

THE FREE COMMUNIST

For Social Revolution and Communism



ISSUE 5

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Remember the Mutineers of WW1 with a Black Poppy

Sometime in the new year we plan on doing a special Free Communist issue around WW1 and the 100 year “celebrations”, including articles from the time on the Imperialist nature of the war and why it is necessary for communists to take a revolutionary defeatist view.

Below is taken from Leicester Afed Blog

No War but the Class War

With a black poppy we remember all soldiers and sailors internationally who rebelled and mutinied against the First World War.



For all the shirkers, skulkers, deserters, malingerers, fraternisers, mutineers, troublemakers, voluntary POWs, so-called cowards and those executed for having the only sane response to the horror of war between competing capitalists.

Aldershot Mutiny 1919 the Red Flag Flying High

At Aldershot 9000 reservists had been recalled to the army because of the ‘crisis’ caused by the coal strike and the threatened rebellion in Ireland. They proved a very unwilling tool of repression. Early in May 1919 several hundred men made plans for a ‘rising’, predicting that ‘soon the red flag will be flying over this town’. On Friday, May 6 a skirmish took place during which Superintendent W. Davis of the Aldershot Constabulary was injured. On Saturday the reservists, led by a private waving the red flag, ran

wild in Union Street, Wellington Street, Gordon Road and Victoria Road. Later the soldier with a red flag was seen perched on top of a bus shouting ‘Come on, the rebels’. Over 60 shops had their windows smashed and were looted, including a jeweller’s. The men stuffed their pockets with diamonds, watches, etc., before hurling the clocks at local traders. The police were overcome but military loyalists attacked the rioters with bayonets and pick-axe handles. *Mutinies.* Dave Lamb.

Typhoon Haiyan Wreaks Havoc in the Philippines: As Usual the Poorest Pay the Highest Price

Global warming is now an accepted fact. Its consequences for humanity are widely debated. When it comes to attributing the cause of any particular disaster there’s always room for doubt. What’s not in doubt is the human and economic disaster caused by typhoon Haiyan when it hit the Philippines archipelago last weekend. At a maximum sustained wind speed of approximately 195mph, Haiyan is credited to be the strongest tropical typhoon to have hit land in recorded history. Airports, towns and villages were flattened, trees uprooted and rice fields flooded while more than a third of the country’s provinces have been left without power and half of them without any communications. It’s now known that forty-one of the Philippines’ eighty provinces have been severely damaged, with

almost 30 provinces left without electricity and 15 broken telecommunications. At the time of writing the preliminary number of missing, according to the Red Cross, is 22,000. Meanwhile the United Nations estimates more than 544,600 people have been displaced by the storm and nearly 12 per cent of the population is directly affected.

In the wake of the storm the familiar disaster mechanisms of our capitalist world have kicked in. First the cautious, massively under-estimated death toll, then — before anyone had any real idea since all communications with the worst hit areas were cut off — a guess of ten thousand or so as the professional aid agencies (aka charities) appeal for public donations to help the rescue ef-

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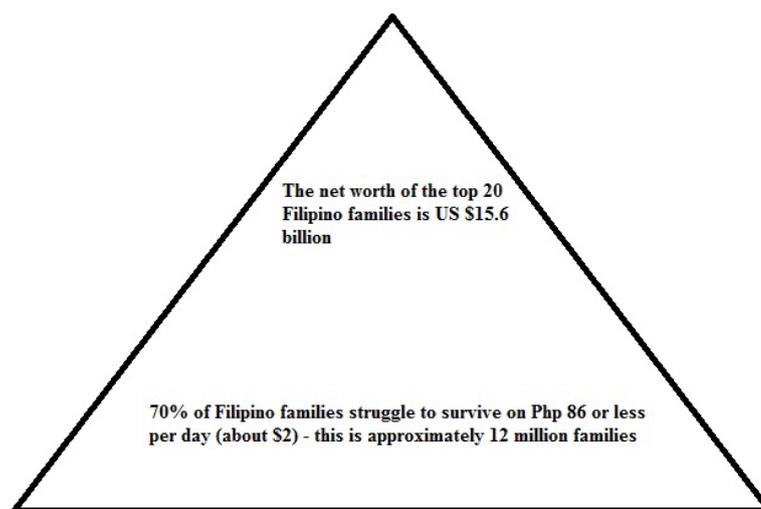
fort. In the Philippines itself President Aquino has declared a “state of national calamity”, even as he denied a likely ten thousand death toll. It seems Aquino is more concerned with fending off criticism that his government under-prepared for the predicted great storm than with the real consequences of the event. In any case, far from humanitarian concern for the human victims of the tragedy, the first response of the state that is facing national calamity was to send the army to Tacloban, a coastal city of 220,000 people — not to bring in food, water and medical supplies but to impose a curfew by force of arms and “prevent looting”. ‘Looting’ ‘robbery’ or ‘plunder’: In a situation where it might be expected human beings have no alternative but to forage amongst the wreckage for the means to survive, the state’s first response is to jump to defend private property against its own citizens. Even after aid got through mayor Lim of Tacloban says only 20 percent of residents were receiving any while houses were being looted because warehouses were empty. “The looting is not criminality. It is self-preservation,” Lim said. (Reuters in Khaleej Times, 14.11.13)

The biggest disaster is capitalism

Behind this, of course, is another familiar side to this story: the richer you are the better chance you have of surviving a ‘natural disaster’. The fact that there are houses to loot confirms what pictures of Tacloban and its surroundings show. Businesses, malls, government buildings and mansions are still standing. The city’s country club is virtually undamaged. By contrast evacuation centres proved ‘inadequate’. As Ian Bray of Ox-fam put it, “People knew what to do, to go to evacuation centres, but the evacuation centres had to be evacuated.” (Financial Times 12.11.13). Why? Because in the main these buildings were flooded. Clearly the emergency procedures were inadequate.

Located along the pathway of storms forming in the Pacific Ocean, the Philippines are hit by an average 20 typhoons a year. If there is anything in the predictions about the consequences of climate change, these are going to get stronger. In fact the country is ranked as one of the world’s most disaster prone areas. Typhoon Haiyan itself came less than a month after a 7.2 magnitude earthquake

which killed 222 people. What these disasters reveal — as with any ‘natural disaster’ in this capitalist world order — is not simply the state’s inadequate preparations for dealing with the consequences, but the grossly increased chance of not surviving at all or being left totally homeless and destitute according to how poor you are. And there sure is a gargantuan wealth divide in the Philippines as the graphic from This Tiny Globe website illustrates.



Even the state’s own National Nutrition Council admits that only four people in ten receive adequate nutrition with twenty-seven per cent of the population experiencing regular hunger. Most of ‘the poor’ live in houses made of wood and other flimsy materials. It’s not really necessary for experts to tell us that “the _major reasons for catastrophic losses are due to poor building materials and quality”, or for a specialist in protective engineering to explain: “We now have the technology and expertise to build typhoon-proof houses and buildings for these types of events. _ There are some low cost solutions for remote areas. These systems will sustain less damage during typhoons, saving lives and allowing rapid, low cost reconstruction, and could involve modular construction techniques.” [Priyan Mendis, University of Melbourne, quoted in the Financial Times 11.11.13]

This only emphasises what we already know. There is a huge gulf between what could technically be put in place immediately to counter disasters and the reality of capitalist society where the lives and well-being of ‘the poor’ are increasingly expendable. If human beings really did live on this planet as a

collective human community, without the poisonous divisions of state boundaries and the obscene discrepancies in overall quality of life which class society imposes, then we could think in terms of people responding as fellow humans to aid their fellow creatures in the event of natural disasters.

Meanwhile, though, distribution of what little state aid there is following a pattern familiar to so many capitalist disasters.

According to the same Khaleej Times article cited earlier many people have complained that military families were given priority to board the C-130 cargo planes whilst more than four days after the typhoon hit (14 November_), “None of the aid passing through the airport had been distributed to the needy crowd at its gates.”_ . Apparently food and other goods have simply been stacked up at the airport in Tacloban. The usual reports, impossible to corroborate, of ‘anarchy’ and looting abound. What is for certain is that thousands of people are living out in the open and many places have yet to see any aid organisation. There is no reason to suppose that the donations of ‘ordinary people’ in response to appeals by charities run by well-paid executives and well-meaning volunteers ‘on the ground’, are any more likely to reach their destination than in previous disasters.

Imperialist interests before human need

As for emergency relief from international powers, this is determined more by imperialist rivalry than humanitarian concerns. Washington has pledged \$20million and launched “Operation

Danaman” (meaning ‘sympathy and help’ in Tagalog), involving thousands of troops, nine ships plus helicopters and aircraft. A convenient way for the Obama administration to reinforce its ‘pivot to Asia’ (which involves deploying more naval ships to the Pacific as it seeks to combat the growing threat of China in the region) and remind president Aquino of the extend of US ‘soft power’ in the region. As for China, whose relief donation of \$100,000 reflects the fact that it is currently involved in a dispute with the Philippines over territory in the South China Sea, it cannot match the US for ‘soft power’. Although China is working on its ‘soft power’ capability Chinese imperialism still has something to learn,



“They just don’t have the hardware, the equipment, the training that the US, Australia, Japan and Thailand have,” says Timothy Keating, a retired admiral who oversaw US forces in Asia as head of Pacific Command. The US has for decades helped its allies and others in the Pacific respond to disasters, including the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and the 2011 earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan. ... “We have always taken that kind of approach but over the past 10 years, we have put more emphasis on it,” says Mr Stavridis, a former head of US Southern Command”. ‘Beijing’s Relief Capabilities Laid Bare’, Demetri Sevastopulo in Financial Times, 14.11.13.

In the same pattern of imperialist manoeuvring, Japan is sending a record 1,000 personnel to support the relief operation on top of \$603,000 worth of supplies. In addition Japanese companies

have announced their own donations. No prizes for guessing how Japan views China’s rise and its increasing claims to territory in the South China Sea and beyond.

Clearly, it’s not the humanitarian crisis that really matters for the major world powers. More important for determining how much aid is donated is how much the allegiance of any particular state is valued in the effort to control their own sphere of interests. And, as in every other major disaster — the Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, the Haitian earthquake, we can be certain that a large part of any aid will be siphoned off and the people who most need it left with little or nothing to ‘rebuild their lives’.

And the future?

Meanwhile, the powers-that-be continue their decades-long wrangle over what to do about climate change. They now more or less accept that measures must be taken to limit global temperature change to no more than 2*0*. Pity that most of the experts agree that this is a nigh on impossible target. While Typhoon Haiyan played itself out UN climate change talks were being held in Poland (Europe’s largest coal producer and biggest carbon emitter). They were discussing the outline of an eventual agreement to be signed in Paris in 2015: how many years it would take to come into play, whether or not it would be obligatory and the mechanisms of such an agreement... If it ever happens it will be irrelevant.

Whichever way you look at it, capitalism is incapable of safeguarding the future of humanity. This class society based on a parasitic few living from the value of the unpaid labour of the world working class, which can only reckon in terms of monetary profit and loss, which confines humanity within the artificial but lethal barriers of nation states is well overdue for overturning. Even now it’s not yet too late. The working class still has a world to win.

E. Rayner,
Communist Workers Organisation.

About The Free Communist

The Free Communist paper puts forward a revolutionary internationalist perspective and is anti-statist in outlook. What this means in practice is that we are against all forms of nationalism including the leftist notions that nations have a right to self-determination and so-called ‘national liberation’. We also oppose all forms of parliamentarianism and do not see the unions as vehicle for either change or to defend our immediate interests. In contrast we put forward the idea of self-organisation of the class struggle, workers directly controlling their own struggles through “mass meetings” and assemblies free from union control. We draw our inspiration from the best traditions of both Dutch/German and Italian left communists as well as anarchist-communism, but doesn’t hold to one camp or the other.

The views expressed in paper and on the website are not necessarily the views of the Free Communist.

Schwab, Alexander aka Sachs, 1887 -1943

A short biography of council communist and organiser of underground networks, Alexander Schwab, who died in a Nazi concentration camp.

Born on the 5th July 1887, at Stuttgart, Alexander Schwab was the son of a choir master. He studied at the Universities of Rostock, Jena, Heidelberg and Freiburg in philosophy, ancient languages, political economy and sociology. He was a member of the Free Students movement.

After graduating successfully he taught at the Freie Schulgemeinde Wickersdorf (a free school set up in 1906) and was one of the leading lights of the Free German Youth Federation.



Because of a lung complaint he avoided the draft during the First World War. He married and started to become involved in the anti-war movement. He joined the socialist USPD in 1917 and in 1918 the Spartakusbund, where he was close to Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht. He was on the left of the communist party KPD and then was one of the founders of the KAPD. He was an occasional member of its executive committee and he represented the KAPD at the 3rd Congress of the Komintern at Moscow.

After the exclusion of his close friend Karl Schröder from the KAPD he left it in 1922. Until the end of the 20s he

chose to remain outside of active politics. In the following years he worked as a journalist and writer, specialising in economics and architecture.

Starting in 1928 Schwab took part at first occasionally, then more frequently in discussions of the Sozialwissenschaftlichen Vereinigung (SWV) and later the Red Fighters while working as head of the press department at the Reich Institute for Labour Placement and Unemployment Insurance in Berlin from 1922 until his dismissal in 1933.

In 1924 Paul Levi -former chairman of the KPD who had been expelled in 1921- set up the SWV. This was a loose union of socialists interested in theoretical and political discussions on the problems of socialism holding monthly meetings and weekend seminars. The meetings were attended mostly by oppositional members of the SPD, but also by others from the groups of the KAPD and the AAU.

By 1928 the SWV had around 800 members within Berlin alone. In 1929 Karl Schröder and others of the old KAPD-Essen group came to the conclusion that the crisis of capitalism and the general political development would lead to a period of dictatorship and illegality for revolutionary communists. They started to build up an organization within the SWV of the most reliable elements, which became known as the Roten Kämpfer (Red Fighters).

Many former members of the KAPD was recruited for the secret network and operated mainly within the SPD, especially the youth groupings, where they supported the left opposition and recruited to their network. From 1931 the Schröder/Schwab-group had fully taken over both the SWV and the bulletin Der Rote Kämpfer, which originally was set up by a local SPD oppositional group in the



Ruhr. Schröder and Schwab began more systematically to transform the network around the SWV and RK into a disciplined organisation prepared for illegal political activity.

After the Nazi rise to power Schwab was imprisoned for 6 months in April 1933. After his release and the death of his wife he set up, together with Franz Jung, a business press agency for banks, newspapers and specialist journals in 1934. He and Jung used this as a cover for underground political activity.

Following the arrest of the leadership of the RK by the Gestapo in November 1936 he was condemned to 8 years imprisonment during the high treason trial in October 1937 against the Red Fighters as one of its leaders. He took a courageous stand at the trial and took entire responsibility for the organising of the illegal political work.

In the following years he was in the prisons at Brandenburg and Sonnenburg and then in in the Börgermoor concentration camp where he was tortured. He died on 12 November 1943 in the Zwickau prison of pneumonia according to official data though like Muehsam and many others he may well have been murdered.

Nick Heath

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