking at the interaction between religion and both reactionary and progressive forces in society throughout history and today. Like all the contributors, James doesn't just offer a sharp, incisive analysis of religion, but also some concrete suggestions that could be included in socialist cultural policies.

Finally, in 'Culture Matters to State Monopoly Capitalism', Ron Brown gives two examples of how the ruling class maintains its political and economic domination through cultural means, and asks questions about the extent of our awareness and how we campaign on cultural issues.

The cultural struggle is broad and deep, and this pamphlet doesn't pretend to cover all cultural activities. Nor do any of the individual pieces pretend to be the last word on their subjects. Members of the Party's Culture Commission have simply aimed to give some examples of the kinds of problems we face, and the kinds of solutions we need to fight for, so as to stimulate awareness, discussion and action by Party members and Party Branches to promote cultural democracy. Our aim is for the cultural struggle to be a worthy companion to our economic and political struggles for communism – to provoke, in the words of Britain's Road to Socialism, 'corresponding responses from the labour and progressive movements'.

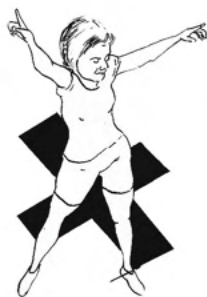
For most of us, cultural experiences of one kind or another – a football match, using social media, listening to music, going to church, watching films – are amongst the most important and enjoyable things in our lives. So let's spend more time thinking how to campaign and struggle to make them more accessible, more enlightening, and more enjoyable.



Thanks to all the contributors and the illustrator, Martin Gollan. Thanks also to Scott Alsworth and Culture Matters for putting this pamphlet together. We hope you enjoy reading it.

Ron Brown  
Mike Quille

*Co-convenors, CPB Culture Commission*



## **MIKE QUILLE** **CREATING CULTURAL DEMOCRACY**

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**T**here is a growing body of evidence (e.g., *Culture Is Bad for You* by O'Brien, Brooks, and Taylor, and studies published by the Centre for Cultural Value) that shows that there is deep, structural inequality and injustice in the cultural landscape in Britain today, in the cultural institutions, and cultural experiences which are publicly funded.

These inequalities negatively affect the lives of working people in the cultural industries, and all of us as consumers. They are around the access and enjoyment of culture by all of us; the employment and careers of workers in the cultural and creative industries; and the way working people are represented in cultural experiences and products.

The extent and nature of these inequalities vary across the different industries and cultural topics within the creative and cultural sector, and across geographical areas of the country, but broadly speaking the research points to several kinds of problem:

- A great deal of publicly funded cultural provision is consumed by a relatively thin slice of people from better off social classes in British society, and by tourists
- There are significant barriers to working-class people, women, and people from BAME communities who wish to start, develop, and maintain a career in the cultural and creative industries
- Local grassroots cultural production of many kinds – music bands, sports activities, festivals, youth activities, etc. – have experienced severe cutbacks by the Tory governments of the last few years

There have also been massive cuts to arts funding, facilities, and cultural education and training which have particularly affected state schools and young, working-class people, and which have made many cultural experiences inaccessible and exclusive

- Working-class families on low incomes are increasingly priced out of enjoying sports, leisure activities, and other cultural experiences
- The representation of working people in the broadcast and print media and in literature, films, exhibitions and the heritage industry etc. is generally inadequate, inaccurate and unfair
- Hierarchical and exclusive definitions of culture by funders, gatekeepers and others reflect and reproduce class divisions, and sharpen gender and racial inequalities.

In addition, recent studies (e.g., by the Centre for Cultural Value) about the effects of the Covid pandemic on the cultural sector shows that these inequalities grew during the pandemic and are likely to continue to grow further.

We therefore need to develop and promote cultural democracy – a new approach to culture which applies basic principles of social ownership and control over cultural experiences so that:

- Current provision is protected and rebalanced in order that all sections of society have fair access to cultural experiences
- The planning, direction, content and control of cultural experiences are democratised so that working people are empowered to decide, plan, and engage with local cultural production of all kinds
- A refreshed cultural landscape is created which reflects values of everyday creativity, equality, justice, and inclusiveness.

Working people across the country are facing problems of low-paid, precarious employment, child poverty, and a struggle to cope with the cost of living following the pandemic. The cultural sector cannot itself solve all of our social and economic problems, but neither does it have to reflect or entrench inequality and injustice and be responsible for the denial, misrepresentation, and devaluing of working-class lives.

The power of cultural production of all kinds to bring enjoyment and enlightenment, to imagine alternatives and bring people together in common experiences, makes it a uniquely effective force to tackle social divisions and inequalities based on class, gender, ethnic background, and other characteristics.



## 2 **BEN LUNN** **ARTS FUNDING IN BRITAIN FOR CLASSICAL MUSIC**

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**L**ike most capitalist nations, Britain has difficulty managing the arts – how much should the state support art? What value do the arts have for the nation?

This value is complicated. Due to the relationship it plays to the societal superstructures we see, as well as the somewhat heroic value given to historic art – we only need to look at how Shakespeare, Auden, Burns, or Yeats are treated in comparison to living authors to see this problem on display.

Following the formation of the NHS and other state-funded developments founded under the Attlee Labour government, the Arts Council was formed to offer a more democratic way to fund the arts, which until that point depended heavily on donations, the ‘free’ market, or philanthropy. Like many elements of the post-war state interventions, they have been attacked and undermined in numerous forms. For the arts, this has taken various guises. However it was only under Heath’s government that we saw an increase in arts spending. Outside of that the Arts Council (like all state ‘control’) has been increasingly attacked, especially with neoliberalism taking a greater hold.

The key form of attack has been through either reducing funding or referring to ‘elitism’ within the arts. This latter attack is by far the most insidious, and ultimately a great trap for the left to fall into – as we want the arts to be more egalitarian but have inadvertently added kindling to the fire being used to destroy the arts.

Before we can breakdown the current ideological problems, or offer a socialist response to the problems currently witnessed in the arts, we have to investigate

the developments following the 2008 crash and look at the 'Regularly Funded Organisations (RFO)/National Portfolio Organisations (NPO)'.

The RFO/NPO is a model that appears in the Arts Council England, Creative Scotland, and Arts Council Wales. This funding stream grants an organisation in the arts regular funding for approximately three years, which allows them to carry out their activities – with the expectation that they'll grow, develop, or be able to meet other criteria and obligations like reaching under-represented regions. This model means an organisation, like an art gallery or opera house, can become better integrated in a region and its community through long-term planning, which is possible through guaranteed funding for that period.

In 2010 the Arts Council England gave £344 million to art organisations in all disciplines. If this cost stayed with inflation it would, according to the Bank of England Inflation Calculator, cost £476 million today. On November 4<sup>th</sup> 2022, the Arts Council England announced its most recent NPO organisations. The total spending announced was £446 million, though an increase from the previous spending in 2018, it still fell below inflation.

Yet, the greater cause of grief has been the particular decisions which seem to be more driven by ideology than reason. Here are key statistics to consider:

- A 21.8% increase in investment outside of London – with this increase mostly paid for via reduction of spending in London, instead of increasing overall investment
- The North receives £128 million – this is skewed heavily to the north-west (Manchester and Liverpool) while the north-east only receives 5% of NPO funding
- A 20% increase in organisations funded to 'deliver work for children and young people'.

So on the face of it, despite still remaining under inflation, the investment looks relatively positive – though with major gaps; namely, investment in the north-east which does not reflect the proportion of the population. However, if we look at three case studies, we can see that the managed cuts are hiding behind 'anti-elitism'.

Glyndebourne Festival Opera, managed by the Glyndebourne company, is one of the world's leading opera events which sees performers and audiences trekking to East Sussex from many miles away. Due to its international standing, Glyndebourne is considered an 'elite' opera company that prices out working-class audiences. Their 'traditional' work, namely their annual festival, is entirely self-funded – however, the organisation uses the NPO funding to cover

its educational work and its touring work. As part of the NPO announcement, their NPO fund was cut by 43% - which means their touring ability, as well as their ability to reach audiences that cannot otherwise attend the festival, are lessened.

This stands in direct opposition to an 'anti-elitist' stance, as Glyndebourne functions independently and will be less able to reach the majority of people, thus becoming a privileged event for wealthy audiences.

Britten Sinfonia is a well-respected and revered chamber orchestra based in Suffolk – the only professional orchestra in a region severely under-represented by the arts. The vast majority of their work is NPO funded – however, as part of the announcement, they lost the entirety of their funding, which means they are no longer guaranteed any future funding either. Though this does not mean they are unable to apply for funds from other sources. The Arts Council has a fund called the 'Open Fund', for projects and artistic development, and it is divided into funds for 'individuals' and 'companies'. The Open Fund is smaller, which means for an organisation like Britten Sinfonia, they will have to find numerous other funding options to cover their activity.

This lack of a regular fund means Britten Sinfonia are dependent on applying for funding which could only cover a year of activity, which will result in less activity due to less funds being available – and more time having to be dedicated to applying to funds which are by no means guaranteed. As an orchestra in a region under-represented by the arts in Britain, this also stands in direct opposition to 'levelling-up'.

English National Opera was founded as a working-class alternative to the Royal Opera House. Its aim was to produce operas solely in English, with the hope that the working classes of London could see opera as something relevant and relatable. The model meant that London, a place with 10 million or so individuals, had two opera companies with two clearly separate identities – much like Berlin's state opera and the comic opera.

As an employer, ENO is one of three opera companies with a permanent chorus and orchestra – whereas the vast majority of opera companies in Britain (including Scottish Opera and Opera North) run on a 'freelance model' – in other words, contracting from production to production. This means their overheads are higher than many other organisations – approximately £12 million per year. Due to their popularity and fixed placement in the Coliseum in London, Opera North was founded to be the Northern 'wing/entity' of ENO.

As part of the NPO announcement in November, ENO was informed they have lost all their funding. This controversial decision was also meant with a bribe to relocate ENO to Manchester – with funding for £17 million over three years,

which still lands £20 million short of what they need, regardless of the economic impact of relocating. Because of the size of the organisation and issues surrounding Open Fund – ENO will be faced with major challenges, which will most likely result in ENO no longer having fully contracted workers as a ‘cost reducing’ exercise. It’ll also result in worse pay and conditions as working production to production does not guarantee regular income or job security.

With the existence of Opera North, ENO’s move north will put them in direct opposition and risk them not having a clear ‘identity’, which means there is no guarantee of an immediate audience. This could bankrupt ENO entirely.

### **Overall view:**

Beyond the problems and inconsistencies on display in these case studies, other concerning elements include the reliance on NPO funding to fill gaps lost by cuts to education. Similarly, the forcible cuts to arts in London, despite making up a fifth of the British population, shows the arts overall fail to meet the needs of the British population. On average, in Britain, each citizen pays between £7-10 per head for the arts (whereas Austria spends approximately £250 and Poland, £55).

### **The Socialist Response:**

Art and its role in a socialist society has been a highly contentious issue, due to a mixture of demonising, disagreement, and varying views on how it should exist.

Firstly, we must consider our current predicament – we are a capitalist nation and forcing art to fit to conditions of a socialist society we haven’t achieved yet is naïve. Though this does not mean we cannot strive for positive developments.

One, we should be endeavouring to make sure the arts are available in those regions of Britain that reflect the overall population. This includes access to education and to a variety of idioms, aesthetics, styles, and sensibilities.

Secondly, development in ‘regions’ should go beyond merely chucking money at them. It should be used to cultivate the art of that region – with the ultimate goal of introducing the world to the region and the region to the world.

Thirdly, conditions for people working in the arts should be drastically improved – driving away from ‘freelance’ models and fighting for more fully contracted work which protects those working in the industry.

Fourth, the arts should be valued based on the merit of the artistic endeavour. This should not be a veil to block development of new talent or idioms, or used



as an excuse to forcibly deny many minority groups the ability to engage in the arts – our egalitarian view should be that those from all walks of life are striving to make art which can be comparable to the generations of artists before them; to quote Boulez ‘we want as many elites as possible’.

Finally, the valuation and vision of the arts should be led by artists. Art ‘managers’ who aren’t artists are like the managers of our railways. They don’t know the right way of working and are guided by financial concerns, not art.

From this campaigning vision, we may address issues in British society – however, when we enter a revolutionary phase, the role of art will have to change, and once socialism has been reached a similar shift will have to occur; but if we maintain a good balance of the material conditions and allow artists to define and campaign within those conditions, we have an opportunity to not only keep the arts useful to our evolving society – but to truly envisage our old motto of culture as a ‘weapon in the struggle’.



# 3

## KEVIN PATRICK McCANN POETRY MATTERS

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*But men won't say: the times were dark.  
But: why were their poets so silent?*

— Bertolt Brecht

**T**he critic John Lucas talks about two strands in poetry. One strand is what he calls "country house verse" which basically accepts (and often applauds) 'our way of life'. They're the ones Brecht compared to artists who paint beautiful still lifes onto the sides of sinking ships.

The other sort is what he calls "the underground stream": William Langland, William Blake, John Clare et al. In other words, the poetry of dissent, of rebellion, of revolution. It's a strand the ruling class either ignores, belittles or, if all else fails, defangs with a lot of well-paid ACE funded 'residencies' and lucrative commissions. You can be a 'rebel' and attack glaring injustices; just don't attack the real causes of those injustices. For example, you can attack racism as long as you don't make the connection between racism and the class system.

When I first started writing poetry, all you needed was a pen, paper, and maybe, a typewriter. Now you need a business plan, a mission statement, an MA, and friends in the publishing world... or so you've been led to believe.

If you go the way of ruling class 'poets', all of that is true.

You can admire Blake as long as you put him in a glass case along with all the other artefacts from a vanished past. Take Jerusalem; a revolutionary anthem

that was later turned into an Anglican hymn.

A few years before he died, I met the Czech poet Miroslav Holub. He told me he liked having poems printed on the back page of the Saturday evening paper alongside the football results. He felt that reading a poem should be no more 'elitist' than reading the results. I tend to agree and here's why.

On the Monday after Hillsborough, I went into school (I was a teacher at the time) to find out one of our students had died there. He was twelve. That morning at break, two poems written by students went up on my wall. At lunchtime they were joined by more. By the end of the day, they'd spilled out onto the school corridor and by Friday there were poems everywhere. Many of them were badly crafted, full of spelling errors and some included very tortured rhyming; but what they lacked in 'polish' they more than made up for in passion, anger, and raw honesty.

They stood in stark contrast to the lies in the media and the callous indifference of the school managers; and for me they proved something I've believed for as long as I can remember: poetry is as natural as breathing and is not the sole province of some MA'd elite.

I am aware that there is hostility to poetry amongst 'ordinary people' but I need to add here that I think that a lot of that hostility is, firstly, the result of bad teaching. The sort that was dying out but is now being rapidly revive; e.g., read this poem then list the adjectives and similes: poetry as comprehension. What I find interesting is that after Hillsborough my students turned to poetry to express their grief and anger.

A few years ago, well actually about twenty, I was approached by an MSc student who wanted to investigate the nature and reality of poetic inspiration for her thesis. She interviewed me and five other poets and sent me a summary of her conclusions which included the following:

*[...] it is possible to conclude that each of the poets is in fact engaged in an active and ongoing quest for self-actualisation.*

— Danielle McGregor: BSc. (Hons); MSc.

In plain English, when writing, we come closest to fulfilling our true potential. We get in touch with our authentic self. I asked her to explain and, in a nutshell, it's this. It's the real you; the one who exists under both self-imposed and socially imposed limitations. The masks we all wear to survive until we end up believing that we can't survive unless we're wearing a mask. It also goes some way to explaining why poems that tell the truth always seem to strike a chord; the ones that lie always strike a false note.

It explained why it was that I saw such remarkable results when I was working in schools, writers' groups, psychiatric units, and prisons.

And what were the remarkable results? Well, for the most part a huge growth in self-esteem, articulation, and cognitive ability. Underachieving children whose self-confidence and therefore levels of achievement grew; working-class writers whose writing skills improved and whose critical faculty not only sharpened when it came to literature, but whose self-confidence and inner strength grew as well. I remember one woman in Preston who began by describing herself as 'an ordinary housewife' and ended up publishing a collection of poems, kicking out an abusive husband and going on to train as a nursery nurse. In other words, she discovered her authentic self. I saw similar results in both prisons and psychiatric units.

Poetry gives a voice back to the silenced, the marginalised, and the oppressed; and not some condescending, white male voice 'speaking for them' but an authentic voice that allows them to speak confidently for themselves.

*A writer or painter cannot change the world but they can keep an essential margin of non-conformity alive. Thanks to them, the powerful can never affirm that everyone agrees with their acts.*

— Luis Buñuel

So, what's to be done? Both the website and Facebook page for Culture Matters are building a steady following. Everyone in our Party should be giving them their full support and sharing their contents as part of a wider campaign to build a socialist media. Culture Matters also has a publishing wing with a growing list of books.

Of course, the ruling classes have more resources than we do... but on the other hand, their driving force is profit and protecting the system that is built on that single premise. We, however, have a different motivation.

So, our first task is to build a platform for socialist media by supporting Culture Matters publications, the Culture Matters website and the Culture Matters Facebook page. That's our starting point and from there we need to begin helping to build an interconnected network of poets and poetry groups. For example, as well as liking and sharing the postings of Poets Against Racism, I do the same for individual poets like Stephen Knight, Michael Rosen, or Fran Lock. I also publicise publishing opportunities in magazines like Shanghai Poetry Lab, as I believe in encouraging people to write as well as read poetry. I think of it as a 'Red Web'.

Quite a few years ago now I read a book by a Indigenous Australian activist. He talked about colonialism and how it works its oppression. Apart from military conquest and the systematic looting of resources, there is also a definite and steady determination to either eradicate or at least diminish indigenous cultures. Destroy a culture and you destroy a group's identity, the solidarity that comes with that, and the will to resist.

So, firstly:

- Native language is demeaned and replaced by the language of the 'Master Race' (*Management Newspeak*; *Received Pronunciation*)
- History is rewritten (Orgreave)
- Shared values and beliefs are ridiculed (*Socialism is Against Human Nature*; *There Is No Alternative*)
- Indigenous cultures are steadily eradicated where possible or else 'folked' (e.g., reduced to something quaint but inferior to the colonialist culture. *Eastenders* and soaps generally are great; Jimmy McGovern writes polemics)
- The indigenous people themselves being reduced to caricatures and then further divided into 'good' and 'bad' natives (Mick Lynch is a 'red swine'; Danny Dyer is a 'top geezer')

I don't think I need to labour the point, but I will draw one very obvious conclusion. If we apply the colonised people analogy to the 'relationship' that exists between the ruling class and the rest of us, the truth of it is blindingly obvious. If we then go on to look at the strategies adopted by, for example, Irish Revolutionaries like James Connolly, we note that there was as much emphasis on rebuilding the indigenous culture and language as there was on direct political action.

*No revolutionary movement is complete without its poetical expression.*

— James Connolly

Whenever I introduce myself to new Branch members it's always as 'Kevin Patrick Michael McCann: online agitator and cultural revolutionary'. It started as a spontaneous joke but then I began to think about it. It reminded me of the quote from Mao about revolutionaries being fish in the sea of the people: it's also what I believe we need to be.

I believe poetry matters because:

- A historian can tell you what happened; a poem can tell you what it felt like
- Real poems always tell the truth
- You don't need to get an MA before you can start writing poetry. You just need a pen, paper, and something to say
- The reason why so many people don't 'get' or don't like poetry is because they've been taught not to
- The reason why so many 'ordinary people' don't like poets is because far too many 'poets' act and speak as if they're more important than the rest of us. They're not. If train drivers go on strike, everyone notices. If poets did, nobody would
- Reading poetry expands the mind; writing poetry liberates it
- If you can be shot for writing a poem, then poetry matters.

### **What is to be done?**

I don't think there's much to be gained (apart from frustration) by knocking on the door of the Arts Council England; it's an undemocratic club which needs fundamental reform to make it more representative and accountable to the people. The state should be funding local arts associations which could set up poetry readings in pubs and community centres and help set up local literary magazines.

Surely the trades unions, and Trades Councils, could be the natural agencies to nurture working-class culture of all kinds, including poetry. Newcastle Trades Union Council, for example, is supporting this year's Bread and Roses Poetry Award. I would also suggest that as well as organising training courses for Union Activists, Unions should consider funding cultural activities for their members, alongside the other kinds of education they deliver.



## 4 SCOTT ALSWORTH A VIRTUAL WORLD TO WIN

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**T**he class struggle is raging all around us. It is, as Marx and Engels observed, a sometimes hidden and a sometimes open fight. Across the country, it's playing out on picket lines and factory floors, in our hospitals and in our schools; shop assistants, care workers, cleaners, students – millions are waking up and challenging a ruthless system dedicated to putting profit before people.

But this conflict is also a battle for ideas. Culture matters not just because it unites us but because it's an inviolable arena, belonging to the mind. No wonder then, that the ideas of the ruling classes are in every age the ruling ideas. The illusion of capital's permanence and power are sacrosanct. Any artist today, courageous enough to take a stand against neoliberal agendas, must face an impossible choice: assimilation or annihilation. By championing revolutionary politics, they artists are forced to accept pariahdom and a lingering, spiritual death; or else, they must conform. This agonising dictum blights every creative enterprise in the UK, including its biggest; the gaming industry.

Video games add more to the British economy than film, TV, music, publishing, design, fashion, and architecture combined. In 2019, some 18,279 game developers contributed a staggering £2.2 bn to the country's GDP; an increase from £1.8 bn the year before. The growth is looking exponential, and it shows no signs of abating. More and more workers are flocking to development studios; PC gaming is up 46%, and mobile gaming, 17%. Since the introduction of a rebate on production spends in 2014, the annual increase in annual sales from games in Great Britain has reached 8.9%, demonstrating the trend is not an isolated phenomenon, nor caused by the market boom brought about by the recent COVID-19 lockdowns.



There is also the mainstream impact of virtual and augmented reality to consider, not to mention the future impact of AI-assisted software, the metaverse, and quantum computing. Emergent technologies will change the way we spend our leisure time. In fact, a 2020-2021 survey showed 92% of adults aged 16 and over are already playing video games, while projections for 2025 suggest the number of video game users in the UK will reach 51.8m. If the population reaches the estimated 68.3m mark, that will be 75% of the nation, actively engaging in digital, interactive entertainment. The figure is impressive globally too: 3.5 bn people around the world will soon be video game consumers. In other words, approximately half the planet.

This embarrassment of riches is often lauded by business leaders and politicians as an entrepreneurial success story, made possible by competition between creatives in a capitalist society. Never mind that video games, like other forms of art, are commercialised and regularly steered from their true potential as a means to explore the human condition – and never mind the awkward truth, that this multibillion-pound industry was founded by a group of self-professed hackers who stole time and resources from America's military-industrial complex to prototype gaming machines. Indeed, all contenders for the much-coveted title of 'first video game ever' have one thing in common; a paper trail leading to the US Department of Defense.

Some examples of this historical context are worth exploring, as they lend us an important dialectical perspective. In 1962, expectations at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for missile targetting systems, capable of countering a Soviet first strike, were running high. Yet, what was secretly in development there was *Spacewar!*, a two-player game conceived by Steve 'the slug' Russell, and designed on a PDP-1 computer. Russell and his colleagues were able to secure expensive research time, using a mix of pretences, to build a responsive computer where simulated spacecraft could launch torpedoes at one another while navigating a gravity well. Needless to say, it was a far cry from contemporary video games. The display was comparable to a battleship's sonar panel with green blips, rendered without sound against a black, starless void. For controls, heavy wooden blocks were used and capped with several switches, allowing both players to move around. Although it was not much to look at, it was a fennel stalk concealing fire; a Promethean gift, snatched from the gods.

Before long, *Spacewar!* spread across the US via the government's Advanced Research Projects Agency network, the ARPANET, as an early instance of open-source freeware. A decade later, a tournament was even held at Stanford University, in a room plastered with posters condemning Nixon and the Vietnam War. Remarkably, it was not the first attempt to re-purpose military funds from within. In 1958, William Higginbotham, a physicist who worked on the atomic bomb and later became a leader in the non-proliferation movement, devised Tennis for Two – a sports simulation, designed on computers intended

for calculating ballistics. One can only imagine the response of his superiors when it was finally unveiled at his laboratory's annual visitors' day.

Another story relates to Ralph Baer, an engineer who redirected the resources of his 500-man team to build a console that could be connected to a television set. Filing out patents under the name of his employers at Sanders Associates, a company supplying the US military with sophisticated technologies, Baer told his managers nothing and during the summer of 1966, laid the groundwork for the Magnavox Odyssey, which made history in 1972 as a commercial gaming platform.

The origin of video games then, is linked to a technoscientific cognitariat that America's powerful defence corporations failed to control. Through channels like the Advanced Research Projects Agency, vast sums of money entered research centres in a bid to steer the first mass draft of immaterial labour in the US towards preparing for a nuclear conflict with the Soviet Union – and we have video games because a little of that money was misappropriated and put to better use.

### **Resistance to commodification and socialism through the arts**

Perhaps this goes some way in explaining the military's interests in the gaming industry, and how it was able to exercise its influence so quickly. By liberating computers and video games from the Pentagon, hackers inadvertently set the stage for their 'reterritorialisation' by capital in pure commodity form. This, and the associated cultural hegemony, superincumbent over all conceivable forms of virtual play, is not going unopposed. Assemblies of immaterial labour have long resisted, and continue to resist, the insipid commodification of art as well as its overall subjugation to neoliberalism.

After the 1960s, there came the creatively unmanageable developers at Atari who, in the 1970s, during the Golden Age of gaming, drove studio executives mad. Then came the suspect subculture of Manga artists who revived Japan's burnt-out American industry in the 1980s, followed by the internal and external pressures of female players and industry workers on male-dominated networks in the 1990s.

Later, into the 21st century, we have the advent of modding communities and teams of micro-innovators reshaping video games as a provocative and independent force. This increasing level of autonomy, energised to no small extent by the availability, affordability, and accessibility of development tools, is empowering 'indie' studios and attracting working-class artists; frustrating attempts to stifle outside opinions while compounding existing tensions within, with regards to unionisation and an inchoate class-consciousness. The pace of technological progress, accelerated by the ruling elite's blind pursuit of wealth

and their ideological-aesthetic, has, paradoxically, left this cultural bastion vulnerable to attack. Even in the early days of gaming, corporations struggled to leverage the creative talent of immaterial labour. Now, the capitalist class is insisting its gravediggers take up the shovel.

The situation is particularly acute owing to the simple fact that, unlike film and literature, video games can achieve massive popularity and commercial success without significant financing from distributors or publishers. Service platforms such as Steam afford blanket coverage for all titles and additional coverage based on sales, acting as an online storefront for a 30-40% share of revenues and a small charge. Their principal competitor, Epic Games, offers a similar service for a 12% cut and no fee. This arrangement means that video games disseminating alternative views can reach mainstream audiences.

In addition, time-honoured tendencies from other artistic disciplines can be adapted and redeployed. Social and Socialist Realist video games are already appearing on the market. There are also those that educate players in Marxist theory; sometimes passively and sometimes with a clear didactic intention. Both can be constructive. The same may be said for the retro appeal of predominantly Soviet design, music, language, and symbology. To take a case in point, I have heard from several comrades that *Command & Conquer: Red Alert 2* was an early influential factor in their political development. This should come as no surprise. Many of us will have been introduced to the concept of socialism through the arts.

### **Marxism and video games**

In 2019, the subject of Marxism and video games was put firmly on the table in an event that took the gaming world by storm. At a crowded auditorium in Los Angeles, during an acceptance speech for the Fresh Indie Game Award, developers of the breakout hit, *Disco Elysium*, gave a passionate shout out to 'some of the great people that came before [them]'; a roll call that included Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Viktor Tsoi, and Vladimir Makovsky. It was an impressive speech, especially as it came from a team responsible for earning approximately £43 million worldwide.

Elsewhere, studios operating as workers' collectives are also gaining media attention. A year after *Disco Elysium*, an American profit-sharing group founded Pixel Pushers Union 512 and released *Tonight We Riot* – a side-scrolling 'beat 'em up' where you play as a crowd of revolutionary workers, hurling petrol bombs and taking on the state. Although as subtle as a sledgehammer, its aggregate review score on Steam is rated 'very positive'. Video games such as these however, are an exception rather than the rule. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the direct and indirect 'militarisation' of the industry; not only by national governments and armed forces but also by arms manufacturers.

In the UK, attempts to bring gamers into the military's fold are openly acknowledged and play a part in recruitment propaganda. The British Army's latest advertising campaign demonstrates this perfectly with posters reading: 'Binge gamers, the army needs you and your drive'. In reality, video games themselves are working as a primer. Many sanitise and glorify modern warfare, normalising violence while promoting nationalistic notions of who our enemies are. This usually involves framing 'good guys' as freedom-loving US special forces and 'bad guys' as generic Middle-Eastern terrorists. Or Iranians. Or nowadays, the Chinese or Russians.

As a video game developer myself, I have seen first-hand how studio executives will push false narratives and politicise creative content. Anti-Marxist sentiments are often mandated from above and historical events are regularly revised before being insidiously presented as fact. Combined with this, for the sake of authenticity, game writers and designers are routinely paired with military consultants, who can prove instrumental in pandering to conservative paranoias. Moreover, video games have also been targeted for product placement by major gun companies, who hope to reinforce their brand identities and have their merchandise showcased in realistic combat scenarios. In this respect, video games are appropriated as interactive promotional materials. Senior developers and stakeholders are approached and courted by arms dealers. They are taken to factories and firing ranges, made to feel like 'real soldiers', and, in some cases, outside the UK, paid-off with samples, taking home assault rifles to their families. A few studios even collaborate with the military to further long-term business plans, leasing in-house software for training purposes.

But once again, there are countercurrents. In 2011, Polish developers at 11 Bit Studios launched *This War of Mine*; a survival game focusing specifically on civilian experiences of conflict. Aside from winning more than a hundred awards, it also made a tangible difference in the world by raising over £400,000 for the charity, War Child. Similarly, two projects I have worked on while contracting for the Czech studio, Bohemia Interactive, have sought to introduce players to International Humanitarian Law through the 2013 military simulation game, *Arma 3* – generating nearly £300,000 for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

### **Class struggle in the workplace**

This then, is to describe something of the battle for ideas. But what about those battles affecting game developers in the workplace? Compulsory overtime is almost expected in the industry. Known as 'crunching', it is a cost-cutting exercise that can lead to 80-hour weeks for extended periods of time, without extra pay. This frequently results in 'burnout', a catch-all term to describe the myriad health problems occurring when studio employees are pressurised into working day and night in stressful circumstances. I can testify to this from

personal experience and have been compelled to crunch for months on end; once, for 96 hours straight. I remember how team members were invited to bring sleeping bags to the office and how, every morning, an anxious producer was forced to step over exhausted bodies to reach my desk. Situations like this are not uncommon. In 2004, the fiancée of a game developer at Electronic Arts wrote a damning online article, describing how her partner was coerced to work 12-hour days, seven days a week, month after month, 'with the occasional Saturday evening off for good behaviour (at 6.30pm)'. Her furious invective, charged with obvious concern and despair, made headlines around the world and shocked many; principally because, within the industry, such hours were not considered shocking at all. Depressingly, not much has changed. According to a 2022 study, 58% of game developers in the UK have experienced crunching within the last two years.

Aside from this gruelling practice, thousands of others also face gender sex discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment. In the words of a fellow freelance narrative designer, Meghna Jayanth, '[it's] a toxic confluence of worker disempowerment and a male-dominated managerial class [that makes game development] an especially unwelcoming place for women. [The industry] sits at the intersection of the worst of the casting couch, predatory networking culture of the entertainment industries, and the unregulated boys-club mentality of Silicon Valley. There's an entire culture of silence, complicity and even enabling toxic behaviour'. This assessment, I would add, is an accurate one. Reports of improper conduct against female employees are often dismissed by upper management. At some studios, disciplinary action is even avoided unless an allegation of rape is made – anything less being blithely put down to 'office hi-jinks'.

Of course, workers have not been idle in resisting these conditions. Over the years, many high-profile cases have appeared in the press and inspired efforts to establish unions. In 2018, a British chapter of the international Game Workers Unite union was legally recognised as a part of the Independent Workers' union of Great Britain (IWGB). The first labour association in the country to represent the interests of game developers, its goals are to end unpaid overtime, to educate and protect targeted workers, to improve inclusion and diversity, and to establish fair and regular wages. In practical terms then, the familiar question of 'what is to be done' may be easily answered. Those of us developing video games in the UK should join the Game Workers branch of the IWGB and encourage others in the industry to do the same, while championing and sharing information on the organisation's campaigns. Political education and further reading should also be considered; especially *Marx at the Arcade* by Jamie Woodcock and *Games of Empire* by Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter. Both books are recommended, for they are very accessible and offer a much richer insight than the one afforded here.

## **Tackling cultural hegemony**

On the subject of our response to capitalist cultural hegemony and video games, we must strive towards a more daring and creative solution. The way ahead is open. Now is the time to advance a radical agenda. To educate, agitate, and organise. To fight back, as artists – *real artists*, leveraging the power of virtual play with passion and integrity. Not alone but together, as Marxist game developers. To do this, we have to combine our skills and resources and establish at least one video game studio, run as a workers' collective for peace and socialism. Such an undertaking will be an ambitious endeavour. It will require experienced and dedicated comrades. But it will also require outside support; namely, from the Game Workers branch of the IWGB, and Communist Parties internationally. In truth, we are at an exciting point in history. The ruling classes, in an impulsive attempt to secure and further the runaway profits of the gaming industry, have left the gate of their falling castle unguarded. By spurring automatised software, generous government subsidiaries, and free digital distribution services, they have unintentionally provided us with the means to confront a social, political, and economic status quo. If we can rise to this occasion we will set an incredible precedent and liberate ourselves from a dominant, bourgeois ideology.



## **5** **NATHAN LE-BAS** **PEOPLE'S MODERNISM: A MARXIST** **APPROACH TO POPULAR CINEMA**

**M**odernism is a concept that has been very central to the last century or so of artistic endeavour; ostensibly a concerted attempt to replenish a shared cultural consciousness by making it new, as the poet Ezra Pound explained.

The great contradiction at large here is Modernism's position historically as a conservative hegemonic base. Indeed, the three most influential poets of the early twentieth century canon, the aforementioned Pound, T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats all at one point displayed fascist sympathies.

Culturally, this bias towards strength over all manifested itself in a concerted elitist tendency towards what made great art and was deemed retrievable from the past of the Western canon. Taken from the current Mussolini adherents this amounted to medieval Japanese drama, the English Metaphysical poets of the early seventeenth century and gold craftsmanship of the Byzantine Empire during the Dark Ages.

Thus, the arts movement of the twentieth century handed down to us as Modernism had its historical trajectory burnished from art created during periods of high absolutism. The 'make it new' axiom was in fact alloyed with a facility for honouring intense conservatism. An aesthetic sensibility that was, according to the Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, as much a part of the age of factory-based work practices as the aeroplane or the cinema reel.

Of course, herein lies the contradiction. Modernism, which consciously identified itself as an anti-liberal Futurist movement in the 1911 manifestos of Marinetti – an influence on the post war fascist discourse – during its greatest



creative impact, from the declamatory prose of the said Futurists to the dialectic multipolarity of Picasso's *Dove of Peace* and Brecht's *Mother Courage* fed on war was also utilised as an aesthetic praxis for socialism. Furthermore, Modernism was deployed as the foundation of cinematic narrative in a socialist country (the nascent Soviet Union): the pioneering use of montage to depict a massacre on the Primorsky Steps by Sergei Eisenstein in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925).

Thus, Modernism and cinema are introduced as this article's main topic. Returning to Walter Benjamin, specifically *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1937), film's new aesthetic, where images were cut by hand, provided a quintessentially revolutionary intervention and rearranged centuries old notions of narrative reception.

Whereas other more post-Fordist elements depicted by Benjamin, such as the factory manufacturing of books and newspapers, acted to increase the speed of previous capitalist relations of labour organisation, film created an innovative artistic grammar. Prior preconceptions regarding linearity and possession of storytelling were now under threat. The very notion of folk memory, what Benjamin described as theological art, was in the process of being shaken by an art form that stressed impermanence.

This was an idea not limited to perspective, as was evident in *Battleship Potemkin*. In American cinema, roughly five years later, the beginning of the gangster film genre sent shock waves through a nation wrecked with the economic fissure of the Wall Street Crash (1929). Titles such as *Little Caesar* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932) smashed bourgeois propriety with tales of aggressive Italian-American wealth accumulation that was both worryingly primitive and exploitative.

The Tommy gun, Homburg hat, and rapier edged characters, such as Rico Bandello and Tommy Camonte, truly did seize wealth; albeit in the brutally mythologised conventions of the new cinematic anti-hero. Amidst the chases in Packards and rat-ta-tat shootouts, conspicuously exploitative opulence is on show. Certainly, no self respecting criminal kingpin is complete without a few tart exchanges in a monkey suit at the centre of his own glamorous night club; a sure example of Edward G. Robinson/Rico Bandello's dishing it out and taking it. Yet, despite the conspicuous wealth and domino-like power, one buffer can always be relied upon in the Depression era gangster saga.

The contradictory influence of ethnicity; a characteristic, despite bearing an overtone of menace, soon enough allows our gangster protagonists to expire. In the case of *Little Caesar*, Bandello is episodically represented as rising – from gas station robbery to dinner suited club deals to the sinister wheel turner on a municipal committee. To take a variation on a quote from pulp crime pioneer Dashiell Hammett; the dearer the villain the gaudier the patter.

It is within this spirit that Bandello's comeuppance is secreted. Note the alternative progress of his long term and significantly more puritanically inclined friend Joe Massara (Douglas Fairbanks Jnr.). Joe chooses to dance, marries a girl with distinctly non-Italian characteristics, Olga Stasoff (Glenda Farrell), and achieves all-American prototype fame; climactically, as Bandello reaches his demise.

The cinematic realisation of *Little Caesar* illustrates how Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* arrived under the very nose of the mechanical dissolution of American capitalism. It is a cinematic version of the racism at the core of the foundation of the United States of America. It is a tale of how a lavishly corpulent Caesar is diminished by a lean hungry Cassius with decidedly Nordic overtones: a sexual union based upon the puritanical virtues of athleticism and bourgeois hard work.

An earlier example of Le Roy's binary alignment of mise-en-scene underlines this more subtly. Bandello receives two esteemed big wheels of state monopoly capitalism in a very plush elite clubhouse, Doric pillars, leather arm chairs, etc. The manner in which Edward G. Robinson renders his dialogue in this scene, more staccato, even syncopated as in the contemporary work of jazz trumpet master, Louis Armstrong, creates the fissure most evident in his character's fatal climax. The conflict between the classical club interior and Bandello's émigré disposition is one that can only be achieved through cinema; Benjamin's specifically non-theological art.

Conclusively what the deep focus of Rico Bandello's desire for respectability and indelibly violent contradiction reveals is the wider political impact of the artistic Modernism described at the piece's beginning. As was advocated by reactionaries such as Eliot and Pound, consciousness did undergo a change in aesthetics, but in a fundamentally popular art.

Contrary to a developed world that did not recognise the revolutionary Soviet Union, the intrinsically dialectical mode in which cinema operated, where ideas of race and class struggle were vividly depicted by mass bourgeois production under the auspices of entertainment, transformed writers making it new into a formative people's Modernism.

Apropos Walter Benjamin, film had begun its mechanical development. The reproduced violence, especially of finance capital, would, in Bertolt Brecht's words, require 'many conceivable ways of telling a story [...] some of them still to be discovered'.

As believers in the necessity of a socialist system, understood via Marxist praxis, the multiple ways of Brecht are best facilitated in concrete action. Popular cinema has shown on numerous occasions that threats to the bourgeois order,

while incorporated, have to be depicted in a way that portrays hegemonic change. Through the previous analysis of *Little Caesar*, I hope very much to have begun a discussion on how the perpetuation of a dialectical popular form enables the working class to better see the contradictions in their own concrete experience. In the words of Louis Althusser, 'the future lasts a long time'.



**BRENT CUTLER**

## **A MARXIST CRITIQUE OF TELEVISION**

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There are around twenty-seven million television sets in the UK and ninety-five percent of households own one. It is still the most popular form of entertainment in Britain and even with the BBC licence fee, the cheapest. At the time of the 1953 coronation there was only one terrestrial TV channel, BBC1; it was joined by ITV in 1955 and BBC2 in 1964. We saw the arrival of Channel 4 in 1982 and Channel 5 in 1997, whilst the main satellite television channel Sky TV started broadcasting in 1989. There are now many terrestrial and satellite channels, as well as online streaming services broadcasting twenty-four hours of the day.

Any discussion on television must include the BBC, the country's state broadcasting service. It was established in 1927 and its first Director General was John Reith, who stated that the aim of the corporation was to broadcast 'All that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement [...]'. The preservation of a high moral tone is obviously of paramount importance'. Over the years the BBC has produced informative television, notably David Attenborough's wildlife programmes and Alan Clarke's *Civilisation*. As to whether these programmes are the exception rather than the rule is a matter for further discussion.

The BBC is part of the deep state; that is a representative of the dominant interests of the ruling class. Its politics span a spectrum from the right of the Tory Party to the Liberal Democrats, Blairites, and even sections of the fake liberal left. This grouping is largely pro-capitalist, pro-NATO, and pro-EU; although it may, to a greater or lesser extent, advocate a form of social liberalism. The BBC effectively created Boris Johnson; with Laura Kuenssberg's famous interview that resembled a date.

It is overwhelmingly hostile to organised labour, a BBC tradition since the General Strike of 1926, and was part of the campaign to undermine Jeremy Corbyn. Ultimately the BBC is a semi-autonomous part of the state apparatus, which means it is a tool of the ruling class but not specifically central government. It is worth posing the question as to what role the BBC would have played had a Corbyn government been elected.

The narrative of many television programmes is to promote and normalise the capitalist system. This can be seen in programmes such as *Dragons' Den* and *The Apprentice*, which are essentially reality TV shows where the winner either becomes a capitalist or obtains investment from established capitalists. Meanwhile, many daytime television programmes, as well as being rather dull, tend to show the world from the perspective of the wealthy; examples being *Homes Under the Hammer* and *Escape to the Country*. Whilst the soap opera *Eastenders* shows most of the cast as entrepreneurs and not always successful ones. In other words, success is dependent on one's ability to operate within the free market. Ironically, ITV's *Coronation Street* gives a more realistic view of society.

A discussion such as this would be incomplete without a look at how the left and communists are portrayed in television drama. In the 1970s drama *When the Boat Comes In*, communists were portrayed in a negative way. They were shown as either idealistic dreamers or psychopaths. They were given an even more negative portrayal in the Second World War drama, *Secret Army*.

Television reflects the position of the dominant class in society, and the BBC, together with the other main television channels, are best described as part of the deep state. Ironically, were a progressive government to be elected it would be advisable to call for greater government control over the BBC.

Also, where television programmes are part of the battle of ideas (the ideological struggle) a more detailed critique of mainstream television needs to take place in the *Morning Star* and other leftist publications. Finally, in a socialist society, television drama would portray a more positive view of the left; communists in particular. Whilst television documentaries would play a key role in raising people's ideological understanding. Perhaps then would it finally meet the standard of 'All that is best in every department of human knowledge, endeavour and achievement [...]. The preservation of a high moral tone is obviously of paramount importance.'



## 7 SCOTT ALSWORTH RECLAIMING LITERATURE

Marx and Engels loved literature, and in particular, the works of Honoré de Balzac. There, they recognised certain truths in human terms. Truths economics has no language for. Indeed, *Illusions Perdues* continues to provide a fair critique of the free bourgeois press and the commercialisation of art under capitalism. In the novel, Lucien, a struggling poet, torn between creative integrity and envelope journalism, remarks how 'it's hard [...] to keep one's illusions about anything in Paris. Everything is taxed, everything is sold, everything is manufactured, even success'. If we exchange Paris for the world, we might be forgiven for thinking the battlefield remains unchanged. That writers intent on championing socialist realism and progressive themes in their narratives are doomed to subsidy publishing and the death drives of the dispossessed; regardless of their worth, regardless of their talent.

This is true, up to a point. The capitalist realist wall that rises up before us can be surmounted. Balzac himself, overcame the mad vertigo and realised the ascent. Robert Tressell too, made it over, thanks to his daughter resurrecting *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* from a cake tin. Great ideas don't die and manuscripts don't burn. But like revolutions, they can be suppressed. Today's bestsellers, with a few noteworthy exceptions, are a pulp testimony to the mediocrity of millions. Literary fame is often engineered. Step into your local branch of Waterstones and you will soon discover a panoply of carefully curated titles. Some 'face out' and accompanied by 'shelf-talkers', with quaint handwritten reviews by booksellers. The deception is diligently performed. These are mandatory recommendations. The company's range is decided by a buying team — and the buying team buy what publishers want to sell in bulk. Gone are the days when booksellers ordered what they thought others ought to read. That is no longer permissible. Publisher deals drive sales and in-store

displays are glut with overstock. Consequently, a vital working-class link between the writer and the reader has been removed. Now, we are in the era of the 'link-save', where booksellers receive incentives such as going home half an hour early if they somehow sell more copies of a specific book than their colleagues. Needless to say, these books are purchased at a discount from wholesalers, on the proviso that they are pushed aggressively at till points and celebrated with shameless praise. I know because I remember, and was an employee at Waterstones for many years. The cultivation of mainstream literature for profit as well as the propagation of neoliberal ideals is an ineluctable context which writers must contend with.

This is further compounded by reputation management, quietly overseen by marketing teams at major publishers. For example, Andy Weir's inane and typo-littered *Project Hail Mary*, published by Del Rey, an imprint of Penguin Random House, features no less than seven different author endorsements. And miraculously, Penguin Random House publishes books by all of them. Again, not much has changed since Balzac's time. In fact, if anything, the commodification of literature has worsened. Success is not only still being manufactured, it's being mass-produced and placed beyond reproach. Enormous pressure is put upon writers to conform. To pursue the latest trends, in both form and content. Publishers, of course, are risk averse, as are literary agents, who tend to pursue manuscripts with an eye towards movie rights or whatever runaway genre happens to be in vogue.

So what are we to do? How can we promote a Marxist tendency in literature? Should we try to climb the obstacle we face or smash right through it?

Here, it's important to draw a distinction between aesthetic theory and praxis. These need to be considered separately. In my mind, socialist realism should be encouraged for the former; it's a well-realised framework that writers can adhere to. However, I would demur from Bertolt Brecht's view that 'art is not a mirror to be held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it', even if I agree with the sentiment. Instead, I'm inclined to advocate the following position: art is a mirror, and good art is perfectly aligned, reflecting reality and a hammer in our hands — let literature remind us we have the power to shape the world ourselves. That's not to say we should avoid didacticism, only that we should be cautious. Stendhal's famous observation in *Le Rouge et Noir* that 'politics in a novel is like a pistol shot in the midst of a concert' holds true. It may command attention, but it's also 'loud' and 'vulgar'.

Returning to a practical policy, we first of all need to find out who our writers are. Then, we need to cultivate a Writer's Group. If we're going to brave this ascent, it's easier if we don't do it alone. In addition, we should deter comrades from subsidy publishing and encourage them to focus on their craft. Discipline is everything. An annual magazine printed by the Party, with short stories and



and poetry, could be a worthwhile endeavour. As could workshops, where celebrated Left-leaning authors might share their knowledge. Simply put, it's time to reclaim the creative high-ground. We should not forget, some of the greatest writers in this country have been card-holding communists. Ours is a proud cultural legacy, and it's one that we can leverage.



8

**ALAN MCGUIRE**

## **MISINFORMED: MONOPOLY PRESS AND BOURGEOIS HEGEMONY**

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**B**etween the evening of the September 14<sup>th</sup>, 2021, until 6am on September 19<sup>th</sup>, 250,000 people queued to see the coffin of the late Queen Elizabeth II. Extending ten miles from the Houses of Westminster, some people queued for up to twenty-four hours, with the average waiting time being fourteen hours. National celebrities joined in with everyone else to pay respects to the former head of state, and when two TV presenters jumped the queue, a national scandal broke out.

Left-wing media outlet, Novara Media, reported from the queue that formed when Elizabeth I died. People told them that the queen ‘was like a grandmother to the nation’ and when asked how they identified regarding the head of state someone said, ‘I wouldn’t use the word monarchist’. One barman, when asked if we would ever see an elected head of state, shook his head and gave a dismissive laugh. The sight of the queue was the envy of royalists abroad, a proud sight for those in the UK, and a depressing spectacle for anyone that wants to see more democracy.

‘The Queue’, as it came to be known, was trending on social media and became something quirky for the British press to report on. Some said it was the ultimate test of Britishness. Many saw it as a test of patience, fairness, dedication to royalty, and respect for tradition. Many claimed this is why the British monarchy endures as it represents the qualities of the country. What could be more British, more representative of the nation, they asked. Even the Archbishop of Canterbury sending pizzas for the queuers added a sense of British eccentricity.

It's often said that the royal family excels at media and public relations. With an army of staffers, close links to the government, civil service, legacy media and a troop of lawyers, the family is well prepared. Not to mention they have had plenty of practice between Charles' affairs, Harry's dull as dishwater biography, Margaret's drunken escapades, and Phillip's racist remarks. Not to forget Andrew being accused of paedophilia and the mismanagement of Diana's death which was turned into a film.

How with all this do they survive – and more importantly, why does it matter? The royal family are not the ruling class, but they are an eccentric left over that remain important for their symbolic value. If the UK were ever to reach the point where they considered getting rid of the Crown, then they may be willing to change the whole system which the current ruling class thrive off for their power. Furthermore, they are an excellent example of cultural hegemony – how to remain acceptable to the British population while retaining influence over bourgeois democracy.

There are many theories on why the UK retains a monarchy of some form. Whether you think we had our bourgeois revolution too early or not at all, the Windsor family and the Crown they inhabit remain an interesting site of study for republicans.

It's not just us, American PR experts even share 'tips and tricks' that you can learn from the family in the US business magazine Forbes. Yet, while the article promotes crisis management in the form of 'less is more' and sticking to the facts, the article forgets to tell you who owns the press in the UK.

### **Who Owns the Media?**

In October 2021 the Media Reform Coalition released a report called 'Who Owns The UK Media?' Its findings were astounding:

- Three groups (News UK, Daily Mail Group and Reach) own 90% of national newspapers (up from 71% in 2015). If you include online readers, this is 80%
- Six companies (Gannett, JPI Media, Reach, Tindle, Archant and Iliffe) make up 84% of all local press outlets
- 295 local newspaper titles have closed since 2005 (nearly 20% of the total UK local press)
- Bauer and Global make up 60% of national commercial digital stations and 70% of all local commercial analogue radio stations
- The combined daily reach of the legacy media, in both print and digital, has

grown by nearly two-fifths since late 2018. This has mainly been the expansion of the *Daily Express*, *The Mirror*, and *The Sun*. *The Daily Mail* and *The Sun* alone reach 18.4 million people every day.

Furthermore, the way we get our news is changing, with 65% of UK adults getting their daily news from the internet. The digital arena is overwhelmingly controlled by lawless American technology companies such as Amazon (£297bn), Apple (£226bn), and Meta (£66bn). Meta alone controls three of the top five social media services used to access online news. Legacy media is responsible for 48% of all Facebook's news content (the largest social media platform). And the most worrying fact of all: 93% of all searches in the UK are carried out on Google.

Then there is TV. Sky is Britain's biggest private TV provider with 8.3 million customers, but streaming is catching up and still remains as concentrated as other sectors with 87% of people who have a streaming service using Netflix (14.2 million) and over 50 percent using Amazon Prime (9.1 million). Despite this, the BBC gets 30% of all TV viewers.

Don't forget the 'Beeb'. The BBC as a social institution and the nation's state broadcaster holds significant weight when it comes to setting the news agenda and protecting the ruling establishment. From Rishi Sunak in Superman costumes to Jeremy Corbyn in a Lenin hat, the BBC has a mixed history but is often on the side of the state. 53% of people watch BBC One for the news at least once a week.

The BBC has been the site of recent scandals with top positions being taken by people close to the Conservative Party. BBC Chairman Richard Sharp had to resign after failing to declare helping Boris Johnson secure an £800,000 loan before getting Johnson to appoint him to the job. There have also been various allegations that the BBC had become too close to government ministers despite its supposedly unbiased history. Despite this the BBC reaches 77% of cross platform news consumption.

### **The press and cultural hegemony**

The press, often called the fourth estate of society, is a strange ideological state apparatus when compared to the education system, the police force, and the parliamentary system. The bourgeois press exists to spread the ideology of the ruling class whilst simultaneously declaring that it 'holds power to account'. There are various, often contradictory, purposes for the press and media in capitalist society. It is effectively a weapon of the ruling classes to control the 'national conversation' and to exclude people, groups, and information that may threaten the dominant social order. It is often said that the education system is the main ideological tool to reproduce capitalist society; it moulds children into

future workers that will continue to consume and vote in bourgeois elections, thus revalidating the whole system with their continued behaviour, no matter what independent thought they might have about it. The press, and popular culture, can be seen as an ideological apparatus that continues the work that the education system has started. Like voting in national elections, they appear to attack and analyse the system. Yet, they never want to change the basis of it: private property and the relations of production.

With all the above taken into account, the press can uncover things that may rock the boat. However, much has to be taken into account. Let's take the above examples and examine the 'values' of the Windsor family, including our Elizabeth II, who had close ties to illegal hunting and influences the law for their own benefit – prime ministers have stood down for less! These investigative reports all came from the *Guardian* and were published before her death, not long after the prince Andrew scandals relating to accusations of paedophilia. They were reported on national news and published in a big newspaper, but little happened. Why? We have to consider:

- The position of the newspaper (liberal)
- Its audience (left/liberal)
- The accusations (medium to big)
- The target of the scandal (the queen herself, not the family).

Some people who have a high social status, a lot of political capital, good connections, and a reasonably clean track record are going to be hard to discredit unless the publication has good evidence, frames it well, and others pick up the need to expose the scandal. The press and the person make the scandal, not necessarily the story. Then readers would be obviously outraged, although on the other side of the political fence, some would still protest 'of course, the *Guardian* would say that'. Also, this does not work in our favour as republicans! If a monopoly press decides to ignore it and not make a massive thing out of it, then it's fair to say that it will just be another tab added to Wikipedia that they hope people will forget. This is hegemony. It's not even being good at spin, or PR, it's the structural forces of monopoly capital and their links with the state that ensure the continuation of the system. Is there a scandal that could bring it down? Sure. But the fact we still have a monarchy in 2023 is evidence enough of how strong the hegemonic status is. Nothing short of a revolution will do.

The press largely protects the monarchy and the system we live in. Even coming close to socialism today in Britain will cause a tidal wave of abuse, scandal, and hounding, as we saw with the vilification of Michael Foot and Jeremy Corbyn,

and they even took jabs at Ed Miliband and Neil Kinnock. Trying to 'get them on side' as Keir Starmer is trying to do, is foolishly ignorant.

Hope lies in the subversive potential of technology. In the early days of social media, it was able to help widen access to the internet and new information. If we want to fight and build a socialist alternative to the monopoly-dominated cyberspace then we have to start utilising and connecting together alternative systems and infrastructure, whilst also fighting on the very fronts we criticise such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram.

The continued maintenance and improvement of valuable spaces such as the *Morning Star*, the *Communist Review*, Manifesto Press, Culture Matters, Commiecast, and *Unity!* are needed. We also need to simultaneously expand their content to ensure that we not only reach a wide audience but more importantly challenge the bourgeois ideology that they reproduce daily by consuming the bourgeois press. We need to remember it is not the number of likes on social media, but the number of minds we change.

The Party should consider supporting initiatives led by comrades such as the Red Roaring Front. Matching our passions, such as football, along with our drive to build socialism, is the perfect way to ensure that we have dedicated comrades willing to participate and drive things forward, but it also allows for us to be more flexible and innovative when it comes to technology, messaging, and analytics.

The Red Roaring Front, backed by Manifesto Press and the *Morning Star*, is not only highlighting international left-leaning football teams, but with its fan charter, it is agitating British clubs' fans to ask for more rights from their clubs, which have been high-jacked by foreign multi-billionaires. Class struggle exists inside these clubs. The Red Roaring Front has gone from a book to a website with a purpose and a YouTube channel. This was only possible with people working together. We must ensure that all we do is for the cause of socialism, not our personal fame. With the Party supporting cultural struggles like this, we can challenge the ruling class, their politicians and their press.



## 9 JAMES CROSSLEY RELIGION AND CULTURE

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**D**oes religion matter? That depends.

Christianity, at least, has a presence in the nation's background. Across much of the country, we still have nativity plays, celebrate Christmas, see plenty of historic churches (for now), have a vague awareness of some (and only some) biblical stories (e.g., Adam and Eve, Noah's Ark, Jesus), and often unwittingly use biblical idioms in everyday speech (e.g., 'let there be light', 'eye for an eye', 'scapegoat', 'nothing new under the sun', 'writing on the wall', 'in the lions' den', 'head on a platter', 'Good Samaritan', etc.).

However, affiliation to traditional Christian denominations is in long-term decline in most of Britain. People are as likely to think of the Christian background as part of British culture rather than as a prompt to piety. Politicians occasionally invoke Christianity, the Bible, and religion but typically to a targeted audience and most voters overwhelmingly do not want politicians talking about religion. Christianity in much of Britain today has become part of the world of consumer choice—it's there if we choose to engage with it, otherwise it can be ignored.

And yet, Islam has remained an obsession, in the media at least, where Muslims are typically presented as taking their religion too far. In much of twenty-first century public debate, Muslims and Islam are tied up with ideas of terrorism and immigration. Groups like Britain First have tried to stage protests with crucifixes in Muslim-dominated areas in order to stir up trouble and prompt reactions that can then be shared widely online. In certain cases, it's in the interests of the ruling class to stress religious motivations behind acts of terror (usually worded in terms of 'a perversion of Islam' or the like) at the expense of discussing the



complexity of causes. This is because a primary focus on 'perverted' forms of religious motivations avoid implicating the actions of the ruling class, such as the invasion of Muslim-dominated countries or collaboration with reactionary and violent religious groups, at home and abroad.

Historically, religion has been a force for both reactionary and progressive forces in Britain. Christianity and the established Church have provided the justification for the ruling class, economic relations, and social order in feudalism and even capitalism to this day. The Coronation of Charles provided the spectacle of two relics of a bygone era — the Church of England and Crown — justifying their ongoing privileged existence, with representatives joining in from other denominations and religions (e.g., Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Buddhist, Hindu, Jain, Bahá'í, Zoroastrian).

But not all mainstream churches were fully enamoured with the Coronation. The United Reform Church (URC), which still offers advice to the monarchy, gave its expected support but with a twist. The URC noted its own tradition of British Christianity was 'at best, rather ambivalent about the monarchy', adding that their 'spiritual ancestors' were active in the English Civil War of the seventeenth century and argued for the execution of Charles I.

As this suggests, religion has also provided the language of resistance to the ruling class, including in some of the most celebrated moments in our radical history, such as the Peasants' Revolt, the revolutionaries of the seventeenth century, Chartism, and the early suffragist movement. The first British Marxists, such as William Morris, sought to harness and absorb some of the progressive power of religion into ideas about the transformation from capitalism to socialism.

As Marx put it, the struggle against religion can be the struggle 'against that world whose spiritual aroma is religion' but at the same time religious suffering can be the 'expression of real suffering and a protest against real suffering'. Religion is 'the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people'. In other words, religion provides evidence of people grasping for a better world, no matter how misguided this may sometimes seem. To understand religion then, means to understand the material conditions which give rise to its role as a justification of and protest against them.

What should we do? At present options are limited because religion is such a wide-ranging, deeply embedded issue in our history and culture and, simultaneously, because much of its old power has faded in Britain. However, some suggestions can be made. Critique of religion and its use by the ruling class must continue wherever material conditions are obfuscated. This critique will range from understanding foreign policy and violence in the name of religion to



the division of workers along the lines of religion. We oppose reactionary and oppressive tendencies in all religions. Where appropriate, we acknowledge and promote the progressive role religion has played in Britain's history. As *Britain's Road to Socialism* stresses, we also support freedom of religious belief and worship and the strengthening of legislation tackling discrimination on the grounds of religion.

However, religion or any given religion must not be given a privileged position to undermine democratic rights and the freedom of others. In the machinery of the state, there must be no privileging of any given religion and the established church should not have the formal role it presently does (e.g., bishops in the House of Lords). While the critical study of religion should be taught at schools, we further support a secular comprehensive education. We oppose the separation of children along religious and sectarian lines and the removal of schools from democratic control (*Britain's Road to Socialism*, 51–53, 68).



10

RON BROWN

## CULTURE MATTERS TO STATE MONOPOLY CAPITALISM

*The ruling capitalist class wages its political struggle on three main, distinct but interconnected fronts: the economic, the political and the **ideological and cultural** [emphasis mine]. This requires corresponding responses from the labour and progressive movements.*

— Britain's Road to Socialism

The purpose of this piece is to highlight how important the ideological and cultural front is to State Monopoly Capitalism (SMC) as it wages its political struggle internationally.

There is a growing body of evidence (e.g., in studies published by the Centre for Cultural Value) that in Britain, the cultural sector reflects and entrenches inequality and injustice in society. Despite this, for over a decade, the government has intervened in the sector only to strip away, in the name of austerity, resources that are supposed to address this issue.

By contrast, SMC can't seem to put a price on whatever it takes to strategically promote 'Western' culture and contain, ruthlessly, forces that pose a challenge to its hegemony. Two examples of this are:

- Media censorship and state-funded global media
- The manufacturing of a pro-'Western' and anti-communist common European cultural heritage.

## Media censorship and state-funded global media

Recent state interventions into broadcasting and social media based on 'national security' concerns have been no secret. Ofcom has now banned Chinese Global Television Network (CGTN) from broadcasting in the UK whilst Russia Today (RT) and Sputnik have been pulled from all social media platforms in Europe – and in some cases globally – following EU sanctions in March, 2022. This makes Facebook's mission statement 'to give people the power to share' sound like doublespeak and raises questions about democracy and freedom of the press.

Meanwhile, the state-funded global media operation promoting the US 'national interest' in key strategic areas is staggering. The US Agency for Global Media (USAGM) (<https://www.usagm.gov/>), for example, operates 6 media networks around the world, including Europe (Radio Free Europe), Asia (Radio Free Asia), the Middle East (Middle East Broadcasting Networks) and Cuba (Office of Cuba Broadcasting). And whilst the US and its allies make moves to contain China over alleged national security concerns, USAGM — through its 'Open Technology Fund' — makes no secret of developing and operating technologies that disrupt security systems put in place by the states it is designed to destabilise.

There are other global media operations funded by SMC, affecting the daily cultural experiences of millions of people around the world. USAGM, with a reported 410 million listeners, is one high profile example. The point is simply to be aware of this, to appreciate the scale of resources required to run such an operation and how much running such an operation matters to SMC, however successful its impact.

The manufacturing of a pro-'Western' and anti-communist common European cultural heritage

As with global media, SMC can direct resources into other cultural developments that promote its interests and undermine alternatives. CIA involvement in the filming of *Animal Farm* and behind-the-scenes promotion of abstract expressionist modern art, for example, demonstrate the role culture had to play in elevating 'Western values' above 'totalitarianism' during the Cold War years.

Today, EU culture policy needs the same kind of class-based research and analysis — here, I'd just like to draw attention to some of the relevant issues.

The first thing to note is that EU culture policy flows from priorities set by the European Council and the European Commission, which currently include 'promoting Europe's interests and values in the world', 'promoting our European way of life', and 'a new push for European democracy.' How these priorities drive

cultural developments and what the consequences are for our class and our movement are questions worth seeking answers to.

The second thing to note is that there is a very highly developed and sophisticated infrastructure, attracting vast amounts of resources, around EU culture policy and its array of initiatives. Whilst there are, no doubt, arguments in favour of many of these initiatives (this is, after all, investment in culture), attention is drawn here to the fact that culture matters to the EU and that culture plays no small role in the EU's political strategy.

Part of this strategy is manufacturing a common European cultural heritage, based on anti-communist historical revisionism and uniting people in all countries of Europe in the forward (e.g., east to west) march toward 'freedom and democracy'.

An example of this manufacturing is the European Heritage Label, which is awarded to selected cultural heritage sites on a biannual basis with the intention of raising their status and profile. High priority has been given so far to heritage sites that have come to symbolise repression by and liberation from communist-controlled states. More recently was the establishment of a European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, which presents communism as a historical evil on a par with fascism.

Manufacturing a common European heritage forms part of a wider Euro-Atlantic political strategy to break up what remains of political infrastructures from the socialist period, hollow out their support and, through this, clear the way for the eastward expansion of SMC. The results of this project have been mixed, but it is fair to say that increasing numbers of generations growing up under these conditions pose a serious challenge for our movement.

## **Solutions**

Firstly, activists can support efforts to resist our own government's commitment to the new cultural Cold War against China, by organisations such as the No Cold War Campaign and Stop the War, as well as promoting positive Sino-British relations in any way they can. In the meantime, China itself is doing what it can to fight back on the cultural front, for example, taking on Hollywood with hit films like *The Battle at Lake Changjin* — developments that we, in Britain, can draw attention to and promote.

Secondly, we can simply be aware and educate others with regards to the undemocratic nature of media monopolies and their political objectives. We can support existing media platforms which promote cultural democracy, e.g. Culture Matters, by sharing and contributing material and by asking how else it can be supported and developed.

Thirdly, we can simply improve our awareness of how cultural hegemony is maintained, in order to legitimise political oppression and capitalist exploitation. We can ask some questions: if culture matters so much to the institutions of SMC that they are prepared to mobilise their resources on the scale outlined in the examples above, are we paying enough attention? Does culture matter as much to the labour and progressive movement? When discussing economic and political issues — in our Branches, Districts, Nations and in the wider movement — are we also discussing how people's cultural experiences are affected by these issues, how this impacts on our class struggle, and how we can organise ourselves to improve people's cultural experiences?

To conclude, let's return to the extract from our Party's programme quoted at the start of this piece, and ask this: how can we build and prioritise this response as part of our three-pronged strategy to make economic, political, and ideological and cultural advances in the class struggle?

# CULTURE MATTERS

The mission of Culture Matters is to develop and promote cultural democracy, in line with the socialist approach to culture set out in *Britain's Road to Socialism*.

We understand culture to include not just the arts (music, literature, painting, film, theatre, etc.) but the whole range of human activities which give life purpose, meaning and value, and which human beings engage in for enjoyment, entertainment, and enlightenment. 'Culture is ordinary' said Raymond Williams, so it includes sport, religion, eating and drinking, fashion and clothing, the media, and other popular activities. Culture is essential to enjoy life and be fully human.

Our perspective is that class-based divisions in society, founded on unequal and unfair property ownership, affect the ways that working people can access and fully enjoy cultural activities. The provision of cultural experiences in 21<sup>st</sup> century Britain is like health, education, and housing provision were in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: expensive, hierarchically organised, and difficult for working people to access and enjoy either as workers or as consumers. In addition, cultural experiences are often managed and weaponised by the ruling class in order to legitimise the exploitation and oppression of workers.


So we aim to help develop and support the struggle for cultural democracy, and to link this cultural struggle to other economic and political struggles for a better world. Our core operation is the website, which has hundreds of articles, poems, images, and short films on a large range of cultural topics. We also publish books; run Bread and Roses arts awards; help trade unions develop cultural education and campaigns for cultural democracy.

Please support us by contributing material and making donations via our website. Please also join us on X, formerly Twitter (#CultureMatters) and Facebook.



<https://www.culturematters.org.uk/>





*Class and Culture; Provocations for Cultural Democracy* is a Communist Party pamphlet, written and produced by members of the Culture Commission.

It consists of several provocations or short essays on various cultural topics, designed to raise awareness and stimulate discussion. It will also help Party members and allies in the labour movement to develop practical campaigns on cultural issues alongside existing work on political and economic issues.

